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### Deafening Silence

Three months ago, if you had asked me about my top three requirements when applying to a college, I would have said location, social life, or major-specific opportunities. However, my priorities have shifted after the events of October 7, 2023. The rise of antisemitism following Hamas's attack on Israel and the varied responses from universities forced my parents and me to reconsider my safety at some of the institutions that I once considered my top choices. Particularly alarming was the initial statement from Cal Poly SLO President Jeffrey Armstrong, who asserted, "Our silence on the event should not be taken as a position that we don't care, but rather that we reserve our public responses on things we can control or influence." This stance, coupled with the unsettling silence from other renowned universities, forced my parents to have a difficult conversation with my sister and I about our safety and the need to 'lay low' on social media platforms. As the week unfolded, the gravity of the situation became more and more apparent, and I began to better understand the implications and consequences of the deafening silence from some of the most esteemed universities.

Albert Einstein once said: "The world will not be destroyed by those who do evil, but by those who watch them without doing anything." Indicating that silence is complicity. People fear speaking out and saying the wrong things, yet little do they realize that they are causing just as much damage and harm by not saying anything at all. On October 13, 2023,

Armstrong sent a statement to the campus noting that Cal Poly should not comment on the current national and world events that “do not directly impact a critical mass of their students and employees.” Ranked as the number one school in both the Regional West Universities and top public schools, I would argue that Cal Poly has a significant impact on being able to influence the situation. Claiming that, as a university, they cannot influence others on this event is nonsense and leads to dangerous and hurtful outcomes. Cal Poly later released another statement apologizing for their failed effort to address the issue in response to the extensive backlash they received from both parents and students.

Universities have a moral obligation to actively engage, discuss, and condemn the events of the October 7 terror attack. Their unique position as centers of education and influence gives them the power to shift and mold the collective understanding, foster compassion, and set an example to show future generations how to address sensitive issues correctly while knowing their power to shape how future situations will be handled.

We are taught from a young age, some through school, others from their parents, that there is a bright line between good and evil. However, in light of what occurred on October 7th, it turns out that the line may be subject to adjustments for some.

Distinguished American philosopher and neuroscientist Sam Harris says, “Universities choosing to stay quiet in fear of saying the wrong thing or crossing that line are perceiving and showing the rest of the world that the line is blurry when, in reality, it is not.” Harris’s perspective highlights the problem of how universities are treating antisemitism on campuses following October 7th by refusing to condemn hate speech directly. The testimony on December 5th at a Congressional hearing on antisemitism at Harvard, Penn, and MIT Campuses reflects Harris’s statement. Republican Representative Elise Stefanil

asked all three Presidents of the Universities whether calling for the genocide of Jews would violate their code of conduct; Penn President Magill said: "It is a context-dependent decision." Hearing none of the school leaders explicitly state that the calling for Jew genocide would necessarily violate their code of conduct and instead insist that it would depend on the circumstances and behavior is very concerning from an incoming freshman's perspective.

While I believe that all hate speech, especially calls for genocide, should be violations, supporters of Magill and Gay claim that context is necessary when validating controversial speech. Anthony L. Fisher, a Senior Opinion Writer at Daily Beast, agrees with the University leaders, claiming that context is required when calling for the genocide of Jews. In other words, Fisher argues that they argued that nuance was needed in interpretations of freedom of speech. And we shouldn't attribute the worst motivations to the speakers of such speech immediately. Fisher goes on to say, " Jewish students who feel unsafe by such expressions should accept that this is all part of the extensive debate that should rightly occur in places of higher learning." While it is true that some nuance is needed to understand specific interpretations better and to hear alternative perspectives, it does not necessarily mean that it is okay to overlook the safety of Jewish students, as it is particularly vulnerable at this time. Campuses can step in the right direction by making clear statements to protect their Jewish students. Other groups have been afforded resources mainly directed to protect their safety on campus, so it is only fair that Jewish students also receive that protection.

Another viewpoint that has come up in the discussion by columnist Stephen M. Walt is the belief that Universities should never take sides in a war. Walt goes on to argue that

“longtime donors have severed ties, students have had job offers canceled for expressing controversial views, and as a result, assorted critics have seen these events as evidence that elite institutions are either indoctrinating students in dangerous ways or failing to instill in them proper ethical values.” Elaborating on a seminal document that he feels shows a university's proper role in issues like this, Walt claims it is essential to emphasize that a university as an organization or institution should not take positions on critical social and political issues. He warns that a university is a community. One that cannot take collective action on issues of the day without endangering the conditions for its existence and effectiveness. He used the controversial example of the open letter on Israel and Gaza that a group of Harvard student organizations issued immediately after Hamas attacked on Oct. 7 to support his reasoning. He began by stating that the student's statement was an inaccurate and unhelpful portrayal of the origins of the current conflict. In his view, the letter did a poor job of having moral values; however, Walt argues that the Harvard leadership should have remained silent on the matter, except to make clear that the signatories spoke for themselves.

Proponents of Walt are right to argue that Universities should not interfere with students expressing their views. However, he disregards letting “the signatories speak solely for themselves. ” Ultimately, those signatures represent students from their school, which means the school itself.

As a result, when universities don't take action to shut down or instigate right from wrong, it leads students to take matters into their own hands. And with no guidance or restrictions, it can lead to more chaos. This can be seen in the outbreaks of antisemitism on university campuses. One example was at NYU. Jewish students were locked in a campus

library surrounded by protesters shouting “Free Palestine.” (Times of Israel) Universal places that are meant to be a home and starting point for so many young adults can quickly turn into their nightmare if they are surrounded by people chanting and protesting for their removal without the comfort or backbone of their school protecting them.

This isn't something that will come along as easily. Trying to aid and support two conflicting and passionate sides while also trying to remain a bystander is not easy. As we continue to watch the rise of antisemitism and Islamophobia, with an increase of 337% in antisemitism and 172% in Islamophobia, according to CNN, the pressure to take action grows. We must stop and remind ourselves what must be sacrificed to achieve security for either side?

Taking action, the Biden administration issued a warning that universities must “unequivocally condemn antisemitic and Islamophobic incidents on campus, and take aggressive action to curb it. If they don't, officials warn, they could lose federal funding”(Smith ). Students on campus argue that this policy is insufficient, although it is a step in the right direction. As voiced by Smith in the article, “Students are upset that the university missed the opportunity to use this as a teachable moment.” Some believe the schools can begin correcting the problem with mandatory training during first-year orientation on respectful discussions. This brings a new question: can schools simultaneously have free speech, safety, and nuance? The simple answer is that in order to achieve that, schools must rethink how they represent themselves to the world.

Universities hold an exceptional moral obligation to help educate future generations on expressing freely, challenging, critiquing, and correcting issues. Jacques Berlinerblau, a Columnist from MSNBC, offers advice to the college administrations: "It's time to think very

seriously about regulating campus rhetoric that celebrates or glorifies violence.”

Berlinerblau hopes that we can learn not to measure a university by what its president declared about the tragedies that occurred on October 7th. Instead, look at how officials take the next complicated steps to ensure students can learn in an atmosphere free of intimidation and fear by noticing which professors use their knowledge to understand better and possibly hold civil conversations about the conflict. We can look forward to all of these changes in the future.

In conclusion, the moral obligation for universities to discuss and condemn the events of the October 7 terror attack is rooted in their role of influence. Beyond pursuing academic knowledge, these institutions shape perspectives and foster more extensive empathy. Universities not only contribute to a collective understanding of such tragic events but also have the power to create a community in which people support one another in times of loss rather than tear each other down. Through reinforced and rewritten regulations, universities can play a pivotal role in steering society toward a path of empathy, understanding, and, hopefully, a brighter future where being Jewish or Palestinian will never have to affect where you want to grow your academic career.

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**Worldbuilding Research Essay Rubric**

*Each category is worth up to 4 points for a total of 24.*

	4	3	2	1
<b>Argument in Context</b>	Hook immediately engages the reader, leading smoothly into a concise summary of the issue and current debate, including at least two major, differing perspectives/viewpoints. The thesis statement is clear and persuasive in the context of the established debate.	Hook is present, but could be more engaging or more smoothly integrated into the summary of the current issue. The debate could be more current, or the summary could be more complete (i.e. the writer needs to consider another perspective on the issue). Thesis statement is present, but it could be clearer or more persuasive.	Hook needs significant improvement (it may be unengaging, cliché, or disjointed). The debate is not current, or the summary is either long-winded or obviously incomplete (i.e. the writer does not entertain a different perspective on the issue, or the issue is unfocused). Thesis statement is unpersuasive.	Hook is missing. There isn't yet an identifiable debate. Thesis is vague.

<b>Support and Development</b>	<p>The writer convincingly supports their argument by integrating the required research source material, using They Say / I Say templates to introduce quotations smoothly and respond insightfully. Writer makes each source's <u>credibility and relevance</u> obvious for the reader in the text. Writer addresses multiple perspectives skillfully in order to illustrate the complexities of the conversation, one of which includes a clear <u>opposing viewpoint</u>. The writer effectively refutes the opposition in order to strengthen their own position.</p>	<p>The writer supports their argument satisfactorily but it could be more convincing. They Say / I Say templates frame each quotation but could be applied more effectively. Each source's credibility and relevance are somewhat obvious for the reader, but could be clearer in the text. The writer could more effectively address multiple perspectives in order to illustrate the complexities of the conversation. The writer addresses at least one opposing viewpoint but could more effectively refute it in order to strengthen their own position.</p>	<p>The writer offers some useful support but it is generally too thin to support the argument satisfactorily. A few They Say / I Say templates are present but need to be used much more often. Questionable source credibility and/or relevance in the text. The essay is not addressing the complexity of the conversation due to some obvious perspectives that are missing. Opposing viewpoint is missing or misapplied.</p>	<p>The writer does not support their argument. They Say / I Say templates are missing or misapplied. Conversation seems one-dimensional or otherwise oversimplified.</p>
<b>Organization</b>	<p>Ideas are coherently and logically organized into paragraphs (intro, body paragraphs, conclusion) and effective transitions. Concluding paragraph follows from and supports the argument presented, leaving the reader with a powerful final impression, lending a sense of closure and unity to the essay.</p>	<p>Ideas are generally coherent and logically organized into paragraphs, although some paragraphs may need to be revised for focus. Some effective use of transitions. Concluding paragraph generally follows from and supports the argument presented, but it could leave the reader with a more powerful final impression or a greater sense of closure/unity.</p>	<p>Ideas could be organized in a more coherent or logical way. Transitions are lacking or ineffective. Concluding paragraph seems incomplete, unsatisfying, or does not completely follow from the argument presented.</p>	<p>Ideas are incoherent and illogically organized. Paragraphs are undeveloped and need transitions. Conclusion is missing.</p>
<b>Voice and Audience</b>	<p>Writer communicates a clear purpose, making the relevance of the argument distinct for the audience. Writer effectively distinguishes</p>	<p>Writer's purpose is somewhat clear, and there is some evidence of attention to the audience. Writer usually distinguishes their own</p>	<p>Writer's purpose is somewhat clear, although there needs to be more attention to the audience in some</p>	<p>The author's purpose of writing is unclear. No obvious attention to audience. Distinction</p>

	their own voice from the voices of others, using voice markers (signal phrases) and embedded references.	voice from the voices of others, but voice markers (signal phrases) and embedded references could be more effective.	areas. Writer does not usually distinguish their own voice from the voices of others. Voice markers (signal phrases) and embedded references are lacking.	between the writer's own voice and the voices of others is unclear.
<b>Research Sources, MLA Format, and Citation</b>	All research sources obviously pass the "CRAP Test." Essay includes at least 7 sources, including 2 primary sources and 5 secondary sources (2 of which are from research databases). MLA format, Works Cited page, and in-text citation are all perfect by MLA standards.	Research sources generally pass the "CRAP Test," although one may be questionable. Essay includes at least 7 sources, including 2 primary sources and 5 secondary sources (2 of which are from research databases). MLA format, Works Cited page, and/or in-text citation are nearly perfect by MLA standards.	Two research sources do not pass the "CRAP Test." Essay includes 7 sources, although they do not meet the minimum primary, secondary, and database source minimum requirements. MLA format, Works Cited page, and/or in-text citation are not close to meeting MLA standards.	Three or more research sources do not pass the "CRAP Test." Essay does not include the required number of sources. MLA format/style has not yet been applied.
<b>Mechanics</b>	Writing is polished, free of spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors.	Writing contains some spelling, grammar, or punctuation errors. However, these errors do not impact the reader's understanding.	Writing contains numerous spelling, grammar, or punctuation errors. These errors impact the reader's understanding.	Frequent errors accumulate, impairing the reader's ability to understand the essay.

Grade: 21/24