

A NJ school dispute shows need for Black-Jewish solidarity | Opinion

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The New Jersey chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations recently filed an ethics complaint against a local high school principal over a privately funded educational trip to Israel, which was sponsored by the local Jewish Federation.

These trips have been happening for years. They are intended to expose educators to the realities of one of the most complicated conflicts in the world, and to provide the type of context that can't be understood through headlines, social media and competing narratives alone.

Sponsored travel for public employees should be subject to content-neutral ethics rules. But no one should assume that participating in an educational trip is proof that an educator's judgment has been purchased. Participation in such a trip should also not necessarily provide the only perspective an educator encounters.

If Muslim or Arab organizations want to bring educators to the Middle East to encounter Muslim history and Palestinian perspectives firsthand, that, too, would be valuable. More encounters, education and firsthand experience are precisely what we all need.

Having recently returned from the Atlanta Summit of Black Pastors and Rabbis, a conference devoted to strengthening relationships between Black and Jewish leaders, we couldn't help seeing the controversy through a wider lens: the dismantling of institutions important to our minority communities.

Over generations, American Jews have built institutions to protect a tiny and historically vulnerable minority. Organizations like the Anti-Defamation League have built expertise in tracking antisemitism and extremism, for Jewish as well as Black Americans and all victims of hate. Jewish Federations comprise hundreds of local chapters, each raising funds to support the vulnerable of all faiths, strengthen Jewish communities and respond to crises.

These institutions, like all organizations, are not above critique. But criticism is different from delegitimization, and increasingly some of the central institutions of American Jewish communal life are not simply being challenged, they are being portrayed as inherently suspect. Their expertise is questioned, their motives cast as corrupt and, at times, their participation in civic life portrayed as sinister.

The relationship between the Black and Jewish communities has always been a complicated mix of communal self-interest and eagerness to stand for justice with other minorities. It has taken more than 100 years for both groups to build institutions, political power and civic influence after facing long histories of exclusion. Today, both communities are watching pieces of that infrastructure come under attack.

For Black Americans, opposition to hard-won protections has increasingly become government policy. In 2026, the Supreme Court's decision in *Louisiana v. Callais* weakened the Voting Rights Act's authority to challenge maps that dilute Black voting power. In 2025, President Donald Trump ordered federal agencies to terminate diversity programs, while states across the country enacted restrictions on diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives. Protections won through decades of struggle are recast as discriminatory, while institutions created to open doors are portrayed as illegitimate.

For Jewish Americans, the attack comes from elsewhere. Activist groups and social media influencers frequently target mainstream Jewish organizations as too powerful, or compromised by their support for Israel's existence, or too politically suspect to be trusted.

Both Black and Jewish Americans are being told that the laws and legitimacy they spent generations fighting for are now the problem.

That suspicion does more than weaken each community. It also makes it easier to pit them against each other. Suddenly, Jewish success is framed as an obstacle to Black achievement, and racial justice is presented as a challenge to Jewish security. Organizations built to secure a place for minorities in American life become objects of suspicion not only among the majority, but also among minority communities themselves.

There are people across our political spectrum who benefit from these divisions. They may have disparate ideologies, parties and goals, but they share an investment in convincing Americans that someone else's belonging threatens our own.

That is why the complaint from the Council on American-Islamic Relations struck us so forcefully. We had just spent three days with dozens of other Black pastors and rabbis refusing the premise that one community's influence must threaten the others. We did not pretend that our communities share identical histories or agree about Israel, DEI, politics or much else. Instead, we committed to remaining in relationship.

That may sound quaint, but today it is radical.

Delegitimizing the institutions of minority communities threatens us all. None of us becomes freer by joining someone else's campaign against our neighbors. A school principal should be able to travel to Israel with educators without having his judgment treated as presumptively compromised. An educator should be able to learn from Muslim or Palestinian organizations without being treated the same way. Black institutions should be able to advocate unapologetically for Black Americans. Jewish institutions should be able to advocate unapologetically for Jews.

The attacks may target different rights and institutions, but the danger is shared. So, too, must be our response. Our communities, Black and Jewish, will be stronger if we stand together, defend one another and recognize that what threatens one of us ultimately diminishes us all. In so doing, we strengthen not only one another, but the democracy we share.

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