

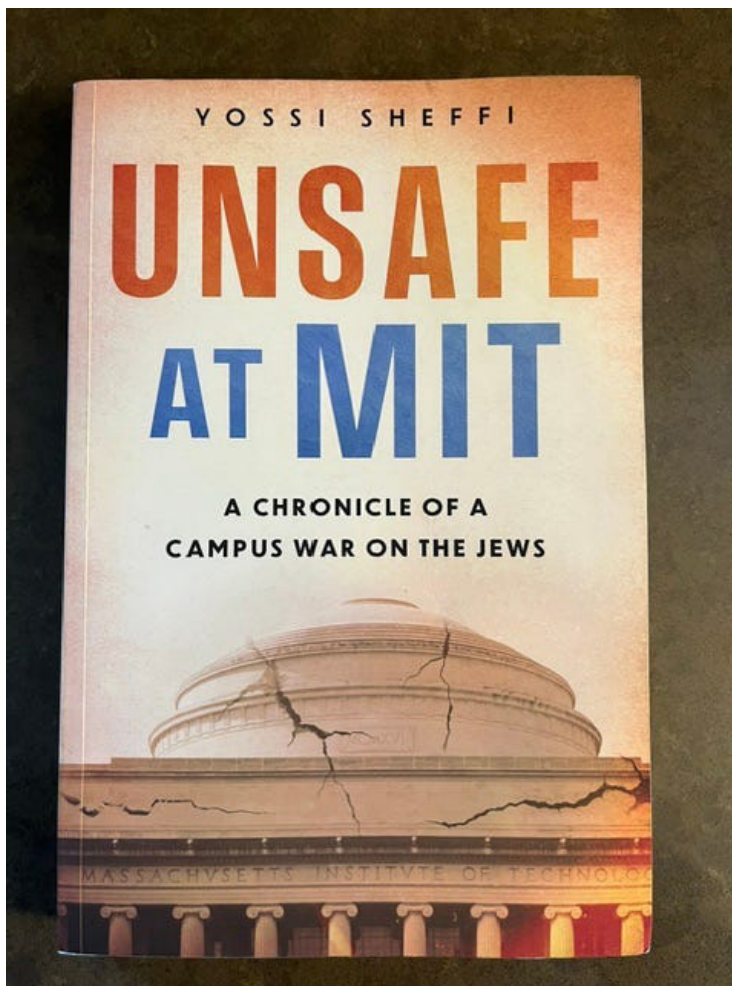
A Failing Grade For MIT

A prominent professor has published a stinging indictment of the school's administration post-October 7. But the 'mob rule' on campus led to one positive outcome.



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MIT did not issue a detailed report on the crisis on campus, so Professor Yossi Sheffi did.

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Lior Alon, who served seven years as an officer in the Israeli Navy, is not easily unnerved. He took part “in operations that risked my life,” he told me in a recent interview. But as a mathematics postdoc at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in the fall of 2023, three days after October 7 he was alarmed by the angry anti-Semitic calls for violence from protestors a few steps from his young daughter’s MIT daycare facility.

Interviewed by a Fox News reporter that evening, Alon said the dozens of students and outside agitators were “calling for an attack *here*.”

Hours later, he emailed MIT president Sally Kornbluth to describe the shouts he had heard for “one solution, intifada” as particularly disturbing to him as well as to other Israelis and Jews on campus. “We are truly afraid for our lives and the lives of our children, right here on campus,” he wrote.

Kornbluth replied that she appreciated his reaching out and shared his concern. “This matter has our full attention,” she wrote.

Not so, according to Alon and many Jewish students and faculty members at the prestigious university, including Yossi Sheffi, a native of Israel and prominent MIT professor of engineering for the last five decades. It was Sheffi who, after more than a year of frustrating and largely unsuccessful efforts by him and others to convince the administration to crack down on what he called “mob rule” on campus, decided in December 2024 to catalogue “a breakdown of everything MIT stood for.” The result is his 265-page self-published book, “Unsafe at MIT: A Chronicle of a Campus War on the Jews,” an insider’s stinging indictment of institutional failure based on more than three dozen interviews with students, faculty and researchers.

In the wake of similar antisemitic acts after October 7, a number of universities issued faculty-led, detailed reports to address the crisis on their campuses. MIT did not. So Sheffi took it upon himself. The author of nine books in his field, and the recipient of numerous awards as an internationally recognized expert in supply chain management, Sheffi said he wanted “to create a historical record of what happened” that would withstand future claims that the protests were within bounds. His book offers detailed descriptions of how an institution famed for its devotion to scientific inquiry and intellectual freedom became an increasingly hostile environment for Jews and Israelis.

Before the war began, Lior Alon said he enjoyed the collaborative atmosphere in his work but that it changed dramatically after October 7, when a number of colleagues stopped talking to him. He became an outspoken critic of the administration, which led to his accepting a position at Ben-Gurion University in Israel for this fall. But he said he wanted to make it clear that he felt “blessed” to have been at MIT, “one of the best scientific institutions in the world.” His primary criticism is not of the research staff but of the administration’s failure to follow its own rules, he asserted. “My goal is not to hurt MIT but to point out that it needs to address its faults and fix them.”

Mauricio Karchmer, a computer scientist, echoed that sentiment, noting that he and other Jewish critics who have spoken out against the leadership of MIT were not seeking “sympathy,” but rather hoped that the school will “return to its roots” and “that the good forces can beat the bad.”

Karchmer resigned his post at MIT in December 2023 because he “could no longer deal with the pervasive antisemitism” on campus, he said. Like Alon, he had a very positive experience at the school until October 7. But in the wake of the Hamas massacre that day, he told me that he came to believe “there are two MITs: one is a real asset to the United States” and the other consists of an “illiberalism” among students and faculty that “foments antisemitism.”

In his letter of resignation, he wrote: "I cannot continue teaching Algorithms to those who lack the most basic critical thinking skills or emotional intelligence. Nor can I teach those who condemn my Jewish identity or my support for Israel's right to exist in peace with its neighbors."

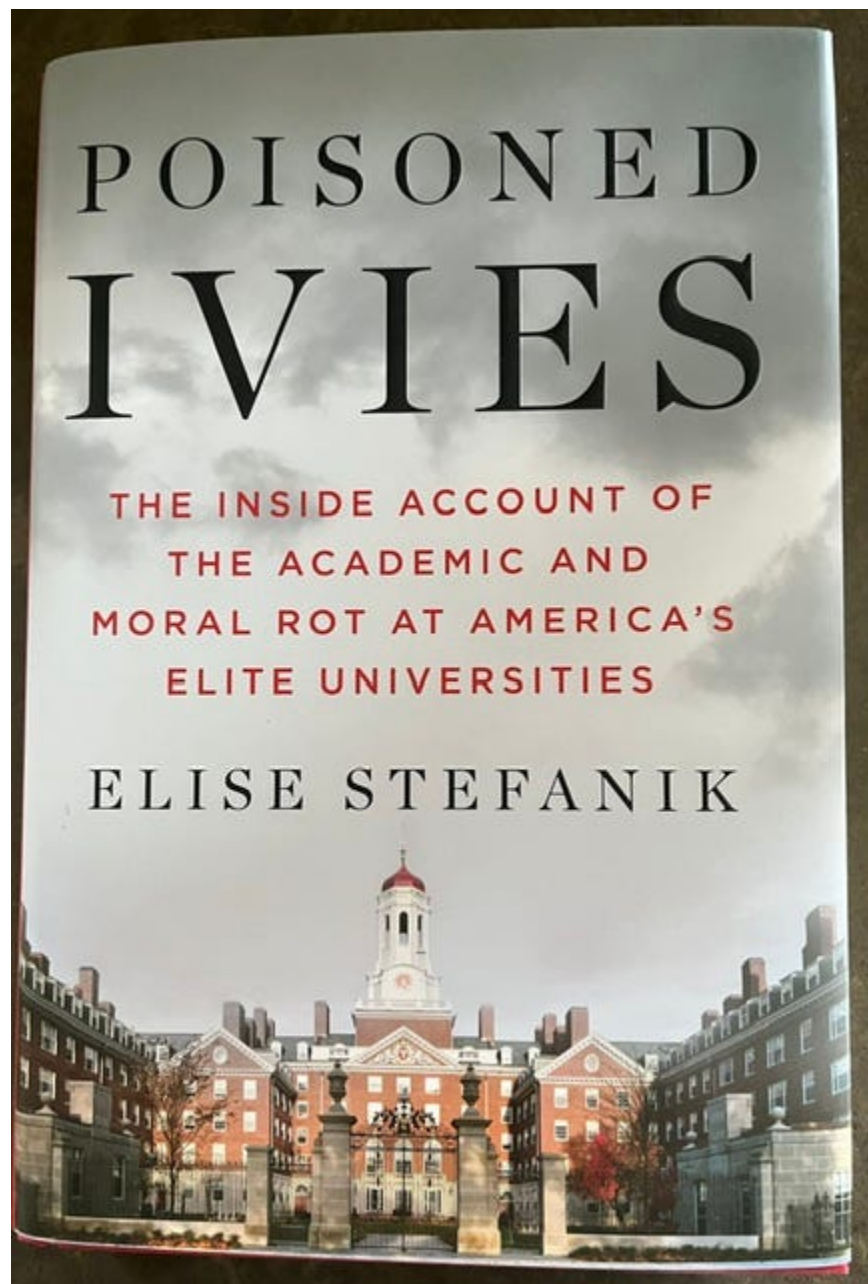
Karchmer wrote an Opinion piece in The Free Press titled "Why I Quit My Dream Job At MIT," which led to a number of invitations to teach, including from Israeli universities and Yeshiva University in New York, where he taught for a semester after leaving MIT. He was impressed with the "unapologetically Zionist" spirit of the campus, and enjoyed the experience, he said, but the commute from Boston was problematic.

Sheffi and his fellow critics make the case that while MIT President Kornbluth, who is Jewish, may have had personal empathy for the trauma Jews on campus were enduring, her administration did not enforce the school's own laws regarding demonstrations, threats of violence, harassment, disruption of classes and the basic legal and moral commitment to protect all students.

"She was new in the job," Sheffi told me of Kornbluth, "and she was in over her head. She was weak and listened to the lawyers." He was referring to the high-profile Congressional hearing in December 2023 where Kornbluth, Harvard president Claudine Gay and University of Pennsylvania president Liz Magill, were grilled by Rep. Elise Stefanik (R-NY). Each of the presidents equivocated when asked if calling for the genocide of Jews violates their school's code of conduct. The impact was immediate and profound. The hearing became front-page news; Gay and Magill were soon out of office. Kornbluth, backed by her board, survived but lost the respect of Jews on campus who felt increasingly vulnerable and unprotected.

Stefanik, riding the wave of support among conservatives for her aggressive questioning at the hearings, wrote a book, "Poisoned Ivies," about antisemitism at elite universities. Its subtitle – "The Inside Account

of the Academic and Moral Rot at America's Elite Universities" – is as blunt as Sheffi's subtitle reference to "a campus war on the Jews." Stefanik focuses on the dramatic Congressional hearing and, like Sheffi, she calls out DEI policies and the widespread failures to protect Jewish students.



A dramatic confrontation in Congress with three university presidents led Rep. Elise Stefanik (R-NY) to write about widespread failures on campus to protect Jewish students.

Both books, which came out within months of each other this year, were praised by conservative and pro-Israel readers for documenting the ordeal many Jews on campus experienced, and criticized by liberals for selective outrage. The opposing responses underscore the sharp political divide that goes beyond how specific universities dealt with antisemitism. It speaks to the larger debate over the Trump administration's efforts to punish several elite schools financially and legally. The administration says its actions are to protect Jewish students from antisemitism on campus; its critics contend the true goal is to end DEI programs and allow Washington to have a direct role in determining what courses are taught and who teaches them, undermining academic freedom.

Not surprisingly, many Jews have felt caught in the political crossfire.

'The Power Of The Brain'

If there is a bright spot in any of this turmoil it is the creation last year of a faculty-led program designed, in the aftermath of October 7, to both strengthen ties between Israeli and American researchers, and to support informal activities on campus for students and faculty who identify with Israel.

Named for a red flower that grows in southern Israel, Kalaniyot was put into motion at MIT when Yossi Sheffi and several other tenured faculty members sought to resolve a serious problem in the world of academia: a form of bias that isolates Israeli scholars, barring them from attending international conferences and refusing to review research they submit for publication in journals in their field.

"We realized we can't solve every problem" on campus that resulted from the war, Sheffi explained, "but we felt we could deal with this one," adding: "Israeli power is the power of the brain." The professors came up with a plan to offer one-year sabbatical fellowships to top Israeli scholars and two-year fellowships to Israeli postdoctoral researchers,

pairing them with academics at American universities. These collaborations often lead to having their joint research papers accepted by journals and deepen their personal as well as professional ties.

A second component of Kalaniyot's goal in countering anti-Israel activities with positive interaction calls for the visiting Israelis to organize seminars, faculty lunches and social events on campus to bring together students, faculty members and others who identify with Israel.

A number of wealthy donors who had stopped giving to universities where anti-Israel protests were out of control helped create Kalaniyot as a foundation that directs the funding, independent of the universities. Now in its second year, the program has Kalaniyot chapters at MIT, Dartmouth, University of Pennsylvania, Harvard Medical School, Columbia, Cornell and the University of Southern California, with several dozen Israeli researchers at those campuses.

There are still some anti-Israel protests and activities taking place at these and other schools, but as Dr. Shai Zilberzwige-Tal, an Israeli postdoc fellow at MIT through Kalaniyot, told The Boston Globe, "now we face them as a community with more tools, more support and a stronger network. Kalaniyot has given us," both faculty and students, "a sense of solidarity that helps us navigate these moments with confidence."

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