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Letter to the Editor: A Jewish Student's Perspective on Antisemitism at Seattle University

Eli Gunderman

"How about you take the Jews back to Europe where they came from. Take them back to where they came from!" This statement was yelled at myself and another Jewish student during a Student Government of Seattle University meeting during public comment for the reaffirmation of a resolution on solidarity with Palestine Nov. 15, 2023 in Harding 143. The speaker continued for another 40 seconds and then the room erupted in applause. Despite the blatant antisemitic sentiment of this statement, the meeting persisted as usual.

When I tell other students that I don't feel safe being a Jew on campus, I am often met with disbelief. There seems to be an unspoken idea that Jews in America are a privileged bunch, wielding sufficient institutional power to shield themselves from the common bigotry facing other marginalized groups. This mistaken belief has led to a general attitude of complacency regarding antisemitism. This is why, I believe, a room full of students were able to overlook such an unabashedly antisemitic statement, and why I feel it is my duty to bring awareness with this op-ed to ensure that antisemitism is not allowed to fester in our Seattle University community.

The word "Jew" originally comes from the word "Yehudi," meaning "From the Kingdom of Judah," The Kingdom of Judah was located in what is now the State of Israel. The idea that Jews should go back to Europe is not only antisemitic, but also ignorant of the thousands of years of Jewish history in the Middle East, North Africa and various other parts of the world. The Jewish people, born out of the Land of Israel 3000 years ago, predate the imperial conquests of the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, the Romans, the Byzantines, the various Arab empires, the Ottomans and the British.

Within our Jewish Student Union are Jews from Iraq, Spain, Israel and other countries. While our diaspora encompasses hundreds of countries, the Jewish ancestral homeland is and always will be Israel. From The Jewish Davidian Kingdom, to the Bar Kokhba revolt against the Romans, to the Maccabean revolt against the Greeks, the Jewish history in Israel spans thousands of years and is supported by abundant historical records and archeological evidence.

Jews only ended up in Europe because of the colonization of their ancestral land in Israel by various empires that subjected them to discriminatory treatment and forced expulsion. Over half of the Jewish population in Israel came from North Africa and Southwest Asian countries. Their families never stepped foot in Europe. The idea that Jews in Israel are "European colonizers," which has empowered individuals who wish to expel us from our homeland, is ignorant at best and a malicious attempt to erase our identity at worst. Furthermore, the idea that indigenous peoples can lose their indigenous status because they were forcefully displaced by colonizers, is incredibly harmful to all indigenous peoples around the world.

Jewish identity is not up for debate. Nor is antisemitism. I am a proud Jew, and Israeli. My Star- of David, a centuries old symbol of the Jewish people, will be worn openly on this campus despite any attempts to erase my Jewish identity, which is inextricably

connected to the Land of Israel. I truly believe in Seattle University, and I urge the administration and student government to take immediate measures to combat antisemitism before it's too late. As students of Seattle University we expect more. We call for accountability, mutual respect and repercussions for antisemitic behavior.