

Future of Jewish

France is on fire. New York will be next.

When societies allow antisemitism to flourish in their schools, they aren't just failing the Jews. They're destroying their own future.

Hana Raviyt Schank October 20, 2026



Protests and riots in Paris on October 17, 2026 (photo: Jorge Jaramillo/Wikipedia)

Future of Jewish is the ultimate newsletter by and for people passionate about Judaism and Israel. Subscribe to better understand and become smarter about the Jewish world.

This is a guest essay by Hana Raviyt Schank, a writer and fourth-generation Brooklyn Jew now living in Israel.

Antisemitism and violence have plagued the French public school system for 15 years, and the government has allowed it. When hatred of Jews becomes the norm, societies die. This

is what we are seeing in France.

French Jews have largely abandoned public schools because they've become hotbeds of antisemitism. After Islamists killed seven people at a Jewish school in Toulouse in 2012, followed by an attack at a kosher supermarket in 2015, 8,000 French Jews left for Israel.

Instead of protecting French Jews, the government and media leaned into Islamist rhetoric. In 2020, French history teacher Samuel Paty was beheaded for teaching freedom of speech. His murderers' sentences were reduced earlier this year. In 2024, a 12-year-old Jewish girl was gang-raped by teenagers hurling antisemitic slurs. One of the rapists' sentences was reduced last year.

Since Paty's murder, France has faced a teacher shortage because no one wants to get beheaded at work. The country has done little to staunch the flow of Jew-hatred, and today we're seeing what happens when hatred, poor education, and violence converge: Your country burns. Unless something changes radically, in 10 years there may be no Jews left in France.

When Jews leave a country, they take their skills with them. Jews account for 22 percent of Nobel Prize winners despite representing just 0.2 percent of the world's population. French Jews are overrepresented in medicine. After Hitler banned Jews from higher education, Germany lost 14 percent of its professors and much of its theoretical physics talent. Expelled German Jews went on to help develop the atomic bomb that defeated Germany's ally, Japan.

New York City's public schools are on the same path as France's. Enrollment has steadily declined since COVID, while Jewish day school enrollment is climbing. But Jews weren't merely students in New York's public schools. They helped build a system that was once a remarkable success story.

In the early 1900s, New York City's public schools were for kids not destined to become Masters of the Universe: poor Protestants, Blacks, and Jews. Catholics attended Catholic schools, while wealthier Protestants attended private preparatory schools. Public education came with Protestant teachings alongside reading, writing and arithmetic.

When Jews arrived in massive numbers around the turn of the century, they swamped the public school system, forcing schools to operate in shifts. To reduce overcrowding, the city introduced Rapid Advancement in 1910, allowing students to complete junior high school

in two years instead of three. The program helped poor families get their children educated, into college, and then into the workforce faster. Jews flooded in, including all four of my grandparents.

Meanwhile, specialized high schools were emerging. Stuyvesant, founded in 1904, introduced admissions tests by the 1930s. Brooklyn Tech and Bronx Science followed similar models, preparing students for careers in science, mathematics, and technical trades. The High School of Music & Art opened in 1936, followed by the High School of Performing Arts in 1947. These schools, too, were swamped by Jewish students.

In 1940, the city abolished Rapid Advancement after concluding that academically advanced children weren't necessarily emotionally mature enough to skip grades. Instead, gifted students were placed in general education classrooms with enrichment programs. In theory, gifted students would raise everyone's academic performance. In practice, teachers spent their time helping struggling students, while gifted children became bored troublemakers.

After World War II, the baby boom strained New York's schools. In 1949, the city introduced Special Progress, which required an IQ above 130 and a recommendation confirming emotional maturity. Again, Jews flooded the program, including both my parents.

Then, in 1957, the Soviet Union launched Sputnik, and America freaked out. To beat the Ruskies, New York began identifying talented math and science students and funneling them into specialized schools. Federal funding brought elaborate laboratories, radio stations, and workshops.

When my father attended Stuyvesant in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the school was all boys and nearly 90 percent Jewish. The highest achievers attended City College, which was free, while others went to Hunter or Brooklyn College.

My father was one of the few Stuyvesant graduates to leave New York, attending the Carnegie Institute of Technology (today Carnegie Mellon University) before landing a tenure-track position at Stanford University. My mother attended the High School of Performing Arts and then Brooklyn College. Their generation of Jews helped drive America's scientific, political, and economic dominance for the next 50 years.

Jews weren't just overrepresented in specialized schools. By 1940, Jewish women accounted for 56 percent of the city's teaching staff. Two of my grandparents, my aunt and

uncle, and countless great-aunts and uncles taught in New York's public schools.

By the time I was born in 1972, New York had become dangerous, and families who could leave did. Jewish children who remained attended private schools or specialized schools, which offered safety and a path to university. Jews had outgrown City College, Ivy League Jewish quotas were fading, and our horizons extended beyond New York.

Though I ached to be a full-time New Yorker, I grew up in New Haven, Connecticut, where my father accepted a professorship. New Haven was just as dangerous, if not more. After elementary school, we moved to the suburbs so I could attend a school where you didn't get knifed in the hallway.

By the time my children entered New York City's public schools in 2010, Special Progress had become Gifted and Talented, a massively oversubscribed program and political football. New York's demographics had also changed. Poor white people had largely disappeared, middle-class whites and Jews had moved to New Jersey or Long Island, and a new demographic had swamped the specialized schools: Asians.

Because New York remains heavily segregated, whether a school is considered "good" or "bad" largely depends on its neighborhood. "Good" schools, populated mostly by Jewish and Asian children, require living in expensive neighborhoods. My husband and I repeatedly found affordable apartments only to discover they were zoned for "bad" schools, meaning the zone included housing projects.

Money shapes public education in other ways. In gentrified Carroll Gardens, Public School 29 has a \$3 million annual Parent Teacher Association budget. Parents are asked to donate \$900 per child, and kindergarteners enjoy yoga and mindfulness classes. The neighborhood's average household income is \$230,000.

Meanwhile, 400 city public schools have Parent Teacher Association budgets of \$0. In Brownsville, once a Jewish neighborhood and now overwhelmingly Black and Hispanic, most households earn under \$20,000 annually. The entire school district has a combined Parent Teacher Association budget of \$29,000.

Brownsville was also the epicenter of New York's Black-Jewish conflict in 1968, when schools abruptly dismissed 19 Jewish teachers and administrators. The community no longer wanted Jews teaching its children, even though Jews represented an estimated 60 to 70 percent of the city's teachers.

One student submitted a poem declaring: “Hey, Jewboy, with that yarmulke on your head / You pale-faced Jew boy — I wish you were dead.” Yet when replacement teachers were hired, half were Jewish, because those were the people willing to teach desperately poor, potentially violent students.

For parents unable to afford neighborhoods with excellent schools, Gifted and Talented offered a golden ticket. As someone raising fifth-generation New Yorkers, I assumed my children would receive the same free education as their grandparents and great-grandparents. I didn’t understand how politicized the program had become.

The city discovered that introducing Gifted and Talented into failing schools attracted wealthier families, whose children’s higher test scores improved a school’s reputation. But because Jewish and Asian children took Gifted and Talented tests more frequently and scored higher than Black and Hispanic students, the programs did little to reduce segregation.

My son’s elementary school, Public School 10, introduced Gifted and Talented into a majority-Hispanic school the year before he started kindergarten. We chose the neighborhood because it was “getting better,” the methadone clinic across from our apartment had become a preschool, and the school offered Gifted and Talented.

The following year, the principal — a Black woman who’d attended Gifted and Talented herself — abolished the program, calling it racist. By the time my son graduated, the school was 50 percent white and considered one of Brooklyn’s “good” schools. It no longer offered Gifted and Talented.

Eliminating advanced instruction without replacing it became the new equity. The number of programs shrank, competition intensified, and the most selective schools began accepting only children scoring in the 99th percentile. Parents responded by preparing 4-year-olds for entrance exams, effectively excluding children whose families lacked time and resources.

In 2021, Mayor Bill de Blasio ended Gifted and Talented, sending New York’s schools back to the 1930s.

Board of Education of the City of New York (photo: Jim Henderson/Wikipedia)

When my daughter entered Mark Twain Junior High School, admission required specialized testing. By graduation, the exams had been abolished. After two years of trying to teach average students a specialized curriculum, the school reversed course and restored testing.

The schools are also overcrowded and increasingly unruly. When my son attended Brooklyn Tech from 2019 to 2023, a school with a four-percent acceptance rate, he attended in shifts. Lunch was at 10:30 a.m., and the cafeteria was so crowded he often ate in the school's 3,100-seat auditorium.

His freshman year, a bomb threat forced 6,000 students into downtown Brooklyn on a freezing winter day. In 2022, a gunman opened fire in a nearby subway station used by students. My son saw chaos and smoke as his train passed through. Other students witnessed the shooting, boarded trains, and went to math class. Later, the school offered counseling to traumatized students. Meanwhile, the shooter was still at large.

My daughter's junior high went into lockdown twice. There's nothing quite like receiving texts from your daughter hiding in a closet, unsure whether she'll be shot to death or continue learning about the Stamp Act.

COVID compounded the problems. Children lost two years of social and emotional development, while exhausted teachers struggled to manage them on meager salaries in one of America's most expensive cities.

One teacher described the children as "feral." While breaking up a fight, a student jumped on his back. The next day, the student's parents accused him of laying hands on their child — which he had, trying to get the kid off his back. After the administration threatened a court case, he abandoned a 40-year teaching career.

By 2025, New York City needed between 7,000 and 9,000 teachers just to stay afloat.

Edward R. Murrow High School, with 3,500 students and one of the city's most diverse student bodies, wasn't my daughter's first choice. But because she's legally blind, we've struggled with a public school system designed for average children with regular abilities. Murrow offered arts education, a writing program, and services for visually impaired students.

Two weeks after she started, a lunchtime riot forced the school to cancel classes. Weeks

later, a student stabbed another in the hallway. The school installed a metal detector, but screening took so long that only one class period remained by the time students entered. The next morning, the metal detector was gone. Later that year, a teacher committed suicide.

But what finally sent us looking for another school was antisemitism.

My son was in Israel on October 7th. Our family was traumatized by the attack, our efforts to get him to safety, and the avalanche of hatred unleashed by our Brooklyn neighbors. At school, my daughter's friends stopped speaking to her because she was a "genocidal Zionist who loved killing Palestinian babies." She was 14.

That winter, the school's literary magazine turned openly antisemitic. One day, my daughter texted me a poem she was reviewing and asked, "Is this antisemitic?" My body froze. It was Hamas propaganda in poem form. It was also an offense to poetry.

The following week, another poem, "Oh my Palestine!" — featuring "From the river to the sea, / You will be free" — narrowly lost the publication vote. The Hamas-propaganda-as-poetry didn't come exclusively from Palestinian students. It came from everyone.

The administration was no better. When my daughter complained to the literary magazine's advisor, he suggested she personally pre-screen submissions for antisemitism. Apparently, the solution to a traumatized Jewish student was to expose her to more trauma. She quit the magazine. Then she was assigned an antisemitic newspaper article in AP Research. I called the vice principal, who assured me she loved Israel — she'd even spent a year there in college! But when I explained the antisemitism problem, she balked.

I offered to arrange Anti-Defamation League training. Silence. The administration was more concerned with riots, stabbings, and crowd control than a little Jew-hatred. By the fall of my daughter's 10th-grade year, it was clear she couldn't finish high school in New York, where antisemitism was spreading like a contagion.

In fall 2024, I began searching for a school where my daughter could finish her education without being harassed, excluded, or othered. We considered Maine, where we have a home, but the local school had only one Jewish family. I understood immediately that my daughter would feel more at home on Mars.

Next, I called my cousin Stéphane in Paris. I'd attended public school there in the 1980s

and always dreamed of returning. Stéphane quickly dashed those hopes. Since Samuel Paty's murder, he explained, teachers were reluctant to teach history, leaving children to learn from radical Islamist videos online. This is what no one reports about the current riots in France. The schools are overcrowded, understaffed, and barely teaching. The problem isn't merely underfunding. Students are steeped in Islamist ideology.

It wasn't always this way. When Stéphane attended public school, many classmates were children of Holocaust survivors. His father Nicolas survived Auschwitz at 16. Their parents rarely discussed their experiences, leaving the children to piece together their histories. Back then, France was a haven for Jews. When I attended Lycée Molière in the 1980s, I was never made to feel like an other. I was l'Américaine ("the American") first, which interested my classmates far more than being la Juive ("the Jew").

And so, we began looking at Israel. Today, my daughter is finishing her senior year at a school attended by Jews, Christians, Sikhs, Bahais, Muslims, and Buddhists from around the world. Nobody asks her to review antisemitic poetry. She went from hating school to becoming a leader at the top of her class.

Israel has plenty of problems, but they're problems I'm eager to help solve. There are politicians I trust, and the government will never decide to expel or kill all the Jews. I'm sorry New York didn't work out for us, but I don't miss it. The Jewish enclave I loved is gone. Here, Tel Aviv feels as vibrant as New York did in the 1990s. Housing and transportation development can't keep up with the growing population, and secular and modern Orthodox families commonly have three children, sometimes six.

More importantly, the problems feel fixable. In New York, violence, racial tensions and the erasure of Jews mean the school system will never return to its glory days, when it produced students who helped change the world. New York's loss will be Israel's gain.

In the meantime, France is still on fire. I expect New York will be next.