

The IDEAS Journal

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Letter from the New Editors

Dear Readers,

We are thrilled to introduce ourselves as the new IDEAS Journal leadership team. With a shared commitment to fostering insightful discourse and amplifying diverse voices, we embark on this journey with enthusiasm and dedication.

In this issue, we delve into a multitude of pressing topics that reflect the complexities of our modern world. From shedding light on the emergence of the Black Student Union, a pivotal development on our campus this year, to grappling with the escalating conflict in Gaza and the alarming rise of antisemitism, we aim to provide comprehensive coverage that sparks critical dialogue and fosters understanding.

Additionally, we tackle the issue of systemic racism embedded within our education system by analyzing the extent to which the history curriculum perpetuates racial biases. Furthermore, we explore the intersections between surveillance capitalism, femtech, and the criminalization of abortion in post-*Roe v. Wade* America, paying close attention to the disproportionate impact on marginalized communities.

At IDEAS, our mission transcends mere tolerance; we strive for respect. We seek not only discussion but empathic dialogue, where diverse perspectives are valued and understood. Through our work, we endeavor to serve our community with integrity and empathy, fostering a space where meaningful engagement thrives.

We are excited to share this experiment with a smaller, more concise journal format in our effort to make our journal more accessible to more members of our community.

As part of this experiment, for the first time, our journal has no unifying theme. Rather, this is a collection of topics about which our IDEAS members are passionate.

If you have any questions or feedback regarding this experiment, we would be happy to hear from you.

Thank you for joining us on this journey. Together, let us embark on a quest for knowledge, empathy, and positive change.

Sincerely,

Teresa Daehne, Editor-in-Chief
Cosima Kramer, Managing Editor



Interview with the Founder and Head of the BSU, Sophie Pust

The Black Student Union (BSU) is a new club at JFKS. Can you tell us why you started it?

BSU was created to provide a supportive space for Black students to organize and advocate for their needs. To take leadership, to foster inter-grade community, to provide opportunities to learn and teach about Black history and culture, and to open lines of communication with administration. It was a space that was missing for the Black student population at JFK that is incredibly valuable.

How many students are currently in the JFKS BSU?

There are currently 17 students in the union.

Can you share your vision for the BSU?

A club completely run by students, for students, which puts the interests and needs of the Black community at JFKS first. It would be lovely to see the BSU remain an important and thriving group, even after the current leadership graduates.

What do you do in BSU meetings?

The structure of the meetings is super flexible and often changes weekly. While we do find time to socialize, the majority of the meetings are spent planning our upcoming initiatives such as our bake sale on April 10th (don't hesitate to drop by!!!), and an elementary school assembly we are presenting in the upcoming weeks. Meetings are always a space for members to bring up any issues they have, or to voice their opinions on their experiences being Black at JFKS and in Germany.

Are non-Black students welcome to join the BSU?

Yes! While BSU is primarily for Black students, students of African descent, or those who identify within the Black/African diaspora, other students may attend meetings if they are interested. We only ask that you be respectful and open-minded! Come visit us in W205 on Fridays at 12:45!

What specific goals do you have for the Black Student Union for the next year or two?

Since we established BSU only a couple of weeks prior to Black History Month, we had limited time to coordinate our efforts. In the upcoming years, I'd love to create a complete event calendar for the month that highlights Black history specific to JFK. We'd love to see more people join, as well as create a connection with the elementary school. Doing more community outreach with local organizations and services is definitely on the plan as well!

How do you define success for the BSU, and what metrics or indicators will you use to measure progress toward your goals?

In our vision for BSU, our success is defined strictly in the terms of our members. While it is exciting to think about all the initiatives and achievements we could accomplish in school, the primary focus of BSU will always be its members. As long as they feel as though they have a place to be themselves and have a community to rely on, which they can trust to advocate for them, the club has been successful.



What Are They Doing Here? Our Quiet Tolerance of Anti-Arab and Anti-Turkish Sentiment

By James Simanowitz

Picture this: you're sitting in English class and someone points out of the window at a visiting group of students from an inner-city school, exclaiming, "what are they doing here?" Someone says the N-word. Other classmates chime in with stereotypes about Black people and say we don't want any "scheißschwarzen" at our school. The substitute either doesn't notice or doesn't care. Precisely this happened at JFKS a couple months ago, but it was Arabic-looking students from a school in Neukölln.

Even students who normally wouldn't brave a risqué joke had looks of disgust on their face, as the entire class gaped through the window at these strangers. Not only did students call them "*Kanacken*" and express hate at the idea of them visiting our school, unlike the politically incorrect statements that are par for the course with some groups of boys in the *Mittelstufe*, there was no shame or irony in this racism. Worse than just ugly trolling, these were people's sincere opinions.

This isn't a one off incident. In Latin class, I overheard classmates talking about at what age an Arab becomes dangerous because you can't beat him up anymore. In Biology class I heard another student respond to someone explaining that a white Benz crashed on their way to school with "Türke! Türke!"

What would we do if a solid chunk of the student body expressed such evident loathing of Black people? Jewish people? We have that level of anti-Arab and anti-Turkish racism at JFKS and yet not only do we talk about it less than any other type of discrimination, we don't talk about it at all. There are two obvious causes for this. First, we have very few Arab or Turkish students.

Second, and perhaps more significantly, the vast majority of the anti-discrimination push comes from the American side of our school. As such, our anti-discrimination conversation is a rather American one and doesn't include the most prominent target of German racism.

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Regardless of whether we are Americans or Germans, we are all Berliners and we need to be conscious of the society we're living in, which means being educated on how raging racism is unacceptable even if we are saying "Scheißaraber" instead of "Scheißschwarzen". Anyone with their eyes and ears open knows there is a problem at our school.

We have the tools to fight discrimination, now we must connect A with B. I would suggest a thorough integration of anti-Arab, anti-Turkish, and anti-Muslim education into our anti-discrimination efforts, beginning with a school wide assembly. If you also see this as part of the right path forward and want to help please email me, we can create a better JFKS.

Navigating the Gaza Conflict: A Complex History of Aggression and Defense

By Maya Tabachnikoff

It is easy to become emotional about the current events in the Gaza Strip and in Israel. There could hardly be a more chaotic, complicated war. Children and elderly people were kidnapped, and hospitals have been bombed; all of this at a high profile, with the world's attention.

Racism, Islamophobia, Anti-Semitism, nationalism, and historical guilt are stirring the pot of opinions, making tensions and tempers rise. Despite this, I will attempt to retain a calm, logical perspective, hoping the reader can, too.

That is not to say that current headlines, which resemble some people's worst fears, can be faced without empathy or outrage.

The controversy is not whether the conflict is painful; this is undeniably true for both sides. The controversy lies in the history of this war; in the argument over which side is the aggressor and which is defending itself.

Between October 7, 2023, and February 29, 2024, at least 30,000 lives have been lost in Gaza. This figure is in addition to the 70,000 people injured, according to CNN. Moreover, the risk of famine in the densely populated Gaza Strip is growing; in the north, the first few people have already died of starvation. There is a shortage of medication and clean water, and some hospitals have shut down due to a lack of resources, according to Al Jazeera.

On the other hand, this conflict was initiated by Hamas—a violent, militant political group in Palestine, whose main goal is to destroy Israel—when they attacked on October 7. Armed men crossed into Israel, abducted over 200 people and killed at least 1,200; among them young people at a concert as well as residents—soldiers and civilians alike—of nearby communal villages. Israel's main reason for retaliating with violence is that it is defending its right to exist, as it has been, on and off, since its founding in 1948. Supporters of Palestine often argue that the fact that Jewish people lived in Jerusalem and the land around it long ago is not enough grounds to reclaim the land.

Palestinians refer to the loss of most of their land 76 years ago as Nakba, which means catastrophe. The dates tell the story: British mandate ended and Israel was officially established on May 14, 1948. The first Arab-Israeli war began on May 15, 1948. In other words, Israel has quite literally been fighting for its existence since day one. Al Jazeera refers to the division of the land which had been Mandatory Palestine as "ethnic cleansing." At the same time, Israel's existence as a Jewish state with millions of inhabitants is largely due to emigration from Europe before, during, and after the Holocaust. Violence and persecution contributed enormously to the resettlement of the area by Jewish people, yet violence is the unwanted result.

The events, current and past, are facts. They seem contradictory, and yet they are true simultaneously.

In contrast with a history of persecution, hundreds of thousands of Israeli citizens live in settlements, which is to say, on land which, by the Oslo Accords of 1995, belongs to Palestinians. While this is illegal and unfair, what Hamas did is beyond all justification: to slaughter and mutilate over a thousand people, most of them civilians. The events, current and past, are facts. They seem contradictory, and yet they are true simultaneously. So where has this investigation brought us? Back to the start?

Ask yourself, who is the aggressor: a people which voted a terrorist group into power in 2006, and is now suffering dreadfully? Or the nation causing this dreadful death and loss, which justifies this on the grounds of necessary self-defense, this being just one of many enemies?



Dueling Perspectives on the Berlin History Curriculum

Perspective 1. Problematic and Unrepresentative, But Not Racist

By Miles Ehrlich

Is the history curriculum taught at JFKS racist? When I first heard this question, I was bewildered. After all, for a school as international and generally progressive as ours is, it is hard to accept such a staunch declaration. But, as someone who arguably spends too much free time learning about obscure historical facts, I was intrigued.

Admittedly, the curriculum's Western-centric focus is easy to discern; we are after all a German-American school offering two national Abschlüsse, the Abitur and the Diploma. Between grades 7 and 10 curricula are prescribed by the Berlin Senate, which are designed for German Gymnasium schools in preparation for the eventual Abitur. In 11th and 12th grade students take American History, in addition to either AP, Grundkurs, or Leistungskurs history classes depending on their preference. However, there is not a single class not explicitly devoted to European or American history. Even other AP history courses such as World History, while widespread in the U.S., are not available at JFKS.

As an 11th grader, the only exception to this I have seen in my 5 years here was a two-hour digression into the Korean War in 10th grade (which was taught more through the American than the Korean lens). Logistics and teacher availability are somewhat responsible for this structure. But why is it that no one else's history seems to matter at our school?

The Oxford definition of racism is "prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism by an individual, community, or institution against a people based on their membership of a particular racial or ethnic group." . So, how do the JFKS curricula hold up to these criteria? While none of the Berlin history *Rahmenlehrpläne* include specific statements about race or ethnicity, both AP courses offered at JFKS include the following: "the study of different nationalities, cultures, religions, races, and ethnicities is essential within a variety of academic disciplines".

More important though, is the actual amount of content devoted to the study of different cultures and histories. Both regular and AP U.S. history classes focus substantially on slavery and the civil rights movement in North America. While European history classes do mention slavery in antiquity and colonialism in the modern age, this is typically done in broad strokes with a focus on how these events affected European people or states.

Rather than specific antagonism against any single ethnic group then, it appears that in or the majority of JFKS history classes, a Eurocentric curriculum is taught that only minimally includes other ethnicities because they are not European. Whether this can or should be labeled racism is up for debate. Firstly, we are still a German school. This does not excuse blatant discrimination but does justify the need to put Europe at the core of a limited history curriculum. 15 years ago students in the *Mittelstufe* received three hours of history class a week for a year. This is now a third of what it once was.

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It is impossible to teach all of the history of every region in the world in such a restrained time window. Since many of our students will likely live in Germany, teaching regional and national history, especially given this country's influential and devastating past, is vital. Secondly, the actual curricula of the Berlin senate are surprisingly flexible, with a wide variety of optional units covering Jewish, Muslim, Arab, Latin American, and Asian history . But these are rarely if ever taught at JFKS. Understandably, teachers have to focus on mandatory units that help prepare students not only for the coming years' curricula but also for the Abitur exams. As a consequence of familiarity with the content required for these, less relevant global history units are neglected, whether out of priority or necessity.

Lastly, other social sciences such as geography do cover substantially more global course content, although this is typically limited to post-WWII analyses of modern states. Deeper and more important historical information cannot be realistically taught in such classes, whose primary focus concerns the present day anyway. History teachers are incentivized to focus on European history

Given the current system, with other cultures and ethnicities relegated to an occasional reference. Is this explicitly and antagonistically racist? In my opinion, no. However, the current curriculum is problematic, lacking in diversity, and unrepresentative. History should not be one-sided. But neither should a curriculum lose the focus of what it (ideally and pedagogically) aims to achieve. As a consequence of being a German-American school, JFKS teaches Eurocentric history classes that minimally discuss other cultures, races, and ethnicities. Logistical, systematic, and institutional restraints only incentivize this further, giving the appearance of a hopeless future. However, there are clear and decisive actions we could take to dramatically improve this situation.

For one, the curriculum should mandate at least one unit of non-European history taught per year in the Mittelstufe, something already being worked on by our Student Council. Additionally, for the Oberstufe, a new history Grundkurs focusing on non-European history would not only be beneficial for students but could also be accredited towards the Abitur. Alternatively, given enough interest, the AP World History course could also be taught. While I do not believe that our history curriculum is explicitly racist, I do think that our school can and should offer a less Eurocentric, more diverse history curriculum.



Perspective 2. The Berlin History Curriculum is Racist

By An Anonymous Alumnus

The Berlin history curriculum is racist. This does not mean that the people who wrote it are racists nor does it mean that the teachers who teach it are racists. But the curriculum is racist.

The history curriculum is racist because it *chooses* to ignore the histories of people of color. No Asian history. No Latin American history. No Middle Eastern history. No African history, except maybe some history of European colonization of Africa. The decision to exclude the histories of all the people from all these regions repeats the message that the only story that *really* matters is the Western story. What history do kids learn in Berlin public schools? Grade 7 is the Middle Ages in Germany. Grade 8 is the Protestant Reformation and the French Revolution. Grade 9 is European nationalism, WWI, and the Weimar Republic. Grade 10 is WWII and the Cold War in Europe. Grade 11 brings kids to Greece and Rome during the first semester before basically repeating the 7-10 curriculum throughout grades 11-12. Of course, as Miles wrote, JFKS has U.S. History and I remember the U.S. History teachers at our school trying to be racially inclusive. But the U.S. is a Western country with Western values and, besides, U.S. History is not part of the Berlin history curriculum.

What if our English department only taught literature written by white authors? What would you call that choice? I would call it racist. Wouldn't you?

Instead, the English curriculum chooses to share diverse voices and experiences. Students benefit from this. Students would also benefit from learning a diverse range of histories.

This is my big point. It's not just that the JFK history curriculum is racist. It's that there are consequences of ignoring histories outside of the Western world.

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I left JFK without an historical framework to understand culture and life and problems in China and India (who together are 35% of the global population). I graduated virtually clueless about Africa. The Middle East is totally ignored. Again, there are consequences of this ignorance.

Consequently, while only some apps “disclaim that they share information with law enforcement” (Fowler, et al. 32), all US-based apps disclose information in response to warrants, exposing individuals to legal threats.

Additionally, most free period apps are “inaccurate and lack a scientific gynecological framework” (Røstvik 156); unsurprising as the monetization of user data rather than the promised outcomes is the developer’s ultimate aim. However, the notion that these apps are truly free is, in itself, a misconception. Drastically put, “when something is free, the customer isn’t a customer at all, but has become the product” (Prince 17). Many different factors in the femtech industry enable companies to monetize user data. Despite claims that companies will “never share or sell” the allegedly “fully encrypted” user data, numerous transgressions have occurred. For example, in 2019, health data from millions of Flo users, including information on users’ pregnancy (terminations), were shared with third parties, without limiting “how third parties could use this health data” (Federal Trade Commission).

One factor allowing companies to monetize user data is that the terms of service and privacy policies are often hidden on their websites or written in a manner that many users are unable to comprehend. A 2019 study found that on average, a college-level education was required to read both types of agreements while close to half of American adults read at or below the eighth-grade comprehension level (Weiss 168-176). Furthermore, companies reserve the right to change their terms of service “unilaterally at any time with sole discretion as to if and how to notify users,” leaving customers’ data vulnerable (Fowler; et al.). Additionally, due to lacking regulations, profiteering from health data has little to no consequences, save for fleeting bad press (Harris et al.). The only certain way for companies to avoid having to disclose data is ensuring that even they cannot access the information.

However, if the monetary interest in reproductive data is considered, it becomes clear why few companies earnestly commit to this strategy. Yet even if efforts to increase data security were made following the rescinding of *Roe v. Wade*, large amounts of information continue to be leaked, risking the security of pregnant individuals.

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Apps like Clue, Flo, and Bellabeat have introduced new layers of security, but considerable amounts of sensitive data are still collected and available to purchase by groups from pro-life activists to law enforcement. Indeed, cases of data utilization against the pregnant individual have already occurred,

such as when federal immigration officers used purchased data to track immigrants’ menstruation and identify pregnant individuals to pressure them, some young teenagers, into continuing the pregnancies and not seeking an abortion (Prince 31).

A future in which all pregnant individuals are liable to having their behaviors questioned is conceivable, even probable if such legislation were to pass.

Additionally, self-managed abortion is rising, meaning that pregnant individuals increasingly face legal prosecution, contrasting with the historical approach of mainly targeting doctors and other health service providers (Prince 27). This will necessitate law enforcement to collect more private health information. Furthermore, “in an era of big data and artificial intelligence, companies hold the power to make inferences about individuals’ health from a wide variety of data points” (Prince 11-12) and “anonymous aggregate data” (Røstvik 164) can often be re-identified. Even if the data obtained through period tracking apps is insufficient to create a triable case, the remainder of a person’s digital footprint can be combined to infer upon reproductive health status and changes to said condition.

Data available to law enforcement through data brokers allows them to target individuals with menstrual irregularities, including, but not limited to pregnancy. Information obtained from these apps provides the date of a user’s last period and can be combined with location data confirming that they “crossed state lines to a jurisdiction where abortion is legal” (Fowler, et al., “Femtechdystopia” 32). Obtaining health data from femtech apps is “standard protocol in jurisdictions where abortion is criminalized,” leaving individuals, including young teenagers, vulnerable to prosecution, even (in some states) in cases of rape or incest (Prince 29).

Additionally, those who have suffered an miscarriage, have irregular periods, or simply forget to enter the dates of their period into the app are also at risk. The latter two are especially common in teens new to menstruating. The dataset-similarities between individuals with an abortion and those with a miscarriage are striking, leaving them vulnerable to legal action. Although reproductive health surveillance affects everyone who menstruates and uses these apps, marginalized communities will be disproportionately affected as they are more likely to be surveilled and discriminated against because of reproductive choices. Additionally, the instigated legal actions predominantly target ethnic minorities and those in poverty will feel the restriction of reproductive rights most intensely.

Following the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, a multitude of lay media sources advised to “delete period tracking apps, download [...] VPNs [...] and even get burner phones” (Prince 6-7).

For many, these technologies are prohibitively expensive. Furthermore, low levels of education, significantly correlated with low socioeconomic status, may further endanger user's rights by decreasing their ability to fully comprehend privacy policies. Thus, more data is available about individuals afflicted by poverty. However, this potent tool at law enforcement's disposal is arguably also one of the most promising weapons to counteract the attack on reproductive freedom. While femtech apps pose many serious risks, asking everyone capable of becoming pregnant to opt out of the digital economy entirely or give up technologies they wish to use would be both unrealistic and misogynistic. Such advice constitutes a chilling effect (discouragement of the exercise of a person's rights through the threat of governmental legal action) which will lead to a decrease in reproductive information, harming thousands of women's ability to make informed decisions (Prince 37).

Femtech has the potential to grant individuals greater autonomy over their reproductive health and gives users insights into their general health. For those seeking an abortion, apps can provide early warning in jurisdictions with a short window for legal abortion. In states prohibiting abortions entirely, early notification allows more time to plan, both financially and logistically. Therefore, femtech has the capacity to aid reproductive rights, but only if current and potential future risks are eliminated. Increasingly strict abortion laws and the introduction of fetal personhood laws raise the risk of criminalization of conduct during pregnancy. In Georgia, “a fetus now qualifies for tax credits [...] and [...] population counts” (Zernike). Similar movements are underway in other states. In light of this, the criminalization of so-called fetal-harming behaviors is not out of the question; data about alcohol/substance use, even information about diet, exercise, and other activities could be leveraged in legal actions (Fowler et al., 6). Fetuses being given the same/similar legal rights as human beings would strengthen the juristical backing for such measures, especially if brought before courts with biased judges. A future in which all pregnant individuals are liable to having their behaviors questioned is conceivable, even probable if such legislation were to pass.

On the whole, while menstruation tracking apps could aid individuals seeking abortions in the post-*Roe v. Wade* America through early warnings, the risks that they pose,

especially to those in marginalized groups, expose customers to threats of legal prosecution, chilling effects and, looking to the future, criminalization of conduct during pregnancy. While state governments aggressively maintain an interest in fetal development via law enforcement, reproductive surveillance is unavoidable. Individual and company actions are necessary, yet for the data ecosystem to become truly user-friendly, a comprehensive overhaul of legislation is necessary. A dragnet surveillance of period tracking apps in order to identify people suspected of terminating a pregnancy is a scenario that ought to be taken seriously in a post *Roe vs. Wade* America.

IDEAS Looks Forward To...

- **New members!** We are especially seeking grade 9 and 10 student participation. So if you are reading this and care about the IDEAS mission, please pop into B209 any Monday at lunch! You'll be sure to be part of a meaningful conversation.
- **Your feedback and recommendations!** If you have any proposals for the journal, the podcast, or are interested in adding your voice, email us at ideas@jfksberlin.org.
- **More podcasts!** Until then, tune in to the podcast to hear our recent debate over gender segregated sports classes or our discussion of Black History Month!
- **Your support!** Please donate to help IDEAS fund projects like the podcast, this journal, and our community initiatives. If you have the means, we humbly ask for donations using the QR code below!



- **Your opinion!** We have a survey about the problems explored in this issue and would really appreciate your point of view! Scan the QR code below.



Note: a version of this journal complete with author sources is available on our website.