

**SPOILER ALERT: The Secret Jewish Guide to *Nevergreen***  
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*Nevergreen* is, on the surface, about campus cancel culture, but also has a subtle, yet quite deep, Jewish angle. In fact one might say that it is *secretly* all about the Jews, and is making the point that the contemporary campus situation is very much about the Jews even where neither the campus, nor the novel, explicitly mention the Jews. And if there is a (secret) thesis of the novel, it might well be this, informed by the infamously lachrymose history of the Jews: that whenever large groups of people are gripped by some all-consuming universalist ideology, as campus activists currently are, it never turns out well for the Jews.

I adopted this strategy of “secrecy” for several reasons:

(1) To reflect the fact that the ideologies relevant to campus cancel culture (such as Critical Race Theory (CRT), Intersectionality, Anti-Zionism) are all ultimately antisemitic even where *they* don’t explicitly mention the Jews and claim not to be. Indeed we might say of these ideologies that they are *secretly* antisemitic. If you just casually glance at them you could miss it entirely. On the surface CRT is about social justice and human rights etc., but with a little digging you discover (say) the racial essentialism and the idea that Jews are white oppressors, etc. Intersectionality may have an insight that different modes of oppression are interconnected in important ways, but a little digging reveals that the oppression of Jews is left out of concern and instead Jews are (again) pegged as oppressors. (And *de facto*, intersectional coalitions on campuses that promote BDS resolutions are almost always constituted by all the ethnic and progressive student groups aligned against the Jewish student groups.) And with Anti-Zionism, well we’re all familiar with the efforts to distinguish that from antisemitism, and also familiar with the many ways that the former reflects and is driven by the latter. In the end, all three of these ideologies (and others) end up being about, and weaponized against, the Jews.

(2) To avoid turning away readers who may not particularly care about the Jewish situation on campus. There’s plenty of material here about campus cancel culture even apart from the secret Jewish angle. And if you just casually glance at *Nevergreen*, you could miss the Jewish angle entirely.

(3) To make the book fun for those who might want to decode it.

But at the risk of possible spoilers, I want to make sure that those potentially providing blurbs or reviews are aware of this deeper level of the book. So here are just some of the clues relevant to such a decoding, presented without too much elaboration or analysis.

- The Jews are absent on this campus. *Conspicuously* absent. The word “Jew” and its cognates does not appear in the novel. Yet the Jews are present throughout, *in* their absence and in other ways.
- Pay attention to the geography of the campus and the names of the buildings (not explicitly Jewish, but deeply Jewish names), starting with the name of the island itself. These call attention to the absence of the Jews, as well as reflect the conspiratorial nature of antisemitic theories.
- There is reference to some “episode” several years prior. There are clues throughout about what that episode was, and that episode explains *why* there are no Jews there. (Hint: whenever large groups of people are gripped by all-consuming universalist ideologies, it never turns out well for the Jews.) Compare to Howard Jacobson’s novel *J.*, re: WHAT HAPPENED, IF IT HAPPENED.
- The college has such a limitless emphasis on inclusivity that it even has affirmative action quotas for white supremacists. That’s a comment on the internal paradox of an allegedly absolute commitment to “diversity” and “tolerance,” but also speaks to the presence on campuses of, and widespread campus solidarity with, groups that really don’t support the values of diversity and

tolerance that bring them there in the first place. That said, pay attention to certain remarks by a student quite deliberately named Ariana.

- The internal paradox of the commitment to absolute diversity and tolerance also plays out in the many diverse, and constantly bickering, campus groups. These diverse groups do indeed differ about many things, and the more extreme groups quite explicitly are opposed to each other, except for the one thing they can all apparently agree on—which produces their annual joint thrashing of a certain now abandoned house in commemoration of the “episode.”
- The cancel campaign targeting the main character, J., reflects this same uneasy alliance, run by shadowy figures named “Cerise” and “Viresce,” who are in charge of “the Resistance.”
- What remains of traditional scholarship on this delirious campus is Jewish-related scholarship (see the Elijah scene in the library, which also connects to the “deeply Jewish” geography and building names). But this scholarship must be done in secret because of the campus atmosphere, which, in a word, is not welcoming to any affirmation of Jewishness. (There’s also that special link between Jews, education, scholarship, universities.)
- And of course the main character, targeted for cancelling, just as the Jews are being targeted for cancelling on campuses all over North America and Europe, goes by the initial “J.,” both as a reference to Jews and to Howard Jacobson’s novel of that name.
- In general, the themes of irrationality and disconnection from reality reflect both the nature of all-consuming commitment to ideology and the antisemitic mind. And the overall thesis, again, is that all-consuming universalist ideologies never turn out well for the Jews.

In the end—in addition to providing a satirical critique of campus cancel culture and its excesses—*Nevergreen* is attempting to communicate what it *feels* like to be the target of cancellation, and to warn of what appears, to this author at any rate, to be the ineluctable trajectory currently underway: the cancellation of the Jews on campus. (The only way out is to forswear any allegiance to the Jewish state; eerily reminiscent of the choice given to many Jews over the centuries: convert, leave, or die.) Early readers have suggested that the book is a mix of “academic satire” and the genre of “horror,” particularly in the way that the main character J. experiences the cancellation campaign. In his subjective experience he is being pursued, possibly, by a mob of mad, bloodthirsty cannibals. But wait, do the students *really* want to, what, *murder* him? Of course not; “they’re just kids”; they’re excited to be activists about their causes *du jour*; they’re easily distractable; they’re not *really* pursuing him. But then again, maybe they kinda sorta are, and really do. Something in them revels in the aggression, the power, of cancelling, something in their commitment to ideology converts these people who are allegedly “against hate” into the deepest haters of all...

The angry campus demonstrations against Israel, depicting Israel via all the blood-libel slanders, accompanied by outright calls to destroy her and for intifada; the onslaught of campus vandalism against Jews, swastikas everywhere, Hillel buildings defaced, Chabad houses vandalized and burned; thousands of professors and administrators and fellow students signing grossly one-sided statements condemning and calling for the cancellation of the lone Jewish state in the world; the physical assaults of Jews in major cities and in and around campuses.

Can you blame Jewish students, staff, and faculty for feeling like they are being pursued, possibly, by a mob of mad, bloodthirsty cannibals?

And just mightn’t it be possible—if the present trajectory remains unchecked—that they are?