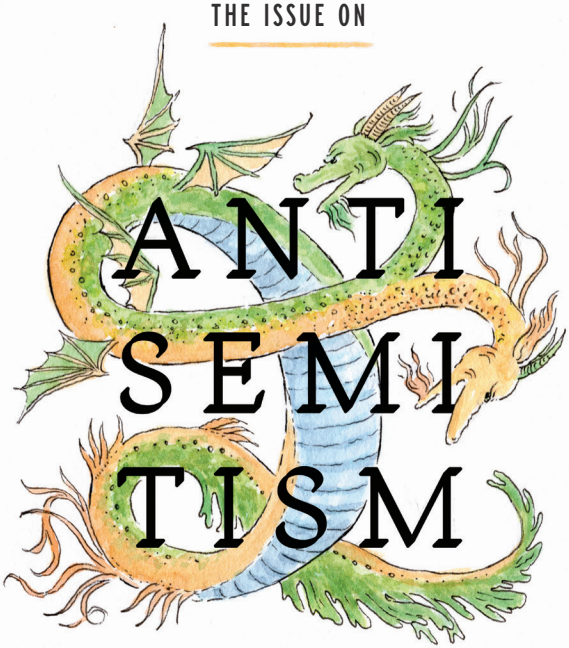
SAPIR

IDEAS FOR A THRIVING JEWISH FUTURE

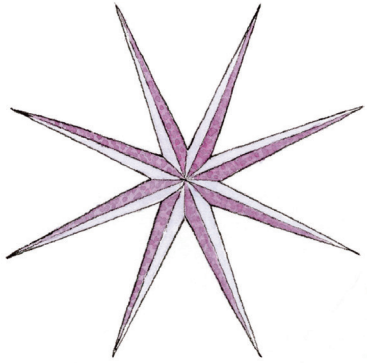
THE ISSUE ON



Volume Ten *Summer 2023*

And they saw the God of Israel:
Under His feet there was the
likeness of a pavement of
sapphire, like the very sky
for purity.

— Exodus 24:10



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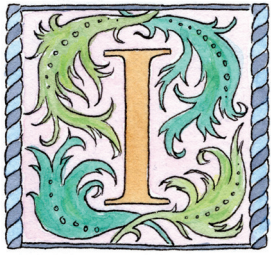


N 1938, in an attempt to fight the polio that afflicted President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the March of Dimes was born. In 1955, a young grantee of the March of Dimes named Jonas Salk rolled out his new vaccine and effectively ended the health crisis that had paralyzed the former president and gripped America for 40 years. While the March of Dimes could have declared victory, thanked its donors, and shut down, it pivoted its focus to birth defects. Today it has an annual budget of around $100 million.

I often reflected on the March of Dimes when I thought of antisemitism in America. Sure, it was always present. But it hid in the shadows, lurking in nasty places among nasty people. To the extent that we focused on antisemitism, it seemed to be more about remembering an old problem than confronting a current one.

How quickly that has changed.

American Jews have had much to be proud of. We worked tirelessly for a secure State of Israel. We fought to preserve the memory

of the Holocaust as a unique historical event. And we jumped in to help Jews in need around the world, from the Soviet Union to Ethiopia. If we were more outward-looking than inward-looking, that could be forgiven. After all, we enjoyed a position of strength and security. Our sense of noblesse oblige prompted us to turn our gaze elsewhere.

I, for one, don't want to go back to a world where the preoccupation of Jews is to hunker down and think solely, or even primarily, about our safety and security. But I also don't think we should settle for a world where children are afraid to walk to school wearing a yarmulke or other public signs of their Jewishness. When it comes to the safety of our children, it's folly to try to determine how much security is enough.

Still, as Bret Stephens reminds us in this issue, antisemitism is ultimately the Gentile's problem, not ours. Ours is about fostering a sense of Jewish identity in our children that is so strong that if we asked them to hide it, they would not know how. Ours is about forging a connection to Israel that inspires regular visits and a sense of solidarity with her people — our people. Ours is about nurturing a love for Torah that permeates every discussion and every aspect of our lives.

Our declaration of victory over antisemitism was premature. It is real, on the Left and the Right, in Paris, Toronto, and New York. Churchill wrote, "Truth is incontrovertible. Panic may resent it. Ignorance may deride it. Malice may distort it. But there it is." We need to recognize antisemitism and we need to fight it. But we also can't allow it to dominate our lives or our attention. Those must have an ultimate focus on fostering a thriving Jewish future.

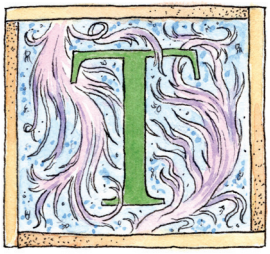
If we don't, what kind of Judaism are we protecting? ✳

PART ONE

SEEING ANTISEMITISM

BRET STEPHENS

Three Falsehoods About Antisemitism — and One Truth



THE FIRST FALSEHOOD we tell ourselves about antisemitism is that it is mysterious: a force that has pursued us from one land and one age to the next for reasons that have no good explanation other than mindless hate or convenient scapegoating.

This is a foundational misunderstanding of the nature of antisemitism. It's an underestimation of the forces, interests, and ideas that undergird and animate it. And it's an injustice to the Jewish people's world-shaping role in history.

Jews have stood for a set of distinctive ideas for thousands of years. *Monotheism. Peoplehood. Freedom-seeking. Moral absolutes. Chosenness. An emphasis on literacy (including female literacy) and the written word. Argument for the sake of heaven.* These ideas long ago ceased to be uniquely Jewish. They may not even be originally Jewish. But no people are as fully associated with them as the Jews.

We rightly take pride in these concepts. They are landmarks in the development of Western civilization, in both its religious and secular dimensions. Without a universal morality dictated by a single and all-powerful God, it would be difficult to conceive of the idea of human rights — rights that transcend political boundaries and cultural differences. Without the respect for differences of scriptural interpretation — the House of Hillel, the House of Shammai — we would have had a much dimmer notion of the inherent value of debate and dissent.

But these ideas are also radical, in their time and still in ours. They are a critique of the way things were, or are, done and a threat to the people who benefit from the status quo. And ideas with radical consequences tend to engender indignant and often furious reactions.

Consider it from the point of view of some long-ago king trying to deal with the challenge of a Jewish minority within his borders.

If there is only one God, he might reasonably ask, what happens to *my* gods — of the moon and sun, fertility and death, wisdom and war? If Jews can assert a degree of apartness as a people, how can I be sure of their fealty? If Moses could demand that Pharaoh let the Jewish people go, won't the oppressed minorities in my kingdom rally behind their own Moseses? If the morality of the Ten Commandments is absolute, what does that say about those of us with different moral ideals? If the Jews see themselves as chosen, does that mean they think they are better than we are? If Jews can read, does it not also give them power in my largely illiterate society? And won't the Jewish penchant for doubting, disputing, and second-guessing threaten the religious and ideological conformity that helps secure my rule?

Before we think of antisemitism as mere bigotry, then, it's worth also thinking about it as the expression of its own set of ideas: anti-freedom, anti-particularity, anti–universal morality, anti-nonconformity — in all, the ideas of anti-Judaism. These ideas are wrong and, in the long run, self-defeating: The civilizations that

have subscribed to them have either already perished or eventually will. They also have been popularized and weaponized in the form of conspiracy theories about Jews — theories that are themselves profoundly irrational, as we will discuss below. But they are still *ideas*, and, as such, intelligible, coherent, self-interested, and often instrumentally rational. To dismiss them as merely foolish is itself foolish.

It's also shortsighted: The road to wisdom when it comes to antisemitism begins when we stop underestimating its personal, political, and intellectual appeal.

The second falsehood is that antisemitism belongs in the same class of hatreds as racism and ethnic bigotry.

That's not to say that antisemitism hasn't, historically, contained powerful elements of each. From the *Sentencia* of 15th-century Spain to the Nazi and Fascist race laws of the 1930s, hatred of Jews has often expressed itself in starkly racist terms. And the restrictive covenants that kept Jews out of redlined neighborhoods and suburban country clubs were of a piece with the discriminatory practices that the old WASP establishment also inflicted on those who were Italian, Mexican, Irish, black — anyone who couldn't trace his lineage to Protestant England or at least western Europe.

But antisemitism is a much broader and more varied bigotry than racial or ethnic prejudice.

While all prejudices stem from "us"-versus-"them" thinking, antisemitism differs in its emotional basis. Racism and ethnic bigotry emerge from feelings of superiority, contempt, and fear. Antisemites are also driven by feelings of envy and (paradoxically) inferiority. To what other minority group is the word "clever" affixed as an insult? Who else is charged with the crimes of fabulous wealth, control of media and finance, access to mysterious technologies, and secret control of the world's governments? The

By the very nature of our particularism, our refusal to give up on *our* God and give in to *their* beliefs, the Jews are a rebuke to any creed that seeks dominion over both our outer and inner lives.

racist and ethnic bigot thinks the objects of his bigotry are deservedly beneath him. The antisemite thinks the object of his bigotry is undeservedly above him.

This matters because it positions Jew-haters as underdogs, no matter how much power they possess; the victimized party, no matter how much damage they inflict. The antisemite, as historian Deborah Lipstadt has observed, almost always believes he is punching up; that his prejudice and cruelty is an act of courage and defiance. Antisemites speak the language of the oppressed, which is why Karl Marx ("What is the worldly cult of the Jew? Huckstering.") was as much an antisemite as the 19th-century German nationalist historian Heinrich von Treitschke ("The Jews are our misfortune"). It is why antisemitism can sit as comfortably with the anti-capitalist Left of a Jeremy Corbyn as it can with the xenophobic Right of a Jean-Marie Le Pen.

Antisemitism is also often a religious hatred. It is bound up with ideas about good and evil, salvation and damnation, the wages of sin and the penalties for apostasy. This turns out to be true whether the religion in question is Christianity or Islam, or, in a more secular age, Nazism or Communism. By the very nature of our particularism, our refusal to give up on *our* God and give in to *their* beliefs, the Jews are a rebuke to any creed that seeks dominion over both our outer and inner lives.

To play that role in history — to be the people saying "no" when the societies around us demand that we say "yes" to their deeply cherished beliefs — makes us a target of their fury. There's a reason religious persecutions are so cruel: Purity is achieved only through the most extreme forms of purgation. For all the horrific cruelties of racism, it generally seeks subjugation, not elimination. It's the religious dimension of antisemitism that so frequently leads antisemites to seek a "solution" to their Jewish problem through mass expulsions or genocide.

Antisemitism is also a political ideology — because it sees Jews as representing a self-interested political force disingenuously disguised as liberalism, socialism, globalism, or Zionism. That is why the man who popularized the term "antisemitism," the 19th-century German journalist Wilhelm Marr, turned his hatred into a political movement, the *Antisemiten-Liga*, or League of Antisemites, which was followed by copycat movements such as Édouard Drumont's *Ligue antisémitique de France*, which was particularly active during the Dreyfus Affair. National Socialism may have been the ultimate expression of antisemitic politics, but it was far from the only one.

The fundamental political argument of the European antisemite is that Jews are imposters and swindlers — imposters for claiming to be fully German, Austrian, French, and so on when they are actually "Semitic" — swindlers for using all their cunning and power to deprive authentic Europeans of their wealth, power, and patrimony. Anti-Zionists make the same claim about Jewish Israelis: that they are imposters for claiming an indigenous connection to the Land of Israel when really, they are latter-day European colonialists, and swindlers for trying to take from Palestinians what, supposedly, is rightfully theirs.

This is why anti-Zionism (never to be mistaken for criticism of Israeli government policy) is a modern-day version of antisemitism: It is an attempt to organize politically and ideologically against Jews by employing the same false charges. The only difference is that, to the European antisemites of the 19th or early 20th century,

the Jew is from the Holy Land; to the anti-Zionists of the late 20th and early 21st century, the Jew is from Europe.

The third falsehood about antisemitism is that education is the answer — particularly, education about the Holocaust.

To read the Biden administration's well-meaning National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism, published in May and based on "listening sessions with more than 1,000 diverse stakeholders across the Jewish community and beyond," is to see the extent to which the Jewish community believes this: The word "education" is mentioned 91 times, the word "Holocaust" 69 times. (Islamophobia is mentioned 21 times; Israel 10 times; Zionism not once.) "We need Holocaust education in schools to correct this lack of knowledge and help ensure that future generations learn about antisemitism and the history of the Holocaust, including how and why it happened," the report suggests.

Knowledge of the Holocaust is obviously a good thing. If more non-Jewish children become familiar with it, it could deepen their understanding of history, sensitize them to a crucial dimension of Jewish consciousness, and make them better aware of the awful places to which unchecked bigotry and demagoguery may lead.

But what does this mean for the student who learns about antisemitism and the history of the Holocaust in high school, and is then told in college by the local chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine that Israel is deliberately killing Palestinian children — just like the Nazis did? Won't that student conclude that the Jews must *truly* be awful if they came through the Holocaust only to adopt such methods? Might not the student think to himself that Jews must be guilty of *something* to have inspired so much hatred across the ages? Or wonder why there is so much teaching about the Holocaust but so little about other horrors such as the Ukrainian Holodomor or the Rwandan genocide — why do Jews get to "privilege" their trauma? Or

Antisemitism is not a problem of education: From Martin Luther to T.S. Eliot to Roald Dahl, there has never been a shortage of literate and even brilliant antisemites. It's a problem of philosophical orientation and logical reasoning.

might the student conclude that Jews focus on the Holocaust only to play the victim card for their own political advantage, after they have long since ceased being the victim?

Educating students about the harm done to Jews in the Holocaust and other anti-Jewish attacks does not, by itself, explain why it is wrong to harm Jews. Antisemitism is not a problem of education: From Martin Luther to T.S. Eliot to Roald Dahl, there has never been a shortage of literate and even brilliant antisemites. It's a problem of philosophical orientation and logical reasoning.

Are the ideas of the Jewish people good things or not? And — to borrow a thought from Alvin Rosenfeld's essay in this issue of Sapir — are the Jews presumed guilty or not?

By "presumed guilty," we mean that antisemitism, as much as it might be founded in specific and intelligible political or religious considerations, almost always takes the form of a conspiracy theory. It is the belief that behind history's greatest crimes and the world's greatest ills lies the hidden hand of a Jew: the Jew as killer of Christ, as murderer of children, as bringer of plague, as financier of war, as underminer of morality, as instigator of 9/11, as replacer of the white working class in the United States, as displacer of native inhabitants in Palestine. It never ends.

The most important element of any conspiracy theory is that it is unfalsifiable — impervious to logical or evidentiary refutation. To the conspiracy theorist, contrary evidence doesn't diminish his argument; it thickens the plot. The antisemite's "reasons" emerge from his worldview and serve his interests. But, in a deeper sense, he has left the realm of reason: His deficiencies are epistemological, not educational. He is a version of Lewis Carroll's Queen of Hearts: Sentencing for presumed guilt — at least insofar as Jews are concerned — comes first. The nature of the crime is determined later.

If the Biden administration really wants to use education in the fight against antisemitism, it would do better to invest much more in the teaching of critical-thinking skills than in the history of the Holocaust. The rise of antisemitism in 21st-century America has many causes; not the least of them is that too many Americans are emerging from high schools and colleges without having learned to weigh the credibility of evidence, make logical arguments, distinguish between reality and fantasy, facts and opinions, and to spot nonsense when they see it. As an antidote to credulity, an education in critical thinking might reach some of those not already predisposed to antisemitism by their philosophical orientation. But it can do only so much.

Which brings us to one truth about antisemitism: The Jews are not going to solve it. Not just because it is ultimately unsolvable, but because *it is not ours to solve*. Jews stand for a set of ideas that will always have fanatical opponents making fantastical claims against us. We can no more wish antisemitism away than we can wish ourselves away.

The real question, then, isn't how to solve antisemitism. It's how to thrive in the face of it. We could start by getting a good definition of it.

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance defines

antisemitism as follows: "A certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities."

The IHRA definition has gained wide acceptance, including by the State Department and the British government. Mainstream Jewish organizations have embraced it, too, because among the "manifestations of antisemitism" it lists is "denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination"—a point that is surely correct, even if progressive and anti-Zionist Jews furiously dispute it. At the moment, the IHRA definition is probably the best one on offer. But it remains inadequate: vague, clunky, unmemorable, raising more questions than it answers. We can do better.

Here is a suggestion:

> *Antisemitism is a conspiracy theory that holds that Jews are uniquely prone to using devious methods to achieve their malevolent ends, and that they must therefore be opposed by any means necessary.*

What, then, is antisemitism? Not a "certain perception" but a *conspiracy theory* that, by its nature, cannot be answered with appeals to facts and reason. Not a "certain perception" but a worldview that specifically singles out Jews, by their very essence, as *uniquely prone* to evil behavior. Not a "certain perception," but a very specific indictment about the supposed Jewish penchant for *devious means*, which has been a hallmark of antisemitism for centuries. Not a "certain perception" but a sense of self-righteous indignation from bullies who think of themselves as victims of *malevolent* Jewish plots. Not a "certain perception" but a call for *any means necessary* to stop Jews, thereby licensing violence against them.

If this is right, then the best answer to antisemitism isn't to redouble investments in tolerance efforts or bus more high-school students to the nearest Holocaust exhibit or sponsor another

round of "dialogues across differences." It is certainly not to put antisemitism at the center of any sort of curriculum about what it means to be a Jew: To do so is to give the antisemite the first and last say in defining Jewish identity. "The antisemite makes the Jew," Jean-Paul Sartre once said. It would be terrible to prove him right.

The alternative is simple: Invest in Jewish thriving—which is not the same thing as thriving Jews.

Thriving Jews are what we have now: Jews who are generally doing quite well when it comes to the careers they have chosen, the esteem in which they are held in their professions and communities, the power and influence they enjoy, the lives they lead. It is an individual ideal, in which thriving is central, Jewishness incidental.

Jewish thriving, on the other hand, is a collective ideal. It is a flourishing, secure, and morally self-confident State of Israel. It is a Diaspora that is proud of and knowledgeable about its own heritage. It is robust attendance at synagogue services and Shabbat dinners and Jewish cultural events. It is the desire to marry a fellow Jew (or an eager convert) and to raise children Jewishly. It is the conviction among all Jews, whatever their level of observance, that their Jewishness is the most cherished element of their identity, a precious inheritance from their forebears and a priceless bequest to their posterity.

We are still far from creating this kind of Jewish thriving. And if we ever do, it might well lead to more antisemitism, not less; it would certainly give those who hate us that much more to envy. But it would strengthen our self-confidence, attract friends and admirers, give us positive reasons to endure and flourish, widen our margin of safety, fortify our sense of Jewish pride, and offer the ultimate riposte to those who seek to diminish and destroy us.

"We are still here, better and stronger than ever" is always a fine reply to antisemitism. ✳

June 27, 2023

ALVIN H. ROSENFELD

‘The Jews Are Guilty’: Reflections on Antisemitism Old and New

ANTISEMITIC incidents are higher in America than at any time in the recent past. The 22nd annual Antisemitism Worldwide Report from the Anti-Defamation League and Tel Aviv University showed that reported or identifiable antisemitic attacks rose steadily from 751 in 2013 to just shy of 3,700 in 2022 — an increase of almost 400 percent. This is the largest number of such reported incidents since the ADL started recording the data in 1979.

The ADL has also been asking a representative sample of Americans 11 questions about classic Jewish stereotypes — clannishness, dual loyalty, dishonesty, shrewdness, and so on — since 1964. The percentage of American adults who agreed with six or more of the 11 stereotypes remained relatively constant from 1998 to 2019, mostly in a tight range between 12 and 15 percent. But this number took a sharp turn for the worse in the ADL’s most recent survey, in

2022, with 20 percent of respondents agreeing with six or more of the 11 stereotypes. We are now in an era where antisemitism is not only growing, but antisemites also feel much more free to express themselves in both word and deed. But there is no indication that the sources of today's antisemitism are at all different from those that appear to operate perpetually.

Antisemitism must be vigorously faced down. So it behooves us to remember where it comes from.

There are two important sources of antisemitism. One, popularized in modern times by the malicious 1903 Russian hoax *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, is the figure of the conspiratorial Jew. The other is his figurative brother, the diabolical Jew. Bring the two together, and you have the delusional but abiding portrait of Jews as a community inherently hostile to non-Jews, intent on bringing endless suffering to mankind — a community that must be dealt with decisively before it is too late.

Hitler, history's most infamous antisemite, wrote in *Mein Kampf* of the Jews as "veritable devils" determined to carry out activities that, unless averted, "must ultimately result in the collapse of human civilization and the consequent devastation of the world." Hitler's propaganda minister, Joseph Goebbels, set out his master's thinking in a famous article, "The Jews Are Guilty."

"The historic responsibility of world Jewry for the outbreak and widening of this war has been proven so clearly that it does not need to be talked about any further," Goebbels wrote. "All Jews by virtue of their birth and their race are part of an international conspiracy against National Socialist Germany. They want its defeat and annihilation and do all in their power to bring it about." But if *all* Jews are guilty simply because they are Jewish, it does not take much analysis to see that the Jews are guilty not because they have done something wrong, but

that they have done something wrong because they are guilty.

Here are the four most recent examples of lethal antisemitism in America:

- In Pittsburgh, white nationalist Robert Bowers killed 11 Jews and wounded six more, including several Holocaust survivors, in the deadliest-ever attack on the Jewish community in the United States. To judge from his social-media postings, he was enraged: "HIAS likes to bring invaders in that kill our people. I can't sit by and watch my people get slaughtered. Screw your optics, I'm going in." HIAS, formerly known as the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, helps settle refugees and immigrants of all backgrounds.

- In Poway, Calif., another white nationalist, 19-year-old John Timothy Earnest, killed one woman, Lori Gilbert-Kaye, and injured three others, at a Chabad synagogue. Earnest had published an open letter on 8chan, an internet message board, saying that Jews were preparing a "meticulously planned genocide of the European race." It also condemned President Trump as a pro-Zionist traitor.

- In Jersey City, N.J., David Anderson and Francine Graham, a black American couple, shot and killed a detective before driving to a kosher grocery store, where they killed three people and wounded three more before they were themselves shot dead by police. Anderson had a history of posting antisemitic and anti–law enforcement messages on social media.

- In Monsey, N.Y., Grafton Thomas entered the home of a Hasidic rabbi during a Hanukkah party and began stabbing guests, one of whom died of his wounds. Thomas, a black American, had expressed antisemitic views in his journals, including the claim that "Hebrew Israelites" had taken from "ebinoid Israelites," a reference to the Black Hebrew Israelite movement, segments of which are antisemitic.

> But if *all* Jews are guilty simply because they are Jewish, it does not take much analysis to see that the Jews are guilty not because they have done something wrong, but that they have done something wrong because they are guilty.

What do these examples share? Nothing — except that the Jews are guilty. Once again, the hate precedes the rationale for action. This points to the core of antisemitism, the reason it never goes away, and its protean, self-contradictory nature.

The idea of the malevolent Jews, collectively bent on ruining the world or secretly plotting to control it (or perhaps doing the one in order to achieve the other), has a clear historical origin in the writings of the Church Fathers, who drew on the New Testament to link Jews to Satan and make them culpable for every kind of sin — including, of course, the death of Jesus. The third-century scholar Origen of Alexandria declared that "the blood of Jesus [falls] not only upon those who lived then but also upon all generations of the Jewish people… until the end of the world." A century later, Jerome of Stridon (later Saint Jerome), Augustine's teacher, referred to the synagogue as "the devil's refuge" and "Satan's fortress." Another early Church father (and future saint), John Chrysostom, the archbishop of Constantinople, expounded passionately and repeatedly on the image of the synagogue as a "dwelling of demons," "a brothel," and a "place of idolatry."

Denunciations such as these branded Jews as collectively and irredeemably wicked, a designation of infamy always available to explain any source of misfortune or explain away any inconvenient evidence. Has a plague struck the community? The Jews are guilty of poisoning the wells. Has a child's body been found in the woods? The Jews are

guilty of murdering him to use his blood in their Passover matzohs. Although the blood libel appears to have lost favor among antisemites, at least for the time being, there are those who blame Jews for Covid, just as there are those who blamed the Jews for AIDS.

Today, a particularly virulent strain of antisemitism holds not just the Jews but the Jewish state guilty. Guilty of what? Of the cardinal sin according to many on the Left today: the imperialist oppression of non-whites. According to this view, the "settler-colonialist" Jews arrived from Europe and Russia in the 19th and 20th centuries and set about stripping the indigenous Palestinians of their national rights. Never mind that there had never been a sovereign Arab Palestine or that the Jews returned to Israel to create a state only because their Russian and European "hosts" had made their life unbearable or actively sought to end it. When an independent state was offered to the Arabs in 1947, they rejected it. Nevertheless, the Jews went on to establish a sovereign state of their own, which flourishes 75 years after its creation.

In short, Goebbels's formulation is alive and well. Indeed, the four words of his essay's title were prominently spray-painted on the wall of the Holocaust Museum in St. Petersburg, Fla., in May 2021, surrounded by crudely drawn swastikas. Similar graffiti has appeared on synagogues, Jewish schools, and other Holocaust monuments and memorials.

That key sources of antisemitism have remained constant over the centuries is not to downplay the seriousness of the situation today. As the examples above suggest, today's antisemitism comes from the reactionary Right and the progressive Left, from whites and from blacks. To many, the antisemitism of white supremacists and others on the far Right is so well known that they are surprised to discover that antisemitism runs higher among American blacks and Hispanics than among whites. While the demographic breakdown of the 2022 ADL survey has not yet been released, the 2016

survey found that 23 percent of African Americans, 19 percent of U.S.-born Hispanics, and 31 percent of foreign-born Hispanics hold antisemitic views, compared with 14 percent of the general U.S. population, and there are no indications that the overall distribution of the data will be fundamentally different today.

Many Americans also may not know that *The Protocols*, which first appeared in a newspaper owned by a racist, ultranationalist, Christian journalist, has been recycled into American discourse by Louis Farrakhan, the black Muslim head of the Nation of Islam. Farrakhan repeatedly refers in his speeches to "Satanic Jews who have infected the whole world with poison and deceit." His words are loudly echoed by some of the more militant Black Hebrew Israelites, who scream from the street corners of Manhattan at passing Jews as "imposters," worshippers at "the synagogue of Satan."

In a polarized society, there will also be elements in the mainstream comfortable with taking anti-Jewish positions, as long as they can describe them as something else. Into this category we may put the anti-Zionist antisemitism discussed above, a particularly severe problem on many university campuses today, where the ideological imperatives of diversity, equity, and inclusion programs also hold powerful sway. The remarkable success won by Jews willing to harness their energies in systems that reward hard work and merit is being undercut by systems of preferred hiring, college admissions, and other "equitable" steps toward achievement. As has happened in the past in Germany, Hungary, Russia, and elsewhere, our very success now counts against us.

The challenge is how to defend against the threat.

First, defending against episodic anti-Jewish assaults requires what we might call more of the same: more security guards at the doors of our synagogues, community centers, schools, and businesses. Should such attacks become chronic, these protections will not suffice. A more systematic cooperative effort, developed in cooperation with law-enforcement agencies, interfaith and interracial groups, and educational institutions will be needed.

American Jews must face the prospect that their physical safety and the security of their institutions are increasingly going to resemble those of Jews in France.

Second, Jewish organizations must invest much more energy on campus insisting that militant anti-Zionism is antisemitic and working to ensure that DEI programs do not have the effect of submerging Jewish identity in a "whiteness" that is then the subject of quasi-official demonization. But Jewish identity must also be a matter of celebrating Jewishness at least as much as it is a matter of resisting its denigration. Jewish students find themselves unwelcome in many places on campus.

Jewish organizations must make it their business to pour energy and money into Hillel, Chabad, Jewish cultural centers, and Jewish fraternities and sororities—places on campus where Jewish students can feel comfortable being Jewish.

Third, American Jews must recognize that they have a role to play in pushing back against the threat to Israel, home to almost half of all living Jews. No threat to the Jewish people today is more aggressively eliminationist than that posed by Iran. Iran's Revolutionary Guards recently put on public display a battery of missiles with the slogan "Death to Israel" boldly written in large Hebrew letters. Whether Iran's developing arsenal of nuclear weapons will be similarly inscribed is anybody's guess, but their intended target is no mystery. In April of this year, Iran's president, Ebrahim Raisi, promised that his country's army will bring about "the destruction of Haifa and Tel Aviv." Antisemitism becomes most virulent when it is state-sponsored.

Jews everywhere, but particularly in the United States, must take the threat from Iran personally, which means taking a much stronger position in opposing the return of the policy of nuclear appeasement with Tehran.

Fourth, American Jews need to take a much stronger stand against what I call "recreational antisemitism." Kanye West, Kyrie Irving, Dave Chappelle, and various hip-hop singers, athletes, and other

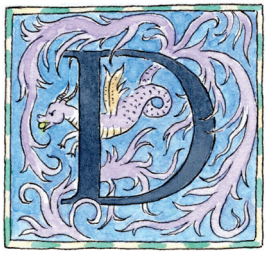
pop-culture figures have been entertaining millions of people with anti-Jewish lies, mockeries, and denunciations. Whoopi Goldberg passed off the Nazi persecution and murder of the Jews on broadcast television as "white-on-white crime." Most recently, the egregious anti-Zionist antisemite Roger Waters appeared on the German stage garbed in a Nazi-style outfit, trivializing and exploiting the figure of Anne Frank to score points on behalf of the Palestinians. At other times, he has introduced stage gimmicks that juxtapose the Magen David with images of pigs. To different degrees, these outrages have been met with pushback. But Whoopi Goldberg is back on the air. Dave Chappelle was at risk not for his anti-Jewish but for his anti-trans remarks. Roger Waters is still touring. Not too long ago, this kind of anti-Jewish trash talk and imagery were taboo. Today, in too many circles, the formerly transgressive merely attracts a welcome notoriety to those giving voice to these slurs.

Jews need a comprehensive strategy to make recreational antisemitism as socially costly as possible for its practitioners.

Finally, American Jews must recognize that the well-being of the State of Israel is fundamental to their own thriving. Many Jews now appear to feel embarrassed by Israel, particularly as the country seems to be going through a populist moment similar to those we have seen all across the world's advanced economies. The sooner this moment passes, the better. On any terms, however, Israel's existence and its achievements remain sources of enormous admiration to a clear majority of Americans. We would do well to invest considerable resources in making an unapologetic case in our own communities and in non-Jewish communities for the proposition that Israel, for all its faults and all the difficulties in reaching a modus vivendi with the Palestinians, has fulfilled the long-held Jewish dream of national self-determination. No apology is needed for this extraordinary accomplishment. It's one to be proud of. ✳

ROYA HAKAKIAN

Letter to an Anti-Zionist Idealist



EAR J,

If the proper study of mankind begins with man, as the poet Alexander Pope once put it, then it seems reasonable that the proper study of Israel should begin with the Jew. This, by way of permitting myself to stand in as that Jew and start with a personal tale: One afternoon in December 1978 in Tehran, only a few weeks before Iran's cataclysmic revolution, a chain of knocks pounded the door of our home, rattling it in its frame. My father rushed to the living room, where we watched everyone's comings and goings through the large windows that overlooked the courtyard. I buzzed the caller in. My father's sister, Monavar, walked in — messily dressed, her hair an untidy mass, her face blurred behind a stream of tears. Alarmed at her sight, my father did not greet her, but cried out, "Monavari" — the added "i" was his diminutive for her — "what's wrong?"

At the question, she erupted into a frenzy of words, which yielded only to sobs. Two days earlier, there had been a demonstration in Khonsar, a small city in central Iran, where my aunt and her family lived and, along with my uncle's two brothers, ran a fabric business. After a while, the demonstration had devolved into looting. The mob had broken into the store, chanting "Jews get lost!" The store had been far more than a business to the three families. It was also a safety deposit box, for they had been tucking all their savings into the rolls of cloth for years. The store had also been their home, for the three families lived above it. The looters had ransacked the store, then doused what they could with kerosene. The fabric proved more flammable than any kindling. In a matter of hours, much of what they had ever owned turned into a smoldering heap.

It took a long time and a feverish conversation between the siblings in their own Judeo-Persian dialect till my father was able to comfort my aunt. They had thought things through, and by the end, she left our home looking determined, as if she had a plan. Two weeks later, we all caught a glimpse of that plan: My aunt and uncle, along with the other two families and their combined 18 children — a grief-stricken lot whose entire wealth was reduced to several bloated suitcases held together by tightly knotted ropes — boarded a plane bound for Israel.

I know of no "apartheid state," dear J, that has been the sole sanctuary for those who have been turned away by every other country. Do you? I cannot name any colonialists who have been second-class citizens nearly everywhere in the world, including in Palestine under the Ottomans, the very land where the ruins of their own ancient kingdom still stand. On his daily walks to school in Khonsar, my father and his siblings were often pelted with rocks. That was on sunny days. On rainy days, they were not allowed to attend school. The locals believed Jews to be "Najes," unclean, and feared that any splash of rainwater off their bodies onto theirs could dirty them, too. (Thus was the fate of my father's education tied to the whims of the clouds!) I cannot name any colonialists who ever accepted the terms

that other world powers set for them: the first time in 1937, when the Peel Commission recommended that 20 percent of the land go to the Jewish residents of Palestine, then in 1947, when the United Nations raised the allotment to 55 percent in the aftermath of the Holocaust. I know of no colonial power that has been forced into war by several armies of larger and mightier nations, as Israel was in 1948. Nor do I know of any apartheid where the "colonial subjects" have risen to the ranks of university professors, supreme court justices, members of parliament, even cabinet ministers.

Our opposing views on Israel depend, in great part, on which of us has endured history's scorching. You, born and raised in the United States, are the product of a life, as any life ought to be, shaped by the daily struggles of work and family. I, on the other hand, am the product of a life that had to be remade from the ashes. The sharing of these autobiographical details does not come easily to me. If I do so here it is not only because they are at the heart of the divide between us. Rather, it is mostly to trace the roots of why peace, which you fault Israel for not achieving, has, in fact, been unachievable.

The dangerous ideology that Ayatollah Khomeini brought into Iran with the 1979 revolution, which ultimately uprooted some 90,000 Jews from there, declared the destruction of Israel as a core mission. But the initial idea of that mission had already formed in his earliest sermons in the 1960s. You see, the Palestinian–Israeli conflict has had distant and longtime stakeholders far beyond their own borders. Israel stands on one side of this conflict. What it faces, however, is not a single adversary. On our televisions, we see the Palestinian civilians square off with a well-armed Goliath that is the IDF. Widen the lens just a little. Take in the region, and see how David grows beside the powerful and intractable parties who define themselves by their desire to annihilate Israel and, as far as Khomeini and his successors are concerned, even Western civilization.

What makes you an American is not only the blue passport that gets you breezing through customs at the world's airports.

I know of no 'apartheid state,' dear J, that has been the sole sanctuary for those who have been turned away by every other country, do you?

It is also the blindness you have for some of the evil in the world. You have a distinct inability to see other authoritarian regimes' atrocities as an expression of their own political or ideological agenda. You blame America, and by extension Israel, for much of the wrong those regimes commit. This is a privileged defect I think of as "first-world narcissism." You attribute such undue might to America and to Israel, within its own neighborhood, that they become the ubiquitous engines of all the bad, while other regimes turn into perennial victims with no agency of their own. I envy your biases because the errors of your perspective are really the blessings of your democratic upbringing—blessings that you, born into them, often cannot recognize, or that you assume to be universal. Though I am not your contemporary, the gap that exists between us is too great to be explained by the difference in our age alone. For instance, when you were studying for your high school civics exam, learning the Bill of Rights and the importance of individual liberties, I had become invisible under my mandatory Islamic uniform and headscarf. My mornings began by standing single file in the schoolyard, chanting "Death to the Great Satan and its bastard child," metaphors for America and Israel. Individual rights and civil liberties were far from our minds as we were busy spewing hate and wishing so many dead. When the worst image on the walls of your city was graffiti, I was staring at the black triangle painted on the wall of our alley. On

each of its corners was the face of the three world leaders who had signed a peace accord together in 1978. Beneath the dark drawing were these words:

Death to the wicked trio: Carter, Sadat, and Begin.

When you were getting days off from school for the Thanksgiving holiday or Martin Luther King's birthday or President's Day, my joyless school calendar — a procession of ghosts — mostly commemorated the death of imams and other figures who had been martyred, which in Iran's clericalese meant that they had committed an act of terror. When you were strolling down Elm Street, I was passing through Khalid Islambouli Avenue — named for the assassin of Anwar Sadat, the slain president of Egypt. The street name and a postage stamp were two of the many tributes the regime paid his assassin. When your presidents were addressing the nation about improving the quality of K–12 education, Iran's supreme leaders were promising paradise to the youth willing to die for the cause of "jihad" and supplying plastic keys to soldiers on the front lines to open its gates. And this was the most unforgettable of them all: In the mid-1980s, when the war between Iran and Iraq was at its peak, Ayatollah Khomeini, who had vowed never to end the fighting until Iran captured Baghdad and then went on to "free" Jerusalem, repeatedly praised the 13-year-old suicide bomber who had thrown himself in the way of enemy tanks. The future, for the ayatollah, was never ahead, but below — in the grave. All these comparisons, I hope, make one badly overlooked point clear: The most formidable of Israel's enemies prize death far above life, which is why they are, first and foremost, the enemies of their own people.

Ayatollah Khomeini's fervor for the Palestinians had little to do with the Palestinians. They were merely pawns in his game of power. His ambition was to prove himself worthy of leading all Muslims everywhere. By casting himself as the champion of the Palestinians, he hoped to distinguish himself — the leader of a

Shiite nation — among the global Sunni majority. Even since his death, Palestine has remained the cause that Iran has used to transcend its status as an Islamic underdog to become the savior of all "oppressed" Muslims everywhere.

By the end of the Iran–Iraq war in 1988, the ayatollah's army had not reached Jerusalem, but his ideology had. Hamas, Hezbollah, and Islamic Jihad — which now either directly rule, or wield great influence, over the majority of the Palestinians — are all the evil mongrels he spawned. If peace has eluded Israel, it is, in great part, because the ayatollah's progeny thrive on chaos, celebrate ruin, and live to die, just as he did. Whatever the origin of the conflict once was, it has now morphed into a war between liberalism and illiberalism, modernity and religious fundamentalism, women's rights and misogyny. No doubt ordinary Palestinians dream of a prosperous future and of leading peaceful lives like any other people. But in the hands of their current leadership, they are as trapped as I once was, standing in the schoolyard, chanting the diatribe the principal shouted into a bullhorn.

One of the greatest human struggles, the writer Joseph Conrad believed, is the struggle of creating an alliance between the two contradictory instincts of egoism, the moving force of the world, and altruism, its morality. For Jews, the tension has been far more acute and persistent, affecting not only the individual but the larger community, too. To fulfill our moral destiny, the Jewish people are commanded to exercise altruism by being "the host to humanity" and opening our homes and lives to receive the stranger and care for him. But there is also Jewish egoism to consider. To end our perpetual persecution, Jews have had to pursue nationalism and build a safe haven, so that victimhood ceases to be our destiny. Altruism and egoism are also the antagonistic instincts that define our challenge. "What is a Jew?" Martin Buber laments. "I shall not attempt to define here the accursed and all-honored question." The philosopher Edmond Jabès sees the antagonism as surpassing the self: "The idea of a Jewish state is a contradiction

The most formidable of Israel's enemies are, first and foremost, the enemies of their own people.

in terms. To be Jewish is to be dispersed, to be without a home in the traditional sense."

The desire to find an equilibrium between the two instincts is, in part, the pursuit that gives depth to our lives and keeps us from the indulgences of undue selfishness or selflessness. But often, we seek to relieve the discomfort by abandoning one for the other. Betraying Jewish egoism — Zionism — and turning one's back on the only Jewish homeland, pretending that the countless mobs that broke windows of Jewish businesses, set fires to Jewish property, and drove out the Jews from their communities are all bygone offenses, would be one way of coping with rising antisemitism and the vehement attacks on Israel, especially on university campuses. Another is to withstand the tension: to stand by Israel's founding principles, while also striving to reach peace with the Palestinians, so they can build their lives and thrive, too. The second task may prove impossible, but as the Mishnaic wisdom goes, we do not have a duty to complete it, only to not abandon it.

In the end, dear J, your objection to Israel is about much more than Israel alone. It is also an objection, albeit inadvertently, to the plight of those who are fighting for freedom and democracy in some of the lands from which we fled. Your good intentions notwithstanding, you become an agent in the propaganda campaigns of autocratic nations, like Iran, that claim Israel to be the world's greatest evil. You become an unwitting party to that deception at the expense of far greater and more dire emergencies, including those of women, secular activists, and the various minorities in

the Palestinian territories. As Israel's violations receive disproportionate attention, those fighting for freedom and equal rights will remain in the shadows. Since September 2022 alone, nearly 20,000 demonstrators have been arrested in Iran and more than 600 have been killed or executed. The demonstrators in Iran have often chanted "Forget Palestine! Think of us!" At a first glance, they may seem to be making a demand from their own government. But they are equally frustrated by an international community, the Western media especially, that seems to quickly move on from every story but that of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

Years ago, the founder of Human Rights Watch, Robert L. Bernstein, wrote in an opinion piece for the *New York Times* decrying the record of the very organization he had created, "The region is populated by authoritarian regimes with appalling human rights records. Yet in recent years Human Rights Watch has written far more condemnations of Israel for violations of international law than of any other country in the region." That trend has only intensified. Israel can be criticized. Every democracy should be. But when the criticism begins to have echoes of the calls from autocrats in the region, you must pause and question whether you have become a pawn in a dangerous game in which countless men and women are valiantly fighting, and dying, without a mention. ✳

An interview with

AMBASSADOR DEBORAH LIPSTADT

'Beyond the Welfare of the Jews'

ISTORIAN *Deborah Lipstadt became the U.S. special envoy to monitor and combat antisemitism, a position in the Department of State with the rank of ambassador, in May 2022. This interview with* Sapir *Associate Editor Felicia Herman was conducted before the White House released its U.S. National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism in May 2023.*

Felicia Herman: The attacks on Jews in Pittsburgh and Poway caused a lot of shock in American Jewish communities and in America more broadly. I was surprised, though, to see that some historians of American Jewry were also quite shocked. Their view, apparently, was that American antisemitism was "over." As a historian, were you shocked? And did these attacks, and the ones that have come after

them, cause you to rethink your historical paradigm for understanding antisemitism in America?

Deborah Lipstadt: I was shocked, but I wasn't surprised. There had been a series of events, trends. Themes like "the Jews will not replace us" had emerged long before Charlottesville. The blatant nature of the behavior was new, but we had seen signs before this: in the [2016] presidential campaign, or attacks on George Soros, or through the use of the term "globalists" to mean a private group lurking behind the scenes. And all of it only increased during Covid. So it hasn't reshaped my paradigm, but it did convince me that we were in a different era. Maybe not a new era, but a different era than we had been in, in the '80s, '90s, the first decades of the Aughts.

Herman: Another thing that those attacks reanimated was the question of whether antisemitism is worse on the Left or the Right. White nationalists marching through Charlottesville certainly is a rare, public expression of antisemitism from the Right. What's your thinking on this question of "which is worse"?

Lipstadt: First of all, I've moved away from talking about a Left–Right dichotomy. I don't find it useful, and it traps you in whataboutism. What I said in my testimony in Charlottesville was that antisemitism is ubiquitous. It's free-flowing. It comes from everywhere on the political spectrum, including centrists. It comes from Christians, Muslims, atheists — even sometimes from Jews.

What is striking to me is that it's the same, irrespective of where it's coming from. The stereotypes, the templates are the same — two people may be in diametrically opposed positions, politically or culturally, but the template they're using about Jews is the same: Jews are all-powerful, all-wealthy, conniving, and tricky; they work behind the scenes; they have dual loyalty.

Second, I've perhaps been more attuned to antisemitism from the Left than other historians because of my time living in England

when I was on trial there. I read the British press, and I was very familiar with Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party. That was clear-cut antisemitism.

But ultimately, I think it's a bit of a fool's errand to get into the "which is worse" game. If I were Sholem Aleichem, I would say, "Would you rather have dysentery in Kyiv or cholera in Czernowitz?" They're both bad.

And too often, it's just a foil for one side trying to justify what's happening on the other side. I know many people who can very accurately identify antisemitism on the other side of the political spectrum from where they are. Their analysis is spot-on! But what they don't see is the antisemitism from the people sitting next to them, on their side. So then I stop and ask myself, "Am I seeing a real fight against antisemitism, or am I seeing the political weaponization of antisemitism?" And I hate that.

I really see myself as an equal-opportunity fighter against antisemitism. I'll give you a few examples.

Within a couple of days of [my] entering office, we had the Lufthansa affair. There were a lot of Hasidic Jews on a flight to visit the grave of a rebbe on his yahrzeit. They didn't buy tickets together, they didn't come together, they didn't have an organized leader. They just were people who happened to be on a flight together. But Lufthansa treated them as a group. Some of the Hasidic Jews on the plane were not observing the mask mandate, but all of them were punished. We spoke out very strongly; so much so that within a couple of days, the CEO of Lufthansa was in my office. And we supported the airline's team as they worked out a plan for how to avoid this kind of thing in the future — what to do, how to acknowledge it. No one on their staff of 105,000 people was saying, "Let's figure out a way of kicking these Jews off the plane." It was what we today in the United States might call unconscious bias: treating a whole group in one way because of the actions of a few. That was mid-May [2022].

A few weeks later, I was in Israel, and a group of American families were celebrating their children's *b'nei mitzvah* at the

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egalitarian prayer space at the Western Wall in Jerusalem. And a group of young Haredi men — I don't want to call them hooligans, because that would make light of what they did — came in, tore up the prayer books. And the police did nothing. I tweeted about it, saying that had this happened in any other country, we would have no problem identifying it as antisemitism.

A final example: In October, there were efforts under way in Finland to require the stunning of animals prior to their being slaughtered, which would have affected both halal and kashrut. My counterpart in the European Union, Katharina von Schnurbein, was very concerned about this. There is no *shechita* [kosher slaughter] in Finland — there are too few Jews — but she was afraid of the snowball effect if the law passed in Finland. So with our very strong support, she convened a one-day conference on religious slaughter. It brought together all the EU member states, rabbis, imams, etc., to talk about this. And one of the rabbis present pointed out that he has been asked to come to the EU to talk about religious slaughter, but always in opposition to some bill or regulation that's being considered. This was the first time that he'd ever been asked to come to talk affirmatively.

So I look at those three things as markers: attacks on Hasidic Jews, on nontraditional Jews, the issue of kashrut. If it's something that smacks of antisemitism or ignorance of Jewish observance

or Jewish cultural traditions — and sometimes people just don't understand what they're doing or saying — then we're going to speak up about it.

Herman: One often hears people say that antisemitism is "the canary in the coal mine."

Lipstadt: I'm one of them. The canary in the coal mine of democracy.

Herman: Right. But as thinkers such as Ruth Wisse and Dara Horn have pointed out, why should we need to extrapolate to a threat to others to convince people to care about a threat to the Jews? Isn't it bad enough that people hate Jews — shouldn't that alone be a reason to fight it?

Lipstadt: Of course Ruth and Dara are right. In the best of all possible worlds, the fight against antisemitism should be enough. There's a population in your midst that could be vulnerable, and it's the job of the government to protect it. Militarily, politically, whatever it might be.

But we don't live in the best of all possible worlds. When I say it's the canary in the coal mine of democracy, I don't do that in order to convince the non-Jewish world to take a stake in this fight; they should have a stake in it simply because it's wrong. But I want to show them that antisemitism is a conspiracy theory that extends well beyond the welfare of the Jews. I don't do it to try to find a way to make them care — I say it because it's true. Think of Weimar Germany. I'm not saying that the antisemitism that Weimar tolerated and allowed to flourish was the cause of its downfall, but it certainly didn't help.

Herman: Can we talk about antisemitism on the internet and social media, and how to square calls for regulation with our principles of free expression?

Lipstadt: Speaking as a representative of the United States government, I'll tell you how we think about it. I use social media all day long — tweeting, checking the internet, seeing what's doing. It's the *misuse* of social media that we find so disturbing. What we really want is for social-media platforms to live up to the standards that they themselves set. If they did so, all might not be perfect, but it would be much better. We're not looking to eliminate free speech; these are private platforms.

Many years ago, when I was beginning to research Holocaust denial, there were college newspapers running Holocaust-denial op-eds and ads. They said, "It's the freedom of the press, we can publish them." And I said, "Have you ever read the First Amendment? The *government* can't restrict speech, but you're a private entity. Do you publish ads, say, for pornography? No. It's the same here — why publish this?" I think sometimes people try to keep their minds so open that their brains fall out.

Herman: Ha. I want to bring up something else that Ruth Wisse often says, which I think about a lot: Antisemitism isn't a Jewish problem — we're not the ones who are infected by it, so we shouldn't be the ones fighting to cure the body politic of it. How do you think about this, as a Jewish person in your role today? Why is this *your* job to do?

Lipstadt: Once again I agree with Ruth. It's not a Jewish problem. In the best of all possible worlds, the Holocaust should be taught in European history classes, because it was something that affected, that infected, Europeans broadly. In Jewish studies you could have courses on Jewish responses, Jewish literature, Jewish resistance, Jewish life during the Holocaust. But the Holocaust itself should be taught in European history, which has not happened at most universities. Would it be better to stand on principle and say, "This should be taught there, and not here, so we don't do it"? No.

But I have many colleagues, probably over 20 of them in different countries who have a portfolio that is parallel to mine — and

When I say that antisemitism is the canary in the coal mine of democracy, I don't do that in order to convince the non-Jewish world to take a stake in this fight; they should have a stake in it simply because it's wrong.

a good number of them are not Jews. Italy, England, Germany, the EU. And their passion for this work is unparalleled.

On the other hand, should we as Jews be sitting back and saying, "This is your problem, we're not going to do anything about it"? When your kid is bullied, do you say, "It's the bully's parents who need to deal with the problem, I'm not going to get involved"? No. Defend yourself!

Herman: Your work is to fight antisemitism around the world. What are you seeing in your travels that worries you the most?

Lipstadt: Certainly grassroots antisemitism, and the ways that the internet nurtures, encourages, fertilizes it. I'm also worried about the normalization of antisemitism, even in America. My remit is overseas, but of course I hear from people. I was talking to a New Yorker the other day whose kids and nieces and nephews go to Jewish day schools. They wear baseball caps on the subway to cover up their yarmulkes. On the Upper West Side of Manhattan! Their parents aren't worried that they're going to get beat up, but they will get hassled. And you see that abroad, too. That normalization — that it's okay to say these things, to do these things — is very worrisome to me.

I'm also worried about the confluence, the intersection

between these views and the willingness to use violence. That's very disturbing.

On the other hand, when I speak in different places, people often ask me, "Is this the 1930s again?" I say no. In the '30s, the danger was coming from government — from Germany, Austria, Poland, Italy — across the European continent. Today, those same governments have envoys to monitor and combat antisemitism. That's a big deal. I wouldn't write that off and say it's meaningless. It's not. And most of them take it quite seriously. My predecessors in this office used to have to go to France or Italy or Germany when something bad happened, to ask, "What are you doing about this?" But now there's someone on the ground in those places. Sometimes we'll join them, to be there, to urge particular actions.

But that's what's called in Israel a *hetzi nechama* — "half a consolation" — because it's terrific that this work is happening, but also antisemitism is getting worse. Sadly, I work in a growth industry.

Herman: How would you articulate the role of government and the diplomatic corps in this work, relative to the work of NGOs?

Lipstadt: There are several terrific NGOs working on these issues, combating antisemitism, fighting prejudice of all kinds. But when I walk into a room — and I've made 17 country visits thus far — I represent the United States government. It's qualitatively different, and it's a pretty awesome thing, especially for a child of two immigrants. And it's a pretty heavy responsibility. That's why the creation of this office that I hold, and its elevation by the Congress to the ambassadorial level, is so important. When I walk into an office abroad with this title, it's a signal that the U.S. government has elevated this issue to the highest level. The ambassador is the representative of the head of the government.

One of the most fascinating parts of my role is my travel to the Persian Gulf, and to some of the Muslim-majority countries. I just came back from Tunisia and Morocco. I was in Tunisia 24

hours before the shooting on the island of Djerba. I would have been upset about what happened there regardless, but it felt worse because we were on a real high from that visit. Just before the shooting, I gave an interview, saying it was quite a moment in Tunisia — this indigenous Jewish community, far smaller than it used to be, having this celebration that was centuries old. Being part of it was really uplifting. I told the interviewer what I had told the Tunisian officials just before, that I'd go back and tweet, write, and talk about the festival to tell everyone about it — and that would boost tourism, which is a big deal for a country that's not as economically vibrant as it might be. The feeling of the State Department is that while increased tourism won't solve all sorts of problems, it does help. When you have people visiting, it's in the best interest of the country to ensure stability, to ensure that their Jewish community lives in peace and security.

Herman: We set up Sapir because we want it to do something — to offer policy prescriptions, not just analysis. What's your advice to Jewish leaders and philanthropists about how to combat antisemitism?

Lipstadt: It's a great question, and I wish I had an easy answer. I am also well aware that no matter what I do in this job and as long as I stay in it, I'm not going to solve this problem. I can only try to contain it, to get people to take it seriously.

I was just reading an article in *Forbes* about "becoming a 'head's-up Jew'," by an observant woman who works in a big corporation. When she took off for Jewish holidays, she would just say, "I'm out." When she would decline to eat something at a work meeting, she wouldn't explain why or push back. She decided — enough of the *sha, shtil* thing.

It will sound weak, but it's crucial: People need to speak out. The time of *sha, shtil* is far behind us. Many people still feel it — "I don't want to make a fuss." But we cannot afford that.

The other thing I would say is that wherever you are on the

I'm the product of 12 years of day-school education, of Jewish summer camps, of studying in Israel for two years. One of the reasons I can do what I do is that I know who I am.

political spectrum, you need to speak out about the antisemitism you see on your own side, from those around you. You have more street cred with them. Don't hesitate. Be proud.

The point is: Speak up, speak out. Sometimes it's ignorance that you're speaking against, so figure out a smart way of responding to ignorant comments. Call it out, educate. I think that's crucial.

Herman: I've been in Jewish philanthropy for 20 years, and just in that short time, we've gone from arguing that we should *stop* talking about antisemitism so much, and even the Holocaust, and focus on strengthening Jewish life and living. "Joy vs. oy," as you put it in your book. And now in Jewish communal organizations, we're back to talking about antisemitism all the time. In a dark way, it offers an opportunity: It awakens people to their Jewish identity.

Lipstadt: I'm glad you raised that point. Even as we speak up and speak out, we should be very careful of not transmitting the message, particularly to young Jews, that that's the raison d'être for being Jewish. Once you do that, you've ceded control of your identity to your oppressor.

A friend once said to me that in his first marriage, he was too busy building his career to really pay attention to his kids' Jewish education. His child from his second marriage, on the other hand, goes to a Jewish day school. And he said, "My older kids don't

observe, they don't know that much, but whenever there's antisemitism, they're at the barricades." He was very proud of this, and I just smiled. But inside, my heart was breaking. When do they feel Jewish — only when someone hates the Jews?

Taking off both my diplomatic and my historian hats, and putting on my who-I-am hat: We are the inheritors, the bearers of a multifaceted, vibrant tradition. It has given so much to the world and to ourselves. Sometimes I go to the National Archives just to check on the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, just to make sure they're still there and that they're okay. You can't — you shouldn't — read those documents without being aware of where those ideas came from. There are no footnotes, but you know it: These ideas are rooted in the Hebrew Bible.

Herman: So — if you had a billion dollars to give Jewishly, how much of it would you put into fighting antisemitism versus building up Jewish life?

Lipstadt: I've never imagined that question! I think I'd split it equally. Or because so many people are now taking on fighting antisemitism, maybe I'd act as a corrective and put more into Jewish life. It's not enough to build the barricades — you have to nurture what's inside as well. I'm the product of 12 years of day-school education, of Jewish summer camps, of studying in Israel for two years. One of the reasons I can do what I do is that I know who I am. I have a really strong grounding. I have nothing in my tradition that I apologize for. Sure, there are things I don't like, but I'm deeply proud of who I am. So maybe it wouldn't be 50-50. Drop the maybe — it wouldn't be 50-50.

Herman: I'm very grateful for your time, and sincerely grateful for your work.

Lipstadt: Thank you; that means a lot. Sometimes people come

up to me and say, "We're counting on you," and that's a bit daunting. But just before I was sworn in, I was at the White House for a screening of a movie about the Holocaust. It was a small group, and the president came out to greet us. It was before I had been sworn in, and as I started to introduce myself to him, he stopped me and said, "I know exactly who you are, and you have a very big job. We're counting on you." Every time I see him, he says, "Keep up the good fight." I think we have a president who really cares about this — from the gut, from the *kishkes*. I knew I would find support for my work in the State Department, but I've been pushing against an open door. I don't even have to push.

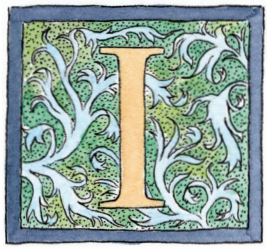
Together, we're pushing the notion of the interconnectedness of hatred. That, as we were saying before, "what starts with the Jews never ends with the Jews." People shouldn't think they're so secure over there, just because they're not Jewish — and if you're going to fight one type of hate, you have to fight them all. But we don't just say, "Hate is bad," and then sit together in a kumbaya kind of way. All hatreds aren't the same. We have to call out antisemitism by its name, specify and explain what it is, and then show how it's part of a larger fabric. ✳

PART TWO

EXPERIENCING ANTISEMITISM

AVI SCHICK

New York's New Untouchables



I HAVE WHAT my family considers to be an irrational affection for New York. While I was at Columbia Law School, a professor asked us to introduce ourselves and explain why we had chosen Columbia. My answer was that it is the best law school in the country near a New York City subway stop. My kids recently got me to spring for tickets to an overpriced new tourist-trap observation space by arguing that it had unparalleled views of Manhattan.

All of which is to say that where others see flaws and imperfections, I see character and spirit.

So I never let the epithets and indignities that identifiably Orthodox Jews inevitably encounter here get me down. Those were the random acts of a lunatic fringe, not a representative sample of New York. Antisemitism surely existed, but not in any institutional way.

The past several years have forced me to reexamine that attitude. The change is not because of inanities uttered by graduation speakers. It's not even because of an increase in physical violence committed against Orthodox and other Jews, deplorable and dangerous as those are.

What concerns me most are the multiple government actions that undermine religious life and institutions. Even scarier, each discriminatory rule was accompanied by a politician who publicly congratulated himself for having the courage to stand up to the Orthodox Jewish community.

The soft bigotry of low expectations is apparently too good for the Orthodox. What we get is the harsh bigotry of double standards.

The challenges to religious life here began a decade or so ago, when New York City cited a concern about neonatal herpes to require signed consent forms prior to certain forms of circumcision. This was the first regulation of circumcision ever adopted in the United States. That became a point of pride for Mayor Bloomberg, who claimed "that nobody else would take that on" because "who wants to have 10,000 guys in black hats outside your office, screaming?"

In October 2020, just as the harshest pandemic restrictions were being eased, Governor Cuomo created gerrymandered districts covering Orthodox Jewish neighborhoods where houses of worship were subject to severe limitations on attendance. Churches in those zones were also affected, but the governor openly declared that his target was "these ultra-Orthodox communities, who are also very politically powerful."

Only Orthodox Jews are targeted for harsh treatment and simultaneously described as (too) politically powerful. The message is that they deserve what they get.

Most recently, New York and its most powerful media institution have unleashed dangerous rules and rhetoric aimed at religious schooling. Yeshivas have been educating students in New York for more than 120 years, and the laws governing private schools have been on the books even longer. That history signifies deep satisfaction with the yeshiva system, but it is dismissed because, as the *New York Times* wrote, those "who might have taken action have instead accommodated a Hasidic voting bloc."

The *Times* had a unique take on this onslaught, running a news article with a sub-headline claiming, "Elected officials

rarely embrace positions that could antagonize Hasidic leaders."

The Orthodox community may not have the political power attributed to it, but it does have lawyers. All three sets of rules targeting Orthodox Jewish life were challenged. We prevailed each time. Given my role in these litigations, I'd love to chalk the victories up to brilliant lawyering. What surely helped was that in each case, New York applied a double standard to religious activity.

The federal court assessing the circumcision regulation noted that it "purposefully singles out religious conduct performed by a subset of Orthodox Jews" and "pertains to religious conduct with a small percentage of HSV infection cases… while leaving secular conduct associated with a larger percentage of such infections unaddressed."

The rules imposing limitations on synagogues were enjoined by the U.S. Supreme Court, which observed that "they single out houses of worship for especially harsh treatment" and that "statements made in connection with the challenged rules can be viewed as targeting the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community."

New York State's attempts to regulate yeshivas have fared no better in court. And no one can miss the irony of a government that focuses so intently on yeshivas enrolling a few thousand students whose parents choose religious education while it ignores the systemic failure of New York's public schools entrusted with over a million children.

Despite my role in these litigation victories, my primary reflection is one of sadness. The Orthodox Jewish community cannot litigate its way to acceptance and safety. Sure, courts can wipe discriminatory rules off the books. But the mindset that created and promoted them remains, and the climate of hostility that they foster spreads rather than dissipates.

A judge can't undo the harm created when Orthodox Jews were made out to be perpetrators rather than victims of the pandemic virus. A court can't enjoin an attitude that caricatures Orthodox Jews as rule-breakers who don't care about their children. The judicial system can't police the systemic effort to dismiss policies preferred by the Orthodox community

as nothing more than the product of a political voting bloc.

The cumulative effect is to turn Orthodox Jews into New York's untouchables. We are being made into a people tainted by birth and belief, not entitled to the full privileges of citizenship.

Let me be clear: I don't believe that New York's mayors and governors are antisemites. But the New York we inhabit at the moment reflects the convergence of the nanny state and the secular state. There is little deference to individual or parental autonomy, and even less respect for religious activity. The result is government limitations on circumcision, prayer, and religious education.

Whatever was in the hearts of the political leaders who crafted these policies, there is no doubt that they unleashed ugly sentiments about Jews that resided in the hearts of others.

The IHRA definition of antisemitism wasn't something I bothered to look at until this week. It includes "a certain perception of Jews" that may involve "rhetorical and physical manifestations… directed toward Jewish… community institutions and religious facilities."

The shoe is ugly, but it fits.

My two daughters do interesting and important work in the public sector. They are smart and talented and, as they ought to be at their age, idealistic and hopeful. Two recent experiences are worth sharing.

My younger daughter texted me one afternoon to ask how she should respond to a colleague — an educated and pleasant man — who asked whether it is true that all Jews are smart and rich, and that Jews control the government. My older daughter recently shared details of a planned trip to Israel with a colleague, who responded, "Enjoy your visit to the homeland."

These are the words and thoughts of just two people. Both would surely chafe at the suggestion that they harbor any antisemitism.

I can't draw a straight line between policies marginalizing Orthodox Jewish life and these comments. Yet one surely created the climate that welcomes the other.

My oldest son lives in Jerusalem with his family. These days, I can't help but wonder which of us is 6,000 miles from home. ✳

JONATHAN A. GREENBLATT

Complicit: Big Tech and Antisemitism

EFORE Robert Bowers was a convicted mass murderer, he was a middle-aged truck driver who mostly kept to himself. In the 1990s, he became enthralled with talk radio. He was particularly drawn to the *Quinn in the Morning* show, whose host, Jim Quinn, ranted that Islam was the source of all our problems. Bowers listened, alone.

Years later, Bowers discovered the fringe online platform Gab. In this forum, he shared materials from the Christian Identity movement, a racist and antisemitic religious ideology popular in extreme right-wing circles. He fell deep into the rabbit hole of conspiratorial thinking. In particular, he adopted the "great replacement" theory, which posits that Jews are manipulating world events to bring more non-white people to Western countries to replace white people.

He posted comments including "Jews are the children of Satan" and "Diversity means chasing down the last white man." But this

time, instead of being alone with his extreme beliefs, he found others to validate and encourage him.

Unlike in generations past, Bowers didn't need to wear a white hood at Klan rallies in hidden forests when he made these claims. He could speak his mind at online "rallies" 24/7.

One morning, he reached a breaking point. He took out his phone, went to Gab, and wrote: "HIAS likes to bring invaders in that kill our people. I can't sit by and watch my people get slaughtered. Screw your optics. I'm going in." He drove to the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh with multiple firearms and murdered 11 worshippers as they sat in the pews.

The same conspiracy theories that motivated Bowers still swirl around the muddy drains of the internet. In the nearly five years since the massacre, mass murderers have engaged similarly on Gab and other fringe platforms, trading information with echoes of replacement theory and posting their own manifestos. These men who became indoctrinated online went out and targeted marginalized communities from Buffalo to El Paso to Christchurch, New Zealand.

For those who already hate, online platforms like Gab mean they're only a few clicks away from feeding the habit. The naïveté of those who are unaware of hateful ideologies can leave them vulnerable to radicalization.

My colleagues at the Anti-Defamation League report that antisemitic content has become the norm rather than the exception on social-media services. It festers on every platform we monitor.

The very worst offenders can be found on niche services such as Telegram, Gab, and 4chan. These sites are populated by a small share of social-media users, but a far larger share of the extremist community. The rhetoric on these sites demonstrates the depth and breadth of the challenges to addressing online antisemitism.

The founder of Gab, Andrew Torba, is a self-described Christian

nationalist who claims that Jewish Americans have dual loyalty to the United States and Israel, that Jews are to blame for the crucifixion of Jesus, and that they control the U.S. government. Asked after the Pittsburgh massacre whether he would make any changes to the site's policies, Torba responded, "Absolutely not."

Some think these sites are essentially self-contained: magnets for extremists but nothing more. Our research shows that the influence of these outlets goes far beyond the platforms themselves. Then there are the large mainstream social-media companies, which in recent years have made solemn promises to do their utmost to remove hateful content on their own sites. But they aren't keeping them. Facebook and YouTube have reversed policies on curbing disinformation. Twitter was never the model for addressing intolerance even before Elon Musk acquired the platform; things have only gotten worse since then. A 2021 report from the Center for Countering Digital Hate found that the five leading social-media companies (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok) failed to remove 84 percent of antisemitic posts — and those were just the ones that had been *flagged* by the tools these companies use to alert content moderators to problematic content.

In their defense, the big social-media companies say that, try as they might, it's impossible to police all the content on their sites, given the sheer volume of it. It's certainly true that there are obstacles in the way of combating online hate and antisemitism. Content moderation is a game of Whac-A-Mole. For example, several years ago, antisemites began using an "echo" — three parentheses bracketing a word — to refer to Jewish individuals. Content-moderation systems could take down every instance of the echo, but that would also sweep up educational posts sharing what the echo means as well as posts by Jews using it to proudly self-identify in the face of hate. Automated content-moderation systems must be updated constantly to accommodate the shifting language and context of hate.

Another obstacle to blocking hateful online content is the tactic popular among social-media "influencers" who deliberately

Hateful content drives engagement, and engagement drives advertising revenue.

evade moderation by weaponizing talking points that incite *others* to harassment. The problem is particularly rampant on Twitter. Twitter, under Musk's leadership, focuses on holding individual accounts responsible for harmful content. As a result, it frequently misses how influential accounts with large followings operate. When influential accounts become hubs of hate for other online users, antisemitic content proliferates. For example, when the far-right activist Ali Alexander tweeted about ADL, his followers replied with overt antisemitism. The platform is a case study in what the ADL calls stochastic harassment: a user "weaponizing talking points that incite others to harassment without being a harasser."

Ultimately, companies lack adequate incentives to dedicate serious resources to overcoming such systemic obstacles. Firms face few consequences, financial or otherwise, for hosting and amplifying hate and harassment. Hateful content drives engagement, and engagement drives advertising revenue. Moreover, major social-media companies have gutted their trust-and-safety teams, despite claims to prioritize user safety.

Some critics of content moderation on social media insist that platforms provide a public service that advances free speech and that any curbs on the rights of people to say whatever they want violate the spirit of the First Amendment. But the First Amendment doesn't apply to all forms of speech online — just as it doesn't apply to all forms of speech in the real world.

The exact moment when speech crosses the line from protected expression to harassment or threat is sometimes a nuanced one: There is a vast amount of speech that, while controversial and unpopular, is considered "awful, but lawful" and, therefore, safeguarded under the First Amendment. However, while some mistakenly contend that freedom of speech is an absolute right with no exceptions, there are several forms of speech that do not enjoy constitutional protection: true threats, incitement to imminent lawless action, defamation, speech integral to criminal conduct, and child pornography.

It is also essential to note that the First Amendment's restriction on abridging speech applies only to governmental actors. Although they are not legally mandated to do so, platforms can, and often do, implement robust policies against hateful speech and conduct in the same way that offline institutions always have. As private actors, social-media platforms are not bound by the First Amendment; in fact, courts have even understood platforms' moderation efforts to be protected speech in and of themselves.

If a person were to walk into a Starbucks and start yelling antisemitic epithets at the patrons, that person would surely be kicked out, because Starbucks, as a private company, can set rules for conduct in its stores. The same should hold true for the extremist who spews racist rhetoric or makes hateful antisemitic threats on privately owned online platforms.

Likewise, newspapers in America are shielded by their First Amendment right to criticize the government and public officials. But they aren't obliged to print anything. Editors select the forms of speech they want to platform and exclude the ones they don't — for instance, a letter from a white supremacist advocating a race war. This is not censorship. It's a matter of maintaining editorial standards. The same must hold true for social-media companies that currently recommend and amplify content from white supremacists and other bigots.

These choices about what is and isn't permissible aren't always easy. For every neo-Nazi, there may be thousands more typing and

posting opinions that, even if we disagree strongly with them, fall within the range of what ought to be considered acceptable speech. That's why it's essential for social-media companies to work with experts from civil society to parse nuance and understand how extremist behavior is changing and how evolving rhetoric affects targeted groups. Twitter used to be one model of this with their Trust and Safety Council, which Musk disbanded.

The key point is this: Freedom of speech does not mean *freedom of reach*. Social-media platforms are not obligated to provide a platform for bigots to spread hateful speech. They are certainly not obligated to amplify those messages using algorithms designed to generate interest among the like-minded. These are conscious choices made in the pursuit of the bottom line, not constitutional freedoms exercised for the greater good.

There is also a supposed question of cost: How can companies such as Facebook be expected to moderate the tidal wave of content being generated every hour on their platforms? The question is a little like asking why major automakers should be expected to produce safe and reliable cars given the many thousands they produce. Safety is part of the cost of doing business in every modern industry, and social-media companies — some of the most profitable firms in history — should hardly be exempt.

Nor should they be exempt from liability when things go wrong. When a large carmaker finds that its airbags are faulty, it is mandated by the government to recall its product and repair the problem. When a fast-food restaurant has a norovirus outbreak, it shuts down, updates its procedures, and pays a hefty fine. This is basic for public health. Social-media companies need to be held to the same commonsense standards.

If social-media companies are still unwilling to make changes, the advertising industry and nongovernmental organizations will need

Freedom of speech does not mean *freedom of reach*. Social-media platforms are not obligated to provide a platform for bigots to spread hateful speech.

to once again step into the void. We've done this before, with the Stop Hate for Profit campaign launched with other NGOs in July 2020 to send a message that social-media companies need to be held accountable.

But awareness campaigns and public pressure won't be enough. Policymakers at the federal and state level must reshape their incentives to force behavior change. Two steps in particular could make a dramatic difference.

- The Communications Decency Act, which governs how social-media companies operate, was passed in 1996 — before iPhones and Apple watches, Twitter and TikTok, and long before the age of artificial intelligence and synthetic media. As currently written, Section 230 of the Act provides platforms such as Facebook and Twitter with near-blanket immunity from liability for "user-generated content" published on their platforms, with few exceptions. In essence, unlike all other forms of media in our society, these companies are not liable even if they publish libel.

  The existing law has become woefully insufficient to regulate tech companies and prevent platforms' ranking algorithms from recommending dangerous content. Section 230 must be updated to account for the reality that the platforms are exacerbating hate, harassment, and extremism. Just as seat belts

did not prevent people from reaching their destination, making social-media companies accountable for what they publish will reduce harm without sacrificing the connective power of the platforms.

- The regulatory toolbox for this issue should also include government-mandated transparency.

  We know that social-media companies can't be trusted to regulate themselves. Companies should be required to disclose how they are actually enforcing content policies — the same kind of consumer protection we see in other industries. California signed an excellent model for this into law in 2022. California's A.B. 587 forces large social-media companies to publicly disclose their platform policies regarding online hate, racism, disinformation, extremism, harassment, and foreign political interference. It also mandates that they release data about their enforcement of those policies. The law doesn't require any content policies at all. Its premise is simple: We should know what social-media platforms' policies *actually* are and how well they're enforced. Federal legislation would be the most effective means to ensure transparency, but if Congress doesn't step in, more states could take action. At present, California, Florida, Texas, and New York have laws of this kind on the books.

American Jews and our friends and allies across the country are looking with alarm: The rate of antisemitic incidents rose nearly fivefold between 2013 and 2022, from 751 to 3,697. Nobody should think it's a coincidence that this dramatic increase coincided with the increasing ubiquity and influence of social media — a type of media that has for too long gotten away with maximizing its profits by minimizing its responsibilities.

It doesn't have to be this way. And we shouldn't have to wait for the next social-media-induced racist or antisemitic massacre before we act. ✳

YAAKOV KATZ

Mainstream Media: Not Antisemitic but Blind to Jewish Concerns

OES THE MAINSTREAM American news media have an antisemitism problem? To many American Jews, the answer is self-evident: Of course it does.

In foreign coverage, there is the obsessive reporting on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, utterly out of proportion to its global importance. There is the unbending and often unsubtle tilt against the Jewish state, notable in the frequency with which Israeli retaliation against terror attacks becomes the focus of a story and is referred to as the original provocation. There is the treatment of anti-Zionism as a respectable political position, never mind that it is nearly the only living ideology in the world to call for the elimination of an entire state.

On the United States' domestic front, there is the treatment of

Orthodox Jews as greedy landlords, pushy neighbors, and cunning political operators who bilk the state of money while refusing to give their own children a basic secular education. There is the bare minimum coverage of violent antisemitic attacks taking place with alarming regularity against visible Jews in Brooklyn, while hate crimes against other minorities receive extensive coverage. There is the persistent belief that the Iraq War was the fault of second- or third-tier Jewish officials in the Bush administration, and the frequent promotion of the notion that AIPAC is the largest and most powerful lobby in Washington.

In answer to such claims, most leading figures in the mainstream media reply: Outrageous nonsense.

For starters, they would say that a great many of the editors and reporters responsible for this coverage are themselves Jewish and not of the self-hating type. They would say that the attention they give the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is in line with the attention the U.S. government and international community give it — and considerably *less* than the attention it gets from those same American Jews who accuse them of exaggerating its importance to begin with. They would say that, for all the criticism they get from pro-Israel Jews for the allegedly pro-Palestinian tilt of their coverage, they get at least as much criticism from pro-Palestinian readers for what they view as pro-Israel coverage. They would say that if they occasionally publish an anti-Zionist voice, they provide a platform far more frequently to pro-Israel voices and that vigorous open discourse is best served by hearing a wide variety of views.

As for their domestic coverage, they would add that, in stories such as the *New York Times* investigation of ultra-Orthodox schools, they may have embarrassed community leaders but they were also shining a spotlight on bad educational standards that poorly serve ultra-Orthodox children. The suggestion that the news media have ignored violent antisemitic outrages is false, they would also add, noting that the attack on the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh

got wall-to-wall coverage, as did Kanye West's antisemitic Twitter tirades, as well as the overall rise in antisemitic incidents.

The result is a proverbial dialogue of the deaf: News-media leaders tend to see their Jewish critics as hyperventilating partisans; those same critics tend to look at those media leaders as arrogant bigots. What passes for communication between them generally occurs in the form of angry letters to the editor, which are sometimes published but rarely catalyze any substantive change.

The truth is that the news media *do* have a problem in much of their reporting on Israel and Diaspora Jewry. It might help further their understanding if it weren't called an "antisemitism problem"—a loaded term that does more to insult than educate—and were described instead as an ignorance problem.

This essay is intended to address that ignorance.

That's not to say there is no antisemitism in the media. In 1977, *Time* magazine introduced Israel's new prime minister, Menachem Begin, to its readers with a useful tip on how to pronounce his surname: "Rhymes with Fagin," the famously cruel miser in Dickens's *Oliver Twist*. In 2018, the *New York Times International Edition* ran a cartoon of a blind, yarmulke-clad Donald Trump being led by a sly-looking Benjamin Netanyahu, drawn as a dog, wearing a leash and a Star of David on his collar. The paper quickly apologized after an outcry, but the fact that the cartoon made it into the paper in the first place was telling in itself. Another antisemitic cartoon involving greedy Jews with grotesque features was published in April 2023, this time in the *Guardian*, leading to another public furor and apology.

Still, examples of classic antisemitism are fairly rare. But reporting that ignores or downplays Jewish concerns to instead play into well-established antisemitic stereotypes is depressingly common, as are stories that rationalize antisemitic behavior and that judge

> News-media leaders tend to see their Jewish critics as hyperventilating partisans; those same critics tend to look at those media leaders as arrogant bigots.

the Jewish state by a standard that differs from that applied to other democratic nations faced with similar security challenges.

Consider a few examples:

1. After a white Christian male murdered eight people (six of them Asian) in Atlanta-area massage parlors, the media breathlessly covered the massacre as an act of anti-Asian hate — even though the motive of the killer (who claimed to be dealing with a sex addiction) has never been established. Yet when a British-Pakistani Muslim traveled thousands of miles to Colleyville, Texas, a few months later, took a rabbi and his congregants hostage, and was witnessed "ranting about Jews and Israel," the media curiously bought into a clearly inane statement by an FBI agent — quickly refuted by the FBI director — that the attack "was not specifically related to the Jewish community." Only a single major U.S. newspaper, the *Washington Post*, devoted a full story to the antisemitic nature of the attack.

2. From 12-year-old Mohammad al-Durrah in 2000 to journalist Shireen Abu Akleh in 2022, the mainstream news media have repeatedly gone to almost epic lengths in attempts to show that Israeli forces kill noncombatants, particularly children, in cold blood — even if, time and again, careful investigations show they don't. In 2021, the *New York Times* front page featured photographs of dozens of Palestinian children (plus two Israelis) killed in that year's Gaza war, under the headline "They Were Only Children." Without addressing the factual mistakes — there were several

Reporting that ignores or downplays Jewish concerns to instead play into well-established antisemitic stereotypes is depressingly common.

featured victims who were found to have connections to terrorist groups or who were killed by Palestinian fire — the most basic question was never really answered: Why did the *Times* devote an entire front page to Palestinian children killed by a foreign country despite never doing so for Iraqi or Afghan children killed by the United States in the many years of war fought by America in those countries?

3. Except when the perpetrators are clearly from the far Right, the media go out of their way to contextualize the motives of antisemitic attacks in a way they would never countenance when it comes to hate crimes against other minorities. In Brooklyn, where Orthodox Jews are routinely the subject of violent antisemitic attacks, often from young black men, "gentrification," rather than hatred, is treated as the cause of the attacks. In 2021, after Palestinian sympathizers attacked Jewish diners at a Los Angeles sushi restaurant, a KABC-TV report of the event was headlined "Mideast tensions lead to LA fight" (as if the assault had been a "fight"). In the reporting on the Colleyville hostage taker, more attention was paid to his alleged mental illness than to his ranting hatred of Jews.

4. In April, CNN's star news anchor Christiane Amanpour used the term "shootout" to describe the unprovoked killing of Lucy Dee and her daughters Maia and Rina in April in the West Bank. Yet the depiction of the attack as a shootout was the furthest

thing from the truth. Lucy and her daughters were driving in a car in the Jordan Valley when they were shot at by Palestinians in a passing car. When Dee's car went off the road and came to a stop, the terrorists pulled over and riddled it with bullets again to ensure that their victims were dead. Despite the obvious falsehood, it took Amanpour more than a month to apologize to the Dee family — and only after CNN and she personally were threatened with a massive lawsuit. Was Amanpour's choice of wording an instance of antisemitism? Not directly, and it might have been a genuine mistake. But to think that it does not affect viewers' state of mind and understanding of the victim–aggressor balance would be naïve.

The list goes on. And it raises the question: Why the constant stream of offensive and one-sided reporting? There is no simple answer, since "media" is a plural noun: Different news organizations operate differently, as do individual reporters and editors. But after years of being both a participant in and observer of the media, I would argue that some generalizations are safe to make.

The most important one, as far as Israel and Jews are concerned, is that most major newsrooms tilt left ideologically, sometimes sharply. This has several effects.

One is a lack of awareness. Reporters and editors tend to believe that antisemitism is largely if not exclusively a phenomenon of the political Right: a shameful constellation of neo-Nazi rallies at Charlottesville, Marjorie Taylor Greene's fantasies about Rothschild space lasers, and the like. As these cases arise, mainstream news organizations have no trouble reporting them. But they have a very large blind spot when it comes to the antisemitism of the Left: the antisemitism that comes forth in expressions of anti-capitalism or anti-colonialism or anti-Zionism.

Another is trouble understanding Jews as a vulnerable

minority. Progressives tend to see the world through the lens of the powerful versus the powerless — the "powerful" typically being wealthy and white, the "powerless" being poor and "of color." That narrative has changed some in recent years, as the return and rise of virulent antisemitism in Europe and the United States have become undeniable. But it does explain the underlying attitude.

Then there is the broad reluctance to call out antisemitism when the antisemites are minorities. Even now it remains shocking to see how Al Sharpton, one of the chief instigators of the 1991 Crown Heights riots, has been sanitized by the Left to the point of having his own show on MSNBC. The media heavily covered the antisemitism of Kanye West, who is seen as an ally of Donald Trump. But, with rare exceptions, there has been little to no serious reporting in the mainstream press about why the Nation of Islam continues to be a force in the black community, attracting high-profile celebrities such as the rapper Snoop Dogg or the activist Tamika Mallory. (The latter was the subject of a flattering write-up and photoshoot in *Vogue* magazine long after her support for the Nation of Islam's Louis Farrakhan, a virulent antisemite, was a matter of public record.)

Finally, as with so much of the Left, the news media look at Israel, Zionism, and their champions with varying degrees of hostility, and at Palestinians and their advocates with corresponding degrees of sympathy.

This is an old story, and this is not the essay to rehash its many details. But in many newsrooms the general perception of Israel as a bad country that gratuitously oppresses Palestinians for no better reason than greediness and fanaticism can easily descend into thinking that replicates antisemitic tropes. "Israel is a superior country with superior people: its talents are above the ordinary," the *Economist* magazine wrote in an editorial at the beginning of the second intifada, in the fall of 2000. "But it has to abate its greed for other people's land." More than two decades later, in September

> With rare exceptions, there has been little to no serious reporting in the mainstream press about why the Nation of Islam continues to be a force in the black community.

2021, a *Times* reporter sought to explain support for Israel among Democrats in Congress as a function of the influence of "influential lobbyists and rabbis." (The paper later deleted the line without acknowledging the change.)

There are, of course, additional reasons beyond the ideological leanings of most journalists to explain this kind of coverage. Like many Americans, many journalists have an inadequate understanding of history: They tend to think that the Jewish state was created "because of the Holocaust," or that an actual Palestinian state preceded Israel in the Holy Land, or that efforts to "liberate" Palestine began only after 1967.

Then, too, the fact that so many reporters and editors are themselves Jewish has, paradoxically, often made the coverage worse. During World War II, the *New York Times* infamously downplayed stories about the Holocaust because its Jewish owners feared that by highlighting those stories they would be accused of special pleading for their own people. In our time, many of the most aggressively anti-Israel voices are themselves Jewish, which, they often appear to think, gives them a license to write about Jews or Israel in a way they never would dream of if they were writing about other minority groups.

Whatever the causes, what ought to be clear is that there *is* a problem. If you, as a reader, happen to be an editor, reporter, or executive at a major media organization, ask yourself this question: If leading members of the black, Hispanic, LGBT, or Asian community had been telling you for years that they felt marginalized, misunderstood, misrepresented, and maligned by your coverage, would you turn a deaf ear and send them away with some curt rejoinder?

Probably not.

How can this change? Perhaps the most obvious — and surprising — answer is a now-familiar word: "diversity."

Today's news organizations go out of their way to recruit and promote employees from "diverse" backgrounds, by which they mainly mean black and Hispanic journalists. The case they make for doing so is that a diverse newsroom enriches the media's ability to fully and sympathetically report on the diverse communities they cover. This is true and important for a newsroom — so why not expand the principle to other underrepresented minorities, including Orthodox Jews? There may be many secular Jews working the *Washington Post*, the *Times*, or CNN, but the sight of a yarmulke remains exceedingly rare. That *can* change.

Beyond diversity of backgrounds, there is the even more important consideration of viewpoint diversity. As explained above, the news media's coverage of Israel and Diaspora Jewry does *not* generally stem from self-consciously antisemitic beliefs. Instead, it comes from a progressive mindset that tends to be hostile to Israel and Zionism, ignores or downplays antisemitism except when it comes from the far Right, and sometimes repeats antisemitic tropes and perpetuates antisemitic stereotypes. Raising awareness of this hostility and tilt to the negative while teaching newsrooms to be more sensitive to Jewish concerns would likely have a positive effect.

But it would be even more effective if newsroom leaders cracked open the ideological monoculture that has dominated the media for too long. This change won't happen overnight and

cannot override core journalistic considerations of independence, accuracy, fairness, and objectivity. In the long term, however, it can bring new perspectives that the media desperately need to challenge their easy assumptions. This will help restore trust with audiences — not only with the Jewish community but with so many others who've almost lost hope they'll ever get a fair shake from a press they once revered. ✳

DAHLIA LITHWICK &
MASUA SAGIV

Between Charlottesville and Jerusalem

IX SUMMERS AGO, Americans watched in horror as hundreds of white supremacists and neo-Nazis marched through Charlottesville, Va., at the Unite the Right rally. Torch-bearing marchers wore swastikas, chanted racist and antisemitic slogans such as "white lives matter" and "Jews will not replace us," and terrorized black neighborhoods, the University of Virginia, the small downtown core, and the local synagogue. As activists gathered to counter their taunts and threats, one Unite the Right protester intentionally drove his car into the crowd, causing severe injuries to counter-protesters and the death of 32-year-old Heather Heyer. Images of the march rocketed around the world, and for a fleeting moment, the horror these images evoked felt almost universal. Although the ideas behind the march were given many names — ascendant fascism,

racism, white supremacy, neo-Nazism, antisemitism — there was widespread acknowledgement among observers that it was abhorrent. The event signified a new era of violent antisemitism and Jewish vulnerability in America.

The sentiments behind the march, and the feelings it evoked in Jews in Charlottesville and around the country, are familiar to Jews in Israel. In the most recent example, in May 2023, a new but familiar installment in the ongoing conflict between Israelis and Palestinians broke out, as rocket attacks from Gaza and Israel's military response, Operation Shield and Arrow, led to more armed conflict and death in the Middle East. This triggered the usual critiques of Israel's behavior, ranging from reasonable debates about geopolitics, national security, and human rights to irrational calls for Israel's eradication and the demonization of Jews and Zionism.

The events in Charlottesville and Israel may appear to be wholly unrelated, having played out with different parties on opposite sides of the world. But they reflect the same story: the challenges faced by today's Jews in navigating both their power and their vulnerability amid contemporary manifestations of antisemitism. We fail to recognize this throughline at our peril.

Much seems to divide American and Israeli Jews today. Polls show an increasing desire among American Jews, particularly those farther to the Left, to dissociate themselves from Israel and Zionism. Increasing numbers of young American Jews disavow any connection to Israel, while Israelis are ever more apt to write off the need for American Jewish support. Yet the two communities share more than they realize, including the ways in which they are perceived by others. This understanding came into sharp relief for us as we watched the civil trial of the Charlottesville protesters unfold in the winter of 2021.

What we found revealing about this trial — which occurred so far off the public radar that even some locals ignored it — is the looking glass it offered for American and Israeli Jews. The lawsuit,

which eventually found white supremacists and neo-Nazis liable for millions of dollars in damages, highlights the double bind facing both communities today: While Jews in America and Israel are undeniably successful and powerful, they are simultaneously threatened — and even at risk of existential demise.

Within days of the Charlottesville march, two narratives emerged to explain what had happened. One held that the events were about racism and white nationalism in a town that held itself out as progressive but still benefited from the vestiges of school segregation, racialized policing, and redlining. The other had less to do with Confederate statues and the shadow of Thomas Jefferson's Monticello, and more to do with antisemitism and continuing efforts to terrorize Jews.

Facing federal inaction, a group of plaintiffs filed a civil rights lawsuit. Their aim was to bankrupt the organizations that had planned the protest. They also hoped to use civil discovery to unearth the funding sources and interconnections among groups such as the Proud Boys, the Ku Klux Klan, and Identity Evropa. The nine plaintiffs were members of the Charlottesville community who were targeted and injured during the rally; several were people of color, but none were Jewish. (One Jewish plaintiff had been dismissed at an earlier stage of the litigation.) The lawyers who represented them, however, were almost all Jewish, and their Jewish identity was a key element in their choice to pursue the case and to ensure that it addressed *both* antisemitism and racism. This was also a primary motivation for Integrity First for America, an NGO established to support the lawsuits, which raised most of its funding from Jewish communities and philanthropists. Even before the trial began, then, the dual experiences of American Jews were clear: Antisemitic threats to the Jewish community would be countered by the power of Jewish lawyers

> While Jews in America and Israel are undeniably successful and powerful, they are simultaneously threatened — and even at risk of existential demise.

and funders, from the heights that Jews had reached in America and in its justice system — and that power would be used to attack American racism as well.

Twelve federal jurors in Charlottesville sat through the four-week trial of *Sines v. Kessler*, hearing testimony from 36 witnesses and sifting through five terabytes of digital evidence. The case pulled threads from both narratives about the march, arguing that it echoed — and perpetuated — not only centuries of anti-black terrorism in the American South but also the history of pogroms and massacres of Jews.

A key moment was the expert witness report of Deborah Lipstadt, a renowned historian of the Holocaust who would soon become the U.S. special envoy for combating antisemitism. Lipstadt argued that the words and deeds of the protesters "fit comfortably within a long tradition of antisemitism and share in the tradition that led to the violent murder of millions of Jews in the Holocaust." She explained the differences between racism and antisemitism: Racism is a form of "punching down," a prejudice built on a perception of superiority over a racial group, while antisemitism is a form of "punching up," a prejudice built on a perception of being victimized by a manipulative, powerful group. The "great replacement" theory championed by the protestors, she noted, deftly merges the two, imagining rich Jews as puppet masters, orchestrating a conspiracy to replace the white, Christian

hegemony with minority populations, including blacks, Muslims, and people of color. In this theory, the Jews are double victimizers, manipulating their inferior racialized puppets in service of destroying white America.

The jury found the organizers of the Unite the Right rally jointly and severally liable under Virginia's civil rights laws for injuries inflicted on the plaintiffs. The 24 defendants and organizations had engaged in a conspiracy to incite racially motivated violence. The 11 plaintiffs were awarded more than $26 million in damages, including $24 million in punitive damages. (In late 2022, the punitive damages were reduced by a federal judge to $350,000, because of a Virginia statute. The $2 million in compensatory awards was unaffected.)

For many, the verdict was an unalloyed success. Journalists wrote of a "historic victory." Yet for us, the trial and the resulting coverage create a more complex understanding of the American Jewish experience — one that enables Jews to use their power to fight contemporary antisemitism and racism, acknowledges their vulnerability in the face of antisemitism, and accepts that many Jews have also benefited from the racist structures of the American past.

The Unite the Right rally was clearly part of the centuries-old story of race-based violence in the American South and — with its Nazi iconography and the targeting of the town's historic synagogue — also another link in the chain of antisemitism. Yet while the alt-Right is sufficiently capacious in its ability to hate blacks and Jews simultaneously, too many other observers require a neat answer as to whether the Charlottesville march was ultimately meant to inspire a race war *or* an anti-Jewish pogrom. The stories of blacks and Jews in America are often perceived as separate and distinct narratives: To focus primarily or even exclusively on

the protesters' racism would appear to deny the antisemitism also present at the rally and experienced, increasingly, by Jews in America every day. (ADL reports a 36 percent increase from 2021 to 2022 in antisemitic incidents in the United States, part of a global trend.) On the other hand, spotlighting antisemitism runs the risk of diminishing the racist elements of the white ethno-nationalist movement and eliding the heights to which Jews have climbed in the American power structure.

Grassroots consciousness of institutional discrimination and violence toward blacks has been growing in recent years among mainstream progressive Americans, following cases of police brutality. Many American Jews have proudly played a part in this reckoning, harking back to the central role played by Jewish activists during the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Yet because the Jewish story in America today is largely one of success, wealth, and political power, it challenges the possibility of black-Jewish collaboration, as some black activists see Jews as part of the white oppressor class.

But the Jewish-American story is also one of vulnerability and a growing sense of concern and danger. Where, then, are Jews situated in the events in Charlottesville? Are they part of a privileged, white America, bearing partial responsibility for generations of racial discrimination and violence, and obliged to step aside and allow public attention to focus on others? Or are Jews a vulnerable minority in these events, watching history repeat itself, and obligated to safeguard its members from persecution and harm?

The answer is both.

This complicated issue of simultaneous power and vulnerability also lies at the heart of much of the world's conception of contemporary Israel. Noting this similarity can help bridge the growing rift between the world's two major Jewish communities.

The experiences of Israeli and American Jews are different in

We must negotiate between power and vulnerability not simply for the sake of our Jewish communities but also to offer a countercultural model of complexity in a world that prefers simplistic stories and radical extremes.

important ways: Israelis live in a sovereign Jewish state where they are a majority; American Jews live in a multicultural society where they are a small minority. Although some critics draw parallels between American institutionalized racism and the Israeli oppression of the Palestinians, or between Israeli "colonialism" and American enslavement, we side with writers such as Matti Friedman and Einat Wilf who argue that these are inaccurate, sloppy transpositions of American conflicts onto Israel. The two communities are unique. Nevertheless, they share a fundamental similarity: Both are remarkably powerful and uniquely vulnerable.

The Jewish state has long been a symbol of power. It is seen by many of its citizens as an island of sanity and prosperity, fighting for its life in a violent, hostile Middle East. Its military is one of the strongest in the world, and it has succeeded repeatedly, often against all odds, in holding off its enemies. In reviving an ancient Hebrew culture and furthering innovation and technology, Israeli Jews have developed a fierce national identity and built a strong economy. As we write this, hundreds of thousands of Israelis continue to march in the streets each week to protest the current government's proposed judicial overhaul, demonstrating the strength of Israel's civil society and democratic culture.

And yet one cannot separate Israelis' perception of their strength from their sense of fear. Israel faces multiple enemies at its borders and experiences a fragile internal sense of security because of the ever-present threat of violence. Israeli Jews live in constant awareness of being under attack and being a hated minority in an Arab Middle East. They build protected spaces against rockets in their apartments and institutions and take cover at the sound of a motorcycle backfiring. Israeli Jews also live with the specter of ancient Jewish history, where internal strife and infighting have ended previous experiments in Jewish sovereignty.

The Israeli occupation of the West Bank is ultimately a testament to feelings of both power and vulnerability. The occupation is sustained by a powerful force that is currently used to discriminate against and oppress Palestinians. Yet for most Israelis it is justified by an existential fear. In ways that are rarely captured in news accounts, Israelis are terrified of violence, even while they exert it themselves. How to navigate this volatile seam? What does it mean, ethically and in practice, to be powerful and vulnerable at the same time?

For centuries, the Jewish narrative was solely one of vulnerability and victimhood — what Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik called "the experience of shared suffering." The flourishing of the Jewish state and the thriving of North American Jewry, however, seem to indicate the transformation of the Jewish story into one of extraordinary power. The ethical challenge for us all is to figure out how to absorb the truth that both can simultaneously be true: We must negotiate between power and vulnerability not simply for the sake of our Jewish communities but also to offer a countercultural model of complexity in a world that prefers simplistic stories and radical extremes. To make the choice to live *inside* the tensions inherent in being both powerful and vulnerable opens up possibilities for moving forward in a new spirit.

What if, instead of embracing absolute versions of one or the other narrative, we could acknowledge that we often seize on extreme stories for transactional purposes?

What if we stopped minimizing the vulnerability and pain of other communities, whether black Americans or Palestinians, and rejected the zero-sum calculation whereby acknowledging another community's pain seems to undermine our own? Remembering that Jewish merchants in Charlottesville benefited from historical redlining and other efforts to stymie black progress does not diminish Jews' suffering from antisemitism, including in the Charlottesville protests. Mourning innocent children killed in an Israeli military operation in Gaza does not negate Israel's need and responsibility to defend itself, nor does it deny Israelis' fear and sense of helplessness when they are under attack.

Reckoning with the suffering of other marginalized groups in no way reduces the real and growing fear of anti-Jewish hate and violence. Narratives that posit antisemitism as a uniquely dangerous form of hate, and that fail to connect it to other hatreds, increasingly fall on deaf ears, particularly among those who are not Jewish. American and Israeli Jews cannot begin to explore what it means to be an ally to other vulnerable communities, or what it means to continue organizing and increasing power either as a minority community or as a sovereign state, until we have a coherent theory that grapples with our considerable power as well as our continued vulnerability. Such a theory would allow us to talk boldly and publicly through a moral lens that acknowledges multiple forms of suffering while reflecting reality more coherently.

To step into this gap might put decades of Jewish narrative on trial, in a sense, with an eye toward abandoning the story of unique suffering and unparalleled greatness. We believe that a less parochial and self-interested narrative, one in which we accept that we are both powerful and afraid, would be better received at this moment. At a minimum, it would change our relationships with other powerless groups, and even with other powerful ones.

Jews have always been experts at navigating complexities, balancing our responsibilities to protect ourselves while also helping others. This is the time to model such nuance, explicitly and loudly.

Refusing to inhabit one narrative or the other, but embracing the tension between them, will strengthen our communities and transform our ability to stand up proudly for ourselves and others. ✳

PART THREE

FIGHTING ANTISEMITISM

JAMES KIRCHICK

Censorship Is Not a Jewish Value

THERE IS A TRAIT in the Jewish character that does provoke animosity. . . . Even a stinker like Hitler didn't just pick on them for no reason."

It's the sort of remark you would expect to hear from the leader of a white-supremacist group. Alas, the above justification for the Shoah is attributable to one of the 20th century's most beloved literary figures. The antisemitism of Roald Dahl — author of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *Matilda*, *James and the Giant Peach*, and too many other classic children's books to count — has never been a secret. Dahl's mild defense of Hitler was not jotted down in a diary and unearthed by a shocked relative long after his death. It was uttered in an interview with the *New Statesman* magazine in 1983. This was the same year that, reviewing a book about the first Lebanon war, Dahl observed of Jews that "never before in the history of man has a race of people switched so rapidly from being much-pitied victims to barbarous murderers," compared Israeli leaders Menachem Begin and Ariel Sharon to "Mr. Hitler and Mr. Goering,"

and prophesied that a "holocaust" against the Jewish state was "inevitable" because "brigand nations never survive forever."

Dahl, who died in 1990, suffered little reputational cost for his public avowals of Jew-hatred. Thirty years after his death, however, the Dahl estate felt moved to address his noxious diatribes, quietly posting a statement on its website that apologized "for the lasting and understandable hurt caused by Roald Dahl's antisemitic statements." Without specifying just what those statements were, the Roald Dahl Story Company today expresses its "hope that, just as he did at his best, at his absolute worst, Roald Dahl can help remind us of the lasting impact of words."

Put aside the possibility that this reckoning may have been occasioned not by a three-decade-deferred sense of shame, but by a desire to protect lucrative film and television projects, Netflix reportedly having paid the Story Company at least $1 billion for the rights to 16 of Dahl's books in 2018. Addressing antisemitism in its various manifestations—whether those emanating from the beer hall or the literary salon—is a salutary task, and one can appreciate the effort by the Dahl estate to reckon with the vile views of its namesake. But an apology from the descendants of a dead antisemite is worse than useless; it's counterproductive. To apologize for something implies that one has done something wrong. It is not Dahl's relatives who ranted about "powerful American Jewish bankers." Their asking for forgiveness reinforces the idea that sin is a heritable trait, a poisonous idea that Jews, of all people, should be the loudest in opposing, given that it has justified nearly 2,000 years of murderous antisemitism.

Dahl's offenses against the Jews, such as they were, cannot be detected within his vast literary output. The only conceivable trace of antisemitism to be found in his books (and it's quite a stretch) might be his characterization of the eponymous villains in *The Witches*, who have large noses. Earlier this year, when Penguin Press announced that it would defer to its "sensitivity readers" and remove certain objectionable words and characterizations from Dahl's works, the

allegedly semitic features of his harridans did not even make the cut. ("Fat," "ugly," "crazy," and "female," however, were deemed beyond the pale.) Following backlash from readers and writers alike ("Roald Dahl was no angel but this is absurd censorship," Salman Rushdie tweeted), Penguin backtracked, announcing that, while it would print the new, bowdlerized versions of Dahl, it would also continue to publish his books in their original form, thereby "offering readers the choice to decide how they experience Roald Dahl's magical, marvelous stories."

Unpleasant though it may be to discover that a favorite childhood author viewed Jewish people with the disgust that he reserved for descriptions of the baddies in his books, Dahl's antisemitism (like that of his contemporary Agatha Christie) was very much of its time. "The anti-Jewish flavor of the talk was not to be ignored or overlooked, or put down to heavy humor or generational prejudice," the late Christopher Hitchens remembered of an evening spent at Christie's home sometime in the 1960s. "It was vividly unpleasant and it was bottom-numbingly boring." When dealing with long-dead authors whose personal bigotry was at best incidental to their artistic creations, discerning readers should decide for themselves whether and to what extent they can separate the two. Personally, I can still remember devouring Dahl's and Christie's stories with fondness while also being alert, now as an adult, to the fact that they held despicable beliefs.

Living authors, whose bigotry is subtler, present a more challenging conundrum for the conscientious reader. Take Sally Rooney, the internationally bestselling Irish novelist who prevented the translation of her latest novel, *Beautiful World, Where Are You*, into Hebrew. "I simply do not feel it would be right for me under the present circumstances to accept a new contract with an Israeli company that does not publicly distance itself from apartheid and support the UN-stipulated rights of the Palestinian people," she said, explicitly aligning herself with the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement that seeks to abolish Israel as a Jewish democratic state.

Rooney's act of self-imposed censorship is antithetical to literature,

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the ultimate aim of which, according to one of its finest practitioners, the late Martin Amis, is to achieve "the universal." Books published hundreds or even thousands of years ago, books written in foreign languages, even books written by authors who held or hold political views or who behaved in ways we may find reprehensible—what makes such works meaningful is their ability to speak to us not as Americans, Irishmen, or Israelis, but as humans. Personally, one of the most rewarding aspects of being an author is having my work translated, as it broadens my audience and brings me into conversation with readers and writers from around the world. In addition to punishing those liberal, cosmopolitan Israelis most likely to be sympathetic to her criticisms of the Israeli state, Rooney's insistence on denying Hebrew-speakers the opportunity to read her books is an attack on the very concept of literature itself.

Rather than offer this broad-minded critique, however, Rooney's most vociferous critics in Israel shut down the conversation altogether. Goaded by an internet-driven campaign, the country's two largest bookstore chains removed Rooney's two previous books from their shelves. "Those who boycott us and incite against Israel are not worthy of selling books here and making money off us," crowed the activist who led the effort to expurgate Rooney's oeuvre. He was following the censorious lead of the Israeli government, which has repeatedly banned critics (including Noam Chomsky and Representative Ilhan Omar) from stepping foot on its territory.

There is something fatalistic about these petulant, knee-jerk, retaliatory responses to antisemitism, which strike me as not only

ethically wrong and strategically self-defeating, but deeply un-Jewish. The situation Jews face today dealing with antisemitism in literary circles brings to mind the last great era of organized cancellation in American history, the Hollywood blacklist, when movie studios (most of them, incidentally, founded and managed by Jews) bowed to political pressure and banned real and suspected Communists (many of them also Jews) from working in the motion-picture industry. It was a shameful period in American history, a time when powerful forces pressured individuals to violate their conscience and inform on their friends and colleagues.

The shame of the blacklist was not only that it exalted within American society what Victor Navasky, in his history of that period, *Naming Names*, called the "informer principle." The tragedy was compounded by the way in which the blacklist made moral heroes out of those wholly unworthy of the honor, people who, had the tables been turned and they the ones holding power, would have enthusiastically endorsed a totalitarian political system in which boycotts of individuals with unpopular political views would have been the *least* of its depredations. Being a Communist in mid-century America was not like being a liberal in a hurry. It meant swearing fealty to a secret, conspiratorial organization devoted to the overthrow of democratic government and its replacement with a one-party dictatorship. Rarely in the scores of documentaries and books devoted to the blacklist is this uncomfortable truth acknowledged about its victims — that the very people who decried the violation of their own civil liberties slavishly backed the regime that created the Gulag. Had the blacklist targeted Nazi writers rather than Communist ones, we would remember the era differently. An allegorical play likening that period to the Salem witch trials — *The Crucible* — would not be part of high school curricula across the land. If Dalton Trumbo had been a supporter of Hitler rather than Stalin, he would never have been portrayed by Bryan Cranston in a critically acclaimed, hagiographic biopic.

Blacklisting people with reprehensible views often ennobles them

with a moral status they do not deserve. The era of the blacklist was one during which American society responded to an authoritarian threat with authoritarian tactics, such that self-proclaimed believers in liberal democracy behaved like the totalitarians they opposed. And however reprehensible the views and tactics of domestic American Communists, the societal reaction to them was wholly out of proportion to the threat they actually represented to the country. Despite the presence of a number of well-placed Soviet spies within the American government and the Manhattan Project, the Communist Party itself never represented a serious threat to the United States. As for Communists working in the entertainment industry, the evidence of pro-Communist propaganda in Hollywood movies was barely more visible than that of the supposedly antisemitic content in the novels of Roald Dahl.

The reign of the blacklist, and McCarthyism more generally, symbolized the inability of America's leaders to articulate two seemingly contradictory but actually complementary propositions at the same time: that Communism was an evil ideology *and* that those who swore by its tenets were entitled to the same constitutional protections as Americans holding mainstream political beliefs. Today, this inability to express two ideas simultaneously is one of the most baleful features of American intellectual life. To state just a few of the paired contentions that our leading lights seem incapable of acknowledging in the same breath: Donald Trump *and* wokeness constitute mutually reinforcing threats to liberal democracy; unchecked illegal immigration threatens social cohesion *and* America must remain a welcoming place for immigrants; #MeToo was a long overdue corrective to the abuses of a patriarchal society *and* in some cases has gone too far.

Resisting the temptation to respond to words and ideas we hate with hatred of our own, whether in the form of a raised fist or through the ink of a red pen, is a burden of chosen-ness, of being a light unto the nations. However difficult, it is the right — and dare I say, the Jewish — thing to do. ✳

ALYZA D. LEWIN

Anti-Zionist Harassment Is Against the Law, Too

S PRESIDENT of the Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law, I speak nearly every day to students on university campuses who are experiencing antisemitism. Here is what they are telling me.

- That trip they took to Israel — it was transformative. It opened their eyes to their Jewish heritage and was among the most meaningful experiences of their lives. But they do not dare post a photo of the trip on social media.

- The items that publicly identify them as Jews — a necklace with a Star of David, a kippah, the T-shirt that they got at Hillel with the name of the university in Hebrew letters: They will not wear them. When they do, they become targets of harassment.

- Those student clubs they wish to join to support causes they care about passionately — women's rights, LGBT rights, immigration, climate change, and more — are increasingly demanding that members pledge "no" to Zionism. It is difficult for Jewish students to belong if they believe Israel has a right to exist.

- That office of diversity, equity, and inclusion — the people assigned to increase sensitivity to bias — is often flummoxed by the uniqueness of Jewish identity. Too often, the DEI officers label Jews as "white," do not recognize Jewishness as an ethnicity, and assume that Jews are merely a religious group needing only kosher food and Sabbath accommodations. Worse, some DEI staff have denied Jewish history and perpetuated antisemitic stereotypes by describing Jews as privileged and powerful.

The students simply want to engage in classes and extracurricular activities without being demonized and marginalized. But they find it increasingly necessary to hide their Jewish identity in order to be accepted. As with past generations of Jewish students, they are being pressured to shed some or all aspects of their Jewish identity to gain acceptance. Led to believe that if they abandon what distinguishes them as Jews, they will avoid discrimination or worse, many comply.

According to the Anti-Defamation League, antisemitic incidents on campuses increased 41 percent in 2022, to 219 — approximately one college incident on any given day when classes are in session. Universities that receive federal funding (a category that includes nearly all universities in the United States) are legally obligated to protect their Jewish students from such harassment and discrimination. Why, then, are universities so woefully ineffective at protecting Jews?

The problem among university administrators is threefold.

Administrators do not understand the nature of contemporary antisemitism. They do not understand Jewish identity and its inextricable relationship with Zionism. And they mistakenly believe that the anti-Zionist animus on campus is simply one side of a good-faith political debate.

As to the first problem: Many administrators today recognize Jew-hatred, such as swastikas spray-painted on a wall or overt denial of the Holocaust, when it comes from white supremacists. Yet, too often, they are unable or unwilling to recognize other forms. They do not understand that antisemitism shows up differently in different generations. The one constant of antisemitism is that no matter the century, Jews are always the scapegoat.

In addition to individual Jews, there exists a Jewish collective — the Jewish nation-state.

There are those today who accuse Israel of being the world's worst violator of human rights, while being stunningly indifferent to human-rights abuses in countries such as North Korea, Syria, or China. There are those who make accusations against Israel that are not only false but also recall classic antisemitic tropes, such as the idea that Israel deliberately targets Palestinian children or harvests Palestinian corpses for organs. There are those who chant "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free." This duplicitous plea for Palestinian liberation actually calls for the annihilation of a sovereign state — a call that is never made against any other state. Whereas traditional antisemitism seeks to deny individual Jews their place in society, contemporary antisemitism seeks to do the same to the Jewish collective in the society of nations.

This is contemporary anti-Semitism. But most university administrators do not recognize or even understand it as such.

This is because of the second problem: Most university administrators do not understand Jewish identity. They do not appreciate that Judaism is an *ethno-religion*, a belief system inextricably connected to cultural heritage, traditions, history — and land. The connection between Jews and the Land of Israel permeates the Jewish calendar,

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Jewish life-cycle events, Jewish law, Jewish prayer, and Jewish history. Over half of the 613 commandments in the Hebrew Bible are related to the Land of Israel and can be observed only there. Three of the most important Jewish holidays are connected to the land: Passover is *Chag HaAviv*, the Spring Festival, when the barley was brought in. Shavuot is *Chag HaKatzir*, the Festival of Reaping. Sukkot is *Chag HaAsif*, the Festival of Ingathering, for all the later-ripening fruits. At Jewish marriage ceremonies, Jews customarily break a glass in remembrance of the destruction of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem.

Jews who consider this ancestral connection to Israel to be part of their Jewish identity are frequently shunned as "Zionists" — deemed pariahs because they believe that Jews have a right to self-determination in their ancestral homeland. But Zionism is as integral to Jewish identity as observing the Sabbath or keeping a kosher diet. It's true that not all Jews are Zionists. But not all Jews are Sabbath-observers, either. Both remain core expressions of Jewish identity. Would university administrators permit student clubs to demand that Catholics disavow the Vatican or that Muslims shed their connection to Mecca in order to be accepted? Or would the administrators recognize that such a demand is discriminatory, biased, and immoral?

The third problem follows directly from the second. Failing to recognize that anti-Zionism is antisemitic, they do not see that ostracizing, marginalizing, or excluding Jews on the basis of the

When Jews are marginalized and excluded on the basis of a fundamental element in their ancestral heritage, society must condemn it as harassment and discrimination.

Zionist component of their Jewish identity is not "speech." It is discriminatory and unlawful conduct. Most university administrators who fail to recognize antisemitic rhetoric when the word "Zionist" is substituted for the word "Jew" appear to believe they are witnessing a good-faith political debate about Israel's policies. And yet, when Jewish students seek to speak with or debate their harassers, they are routinely rebuffed. Increasingly, those who oppose "normalizing" relations with Israel boycott Hillel and other pro-Israel organizations on campus and refuse to speak with Jewish students who support Israel's right to exist.

A recent episode at the University of Vermont suggests a way forward.

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 requires universities that receive federal funds to protect students from harassment and discrimination based on race, color, or national origin. Title VI does not mention religion, but according to sub-regulatory guidance, members of religious groups, including Jews, Sikhs, and Muslims, are protected by Title VI if they are harassed or discriminated against on the basis of their actual or perceived shared ancestry or ethnicity. In addition, Executive Order 13899 on Combating Anti-Semitism, enacted in 2019, directs agencies, including the Department of Education, to refer to the International Holocaust

Remembrance Alliance Working Definition of Anti-Semitism when investigating Title VI complaints of antisemitic harassment and discrimination. The Department of Education includes FAQs about EO 13899 on its website. It recently referred university administrators to this resource in a "Dear Colleague" letter issued by the Department of Education pursuant to the Biden administration's National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism.

President Biden's Department of Education recently demonstrated its understanding of the law when it announced its first campus antisemitism resolution in a case involving anti-Zionist harassment and discrimination at the University of Vermont (UVM). The complaint in that case, filed by the Brandeis Center and the Jewish on Campus student advocacy group (JOC), described how Jewish Zionists were being excluded from two UVM student groups, and how a university teaching assistant repeatedly harassed Jewish Zionists online. In one tweet, she wrote: "Is it unethical for me, a TA, to not give Zionists credit for participation??? i feel like it is good and funny, -5 points for going on birthright in 2018, -10 for posting a pic with a tank in the Golan heights, -2 points just cuz i hate ur vibe in general."

The Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR) treated the harassment as a form of national-origin discrimination on the basis of shared ancestry and required UVM, among other things, to revise its policies, procedures, and training to ensure they address it. Jewish students at UVM reported to me that they quickly saw a marked improvement in the way the university responded to their concerns.

The UVM case was the first Biden-administration campus antisemitism case. There were, however, also resolution agreements issued by the Trump administration in campus antisemitism cases at New York University, Duke, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and OCR is currently investigating the University of Southern California, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), George Washington University, CUNY Law, and Brooklyn

College, among others, in response to Title VI complaints alleging that the universities failed to protect Jewish students from antisemitic harassment and discrimination.

But the first campus antisemitism investigation to be opened by OCR *after* the National Strategy was announced involves a complaint filed by the Brandeis Center and JOC against SUNY New Paltz. In that case, two Jewish students were kicked out of a group of sexual-assault survivors and then bullied, harassed, and threatened online on the basis of their Jewish and Israeli identities. Leaders of the student organization removed the Jewish students (one of whom had founded the group) after the Jewish students shared on their *personal* Instagram accounts an infographic that said, "Jews are an ethnic group who come from Israel" and "you cannot colonize the land your ancestors are from." The students were cancelled, stalked, intimidated, and harassed so intensely that they felt compelled to leave campus for their safety. Coming on the heels of the UVM resolution agreement and the release of the National Strategy, the opening of the SUNY New Paltz investigation sends a clear message that OCR is taking this form of antisemitism seriously.

The best antidote to harassment and discrimination is self-confidence and pride. To counter campus antisemitism, we must reject "erasive antisemitism"—defined by the writer Ben Freeman as the erasure of Jewish identity or of Jews as victims of prejudice—and push back against those who ignore or, worse, revise Jewish history and deny the uniqueness of Jewish identity.

No one has the right to demand that Jews shed their sense of peoplehood and repudiate their historic yearning for and connection to Zion (another name for Jerusalem). DEI programs must recognize Jews as both a religious group and a national and ethnic identity. Universities should start, as UIUC did, by issuing

statements recognizing that for many students, Zionism is an integral part of their Jewish identity. When Jews are marginalized and excluded on the basis of a fundamental element in their ancestral heritage, society must condemn it as harassment and discrimination. It is time for us to use our legal tools to protect Jews on the basis of not only our religious practice, but also our national, ancestral, and ethnic heritage. The UVM case is just an early drop in the proverbial bucket. But it provides an important model for the ongoing effort to counter campus antisemitism. ✳

TAMMI ROSSMAN-BENJAMIN

Why DEI Programs Can't Address Campus Antisemitism

OR MORE THAN a decade, Jewish students on American campuses have been targets of abusive conduct because of their support, or perceived support, for Israel. The incidence of such behavior has increased dramatically over the last few years in not only quantity but also severity, as the anti-Israel activism of students and faculty has expanded to include verbal and physical attacks on Israel's on-campus supporters.

Yet, while universities have promptly and vigorously addressed harassment directed at some identity groups, they have done little or nothing about the far more frequent acts of anti-Zionist harassment perpetrated on their campuses.

Desperate to find ways to keep Jewish students safe, many in the Jewish community have pinned their hopes on the White House's recently released U.S. National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism,

which describes itself as "the most ambitious and comprehensive U.S. government-led effort to fight antisemitism in American history."

At first blush, there's cause for hope.

For one thing, the White House report acknowledges for the first time the significant harm anti-Zionist harassment inflicts on Jewish students, noting they have been "derided, ostracized, and sometimes discriminated against because of their actual or perceived views on Israel."

The report also proposes concrete steps to tackle campus antisemitism, among them urging higher-education institutions to integrate antisemitism awareness and training into their diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs, including their required anti-discrimination and -harassment training programs.

The advantages of the report's recommendation seem obvious, given the rapidly growing influence of campus-based DEI programs. Once a relative rarity, well-funded and -staffed DEI offices now exist on most U.S. campuses and offer programming designed to educate the campus community about bigotry and how to fight it. Many campus DEI offices are also tasked with handling bias complaints, enforcing the school's discrimination and harassment policy, and ensuring compliance with federal anti-discrimination laws.

It's therefore not unreasonable to suppose that incorporating antisemitism education and training into such a firmly ensconced DEI infrastructure *could* bring much-needed attention to the harassment that Jewish students are confronting on their campuses.

But will it? And what are the chances it could backfire, harming Jewish students instead of helping them?

It turns out there are numerous problems involved in trying to address antisemitism within a DEI framework.

The "diversity" element of DEI suggests that DEI programs are intended to foster appreciation of the full range of diverse identities

found on campus, including Jewish identity. As a practical matter, DEI programs limit their "equity" and "inclusion" efforts to certain identity groups, which rarely include Jews. The reason for this harks back to why DEI programs were originally established and have recently proliferated.

The earliest campus-based DEI programs, often known as affirmative-action or equal-opportunity programs, were directly tied to civil rights legislation, especially Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Title VI prohibits discrimination based on race, color, and national origin in institutions that receive federal funds, which includes almost every college and university. Enacted in response to escalating racial tensions, with the goal of reducing social inequality, affirmative-action and equal-opportunity programs focused on black students and other historically marginalized and underrepresented racial and ethnic groups, including Hispanic, Asian-American, and Native-American students. Not surprisingly, these same groups became the priority of DEI programs established to ensure compliance with Title VI.

While civil rights law continues to play an important role in how DEI programs operate, they have since evolved and expanded, especially in the last decade. With the establishment and rapid growth of the Black Lives Matter movement and the popularization of critical race theory, there has been an explosion of interest among colleges and universities in establishing or expanding DEI programs not just to reduce social inequality, but to fight the systemic injustice that leads to it. Although the same identity groups remain the focus of DEI efforts, those efforts now view them through the lens not of social inequality but of systemic oppression.

How do Jewish students fit into this picture? Until 2004 they were not afforded Title VI protections from discrimination, because they were regarded solely as members of a religious group — not a protected category under Title VI. As a result, campus affirmative-action or equal-opportunity programs had no reason to include Jewish students in their efforts. But even after 2004, when

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Jewish students were deemed eligible for Title VI protection as members of a national origin group, neither they nor antisemitism was integrated into most DEI initiatives, despite an increasingly hostile campus environment.

The blindness of DEI programs to Jewish students and antisemitism is likely the result of two factors.

First, although Jews were once a historically marginalized and underrepresented group in American higher education, that is certainly no longer the case. Consequently, despite having endured thousands of years of oppression, including one of history's largest genocides, and even now suffering more hate crimes in America than any historically marginalized and underrepresented group except African Americans, Jews are not *viewed* as oppressed at all within a DEI framework. On the contrary, they are generally seen as white, privileged oppressors who do not merit the attention of DEI programs.

Second, even if Jewish students manage to secure a seat at the DEI table, a thornier problem awaits. Although a growing number of DEI officials are willing to respond to and educate the campus community about acts of classical antisemitism, such as swastikas painted on a Jewish fraternity house or neo-Nazi fliers distributed on campus, many of those same officials are unwilling to acknowledge and address anti-Zionist-motivated harassment. Yet this is by far

the predominant form of antisemitism facing Jewish students today.

The disparate treatment of these two types of antisemitism is very much related to the ideological leanings of most DEI programs. Because instances of classical antisemitism are often perpetrated by individuals associated with white-supremacist groups, who are also perpetrators of racist attacks on many historically marginalized groups, calling out and educating about this type of antisemitism actually kills two birds with one stone.

On the other hand, many instances of anti-Zionist harassment on campus are perpetrated by members of identity groups served by DEI programs. In addition, many DEI staff themselves harbor virulently anti-Israel sentiments, as demonstrated in a 2021 report examining the social-media postings of DEI staff at major universities. Drawing heavily on ideologies undergirding most DEI programs, these postings portrayed Israel as a racist, settler-colonial state, linked the plight of Palestinians to the struggles of oppressed minorities in America, and implied that it was the duty of antiracist activists to support the liberation of Palestine "from the river to the sea," a rallying cry for the elimination of the Jewish state.

Against this backdrop, it's not hard to see why so many DEI programs are loath to acknowledge the antisemitic nature of anti-Zionist behavior that so often leads to the harassment of Jewish students. But that hasn't stopped Jewish advocates from trying.

The primary approach to getting anti-Zionist-motivated harassment onto the DEI radar has been to make the case that Zionism — understood as the religious, historical, and ethnic connection of Jews to the Land of Israel — is an integral component of Jewish *identity*, a protected category under federal anti-discrimination law. An essential tool pressed into service by advocates of this approach is the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism, which contains several examples linking anti-Zionism to Jew-hatred.

This approach has met with considerable backlash on many

campuses. A recent study by my organization, AMCHA initiative, documented a dramatic rise in efforts to deny that Zionism is part of Jewish identity and to challenge the legitimacy of the IHRA definition — efforts that were strongly linked to alarming increases in the harassment of pro-Israel Jewish students.

Unfortunately, although the White House plan calls the IHRA definition "the most prominent" definition of antisemitism and acknowledges that "the United States has embraced [it]," the plan also "welcomes and appreciates the Nexus Document," an alternative to the IHRA definition that considers only some forms of anti-Zionism to be antisemitic. The Nexus Document states specifically that, "as a general rule, criticism of Zionism and Israel … should not, as such, be deemed antisemitic." In addition, the plan "note[s] other such efforts," an obvious hat-tip to the Jerusalem Declaration, which openly challenges the IHRA definition by claiming that "it has caused confusion and generated controversy, hence weakening the fight against antisemitism." Signed by more than 300 professors, including many Jewish studies scholars, the Jerusalem Declaration almost wholly dissociates anti-Zionism from antisemitism.

Far from straightforwardly providing support for the case that anti-Zionist harassment is a form of discrimination that falls well within the purview of DEI programs, the Biden administration's equivocation on a definition of antisemitism will make it considerably harder for Jewish students to get DEI offices to recognize and address the antisemitism they are experiencing.

The White House's acknowledgement of widely divergent definitions of antisemitism underscores how dangerous — even disastrous — it will be to implement the administration's own recommendation for integrating antisemitism awareness and training into DEI programming. If scholars of antisemitism can't even agree

on a definition of antisemitism, how can DEI officials be expected to understand what antisemitism is and to create effective programming to address it?

In fact, considering that many DEI staff are far more ideologically aligned with the Jerusalem Declaration than the IHRA definition, it's likely that their attempts to implement the White House recommendation will result in programming that, instead of lessening campus antisemitism, gives license to it.

The Biden team no doubt had the best of intentions in recommending that efforts to confront campus antisemitism be tied to DEI programs anchored in school policy and anti-discrimination law. However, implementing that recommendation will force-fit Jewish students into identity categories that don't accurately reflect their identities as they understand them. It is also likely to subject them to an anti-Zionist litmus test as the price of being protected from an alarming level of harassment no college student should face.

DEI is the wrong vehicle for addressing campus antisemitism. Yet on most college campuses, there are no viable alternatives. Students who do not fit into one of the identity groups prioritized in DEI programs, or whose harassers are members of identity groups prioritized over theirs, are usually out of luck when it comes to getting school officials to address harassment that targets them.

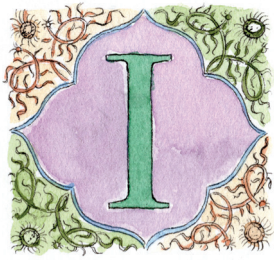
Perhaps in recognition of this double standard, the White House report calls on colleges and universities to "treat antisemitism with the same seriousness as other forms of hate." But in the absence of a policy guaranteeing every student protection no less robust than that afforded students in protected identity groups, there is simply no internal mechanism for ensuring that antisemitism will be treated fairly or adequately. And since there are no federal laws obligating schools to address the harassment of students not covered under Title VI, few schools will be motivated to adopt policies or programs that do not consider student identity in responding to hateful behavior, including antisemitism.

If the White House is serious about confronting campus antisemitism, it must fundamentally rethink its approach. The administration should call on Congress to enact new legislation obligating schools to protect *all* students *equally* from behavior affecting their ability to express their identity and fully participate in campus life. In compliance with the new law, schools would need to establish policies that provide every student with the same stringent standard of protection prescribed under the school's discrimination and harassment policy.

Doling out protection on the basis of group identity, the stock-in-trade of DEI programs and the policies and laws on which they are based, has led to the exacerbation of group differences and an unhealthy competition for group rights on many campuses. Affording all students equal protection from behavior that no student should have to endure offers the possibility of a healthier campus climate for everyone. ✳

ISAAC HART

Beating, Not Joining, Ethnic Studies



In 2019, the California State Board of Education released a draft of an ethnic-studies model curriculum. Reaction was swift and furious. More than 100,000 Californians submitted public-comment letters, many expressing disgust. Even the reliably liberal *Los Angeles Times* editorial board called it "an impenetrable melange of academic jargon and politically correct pronouncements," adding that it was "hard to wade through all the references to hxrstory and womxn and misogynoir and cisheteropatriarchy." A coalition of civic organizations representing a variety of ethnic groups released a joint statement denouncing the draft curriculum for being "replete with mischaracterizations and omissions."

California's Jewish population, more than a million strong, felt especially singled out. The draft curriculum endorsed the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement. It cited the words of

a Palestinian rapper accusing Israelis of "[using] the press so they can manufacture." The scant reference to antisemitism was especially stark given that the synagogue shooting in Poway, Calif., occurred during the preparation of the curriculum. The Jewish caucus in the state legislature took note, writing in a letter to the Department of Education that "the draft curriculum denigrates Jews" and goes out of its way to attack the Jewish state. "In stark contrast to brief and dispassionate references to other global conflicts," reads the letter, the model curriculum "singles out Israel … for special critique and condemnation that is both out of context and factually inaccurate."

Within a month, Governor Gavin Newsom vowed that the draft curriculum would "never see the light of day." Two years later, with the participation of a coalition of Jewish groups, a new curriculum was released that crossed out the overt antisemitism and included new Jewish-focused lesson plans, fulfilling the bill's stated objective of "preparing pupils to be global citizens with an appreciation for the contributions of multiple cultures." By the end of this decade, a semester-long course in ethnic studies will be a high-school graduation requirement for every student in California public schools.

Whether that represents a triumph for California's students — or for Jews — is another question.

To understand how an ostensible attempt to sensitize California's students to their state's ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity rapidly devolved into a forthright exercise in antisemitism, among other things, it helps to know something about what ethnic studies is and where it comes from. The first ethnic studies department in the United States was established in 1968 at what is now San Francisco State University, as a result of a student strike led by a group called the Third World Liberation Front. As that name suggests, ethnic studies was never about disinterested scholarship.

A mission statement by the Critical Ethnic Studies Association (CESA) makes clear the ideological commitments of most university ethnic studies departments:

> Ethnic studies scholarship has laid the foundation for analyzing how racism, settler colonialism, immigration, imperialism, and slavery interact in the creation and maintenance of systems of domination, dispossession, criminalization, expropriation, exploitation, and violence that are predicated upon hierarchies of racialized, gendered, sexualized, economized, and nationalized social existence in the United States and beyond.

Not surprisingly, then, the main purpose of ethnic studies isn't to celebrate America's multicultural society. It's to denounce every form of American perfidy, real or not, not the least of which is U.S. support for the Jewish state. A 2021 paper by the AMCHA Initiative notes that "one-third of all U.S. faculty who support an academic boycott of Israel have a primary or secondary affiliation in a university Ethnic Studies program." CESA's inaugural conference in 2011 included discussions on "Turtle Island and Palestine: Forging Alliances Against Settler Colonialism" and "Suppression of Palestine Solidarity by the Academic Industrial Complex and the Nation State." (Turtle Island is a Native-American name for North America.)

These were the attitudes that also informed the original model curriculum. Students were asked to "challenge racist, bigoted, discriminatory, imperialist/colonialist beliefs," to "critique empire-building in history," and to "connect ourselves to past and contemporary movements that struggle for social justice." The language remains even in the current 696-page model curriculum that was ultimately adopted by the state. It also lives on in what is now called the Liberated Curriculum, which splintered out of the remains of the initial draft curriculum disavowed by Governor Newsom. Last year, the Hayward Unified School District, an East

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Bay body that operates 30 schools serving over 20,000 students, signed a contract with the Liberated Ethnic Model Curriculum Consortium to implement its version of ethnic studies. Among its other educational offerings, the Consortium offered a "toolkit" for "Preparing to Teach Palestine," which warned that opponents of their curriculum "want to prevent teachers and students from making connections between the U.S. and Israel as white settler states, or apartheid-era South Africa and the current apartheid in Israel."

But what about the new, quasi-official curriculum?

Some argue that the revised curriculum is a triumph for the Jewish community. Not only are the antisemitic dog whistles and anti-Israel slurs gone, there are now two separate and extensive sample lessons on Jewish issues: one on "Antisemitism and Jewish Middle Eastern Americans," the other titled "Jewish Americans: Identity, Intersectionality, and Complicating Ideas of Race." Eleven Jewish figures, including Norman Lear, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Julius Lester, and Rabbi Eric Yoffie offer testimonials about the meaning of their Jewishness. A fact sheet on Jewish Americans emphasizes the many forms of discrimination Jews have experienced in the United States, from university quotas to employment discrimination to murderous antisemitic attacks in Poway and Pittsburgh. It quotes two definitions of antisemitism, the first from the Anti-Defamation League, the second from

Where California's ethnic studies curriculum sees 'interlocking systems of oppression and privilege,' the Jewish experience in America has largely been one of interlocking systems of opportunity and advancement.

the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. There is an emphasis on the cultural, ethnic and racial diversity within the broad Jewish family, as well as the persecutions they have endured. Significantly, the sample lesson notes that "the Jewish people originated about 3,000 years ago in Southwest Asia, in the land of Israel."

As many Jewish groups and leaders argued at the time, the revised curriculum gave Jews a seat at the table, which was surely better than being *on* the table, as they were the first time around. But should Jews really want to be at this table at all?

For all the changes made to the new curriculum, it remains rooted in the foundational ideological themes of ethnic studies. To adapt a line from *Animal Farm*, while all minorities may be equal in the curriculum, some are more equal than others. In its preface, the curriculum stresses that its focus will be on "African American, Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x, Native American, and Asian American and Pacific Islander studies." Other minorities, including Jews, remain strictly secondary, and some prominent American ethnic groups rate almost no discussion at all (the word "Italian" gets five mentions; the word "Irish," one). This is largely in keeping with ethnic studies' "intersectional" approach (the word is mentioned 59 times) to the study of identity, which in theory is a way of taking note of multiple overlapping identities but in practice amounts to

little more than a points system that reduces genuine diversity to a continuum that runs from "oppression" to "privilege."

These frames of reference pervade the curriculum's discussions of Jewish identity. "Assimilation allowed the children of Jewish immigrants to change their position on the racial hierarchy…." "Light-skinned Jews may experience the benefits of conditional whiteness on the basis of their appearance…." "Jews of color, like all communities of color, face systemic racism…."

This kind of language is an attempt to make the Jewish-American experience fit within the rigid boxes created by the ethnic studies worldview — one that views the United States as a cisheteropatriarchy, brought forth upon a settler-colonized continent, conceived in slavery, and dedicated to the proposition that power should remain in the hands of exploitative white capitalists.

Is this actually how Jews think of America, or of our personal or family histories in it? Surely not.

Yes, many Jewish families have stories that involve an encounter with antisemitism: a country club where Jews knew not to apply; a white-shoe law firm with an unstated policy of not hiring Jews; a grandfather who had the grades to go to Harvard but wound up at City College instead, a victim of admissions quotas; a nasty remark about being "Jewed down" in a business transaction.

But, for the most part, Jews have overwhelmingly seen the United States as the *goldene medina*, a place where such bigotries as we encountered were trivial next to the bigotries we had escaped — and trivial, too, compared with the opportunities available to us. Jews experienced religious and cultural freedom in the United States as we never had elsewhere in our long history of exile. Our achievements in dozens of fields — academia, business, finance, law, literature, medicine, music, science, and technology, to name only the obvious ones — tended to be admired, not envied. When doors to certain institutions remained closed to us, we were free to build competing institutions, from which we opened the doors to all. Whenever we wished to assimilate, we could; when we

wished to preserve our differences, we could do that, too. And what was true for Jews from European backgrounds quickly proved to be true for Jews from Middle Eastern backgrounds, too, as anyone who has spent time in Beverly Hills can attest.

In other words, the Jewish-American story isn't part of the ethnic studies worldview at all. It's a *refutation* of it. Where California's ethnic studies curriculum sees "interlocking systems of oppression and privilege," the Jewish experience in America has largely been one of interlocking systems of opportunity and advancement — from, say, Lowell High School to Harvard Law to the Supreme Court (Stephen Breyer) or Stuyvesant High School to Brandeis University to the presidency of the University of Chicago (Robert Zimmer). Much the same can be said for so many other minority groups — whether they are from Albania, Nigeria, or Vietnam — whose broad experience of America has been one of possibility and prosperity, even if sometimes in the face of xenophobia and racism.

Here, then, lie the deeper problems for Jews with even the new-and-improved ethnic studies curriculum.

First, it's a false narrative — false about the Jewish experience in America and about America itself. Jews should be wary of being included in any narrative that asks us to misconstrue our own history while defaming a country that has, for all its faults, been very good to us — as it has to so many other minorities.

Second, while the new ethnic studies curriculum gives Jews a seat at its table, it's a table for perpetual victims. Shouldn't minority groups who are unembarrassed by their success and who choose *not* to see themselves as victims have their stories told in schools? It is particularly galling to be taught that Jewish success was purchased, in part, through a "conditional whiteness" that suggests complicity with a system of white supremacy.

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Third, ethnic studies isn't about *studying* anything. It's about ideological indoctrination of students and teachers alike, relentlessly one-sided in its outlook, simplistic in its understanding of history, and overtly partisan. This would be bad in any educational context, but it is particularly worrying for Jews. The complexities and contradictions of Jewish history make it incompatible with facile dogma — as is true of any ethnic group with a complex history. Ethnic studies flattens these experiences, rather than bringing out their depths. The problem will only become worse as ethnic studies expands from California to states such as Minnesota and cities including Seattle and Boston.

We can do better. All it takes is a look back at our own tradition.

As people of the Book, Jewish parents, educators, and policymakers outside California should make the effort to *read* the model curriculum. They will discover that it is not a laudable and liberal-minded effort to broaden the American story to include historically marginalized minority groups. It is a tendentious and radical recasting of American history as one long tale of oppression and exclusion, a narrative we have become all too familiar with over the last several decades.

To see just how inimical the curriculum is to pedagogy, Jews

can look to their own contribution to the art of teaching. The Talmud offers a model of responsible learning that records all sides of an argument, emphasizing disagreement and the importance of intellectual diversity across its 63 tractates. Jews don't define community by tearful head-nodding and catechisms of dominance and subjugation, but by rigorous, good-faith questioning. In place of the one-to-many dispensation of knowledge from instructor to student, we offer *chevrutot*, partnership study sessions in which students are united by questions prompted by the texts before them. For Jews, intellectual diversity opens up the subjects examined. The ethnic studies model offers an ideological straightjacket that shuts them down.

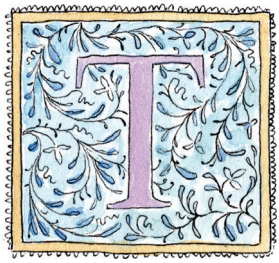
American Jews also have a moral and civic obligation to ask whether the ethnic studies curriculum advances the ideal of *e pluribus unum* or its opposite, *ex uno multi*. Despite its claim to "strive for a future of greater equity and inclusivity," the curriculum guarantees the latter motto, since it is premised on a sense of profound grievance and therefore insists on division. As the model curriculum notes in its introduction: "Ethnic studies did not arise in a vacuum. It arose with the intent of giving voice to stories long silenced, including stories of injustice, marginalization, and discrimination, as well as stories of those who became part of our nation in different ways, such as through slavery, conquest, colonization, and immigration." How about stories of striving and success, of people from impoverished ethnic backgrounds achieving the American Dream, of refugees starting great companies and becoming pillars of the American establishment? That is both a Jewish story and an American story — and one California's students deserve to know.

Finally, Jews have always been the people who don't always feel the need to go along. A table you don't want to be on is not one you ought to be sitting at. Why not build our own? The Jewish story is also an ethnic studies story — one that begins in oppression but does not dwell on it, which has allowed it to culminate

in freedom; one that mourns tragedies but celebrates triumphs; one that focuses on the particular but never forgets the universal. Wouldn't this particular model of ethnic studies serve all young Americans better than the one on offer? ✳

ARMIN ROSEN

How the Jewish Coalition Against Antisemitism Fractured



THE VIDEO that caused a split between an emerging coalition against antisemitism and one of the largest Jewish communal organizations in the United States gave off so faint a signal across the vastness of the internet that the Wayback Machine didn't preserve the clip's original web page at any point during its roughly two-week lifespan. That's not so shocking: Jewish existence has been awash in disproportion ever since a botched reconnaissance mission earned us an extra 40 years wandering in the wilderness, and the obscure relationship between small things and much bigger ones has revealed itself in a multitude of tragic and surprising ways across three millennia. The "woke antisemitism" video controversy is a minor but striking instance of deep anxieties and fundamental fault lines erupting through a series of normal-sized mistakes.

As often happens, some of the most urgent questions in Jewish life converged around a farce.

The Combat Antisemitism Movement's three-and-a-half-minute video, published in early June and un-published on June 18, claimed that "wokeism" is "fann[ing] the flames of antisemitism" by creating an "oppressor vs. oppressed binary" that blames "successful groups," including the Jews, for most of the world's problems. The video treated "wokeness" as if this fraught term had a single accepted definition and featured several still images of right-wing extremists, a mistake that could give the impression that there exist no "woke antisemites" for CAM to showcase.

A journalist from the *Forward* tweeted about the video after CAM shared it in a weekly newsletter. "Really strident stuff coming from a coalition representing @jfederations, @AJCGlobal and most of the Jewish mainstream," wrote reporter Arno Rosenfeld. In 2021, Rosenfeld authored a 5,000-word report on CAM, implying that the two-year-old group, whose advisory board chairman is Natan Sharansky, functioned as a "dark money" front group for the conservative Kansas oil billionaire Adam Beren.

The Jewish Federations of North America CEO Eric Fingerhut, a moderate Democrat during his 16 years in electoral politics, said his organization learned about the video only after having been tagged in Rosenfeld's June 16 tweet. JFNA is the umbrella group for nearly 400 local federations, the organizational structures that often serve as the main channel of public and charitable funds into communal institutions. "Federations are very active in government relations at the state and local level," Fingerhut told me.

Meanwhile, the Jewish Council for Public Affairs "first learned of the video just before Shabbat on June 16 from Jewish Community Relations Councils (JCRCs) who reached out to us with

concerns, including concerns with the implication that JCPA and others were seemingly endorsing the video, since our logo was on the website," according to a spokesperson for the organization. JCPA helps coordinate the advocacy work of scores of local and national Jewish communal institutions. Amy Spitalnick, a progressive activist and former press secretary of J Street, became the group's new CEO in May. Most recently, as executive director of Integrity First for America, she successfully sued the organizers of the far-Right Charlottesville rally.

Fingerhut told me that CAM declined to remove the video after JFNA raised concerns with the group on June 16 but reversed the decision and spiked the clip two days later. He explained that JFNA would likely be working with CAM in the future and would probably be involved in the group's annual summit of mayors, but would still leave its logo off CAM's website for the time being.

"Fighting antisemitism is not easy. It hasn't been easy, and it will not be easy," said CAM chief executive Sacha Roytman Dratwa in early July. "We've really tried to fight antisemitism in a nonpartisan way.... Being judged on one video was a big surprise."

On the face of it, opposing antisemitism is one of the least divisive objectives Jews could possibly have. Jews have a disputatious communal life, but not to the point of there being a constituency in favor of being hated. "By and large the goal of fighting antisemitism is a unifying effort," Fingerhut said.

In reality, the fight against antisemitism is highly divisive, and there is growing discord over the parameters and basic nature of the problem. Part of the challenge comes from how differently antisemitism manifests in a range of contexts, many of which the average, well-intentioned American Jew will never even see. A pro-Israel college student probably doesn't have to worry about being randomly attacked in the street the way a Satmar Hasid

A pro-Israel college student probably doesn't have to worry about being randomly attacked in the street the way a Satmar Hasid in Brooklyn does, just as the Brooklyn Satmar faces far less of a threat from Palestinian jihadists than does a secular Israeli Jew living in Sderot.

in Brooklyn does, just as the Brooklyn Satmar faces far less of a threat from Palestinian jihadists than does a secular Israeli Jew living in Sderot. It is possible that the majority of American Jews wouldn't see any real commonalities between the slaughter of 11 non-Orthodox worshippers in a Pittsburgh synagogue and the organized effort to keep Haredi Jews out of certain towns in New York's Rockland and Orange Counties.

What should be the higher priority for American Jews: the anonymous young white men who unfurled Nazi flags in front of synagogues in Georgia and Florida, or a nationally prominent progressive U.S. congresswoman who a few days later accused Israel of a fictive "massacre" in Jenin? There is increasingly bitter disagreement over this kind of question, and the "woke antisemitism" video was an inartful attempt at pointing out a real phenomenon. Antisemitism is so adaptive and appealing that even ostensibly tolerant ideologies can produce their own version of it. Interpreted generously, the video urges Jews to be aware that noble-seeming ideas held among their political allies are being turned against them.

If "woke antisemitism" actually exists, one could conclude that its standard-bearers should be confronted with as little

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hesitation or sympathy as any other group of bigots. David Bernstein, author of the 2022 book *Woke Antisemitism* and a senior adviser to CAM — and, in a possible indication of the leftward drift of Jewish institutional life, Amy Spitalnick's immediate predecessor as head of JCPA — told me that in his view, working together with progressives to combat antisemitism had proved to be a dead end. The conciliatory approach "really wasn't a viable community strategy by 2017–18," he said, a time when it was rapidly becoming much more common for American social justice movements to accuse the State of Israel and its supporters of being agents of white supremacy, police brutality, and a host of other evils.

"And what was worse and more concerning to me," he added, "was that some Jewish advocacy organizations were sort of paying the price of admission to be in the progressive coalition. They were willing to say that America is a white supremacist state. That's language no Jewish group would have entertained in years prior but are now embracing so they can maintain their progressive alliances." (Bernstein told me that he viewed an early version

of the script for the "woke antisemitism" video but had no other involvement in it.)

Bernstein's thesis is vulnerable to a single unavoidable fact, which is that most American Jews are liberals. Perhaps they are deluded about the beliefs and intentions of their supposed allies and have a miscalibrated sense of their own self-interest — such mindsets have a long and awful precedent in Jewish history. But it is also possible the liberal majority is correct, and that the same values animating the woke extremists have also, in their softer and more common forms, created the openness and social harmony that have allowed American minority groups to thrive in safety, Jews above all. American Jewish success is the great vindication of the liberalism that Jews still overwhelmingly support. As a salvo in a debate that asks Jews to recognize the potential dangers of a cherished worldview, the "woke antisemitism" video was puzzling at best.

But the shortcomings of the video didn't obligate JFNA or JCPA to publicly break with CAM. Both groups could have registered their criticism in a less public form and in a way that didn't result in the video's being taken offline. Such a response could have prompted a needed conversation about a complex topic. No such thing has happened: Days after the video was removed, both JFNA and JCPA told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency that they had no immediate plans to rejoin CAM's coalition.

The video and the responses it evoked were a heavy-handed intervention in a sharpening debate over how Jews should deal with threats from the Left. To some, the video fracas came as further evidence that mainline Jewish organizations such as JFNA have become the enablers of progressive Jew-hatred. On June 29, a group called the Jewish Leadership Project (JLP) sent a digital billboard truck to drive past Eric Fingerhut's office in lower Manhattan. "Profiles in Cowardice," the truck read, over a headshot of

Fingerhut. "Why do you censor leftist Jew hatred?" (When asked about the truck, Fingerhut replied, "My reaction is that it's completely unworthy of response or attention.")

Avi Goldwasser, a tech executive and co-founder of JLP, sparked a video controversy of his own nearly 20 years ago, one that shows how much has remained constant in the debate about left-wing antisemitism. In 2004, he and the Boston-based activist Charles Jacobs made a short film about alleged hostility toward Jewish students from anti-Israel professors in the Department of Middle Eastern and Asian Languages and Cultures at Columbia University. Produced in the heated atmosphere of the second intifada and the invasion of Iraq, *Columbia Unbecoming* actually did force Jewish organizations to address the possible negative impact of left-wing academia on broader American Jewish life. But this additional attention to an emerging problem didn't mean it was on its way to being solved, or even addressed effectively. The controversy feels both prescient and somewhat quaint after two decades of BDS resolutions, speech disruptions, Israel Apartheid Weeks, and apparent declines in Jewish enrollment in elite institutions — almost every major university now looks like Columbia did in the early 2000s.

"We met with Jewish trustees of Columbia," Goldwasser recalled. "It was amazing. They watched the film, and they didn't want to do anything. They didn't want to waste their capital. They didn't think it was important. Life is too good! I want to sleep at night, don't bother me, please." That kind of complacency could also be found in Europe 80 years ago, he continued. "It's not the 1930s," he said. "I don't want to be dramatic about it. But it's human nature. We'd rather not deal with uncomfortable truths."

Here was another case of things big and small blurring together, an example of the surreal places that a justified and painfully earned sense of vigilance will lead: Goldwasser and I had started our conversation by talking about a short video from an obscure organization that hardly anyone will ever see. Some 20 minutes

In the era of synagogue shootings, Donald Trump, Ihan Omar, BLM, BDS, and rampant attacks on the streets of New York, Jews have confronted antisemitism the way any group of Americans now confronts any massive and endlessly mutable problem: by establishing a series of activist nonprofit organizations.

later, we were in Poland on the eve of the Nazi invasion. "My father heard Jabotinsky in Lodz in 1938," Goldwasser said. "He couldn't convince any of his siblings to leave."

In the era of synagogue shootings, Donald Trump, Ihan Omar, BLM, BDS, and rampant attacks on the streets of New York, Jews have confronted antisemitism the way any group of Americans now confronts any massive and endlessly mutable problem: by establishing a series of activist nonprofit organizations. There's Robert Kraft's Foundation to Combat Antisemitism, which has funded the #StandUpToJewishHate campaign to the tune of $25 million. There's Ron Lauder's $25 million Anti-Semitism Accountability Project. There's JewBelong, responsible for hot-pink billboards and subway advertisements calling out antisemitism. And there are numerous smaller players. CAM came along in 2019 as a project pushed by Beren, who also funds much of the Jewish community in Wichita, Kan. Beren has pledged to dedicate at least half of his

charitable giving to Jewish causes. As the *Forward* notes, "Beren maintains a low profile and does not appear to have granted interviews about his philanthropy, his politics or his Judaism."

The newspaper's excavation of CAM tried to present it as a stealth right-wing operation, but a quick search of Google News paints a different picture. CAM issued reports on the use of Holocaust imagery in anti-lockdown rhetoric during the pandemic, and on the alleged rise in antisemitism on Twitter after Elon Musk's purchase of the platform. Other staid and establishment-friendly projects include CAM's annual mayors' conference and its promotion of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's definition of antisemitism.

CAM is not a subversively partisan band of rebels, boldly disrupting an establishment center-Left monopoly on the antisemitism debate. It is something much more mundane: the umpteenth group of comfortably funded consensus-seekers and coalition-builders working on a predictable set of problems using the usual set of tools. "I don't know what CAM does or who's involved, except that Sharansky has something to do with it," said the head of an organization whose logo still appears on the CAM website. "I can't reflect on the work that they do because I don't know what it is, and I don't care that much."

Perhaps CAM's strategy is working: Their website boasts of the "1,100 entities worldwide adopting or endorsing" the IHRA's antisemitism definition. "The movement is based on IHRA," Dratwa told me. For instance, he said, "we've been standing behind the Albanian adoption of IHRA." One could reasonably ask why it matters if various governments back a specific — and, per Dratwa, "nonbinding" — definition of antisemitism. From one perspective, excessive focus on IHRA risks setting off a distracting meta-debate, as was obvious from the mystifying amounts of attention the Jewish institutional world recently paid to the non-endorsement of both the IHRA definition and the competing Nexus definition in the White House's national antisemitism strategy. Maybe, after a while,

defining a problem becomes a comfortable replacement for solving it. It will probably fall to some group other than CAM to raise this possibility, however, since CAM's boldest deviation from palatable consensus-building activism was quashed so swiftly.

Could consensus itself be an obstacle? An honest and inevitably more effective response to antisemitism might mean eschewing easy wins, confronting close allies, and putting both institutional reputations and communal peace at risk. That would all be very unpleasant for the CAMs, JFNAs and JCPAs of the world — or at least it would be less pleasant than a few days' worth of angry emails and a pointed article in the *Forward* have proved to be. The "woke antisemitism" video and the various reactions to it are a light comic parody of a much more serious reckoning that becomes more likely the more the organized Jewish world scrambles to avoid it. ✳

An interview with

LORD JOHN MANN & DARIUS JONES

Finding Allies in the Fight

IN EVERY GENERATION, *there are those who, though not themselves Jewish, are moved to devote a considerable portion of their energies to fighting antisemitism.* SAPIR *Managing Editor Saul Rosenberg sat down with two of them, one American and one British, to understand what motivates them to do this work. Lord John Mann is a British politician who serves as an adviser to the government on antisemitism, sitting as a member of the House of Lords. Darius Jones is the founder and president of the National Black Empowerment Council, an organization supporting leadership collaborations that can close the wealth, influence, and achievement gaps between African Americans and other groups.*

Saul Rosenberg: I'd like to start by asking each of you how you came to feel that antisemitism ought not merely to be fought but that you should join that fight yourselves. Can we start with you, John?

Lord John Mann: It's the definition of political leadership. I was an elected national politician for nearly 20 years. I've worked for lots of prime ministers. For people in my line, it should be taken as automatic that you do your little bit to combat any form of discrimination — and therefore you do your little bit to combat antisemitism.

Rosenberg: I'd like to push you a little on that if I may. There are so many prejudices one can fight. What led you to dedicate so much time and energy to fighting this prejudice?

Mann: Well, the Jewish community asked me and have kept asking me. Obviously, the fact that I'm not Jewish has certain advantages. I'm not a — I suppose the term is Judeophile. It's simply that my family was brought up near and amongst Jewish people. And I can speak. And when I spoke, I said what I thought, and it went down very well with young Jewish people. Then they asked me to take on a bigger role 20 years ago, and I've just carried on doing it.

I don't worry about how you identify as being Jewish. I don't care if you are Liberal, Reform, Orthodox, Ultra-Orthodox. I don't care if you go to synagogue or not, keep kosher or not. I don't care if you are Zionist, anti-Zionist, or somewhere ambivalently in the middle. It's not my prerogative to care. My role is to advise our government that, however you choose to identify, you can be yourself with no negatives. That's my remit. I look at what the obstacles to that are — the individuals, the structures, the systems. I spend a lot of time on structural antisemitism and how to deal with it. People sometimes call this education. It's much more than that. What systems are needed to combat

antisemitism? And clearly, people think that's very useful. It's not intellectual theorizing. It's what should be done to combat antisemitism, what works, what doesn't work — strategy, if you like.

Rosenberg: Darius, there's also a relevant stream in your history and career — could you discuss the path that led to your being a voice in your community against antisemitism?

Darius Jones: I was put on this path by my parents, both of whom were very involved in the civil rights movement — including the famous Freedom Rides, when delegations went into Mississippi and faced fierce, often dire resistance trying to register African Americans to vote. History teaches us many powerful lessons. But one thing my mother and father made sure I understood was that the movement was successful, obviously because of a tremendous amount of work done by the black community, but also because there were people of conscience from other communities who got involved in our struggle in decisive ways. My mother always said that chief among those allies were our Jewish brothers and sisters who contributed time, talent, treasure, and even made the ultimate sacrifice so African Americans could have freedom and self-determination in this country. I was awed and inspired to learn of a group so selflessly motivated by high principles.

If you think about the 400-year sojourn of African Americans in the United States, there have not been many stepping up to ally with us. But if you had to identify a group consistently willing to step into the breach and lock arms with African Americans, it has always been the Jewish community. As a black man, I cannot overstate the existential impact this alliance has had upon black lives over the decades. So when I heard some of the challenges around antisemitism and around anti-Zionism, I wanted to mobilize a similar vanguard within the black community — leaders, people of conscience — who would join an effort to stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in the Jewish community.

I've never heard a white supremacist say, 'I love black people, but I can't stand Jews,' or 'I love Jews, but I can't stand black people.' Our adversaries draw no distinction.

Rosenberg: How did you go about that?

Jones: I traveled to Israel in 2009 with the American Israel Education Foundation and came to understand the enduring, existential challenges Israel faces. People who have not travelled to the region cannot even begin to appreciate the complicated dynamics. After processing everything I learned from the perspectives of the Israelis and the Palestinians, I had a personal revelation that changed my life. There I was at week's end, awed by the panoramic view from an overlook above the Old City, saying to myself: This is one of the most phenomenal examples of peoplehood and collective self-determination I've ever seen. Herzl said, "If you will it, it is no dream." Israel is a towering testament to the power of intention and an indomitable human spirit. Such narratives can be universal in their application. At that moment, I decided that if I could be part of an effort to identify like-minded black leaders and bring them to Israel so they could have a similarly moving experience — that would be something I'd be willing to dedicate my life to.

For the 10 years I was at AIPAC, I identified dynamic, emerging black leaders. I took them to Israel, where they had my same experience, then came back to the United States and continued to lead on black issues, but also became involved in advancing the U.S.-Israel relationship and leaning into the black-Jewish

relationship. When I created the National Black Empowerment Council (NBEC), I decided to double down on that model. I felt like the circumstances in our nation called for that. As social, cultural, and political polarization continues to fray the fabric of our nation, we must create a community of people of conscience and consequence, who can push back against antisemitism, racism, and all forms of injustice we see emerging in the world.

Rosenberg: It seems to me you both belong to communities that feel at least sometimes that antisemitism is different, that it's not racism, and therefore that it's less important. John, you are on record as describing antisemitism as the worst of the racisms. Can you talk a little bit about what it's like in your comunity to be saying, "No, antisemitism isn't so different from racism"?

Mann: I represented an all-white working-class community. I've had to challenge all sorts of racisms very directly — sometimes very brutally — to protect people and to try and change attitudes. I don't just deal with antisemitism, but antisemitism mutates in different forms. That's what makes it different. Anti-black racism can be very insidious, very disguised and hidden, so that's a challenge. But it's a little easier to get started. With antisemitism, you have two problems. First, you have the problem of [opposition to] Israel, so you have a political dimension to overcome. Secondly, there's the fact that Jews often don't look different.

I do a lot of training sessions for football teams. I get two people to stand up at the front and I ask which one is white, and they look identical. I deconstruct that. I explain that one of them is Jewish and that there are a lot of people who don't regard them as white — you use the Nazis as the simplest example to demonstrate that. But that's a complexity. I show them a picture of a football crowd, 50,000 people, and I say, "Spot the Jew." And of course, nobody, including me, has a clue who's Jewish there. Yet if you see a 10-year-old black child in front of you listening to

racist remarks, you can see there's a problem affecting somebody, because you can see the person it's impacting. If it's a 10-year-old Jewish child, you can't see that, even though the racism may be just as vitriolic. And just experiencing that has had a transformative impact in people's thinking through the issue and how they train the stewards and the staff in how they deal with racism inside a football stadium. And I find awareness makes it more likely that the same people will better equip themselves to deal with the anti-black racism. They are thinking: What is the impact on that child? What are we doing to make sure the negatives turn to a positive? Where are our role models? How do we portray our role models? Suddenly you're into a very different, more positive, more engaging, more useful dialogue.

Rosenberg: As a white Jewish guy, I am perceived much more as white than I'm perceived as Jewish. I heard that on TV when Whoopi Goldberg dismissed the Holocaust as not a racist event. Darius, you seem to be taking on antisemitism specifically as a leader in the black community, which has been in the news recently because of controversial statements from black celebrities like Kanye West and Kyrie Irving, as well as revived tensions in black-Jewish neighborhoods of New York City. What's your perspective on that, and what's it like trying to fight against it?

Jones: There is a tremendous amount of confusion in the African-American community as to whether the Jewish people are a race, a religion, an ethnicity, a culture. But one thing is certain to most in the black community: A tremendous amount of hatred has been targeted at Jews, at a level commensurate with our own historical experience — creating empathy and kinship. I've never heard a white supremacist come out and say, "I love black people, but I can't stand Jews," or "I love Jews, but I can't stand black people." Our adversaries draw no distinction. To them, we're a package deal, and neither group can leave this land fast enough.

I was with a Jewish businessman in my own city, quite young, very successful, telling me he'd never seen any antisemitism in his life. I mentioned a golf club — and when he last played there, the other golfers put down their clubs and walked away from him the moment they learned he was Jewish.

Inaction in my community on antisemitism often stems from the fact that many people perceive Jews through tropes anchored in an exaggerated sense of privilege and power, and as a group eminently capable of fighting its own battles — a power black people don't necessarily feel we can manifest as easily. The perception of power *is* power. But such subjectivity can cut both ways: It can keep enemies at bay; sadly, it occasionally does the same with allies. People often see antisemitic hate speech and derision but are convinced of the Jewish community's ability to address it. And because, for the average African American, safety and survival are such essential concerns, there are too few people who can both see and say that that's not true. Better relationships at the leadership level are an important first step.

Rosenberg: What would you say to an ultra-Orthodox Jew in Brooklyn who said, "Of course, there's a risk that a white supremacist will appear in my synagogue with an AR-15, but I worry more about the black people on the street, some of whom are beating up some of my co-religionists. I worry for my children

because of that community, because the white supremacists are not threatening me here in Brooklyn.

Jones: You are absolutely right. The situation is as unacceptable as it is egregious. On the assertion of antisemitism as the main criminal motive, however, we must be able to reach that conclusion with a high degree of certainty. I am not saying that to diminish your premise in any way, because the violence that has been visited specifically upon the Orthodox community in that area is a very real problem. No one deserves to live in fear, and we must have a zero-tolerance policy for violent crime, especially when motivated by hatred of a particular group. Looking into some of these incidents, I have learned that a few of these assailants were in the throes of protracted periods of vagrancy due to untreated mental deficiencies. On account of their severe impairment, these could have been crimes of desperation, opportunity, or the result of a psychotic episode. I know each attack is different, and antisemitism was definitely a factor in too many cases. I just want to be clear what we are dealing with, so the police, mental health professionals, and the black community can all take informed action to end this crisis.

I've done a lot of work helping African Americans bridge divides with the Jewish community. Without exception, the black people I talk to harbor no ill will or aggressive intent whatsoever toward the Jewish community. I think the biggest problem here is that we have 6 million Jews and 47 million black people who often live in the same cities but don't engage with one another. That creates a space where Kanye West can make these egregiously antisemitic statements, and there aren't enough black people with the lived experience to contradict him. Again, only better relationships can address these issues.

Rosenberg: John, what would you say to a version of that question that might run like this: When I was growing up in London, when I walked down Cricklewood Broadway on a Saturday night,

I was worried about skinheads whom you would probably put on the Right of the political spectrum. And when I look at England now, it seems to me that for the first time in my life, there's a bigger problem on the Left. And the Left is obviously so much your philosophical home, if you will. How did we get here?

Mann: Well, those issues on the Left have always been there. They are not new. They have resurrected themselves.

But it's a different kind of problem. It's not a problem of violence, it's not a problem of murder or attempted murder. It's a negativity. I call it the intimidation of silence because that's what we observe the most, and that's very, very difficult. You see that in universities, for example, where Jewish students will get negativity by simply being themselves, being Jewish. We are tackling that head-on. I've changed the narrative entirely, with success, away from people looking for violence to people looking for negativity, which is different. If you look under the surface, if in a university there was, say, a black Evangelical student church set up, they would experience the same thing because they are different, and that would be seen as a negative. But it wouldn't manifest in violence, rarely in abuse. It would be in terms of ostracism and disdain. It would be about issues. In that instance it might be a debate on abortion — in the same way that, with Jewish students, it'd be a debate on the Middle East.

The Jewish community and its leadership in the Western world have been too comfortable in their security and in doing well. That's led to a huge complacency. Certainly, people 10 years ago were telling me there is no antisemitism in the country. My response to that was, "You and I move in different circles." I was with a Jewish businessman in my own city, quite young, very successful, telling me he'd never seen any antisemitism in his life. I mentioned a golf club — and when he last played there, the other golfers put down their clubs and walked away from him the moment they learned he was Jewish. And yet he was saying he'd never experienced any antisemitism. That golf-club antisemitism

> Many times, well-meaning leaders from the Jewish community reach out without really knowing who the credible and responsible players are in the African-American community. You engage with people you have read about or seen on television, and there's too much focus on those leaders.

is so strong, and it doesn't matter how successful you are, it is there. And it seems to me it's exactly the same with the black community. You may be the most successful musician or sports star or in any walk of life, but will you be allowed to play in the golf club? Will you be welcomed into the golf club? Where else won't you be welcomed?

One of my big criticisms of Jewish communal organizations is that they haven't built the alliances with other communities. The black community is probably the easiest to do it with in Europe and the United States, but they haven't treated it as a priority to anything like the extent they should. That's why the work I'm doing in sport is so interesting, because suddenly those alliances are blooming again. We're building or rebuilding an effective alliance between communities where, because they're minorities, because there's a difference, people are choosing to use that difference as a weakness to try and exploit through abuse and racism.

Rosenberg: When I was growing up, my father went every week to the local Council of Christians and Jews. I do not do anything

like that. So I want to ask you both, what should Jews do that we aren't doing? Darius?

Jones: Many times, well-meaning leaders from the Jewish community reach out without really knowing who the credible and responsible players are in the African-American community. You engage with people you have read about or seen on television, and there's too much focus on those leaders. Often, those leaders tend not to be the most effective partners for such a mission.

Reconstructing a modern black-Jewish alliance requires assembling a strong team. NBEC is launching an effort we call the Convergence Initiative. It is all about getting the band back together, as they say. We have established partnerships with and received support from the Jewish community. Uniquely though, Convergence is an African-American-conceived and -led initiative to bring the best and brightest from our community into a formidable alliance with a similar contingent of leaders from the Jewish community. Every member of NBEC has traveled to Israel and is committed to strengthening the black-Jewish relationship, so we are able to engage at a more advanced level, enabling connection and action much more quickly. We'll be focusing our efforts on continually taking delegations of influential black leaders to Israel. Adding to our ranks in this fashion allows NBEC to keep expanding a leadership network that brings innovative approaches to the challenges faced by the black community and recruits individuals who are uniquely prepared to join with the Jewish people in combating hate and making our world a better place.

Rosenberg: John, I'll give you the last word.

Mann: In terms of those alliances, we are quite a distance behind the United States from what I have observed and from what I have just heard. This notion of developing leadership, that's absolutely

where I'm coming from. In the U.K political world, which is a small world, we've achieved this cross-party. We've done that very well, probably better than any other country. In student leadership, we've been very successful. People need to ask, "What are the outcomes?" Quantify the outcomes. Because the outcomes have to be real rather than superficial. There's not enough asking, "Why is this working? What is working? How is it working?" And also, "What's *not* working?" Not enough people come to me and say, "Tell me what the failures are in everything you're doing and everything you see everyone else do." Everyone can cover up their failures and just highlight the odd success, but that's not progress and it's certainly not leadership. That's what I'd like the community leaders and the philanthropists to do — I'd like philanthropists coming and saying, not, "Look, here's some money to do this." I'd like them to say, "Tell me what you're doing wrong, tell me what you're doing right, tell me how I can help." ✳

DEPARTURES

LIEL LEIBOVITZ

Jewish Masterpiece: The Talmud

IN THE 1,500 years or so since it was compiled, no one has ever accused the Talmud of being a page-turner.

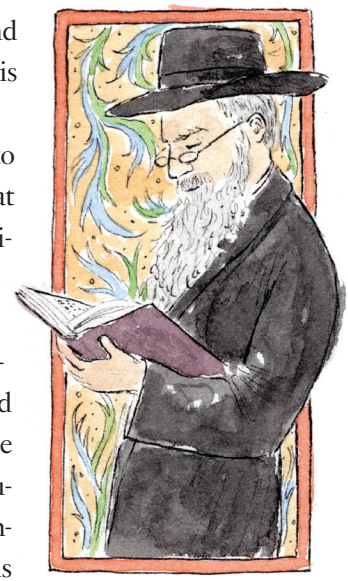
It's not hard to understand why. The very first page finds the rabbis arguing about the precise timing for reciting the Shema prayer — not exactly the sort of stuff that keeps readers glued to their chairs. Skip a few pages ahead, and you'll encounter elaborate quarrels on anything from whether or not prayer is better than good deeds to whether or not you may use an elephant as a wall for your sukkah.

Almost always, these heated conversations are presented in shorthand, calling on the reader to fill in a lot of blanks. They are also often delivered without resolution, which sometimes makes reading the Talmud like watching a terrific ball game without ever knowing who won. It's also sprawling, with 63 different volumes, called tractates, clocking in at 2,711 supersize pages — in Aramaic more often than Hebrew. And even if you choose to ignore the ample commentary arranged in neat blocks on the margins of each page—making

the Talmud, as the writer Jonathan Rosen so astutely observed, the precursor to the internet's architecture of hyperlinks—it's easy to get lost in the Talmud's textual thicket, with legalistic inquiries, fantastical tales, philosophical meditations, and personal interactions all bleeding into one another with no apparent order or borders.

And yet, to the extent that the Talmud can even be called a book—it's more accurately described, Rosen wrote, as "a drift net for catching God"—it's a truly magnificent one. Because in touching on virtually every human experience, from passing wind to losing a loved one, the Talmud is, arguably, humanity's first, greatest, and still most astonishing self-help book.

The self-help category, alas, has suffered some wear and tear lately. Walk into the self-help section of your local bookstore, and you're likely to stumble on entries such as *The Secret*, which, in just 198 pages, promises to deliver all the wisdom you need to make millions, lose weight, win friends, influence people, and much more. But the desire for self-improvement, hallelujah, transcends twaddle; it wouldn't be pushing it too far to say that we come to all great art expecting a spoonful of self-help, something to assist us as we try to claw our way above our imperfections in the hope of catching a better glimpse of truth and beauty. And no other book delivers on this aspiration like the Talmud.



To understand why, you first have to know a thing or two about that great book, and that, no surprise, is complicated. Why? For starters, there are not one but two Talmuds, one compiled in Bavel, or Jewish Babylonia, in modern-day Iraq, and the other in the Land of Israel, mainly in Galilee. Hence, the Babylonian and the Palestinian or Jerusalem Talmud. And each of them contains mostly the Gemara and two famous

commentaries, one by the 11th-century French sage Rashi, the other by the Tosafists, French and German rabbis of the four centuries following. The Gemara itself is a collection of rabbinic commentaries on the Mishnah, a separate compendium of Jewish laws and traditions passed down orally for centuries and redacted at some point in the third century C.E. The Talmud then, is an enormous project, and the story of its creation is as inspiring as it is timely, because the Talmud, really, is a guide for a troubled people living in troubled times — any troubled times, as indicated by the references, festooned around the main texts, to well over a thousand years of later commentary.

The story of the Talmud's creation goes something like this: In 70 C.E., after the Romans burned down the Temple in Jerusalem, Jews found themselves on the brink of a second extinction event. For centuries after returning from their first extinction event, when Cyrus permitted them to return from Babylonian exile 650 years earlier, their religion had centered around marching to God's earthly home and offering pilgrimages there. With that sacred sanctuary now gone, no one was quite sure whether or how Judaism could survive.

Enter the rabbis. Our ancestors had two insights up their collective sleeve. Together, they did not merely save Judaism. They gave it the tools to continue to flourish and inspire for millennia. The first was to take all the religion's practices and put them in this book. We may not be able to worship in the Temple, went the logic, but we can still read detailed accounts of how the Temple ran and operated, and by reading transport the religious experience from action to contemplation.

That alone should delight anyone who was ever so lost in a story that he imagined it was real, or who'd felt she knew Narnia or Middle Earth, say, as

The Talmud is, arguably, humanity's first, greatest, and still most astonishing self-help book.

well as her own block. Of course, the Talmud is more than just an account of Temple practice. It sets out a way of life — really, *the* way of life — focused on Torah and Jewish law, rather than Temple worship or political sovereignty. But in setting out the laws of the Torah and the practices we derive from it, the rabbis had a second insight, this one even more profound. If all they had done was write down a bunch of laws, readers would eventually have lost interest. New generations would argue that the old truths no longer applied, that the times, they were a-changin', that a fresh coat of paint was needed to restore the façade of that old-time religion. As anyone who was ever a teenager can confirm, it's human nature to think we know better than our elders, and to call this hubris progress. Instead of merely recording divine commandments, then, the rabbis who compiled the Talmud wrote down their all-too-human disagreements, too. Open any page, and you'll find yourself right there with them, invited to jump straight into a family argument that's been going on for nearly two millennia.

What's the argument about? Everything, really, which is what gives the Talmud its immense appeal, allowing anyone and everyone to find something in it that feels immediate and relevant. Take, for example, page 50 of tractate Nazir. The rabbis kick things off by explaining that the Nazir, a person who had taken a vow of purity, is rendered impure if he or she comes into contact with a handful of dust that covers a corpse.

Which, naturally, raises a basic question: What, exactly, is a handful? Is it a precise unit of measurement or an approximation? The

rabbis soon alight on a profound resolution. The answer, they decide, is relative to each of us, as one person's hand is rarely the same size as another's. They're speaking literally but also metaphorically, reminding us that we all have different sensibilities and therefore different susceptibilities to all things impure. For some, it takes but a nip of gin for vice to come calling, while others can drink all night and remain morally and physically upright. Some of us need but the gentlest temptation to lie, cheat, or steal, while some of us would rather suffer than transgress. And if we understand that about ourselves, we can set a course for self-improvement based not on some unobtainable, unachievable, abstract ideal but on our own individual ethical capacity, taking small and customized steps toward being better every day.

These subtle but startling lessons are everywhere in the Talmud, and if the book did nothing but deliver such insights into human nature and practical advice for learning and growing, it would have been enough. But the Talmud delivers two more treats that should send us all to the local Judaica store in search of a copy.

The first is the Aggadah, or the parts of the Talmud that don't deal directly with halakhah, or Jewish law. Often, these parts are little morality tales: self-contained fables designed to educate and move the reader, such as the tale (arguably the Talmud's most famous) about the rabbis arguing over a certain legalistic matter. Everyone agrees on a certain answer except for Rabbi Eliezer, who, frustrated, says that if he's right, he'd like to see a nearby tree uproot itself and walk a short distance down the road. The tree obliges, but the other rabbis aren't impressed by this supernatural confirmation. Trees, they say dryly, don't get to decide halakhah. Doubling down, Eliezer commands the river to reverse the direction of its flow, and this miracle, too, soon occurs. But the other rabbis are still convinced that Eliezer is wrong, and so, flustered, Eliezer asks God Himself to intervene. Immediately, a heavenly voice makes itself heard and says that Rabbi Eliezer is correct. "Excuse me," respond the other rabbis, "but this is not up to heaven." God may give us laws, they explain, but here

on earth, it's up to us humans, not the Almighty, to interpret and enforce them. God, the Talmud reports, is mightily pleased with this reply, saying, "My sons have bested Me."

Such stories are empowering, but the Talmud's wisdom runs yet deeper than this collection of edifying tales. The second treat is that the Talmud's structure alone offers revelations. For example, the section of the Talmud dealing with family law opens with levirate marriage, which obligates a man, under certain conditions, to marry the widow of his deceased brother so that she's not left alone and destitute.

Why start the discussion there? Why not follow the natural order of things, and talk first of love and marriage, of pregnancy and child-rearing, and of all the other beautiful steps that two people take as they start and build their family? Because families, the rabbis understood, are complicated things, and our fealties are best tested not when we're content and life is peachy but when tragedy strikes. The man who steps up to wed his dead brother's widow is showing her, by this virtuous deed, that he truly cares for her and that she's truly part of the family even though she joined it by marriage, not birth. Hardship is the best crucible for the most enduring bonds. Simply by placing the discussion of what happens to a family when times grow tough before all other considerations of family life, the Talmud is teaching us to rethink everything we thought we knew about our own affinities and priorities.

Should you, then, take the Talmud to the beach this summer? I wouldn't recommend it. But you could take some time to read just one page of Talmud a day. The practice, known as *Daf Yomi*, is shared by hundreds of thousands of Jews around the world, and anyone with an internet connection can join. You may discover the masterpiece you never knew you needed. Great works of art tell us what to think about; the Talmud teaches us how to think, flooding us with examples and hypotheticals that force us to examine our definitions, sharpen our categories, and question every assumption we have about living in this world and yearning for the next. We could hardly ask more of a book. ✳

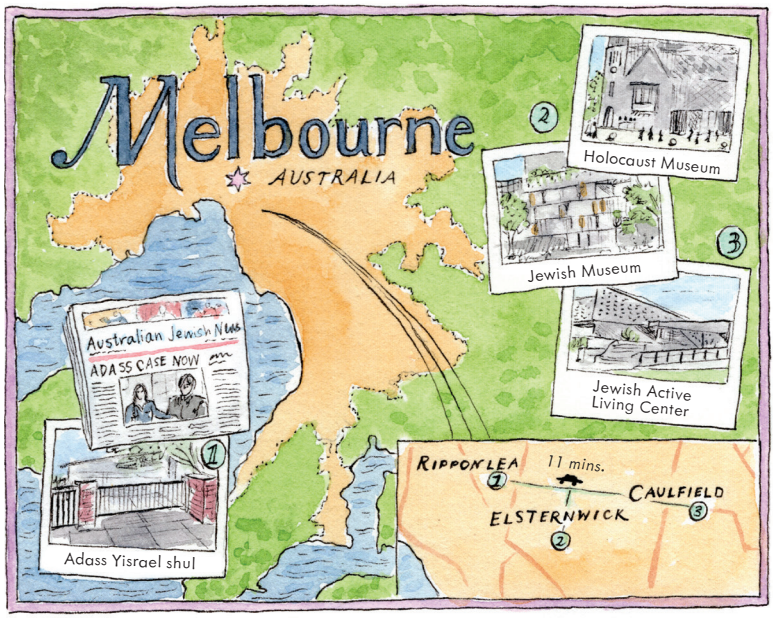
ANSHEL PFEFFER

Postcard from Melbourne

ON APRIL 3, it was finally supposed to be over. After a nine-week trial, a jury in Melbourne found Malka Leifer, 56, guilty on 18 counts of sexual assault, including five of rape, of two teenage girls who had been in her charge as principal of the ultra-Orthodox Adass Yisrael School. It seemed like the long-awaited end of a 15-year saga that began when Leifer fled to Israel and the *Australian Jewish News* (*AJN*) stunned the community by breaking the story.

But it wasn't over. Sisters Dassi Erlich and Elly Sapper, who chose to identify themselves publicly, had been vindicated in court (Leifer was found not guilty of assaulting a third sister). But the accusations kept swirling. Two months after the verdict, the police confirmed they had reopened an investigation into those at the school who allegedly helped Leifer evade justice back in 2008. She had fled to Israel on a plane ticket purchased by others on the same day she learned of the allegations.

Every crime of this nature ripples out in shockwaves, leaving a range of casualties in its wake. Families are torn apart, institutions



shaken, communities damaged. In the case of Malka Leifer, the damage extended nearly halfway across the world.

When I landed in Melbourne some months back, I had hoped to catch a session at the opening of the Leifer case, but it had been delayed. It was my second trip to the city, and it struck me on both visits that Melbourne's is as close to a model Jewish community as you can get. Its size (nearly half of Australia's estimated 120,000 Jews live there) and its isolated location have bred unique self-sufficiency and strong communal organizations. The rate of intermarriage is relatively low compared with that in other Western Jewish communities. An influx of South African Jews over the past few decades has also boosted its numbers. On the other hand, the fact that the Australian Jewish population is not that large has made the community outward-looking, and it maintains strong relations with Israel and other Diaspora communities.

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In addition, the community's relatively short history means that a large proportion still identifies not just as Jews, but as specific types of Jews. Walk for just a quarter of an hour across Elsternwick and Caulfield, the southern suburbs where most of the Jews live, and in quick succession you'll pass shuls and day schools, youth and community centers, of nearly every denomination of Judaism: Hasidim, including Chabad, Litvaks, the various stripes of non-Haredi Orthodoxy, progressive and secular Zionists, all the way to non-Zionist neo-Bundism. All kosher services offered. Every flavor of Jewish culture available homegrown or imported. A community large and affluent enough to supply it all, but too small to break up into separate sects.

I'm sure some Australian Jews reading this will dispute this sunny appreciation of their community and point to problems and shortcomings. But I have traveled widely across the Jewish world, and there is nothing like Melbourne. Where else in the rapidly polarizing Jewish world is there a major community where religious and secular, left- and right-wing Jewish youth movements, go together to summer camps and joint study on Shavuot night? They also run some of their Israel programs together.

But the best proof of its strength is the way it handled the Leifer case. It was a mainstream Jewish newspaper, the 128-year-old *AJN*, that broke the story in 2008. It was the community that kept up the campaign to support the victims, including a tenacious lobbying

effort to pursue Leifer's extradition after she had fled to Israel. And despite the powerful feelings that such a case inevitably evokes, Melbourne's Jews also ensured there was no ugly backlash against the Haredi community.

"There was some pushback, and people writing in that we shouldn't have published the story, that it would fuel antisemitism and should be dealt with internally," says Ashley Browne, who edited *AJN* at the time alongside his deputy Naomi Levin. "But there was also a lot of support and I think a broader consensus that what we were doing was vital." In the week after first running the story, the *AJN* published letters attacking it for committing the sin of *lashon hara* (gossip).

But as time has passed, it has become much rarer to hear that line of criticism.

The saga of Leifer's escape to Israel and her lengthy extradition case also put a strain on Australian Jewry's strong ties with Israel. Those ties had been tested before: in 1997, when four members of the Australian delegation to the Maccabiah Games died because of the catastrophic failure of a shoddily built pedestrian bridge, and again in 2010 with the suicide in an Israeli prison of Ben Zygier, a Melbourne-born Mossad agent. But the Leifer case — unfolding in locations 8,500 miles apart, from Australian courtrooms, to the Haredi towns in Israel where Leifer sheltered, to the therapist's office in Israel where Dassi Erlich began speaking about her ordeal after making aliyah — was in a different league.

There aren't many Diaspora communities, including in the United States, that can engage effectively with the often-cumbersome Israeli legal system. Melbourne's engagement went all the way to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Netanyahu promised in multiple meetings to solve the crisis, but he failed to publicly reprimand his Haredi health minister, Yaakov Litzman, for pressuring the district psychiatrist for an assessment that Leifer was unfit to be extradited to Australia to stand trial.

Nevertheless, Litzman ultimately admitted in a plea deal to using his ministerial power to help shield Leifer.

Beyond the challenge of dealing with the Israeli government, there was the equally difficult task of bridging gaps between Melbourne's wider Jewish community and its insular Hasidic community, many members of which are descended from Hungarian Jews who arrived after the Holocaust.

That's clearly visible within a few street blocks in the small neighborhood of Ripponlea. The Adass Yisrael shul and the separate boys' and girls' schools nearby look nothing like the wide and welcoming campuses of Melbourne's other Jewish institutions. There are no distinguishing signs on the buildings, the entrance is through side doors with keypads and CCTV, and the children play in tight courtyards behind tall fences. I went inside the shul to daven mincha, and the men there were friendly enough, but nobody wanted to talk.

The Hasidim here are not affiliated with a particular Hasidic court, but are called *klal-hasidi*, or general Hasidic. Even within them there are schisms. Around the corner from the main shul is a tiny offshoot minyan that insisted on continuing to gather for prayer during the pandemic, despite the strict lockdown and social-distancing regulations. On its unobtrusive door there's a tiny handwritten notice in Hebrew quoting Genesis 19:11: "They were helpless to find the entrance"—a sly reference to the depraved residents of Sodom, struck blind when they tried to break into the house of Abraham's nephew Lot to seize the angels sent to save him.

Down the street there are a handful of kosher groceries and butchers. "We're a separate community, but we do a service to the non-Haredi community by providing most of the kosher food and catering," says one patron who asked not to be named. "They did us a service with Malka Leifer. Everyone knows she

There aren't many Diaspora communities, including in the United States, that can engage effectively with the often-cumbersome Israeli legal system. Melbourne's engagement went all the way to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

did terrible things, but our community can't handle these things."

"Our Shoah legacy is important, but there's a feeling that for Adass it's ever-present and still dictates much of their relationship with the outside world," one Jewish educator told me. "And there is a general tendency of protectiveness toward Adass, despite the criticism of their conduct during Covid and over Leifer."

Speaking with various Australian Jews, I heard some level of understanding for the Haredi trauma at the very idea of a member of their community, especially a woman, being in prison among the goyim — not that this understanding extended to any kind of sympathy for Leifer, of course.

There are also notes of criticism of the Melbourne Jewish community's leadership: that it was perhaps easier for them to confront a scandal originating in a school none of them had any responsibility for or affiliation with; that, had the three sisters not gone public, the story might have been swept under the rug; that some of the impetus to deal with the scandal owed something to the wider coverage in the Australian and international media of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church.

Still, it is very easy to envisage how it all could have resulted in very ugly scenes of Haredi-bashing, Israel-bashing, and a breakdown

of relations between the Jewish community and the police. None of that happened.

The Leifer case and the experience of Melbourne Jewry highlights questions crucial to the relationships between Jewish communities in Israel and the Diaspora, and with the wider world. The responsibility for the welfare and education of children in ultra-Orthodox schools has in recent months become a major political issue throughout the Jewish world. That's true in the city and state of New York, where Hasidic schools have been the subject of a controversial series of investigative pieces in the *New York Times*. It's true in Britain, where the national inspectorate of schools and childcare, OFSTED, has been clashing with the ultra-Orthodox community. And it's true in Canada, where former Hasidim have taken the government of Quebec to court, claiming that they fail to supervise Haredi schools.

It is an acute dilemma for Jewish leaders and senior professionals in Israel and the Diaspora, who must engage with growing and increasingly influential Haredi groups that are not part of the general communal framework. Matters haven't been helped by the political situation in Israel, where the ultra-Orthodox parties are key members in Netanyahu's coalition, which now confronts a largely secular Israeli middle class bitterly opposed to the government's attempts to overhaul Israel's judiciary.

Does the wider Jewish world have a duty to care for individuals, especially minors, within Haredi communities and schools? And if so, does that extend just to cases of sexual abuse or also to the curriculum? When Haredi institutions clash with local and national governments over such matters, should the legacy Jewish establishment weigh in? And on whose side?

There are no easy answers. Cooperation is crucial. In some places, there has been progress on matters such as adult education

and vocational training, but levels of suspicion have never been higher. As the leader of a major American Jewish organization who works closely with Haredi counterparts says, "you are constantly being scrutinized for any sign of enticing Haredim to leave."

Do Melbourne and the Leifer case offer some answers? The renewed investigation may yet plunge the community into recriminations. But Jewish leaders would do well to take note of how the Jews Down Under dealt with this crisis. ✳

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וַיִּרְאוּ אֵת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְתַחַת
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וּכְעֶצֶם הַשָּׁמַיִם לָטֹהַר׃

— שמות כד:י

My mornings began by standing single file in the schoolyard, chanting 'Death to the Great Satan and its bastard child,' metaphors for America and Israel.

ROYA HAKAKIAN · 28

People need to speak out. The time of *sha, shtil* is far behind us. Many people still feel it — 'I don't want to make a fuss.' But we cannot afford that.

DEBORAH LIPSTADT · 36

The soft bigotry of low expectations is apparently too good for the Orthodox. What we get is the harsh bigotry of double standards.

AVI SCHICK · 50

Narratives that posit antisemitism as a uniquely dangerous form of hate, and that fail to connect it to other hatreds, increasingly fall on deaf ears, particularly among those who are not Jewish.

DAHLIA LITHWICK & MASUA SAGIV · 72

When dealing with long-dead authors whose personal bigotry was at best incidental to their artistic creations, discerning readers should decide for themselves whether and to what extent they can separate the two.

JAMES KIRCHICK · 84