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Written Testimony
before the
United States House of Representatives
Committee on Education and the Workforce

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Introduction

Thank you, Chairwoman Foxx and Ranking Member Scott, for inviting me to discuss confronting antisemitism on our nation's campuses.

I am Pamela Nadell, a professor of history and Jewish Studies at American University. I am currently writing a book titled *Antisemitism, an American Tradition*, under contract with W. W. Norton, a project supported, in part, by a National Endowment for the Humanities Public Scholars Award. I am delighted that this hearing gives me the opportunity to thank Congress publicly for supporting, through the National Endowment for the Humanities, scholarship, exhibitions, and documentaries essential to informing our citizens about our nation's past and for recognizing my scholarship with this prestigious award.

This is the third time that I have testified about this topic before Congress. The first was in 2017, just three months after white supremacists chanting "Jews will not replace us" paraded in the Unite the Right rally through the University of Virginia, brandishing torchlights, echoing Nazi storm troopers strutting through the streets of Germany in the 1930s.

I emphasize this because the antisemitism igniting on college campuses today is not new. It is part of a long history of antisemitism in our nation's colleges, just one manifestation of the trajectory of antisemitism in American life.

Understanding Antisemitism

Before turning to the questions of free speech and antisemitism on campuses today, we need to begin to understand just what antisemitism is. While it is difficult to define antisemitism, we can look to examples from history to illustrate the contours of this prejudice.

The term "antisemitism" is a relatively recent invention. The word was coined in Germany in the late 1870s to distinguish between the modern racial basis of Jew hatred and historic religious antipathy. Today, the word antisemitism is commonly used to signify any of the ancient, medieval, and modern expressions of animosity towards Judaism and the Jewish people.

Here are just some of antisemitism's historic canards.

- Antisemitism blames Jews for Jesus's death and posits that Jews, the historical witnesses to Jesus's life, must be punished across eternity until they recognize the truth of Christianity.
- Antisemitism charges that Jews murder Christian children to use their blood for religious purposes.

- Antisemites believe Jews have been corrupted by money since Judas betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. Ideas about nefarious, avaricious Jews have been repeated across the ages with different shorthand code names—Shylock, Rothschild, and more recently George Soros—signaling covetous Jews.
- Antisemites believe Jews are more loyal to their people than to the lands where they live and that, since medieval times, Jews have conspired across borders to destroy Christianity and seize power.
- These conspiracy theories gained new currency early in the twentieth century with the publication of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and the series *The International Jew—The World's Foremost Problem*, which first appeared in the *Dearborn Independent*, a newspaper owned by Henry Ford.¹
- More recently, the canard charging that that the Jews are internationalists, more loyal to their people around the world than to their nations, has been replaced by the dog whistle, “globalist,” a coded word for the old antisemitic conspiracy theory that Jews’ stand behind a worldwide order that will bring them control over banks, governments, and media.²

Antisemitism in America: The Past

Across American history, people from all walks of life have conveyed these antisemitic ideas about the Jews as enemies, as financially unscrupulous, as standing by their people rather than by their nation, and as a cabal exercising power over the nation. Here are just a few examples:

- In 1654 when twenty-three Jews landed in New Amsterdam, before it became New York, Governor Peter Stuyvesant sought to expel this “deceitful race, — such hateful enemies and blasphemers of the name of Christ,” for their “customary usury and deceitful trading with the Christians.”³
- In 1780, when John Quincy Adams, the future president, was just thirteen years old, he said of the Jews he saw in an Amsterdam synagogue: “I am sure they are all wretched creatures for I think I never saw in my life such a set of miserable looking people, and they would steal your eyes out of your head if they possibly could.”⁴
- On December 17, 1862, from Holly Springs, Mississippi where General Ulysses S. Grant had his headquarters in the Department of Tennessee, he issued his infamous General Orders No. 11. It declared: “The Jews, as a class violating every regulation of trade established by the Treasury Department and also department orders, are hereby expelled from the department within twenty-

¹ For somewhat fuller discussions of these themes, see the resource guide American University’s Jewish Program developed. [Understanding Antisemitism: A Guide for the AU Community](#) (April 2023).

² American Jewish Committee, [Translate Hate: Stopping Antisemitism Starts with Understanding It](#).

³ Quoted in Samuel Oppenheim, “The Early History of the Jews of New York, 1654-1664: Some New Matter on the Subject,” *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*, 18 (1909), p.4-5.

⁴ [Diary of John Quincy Adams, vol. 1, August 25, 1780](#)

four hours from the receipt of this order.”⁵

- In February 1924 Congressman Albert Johnson, a chief architect of the 1924 National Origins Act which established immigration quotas based on the pseudoscience of racial hierarchy, told a Jewish Telegraphic Agency reporter: “If the Jewish people combine to defeat the immigration bill as reported by the Committee, their children will regret it.”⁶
- In April 1941, Congressman John E. Rankin called the journalist Walter Lippmann an “international Jew,” a mouthpiece for the international Jewish financiers who “have controlled the world through the gold standard ever since Rothchilds [sic] got financial control of England during the Napoleonic war. They are now crucifying civilization on a cross of gold.”⁷

Antisemitism in America: The Present

The antisemitism visible on colleges and universities today is just part of the toxic stew of antisemitism Jews in the U.S. now face.

I want to convey how dramatic a change this is. In 2012, the historian Leonard Dinnerstein, who had published the fine history *Antisemitism in America* in 1994, looked at what had happened since that book appeared. He concluded then, and repeated this in 2016, that of the “the plague of antisemitism: *most American Jews don’t see it, feel it, or fear it.*” He continued, “antisemitism is too minor an issue to disturb the daily lives of American Jews.”⁸

The change in just a decade is chilling. We have just passed the fifth anniversary of the deadliest antisemitic attack on American soil when a gunman murdered eleven Jews at prayer in Pittsburgh’s Tree of Life Synagogue. Since then, Jews were murdered at a synagogue in Poway, California,⁹ and at a kosher supermarket in Jersey City;¹⁰ and a rabbi and three congregants were taken hostage at a synagogue in Colleyville, Texas.¹¹

American Jews now have a new litany: Charlottesville, Poway, Jersey City, Colleyville. The fear evoked by Charlottesville’s “Unite the Right” rally now sits at the bedrock of Jewish identity in the United States of America.

Those violent attacks are just the tip of the iceberg. On city streets, visibly Orthodox Jews are physically attacked. In 2022, a woman in Brooklyn spit at some children playing in New York and yelled “Hitler

⁵ [General Orders No. 11](#)

⁶ “Johnson Piqued at Opposition to Immigration Bill,” *JTA.org*, February 14 1924.

⁷ Quoted in Edward S. Shapiro, “The Approach of War: Congressional Isolationism and Anti-Semitism, 1939-1941,” *American Jewish History* 74, 1 (September 1984), p. 59.

⁸ Leonard Dinnerstein, “*Antisemitism in America: An Update 1995-2012*,” *Journal for the Study of Antisemitism*, 4 (2012), p. 565. Leonard Dinnerstein, “My Assessment of American Antisemitism Today,” in *Antisemitism in North America: New World, Old Hate*, eds. Steven K. Baum, Neil J. Kressel, Florette Cohen, Steven Leonard Jacobs. (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016), ch. 3. [emphasis in original].

⁹ Chabad of Poway, April 27, 2019.

¹⁰ December 10, 2019.

¹¹ Congregation Beth Israel, January 15, 2022.

should have killed you all.”¹² A swastika was etched into the wall of an elevator at the U.S. State Department, not far from the office of the special envoy to combat antisemitism.¹³

On the Bethesda Trolley Trail, not far from where I live, vandals scrawled swastikas and “White Power 1488.”¹⁴ The 14 stands for the final words of a white supremacist manifesto: “We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children.” The number 88 stands for “Heil Hitler,” since H is the 8th letter of the alphabet.

Antisemitism and the Campus

The long history of antisemitism extended to our nation’s colleges and universities.¹⁵

- American Jews have long recorded slights and exclusions they faced in college. In 1947, Laura Z. Hobson exposed American antisemitism in the popular novel and film *Gentleman’s Agreement*. But when she was in her eighties, she wrote about “great wound of her youth” how a “Jew clean-up” kept her and other Jewish students out of Phi Beta Kappa at Cornell University in 1921.¹⁶
- Personal affronts paled before the systemic effort to limit Jewish enrollments derailing Jews’ access to careers and professions for decades. The quotas began in the Ivy League in the 1920s, spread to the women’s colleges called the Seven Sisters, and from there to some 700 private colleges and universities.¹⁷
- Colleges and universities were also challenged by antisemitic speech before the twenty-first century. Perhaps the best remembered example is that in the early 1990s, a small group of Holocaust deniers began taking out full page ads in student newspapers with titles like “The Holocaust Story: How Much is False?” Those ads launched furious campus debates about free speech and also helped propel Holocaust courses into university curricula to respond to the disinformation.¹⁸

As we all recognize, when antisemitism flares on campus today, the issue is students’ support for or opposition to the state of Israel. But this has been evident on campuses well before the horror of the attack on Israel of October 7, 2023.

- In October 2000, when the First Intifada was underway, 200 Arab students protested a Hillel teach-in and yelled “Israel is a fascist state” at the University of Michigan, while at Rutgers

¹² Timothy Bella, “Woman 21, arrested after Jewish Boy was spat on outside synagogue.” *Washington Post*, January 22, 2022.

¹³ Astead W. Herndon, “The State Department Finds a Swastika in One of its Elevators,” *New York Times*, July 27, 2021.

¹⁴ Chioma-Emilia Ahaghotu, “Antisemitic Graffiti Discovered on Bethesda Trolley Trail, *WUSA9*, August 8, 2022.

¹⁵ Valerie Strauss, “A brief history of antisemitism in U.S. higher education,” *Washington Post*, November 13, 2023.

¹⁶ Laura Z Hobson, *Laura Z: A Life* (New York: Arbor House, 1983), 55-56.

¹⁷ Marcia Graham Synnott, “Anti-Semitism and American Universities: Did Quotas Follow the Jews?,” in *Anti-Semitism in American History*, ed. David A. Gerber (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 250.

¹⁸ Deborah E. Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory* (New York: Free Press, 1993), 183-84, 90ff..

University, Jewish students saw placards calling for the “liquidation of the Jewish state.”¹⁹

- In 2015, a University of California at Los Angeles student judicial board originally rejected a candidate for membership because she was Jewish and involved with Jewish groups.²⁰
- In November 2015, when a pro-Palestinian student group disrupted an academic event organized by the University of Texas’s Institute for Israel Studies, police had to intervene.²¹
- In April 2018, when a pro-Israel New York University student club held a rave in Washington Square Park, pro-Palestinian student protestors set an Israeli flag on fire, and one, shouting “Free Palestine, end the occupation,” wrestled the microphone away from a student singing Israel’s national anthem.”²²

These events and a myriad of others preceded October 7, 2023.

October 7, 2023: A Dividing Line

The barbarity of the Hamas invasion has entered Jewish memory and will stand for all eternity alongside the massacres of the Crusades, the Jews burned at the stake during the Inquisition, the 1903 Kishinev Pogrom, when the world was outraged over the murder of “only” 49 Jews, and the massacre at Babi Yar, when over the course of two days, the Nazis and their collaborators murdered 33,000 Jews at the ravine outside Kiev. The atrocities of October 7, 2023—the murdering of babies, the rapes, the burning of people alive, and the taking of more than 200 hostages—add a terrible new chapter to Jewish history.

Anyone who claims to care about human rights should denounce these horrors. That so many students on college campuses not only did not but that they celebrated the violence or blamed Israel for spurring it has caused their Jewish peers, faculty, staff, and administrators deep anguish.

For Jews what happened on October 7th was not anti-Zionism, opposition to the policies of Israel, it was antisemitism.

Zionism was a nineteenth-century European nationalist movement, a response not only to discrimination Jews faced in their nation states but also to the pogroms, the anti-Jewish riots in the Russian Empire. These attacks persisted well into the twentieth century before the rise of the Nazis, with an estimated 100,000 Jews murdered in the Ukraine between 1918 and 1921.²³ The political movement of Zionism rests on the traditional Jewish hope that one day the Jewish people would return to their historic homeland.

Criticism of the government of Israel, a state brought into existence through the United Nations, is not antisemitism. We watched in recent months as hundreds of thousands of Israelis turned out weekly to protest their government’s policies.

¹⁹ Toni L. Kamins, “Focus on Issues: Anti-Israel Rallies Give College Jews Their First Lesson in Mideast Rhetoric,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, October 18, 2000.

²⁰ “Jews Need Not Apply?” *Inside Higher Ed*, March 2, 2015.

²¹ “Statement on University Review of Nov. 13 Incident,” *UT News*, March 19, 2016.

²² Sarah Jackson, “Two Student Protestors Arrested at Rave for Israel’s 70th Birthday.” *Washington Square News*, April 27, 2018.

²³ Jeffrey Veidlinger, *In the Midst of Civilized Europe* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2021).

But when bigoted symbols and tropes about the Israel-Palestine conflict cross the line into hateful speech, when Palestinians proclaiming “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free” intend that as a call to destroy the Jewish state, a democracy and strong ally of the United States, then these symbols and rhetoric become antisemitic.

Yet, antisemitic speech is protected speech. It may be abhorrent, but abhorrent speech remains protected.²⁴

Free speech not only upholds the First Amendment, it is also essential to educating the future generations of our nation’s leaders. This was stated eloquently at the University of Chicago when Dean of Students John Jay Ellison welcomed the Class of 2020. He wrote: “Our commitment to academic freedom means that we do not support so-called ‘trigger warnings,’ we do not cancel invited speakers because their topics might prove controversial, and we do not condone the creation of intellectual ‘safe spaces’ where individuals can retreat from ideas and perspectives at odds with their own. Fostering the free exchange of ideas reinforces a related University priority—building a campus that welcomes people of all backgrounds. Diversity of opinion and background is a fundamental strength of our community. The members of our community must have the freedom to espouse and explore a wide range of ideas.”²⁵

This wide-ranging exploration remains the essence of a liberal arts education, educations almost every member of Congress benefitted from, as undergraduate, graduate, and professional students in this country’s outstanding private and public universities and colleges. You have an obligation to ensure that college students today will benefit from the same opportunities to learn and to be challenged that you had when you were in college.

What is absolutely not protected is discrimination, violence, harassment, intimidation and bullying, and that is what we have seen on some campuses recently when Jewish and Israeli students have been physically assaulted, when they have been threatened with murder, and when confrontations between pro-Palestinian and pro-Israel students have led to menacing encounters that have no place in the academy or anywhere else in the United States.

What is to be done?

Voicing antisemitism is not illegal. We cannot censor antisemitic speech, nor can we command everyone in our university community to support human rights.

What we must do is make certain that everyone on the campus—students, faculty, and staff, no matter their religious, racial, ethnic, or national background—feels safe and does not encounter discrimination in any form, whether in the classroom from faculty members who single out Jewish students or from student organizations that use litmus tests requiring Jewish students to distance themselves from Israel if they wish to be members. These are forms of discrimination, which along with intimidation, threats of violence, and violence will not be tolerated. We have legal and institutional mechanisms to deal with these.

The American Jewish community has long employed various strategies to reduce antisemitism. They led to the creation of legacy Jewish organizations committed to fighting it at home and abroad. These

²⁴ In *Nazis in Copley Square*, the author Charles Gallagher claims that *Terminiello v. Chicago* 337 U.S. 1 (1949) upholds the right to engage in public antisemitic speech; (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2021), p. 246.

²⁵ John Jay Ellison, University of Chicago, to the Class of 2020 student, (undated)

https://news.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/attachments/Dear_Class_of_2020_Students.pdf

organizations refuted antisemitic canards in the press and in the halls of Congress. They pioneered educational and cultural programs to expose antisemitism. They sought redress through our legislative and judicial bodies. Most importantly, convinced that antisemitism is not just a Jewish problem but that, like all forms of bigotry, antisemitism threatens our democracy, they sought out allies across religious and ethnic lines to address with them this hate and all forms of hate.²⁶

So what are the colleges doing now. Universities are responding in multiple ways to the rise of antisemitism on campus and beyond.

- Campus public safety officers are working with law enforcement over threats that demand their intervention.
- Universities are using their student conduct codes, which prohibit misconduct—including “physical assault,” actions threatening the safety of anyone, and “harassment”²⁷—to hold students accountable for violations
- Professors, deans, and university presidents are working overtime to listen to students and their parents’ concerns and are seeking ways to support them.
- Task forces charged with understanding antisemitism on the campus and with integrating the Jewish experience into diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives are emerging around the country.
- Legacy Jewish organizations, like the American Jewish Committee and Anti-Defamation League, are offering their expertise to colleges and universities.²⁸

I also want to emphasize what Jewish Studies faculty around the country have been doing. In 1950, only two tenured faculty in the nation taught Jewish Studies. This interdisciplinary field began to grow in the 1960s. Today, the Association for Jewish Studies, the learned society of these scholars, has approximately 1,800 members.²⁹

Many of us have been responding to antisemitism not since October 7th but since August 2017. We began adding courses on this enduring hatred to our curriculum. We have published resource guides to explain its manifestations to our campuses.³⁰ We have run webinar series about antisemitism from the Holocaust to today.³¹

Then October 7 came, and we Jewish Studies faculty found ourselves on the front lines. We responded personally. The director of the Schusterman Center for Jewish Studies at the University of Texas at Austin reached out individually in the days after October 7th to every undergraduate student in its programs,

²⁶ See, e.g., Stuart Svonkin, *Jews against prejudice: American Jews and the fight for civil liberties* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997)..

²⁷ American University, *Student Conduct Code 2023-2024*, 8-9.

²⁸ See, e.g. American Jewish Committee, *AJC Action Plan for Confronting Campus Antisemitism: A Toolkit for University Students*

²⁹ [Association for Jewish Studies](#)

³⁰ See, e.g., Michigan State University, The Serling Institute for Jewish Studies and Modern Israel, *Guide on Antisemitism for the MSU Community, 2023*; American University Jewish Studies Program, *Understanding Antisemitism: A Guide for the AU Community* (April 2023).

³¹ See e.g., American University’s Jewish Studies Program’s series “Antisemitism since the Holocaust: Europe, Israel, America.” (Fall 2020). <https://www.american.edu/cas/js/>

every graduate student affiliate, and every faculty affiliate to check in and offer support.³² We have mounted public programs to do what we do best—to teach, to inform, to provide opportunity to reflect. At Dartmouth College, the first faculty public forum on the crisis drew 100 people in person and 600 people online; the second had an audience of 300 in the room, and 5,000 online.³³ The coming semester will continue these initiatives.

Two self-identified “Jewish-Israeli scholars,” teaching at universities where protests over the conflict have made national headlines,³⁴ understand that these responses—lectures, panel discussions, roundtables, teach-ins, and the publication of academic essays and articles informed by scholarship—rarely make the news. But these responses are happening on campuses around the nation, even as the media highlights the “newsworthy”—the demonstrations, provocations, threats, and violence. These professors do not downplay these shocking events, but they do ask us to look at the campus as a whole. There they see, as do others, far more often “students and colleagues... curious and open-minded to learn more about the Israel-Hamas War.”³⁵

The U.S. National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism

Among the most important tools for fighting antisemitism today, on campus and across America, is the May 2023 *The U.S. National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism*, the first outcome of the president’s new initiative to counter antisemitism, Islamophobia, and other forms of bias and discrimination in our nation. Its “Strategic Goal 3.4—Address Antisemitism in K-12 Schools and on College Campuses” contains concrete steps which our leaders have begun implementing and must continue to do so. These recommendations include educating not only about the alarming rise of antisemitism but also about the protections Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act offers as well as sharing with students, educators, and communities notable efforts that aim to prevent and address antisemitism.³⁶

The U.S. National Strategy’s “Whole-of-Society Calls to Action” are already advancing widely at colleges and universities. The many statements university presidents around the country have issued since October 7th have called out antisemitism as “reprehensible” and announced that “hate speech will not be tolerated.”³⁷ They have directed Jewish, Israeli, Muslim, and Palestinian members of their communities and their families to resources for reporting incidents of hate. They have created advisory groups and task forces to help university leaders develop responses to antisemitism and create educational programming, including integrating antisemitism studies into diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives.

The history of efforts to minimize antisemitism in the past demonstrates that positive results take time and that there is no magic bullet, no vaccine to inoculate against antisemitism.

³² Jonathan Kaplan, email to jewishstudiesdirectors@googlegroups.com, October 31, 2023.

³³ “This Ivy League school took a novel approach to easing tensions sparked by the Israel-Hamas war. Did it work?” *NBCNews.com*, November 25, 2023, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/dartmouth-easing-tensions-sparked-israel-hamas-war-rcna126594>

³⁴ Johanna Alonso, “U of Michigan Shuts Down Student Vote on Israeli, Palestinian Resolutions,” *Inside Higher Ed*, December 1, 2023; Cade McAllister and Hannah Marr, “Students project anti-Israel, anti-GW messages onto library, sparking outcry,” *GW Hatchet*, October 25, 2023.

³⁵ Shachar Pinsker and Arie M. Dubnov, “Toxicity Doesn’t Rule the Hamas-Israel Debate on U.S. College Campuses,” *Haaretz*, November 26, 2023.

³⁶ *The U.S. National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism* (May 2023).

³⁷ For one example, see [American University President Sylvia Burwell, October 20, 2023](#).

But it would not only be utterly unfair, it would be a deliberate distortion of the evidence, to imply or misread the current situation to suggest that the leaders of our nations' universities are not responding to the current crisis.

Conclusion

As a proud American and a proud Jew, the daughter of a soldier who served in the occupation army in Germany who was a typist at the Nuremberg trials, I grew up in a country where I was never afraid to say that I was a Jew. Since 2017, that has changed. Surely, *The U.S. National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism*, the first time, I believe, that any nation has issued such a strategy, with its concrete steps to address rising antisemitism on college campuses and across the nation, merits bipartisan support.