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**The American Jewish Committee**

Advancing democracy, pluralism and mutual understanding

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November 18, 2005

The Honorable Gerald A. Reynolds  
Chairperson  
U.S. Commission on Civil Rights  
624 9<sup>th</sup> Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20425

Dear Mr. Chairperson:

I write on behalf of the American Jewish Committee, America's oldest human relations organization, with over 150,000 members and supporters. Founded in 1906 in response to the Kishinev pogroms, combating anti-Semitism remains one of AJC's core missions.

There is no question that anti-Semitism exists on some college campuses. This anti-Semitism, however, is different from that which plagued American higher education decades ago, when quotas kept Jews out. Today Jewish campus life is thriving, and universities which only decades ago closed their doors to Jews now even have Jewish presidents. Campuses are welcoming to Jews, and it is a rare first-rate institution which does not have a program on Jewish studies. We recognize and welcome these important changes.

Where anti-Semitism does exist, it is predominantly expressed as the political anti-Semitism known as anti-Zionism. Whereas once Jews were stigmatized and dehumanized, now in some circles the collective national self-expression of the Jewish people, the state of Israel, is demonized and treated by a double standard not applied to any other nation on the globe.

In the aftermath of the collapse of the peace process in the fall of 2000, we saw an increase in anti-Semitic incidents on some campuses in North America. These incidents were high in profile, but even though they were relatively few in number, they were of serious concern. They were also unfolding at the same time as a movement asking universities to divest from Israel, and portraying it as the functional equivalent of apartheid-era South Africa. (That movement has not succeeded – no American university has divested.)

At the same time, we have been and remain concerned that some students experience harassment or intimidation for speaking out in favor of Israel, both inside and outside the classroom. AJC worked with a group of current and former university presidents to circulate a statement noting these problems, and asserting that in order for campuses to be open to the expression

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of all opinion, intimidation must not be allowed. That statement was subscribed to by over 300 presidents, and published in various newspapers around the country. We continue to urge universities to have clear grievance procedures so that students know what to do if they are victimized in this manner.

We also are aware that for a variety of reasons, including but not limited to funding sources and ideology, many Middle East Studies departments have become dogmatic and propagandistic in their anti-Israel bent. There are, of course, many reasons one can criticize Israeli policies, just as one might those of any other country, but when Israel is consistently painted as the incarnation of evil (and the Palestinian cause as one which can do little wrong), a line is crossed.

The purpose of education is to stretch students' minds and teach them how to learn. As such, programs which offer propaganda masquerading as scholarship fail their ultimate mission, are by definition defective, and must be of concern to the university, regardless of the subject area.

In dealing with allegations of bigotry on campus, it is always important to take those assertions seriously and avoid exacerbating fears. Groups concerned with these issues should seek to work in partnership with the university, and in resonance with its mission, to make sure that the best and most challenging scholarship is available. Accordingly, the American Jewish Committee has been working with Brandeis University and others to enhance the scholarly study and academic teaching of modern Israel. And since 1990 AJC has worked with over 200 universities to help them craft procedures and structures to respond effectively to any type of bigotry on campus.

Campuses have their own cultures, and the way to change these cultures over time is to work in resonance with their core principles, namely: 1) having the best scholarship possible, 2) challenging students to rethink their ideas, rather than to accept dogmas, and 3) insuring the freedom for diverse opinions to be aired inside and outside the classroom in an environment free from harassment and intimidation.

To this end, AJC has worked with many college administrations around the country, and has a series of publications focused either primarily or else touching upon contemporary issues of anti-Semitism on campus. Among them are "Why Campus Anti-Israel Activity Flunks Bigotry 101" and "Anti-Semitism Matters," both of which are enclosed.

If AJC can be of any service to you as you explore this issue, please feel free to contact me.

Respectfully,



Kenneth Stern

Program Specialist on Anti-Semitism and Extremism

**ANTISEMITISM  
MATTERS**

**KENNETH S. STERN**

**THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE**

*Kenneth S. Stern is the American Jewish Committee's expert on anti-Semitism and bigotry. Mr. Stern is the author of three books on human rights: A Force Upon the Plain: The American Militia Movement and the Politics of Hate; Holocaust Denial; and the award-winning Loud Hawk: The United States vs. The American Indian Movement. A frequent guest on television news shows, Mr. Stern has argued before the United States Supreme Court, testified before Congress, and was an invited presenter at the White House Conference on Hate Crimes.*

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**A**nti-Semitism is prejudice about or discrimination against Jews. At heart, it is a form of human hatred no different than racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of bigotry. But it has a unique complexity, in part due to historical events, in part due to the dual aspects of Judaism: Judaism is a religion, but Jews are also a people (of many races and varying degrees of religious observance) who share a common culture, legacy, traditions, and values.

The term “anti-Semitism” was coined by Wilhelm Marr in Germany in 1873. A misnomer, it has nothing to do with a prejudice against “Semites”—“Semitic” being a term that applies to languages, not people. But Marr used it to mean hatred of Jews.

Of course, anti-Semitism was around for centuries before Marr. It has three distinct strains that sometimes overlap.

### **Religious-based Anti-Semitism**

The oldest form is *religious-based* anti-Semitism. One can trace anti-Semitism back to biblical times. For example, there’s the Book of Esther, with the story of King Ahasuerus’s edict to wipe out all the Jews and Haman’s insinuation that Jews are “a people apart.”

Its modern form begins with the birth of Christianity, as Christianity and Judaism were competitive faiths in the late Roman Empire.

Jesus, of course, was a Jew, as were many of the early Christians. But many Jews refused to join the new faith, and their continued existence had to be explained in light of Christian belief that Christians had made a new covenant that superceded the Jewish covenant with God. Some concluded that God had permitted the Jews to live as a sign of what should happen if people rejected and denied Jesus. Jews were forced to the fringes of society, and church edicts segregated them into ghettos. Jews were blamed for the death of Jesus, and canards such as “Christ-killers” were leveled against them.

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conspires to harm non-Jews,  
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As Christianity became dominant in Europe, Jews were discriminated against through special taxes, special clothing, limited avenues of employment, and periodic expulsions. During the years of the Black Death, Jews were accused of poisoning wells, and at other times they were charged with stealing Christian children to use their blood to make Passover matzah. During the Crusades, Jews were murdered, raped, forced to convert, or expelled from their homes. On the Iberian Peninsula, after the Christian victory over Islam, Jews who did not leave were subject to the tortures of the Inquisition, which sought

to determine whether they were true Christians.

Religious anti-Semitism defined the common denominator for how all forms of anti-Semitism work: Jews are seen as a group that conspires to harm non-Jews, and “blaming the Jews” provides a simple explanation for all that has gone wrong in life.

In modern times, while religious anti-Semitism remains a problem, it is less so in the Christian world since the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, which removed the charge of deicide and identified anti-Semitism as a sin.

In the Muslim world, however, the trend has lately been the other way. While Jews and Muslims lived together harmoniously at times in the past—certainly with more harmony than Jews lived in Christian Europe—Jews never enjoyed full equality. Islam defines Jews (and Christians) as *dhimmi* (“protected peoples”), meaning tolerated but second-class citizens. In recent years, largely due to the Arab-Israel conflict as well as to the untenable notion that non-Muslims should never have sovereignty over lands that were once linked with Islam, the Islamic form of religious-based anti-Semitism has been growing. There is also an increasing nexus between anti-Semitism and anti-Americanism, in large part due to Islamists’ distain for democracy, since in their theocratic view of the world, democracies (such as Israel and the U.S.) are inherently sinful, as they put the will of people over the will of Allah.



### **Race-based Anti-Semitism**

*Race-based* anti-Semitism is a more modern, and in some ways more pernicious, form of Jew-hatred. Following the advent of Charles Darwin's notion of evolution and the idea of race, this strain of anti-Semitism identified Jews as a distinct race, downplaying their identity as a religion. Whereas previously a persecuted Jew could convert to another religion to save himself or herself, under a race-based definition of Judaism, this was no longer an option. Nazi Germany represented the extreme application of this race-based type of anti-Semitism: Even one who didn't consider himself Jewish but had one Jewish grandparent could be sent to the death camps. On the other hand, this form of anti-Semitism worked just like the older religious-based hatred had: demonizing Jews, identifying them as "the problem," and suggesting that they exercise secret power.

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**Race-based anti-Semites hate all nonwhites and see Jews as responsible for opening the door to equal rights and opportunity for them.**

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Race-based anti-Semitism has its own literature. A czarist forgery, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, argues that Jews meet secretly to control the world. This document, translated into various languages, was used to propel many pogroms (violent attacks) against Jews in Europe in the late 1800s and early 1900s. It was popularized in the United States by

automaker Henry Ford in the 1920s. While it continues to be a staple of white supremacist groups today (who see a "Jewish plot" behind all the efforts to make every American equal), it is also promoted by groups such as the Nation of Islam. They have their own version, *The Secret Relationship between Blacks and Jews*, which distorts the history of slavery to paint it as a Jewish operation against black people.

Today's main practitioners of race-based anti-Semitism are neo-Nazis, skinheads, Christian Identity adherents (who believe that people of color are subhuman and Jews the offspring of Satan), and various other white supremacists and white nationalists. While there are important ideological and theological differences between these groups, they all hate nonwhites and see Jews as responsible for opening the door to equal rights and opportunity for them, as part of a nefarious plot to destroy "white America" through immigration, affirmative action, control of the media, and other alleged schemes.

### **Political Anti-Semitism**

*Political* anti-Semitism (or anti-Zionism\*) is the most recent and least understood form of this prejudice. While all forms of anti-Semi-

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\* Zionism is the belief that Israel has the right to exist as a homeland for Jews. It says nothing about the policies or programs of the state, merely that it has a right to exist. There are left-wing Zionists and right-wing Zionists, and many in between. Some Zionists are harsh critics of Israeli policies; others are supportive. Anti-Zionists, on the other hand, treat Israel more harshly and by a different standard than they would treat any other state on the globe. They frequently demonize it and essentially believe that Israel has no right to exist as a Jewish state, regardless of its policies, its leaders, or how the society is run.

tism serve political purposes, the rebirth of the State of Israel after a 2,000-year exile of the Jewish people gave rise to this most modern form. As the quintessential Israeli diplomat, Abba Eban, noted, "Classical anti-Semitism denies the rights of Jews as citizens within society. Anti-Zionism denies the equal rights of the Jewish people to its lawful sovereignty within the community of nations.... All that has happened is that the discriminatory principle has been transferred from the realm of individual rights to the domain of collective identity."

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**"Classical anti-Semitism denies the rights of Jews as citizens within society. Anti-Zionism denies the equal rights of the Jewish people to its lawful sovereignty within the community of nations."**

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Of course, one can and should criticize Israel when it errs, just as one would be critical of the United States, France, Egypt, or any other nation. There's no anti-Semitism in disapproving of a party, a program, a policy, or a political leader. But when Israel is expected to live up to standards not applied to any other nation; or when its perceived deficiencies are used to attack its basic legitimacy, that's a problem. In the current context, if one supports the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination in a land of their own, but would deny the Jews the same right in their historic homeland, that is anti-Semitism.

While the religious or racial-based anti-Semite would generally not want to associate with Jews (although there are many instances when such people point to a “good Jew” they know, just as some would point to the “good black” or “good Latino”), the political anti-Semite likely has no problem with an individual Jew. It is the collective identity of Jews—expressed in the existence of the modern State of Israel—which animates them. Not surprisingly, the canards that fuel the older types of anti-Semitism are recycled here: Jews are seen as secretly influencing or controlling U.S. policy or public attitudes. And sometimes even the same symbols are used—the Star of David equaling the swastika, for instance. Political anti-Semitism can be found on both the far right and the far left, with many of the same tropes. But whereas most racial and religious-based anti-Semites wouldn't deny their prejudice (or if they did, their denials would be seen as transparent), political anti-Semites generally won't admit their bigotry.

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**When Israel is expected to live up to standards not applied to any other nation; or when its perceived deficiencies are used to attack its basic legitimacy, that's a problem.**

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In addition to distinguishing the three basic types of anti-Semitism, it is also important to define the context in which the prejudice is being expressed. One can look at anti-Semitism by venue: on campus, in Europe, in the

Arab and Muslim world, in the media, etc. Or one can examine the strain of ideas that propel it: denial of the Holocaust, for instance, or the claim that Jews were secretly responsible for 9/11. While these lines are never fixed (for example, Holocaust denial, the brainchild of the neo-Nazi crowd, has its largest recent growth in the Arab world), they are important to keep in mind.

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**The frustration for many Jews, however, is that while all forms of anti-Semitism are dangerous, sometimes our friends only see one type or the other as meaningful.**

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Finally, anti-Semitism of every type treats Jews, either individually or collectively, as an "other." It ascribes pernicious motives to them and frequently recycles and updates old canards painting the Jew as plotting to harm non-Jews, often in order to provide an explanation for world events. The frustration for many Jews, however, is that while all forms of anti-Semitism are dangerous, sometimes our friends only see one type or the other as meaningful. At the World Conference against Racism in Durban, for example, political anti-Semitism was ratcheted up to a new level, as the language of antiracism was used to attack both Jews and the right of Israel to exist, alone among the nations on the globe. Groups that were in the forefront of speaking out when literature praising Hitler was distributed by neo-Nazis were conspicuously silent when the same

literature in Arabic was being passed out. Or at an anti-Iraq war demonstration in the U.K., groups that would have challenged Holocaust-denial banners held by teenage skinheads were silent when such a banner was displayed by Muslim youth.

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**Anti-Semitism in any of its forms  
matters—and not just to Jews.**

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Anti-Semitism in any of its forms matters—and not just to Jews. History has repeatedly shown that anti-Semitism is the miner's canary for a society's health. It always starts with the Jews, but never ends there. And it is always dangerous to democracy, human rights, and freedom.

## Contact Information

For further information, please contact your local chapter of the American Jewish Committee or our national office.

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**WHY  
CAMPUS  
ANTI-ISRAEL  
ACTIVITY  
FLUNKS  
BIGOTRY  
101**

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**Kenneth S. Stern**

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THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE



*Kenneth S. Stern is the American Jewish Committee's expert on anti-Semitism and bigotry. Mr. Stern is the author of three books on human rights: A Force Upon the Plain: The American Militia Movement and the Politics of Hate; Holocaust Denial; and the award-winning Loud Hawk: The United States vs. The American Indian Movement. A frequent guest on television news shows, Mr. Stern has argued before the United States Supreme Court, testified before Congress, and was an invited presenter at the White House Conference on Hate Crimes.*

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My favorite graffito was carved—not just penned—into the green wooden stall wall of a college men’s room. It said, “If I didn’t believe it with my own mind, I never would have seen it.”

While this graffito appeared in the 1970s and may have been a comment on the drug culture, it remains a great definition of dogmatism. People may believe things so strongly that they twist what they think they see like a pretzel to conform to and confirm their a priori beliefs.

Bigotry that is ideologically inspired—which is bigotry at its most dangerous—always works by this rule. Beliefs define what is seen and what is not seen, and anything that cannot be distorted to support the set-in-stone premise is ignored or explained away. White supremacists, for example, can see only what whites have contributed to the building of America. Holocaust deniers, of course, will try to explain away gas chambers as air raid shelters or morgues, and don’t consider the implications of their distortions: If they are correct, then the thousands of tenured professors who teach about the Holocaust and World War II, whether in the U.S., Britain, Germany, Israel, or elsewhere, are all incompetent, part of a grand conspiracy, or both.

This blinding bigotry is most distressing and perilous when practiced by otherwise intelligent and educated people. Many would

like to believe that education is a sufficient antidote to bigotry, but the facts demonstrate otherwise. There have always been too many very well-educated bigots. Just ask the Southern blacks who were victimized, not only by the lynchings of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1950s and 1960s, but also by the powerful local white “citizens councils” that spoke about “states’ rights” and whose members included many well-educated community leaders.

Today many educated bigots are active on American campuses. Some are promoting anti-Semitism in the guise of criticism of Israel.

Israel, of course, should not be immune from criticism, any more than any other country is. But too many complaints about Israel are unmistakably driven by anti-Semitism. The current divestiture and “boycott” movements are a case in point.

## **Bigotry 101**

Consider “Bigotry-finder rule 101”: Take a situation, change the race, religion, sexual orientation, or other aspect of the players’ identities, and see if the same results apply.

I cited this test repeatedly in the aftermath of the Oklahoma City bombing, when white supremacists were the engine of the militia movement, but Congress refused to hold any serious investigation into the problem. I argued that if this same movement, with the same means and plans for acts of domestic terror, were being driven by thousands of black supremacists, members of Congress would have left skid marks racing to the podium to demand full-scale hearings. Congressional failure to do so was evidence of a double standard

that had less to do with the nature of the threat than with the color of skin.

Similarly, the attacks on Israel on campus today reflect a double standard that can only be explained by bigotry, by the fact that Jews are in this “scenario.”

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**Listen to the criticism of any other country: It is a political party, a program, a policy, or a person that is criticized, never the legitimacy of a society. Except for Israel.**

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Listen to the criticism of any other country: It is always a political party, a program, a policy, or a person that is criticized, never the legitimacy of a society. Except for Israel.

Even if a person is a revolutionary Marxist who sees both Israel and the United States as “settler colonialist imperialist” powers, how is it that he or she believes that the U.S. should be reorganized by revolution, but the Jewish state should disappear?

And even if a person believes that Israel’s presence in the West Bank and Gaza is illegitimate, immoral and illegal, why is it that Israel is lambasted in sign after sign for the “occupation,” when there were no similar signs just decades ago when Jordan and Egypt were in control of these same areas for nearly 20 years? And why are there no signs today lambasting Syria, which occupies Arab land in Lebanon, right next door?

The answer: Bigotry-finder rule 101. Take Jews out of this picture, and other rules apply.

Or consider another example: Some progressives compare Palestinians to American Indians and Israelis to the whites who colonized America, leaving Indians in a state of poverty and despair. Leave aside for a moment the problems with this analogy, or that from my reading of history, it is the Israelis who are closer to the Indians; they are trying to regain a bit of sovereignty over a portion of their historic homeland to which they and their culture and religion have links of thousands of years, despite being surrounded and greatly outnumbered by hostile “others.” Even assuming for the sake of argument that the Palestinian-Indian analogy is correct, who on campus is urging that universities divest from American companies until the U.S. ceases its illegal occupation of Indian lands that were not only the property of Indian nations before whites arrived, but were also “promised” to Indians by hundreds of treaties, nearly all of which have been broken over the last two hundred plus years by the U.S. government?

Take Jews out of the picture, and a different standard applies.

### **Bigotry 201: Part I: Distortion of History to Promote Hatred**

A large part of the current anti-Israel campaign is based on historical distortion. This is the stock-in-trade of Holocaust deniers, sophisticated white supremacists, and some black supremacists, too. They disfigure history by omitting a fact here, a fact there, then turning the “story” on its head, knowing that most people are ill-prepared to find where the error is.

It is one thing to have different interpretations of historical events—one would hardly expect a Palestinian child in Gaza and a Jewish child in Tel Aviv to view the history of the Middle East from the same vantage point. But basic facts are just that.

Anti-Israel activists on campus are increasingly trying to paint Israel as the functional equivalent of apartheid-era South Africa. Israel, it is claimed, is a country where only Jews have rights, where those in control are whites who came to “colonize” indigenous people who were viewed as inferior, just as in South Africa.

But to make this case requires historical distortion that wipes out the connection between Jews and the land of Israel even more completely than the most fervent white supremacist would want to vaporize the rightful place of people of color in America. Indeed, to paint this picture requires not only denying the history of the Jewish people, but also distorting the Jewish religion.

Whereas whites had no history in South Africa before they came to colonize it, Jews—who come in all races (including blacks from Ethiopia)—have had a deep and long connection with the land of Israel.

Judaism is an inextricably land-linked religion, and that land is Eretz Yisrael, the land of Israel. It was in Israel that the stories of the Jewish patriarchs and matriarchs of the Hebrew Bible—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Leah and Rachel—took place. The first and second Temples—the centers of spiritual and political Jewish life centuries ago—stood there, in Jerusalem. The Exodus from slavery in Egypt—retold every year during the

Passover Seder—was a return to Israel.

Jewish liturgy is filled with references to the land where Judaism was born. The Hebrew Bible refers to Jerusalem—the capital of ancient (and modern) Israel—750 times. It also mentions “a small mount just outside” of the Old City 180 times. That mount is Mount Zion.

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**Jews lived in Israel in ancient times,  
and continued to live there  
throughout the ages.**

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Jews lived in Israel in ancient times, and continued to live there throughout the ages. Jewish sovereignty was lost to invading armies—the Babylonians and later the Romans—but to the Jews dispersed around the world, the land remained the focus. When Jews began their Babylonian exile, Psalm 137 expressed the centrality of their homeland to their identity: “If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.” That psalm begins: “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yes, we wept, when we remembered Zion.”

How much of this history and liturgy is ever mentioned by those who want to describe Israel as a “settler-colonialist” state? Their story usually begins with the persecution of European Jews in the nineteenth century and their return to their homeland in the twentieth century. While it is hard to imagine that anyone of goodwill would question the need for a state where Jews can provide for their own

self-defense, especially after the Holocaust, the legitimacy of the State of Israel is not based on what the Nazis did. Rather, it is based on the historic connection and continual presence of Jews in the land of Israel.

This is not to say that there is not an Arab history in the region too. There is, of course. Some might point out that there was never an Arab government over "Palestine," only a Jewish one before the Roman, Turkish, and English occupations. Some might point to the Palestinian national identity as a recently minted reaction to the organized presence of Jews. (Beforehand there had been instead a pan-Arab identity; in fact, before 1948 the word "Palestinian" connoted not an Arab, but a Jew living in the land of Israel.) Regardless, there is a Palestinian national identity now that requires respect for its right to self-determination. But just as Palestinians have the right to self-determination, so do Jews. Those who assert that Israel doesn't have a right to exist—anti-Zionists—are denying to Jews alone the rights claimed and respected by every other national group on the globe.

### **Bigotry 201: Part II: Twisting Current History**

The attempt to paint Israel as a "colonial settler state" like apartheid-era South Africa also distorts contemporary history. Too many people think the story is: There was an Arab state called Palestine, European Jews came and occupied their land, and they won't give it back.

Aside from the fact that there was never an Arab state called Palestine, the Jews who lived in the land, or who came to it in the last cen-



ture, never desired to rule over another people. The Balfour Declaration of 1917 promised Jews a national homeland in their historic land in Palestine, while insuring the rights of non-Jews in the region. Five years later 80 percent of the land mass of British Mandatory Palestine was removed, and the Arab country of Transjordan (now Jordan) was created.

In 1947 the United Nations divided the remaining 20 percent of the British Mandate into two states: one Jewish, one Arab. The Jews accepted the UN's vote. The Arabs declared war, proclaiming they would "drive the Jews into the sea."

The Arab armies tried, but failed, against the Jews, many of whom had just come out of the DP (displaced person) camps of World War II. Israel survived that war and others thrust upon it by its Arab neighbors.

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**Where were the calls during these 19 years ... for an end to "occupation" or the creation of an independent Palestinian state?**

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Between 1948 and 1967 Jordan controlled the West Bank, and Egypt ran Gaza. The Arab refugees from the 1948 war roughly equaled the number of Jews from Arab lands who were forced to flee their historic homes. While Israel absorbed these Jews from the Middle East and North Africa (who, now with their descendants, make up nearly half of Israel's Jewish population), the Arab countries kept generation after generation of Arabs as refugees,

many in camps.

Where were the calls during these 19 years—either from inside or outside these lands—for an end to “occupation” or the creation of an independent Palestinian state? As long as Arabs ruled and oppressed other Arabs, it seems, there was no serious complaint (just as today there is near silence about the Syrian occupation of Lebanon).

The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was created in 1964. That was three years *before* the 1967 war, when the Arab countries would promise yet again to destroy Israel, but Israel would not only survive but also capture the West Bank from Jordan, Gaza from Egypt, and the Golan Heights from Syria. But in 1964 the PLO’s covenant, rather than focusing on how to “liberate” the West Bank and Gaza from its Arab brothers, instead called for the total destruction of Israel (within its pre-1967 borders) as an occupier of Arab lands.

Regardless of whether one views Israel’s control of the West Bank and Gaza since the 1967 war as legitimate, the fact is that during the Camp David negotiations in the summer of 2000 the Israeli government was willing to agree to a Palestinian state in more than 95 percent of the West Bank and Gaza (including parts of Jerusalem). And rather than offer a counterproposal, the Palestinian leadership walked away from the table and chose to turn the conflict from a territorial one into an existential one. Territory can be divided; but defining your “enemy” as a devil, which is what is regularly preached to the Palestinians, means there can be no compromise, only violence.

Of course, this fact is inconvenient to those who want to paint Israel as apartheid-era South Africa. South Africa didn't want to end its control over the black majority. Israel, on the other hand, wants the Palestinians to be able to set up the infrastructure for their own democratic government.

Further, which state—Israel or the proposed Palestinian state—more resembles the bone-chilling bigotry of apartheid? While (as Israeli human rights organizations have documented and the Israeli Supreme Court has addressed) there are indeed instances of discrimination against Arabs in Israeli society, Arabs are citizens of Israel with the right to vote and participate in its democracy, and are even elected to the Knesset (Israel's parliament). Israel is one of the few countries in the world where Arabs are allowed to vote, and one of the fewer still where Arab women have this right. Where is the Palestinian willingness to extend similar political rights and protections to Jews who live in settlements that will one day be part of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza (in areas such as Hebron and Shechem [Nablus] where Jews have lived throughout history until they were forced out—many in 1948—only to return after 1967)?

### **Bigotry 201: Part III: Distortion of Language to Promote Bigotry**

How many times have you heard “I’m not anti-Semitic, I’m just anti-Zionist?” But to be anti-Zionist is, by definition, to be anti-Semitic.<sup>1</sup>

Zionism is nothing more than a belief that

Israel has the right to exist as a homeland for Jews. It says nothing about the policies or programs of the state, merely that it has a right to exist. There are left-wing Zionists and right-wing Zionists—and many in between. Some Zionists are harsh critics of Israeli policies; others are supportive. But the term “Zionist” connotes nothing more than the right of Israel to exist; anti-Zionist means that Israel, regardless of its leaders, policies, or other aspects of how its society is run, has no right to exist.

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**To say that Jews alone don't have a right to self-determination in a part of their historic homeland is clearly anti-Semitic.**

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To say that Jews alone don't have a right to self-determination in a part of their historic homeland is clearly anti-Semitic, despite the effort to hide the bigotry behind a supposed political term.

Likewise, the nonsensical attempt to say that Arabs can't be anti-Semitic, no matter what they say, because they, like Jews, are “Semites.” (The word, of course, has always been used to mean prejudice against Jews since it was coined by Wilhelm Marr in Germany in 1873; the term “Semitic” applies to languages, not people. When was the last time you heard an Arab group complain about “anti-Semitism” when Arabs were discriminated against?)

It is a sign of bigotry when people try to use code words to “explain” away their defamation of a group. Whites opposed to the civil rights

movement knew it was “politically incorrect” to say they were anti-black, so they used code words such as “anti-busing.” Right-wing anti-Semites who want to maintain the fiction that they are not bigoted use code words such as “international bankers” to defame Jews. The word “anti-Zionist” is of the same mold in the lexicon of the left, and it should fool no one. Anti-Zionism is anti-Semitism.

Further evidence of this anti-Semitism is the penchant among self-proclaimed anti-Zionists to take language associated with the Holocaust and twist it around to label Israelis as Nazis and Israeli leaders as Hitler. No unbiased person could use terminology associated with the mass murder of nearly six million Jews and countless others (including Communists, gays, anti-Nazis, Roma, and Jehovah’s Witnesses), many in purposely-built execution chambers, and suggest that the Israelis were engaged in a similar enterprise. And even if some anti-Zionists refuse to recognize either the history or the complexities of the conflict, why do they use the “Nazi” nomenclature to complain only about Israel? Why not use it to describe Rwanda, for example?

The answer is simple: Jews are in the equation, so a different standard applies. Likewise no one on the left would have the temerity to claim that the worst excesses of corporate America are comparable to the horrors of the Middle Passage. Such a comparison would be understood to be both gross overstatement and an immoral diminishing of the terror of genocide—especially so if a targeted corporation were run by an African American. So why the almost gleeful comparison of Israelis to Nazis? Don’t know? See Bigotry 101.

### **Bigotry 301: Part I: Abandonment of Basic Principles in Order to Vilify an “Enemy”**

Forget about Israel for a moment. Look at the forces that “progressive” anti-Israel groups are supporting, if not affirmatively, at least by their silence in the face of suicide bombings and other acts of terror: the Palestinian Authority, which is universally understood to be thoroughly corrupt, Islamic Jihad, Hamas, Hizballah.

None of these groups can be said to have a “progressive” agenda. Some are functionally fascist. Are they models of, say, women’s rights? Gay rights? Respect for diversity? Models of concern for workers’ rights?

Hamas, Hizballah, and Islamic Jihad, in particular, have visions of society that are not that much different than that of the Taliban.

The left has prided itself as a champion of the rights of racial, religious, ethnic, and sexual minorities. But it is willing to support groups that overtly oppress people in exactly these ways because they oppose (and commit acts of violence against) an organized Jewish presence on one-sixth of one percent of the land in the “Arab world.”

It takes a great deal of prejudice to overlook basic principles in order to provide enthusiastic support for groups whose main “asset” is hatred of an “enemy.” The left’s abandonment of its principles in its reflexive support for these fascistic anti-Israel terror groups is very troubling. It says that hatred of Israel is stronger than the left’s core human values.

Go back to Bigotry 101. Assume the head

of one state—India or Pakistan, for example—offered to pay \$25,000 to the families of people in the other country who would go into a crowded area and blow themselves up, taking with them as many of the “other’s” civilians as they could. Progressive folk would be outraged, and would call this barbaric and against basic principles of how governments should behave. Further, if the state offering this functional “bounty” for the murder of civilians was at the same time pleading poverty, at least some eyebrows would be raised.

But Iraq’s Saddam Hussein has offered such a bounty on Jews in Israel. There has not been a peep of protest from the left, let alone questioning how a country that complains of starvation and disease because of international sanctions for its failure to entertain weapons inspectors has enough money to pay huge bonuses for suicide bombings (separate budget lines, perhaps?).

Or recall the left’s great tradition of protecting children from exploitation, from its focus on American child labor in sweat shops 100 years ago to current efforts to target these same problems in an era of globalization. How can it be that the left speaks out loudly and eloquently if a child is forced to work long hours for low pay anywhere in the world, but remains silent (or even applauds) when a Palestinian child is dressed up as, and told to aspire to be, a suicide bomber who will one day kill him or herself along with Jewish men, women, and children?

## **Bigotry 301: Part II: Failure of Empathy and Imagination**

One asserted distinction between progressives and some conservatives is the capacity of the former to see others not of the same economic status or skin color or religion, and imagine themselves in their shoes: What would it be like if I were a \_\_\_\_\_?

Progressives—especially on campus—have championed the causes of exploited workers here and abroad; American Indians, who are depicted in mainstream American culture in racist ways no other group would be (could you imagine a football team called the Washington Blackskins or a baseball team called the New York Jews?) with corresponding stereotypes, demeaning them not only as human beings, but also their history, culture, and religion; the homeless; and scores of other groups who have been victimized in some way.

And it is easy, as it should be, for progressives to empathize with the condition of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza—the inability to travel freely from time to time, the inability to have full control over their own lives, the worsening economic conditions, etc.

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**The capacity to imagine what it is like to be a Palestinian, but not an Israeli, is anti-Semitism.**

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But rather than seeing their condition as a result of many factors, among them the cor-



ruption of the Palestinian Authority and the rejection at Camp David of a settlement that would have resulted in a Palestinian state in over 95 percent of the West Bank and 100 percent of Gaza, 100 percent of the blame is put on the Israelis, all the time.

Worse, progressives clearly have a block (see Bigotry rule 101) against putting themselves in the place of the Israelis. Why can't they imagine what it would be like for Israelis to offer to end their control of the West Bank and Gaza, in return for an end to the conflict, only to see their offer rejected without even a counterproposal, and the launching thereafter of a war of terror against all Israelis?

Why can progressives not empathize with Israelis who see their children blown up in a pizzeria in Jerusalem, and then find the event celebrated in art at a Palestinian exhibit? Why can progressives not understand that Israelis have every right to be disturbed when they are regularly demonized in sermons in mosques in Gaza and the West Bank and on Arab television in terms directly plagiarized from Nazi propaganda?

Why can't progressives take the Israeli experience, put it in an American context, and ask what they think America would do? What would America do if the Canadian government were the functional equivalent of the PA, and tens of thousands of American civilians (to approximate the relative proportion of Israelis) were being blown up by terrorists harbored and helped by the Canadians? I suspect the American response would be harsher than anything the Israelis have done, that such a response would have the overwhelming support of the American people, and that even if

progressives didn't approve of such actions, they would at least understand why those targeted by terrorists had a right to feel concerned.

But apparently when it comes to Jews in Israel, there is no such capacity for empathy and imagination. The Jew, then, becomes a complete "other," unlike the rest of humanity in any way. The capacity to imagine what it is like to be a Palestinian, but not an Israeli, is anti-Semitism.

### **Bigotry 401: Overlooking Anti-Semitism**

Bigotry is at its most blinding when a person can see hatred if it comes from someone of a different political persuasion, but can't see the same bigotry coming from within.

The drive to boycott and divest from companies doing business with Israel is being propelled not just by distortions of history, but by turning a blind eye to (or in fact promoting) anti-Semitism.

Progressive groups have been very good at pointing out anti-Semitism from the far right, for example, when hateful tracts such as the forgery *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* or Hitler's *Mein Kampf* are promoted by neo-Nazis, skinheads and other white supremacists.

Yet the same material is being hawked widely in the Arab media. Medieval European anti-Semitic claims—such as that Jews kill non-Jewish kids to use their blood for making Passover matzah—are printed as front-page truthful stories in many Arab newspapers around the world. And at the World Conference Against Racism in Durban in summer

2001, anti-Semitic tracts, including the *Protocols*, were distributed. An Arab lawyers group even printed and prominently displayed enlargements of anti-Semitic cartoons. Anti-Semitic posters and banners were ubiquitous.

But left groups, which would have blasted these same items from hard-right groups, were conspicuously silent. It was almost as if there were a belief that *Mein Kampf* printed in its original German would be anti-Semitic, but an Arab edition not.

A few days after the Durban conference ended, the attacks of September 11 occurred. And again events were twisted in an anti-Semitic way.

The most egregious fabrications were the charges in many Arab and Islamic countries that Jews were behind the attacks. Polls showed that 48 percent of Pakistanis, for example, believed in such a Jewish conspiracy.

Where were the voices on the left and on the campus pointing to this clear case of bigotry? If mainstream voices in many countries blamed American blacks or gays for the purposeful spreading of AIDS worldwide, you'd expect progressives to expose and protest this hatred. But not when the victims are Jews, apparently.

Could this be because many voices on campus also blame Israel and the Jews for 9/11 (either alone, or in conjunction with "American policies")? Not as secret controllers of the planes or plotters of the crimes, but as morally responsible because of Israeli relations with the Palestinians. Those who make that charge again engage in factual distortion.

The plot to attack the World Trade Center was hatched before the collapse of the peace

process, when it looked as if a negotiated settlement between the Israelis and the Palestinians, supported by the United States, was a good bet. The prospect of peace, meaning that Arabs would accept non-Arabs as permanent sovereign neighbors in the Middle East, is anathema to Islamicists. So, to the extent that Israel may have entered into the mindset of the terrorists, any progress toward a peace settlement between the Palestinians and the Israelis would have *angered* the terrorists, not defused them, because peace would mean that Israel would continue to exist. To blame Israel for the terrorism of 9/11 would be like blaming blacks for the terrorism of the Ku Klux Klan, since in both cases their mere existence was an impetus for the terrorists. But why do campus activists and others on the left who would clearly see the bigotry in the example of blacks in the South not see it when it comes to Jews in Israel?

Terrorism, after all, is in essence a hate crime writ large. Since when is it permissible for the left to “blame the victim” for a hate crime? A woman, no matter how scantily dressed, does not invite rape. Some straight people are made uncomfortable by gays, but would any progressive person tolerate the suggestion that Matthew Shepard was in some way responsible for his own horrid murder? Or that “black crime” might have angered the executioners of James Byrd?

9/11 was a mass murder. There is never any excuse for mass murder, period. But the willingness to bring Jews, Israel, and by extension the American support for Israel into an “explanation” is not only perverse, but bigoted. It is to be expected that a hard-right racist such as

David Duke would make such a claim; but following 9/11, some student groups, including a prominent one at NYU, promoted and distributed Duke's "analysis" as correct.

### **What's Necessary for a Passing Grade**

Criticism of Israeli policies is fine if it is made in the same manner as one would criticize the policies of any other country (including Arab countries and the U.S.), and the "remedies" called for are of the same caliber. (In other words, "divestiture" is by definition a tool of bigotry unless it is employed against other countries whose policies are clearly more problematic—by any measure—than Israel's.)

Criticism of Israeli policies is fine if it is proportional and not reflective of a double standard. For example, it would strike educated people as nonsense or worse if a police department spent all its time chasing graffiti "artists" and none of its time going after robbers, rapists, and murderers. Likewise, even if one believes that Israel's human rights record is far from perfect, it is clearly much better than that of the Sudanese, who enslave non-Muslim blacks in the south of the country; the Saudis, who refuse women even the most basic human rights; the Iranians, who suppress the Bahai; the Egyptians, who oppress gays; the Chinese, who repress the Tibetans, etc.

Criticism of Israeli policies is fine if it is not accompanied by a marked increase in anti-Semitic activity. Since the beginning of the movement for divestiture, Jews have been called "kike"; a rock was thrown at a student's window that sported an Israeli flag; a Hillel

building's glass door was shattered by a cement block; swastikas were drawn on a sukkah; death threats were shouted at a rally of Jewish students; taunts such as "Hitler didn't finish the job" were yelled; graffiti saying "God Hates Jews" and "Burn the Torah" were painted. If anti-civil rights protestors in the 1960s claimed that their cause wasn't racist, but similar anti-black actions were associated with their movement, progressives wouldn't have been fooled. They mustn't be fooled now.

Go back to Bigotry 101. Jewish students on some campuses are being harassed when they gather collectively, even for events that have nothing to do with the Middle East, such as celebrations of Jewish holidays or commemorations of the Holocaust. If Muslim students had to face protests when they came together to celebrate Islamic holidays, or black students suffered counterdemonstrations on Martin Luther King Day, the left would be quick to see and expose that bigotry.

If progressives want to help the people of the Middle East, they must reject the simplistic lens of bigotry that distorts complex events into all good on one side and all evil on the other. They should rather attempt to find opportunities to help both sides move forward with a progressive agenda. Rather than calling for the boycott of Israeli academics, as some have, American academics should be finding ways to bring their Palestinian and Israeli colleagues together on new, empowering, and imaginative collaborative projects.

Many progressives seem so ensconced in anti-Israel venom that they fail to remember a basic truth they knew well half a century ago: that anti-Semitism is not only the miner's

canary (i.e., the early-warning system) of danger to democracy, but also is a highly combustible fuel that propels much of the world's ideological engines of racism and xenophobia, engines that when fully stoked are not only very dangerous, but also difficult to control.

Finally, history is full of examples of times the left in general, and campus progressives in particular, have played an important role in making the world a better, fairer, and more just place. But they cannot do so today if they fail first to confront and reject the anti-Semitism within. This is a defining test for the left. If it is to be a constructive force and promote the conditions for a stable and just peace in the Middle East, it must build such a program on a foundation that fully rejects the caustic bigotry of anti-Zionism. Unfortunately, so far, it is failing this test miserably.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>There are two exceptions to the rule of anti-Zionism, by definition, being anti-Semitism. 1) Before World War II and the rebirth of Israel in 1948, there was a debate, not about the right but rather about the wisdom of creating a modern Jewish state, since some worried about an increase of anti-Semitism in other nations where Jews had historically been seen as other than "full" citizens and others questioned the viability of such a state. 2) Some ultra-Orthodox Jews believe that Jews should only join their brothers and sisters in Israel when the Messiah comes.