

Activating Archives, Libraries, and Museums in the Fight Against Antisemitism

**Archives
Libraries
Museums**

A Publication of the Center for
Jewish History and jMUSE

Commissioned and made possible
by the **David Berg Foundation**
and **Leon Levy Foundation**,
with additional support from
the **Margaret and Daniel**
Loeb Foundation

Edited by **Michael S. Glickman**
and **Miriam R. Haier**

CENTER FOR JEWISH HISTORY

jMUSE

**Activating
Archives,
Libraries, and
Museums in the
Fight Against
Antisemitism**

Published by the Center for Jewish History

The Center for Jewish History is home to five distinguished partner organizations—American Jewish Historical Society, American Sephardi Federation, Leo Baeck Institute, Yeshiva University Museum, and YIVO Institute for Jewish Research—and is the largest and most comprehensive archive of the modern Jewish experience outside of Israel. Center for Jewish History and partner collections span five thousand years, with tens of millions of archival documents (in dozens of languages and alphabet systems), more than 500,000 volumes, as well as thousands of artworks, textiles, ritual objects, recordings, films, and photographs. The Center's experts are leaders in unlocking archival material for a wide audience through the latest practices in digitization, library science, and public education. As one of the world's foremost research institutions, the Center offers academic fellowships, symposia, conferences, and lectures as well as a wide array of cultural, educational, and genealogy programs for the public.

Peter Baldwin

Chair, Board of Directors

Bernard J. Michael

President & CEO

Confronting Antisemitism Beyond the Symposium

**Advancing the Work of Confronting
Antisemitism** **10**

**Confronting Antisemitism:
The Role of Archives, Libraries,
and Museums** **14**
Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett

What We Are Up Against **32**
Featuring Simon Schama

**Reflections on “Strategies for Confronting
Antisemitism”** **36**
Lila Corwin Berman

Fostering Empathy and Awareness **44**
Featuring Ronald Leopold, Louise Mirrer,
Paul Salmons, Dariusz Stola, and
Oren Weinberg in Conversation

**How To (Not) Talk to an Antisemite:
On the Failure of Jewish Apologetics** **62**
Derek Jonathan Penslar

Is It Funny for the Jews? **70**
Jason Zinoman

**The Beginning of the Answer:
Storytelling to Reveal Antisemitism** **82**
Dara Horn

Responses to Antisemitism

Archives, Libraries, and Museums Take Action

Preserving History, Providing Information, Supporting Democracy	90
Featuring Hon. Carla Hayden and Hon. David S. Ferriero in Conversation	
Editing Wikipedia	94
Center for Jewish History	
A Call to Action from the Council of American Jewish Museums	98
Seeing Antisemitism as a Local Issue	100
J. Adam Clemons	
Holocaust Museums Take Action	104
Dallas Holocaust and Human Rights Museum, Holocaust Museum LA, Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center, and the National Holocaust Centre & Museum (UK)	
Observations and Opportunities: Considering the Work of Holocaust Museums	126
Michael S. Glickman	
Expanding Our Views of Jewish History and Experience	130
Featuring Rachel Miller, Simona Di Nepi, and Lyudmila Sholokhova in Conversation	
Acknowledgments	142

Confronting Antisemitism Beyond the Symposium

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett

Simon Schama

Lila Corwin Berman

Ronald Leopold

Louise Mirrer

Paul Salmons

Dariusz Stola

Oren Weinberg

Advancing the Work of Confronting Antisemitism

On Sunday, October 17, 2021, the Center for Jewish History and jMUSE presented the international symposium ***Confronting Antisemitism: Activating Archives, Libraries, and Museums.*** This unprecedented, virtual gathering had at its core a crucial question: As trusted public institutions with diverse audiences, how can archives, libraries, museums, and cultural institutions use their unique strengths to combat antisemitism and create lasting change?

Across a range of curated discussions, more than 25 experts from universities, archives, libraries, and museums shared their insights—and their persistent questions—with a global public audience. The Center’s five in-house partners participated in a pre-symposium workshop for students, scholars, and practitioners. Symposium sessions were recorded and made freely available online, facilitating ongoing engagement and response. The symposium was made possible by the generous support of the David Berg Foundation and Leon Levy Foundation. It was produced by jMUSE.

In the immediate aftermath of the *Confronting Antisemitism* symposium, the Center for Jewish History and jMUSE committed to continuing the important and challenging conversations that the symposium started.

Rather than merely documenting the discussions that have already taken place, the following pages seek to advance their urgently relevant themes. This digital publication offers readers the opportunity to consider expert contributions and responses to the symposium; hear from additional thinkers and explore different perspectives; and reflect on opportunities for further research, thought, collaboration, and action.

Confronting Antisemitism Impact

Symposium, October 17, 2021

The Confronting Antisemitism symposium—available online at cjh.org/antisemitism and confrontingantisemitism.info—welcomed audience members from

25 countries

over the course of its five-hour presentation.

By April 2022, the symposium had been viewed more than

74,000 times.

Confronting Antisemitism brought together

26 speakers from **seven countries.**



Speakers joined from:

Amsterdam
Ann Arbor
Cambridge
Chicago
Dallas
East Lansing

Jerusalem
Johannesburg
London
Los Angeles
Madison
New York

Paris
Princeton
Warsaw
Washington, D.C.
West Point

**Confronting Antisemitism:
The Role of
Archives,
Libraries, and
Museums**

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett

It has been said that archives, libraries, and museums are among the most trusted institutions in a democratic society. This imposes a formidable responsibility upon them. They must not only hold in trust all that society values, but also be trusted. What can and what should our most trusted institutions do to combat antisemitism? That was the subject of *Confronting Antisemitism: Activating Archives, Libraries, and Museums*, an online conference on 17 October 2021, convened by the Center for Jewish History and jMUSE. These three types of institutions, to which universities were added, play different but complementary roles. This conference showed what they can learn from each other and just how effective their collaboration can be. The participants diagnosed the problem as it presents itself today and identified a broad range of strategies for addressing this scourge.

Diagnosing the problem

As in the past and with each new generation, there continue to be critical gaps in Holocaust awareness, lack of knowledge about genocide, coupled with misinformation, distortion, and denial. As historian Simon Schama noted, “There seems to be a parallel resurgence in antisemitism, the more we try and

educate people.” Many reasons were offered for this, first and foremost “the collapse of truth.” Dariusz Stola, a Polish historian, attributed this collapse to a crisis in the authority of expert knowledge, while historian Timothy Snyder pointed to the rise

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett
is Professor Emerita at New York
University and Ronald S. Lauder
Chief Curator of the Core Exhibition
at POLIN Museum of the History of
Polish Jews in Warsaw.

A first step is to recognize that “antisemitism is everyone’s problem.” First, no one is safe until everyone is safe. To confront antisemitism is to defend human rights and oppose all forms of hate and racism. This is a Jewish story, but not only.

of conspiratorial thinking, citing antisemitism as a case in point. Science skepticism underpins today’s anti-vaccination movement, and the conspiracy theories of QAnon played a role in the January 6th attack on the Capitol. As historian and curator Paul Salmons noted, these fantasies and deeply irrational beliefs are remarkably resistant to reasoned argument and hard evidence. Social media accelerate these tendencies, as algorithms amplify divisive and highly emotional content. This unregulated space becomes fertile ground for algorithmic bias.

Reflecting on this situation, Lawrence S. Bacow, president of Harvard University, defined antisemitism as a “condition” we need to manage, rather than as a “problem” that we can solve. As he explained, “A condition if you ignore it can kill you, but if you manage it long-term, you can live with it.” How, then, to manage antisemitism? A first step is to recognize that “antisemitism is everyone’s problem.” First, no one is safe until everyone is safe. To confront antisemitism is to defend human rights and oppose all forms of hate and racism. This is a Jewish story, but not only. Other groups have also experienced hate. Hate crimes against Asian Americans have been rising exponentially during the pandemic. Second, difficult as it is to accept, we cannot reach everyone. As Paul Salmons

notes, it is pointless to try to change the minds of those with entrenched beliefs. If anything, they are more likely to double down. It would be better to prevent “the spread of antisemitic ideas to others who might be susceptible to them,” especially youth. As historian Dariusz Stola advises, we should listen closely to what youth have to say, what they care about, and demonstrate to them how today’s news relates to events in the past.

While antisemitism is at the heart of the Holocaust, hatred of Jews, whatever its motivation or form, is a broader phenomenon in the past and today.

Defining antisemitism

While antisemitism is at the heart of the Holocaust, hatred of Jews, whatever its motivation or form, is a broader phenomenon in the past and today. Somewhat surprisingly, defining “antisemitism” did not come up during the conference. Simon Schama did refer to “Judeophobia,” a broader term, but without addressing the limitations of any single term for

the diversity of forms of hatred of Jews. The term “antisemitism” first gained purchase in Germany during the early 1880s in the context of protests against legal arrangements thought to give Jews undue influence. The term rapidly spread beyond Germany with the increasing fear that Jewish emancipation and integration would have negative consequences for the wider society. The term quickly expanded to include examples from across Jewish history and was used interchangeably with *antijüdisch*, *Judengegner*, and related words in German and

other languages. One need only compare the definitions of “antisemitism” in the 1911 and 1979 editions of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, as David Engel has noted. Lucien Wolf, author of the entry in the 1911 edition, rejected the idea that antisemitism was rooted in a long history of Jew-hatred and identified it instead with anxieties about Jewish emancipation in the mid-19th

century. By 1979, the *Encyclopædia Britannica* had broadened the definition to mean “hostility toward Jews ranging from mild antipathy to a violently expressed hatred” across time and space.

Today, “antisemitism” is defined by the Anti-Defamation League simply as “hostility toward Jews,” and this is the basis for the history of antisemitism from the Middle Ages to the present that is presented at Holocaust museums. So capacious is this definition in the academy and public life that it has come to include anti-Zionism, eliding objections to Israel’s policies with denial of its

right to exist, a topic discussed at the conference. Historians ask: What, if anything, connects the diversity of such hateful attitudes and hostility across the millennia, and can a direct line really be drawn from the anti-Judaism of the medieval period to the racial antisemitism of the Holocaust?

Historians ask: What, if anything, connects the diversity of such hateful attitudes and hostility across the millennia, and can a direct line really be drawn from the anti-Judaism of the medieval period to the racial antisemitism of the Holocaust?

Although the psychological and structural aspects of antisemitism work hand in hand, they are different and need to be confronted differently.

This historiographic exercise, while academic, is useful for understanding two approaches—one psychological and the other structural or systemic—to “explaining” and confronting antisemitism, as discussed by Timothy Snyder. The notion of “antisemitism” that arose in the 1890s in Germany in the legal context of Jewish emancipation and integration

is a case of structural antisemitism, as was the systematic dismantling by the Germans of rights that Jews had been granted as full citizens. For Snyder, it is important to communicate not only the psychological aspect of hate, but also its systemic nature. Although the psychological and structural aspects of antisemitism work hand in hand, they are different and need to be confronted differently. As Snyder remarked, in the United States today, the systemic nature of discrimination is recognized in relation to the Holocaust but not in relation to American racism, with serious consequences for addressing racial injustice. Protests against Critical Race Theory, which is poorly understood and cynically exploited, offer clear evidence of the failure to recognize the systemic nature of racism, as do efforts to remove books that deal with difficult subjects from curricula and school libraries.

Developing 21st-century competencies

Raising awareness, increasing knowledge, and counteracting misinformation about the Holocaust are fundamental to

confronting the nature and scourge of antisemitism. However, although reliable information is necessary, it is not sufficient. More is needed to prepare the public to recognize and address antisemitism and other forms of hate. As historian Jeffrey Veidlinger notes, his students simply do not recognize antisemitism when they see it. Recognizing it is the precondition for confronting it.

Archives, libraries, museums, and universities, with their unique resources, take different if related approaches to this challenge. They are ideally positioned not only to educate about antisemitism and the Holocaust, but also to strengthen 21st-century competencies: critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and media literacy, among others. These are the competencies that will equip the public to distinguish truth from falsehood, feel empathy, engage in

These are the competencies
that will equip the public to
distinguish truth from falsehood,
feel empathy, engage in
informed civil debate, become
responsible citizens,
and stand up to hate.

informed civil debate, become responsible citizens, and stand up to hate.

Lawrence S. Bacow, president of Harvard, and Christopher L. Eisgruber, president of Princeton, stressed the importance of a liberal education, which encourages critical thinking, an antidote to the irrational skepticism and gullibility that fuel conspiracy theories. They stressed the importance of open debate and the value of convening difficult conversations that foster mutual understanding and mitigate polarization. They also described

efforts to identify and address racist and antisemitic aspects of the history and current operation of their own institutions.

For Dariusz Stola, former director of POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw, museums are a safe place to meet and talk freely, especially in a country that was the epicenter of the genocide and where confronting antisemitism before, during, and after the Second World War is an ongoing process. As Stola has said on another occasion, we are not responsible for what people who came before us did, but we are responsible for what we do with that knowledge. This insight is critical for understanding the different ways the Holocaust and antisemitism are addressed in Germany and Poland, the United Kingdom and the United States, and South Africa.

Increasingly, concern with the Holocaust is broadened to encompass other genocides and human rights more generally. For Tali Nates, founder and director of the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre, the Holocaust is an entry point in a country where perpetrators are still living side by side with victims, and where others were more hated than Jews. For Susan L. Abrams, CEO of the Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center, education is the best antidote to bigotry, but it is not enough. Committed to building the moral resolve to stand up to hate, she and others have prepared toolkits, convened courageous conversation workshops, and brought forward the story of upstanders. David Frey, director of the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies at the United States Military Academy at West Point, partners with museums and archives in developing courses that address leadership responsibility, officer ethics, and atrocity prevention. “Ordinary Soldiers,” a case study

Although a museum
visit might last but two
hours, its impact can
last indefinitely.

— Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett

One can only hope that there is more to Jewish self-understanding than a response to antisemitism and that a deeper connection to Jewish history and culture might follow.

of decisions taken by German army officers in Byelorussia in 1941 who were ordered to kill Jews, is now part of the reserve officer training course nationwide.

How they lived, how they died

Will the world know more about how Jews died than how they lived? To the extent that the world will know anything about Jews, will it be

almost exclusively through the lens of antisemitism and efforts to combat this plague? Historian Peter Baldwin asked if there might be an upside to antisemitism, namely an awakening or strengthening of Jewish consciousness, identity, and solidarity, citing David Baddiel's *Jews Don't Count*, a bestseller in the United Kingdom. One can only hope that there is more to Jewish self-understanding than a response to antisemitism and that a deeper connection to Jewish history and culture might follow.

For Mary Pat Higgins, president and CEO of the Dallas Holocaust and Human Rights Museum, it was important that their new permanent exhibition orient visitors, in brief, to the history of the Jewish people and the long history of antisemitism before they are introduced to the Holocaust, especially because most of their visitors and schoolchildren are not Jewish. Yad Vashem's exhibition, *Shoah*, which opened in Block 27 at Auschwitz in 2013, devotes significant space and time in this small building to Jewish life before the war. A 20-minute immersive multimedia installation, without narration, is low on

We might take a page from historian Magda Teter, who makes Jews an integral part of her European history courses at Fordham University. Her approach has the potential to neutralize the stereotype of the Jew as “eternal outsider,” an image that continues to fuel fear, envy, and hate.

“information” but high on impact. It does what museums do best: communicate key messages in ways that are informative without being didactic, evoke authentic emotion, create intuitive points of connection, and do so in artful and memorable ways. A key goal is creating empathy, a bulwark against dehumanization.

What is the place of antisemitism and the Holocaust in museums of Jewish history? Is Jewish history to be defined by antisemitism and viewed through the lens of the Holocaust as its inevitable telos, a history of Jews as objects on which others project their fantasies and fears, or are Jews agents in their own history

even during the Holocaust? What is the place of the Holocaust in museums of the Second World War and in museums of European history? We might take a page from historian Magda Teter, who makes Jews an integral part of her European history courses at Fordham University. Her approach has the potential to neutralize the stereotype of the Jew as “eternal outsider,” an image that continues to fuel fear, envy, and hate.

When asked why her organization creates exhibitions about antisemitism, including one about antisemitism in Germany leading up to the Second World War, Louise Mirrer, president and CEO of the New-York Historical Society, explains that to

understand why New York has such a strong Jewish population, you need to understand antisemitism in Europe, a story she hopes will resonate with other communities that have fled persecution and found safe haven here.

Lest Holocaust education create the impression that antisemitism is only a European problem, historian Tony Michels has rethought his course in American Jewish history and found ways to integrate the Holocaust and antisemitism. He does so with care in an increasingly politicized and polarized academic environment. Even the public schools are a battleground. The Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum for public schools in California addresses hate crimes, white supremacy, prejudice, and discrimination, but does not give antisemitism its due, makes derogatory statements about Israel, and does not consider Jews one of the “historically marginalized groups.” Jews have been moved into the category of “white privilege,” notwithstanding the history and recent rise of antisemitic incidents, Charlottesville and Pittsburgh among the many others cited by Michael S. Glickman, founder and CEO of jMUSE, in his opening remarks. Even the heroic leader of Ukraine, grandson of a Holocaust survivor, who is lauded worldwide for his effectiveness in rallying his country’s defense against the Russian invasion, is the target of antisemitic attacks in the United States, most recently as the “new Soros.” Last but not least, after many delays, Deborah Lipstadt has finally been appointed Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism.

Noting that so much of what archives contain remains untapped, Timothy Snyder cautioned against over-reliance on new media and underestimation of old media: “We have to make sure that the memory of survivors is guarded and supported by all of the other source material that’s out there.”

The power of evidence

In a world rife with unreliable information, the ability to evaluate sources is an invaluable skill. Historians understand this well. Snyder stressed the importance of archives, noting their vast potential for new insights in our evolving understanding of the Holocaust. Noting that so much of what archives contain remains untapped, he cautioned against over-reliance on new media and underestimation of old media: “We have to make sure that the memory of survivors is guarded and supported by all of the other source material that’s out there.” Complementing the vast video archive of survivor testimony, first and foremost the Visual History

Archive of the USC Shoah Foundation, are the thousands of pages of testimony by victims who wrote in real time, on the spot. They did not survive, but their words did, and it is thanks to them that we gain a unique perspective on events as they were lived in the moment, without knowledge of what lay ahead. Much of that invaluable material still awaits analysis.

Where would we be without archives and libraries, those mighty pyramids of evidence, painstakingly gathered, organized, preserved, and open to scholars and the public? They support

our evolving understanding of antisemitism and the Holocaust, understood as a living history closely connected to authentic primary sources. Evidence is a check on wild speculation and manipulation. As Carla Hayden, the 14th Librarian of Congress, said, “A library is a never-failing spring in the desert” of misinformation and distortion. For David Ferriero, 10th Archivist of the United States, the accuracy of information found in archives is what makes them trusted sources. While social media is a big part of the problem, Ferriero and others also see how social media can be part of the solution as a platform for extending the reach and impact of their collections. Others stressed steps that could be taken to mitigate algorithmic bias and demand greater accountability from social platforms.

Ferriero is painfully aware of how little members of the public understand about how government works and about their responsibilities—and not just their rights—as citizens. Indeed, a major goal in developing 21st-century competencies is the strengthening of civil society. The ravaging effects of the pandemic in the United States can be attributed in part to a failure of responsible citizenship, the deadly consequence of prioritizing “individual freedom” over collective welfare during a devastating public health crisis. To add insult to injury are those who identify the “tyranny” of mask and vaccine requirements with the horrors of the Holocaust. The convergence here of Holocaust awareness and Holocaust ignorance is dangerous. Toby Simpson, Director of the Wiener Holocaust Library in London, described the prescience of Dr. Alfred Wiener, who collected tangible evidence of Nazi ideology as a warning of its danger. Believing that only tangible evidence could open

To add insult to injury are those who identify the “tyranny” of mask and vaccine requirements with the horrors of the Holocaust. The convergence here of Holocaust awareness and Holocaust ignorance is dangerous.

people’s eyes and make them take seriously the existential threat that Hitler posed, he anticipated a future that he tried to avert. Forming a library of evidence in real time was his weapon. Scholars say that the present does not become historical until 50 years have passed. Yet, there are moments so cataclysmic that they are experienced as historical even before they are over. This accounts for the letters, diaries, underground press, and other materials that are not only created, but also collected and preserved

in real time and in anticipation of a future when historians will look back. Recent examples include the collecting efforts at the time of 9/11 and, most recently, during the pandemic. What are archives, libraries, and museums collecting now, in real time, to document antisemitism today?

The best-known historical example of “contemporary collecting” is Oyneg Shabes, code name for the Warsaw ghetto underground archive led by Emanuel Ringelblum. The team secretly collected every shred of evidence—from ration tickets and candy wrappers to diaries and German notices—in order to document what was happening in the ghetto and beyond. The team originally planned to write a history of the Warsaw ghetto after the war, but during the Great Deportation in the summer of 1942 and several weeks before the Warsaw ghetto uprising

Try as they might, the Oyneg Shabes team could not warn the world and avert the catastrophe, but they did ensure that the world would know what transpired.

in April 1943, when they realized they would not survive, they buried the archive. Found in the rubble of the ghetto after the war, the Oyneg Shabes archive, a code name, has been inscribed in UNESCO's Memory of the World Register. Try as they might, the Oyneg Shabes team could not warn the world and avert the catastrophe, but they did ensure that the world would know what

transpired. That treasure, which will continue to yield insights for years to come, was the basis for the Holocaust gallery at POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, where the story is told in the first person from these documents. The original materials are kept at the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, which rotates them in their new permanent exhibition.

A direct encounter with the original documents is a chilling and utterly memorable experience, which makes visiting an archive or a museum exhibition so powerful. So too is the encounter with primary sources in the classroom. For Father Patrick Desbois, the best way to reach his students, who know virtually nothing about the Holocaust, is to confront them with evidence. Primary sources and original objects are also key to the research-centered pedagogy of historians Kirsten Fermaglich and Magda Teter, who also draws on antisemitica and discusses with her students whether such material should be collected and exhibited. For Oren Weinberg, CEO of the National Library of Israel, antisemitism is about antisemites, and is therefore

external to Jewish life. This is why the NLI, while acknowledging the place of antisemitism in Jewish history, does not actively collect antisemitica. In contrast, Teter was inspired by such material to teach a course on the history of the technology of hate, an excellent way to strengthen another core competency: media literacy.

A bridge between the academy and the public

Museums form a bridge between the public, whom they serve, and the trusted institutions on which they depend. However important their collections and the story they tell, it is the museum's relationship with its public that is primary. Almost 30 years ago, Leon Wieseltier described the new United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) as a "pedagogical masterpiece." Many of the reasons hold true for Holocaust museums since then and distinguish museums, as sites of informal learning and soft mastery, from the hard mastery of formal education. As Wieseltier writes, the USHMM juxtaposes "the pain of the survivors with the painstaking research of the historians, the subjectivity of the victims and objectivity of the historical evidence." "Feeling must be annotated by fact." The materiality of objects "wakens you. It reminds you that all this dying was lived." As Jeshajahu Weinberg, the USHMM's first director, and Rina Elieli, his coauthor, explain: "Visitors find themselves positioned between two poles: between the concrete and abstract, the historical and metaphoric, unique and universal...the educational process is taking place between one pole and the other...there should never be an attempt at resolving the tension between the poles."

Although a museum visit might last but two hours, its impact can last indefinitely. When successful, a museum experience is more than a history lesson, as visits to the Anne Frank House, which is largely “empty,” attest. Its power lies in the original site, the story, and the diary—the original manuscript is now on display. As Ronald Leopold, executive director of the Anne Frank House, explains, the goal in presenting this singular story in this vacated house is to invite “visitors to reflect on our humanity, on who we are and who we want to be,” a tall but worthy order for all of our trusted institutions.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett
Manhattan, 2 April 2022

What We Are Up Against

Featuring

Simon Schama

There are different strands in the fabric of antisemitism.

You could step back a bit to actually divide the history of antisemitism into Judeophobia and the modern, ethnically toxic antisemitism that we associate with the rise of the Nazis. What is extraordinary about contemporary antisemitism is that it draws on the sense that the Jews are “bloodsuckers,” for example—something that comes from the blood libel, from horrifying demonization. Each of these themes gets perpetually refreshed.

The virulence of antisemitism over the last two decades has coincided with the rise of Holocaust education. That is the magnitude of what we are up against. It is not simply as though Holocaust education was forgotten about or soft-pedaled. There seems to have been a parallel resurgence in antisemitism—the more we try and educate people.

The issue is, what can archives, libraries, and museums do? Obviously, they can do all kinds of things for the learned or for those who want to learn. But what can they do about, for example, the hideous websites out there on the toxic web?

I often feel that what gets short shrift is the *long* history of antisemitism—possibly going back to the Romans, certainly going back to the Christian Middle Ages. It strikes me that it is possible to convey that the appalling, sustained dehumanization and demonization of a people and a religion goes back hundreds of years—goes back centuries. Twenty or thirty percent of any Holocaust educational program or even museum should be devoted to that longer history.

There are two things conspiring against the success of education confounding ignorance. The first is

Simon Schama is University
Professor of History and Art
History at Columbia University.

I often feel that what
gets short shrift is
the long history of
antisemitism—possibly
going back to the
Romans, certainly going
back to the Christian
Middle Ages.

— Simon Schama

the collapse of truth. We are in the middle of Hannah Arendt's nightmare: Once you are in the world of "truthiness," or the indistinguishability of truth and monstrous falsehood, then you are in trouble. Secondly, we are in a moment in which one of the most successful pieces of political currency is the most ethnically driven, exclusivist, nationalist, populist—the most unthinking and brutal flag-waving.

You put those two things together—the collapse of truth and the success of viscerally mobilized, ethnically-driven nationalism—and we are in a very difficult place. It makes this conversation even more important.

This provocation is adapted from Simon Schama's remarks during Session One of the *Confronting Antisemitism* symposium—"Reflections on the History and Persistence of Antisemitism"—during which he was in conversation with Peter Baldwin (Chair of the Board of Directors, Center for Jewish History; Professor of History, UCLA).

Reflections on “Strategies for Confronting Antisemitism”

Lila Corwin Berman

We academics often feel pressed to explain why our expertise is relevant or even interesting. The present circumstances, in which antisemitism appears to be rising, may demand the expertise of Jewish studies scholars in new ways. Of course, those same circumstances may harshly reflect how inadequate or limited our scholarly and teacherly efforts have been. My colleagues who spoke on the *Confronting Antisemitism* symposium panel “Strategies for Confronting Antisemitism: Informing and Empowering Students, Teachers, and Members of the Public” captured the present possibility, and the peril, of teaching about antisemitism at universities and beyond.

Like my colleagues on the panel, I have spent a growing amount of time focusing on antisemitism through my teaching, research, and service. Since last April, I have co-chaired with Ethan Katz, a modern Jewish historian at Berkeley, the Association for Jewish Studies (AJS) group assigned to study antisemitism and academic freedom on university campuses. We were charged with determining whether the AJS, the largest professional organization of Jewish studies scholars across the world, can shed light on the challenges of responding to rising antisemitic incidents in the context of universities’ commitments to academic freedom.

Lila Corwin Berman is Professor of History at Temple University, where she holds the Murray Friedman Chair of American Jewish History and directs the Feinstein Center for American Jewish History.

Although Ethan and I are both historians, the group members we assembled are diverse in their training, home institutions, and political commitments, and many of us entered the work doubtful that we would be able to find common

Justice is not always achieved
through education, but it rarely
succeeds without it.

ground. My skepticism grew from my observation that the battles over what constitutes antisemitism, especially in the realm of Israel, Zionism, and anti-Zionism, are often as intense as the efforts to combat antisemitism.

However, many of the same insights that emerged from the *Confronting Antisemitism* panel discussion guided our task force's eventual realization that we scholars *do* have something necessary to contribute to discussions about how to identify and combat antisemitism, especially on campus. Just as the symposium panelists all described universities as places of broad exploration and curiosity, our group agreed that universities' educative missions must be the starting point for any discussion of antisemitism. In my own teaching, which regularly includes courses on antisemitism and the history of the Holocaust, I sometimes encounter students whose questions or assertions replicate antisemitic ideas or tropes. In a classroom and on a campus, the first line of defense is education. Justice is not always achieved through education, but it rarely succeeds without it.

Attention to context has also been an animating part of our task force's conversations about antisemitism. Students may crave clear definitions of antisemitism; however, perhaps the most vexing quality of antisemitism is its resistance to being pinned down. In my experience, the project of trying to define antisemitism can be valuable and even essential, but the outcome of the project is woefully insufficient. Too narrow in one context and overly broad in another, a single definition of

antisemitism, like that of any other historical force, is at best a blunt tool. Students and university administrators must learn to pay attention to context and should not expect to find a singular definition of antisemitism that can be applied in a mechanistic fashion.

Finally, much like the symposium panelists, the task force has wrestled with cases in which campus communities may not have the knowledge to recognize an antisemitic trope when they encounter one. On one level, the proper response to this ignorance is, again, education. Like my colleagues on the panel, I introduce my students to primary sources and help them understand the innuendoes and “dog whistles” that are audible only if one knows to identify them. In discussions with university personnel who staff Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion offices, I have found an eagerness to gain that same training and learn how to identify antisemitism in its less obvious but equally pernicious manifestations. Off-campus organizations—and there are a bevy of new ones—often jump to fill this role, eager to sculpt the way that universities see, hear, and punish antisemitism. While education should come from multiple sources, our task force agreed that universities must exercise caution when it comes to pressure campaigns from outside organizations.

As I listened to the panel and reflected on our task force’s work, I found myself stuck on a question about when education might be an obstacle to the process of historical change. Similar to the panelists, I have noticed that certain tropes that I can identify as antisemitic appear entirely innocuous to my students. While my automatic response is to lean into education, to alert them to what rests below the surface, I wonder if in some cases

Each time I decide what to put on a syllabus or which topic to research, I empower certain forms of knowledge and interpretation over others.

a better response would be to let the trope wilt and to step back from the impulse to feed it with meaning. Is it ever the case that our educative efforts resuscitate a trope that was meant to die, as it was barely clinging to the vine?

Here, it seems impossible to dodge the politics of scholarship and teaching. Each time I decide what to

put on a syllabus or which topic to research, I empower certain forms of knowledge and interpretation over others. Before 2016, when I taught American Jewish history, there was only one week—when I covered the 1920s and 1930s—of sustained attention to antisemitism. I certainly knew other texts and historical episodes of American antisemitism that I might have included. But I did not choose to emphasize those historical moments, and they did not contribute significantly to the narrative of the course. These days, however, like some of my colleagues on the panel, I weave the theme across the entire class.

That I have changed my calculation of what counts and what should be put on the syllabus reflects the moment in which we are living and my sense of what it requires. It would be foolhardy not to recognize the political nature of these calculations about what to teach our students. I am curious about what appears to be my field's newfound sense of obligation to teach about antisemitism and whether it might contain some unintended consequences, especially when we insist our students perceive antisemitism where they might not otherwise recognize it.

At the end of its first phase, the AJS task force, itself a product of the politics of our moment, arrived at a relative consensus and drafted a set of recommendations to help universities contend with antisemitism in a thoughtful and practical manner. (I encourage readers to **view the report.**) I have been buoyed by the fact that even during such polarizing and often vicious times, we found common ground. But

I also worry that I sometimes seek too much comfort in the intellectual project, when instead I ought to confront injustices more squarely, humanely, and vulnerably. My best hope is that there remains a way to do both: to think and to feel.

As a member of the Academic Advisory Council of the Center for Jewish History, Lila Corwin Berman was invited to offer this response to the *Confronting Antisemitism* panel “Strategies for Confronting Antisemitism: Informing and Empowering Students, Teachers, and Members of the Public.” The panel discussion featured Kirsten Fermaglich (Professor of History and Jewish Studies, Michigan State University), David Frey (Professor of History & Director, Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, United States Military Academy at West Point), Tony Michels (George L. Mosse Professor of American Jewish History, University of Wisconsin-Madison), and Magda Teter (Professor of History and Shvidler Chair in Judaic Studies, Fordham University). The discussion was moderated by Jeffrey Veidlinger (Joseph Brodsky Collegiate Professor of History and Judaic Studies, University of Michigan, and Chair of the Academic Advisory Council of the Center for Jewish History).

Timothy Snyder

**Richard C. Levin Professor of
History and Fortunoff Archive
Faculty Advisor, Yale University
Permanent Fellow, Institute for
Human Sciences in Vienna**

From the *Confronting Antisemitism*
symposium conversation

“Antisemitism is Everyone’s
Problem: Considering the Dangers
Antisemitism Poses to Free
Societies” (Oct. 17, 2021)

“Archives are there to make
sure that what we see is
fresh and authentic
and convincing. **Our**

**understanding of the Holocaust and
antisemitism is something that must
continue to evolve as we do new research.
If it doesn’t evolve, then it starts to
become implausible and inaccessible.**

Being able to learn more and tell the story
in different ways over time depends upon
maintaining languages, maintaining archives,
maintaining people’s access to archives.”

Fostering Empathy and Awareness

Featuring

Ronald Leopold

Louise Mirrer

Paul Salmons

Dariusz Stola

Oren Weinberg

in Conversation

This excerpt from the *Confronting Antisemitism* symposium panel “Advancing Awareness and Sparking Change: Museums and Libraries in the Fight Against Antisemitism” has been edited for brevity and clarity.

Paul Salmons (Moderator): We are in an increasingly digital world, with fast-moving information, where members of the public create and curate their own narratives and explanations about the past and the present. We are living through what some have called a “post-truth

age,” where many people are uncertain of who to trust and of what to believe. It seems not coincidental that in an age of so-called “fake news,” disinformation, and the spread of conspiracy theories, we have seen such a resurgence of antisemitism. It is in this context that I’d like to ask our panelists about what they see as the roles of museums and libraries in confronting antisemitism.

Ronald Leopold: In normal times, we at the Anne Frank House receive more than one million visitors every year. Not last year and not this year, due to the coronavirus—but normally, one million visitors from across the world, and usually, very young audiences. The average age of our visitors is under 30.

They come here, of course, to learn about Anne’s life and about her fate. They connect to that from their own lives, from their own backgrounds. To a certain extent, that means that this museum experience transcends the specific historic circumstances and is, in a way, an emotional connection to a meaningful experience, which is more than just a history lesson. Sometimes, we say this museum is probably the only museum

This emotional experience leads to something that I feel is an incredible, powerful instrument—when it comes to confronting antisemitism, racism, and discrimination—which is called empathy.

in the world where there's not much else to offer other than empty spaces—an emptiness, of course, that tells of the loss of so many lives here in Amsterdam, and the loss of a father who lost his entire family.

It also serves as a mirror to all of us, in terms of what makes us human. It invites visitors to reflect on our humanity, on who we are and who we want to be. This emotional experience leads to something that

I feel is an incredible, powerful instrument—when it comes to confronting antisemitism, racism, and discrimination—which is called empathy. Sharing that with the millions of people who come to the Anne Frank House is one of the elements that contributes to our common cause of confronting antisemitism.

Paul Salmons: Thank you, Ronald. Yes, there is enormous emotional power in visiting an authentic site such as the Anne Frank House or many others, unfortunately, across Europe.

Oren, your institution, the National Library of Israel, won't have the same resonance as an authentic site in Europe. But what will a library or archive offer that can strengthen this fight against antisemitism?

Oren Weinberg: The National Library of Israel (NLI) is probably the largest memory institution in the world that has collected and keeps on collecting and documenting everything concerning Jewish life and Jewish history. It has been doing that for almost 130 years. We are the largest repository of books and newspapers that deal with Jewish life.

It is quite uncommon for an institution that deals with Jewish life to also collect and document antisemitism, which is a phenomenon external to Jewish life. We don't collect antisemitic material, in principle, but we do of course acknowledge that there is no understanding Jewish history—especially since the 19th century—without looking at antisemitic material. This is why we also take care of that angle. We also acknowledge that there is no way to research, educate, and understand how we can tackle antisemitism without understanding the roots through primary sources. Those are the sources we have.

We are both a library and archive and, in the future, our new building will also have exhibition spaces and educational areas. We believe that we can tell the story of how Jewish life was affected—taking advantage of the material, the primary and secondary sources—and tackle antisemitism. We are already doing it using maybe some of the methods that antisemitism is using today—social networks and the internet at large. We are taking stories from what we have in the collection and telling the general public, both in Israel and outside of Israel, how we might look at the sources of antisemitism.

We are doing that by telling stories, telling emotional stories, and through that helping people understand that Jewish lives were no different from other lives around them, and there was no need to envy or fear them. That's what we try to do by using the collection and letting materials spread and be used in various ways to deal with antisemitism and other phenomena.

Paul Salmons: It's so important in my work and others' work, in terms of Holocaust education, to be able to draw upon the kinds of archives and the documents you speak about, that show Jewish life. One reason is that showing Jewish life is a strong counter to the antisemitic tropes and motifs that unfortunately young people will encounter when they are studying the Holocaust. Also, though, it is important for understanding what was lost in the genocide. You can't understand the loss if you don't understand what was there in Europe before.

Louise, may I turn to you, please, to say something about your institution and how its role can play an important part in this struggle?

Louise Mirrer: The New-York Historical Society is New York's first museum. It was founded in 1804 by 11 men who had lived through the eight years of British occupation in New York and the preceding movement towards revolution. Those 11 men worried that if no one recorded and preserved their own historical moment, then it would be nothing more than speculations and dust.

We have a strong consciousness about preserving the past. None of our founders were Jewish, and we are not an institution that has specifically collected around Jewish history either in America or in New York. But we do have the records of the prominent and earliest Jewish families in New York. We have a strong consciousness of our obligation—as we are an institution that resides in a city with a very large number of Jewish people—to be attentive to telling the story of the history of those people and how they came specifically to be in New York. We have seized the opportunity whenever possible to tell that history.

Over my time at New-York Historical, which is now quite substantial—I've been here since June of 2004—we have mounted at least a half dozen major exhibitions on topics relating to antisemitism. One of them puzzled people. It was an exhibition that focused on antisemitism in Germany leading up to World War II. People wondered, why was a museum of New York and American history mounting an exhibition like that. Well, the clear answer is that there is a reason why New York has the strong Jewish population that it has, and much of that reason has to do with antisemitism in Europe. I think it was one of our more successful exhibitions.

We have about 200,000 New York City public school students who come through our building each year. Many of them look around and see a Jewish population and have no idea, whatsoever, of how that came to be. [Despite] the strong consciousness that they have as young people who either came here or their parents came here as refugees—or in terms

of the Black population, whose ancestors came here enslaved—they have no sense of any commonality with Jewish people until they understand, through an exhibition like the one I mentioned, that Jewish people have suffered tremendous oppression.

We've done numerous other exhibitions that speak to aspects of antisemitism. Our goal with those exhibitions and all of the work that we do—including the educational curricula that we develop for the New York City public schools—is to raise young people's consciousness so that they understand more about the history of Jews in New York and in America. It's so that they develop—I've heard this word used a couple of times already today—empathy, which is so necessary. If you can't walk in someone else's shoes, you will never really understand how to engage and interact with them and truly be civic-minded in a city like New York, or in the world for that matter.

Paul Salmons: Thank you, Louise.

Dariusz, as a historian, you're delving deep into the archives that we're hearing about. Of course, as the former director of POLIN, you're also closely connected with the museum world. Could you tell us a little bit more about that work, and about how you think archives, libraries, and museums can contribute to the struggle against antisemitism?

Dariusz Stola: POLIN Museum is a relatively young institution. We opened the core exhibition in only 2014 with remarkable success, because very quickly, it was attracting more than 600,000 visits annually—before the pandemic. About half of our visitors were foreign and the other half were Polish, which means non-Jewish Polish visitors. I stress this because the museum stands in a city that was the biggest Jewish metropolis of Europe before the Second World War. But we are not a Holocaust museum—or, not *only* a Holocaust museum. This is a museum that shows almost 1,000 years of Jewish history in Poland, including the Holocaust.

The Shoah gallery is the biggest of all, but it's not the first one, and it's not the last one. It shows how much was lost, and what was lost, as a consequence of the catastrophe during the Second World War. It shows the complex, dramatic history of Polish Jews, including various forms of Judeophobia at different moments in time. This is an educational mission to directly counteract the ignorance which is very often the basis of prejudice.

POLIN Museum was so much disliked by the antisemites in Poland and in Eastern Europe in general because we took the initiative. We were not just reacting to various expressions of anti-Jewish prejudices—we were offering a compelling story. An important message of this compelling story is that Jews have been an integral part of Poland for centuries. It's a way of redefining—who are “we?” Who is the big “we” when we talk “we,” the Poles?

A museum is a place
where people can safely
meet and freely talk. We
are the guardians of the
rules of discussion, not
to have it dominated or
taken over by people who
would like to destroy it.

— Dariusz Stola

When I say that POLIN Museum shows that you cannot understand the history of Poland without the Jews, you can say this about Europe in general, and especially about countries like Spain or Russia, or Ukraine, most of Eastern Europe, or Hungary. Without the Jewish chapters, their history would be completely different.

In Eastern Europe, we still have too many eyewitnesses of the Holocaust to make denial effective. But *distortion* is quite widespread—a way of distorting the Holocaust, of minimizing it, though maybe not negating it completely. This is what I believe to be the most dangerous component of contemporary antisemitism....

Today's museums are not only an exhibition plus a collection. They are much more multifunctional cultural institutions. A museum is a place where people can safely meet and freely talk. We are the guardians of the rules of discussion, not to have it dominated or taken over by people who would like to destroy it.

Within the last 30 years, we have seen in Poland and elsewhere in Eastern Europe a growing number of people, of very different backgrounds, who for various reasons believe that antisemitism is very bad. They are opposed to it. Various forms of Judeophobia have lasted for a long time and will probably stay with us, but there is something new in this field which we should not forget.

I would also stress the importance of the stories. Information is not enough. What we've been trying to do is to offer stories that are trustworthy, that are reliable, that are compelling and polyphonic. "Polyphonic" means that they can be interesting and compelling to a diverse audience. In particular, it requires listening to the questions people ask, because every generation has a different set of questions. The way of remaining relevant for young people is listening carefully to what they say, what are their interests, what are their concerns, and showing that history may be relevant for the problems they are facing today.

Second is to help those who are doing the same work at a very local level, who do it face-to-face.

This is really a way of building the basis for the future—concentrating not on a big project on a nationwide scale but on something that is small but accepted as endogenous, as coming from within the community. This is the basis of remaining trustworthy.

Ronald Leopold is the Executive Director of the Anne Frank House.

Louise Mirrer is the President & CEO of the New-York Historical Society.

Paul Salmons is a public historian and independent curator.

Dariusz Stola is Professor of History, Institute of Political Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences, and the Former Director of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews.

Oren Weinberg is the Chief Executive Officer of the National Library of Israel.

Responses to Antisemitism

Derek Jonathan Penslar

Jason Zinoman

Dara Horn

Lawrence S. Bacow

President, Harvard University

Both of the following quotes are from the *Confronting Antisemitism* symposium conversation “The Evolution of Understanding: Universities and the Fight Against Antisemitism” (Oct. 17, 2021)

“Antisemitism was the defining experience in both of my parents’ lives. My father was born in Minsk.

He came to this country to escape the pogroms of Eastern Europe before World War II. My mother was born and raised in Germany. She was a survivor of Auschwitz. Sadly, she was the only member of her family—the only member of her town—to survive the war. For me, the experience of my parents serves as a reminder of why we need to be attentive to this issue.”

Christopher L. Eisgruber

President, Princeton University

“I discovered late in life that I was Jewish after finding out that my mother was Jewish. She had come over to the United States at age eight in 1940, escaping the Holocaust in Germany. She suppressed her Jewish identity from the time she left high school and went to college. Because I discovered this only after her death, I never had a chance to find out her reasons why—but I think it was because she believed that antisemitism made it very dangerous to be Jewish in the world. It has been a tremendously rewarding and enriching experience for me to discover my Jewish identity and to get to know a family and a set of relatives whom I didn’t know existed.”

How To (Not) Talk to an Antisemite: On the Failure of Jewish Apologetics

Derek Jonathan Penslar

Almost two thousand years ago, Yosef bin Matityahu, known to history as Flavius Josephus, wrote *Against Apion*, a tract refuting anti-Jewish slurs. It was an early example of Jewish apologetics, the use of logical argument to defend Judaism and Jews. Like most examples of the genre, it had two characteristics: it refuted negative qualities that Gentiles attributed to Jews and claimed that Jews were the equal, if not the better, of Gentiles at whatever those who attacked them valued most. Over the millennia, Jews have written countless apologetics, and they are worth studying, not because they convinced Jew-haters of their errors—there is scant evidence for that—but because of the apologetic’s power to console Jews and raise their spirits.

Against Apion illustrates these points. In the ancient Hellenistic world, there were rumors that Jews kept a Greek man captive in the Jerusalem Temple, fattening him up for an annual human sacrifice. Josephus denied that Jews do that sort of thing, but he went further. Because the Greeks valued the antiquity of their pedigree and claimed that Jews were a “new” and hence inferior people, Josephus retorted that Jews were more ancient than the Greeks and could prove it via the ancient laws handed to the Israelites by Moses at Sinai. Greeks cherished the writing of history, so Josephus argued that Jews were better at preserving records. The Greeks prided themselves on their knowledge of astronomy and philosophy, so Josephus,

like the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria, depicted Jews as founders of philosophy and Abraham as having taught astronomy to the Babylonians and Egyptians.

**Derek Jonathan Penslar is
the William Lee Frost
Professor of Jewish History
at Harvard University.**

During the Middle Ages, within Christian Europe the tone of Jewish apologetics changed as Gentile polemic against Jews grew shriller and more threatening. Assisted by Jewish converts to Christianity, learned friars claimed that the Jews' denial of Jesus as the Savior of humanity rested on a willful distortion of Scripture. The Jews' powerless state and their dependence on Gentile sufferance for their very lives were, in Christian eyes, further proof of the Jews' blindness, obstinance, and malevolence. In response, Jews insisted that they had neither been abandoned by God nor had they misinterpreted Scripture. At that time, the struggle between Christianity and Judaism was a zero-sum game—any defense of Jewish readings of Scripture was, by definition, a polemic against Christianity. If the Jews were still the beloved children of God, patiently bearing Christian persecution until their messiah came to redeem them, then Christianity was built on lies. It is no surprise, therefore, that rabbis' denial that the Hebrew Bible predicted the Virgin Birth or their rejection of the Trinity did not lead to Jewish victories in disputations with Christians or prevent the burning and censoring of the Talmud or the torture, murder, and expulsions of Jews.

In modern times, there were greater possibilities for Jewish involvement in society on equal terms and increased economic opportunity due to global exploration and the expansion of capitalism. Jewish apologetics, in turn, become less spiritual and more material. In 1638, Simone Luzzatto pled with the leaders of the Venetian Republic for the toleration of Jews, citing the Jews' economic talents and the great wealth they could bring to the bustling city-state. Seventeen years later, the

Portuguese rabbi Menasseh Ben Israel incorporated economic apologetics into his plea to Oliver Cromwell that Jews be readmitted to England, from which they had been expelled more than three centuries before. Luzzatto and Menasseh Ben Israel did not demean Gentile economic prowess, but they did claim that Jews had particular abilities that the state could exploit for its own good.

This rhetoric heated up during the 1800s, when Jews eager for integration into European and American society asserted that they were the life's blood of capitalism. Countering antisemitic notions that Jews were parasitic, some of the western world's most distinguished rabbis boasted that Jews contributed far beyond their numbers to commerce and industry, fulfilling what the prominent German rabbi Ludwig Philippson called "the industrial mission of the Jews." According to the German-American rabbi Kaufmann Kohler, "Russia needs the Jews much more than the Jews need Russia, and the German Kaiser knows better than the Tsar...what [Jewish] trade has accomplished for the ascent and of flowering of nations." Economic apologetics were a material counterpart to the popular idea among 19th-century Reform Jews of their mission to benefit society by being model citizens modeling exemplary behavior.

A radically different type of modern Jewish apologetic responded to antisemitism by agreeing that Jews were deficient but that their flaws were the result of Gentile oppression. In this view, in antiquity the Jews had been sturdy farmers and craftsmen, but during the Christian Middle Ages they were forced into petty commerce and moneylending. If Jews were granted the opportunity to return to the land and take up crafts,

the argument went, they would gladly do so. Throughout the 1800s and early 1900s, well-meaning Jewish philanthropists in western and central Europe attempted to educate poor Jews in crafts and agriculture. (A good example was the Ahlem Jewish agricultural school, established near Hanover in 1893 by Moritz Alexander Simon.) Such initiatives met with only modest success. There is, moreover, little evidence that such initiatives changed antisemites' opinions of Jews.

The Zionist movement derided apologetic efforts by Jews to gain acceptance within Gentile society. But Zionism was itself an apologetic enterprise that combined aspects of both the triumphalist and self-critical forms represented by Kohler and Simon respectively. For Theodor Herzl, a Jewish state would rid Europe of masses of Jewish paupers in the East and over-educated, underemployed Jewish intellectuals in the West. It would transform both types into productive citizens of a Jewish national home that would be a model of technological progress and social justice. Throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, diaspora Jews have looked to Israel as proof that Jews can not only do what their societies value highly but can do it better, whether it is farming the land, developing software, or—perhaps most important of all—bravely serving in their country's military.

Since 1948, pride in the Jews' fighting spirit has focused on the State of Israel. But before then, diaspora Jewish apologetics centered around Jews in militaries over the course of history. They did so in response to antisemitic claims that Jews lacked honor, courage, and a spirit of sacrifice. This language was particularly directed at Jewish men, accusing them of being weak, cowardly, and prone to shirk hard work of any kind, let

The presence of Jews in uniform did not take the wind out of antisemites' sails.

alone the rigors and dangers of military service. Jews responded with sermons professing Jewish patriotism, historical accounts of Jewish military service throughout the ages, articles in the Jewish

press glorifying the valor of Jewish soldiers, and statistics documenting the presence of Jews in every European war (and on every side). The 1901–1906 American *Jewish Encyclopedia* featured dozens of articles on famous Jewish commanders, and its article on “Army” was one of the longest in the entire encyclopedia. (One of its authors was none other than that veteran apologist, Kaufmann Kohler.)

The presence of Jews in uniform did not take the wind out of antisemites' sails. When it became impossible to deny the substantial numbers of Jews serving in a country's army, antisemites simply reversed their argument. For example, the notorious French journalist Eduard Drumont, whose 1886 book *La France Juive* became a bestseller, claimed that the hundreds of Jewish senior officers in the French army were part of a Jewish plot to control France.

After World War I, the legacy of apologetic loomed especially heavily over German Jewry. Combatting the government's assertion during the war that Jews were underrepresented in the army, Jewish activists prepared statistical studies documenting their brethren's role in the war effort. After the war, Jewish periodicals repeated over and again that a full 100,000 Jews had served Germany during the war and that 12,000 had died. There was, in fact, nothing remarkable

about those numbers; some 15 percent of mobilized Germans died during the war, and the percentage of German Jews who were mobilized was slightly lower than that of Germans as a whole. But Jews wanted to claim that they were equal members of Germany's community of mourning—and antisemites refused to admit them to that community.

It shows us how much Jews have needed to convince the world—and themselves—that they were actors no less than victims, that logical argument and historical narrative could defend the Jews as well as physical force, and that the Jews' past and current travails would someday surely cease.

Post-World War I America had its share of vicious antisemitism, to which American Jews responded by cranking out apologetic literature documenting the numbers of Jews who served in the war. This same defensive spirit carried over into the Second World War, with the production of children's books like *Jews Fight Too!* (1945), a collection of edifying vignettes about the heroism of American Jewish soldiers, partisans and ghetto rebels in Europe, and Zionist fighters like Moshe Dayan and David Raziel. Ultimately, however, the main contribution of the Jewish soldiers and fighters in World War II had nothing to do with dissuading

antisemites. Rather, what mattered was their contribution to the defeat of Nazism and the role that some of them played three years later as volunteers fighting for the establishment of the Israeli army. The Jews who fought, whether they survived or died, neither refuted nor deterred antisemitism. The decline of

antisemitism in the postwar western world was the result of guilt and horror over Gentile actions, not admiration of Jewish agency.

The vast disproportion between the quantity of Jewish apologetic literature produced over the centuries and its actual effect illustrates more than that literature's failings. It shows us how much Jews have needed to convince the world—and themselves—that they were actors no less than victims, that logical argument and historical narrative could defend the Jews as well as physical force, and that the Jews' past and current travails would someday surely cease. In short, apologetic was a form of consolation, an expression of hope and an alternative to despair—part of that great history of Jewish hope to which Yosef Haim Yerushalmi referred in a lecture from 1984*. Unlike dialogue, in which interlocutors truly engage with and hearken to each other, apologetics are a one-way form of communication whose ultimate significance lies in the feelings they reflect and instill in those who generate them.

* Yosef Haim Yerushalmi, "Toward a History of Jewish Hope," reproduced in *The Faith of Fallen Jews: Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi and the Writing of Jewish History*, ed. David N. Myers and Alexander Kaye (Brandeis University Press, 2013).

Is It Funny for the Jews?

Jason Zinoman

Published in *The New York Times*, February 17, 2022

For a cultural critic, a sense of humor is integral to his Jewish identity. But these dark times raise existential questions about comedy and its uses.

In the climactic scene of the musical “Caroline, or Change,” an 8-year-old Jewish boy, Noah, and his African American maid, Caroline, living in the Jim Crow South, get into a heated fight and end up trading ugly insults.

Noah says he hopes a bomb kills all Black people, and Caroline responds that all Jews will go to hell.

It’s always a charged moment, but there was something peculiarly unsettling about it the night I saw the recent Broadway revival. For while there was silence after Noah’s hateful outburst, what followed Caroline’s comment was something I did not expect: laughter. Nervous giggling in uncomfortable moments can be a coping mechanism. And that wasn’t the audience reaction every night. But in a radio interview, Sharon D. Clarke, who played the title character, said that at the majority of shows, there was laughter. She was disturbed by it but couldn’t explain it.

I found it jarring because I thought I could. Of course it’s impossible to get inside the heads of theatergoers, but as a Jewish person, I recognized this laughter. Who would buy a ticket to a Broadway show and chuckle at the eternal damnation of Jewish people other than Jews?

There is a long, rich Jewish tradition of grappling with antisemitism by laughing at it. This has produced a vast amount

of great comedy, from Mel Brooks turning Nazis into musical theater buffoons in “The Producers” to Sacha Baron Cohen, in character as Borat, leading the denizens of a Southern bar

Jason Zinoman is a comedy columnist for *The New York Times* and the author of books on David Letterman and 1970s horror.

in singing, “Throw the Jew down the well.” There is a sensibility behind these jokes that I grew up around and have long embraced.

Some artists argue that making light of prejudice, or turning purveyors of it into absurdities, robs hatred of power. I’ve been persuaded by that idea, and like many secular types, a Jewish sense of humor is more integral to my identity than any religious observance. It’s also a source of pride. A resilient comic sensibility that finds joy in dark places is one of the greatest Jewish legacies—as is an ability to laugh at ourselves.

Those hung up on the question of whether the latest news is good for the Jews always seemed not only hopelessly ineffective but also tedious. Scolds from the Anti-Defamation League, alert to the damage done by every Jewish stereotype, will never end an ancient prejudice, but they could ruin a good time. And yet, as a critic engaging with a chaotic and constantly changing culture, in an online world that seems somehow both more outraged by and tolerant of hate speech, I am increasingly uncomfortable with this kind of condescension. It’s too glib. And that has made me look closer at the disturbing rise in antisemitism today, Jewish culture and identity, and the implications of what we find funny.

There’s been growing pushback in the last year from some Jews about double standards in the cultural conversation. Take the increasingly politicized issue of casting, which has inspired considerable controversy. We have never been more sensitive to issues of whitewashing, appropriation and representation. Think of Scarlett Johansson being hired for an Asian role. But when

gentiles are cast as Golda Meir or Mrs. Maisel or Ruth Bader Ginsburg, there is little blowback. The superb indie comedy “Shiva Baby” tackles explicitly Jewish themes, but the fact that the lead is played by a Catholic stand-up, Rachel Sennott, barely raised an eyebrow.

On her podcast, Sarah Silverman has spoken passionately about how Jewish characters are regularly played by gentile actors, specifically lamenting the lack of meaty roles for women. “The pattern in film is just undeniable,” she said, “and the pattern is—if the Jewish woman character is courageous or deserves love, she is never played by a Jew.”

She delivered this sharp monologue with an ambivalence that also resonated with me. Acting requires an empathetic leap of imagination. Like Silverman, I know that great performers of any religion can and have brilliantly played Jews, and it’s easier to pass as Jewish than, say, African American. But is experience as a Jewish person irrelevant to playing Tevye in “Fiddler on the Roof” (as Alfred Molina, who was raised Catholic, did on Broadway) or to embodying Joan Rivers in a biopic? (Before the project fell apart, the gentile Kathryn Hahn was slated to play her.) I think it matters. When a gentile plays a Jew, the results are often more affected, the mannerisms pronounced, which can often mean the difference between someone playing Jewish vs. inhabiting a Jewish character.

In his book “Jews Don’t Count,” the British comic David Baddiel argues that casting is one of many issues in contemporary discourse that illustrate how antisemitism is far more acceptable than other forms of bigotry. One need only point to the career of Mel Gibson to find evidence. Part of the

Jewish people have clearly been tremendously successful in Hollywood, on Broadway and in comedy, among other artistic pursuits, but that doesn't erase the specific discriminatory shadow hovering behind their rise.

reason, Baddiel explains, is that at a time when we are particularly sensitive to power imbalances, what distinguishes antisemitism is that the bigot imagines Jewish people as both low status (rats, venal) and high status (running the banks, part of a globalist conspiracy).

Jewish people have clearly been tremendously successful in Hollywood, on Broadway and in comedy, among other artistic pursuits, but that doesn't erase the specific discriminatory shadow hovering behind their rise. Silverman points

to the number of famous Jews who have changed their names. "If Winona Ryder had stayed Winona Horowitz, would she have starred in 'The Age of Innocence'?" Silverman has asked. "She wouldn't."

Behind the discussion of gentiles in Jewish roles is the long history of Hollywood anxiety that a work will be "too Jewish," words that have haunted Jewish artists for generations. The first time Jerry Seinfeld appeared on a sitcom, on "Benson" in 1980, he played a courier trying to sell a joke for the governor to use in a speech. When one flopped ("Did you hear about the rabbi who bought himself a ranch? Called it the Bar Mitzvah"), he asked: "Too Jewish?" Nine years later, a Jewish NBC executive dismissed the pilot for "Seinfeld" as "too New York, too Jewish," and while it was picked up, the network ordered only four episodes.

A resilient comic
sensibility that finds
joy in dark places is
one of the greatest
Jewish legacies—
as is an ability to
laugh at ourselves.

— Jason Zinoman

In the most memorable joke of his breakthrough 1986 Broadway comedy, “The World According to Me,” the comic Jackie Mason said, “You know what’s going to happen after this show: The gentiles are going to say, ‘It’s a hit.’ And the Jews are going to say, ‘Too Jewish.’” Mason delivers this cheerfully, but there’s a bristling undercurrent, a finger wag about self-loathing.

Mason has always been a kind of guilty pleasure for me. Compared with my favorite comics, he seemed impossibly old-fashioned, not just in his borscht belt rhythms, but also in having bits centered on how fundamentally alien gentiles were to Jews. But listening to him again more recently, I detected a defiance that was, in its own way, radical, even countercultural. His accent itself, which if anything got thicker as he got older, represented a bold refusal to assimilate. The Jewish artists who found mainstream success didn’t sound like him.

And when he died last year, with a modest amount of media attention paid to his legacy, it made me wonder about the obstacle course of Jewish success in a country where we are a tiny minority. But I also thought about the role played by Jewish people measuring the degree of acceptable Jewishness, the kind Mason was talking about in his show.

When representation in culture is discussed today, what’s often emphasized is how valuable it can be when children from minority groups see or hear someone like them and how that can expand their horizons. I have never felt this was an issue for me, because there seemed to be an abundance of Jewish people in the arts. Sure, some changed their names or played down their background, but we could tell. I never questioned the idea

I never questioned the idea that Jews had been well represented in popular culture until I read Jeremy Dauber's book "Jewish Comedy: A Serious History" and learned that not one leading character on prime-time television clearly identified as Jewish from 1954 to 1972 and again from 1978 to 1987.

that Jews had been well represented in popular culture until I read Jeremy Dauber's book "Jewish Comedy: A Serious History" and learned that not one leading character on prime-time television clearly identified as Jewish from 1954 to 1972 and again from 1978 to 1987.

That came as a surprise and made me reconsider my 1980s childhood diet of pop culture. Back then, this mainly consisted of the offerings of three television networks, along with the occasional PG movie. This was the era of "The Cosby Show" and "Family Ties," and I couldn't think of a single Jewish character on a show I watched until I became a

teenager. But a major shift for Jewish representation took place in 1989. That's when "Seinfeld," "Anything but Love" with Richard Lewis and "Chicken Soup" with Mason all premiered. (It's also the year of "When Harry Met Sally.") What's striking about this influx of Jewish characters is that only one kind was allowed: A male stand-up with a gentile love interest.

In order to not be too Jewish in the popular culture of my youth, you had to be a funny man interested in someone from another background. For a funny Jewish woman, you had to wait until "The Nanny."

How much did it matter that as a boy I saw no Jewish couples on television? I'm not certain—draw your own conclusions about the fact that I married a non-Jew.

But one thing I surely developed as a young Jewish culture vulture were the tools to enjoy work by antisemites. The most formative artists I loved as a kid, from Roald Dahl to Ice Cube to H.P. Lovecraft, have track records of hateful comments toward Jews. I knew this even then.

Has a coping mechanism
prevented me from seeing the
world clearly?

Once I got older, and studying Shakespeare led to a lifelong love of theater, I never thought, as many do, that the greatness and humanity of the playwright's characterizations transcended his portrait of Shylock in

the antisemitic classic "The Merchant of Venice." But I also found tossing aside this incredible play because of it an overreaction. To be a young Jew hungry for and alert to the best of culture sometimes meant learning to live with some antisemitism.

To be honest, this wasn't hard. I have never felt impeded or defined by prejudice against Jews, even though I could certainly tell a version of my life that would seem like it. I have a laundry list of what are now known as microaggressions, from a childhood friend who refused to believe I was Jewish and then stopped hanging out with me to a comic online dismissing my positive review because the subject was Jewish. But these didn't traumatize or even faze me. This is not a boast. If anything, only recently have I questioned the downside of not lingering on these events. Has a coping mechanism prevented me from seeing the world clearly?

Of course, one reason some Jews don't make a bigger fuss about discrimination, one reason they feel comfortable laughing at it, is that they—we—feel safe. It's easier to laugh at antisemitism when it happens in an unthreatening place. The feeling is: There are worse problems in the world.

In her acclaimed book "People Love Dead Jews," Dara Horn takes fierce aim at this blasé attitude, at the downplaying and rationalizations that Jewish Americans make, whether it's the strained lengths intellectuals go to to argue that Shakespeare transcended bigotry in his portrayal of Shylock or to take comfort in the story of Anne Frank's faith in the goodness of people (before bad people killed her).

Horn's bracing argument is that there is a cost to denial, that the rise of antisemitic incidents and hate crimes against Jews—including the deadliest antisemitic attack in American history at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh—is directly tied to the fading of the stigma of bigotry against Jews. Hatred of Jews is not unusual, she argues; it's the years after the Holocaust when that was socially unacceptable that were the anomaly. "Historically speaking, the decades in which my parents and I had grown up simply hadn't been normal," writes Horn. Now, she writes, normal is back.

For Jews like myself with family photos featuring relatives murdered in the Holocaust, this point stopped me cold. There are signs of a new, more sober attitude toward antisemitism among younger Jewish artists. The 26-year-old Hannah Einbinder, who has integrated a long Hebrew prayer into her stand-up set, has said she stayed off Twitter in part because of antisemitism and always wears a Star of David necklace for political reasons.

The comic Alex Edelman, 32, built his extremely funny Off Broadway show “Just for Us” around visiting a white nationalist meeting in Queens, having conversations with antisemites that eventually culminate in confrontation. His show is pointedly pessimistic about the ability of comedy to combat bigotry.

As I mulled over the tension between the twin Jewish traditions of being on guard against antisemitism and of finding humor in it, I thought back to my first adult job, as a copy editor at the Jewish newspaper The Forward in the late 1990s.

One of my responsibilities was typing the hard-copy letters to the editor into the computer system, and in filing one from a woman offering feedback on a story about Hebrew schools, I made a typo. What she wrote in reference to her childhood peers was: “We knew exactly why Micah told us first to do justice, then to love mercy.” In a catastrophic mistake, I transcribed it as: “first to do justice, then to love *money*.”

It didn’t take long before I was summoned to the editor’s office and fired. My first reaction was shock and panic. What will I do now? How will I pay the rent? But upon reflection, what stands out is how quickly my anxiety transformed into a kind of delight. I lost a job but gained a terrifically funny story that I would surely tell for years. And I did. It has gotten a ton of laughs. Long before social media, my story went viral offline, so much so that someone told it to me at a party not knowing it was about me. In my version, the woman who wrote the letter and the editor who fired me were guilty of a ridiculous overreaction to an honest mistake. Couldn’t they just laugh it off?

In 2014, after a Pew study revealed that 42 percent of American Jews described having a good sense of humor as “essential” to being Jewish (more than twice as many as those who cited “Observing Jewish Law”), The Forward asked me to return to speak to its editorial board about comedy. In exchange, I asked if I could find the letter with my typo from the archives. I made a copy, framed it and put it above my desk. More recently, I took it down and put it in a file.

I wish I could say that considering these issues has led to a dramatic epiphany, that it has radically changed me as a critic and a Jew. That would make for a better ending to this essay. But the truth is that I remain ambivalent, as uncomfortable with being defined by prejudice as with ignoring it, living up to the stereotype of the neurotic Jew.

Though I still find that story of being fired to be funny, now the outraged response doesn’t seem ridiculous. Joking about dark things is one of the great joys in life. But some laughs should stick in your throat.

Reprinted from *The New York Times* by
permission of Jason Zinoman.

The Beginning of the Answer: Storytelling to Reveal Antisemitism

Dara Horn

We often think of art as a magical enterprise, one whose practitioners transport us beyond what we considered possible. But as a person who spent the past 20 years writing novels, I've been alarmed to discover that it is actually nonfiction storytellers—including academics, researchers, educators, and museum curators—who are expected to work magic. When you tell a story as a fiction writer, people expect nothing further from you. But when you tell a nonfiction story, particularly a deeply researched and incredibly disturbing one, suddenly it isn't enough to simply describe a problem. No, then people want more. They want you to solve it.

Such is the challenge I found myself facing after publishing *People Love Dead Jews*, a book about the unnerving role dead Jews often play in the wider world's imagination. I had embarked on the book as a writer and researcher documenting a pervasive phenomenon I'd encountered in my work: non-Jewish societies piously honoring dead Jews of the past while either studiously ignoring or actively erasing living Jews and Jewish culture. I hadn't intended to write a book about antisemitism and didn't even see the project that way myself. But my readers read it that way, and since the book's release, they have poured out their pain to me—and, since nonfiction storytellers are apparently

magicians, they have begged me for answers. Unfortunately, I didn't have any.

For too long, the most common solution to this problem has been Holocaust education. It's a response that makes sense if the chief concern

Dara Horn is the award-winning author of five novels and the essay collection *People Love Dead Jews*, and the creator and host of the podcast *Adventures with Dead Jews*.

Antisemitism shouldn't have to lead to either widespread violence or the destruction of democracy in order to concern us.

is the erosion of liberal democracy and the threat of mass violence rather than the degrading of a group's public image and their subsequent humiliation and ostracism. By setting the bar for antisemitism at genocide, Holocaust education is remarkably limited in addressing the kind of low-

grade, acceptable hatred of Jews that has proliferated around the world in recent years. This hatred has manifested less in government power grabs or acts of violence (though those are hardly absent) than in popular prejudices reignited in new forms, including reconstituted conspiracy theories and the self-righteous laundering of reality that seduces vulnerable minds by providing easy answers to serious social challenges and allowing people to avoid responsibility. Antisemitism shouldn't have to lead to either widespread violence or the destruction of democracy in order to concern us. In fact, the demand that it must do so in order for us to care has contributed to public ignorance about what antisemitism even is.

To me, the most inspiring insight to come out of the *Confronting Antisemitism* symposium was the revelation of that public ignorance and the hard work that many academics, researchers, and other educators are doing to remedy it. It was extraordinary to hear educators from a broad range of high-caliber institutions around the world agree on how little their students and museum visitors knew about antisemitism—particularly the nearly universal ignorance that this problem exists outside of 80-year-old gas chambers. It is impossible to

Why do Jews only
appear in high school
history textbooks
once they are headed
for a mass grave?

— Dara Horn

It is impossible to fight something if you have no idea what you are fighting.

fight something if you have no idea what you are fighting. I was moved to hear from thoughtful colleagues who have addressed this ignorance head-on, combing through archives and creating educational materials

to demonstrate how antisemitism has constituted itself through things as seemingly irrelevant as a college application form or an illustrated postcard or a local American law, or through concepts articulated not just in the ravings of fringe figures, but also in the writings of civilizational luminaries. Educators are revealing the ways in which antisemitism has been constituted through countless evolving social choices, large and small, against which both Jews and non-Jews have always pushed back. This kind of education is the beginning of the answer my readers were looking for.

Hearing optimistic colleagues describing educational possibilities made me think bigger about the answers my readers desperately wanted from me. I've now begun to imagine other ways that the usual narrative about antisemitism might be flipped on its head. Why, for instance, do we so often require students to learn about antisemitism, or more specifically to learn about the Holocaust, without requiring them to learn anything at all about Jews or Jewish history—not even the most basic facts about what Jewish identity is or about what Jewish culture contains? Why do Jews only appear in high school history textbooks once they are headed for a mass grave? Jews are not minor players in Western history. Jewish civilization is at the foundation of Western civilization, and it

is also a counterculture that runs through the history of the West, persisting within it and sometimes as a direct challenge to it. Might telling this longer, broader, deeper story be another way of combating the ignorance we confront—which isn't just an ignorance about the evils of prejudice, but also about the nature of Jewish identity itself and the many varied ways it has developed and endured? Might it make sense not to educate people against prejudice merely by suggesting that Jews are “just like everyone else,” but by encouraging curiosity about cultural differences and about an evolving group of people with a truly fascinating past and present?

Researchers, academics, and curators are all in the business of storytelling. But, unlike fiction writers, these storytellers are telling stories with extremely high stakes. Fortunately, we are blessed with people in this generation who are up to the challenge.

In addition to offering this response to *Confronting Antisemitism*, Dara Horn participated in the symposium as a moderator of the conversation “The Evolution of Understanding: Universities and the Fight Against Antisemitism” featuring Lawrence S. Bacow (President, Harvard University) and Christopher L. Eisgruber (President, Princeton University).

**Archives,
Libraries, and
Museums
Take Action**

Hon. Carla Hayden

Hon. David S. Ferriero

J. Adam Clemons

Michael S. Glickman

Rachel Miller

Simona Di Nepi

Lyudmila Sholokhova

**Preserving
History, Providing
Information,
Supporting
Democracy**

Featuring

Hon. Carla Hayden

Hon. David S. Ferriero

in Conversation

The following snapshot of the *Confronting Antisemitism* symposium conversation “Preserving History, Providing Information, Supporting Democracy: Exploring the Unique Roles of American Institutions” has been edited for brevity and clarity.

Carla Hayden: The mission of libraries is to make sure that records, information, and documentation about history and culture are available.

There is a quote that comes to mind when I think about what libraries and archives do: “A library is a never-failing spring in the desert” [Andrew Carnegie]. When you are confronting the challenges of misinformation and misappropriation, libraries—and museums and archives as well—can be that spring.

The Library of Congress has a very robust, international presence. We also make sure we have the opportunity to support other institutions by providing resources online, including to public libraries. Public libraries are opportunity centers. They are in every community in this country, and they are the first line for lifesaving information and support.

David S. Ferriero: It is so important that people have places where they can go to find the truth. At the National Archives, we are responsible for collecting, protecting, and encouraging the use of the records of the United States government. Unlike some other governments, we collect *all* of the records—the good stories and the bad stories. We have close to 16 billion pieces of paper in the National Archives, and every one of those is a story.

Public libraries are opportunity centers. They are in every community in this country, and they are the first line for lifesaving information and support.

Carla Hayden: In 2004, the Library of Congress presented a major exhibition and a publication that is still in print called *From Haven to Home: 350 Years of Jewish Life in America*. There is a chapter on the history of American antisemitism. It contains a photograph, from our Prints and Photographs Division, of the lynching of Leo Frank in 1915. The photograph is very disturbing. But by

presenting the information—that is one way we can make sure that people are equipped.

David S. Ferriero: There is nothing more powerful than seeing original documentation. For instance, when I saw The Nuremberg Laws for the first time—there is just a gut reaction to seeing the signatures.

Monumental statues on both sides of the [National Archives] advise passers-by to study the past. One delivers the message that, “Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.”

The **Honorable Carla Hayden** is the 14th Librarian of Congress.

The **Honorable David S. Ferriero** is the 10th Archivist of the United States.

Editing Wikipedia

Center for Jewish History

Writing history begins with access to archives. The Center for Jewish History is dedicated to preserving historical records and—critically—making them as widely accessible as possible. This includes not only running a massive online **public access catalog** and **archival repository**, but also sharing information so that researchers can easily find materials of interest.

As an important part of its information-sharing efforts, the Center contributes to one of the most remarkable information resources in our age: Wikipedia. It is one of the top 10 most popular websites in the entire world (alongside Google, YouTube, Facebook, for example) and the only non-commercial site among them. Wikipedia is the largest, most comprehensive encyclopedia ever known, and one that can be updated almost instantaneously. Perhaps most incredibly, Wikipedia functions thanks to the goodwill of hundreds of thousands of volunteer editors. These editors (called Wikipedians) write, edit, review, and give freely of their time, contributing to Wikipedia's aim of opening access to the sum of all human knowledge.

Of course, Wikipedia is imperfect, as are all encyclopedias. That is why editing it is so important. The Center for Jewish History works to make Wikipedia better, bit by bit. Several Center staff members are Wikipedia editors, and the Center has hosted editing events to improve coverage of subjects such as women in Jewish history and the American Soviet Jewry Movement. When new archival collections are opened for research, Center archivists add links to information on those collections on relevant Wikipedia pages. Adding links like this takes only a few minutes and can drive thousands of viewers to quality primary sources.

Of course, Wikipedia is imperfect, as are all encyclopedias. That is why editing it is so important. The Center for Jewish History works to make Wikipedia better, bit by bit.

As a result, English-language Wikipedia is consistently a top driver of online traffic to the Center's archival finding aids and research materials available from the Center's five in-house partners. Nearly all of the online users who discover these resources through Wikipedia are visiting Center sites for the first time.

A Call to Action from the Council of American Jewish Museums

The Council of American Jewish Museums (CAJM) is an association of institutions and individuals committed to enriching American and Jewish culture and enhancing the value of Jewish museums to their communities.

- » Evolve interpretive storylines up to this century
- » Navigate such narratives alongside American racism and injustice
- » Collect and interpret contemporary antisemitism.

Shortly after the murders at Pittsburgh's Tree of Life Synagogue in 2018, the Council of American Jewish Museums (CAJM) began offering special professional development opportunities for content professionals working in Jewish museums. Created as the series *Combating Antisemitism*, each of CAJM's multi-day seminars emphasized different areas of museum work: education, collections, security, and social justice.

CAJM's *Combating Antisemitism* programs—in Washington, DC (June 2019); Portland, OR (November 2019); and two online (December 2020 and January 2021)—responded to the needs of museum practitioners, offering classroom-style learning and dialogue with experts including Deborah Lipstadt, Eric Ward, Robert Williams, Elaine Gurian, Stacy Burdett, Jonah Boyarin, Sarah Pharaon, Joel Levy, Yosi Sergeant, Doris Hamburg, and Kinshasha Holman Conwill.

The series has raised critical questions about policies and practices for museums combating antisemitism. It has also brought forward new voices, increased knowledge and fluency, and cultivated possibilities for collective action.

Seeing Antisemitism as a Local Issue

J. Adam Clemons

On programming at the University of Mississippi Libraries

The University of Mississippi Libraries

Americans and the Holocaust, a

traveling exhibition from the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. that examines the motives, pressures, and fears that shaped Americans' responses to Nazism, war, and genocide in Europe during the 1930s and 1940s. The exhibition challenges the common assumption that Americans knew very little about the Holocaust and asks participants to consider not only "what would I have done," but also "what will I do" as antisemitism persists in communities across America.

As a host-site, part of the library's programming effort centered on antisemitism as a local issue. A public lecture explored the effects of the Holocaust on Jewish communities throughout the American South. Two display cases highlighted the papers of John Rankin, a member of the U.S. House of Representatives for Mississippi from 1921–1953, most known for his inflammatory public statements, xenophobia, and anti-Jewish positions. We challenged participants to see antisemitism as a local issue that persists in communities across America.

There are a number of free resources that public librarians can use to confront antisemitism in their communities. The Anti-Defamation League has created *Resources to Address and*

Challenge Antisemitism and the Jewish Federation of Washington, D.C. has created *Resources and Tools for Addressing Antisemitism, Intolerance, & Bias* that includes lesson

J. Adam Clemons is a Research and Instruction Librarian and Assistant Professor at the University of Mississippi.

We challenged
participants to see
antisemitism as
a local issue that
persists in communities
across America.

— J. Adam Clemons

plans, tools, strategies, and reports on antisemitism. Public libraries are well-situated to confront antisemitism in ways that are relevant to their communities. Programs that explore antisemitism as a *global and historical* as well as *local and contemporary* issue are an excellent way to engage community members, many of whom may have limited exposure to the American Jewish experience.

Holocaust Museums Take Action

Dallas Holocaust and Human Rights Museum

Holocaust Museum LA

Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center

National Holocaust Centre & Museum (UK)

Museums Connect

The *Confronting Antisemitism* symposium raised crucial questions about the range of possibilities for educating diverse audiences about antisemitism, and about how this work connects with Holocaust museums' missions, exhibitions, public programs, and educational resources.

Following the October 2021 symposium, jMUSE reached out to four high-performing institutions—Dallas Holocaust and Human Rights Museum, Holocaust Museum LA, Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center, and the National Holocaust Centre & Museum (UK)—to spotlight the ways

in which they leverage their expertise. Each museum received the same set of questions and responded in writing. Here, their edited responses are organized according to three major themes.

On revealing the urgent relevance of Holocaust history

On how antisemitism is addressed in public exhibitions, programs, and educational offerings—and how the museum would like to be able to address it in the future

On serving diverse audiences and convening challenging conversations about contemporary issues

Dallas Holocaust and Human Rights Museum

Mary Pat Higgins
President and CEO

On revealing the urgent relevance of Holocaust history

Our permanent exhibition builds upon the Holocaust as the paradigm of prejudice, indifference, hatred, and genocide, and reflects on our contemporary society through the

representational justice of the International Military Tribunal and other post-War trials, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 10 Stages of Genocide, and the growth and development of American civil and human rights. We also create and host public programs on Holocaust history, Holocaust denial and distortion, and contemporary antisemitism.

On how antisemitism is addressed in public exhibitions, programs, and educational offerings—and how the museum would like to be able to address it in the future

Our core exhibition and some of our rotating special exhibitions explore the history of antisemitism, define the concept, and teach about who the Jews are and why they have been targeted for hatred over the millennia. *Our Dimensions in Testimony* theater (in conjunction with USC Shoah Foundation) provides the chance to speak to 12 holographic survivors who discuss the contemporary antisemitism they have encountered; their views of the lessons of the Holocaust; and their experiences before, during, and after the Holocaust.

In addition to structured classroom lessons, Dallas Holocaust and Human Rights Museum has also created resources such as introductory-level, quick videos and

infographics explaining “who are the Jews” and defining antisemitism. Our Antisemitism Tool Kit helps people to understand not only the issues, but also how they can access educational resources and begin to respond.

We offer a variety of easily accessible public programs on antisemitism and aspects of its history led by experts in the field, including the four-part *Crucial Conversations* programs; *Exhibit Highlight* programs; the annual *Mittelman-Berman Lecture*; *History Highlights* programs, and the survivor and 2G speakers series. When possible, we also call attention to significant, current occurrences of antisemitism in the public arena.

On serving diverse audiences and convening challenging conversations about contemporary issues

Many of our student visitors are English Language Learners. Their needs have inspired us to provide most of our lessons, exhibitions materials, and other resources in Spanish.

In our exhibition’s final wing, visitors are invited to explore American foundational ideals, historical reality, and the repair process, which brings our ideals and reality more closely into accord. This is done through interactive kiosks and testimonies of “Upstanders” that highlight the history of rights acquisition by 12 diverse groups of Americans. Our exhibition ends with a “Call to Action” section that invites all guests to sign up on the spot with curated local, national, and international nonprofit organizations to volunteer and get involved in human and civil rights issues of interest to them.

We have a very diverse audience, and we focus our programs—such as our annual, four-part *Crucial Conversations Series*—on issues of broad importance to our community, such as race and racism, antisemitism, and anti-AAPI [Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders] hatred. Through our annual *Civil Discourse Series*, we serve as a convener of conversations on difficult but important current issues about which members of our wider community may disagree. Our goal is to expose participants to multiple perspectives and to spark conversation and critical thinking.

We build upon conversations about the Holocaust and antisemitism, bringing in other discussions about racism, genocide, and American human and civil rights. This allows diverse members of our community—including members of the LGBTQ+, African-American, and Latinx communities—to feel seen and heard in the conversations and programs the Museum conducts.

Holocaust Museum LA

Beth Kean

Chief Executive Officer

On revealing the urgent relevance of Holocaust history

Holocaust Museum LA utilizes our primary source collection to teach visitors and students

the critical lessons of the Holocaust through artifact-rich exhibits, customized tours, creative education programs, and intergenerational conversations with Holocaust survivors. Gallery tours invite students to analyze primary sources and think critically about the Holocaust and its contemporary social relevance. In 2021, 95% of the tens of thousands of students who toured the Museum noted that their virtual or in-person tour helped them to understand the importance of standing up against discrimination and hate.

Holocaust Museum LA's exhibits and tours discuss identity-based violence, contextualize the Holocaust within the framework of genocide, and engage students in understanding and learning the 10 stages of genocide. This fosters thinking around current events and mass atrocities.

We offer several key programs for students from diverse backgrounds, furthering intergenerational and cross-cultural conversations about the Holocaust. For example, our *Voices of History* art workshops invite students to explore the connections between art, memory, and action. Students work with survivor artists to reflect on survivors' stories and the social relevance of the Holocaust. Inspired by history, students create art that depicts messages of empowerment, speaks out to embolden community action, stands up to discrimination, and strengthens community ties. Using monotypes, mixed media prints, stencil

prints, blackout poetry, and collage techniques, students experience the ways in which art is a powerful catalyst for healing and change.

On how antisemitism is addressed in public exhibitions, programs, and educational offerings—and how the museum would like to be able to address it in the future

Nearly all of Holocaust Museum LA's student tour participants do not identify as Jewish, creating the opportunity for students to learn about a people and a history that they do not encounter every day. By connecting with and learning about people who are seemingly different, we are humanizing instead of othering.

The Museum educates students in an age-appropriate manner on the dangers of antisemitism before, during, and after the Holocaust. The first gallery at the Museum discusses Jewish life before the Holocaust. In it, visitors and students are introduced to the concept of antisemitism and the fact that it existed before the Holocaust and continues to exist today.

In addition, *Share Our Stories* at Holocaust Museum LA is a program that connects students from under-resourced schools with Holocaust survivors for meaningful dialogue, artifact-based learning, Museum gallery exploration, and reflective art workshops. By building interfaith communities, we believe we can weed out antisemitism before it happens and give students the tools to stand up for themselves and others.

On serving diverse audiences and convening challenging conversations about antiracism and a range of contemporary issues

We offer survivor talks and school tours in Spanish and English. The Museum's audio guide is also available in Spanish.

While the Holocaust remains at the center of our mission, we have worked to make our efforts more inclusive to the shared struggles of communities who experience identity-based persecution. Our goal is to create a society free of antisemitism, bigotry, and hate in all its forms by educating people about the horrors of the Holocaust and drawing attention to its social relevancy to today's issues. We aim to inspire humanity through truth.

The Museum is committed to becoming a leading advocate against discrimination. Our *Building Bridges* cross-cultural discussion series brings together leaders from diverse communities for conversations about working toward common social justice goals. It also tackles problems and addresses tangible solutions to the growing divides in Los Angeles. We partner with respected organizations in the AAPI [Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders], Latinx, and Black communities. Topics have ranged from "Race Relations in the COVID 19 Era" to "Diverse Communities Respond to Rising Hate Crimes."

In 2021, we hosted *Building Bridges: Black and Jewish Relations in LA*, which discussed how Black and Jewish communities in the US have a long history of partnership in the fight for civil rights, and how Los Angeles has its own unique history of biracial political cooperation. Also in 2021, the Museum held a talk called *Racial Stress & Trauma: A Conversation About*

Social Justice and Resilience in which a panel of mental health professionals discussed how racial stress and historical trauma impacts individuals and communities. Attendees learned to identify resilience factors and gained resources and tools to help them advocate for themselves and others.

Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center

Susan L. Abrams
Chief Executive Officer

On revealing the urgent relevance of Holocaust history

Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center teaches the history and lessons of the Holocaust by transforming historical events into relevant, universal lessons in

humanity. The Museum's exhibitions and programs inspire individuals and organizations and provide a universal wakeup call to action. This includes encouraging "upstanderism" among young people (through our Student Leadership Days, *Take a Stand Center*, and *Make a Difference! The Harvey L. Miller Family Youth Exhibition*) and introducing audiences of all ages to local and global obstacles to human rights and strategies to overcome those obstacles. Special exhibitions enable the Museum to both delve into lesser-known aspects of the Holocaust and address other areas of social justice and human rights—making critical connections between the Holocaust and our world today.

On how antisemitism is addressed in public exhibitions, educational programs, and offerings—and how the museum would like to be able to address it in the future

Museums are places of learning as well as places of dialogue. We provide educational materials, resources, programming, and training—including for teachers and law enforcement—that reinforce the impact individuals can make. We also work to address issues of antisemitism, including Holocaust distortion and denial. Museums like ours can present accounts of successful—and unsuccessful—approaches to historic

challenges, and provide the space for scholars, community leaders, and community members to come together to discuss problems as well as approaches to working together.

Our core exhibitions address historic antisemitism through artifacts and, most importantly, firsthand accounts of the impact and implications of historic antisemitism through survivor testimony. Many of our changing exhibitions use similar approaches to address contemporary antisemitism and other forms of bigotry, hatred, and discrimination. Our educational programs for both students and the broader public address multiple aspects of this spectrum and offer space to bring personal experiences into conversations when appropriate.

Our interactive survivor holograms, developed by USC Shoah Foundation in association with Illinois Holocaust Museum, enable audiences to have personal, real-time conversations with a survivor—through their hologram and custom voice recognition software. In addition, through our virtual reality films, with a headset, we can transport viewers to the sites where a survivor grew up or where the atrocities occurred so that museum visitors can stand beside the survivor and hear their story in the very place it happened.

Imagine standing with Fritzie Fritzshall, a survivor of Auschwitz, in the barracks as she tells you how each night her Aunt Bella would put her arms around her and whisper, “Tomorrow will be better. Let’s just live until the morning, and you’ll see, tomorrow will be better.” Fritzie’s story, *A Promise Kept*, debuted at our Museum in our Richard and Jill Chaifetz Family Virtual Reality Gallery. We are working to share these virtual reality experiences with other museums and learning institutions.

On serving diverse audiences and convening challenging conversations on contemporary issues

We serve diverse audiences through a variety of channels: offering onsite, virtual, and hybrid programs and tours for all ages; engaging scholars and thought leaders on a range of historic and contemporary issues; partnering with diverse community-based institutions; and providing financial assistance for school field trips, including transportation reimbursement. We regularly engage with peer organizations to frame programming and exhibitions and bring authentic voices to the table—and podium—at every opportunity. In addition, we offer training for educators, community groups, and corporations on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and engaging in challenging conversations in their settings.

Holocaust history offers examples of the impact of racial bias on individuals and institutions; strategies to combat or counteract racist systems; and the dangers when interventions are insufficient. We have partnered with a range of individuals and organizations to address relevant contemporary issues, including the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), Western States Center, Asian Americans Advancing Justice Chicago, and Chicago CPOST (Chicago Project on Security & Threats), among others. These organizations are among the leaders, locally and nationally, in identifying and addressing contemporary threats to equitable societies. They represent diverse communities, expertise, and approaches.

National Holocaust Centre & Museum (UK)

Marc Cave
Director

On revealing the urgent relevance of Holocaust history

The National Holocaust Centre and Museum is Britain's national museum of the Holocaust. Working closely with our extensive "family" of

survivors, for whom we have been a home-away-from-home for nearly three decades, and with a team of committed educational and curatorial staff, the Museum communicates the memory of the Holocaust for an explicitly contemporary purpose: to enhance critical thinking and media literacy among young people in an age of "fake news," social media manipulation, and rising anti-Jewish prejudice in the UK and globally.

The world's single greatest ever atrocity was the product of the world's longest running conspiracy theory. It persists to this day with new variants of the same 2,000-year-old myths. We join the dots between "yesterday" and today with our two permanent museum exhibitions (currently undergoing a major redevelopment program); stunning memorial gardens; temporary exhibitions; and digital learning experiences which use cutting-edge tech innovation.

Our digital offerings include *The Forever Project* (interactive survivor testimony); the national touring exhibition *The Eye As Witness*; and *The Journey App*. We are ruthlessly audience-centric. We go where the culture goes—for example, filmic storytelling, linking Holocaust to racism in sports today, with 24 of the English Premier League's biggest football stars; and narrating survivor testimony through the medium of hip-hop. These are tools which stimulate young people to "learn forward."

We teach the Holocaust not as history but as a contemporary social issue.

On how antisemitism is addressed in public exhibitions, educational programs, and offerings—and how the museum would like to be able to address it in the future

Anti-Jewish racism is inextricably linked to conspiracy theories, which in turn are massively fueled by social media. An analysis we conducted in 2021 shows that conspiracy theories are particularly pronounced on the social media platforms that are most popular with young people. Through our research partnerships with the University of Nottingham, led by Professor Maiken Umbach, we have worked with five major conspiracy theory surveys in the UK and beyond. They show that over 50% of the British population believes in at least one conspiracy theory, and that belief in one conspiracy theory is highly correlated to belief in another. Belief in seemingly harmless, seemingly apolitical conspiracies (e.g., with respect to UFOs) enables belief in anti-Jewish conspiracies.

We believe education is key to addressing the problem. Holocaust education is particularly well-placed to convey the conceptual skills to see through conspiracy theories—but, as we trace the historical genealogy of such beliefs, we make the link to the present explicit.

The UK's Community Security Trust reports significant increases in anti-Jewish hate on university campuses. Together with the Anglo-Jewish Association and Lord Mann, the UK Government Advisor on Antisemitism, in 2022 we will launch a new program to combat anti-Jewish hate in UK universities.

This will be achieved by empowering participants—university staff and students—to explore and bust the myths on which anti-Jewish racism is built. We will show how the ideas and imaginaries that fuel anti-Jewish prejudices and conspiracy theories today draw on, in particular, a reservoir of historical tropes that were popularized by Christianity.

We will use our unique environment to provide opportunities for students and staff to openly and safely discuss issues about which many have little knowledge. Together, we will uncover the reappropriation of such traditions in modern varieties of anti-Jewish prejudice.

Our aim is to turn bystanders into upstanders. We want to highlight the responsibility of non-Jewish participants to recognize and challenge anti-Jewish racism in all forms, and to better support those on the receiving end of it. We also seek to attract Jewish participants, to facilitate healthy and respectful discussion, and so that all groups can learn from each other. We will work with universities to improve reporting mechanisms, and to let participants know where they can turn for support if they are experiencing abuse on campus.

Areas of academic research that are key for us include new research on photography and the problem of visual literacy. Research in this area has revealed that the over-reliance of museums, school textbooks, and media representations on perpetrator-made photos of the Holocaust can inadvertently reinforce rather than tackle antisemitism. Nazi images were designed to denigrate and dehumanize their victims. Conversely, photographs taken by Jewish victims of persecution uncover a different history and enable meaningful empathy.

On serving diverse audiences and convening challenging conversations on contemporary issues

We are a garden museum, set in a beautiful rural location, which creates a peaceful aura. Visitors value the objectivity, open-mindedness and kindness in our founding DNA. This appeals to every section of UK society. It makes us a “safe space” for tough conversations about the misinformation and prejudices which have shattered contemporary civil discourse and are beginning to threaten democracy itself.

As an Arts Council “National Portfolio Organisation,” we have a duty to reach diverse audiences. The UK is vastly more demographically diverse than when we were founded in 1995. Yet the one thing which has not changed is our ethos of reconciliation between people of different faiths and none. It is why our founders, the remarkable brothers Stephen and James Smith, originally named us “Beth Shalom”—the House of Peace. We are not a museum. We are not an organization. We are a home (literally—we were founded in the Smith family farmhouse). No one reaches more widely across the social and religious spectrum to invite people in. With our extended “family” of survivors, schools and members, we are truly a community. People want to feel part of something, and they are always welcome here.

Surveying the Field

Holocaust Museums, Exhibitions, and Memory Centers

- » **The Wiener Holocaust Library** in London is the world's oldest collection of original archival material on the Nazi era and the Holocaust. Its predecessor organization was established in 1933 to gather evidence about antisemitism and the persecution of Jews in Germany. The Library has been open since 1939.
- » **Ghetto Fighters' House**—founded in Israel by Holocaust survivors in 1949—was the first Holocaust museum in the world.
- » In 1953, five years after the establishment of the State of Israel, its Parliament created **Yad Vashem**, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center, in Jerusalem. Today, Yad Vashem is the largest and most significant Holocaust-era repository in the world.
- » **Mémorial de la Shoah** in Paris (established in 1956) and **Anne Frank House** in Amsterdam (established in 1957) are two of the earliest-established sites of Holocaust memory in Europe.
- » In 1961, Holocaust survivors in Los Angeles established **Holocaust Museum LA**. It was the first Holocaust museum in the United States.

- » In 1979, Holocaust survivors created the **Montreal Holocaust Museum**. It was the second Holocaust museum to open in North America.
- » **The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** (Washington, D.C.) opened to the public in 1993. It was established by an Act of Congress to create a memorial to honor victims and survivors and to ensure that the lessons of the Holocaust are taught in perpetuity.
- » Throughout the 1980s and '90s, **regional Holocaust museums** opened across the US in places such as Dallas, Farmington Hills (a suburb of Detroit), Houston, New York City, Skokie (a suburb of Chicago), and St. Petersburg.
- » In the 2000s, **Holocaust memorials across Europe** were established and expanded, including the **Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe** in Berlin.
- » More recently, the new permanent **Second World War and The Holocaust Galleries** opened at **Imperial War Museum London** to critical acclaim. The temporary museum exhibition **Auschwitz. Not long ago. Not far away.** has been presented in Madrid, New York City, and Kansas City, and seen by more than one million people.

Tali Nates

**Founder and Director,
Johannesburg Holocaust &
Genocide Centre**

From the *Confronting Antisemitism* symposium panel “Holocaust Remembrance and the Study of Antisemitism: The Power and Potential of Public Dialogue” (Oct. 17, 2021)

“In South Africa, where it is still very difficult to speak about our own history [of apartheid], it is compulsory to study the Holocaust. Speaking about the Holocaust, speaking about antisemitism and hatred of ‘the other,’ can also allow you to have a conversation about your own painful history and to confront your own painful past.”

Observations and Opportunities: Considering the Work of Holocaust Museums

Michael S. Glickman

Minimizing the Holocaust—and falsifying its scope, magnitude, and significance—is among the most common forms of antisemitism, and one that spurs and supports real violence against Jewish people around the world. Holocaust denial and distortion desecrates the memory of those who were murdered and disrespects the survivors whose lives were changed forever. It also paves the way for Jewish people today to be ostracized and dehumanized in ways that are painfully familiar to students of history.

The archives, libraries, and museums that steward evidence of history—preserving and protecting artifacts, records, and eyewitness accounts—have much to offer efforts that raise public awareness and understanding. However, museum leaders, archival professionals, collection specialists, and scholars must work to envision the future of Holocaust information literacy.

Holocaust-related resources largely remain siloed, with their impact limited to the modest spheres in which they were created. Even the libraries, archives, and museums whose resources are freely available have learned that unless resources are easily *discoverable* online—unless a website visitor finds

something of immediate relevance with a single click—their public use is limited.

Unfortunately, the sheer volume of resources is often overwhelming to the non-specialist user, who would greatly benefit from a curatorial layer guiding their exploration of history. In

Michael S. Glickman is Founder & CEO of jMUSE and former President & CEO of the Museum of Jewish Heritage — A Living Memorial to the Holocaust. Prior to joining the museum, Michael led the Center for Jewish History.

addition, there are many cases in which virtually uniting disparate archives—scattered across different institutions—would result in a more complete picture for public learners, particularly as public-access resources and capabilities remain uneven across different institutions.

Achieving this kind of integration would demand casting a wide net, including looking for phenomenal resources produced by lower-profile institutions or in surprising settings. It would require exploring:

- » How to integrate globally disparate collections, projects, and initiatives to generate transformative tools and methods for search and discovery
- » How to find ways to bridge distances and collections
- » How to coordinate activities and use the internet as a tool for good—contributing to public knowledge and effective modes of combating antisemitism.

In the 21st century, no collection stands alone; no institution is unrelated to other organizations and communities. What if we could gather the best digital exhibitions and tools and learning platforms—the resources that represent true innovations in Holocaust education—and give them the potential for a more

What new possibilities would a centralized collection of resources unlock for the general public, especially in historically underserved communities?

expansive reach? What if a resource developed in Melbourne could start to have a positive impact in Montreal? Or a person in London could meaningfully participate in a project in Los Angeles? What new possibilities would a centralized collection of resources unlock for the general public, especially in historically underserved

communities?

Even as propaganda that the Nazis created, popularized, or reactivated still circulates online—sowing distrust and misinformation in an astonishing range of communities—the cultural world can cut through the commotion of the internet to present truth, remembrance, honor, and dignity. We must mobilize our resources, enhance public knowledge of the information that is available, and highlight the relevance of that information. Addressing the urgent problem of antisemitism in our own time means confronting the denial, ignorance, and distortion of Holocaust history.

Expanding Our Views of Jewish History and Experience

Featuring

Rachel Miller
Simona Di Nepi
Lyudmila Sholokhova

in Conversation

On Tuesday, February 8, 2022, Rachel Miller (Center for Jewish History) and Simona Di Nepi (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) met with jMUSE on Zoom for a conversation about the unique strengths of archives, libraries, and museums in their work to confront antisemitism. On February 11, 2022, they were joined by a third colleague, Lyudmila Sholokhova (New York Public Library), for a second conversation. The following excerpt has been edited for brevity and clarity.

Rachel Miller: One of the great strengths of archives is that they are immense repositories for different perspectives and voices, whether of the perpetrators—when it comes to antisemitic individuals, organizations, or states—or of the victims of antisemitism. The voices of the victims may be represented on an organizational level, such as a refugee aid organization that is responding to state-sponsored antisemitism. They may be represented by eyewitness testimonies directly after, or decades after, an antisemitic horror. What has memory done to someone's

experience? How has that person responded in their own life?

As the home of all of those voices, archives serve up an incredible amount of raw material for the different interpreters that come through their virtual or physical doors, such as the Center for Jewish History's doors on 16th Street in New York City. Year by year, decade by decade, as individual researchers or members of the public look at what has happened in *response* to antisemitism in new ways, through new theoretical lenses, the outcomes of research change over time. The way we understand the voices changes over time—we hear them differently, we read them differently, depending on the moment we occupy.

What does not change are the primary sources that archives are serving up—the foundation. We can be trusted repositories—dependable and stable places where people know they can return. We offer the ability for people to come here on an ongoing basis and evolve their interpretations of what has happened in the past, of themselves, and even of what human beings are capable of.

Simona Di Nepi: In the case of institutions like the Center for Jewish History, there is the assumption that most people who walk in their doors or visit their websites already have an interest in Jewish materials. Art museums such as the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (MFA) do not have that assumption. We have access to a vast and diverse audience—but, at the same time, there is a lot of possibility and competition in terms of the materials, subjects, themes, and particular works of art that are brought to the public. At the MFA, there certainly is an intention to represent Jewish themes, including antisemitism and the Holocaust, but it is also true that we have a massive, encyclopedic collection that goes from ancient times to contemporary, living artists and covers pretty much the entire globe.

With over 500,000 items, our collection is vast, but we try to present what is important to us. The collecting and display of Jewish work and Jewish themes is relatively new to the MFA, and I have been working to address it on two levels. The first is that we are building a collection of Judaica, which I am shaping as having a wide meaning. To me, that means “Judaica” as not only Jewish ceremonial objects, but also Jewish materials relating to

Jewish life, history, art, and culture. That includes items that tell the story of the Holocaust and antisemitism.

Rachel Miller: Beyond the continual relevance of antisemitism for the Jewish community itself, the last couple of years have made clear that here in the United States, we are looking at a racial justice reckoning. We are seeing antisemitism as one part of a larger landscape of hate.

Especially in this moment, it's important to focus on relations and complications between different minority communities.

When we were closed to the public during the first year of COVID-19, we were serving researchers remotely and doing a lot of digitization-on-demand for researchers. And we noticed a real increase in interest around Black-Jewish relations. As part of one of the Center's most

recent digitization projects, we have decided to respond to that public interest by focusing on papers at the American Jewish Historical Society [one of the Center's in-house partners] that shed light on various facets of the Jewish community's response to the Crown Heights riots and the Rodney King case. These materials may not offer easy narratives, and their complexities deserve attention.

Especially in this moment, it's important to focus on relations and complications between different minority communities. We've done great work with the Museum of Chinese in America (MOCA) here in New York City, for example. For six years now,

we've had a relationship with them that started off as a collegial, behind-the-scenes tour and ultimately led to much larger conversations around joint exhibitions—which we achieved through *An Unlikely Photojournalist: Emile Bocian in Chinatown*—and projects that show the two groups as neighbors in New York, sharing immigrant and refugee experiences. We are trying to make those materials and stories widely accessible to the public.

Now, when teachers in Boston schools email us for resources on antisemitism, we can actually say yes, we have material.

Simona Di Nepi: In 2017—before I was here at the MFA—the museum had a very important temporary exhibition. Organized in association with the Art Gallery of Ontario, it showed the Lodz Ghetto photographs of Henryk Ross. That was wonderful because it was very different from what the MFA usually does. And, last year, 48 prints of Henryk Ross

photos were actually acquired. We also have the Leonard A. Lauder collection of postcards. I am sure that in those 120,000 postcards, we have images of ghettos and camps, but they have not been cataloged yet.

I am very pleased that recently we've made two other new acquisitions that address the theme of the Holocaust. Now, when teachers in Boston schools email us for resources on antisemitism, we can actually say yes, we have material. (On our website, there is a section called "Art Finder." Teachers can fill in a form where they explain what theme they want to teach,

for what class. “Can you please help me find works of art that express or represent...?” We get requests for Jewish materials.)

One of the MFA’s new acquisitions is a large painting called *The Ghetto* by the artist Samuel Bak. He is local, although in his life, he lived in many different countries after having been born in Vilnius. We acquired what I think is his very best picture—a personal memory/reinterpretation of the Vilna Ghetto, where he lived as a child. Immediately, when we posted it on social media, it got incredible response and attention. Schoolteachers approached us for images of and information on this one work—this representation—that had been missing. There had been a gap in the collection.

The other new acquisition is a more unusual object—a cigarette case made of brass that comes from the Lodz Ghetto. It is engraved on the front with the image of the Lodz Ghetto bridge, and it was given as a gift to a man called Samuel Lewin, who was the director of the shoe factory in the ghetto. Attached to this object is the story of the owner, how he was sent to the camps, how he escaped, how he retrieved the object. It also represents the story of the workers of the shoe factory who expressed their admiration and respect with this object.

New acquisitions allow us to tell stories that we haven’t been able to tell. But some of an institution’s public response to antisemitism—whether from an archive or museum—has to do with how nimble, how agile an institution is, and how quickly it can respond in a relevant way.

There are statements you can put out, responses or interpretations you can offer right away. But there is also the need to document right away.

Rachel Miller: There are statements you can put out, responses or interpretations you can offer right away. But there is also the need to *document* right away. When the shooting occurred at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, our archivists stepped up to capture history in real time. The American Jewish Historical Society and the

YIVO Institute for Jewish Research [two of the Center's in-house partners] hold the records of HIAS, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society. In the immediate aftermath of the shooting, we began to capture press and social media content that mentioned HIAS in relationship to the Pittsburgh shooting—from HIAS's own statements to the social media commentary that surrounded them. We have a great deal of web archiving expertise at the Center, and we used Archive-It web archiving services. Now we have this encapsulated moment that we are able to make available to present and future publics. That is a form of response.

Lyudmila Sholokhova: From my perspective, there is certainly a lot of work that needs to be done. Here at the Dorot Jewish Collection at the New York Public Library, that would include a detailed survey of the materials that we have that are relevant to antisemitism, because they are spread across collections. We need an in-depth survey but also a critical review of these

There are not many libraries
that specifically collect
antisemitic materials,
but we do.

holdings. And, to engage more people in educational activities, we need to promote more of these materials and engage in outreach. We do have student groups who visit and who have a more general sense of the materials that are available.

There are not many libraries that specifically collect antisemitic materials, but we do. We have materials, but for the most part, researchers have to know about them to use them. We can do more to expose the collections. It would be wonderful to have a dedicated fellowship position every year—again, to invite researchers to use the materials and to make them more widely known.

The Dorot Jewish Collection also has the opportunity to do programming from within the NYPL libraries. I have a lot of freedom in terms of the format, as long as the program features someone who did research here at NYPL and published something fresh—a book, an article, a brochure. One way to talk about antisemitism would be through the newest publications. There are a lot of opportunities that are just a matter of the goodwill of the researchers. I approach many researchers about the potential to promote new work and highlight projects.

Simona Di Nepi: In the MFA context, to present a story that is multifaceted and complex—or even to present a story of Jews at a certain period or in a certain place—I think needs a physical

space. Because our approach has historically been to integrate individual objects into larger galleries of material that is not Jewish, it is quite difficult to really address and explain certain issues or periods of history from a Jewish perspective. You are talking about an individual object; its label doesn't have the word count you need. Until we show individual objects within that particular context, we are unable to fully represent the complexities of Jewish history—the positives and the discrimination.

Very often, it's research and the questions of researchers that prompt us to dig into our own collections.

Lyudmila Sholokhova: Very often, it's research and the questions of researchers that prompt us to dig into our own collections. For example, a synagogue might reach out to us and say, "We would like to have a such-and-such presentation. Would you be able to accommodate

us?" If a researcher or even a community leader comes up with a question—it prompts us to be able to respond.

As we talk, I think that we need a special research guide that would direct people to our collections in a very specific way. It would align with the entire NYPL's strategy to prioritize diversity and compassion, to address hatred and discrimination. Of course, dedicated online exhibitions—such as the project we are doing with the David Berg Foundation—also offer doors into the collections.

The question of access is probably what has kept me awake at night the most in the past four years.

Simona Di Nepi: The question of access is probably what has kept me awake at night the most in the past four years. With the sheer, massive size of the museum building, and the number of galleries—we have either individual objects or groupings that I have created, but can people find them?

There is also a curatorial decision about what we want people to identify or recognize as a Jewish contribution. So far, in terms of keywords, I have tagged as “Jewish” and “Judaica” items that are not only Jewish ritual items but that have some Jewish theme or relevance. However, there is a huge array of Jewish artists, especially contemporary artists. I am thinking about it now. Mark Rothko, for example, is not on the “Judaica” webpage or on my list. And if his work is not there, people will not find it associated with “Jewish” works. Maybe I should review that, because even if a Jewish artist’s work does not deal with Jewish subjects or Jewishness—perhaps there are broader criteria.

Rachel Miller: Before this call, I was looking at a list of the most utilized archival collections at the Center for Jewish History over the last year. Looking the top 20—and thinking about antisemitism broadly, in all of its many aspects and contexts—the vast majority of the most frequently used collections touch on antisemitism. The most viewed collections include the displaced persons camp records held by YIVO. We also see a

So much of what people come to the Center's Lillian Goldman Reading Room to investigate touches on the subject of antisemitism.

lot of people consulting the Adolf Eichmann trial records held by the Leo Baeck Institute and, of course, the American Jewish Congress records held by the American Jewish Historical Society.

So much of what people come to the Center's Lillian Goldman Reading Room to investigate touches on the subject of antisemitism. And there are so many different ways you could define collections as "related to antisemitism." At the Center, I feel like our 12-floor stacks tower is filled with materials that respond in one way or another to antisemitism, or speak to rebuilding and repair in the wake of antisemitism.

Rachel Miller is the Chief of Archive and Library Services at the Center for Jewish History.

Simona Di Nepi is the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Curator of Judaica at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Lyudmila Sholokhova is the Curator of the Dorot Jewish Collection at the New York Public Library.

Acknowledgments

For their leadership and generous support of both the *Confronting Antisemitism* symposium and this publication, the Center for Jewish History and jMUSE again wish to thank the David Berg Foundation and Leon Levy Foundation. We are thankful to the Margaret and Daniel Loeb Foundation for their support of this publication.

It was our honor to feature and learn from the following distinguished speakers during the October 17, 2021 *Confronting Antisemitism* symposium (which can be viewed via cjh.org/antisemitism and confrontingantisemitism.info).

Susan L. Abrams

CEO, Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center

Lawrence S. Bacow

President, Harvard University

Peter Baldwin

Chair of the Board of Directors,
Center for Jewish History;
Professor of History, UCLA

Father Patrick Desbois

President, Yahad-In Unum

Christopher L. Eisgruber

President, Princeton University

Kirsten Fermaglich

Professor of History and Jewish Studies,
Michigan State University

Hon. David S. Ferriero

Archivist of the United States

David Frey

Professor of History & Director,
Center Holocaust and Genocide Studies,
United States Military Academy at West Point

Michael S. Glickman

Founder & CEO, jMUSE

Hon. Carla Hayden

Librarian of Congress

Mary Pat Higgins

President and CEO, Dallas Holocaust
and Human Rights Museum

Dara Horn

Author

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett

University Professor Emerita, NYU;
Ronald S. Lauder Chief Curator, POLIN Museum
of the History of Polish Jews, Warsaw

Ronald Leopold

Executive Director, Anne Frank House, Amsterdam

Bernard J. Michael

President & CEO, Center for Jewish History

Tony Michels

George L. Mosse Professor of American Jewish History, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Louise Mirrer

President & CEO, New-York Historical Society

Tali Nates

Founder and Director, Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre

Paul Salmons

Public historian and independent curator, London

Simon Schama

University Professor of History and Art History, Columbia University

Toby Simpson

Director, The Wiener Holocaust Library, London

Stephen D. Smith

Former Viterbi Endowed Executive Director, USC Shoah Foundation

Timothy Snyder

Richard C. Levin Professor of History and Fortunoff Archive Faculty Advisor, Yale University; Permanent Fellow, Institute for Human Sciences in Vienna

Dariusz Stola

Professor of History, Institute of Political Studies
of the Polish Academy of Sciences;
Former Director, POLIN Museum of the History
of Polish Jews, Warsaw

Magda Teter

Professor of History and Shvidler Chair
in Judaic Studies, Fordham University

Jeffrey Veidlinger

Joseph Brodsky Collegiate Professor of History
and Judaic Studies, University of Michigan

Oren Weinberg

Chief Executive Officer, National Library of Israel,
Jerusalem

For their participation in the pre-symposium workshop session,
along with moderator **Bernard J. Michael**, the Center for
Jewish History and jMUSE wish to thank **Gemma R. Birnbaum**
(American Jewish Historical Society); **Jonathan Brent** (YIVO
Institute for Jewish Research); **Jason Guberman** (American
Sephardi Federation); **William Weitzer** (Leo Baeck Institute);
and **Shulamith Z. Berger** (Yeshiva University Museum).

The Center for Jewish History and jMUSE are also grateful to their colleagues Rio Daniel, Rachel Miller, Ian Gray, Julie Kaplan, and Ilana Rosenbluth for their contributions to the success of the symposium.

The editors of this publication gratefully acknowledge the scholarly contributions and critical feedback provided by Jeffrey Veidlinger (University of Michigan), Marjorie Lehman (Jewish Theological Seminary), and their colleagues on the Center for Jewish History's Academic Advisory Council.

The symposium was funded, in part, by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the New York City Council.

The Center for Jewish History wishes to acknowledge Lea Lange for writing the Center's "Editing Wikipedia" article. Dallas Holocaust and Human Rights Museum wishes to thank Dr. Sara Abosch and Dr. Charlotte Decoster for their contributions to museum's responses in the "Holocaust Museums Take Action" article. The National Holocaust Centre & Museum (UK) gratefully acknowledges Professor Maiken Umbach's contributions to its responses in the "Holocaust Museums Take Action" article.

jMUSE is an arts and culture venture founded on and committed to the principles of collaboration and exchange. It brings together institutions, experts, and philanthropists to experiment with new ways to present important ideas and innovative content across the United States and Europe.

*Activating Archives, Libraries,
and Museums in the Fight Against
Antisemitism* was designed by
Pure+Applied.

Copyright April 2022

