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**United States House of Representatives
Committee on the Judiciary**

Examining Anti-Semitism on College Campuses

Written Testimony of Pamela S. Nadell

Before the

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Introduction

Thank you, Chairman Goodlatte, Ranking Member Conyers, and distinguished members of this committee for inviting me to this important hearing on antisemitism on our nation's college campuses.¹

I am Pamela Nadell, a professor of history and director of the Jewish Studies Program at American University. I am also president of the Association for Jewish Studies, a learned society of nearly two thousand members in the U.S. and far beyond who research, write, and teach in all fields of Jewish Studies from the Bible to contemporary Jewish life.²

I have spent most of my life on a college campus. As a scholar of American Jewish history, I know that antisemitism has coursed through our nation's past since twenty-three Jews landed in New Amsterdam in 1654 and the colony's governor, Peter Stuyvesant, sought to expel what he called this "deceitful race [of]...hateful enemies and blasphemers." Had his "request that the new territories should no more be allowed to be infected by people of the Jewish nation" been granted, perhaps we would not have this morning's hearing.³

But, more than 350 years ago, he failed, and, since then, Jews have immigrated to America from around the world, and they and their descendants have proudly called this nation their home. As citizens, American Jews enjoy the rights guaranteed in our First Amendment—the freedoms of worship, speech, the press, and peaceable assembly.

Those same rights allow others to voice their contempt for the Jewish people and the Jewish religion. We call that antisemitism, a form of bigotry and hatred based on many stereotypes and myths. Antisemites charge that Jews conspire to control governments, the media, the entire world; they deny the historicity of the Holocaust; they call Jews Christ-killers. At its heart antisemitism is a malevolent ideology. It targets Jews as individuals and as a people. As an historian, I know that antisemitism has waxed and waned across the landscape of American history.⁴ The political moment, economic dislocations, social forces, the movies in their heyday and social media today set its volume control.

Antisemitism today

We are, by all accounts, sadly, at one of those moments where the volume on antisemitism in American life is turned way up. Scholars and watchdog Jewish communal agencies produce alarming surveys. The press and, as this hearing demonstrates, the U.S. Congress, rightly pay attention.⁵ When a violent protest erupts as white supremacists in Charlottesville, a college town, chant “Jews will not replace us,” American Jews are rightly fearful.⁶ Antisemitism takes many forms: harassment and threats against individuals and Jewish organizations, vandalism and bomb threats against Jewish institutions. Swastikas spray-painted anywhere signal a renewed call to exterminate the Jews. The number of physical assaults remains low, but each is a shocking reminder of the vulnerability of all Jews. On social media, antisemitic threats have exploded. Attacks there, especially targeting Jewish journalists, run horrifically into the millions.⁷

The hard evidence about the rising numbers of antisemitic incidents is indisputable, and everyone—politicians, government officials, leaders of business and industry, and especially our nation’s educators—must do all they can to model respectful behavior and condemn this bigotry, and all expressions of racial hatred.

But, the question that has brought us to this hearing today is the climate of antisemitism on our campuses. Some charting its rise have specifically called out our colleges and universities as “hotspots of antisemitism and anti-Israel sentiment.”⁸ Social scientists find that, when Jewish students are handed a list of antisemitic statements, nearly three-quarters will confess that they were exposed to at least one of them in the past year. As one 2015 study concluded from this data: “Hostility towards Jews and Israel appears to be a problem for a significant number of Jewish students.”⁹

But how does such unfortunate stereotyping impact Jewish student life on campus? Are campuses really hotbeds of antisemitism? Or are they places where Jews, one minority among many, meet, from time to time, stupidity, insensitivity, and prejudice in a space that we all wish would be free from such expression. Is antisemitism so pervasive on the campus that it has created a hostile environment for Jews? Does antisemitic bias prevent Jewish students from experiencing all that their college years have to offer?

Even though, in some surveys, three-quarters of Jewish students report exposure to antisemitism, they deny that their campuses are hotbeds of antisemitism. A September 2017 Stanford University study analyzed interviews with sixty-six Jewish students at five California universities, among them campuses routinely painted as centers of antisemitic ferment. The report’s conclusion: Jewish “[s]tudents feel safe on campus.” The students interviewed, deliberately selected because they were not active in campus Jewish organizations, did not label their campuses antisemitic. When these students experience discomfort as Jews, they trace it to the stridency of both sides of the Israel-Palestine debate on campus.¹⁰ While that debate can devolve into antisemitism, such political speech is not *ipso facto* antisemitic.

Other studies, including ones of students active in Jewish campus organizations, a group more likely to claim encountering antisemitism and anti-Israel bias, also demonstrate that Jewish students do not label their campuses as bastions of antisemitism. Yes, they report encounters with antisemitic expression, but mostly it comes from their peers, not from their professors or their institutions. These students say antisemitism is a significant problem for our country, but they are “reluctant to characterize their campuses as anti-Semitic.” A 2015 survey of “Jewish Life on Campus,” concedes that we have “more noise than information” about campus climate around antisemitism, and concludes: “[D]espite the anguish in the Jewish news media about the dangers of anti-Semitism on campus, students say they feel safe.”¹¹

The campus responds

This research confirms my own impressions of the Jewish college experience both on my own campus and on those of so many of my Association for Jewish Studies colleagues teaching around the country. Unquestionably, there are explosive incidents—invited Israeli scholars prevented from speaking even though their topics have nothing to do with the conflict, vitriol that shockingly explodes into shoving matches, “Death to Israel and to all Jews” scrawled on a Jewish student organization’s Facebook page—but these deplorable individual incidents do not prove that the campus environment is rife with antisemitism.¹²

You may have heard that recently on my own campus, Confederate flags affixed with cotton stems were posted on bulletin boards at the same moment that American University History Professor Ibram X. Kendi was launching our new Antiracist Research and Policy Center. You may not know that several of the flags were affixed to the bulletin board of our Center for Israel Studies, and that American University is just one of approximately 150 campuses targeted in the past year with white supremacist flyers.¹³

When such revolting racist incidents occur, the response from university leaders is immediate and multi-layered. We hold town halls proclaiming, “enough is enough”; we issue statements of condemnation; we offer distraught students opportunities for healing and counseling. I would point the members of this committee to Professor Kendi’s remarks after this incident. He spoke to the entire campus, but also “especially to students of color and Jewish students,” the targets of this hate.¹⁴ Perhaps there are campuses where administrators respond diffidently to such displays, but I believe them to be the exception. My anecdotal impression from canvassing colleagues teaching Jewish Studies elsewhere is that their experiences parallel mine: When confronted with acts of racism and antisemitism, university leaders condemn swiftly and forcefully.

Are antisemites targeting the college campus? Unfortunately, yes. Do Jewish students encounter antisemitism on their college campuses? Sadly, yes. Have I on rare occasions in academe heard an antisemitic remark? The answer is also yes. Is antisemitism at “the epicenter of campus intolerance,” as one report claims? Has it created a climate of fear that impinges upon Jewish students’ ability to learn and experience college life to the fullest? My impression: an unequivocal no.

¹ On the spelling of antisemitism, see International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, “Memo of Spelling on Antisemitism,” April 2015, https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/sites/default/files/memo-on-spelling-of-antisemitism_final-1.pdf.

² For more information, see www.associationforjewishstudies.org.

³ “Peter Stuyvesant, Manhattan, to the Amsterdam Chamber of Directors, 22 September 1654,” and “The West India Company to Peter Stuyvesant, 26 April 1655,” in *The Jew in the American World*, ed. Jacob Rader Marcus (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996), 29-33.

⁴ For a sweeping overview, see Leonard Dinnerstein, *Anti-Semitism in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

⁵ See, e.g., “Anti-Semitic Incidents Surge in the United States, ADL says,” *JTA: Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, November 2, 2017, <https://www.jta.org/2017/11/02/news-opinion/united-states/anti-semitic-incidents-surge-in-united-states-adl-says>.

⁶ Emma Green, “Why the Charlottesville Marchers Were Obsessed with Jews: Anti-Semitic logic fueled the violence over the weekend, no matter what the president says.” *The Atlantic*, August 15, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/08/nazis-racism-charlottesville/536928/>.

⁷ “Testimony of Jonathan A. Greenblatt, CEO and National Director, Anti-Defamation League, Before the Senate Judiciary Committee Hearings on Responses to Increase in Religious Hate Crimes,” May 2, 2017, <https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/05-02-17%20Greenblatt%20Testimony.pdf>

⁸ Quoted in Ari Kelman, Abiya Ahmed, Ilana Horwitz, Jeremiah Lockwood, Marva Shalev Marom, Maja Zuckerman, *Safe and on the Sidelines: Jewish Studies and the Israel-Palestine Conflict on Campus*, Stanford Graduate School of Education, September 2017, <https://stanford.app.box.com/v/Safeandonthesidelinesreport>
See AMCHA Initiative, *Antisemitism: At the Epicenter of Campus Intolerance Antisemitic Activity in 2016 at U.S. Colleges and Universities with the Largest Jewish Undergraduate Populations*. April 2017. https://www.amchainitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Antisemitism_At-the-Epicenter-of-Campus-Intolerance_Report-2016.pdf; Kristine Phillips, “The ‘hotbed of anti-Semitism’ isn’t a foreign country. It’s U.S. college campuses, a new report says,” *Washington Post*, April 24, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2017/04/24/the-hotbed-of-anti-semitism-isnt-a-foreign-country-but-u-s-college-campuses-report-says/?utm_term=.864f22e3f4fa.

⁹ Leonard Saxe, Theodore Sasson, Graham Wright, and Shahar Hecht. *Antisemitism and the College Campus: Perceptions and Realities*, Brandeis University Maurice and Marilyn Cohen

Center for Modern Jewish Studies, 2015, esp. p. 23.

<https://www.brandeis.edu/cmjs/pdfs/birthright/AntisemitismCampus072715.pdf>.

¹⁰ Ari Kelman, Abiya Ahmed, Ilana Horwitz, Jeremiah Lockwood, Marva Shalev Marom, Maja Zucerkman, *Safe and on the Sidelines: Jewish Studies and the Israel-Palestine Conflict on Campus*, Stanford Graduate School of Education, September 2017, <https://stanford.app.box.com/v/SafeandonthesidelinesReport>.

¹¹ Annette Koren, Leonard Saxe, and Eric Fleisch, “Jewish Life on Campus: From Backwater to Battleground,” *American Jewish Year Book 2015*, eds. Arnold Dashefsky and Ira Sheskin 115 (New York: Springer, 2015): 45-88, quotations, 54.

¹² AMCHA Initiative, *Antisemitism: At the Epicenter of Campus Intolerance: Antisemitic Activity in 2016 at U.S. Colleges and University with the Largest Jewish Undergraduate Populations*, April 2017, <https://www.amchainitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Antisemitism-At-the-Epicenter-of-Campus-Intolerance-Report-2016.pdf> esp. 7.

¹³ Cassandra Santiago and Tina Burnside, “Confederate flag posters with cotton stems attached, is found on American University campus,” *CNN*, September 27, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2017/09/27/health/american-university-racist-cotton-posters-trnd/index.html>.

¹⁴ For the multiple responses to this incident, see American University, Confederate Flag Incident, September 2017, http://www.american.edu/president/diversity/Confederate_Flag_Incident.cfm. When the Senate considered the Anti-Semitism Awareness Act of 2016, Senator Bob Casey pointed to swastikas spray-painted in a bathroom at Swarthmore College, and he praised the college for its swift condemnation and response; Anti-Semitism Awareness Act of 2016, *Congressional Record Online*, Government Publishing Office, December 1, 2016, <https://www.congress.gov/crec/2016/12/01/modified/CREC-2016-12-01-pt1-PgS6649.htm>.