

2020

**Foreword: The Conflict Over The Conflict: The Israel/Palestine
Campus Debate**

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Foreword

In July of 1991, Leonard Jeffries, a tenured professor at the City College of New York and chair of its black studies department, gave a speech in Albany, New York. He claimed that there was an anti-black “conspiracy, planned and plotted and programmed out of Hollywood,” and moreover that “Russian Jewry had a particular control over the movies, and their financial partners, the Mafia, put together a system of destruction for black people.” Few had heard of Jeffries beforehand, but news stories soon revealed that he also espoused a form of eugenics in which black people (whom he called “sun people”) were superior to white people (whom he called “ice people”) because they had more melanin in their skins. Outraged that someone holding such a prominent public position should hold and convey these views, many politicians and members of the public – including some leaders of the Jewish community – called for City College to fire Jeffries.

A few months later, I participated in a panel discussion about the Jeffries case at New York Law School, where I teach. Tensions between some members of the Jewish and African American communities, already inflamed by the Jeffries case, seemed at a fever pitch due to even more recent events. Only weeks after Jeffries’s Albany speech, the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn – with its large African American and Orthodox Jewish communities – erupted in riots following the tragic death of a seven-year-old African American boy, who had been run over by a station wagon in the motorcade of a prominent rabbi. Some black youths attacked

and seriously injured several Jews on the street, and killed a Jewish student from Australia.

One member of that New York Law School panel was the American Jewish Committee's expert on antisemitism, Ken Stern. I expected this leader of a Jewish organization to argue that anyone who spouts hateful propaganda, such as Jeffries, should not teach at a public university, especially given the charged context, in which Jews (among others) were being targeted with not only hateful ideas but also violence, injury, and death. Indeed, Ken pulled no punches in exposing and condemning Jeffries's racist ideas, and he explained that City College lawfully could (and should) remove Jeffries from his official leadership role as department chair, because his discriminatory advocacy was directly at odds with the College's mission. However, Ken also made forceful arguments that Jeffries's tenured teaching position should remain secure, for reasons of both principle and strategy. Ken stressed that tenure is essential even – indeed, especially – to protect freedom for “the thought that we hate,” to quote Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes; and he predicted that dismissing Jeffries would, perversely, increase attention to and sympathy for him and his ideas, by turning him into a free speech “martyr.” This was hardly a popular position for a Jewish communal official to take, and I was deeply impressed by Ken's staunch adherence to principle, as well as his strategic savvy.

Ever since that memorable encounter almost three decades ago, I have continued to follow Ken's remarkable career with admiration and appreciation. He continues to vigorously speak out – and to take effective actions – against both hatred and censorship, even when his is the proverbial voice in the wilderness. For example, demonstrating his expertise and vigilance concerning hate-fueled violence, Ken issued a prescient report about the militia movement just nine days before the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, which was the worst terrorist attack on US soil until 11 September 2001. Ken's groundbreaking report documented the serious danger that these groups posed, when too many were writing them off as harmless white guys playing with guns in the woods. In the report's cover memo, Ken warned that there might well be an attack on some government official or building

on 19 April 1995, the anniversary of the fiery end of the Branch Davidian cult in Texas, which to the militias epitomized government evil. Too few people remember that national news programs featured pundits who reflexively blamed the Oklahoma City bombing on Muslims, until Timothy McVeigh was arrested, thus vindicating Ken's sadly well-founded warning.

Readers of historian Deborah Lipstadt's book *History on Trial: My Day in Court with David Irving* (2005) will note Ken's contributions to the momentous 2000 London trial she recounts, which resulted in her landmark victory against Holocaust denier David Irving, who had sued her for libel. Ken, along with Lipstadt herself, consistently explains why Holocaust denial propagates anti-semitism, but nonetheless opposes making it illegal. He explains that effectively combating antisemitism (and other forms of hate) requires multifaceted societal action, including education and counterspeech, and that laws punishing Holocaust denial (and other hateful speech) reduce the impetus to pursue these more promising non-censorial responses. Again, this stance illustrates major pillars that undergird all of Ken's extensive advocacy and activism, as also shown in the Jeffries case: his unwavering commitment to human rights – including equality and free speech – as well as his determination to pursue strategies that are thoughtfully designed to actually have a positive impact.

Ken has consistently been both principled and effective in advancing the anti-hate, pro-human rights cause throughout all phases of his distinguished, multifaceted career: as a trial lawyer (for example, he represented American Indian Movement co-founder Dennis Banks before the United States Supreme Court), a human rights activist, a visiting professor, a foundation executive director, and now the founding director of the Bard Center for the Study of Hate.

All of which leads to the present impressive book. Ken realizes that its topic is a "third rail," and that he will be attacked by partisans on all sides of Israel/Palestine issues. But he will not be deterred – especially because the core aim of this timely book is precisely to embolden and encourage others to robustly exercise their freedoms of thought, discussion, and debate, and to respect and indeed foster everyone else's equivalent rights, without either

ensorship by others or self-censorship. The book recognizes that especially insidious pressures are exerted by people with whom we are generally allies – or by our (mis)perceptions of them – because we are loath to alienate them by “deviating” from “the party line,” or even questioning it.

Being married to a Columbia University professor and living on the edge of the Columbia campus, I am painfully aware of how “the conflict over the conflict” has riven that campus, with many adverse repercussions for academic freedom and campus life more generally. Let me quote a portion of an in-depth 2018 article in the daily student newspaper the *Columbia Spectator*, “Decades of Discord: What Makes the Israel-Palestine Debate Uniquely Persistent, and Personal”:

For decades, the debate has permeated discussions across multiple facets of [the Columbia] campus, including student government, academic settings, and apolitical clubs – even aspects of students’ personal lives. Most significantly ... community members fear social or academic repercussions if they associate with a particular stance in the debate. As a result, students ... highlighted their discomfort with even being a member of certain clubs or taking certain classes ... Even in largely unrelated contexts ... some students said they feel uncomfortable due to their own political views. For example, activist organizations often distance themselves from Columbia University Democrats due to its perceived pro-Israel stance.

I am especially happy to write this foreword not only because it introduces such an important book but also because I had the good fortune to be present at the book’s inception. I even have the *chutzpah* to claim some credit for Ken’s decision to write it. Let me explain.

A few years ago, Ken reached out to me to discuss his concerns about the Israel/Palestine campus situation. Being familiar with my advocacy of free speech, open inquiry, and civil discourse, including on campus, Ken realized that I shared his concerns. We discussed how campus activists and their outside supporters on all sides of the Israel/Palestine debate were turning campuses into

battlegrounds, damaging free speech and academic freedom in the process. We commiserated about incidents in which each side called out the other's transgressions, but was silent about, or rationalized, its own, thus displaying the all-too-common support of "free speech for me, but not for thee" (to quote the title of journalist Nat Hentoff's 1992 book). This particular situation is troubling enough in itself, but even worse, it typifies a broader problem, which plagues debates about public policy issues in general, on campus and beyond. Ken easily persuaded me that documenting both the problems and the potential solutions in the particular context of the Israel/Palestine debate could have a far-reaching positive impact for our campus and political discourse more broadly.

Noting that no one had written any in-depth report or book about this situation, Ken tried to persuade me to do so. Flattered as I was by Ken's suggestion, I declined, explaining to him that a certain someone else was uniquely well-qualified to "write the book" on this topic: none other than Ken Stern himself! High as my expectations were for the book that I urged Ken to write, the resulting work exceeds even those high hopes. It masterfully blends riveting insider accounts of key developments, drawing on Ken's longtime leadership role on these issues, with astute expert analysis.

In addition to his human rights and legal expertise, Ken also is a long-standing, pioneering thought leader in the emerging interdisciplinary field of "hate studies," of which he was literally a "founding father." As the book recounts, Ken worked with a few other foresightful leaders to found the very first center for hate studies – the Gonzaga University Institute for Hate Studies, which was launched in 1997. In the 2004 inaugural issue of that institute's pathbreaking *Journal of Hate Studies*, which Ken also helped to spearhead, he wrote a seminal article, whose title says it all: "The Need for an Interdisciplinary Field of Hate Studies." That article provides the following definition of the then-proposed field, which now is flourishing at a growing number of centers in the US as well as other countries: "Inquiries into the human capacity to define, and then demonize or dehumanize, an 'other,' and the processes which inform and give expression to, or can curtail, control, or combat, that capacity." Ken has continued to make essential contributions

to this burgeoning field, including through his current service as the founding director of the Bard Center for the Study of Hate. The resulting insights from many fields – including evolutionary, social, and moral psychology – enhance this book, deepening our understanding of both the causes of the current polarization and the most promising countermeasures.

Of all the important aspects of this book, the one that I particularly salute is the blueprint it provides for how we can surmount the “us/them” mentality, to forge a constructive path forward. Ken outlines specific steps that we can all pursue, which will not only enrich our own thinking and enliven our interactions with others, but also lay the groundwork for mutually acceptable (and, hence, mutually objectionable) resolutions of seemingly intractable societal problems. Having been working and reading in this area intensely for many years, I nonetheless learned new and invaluable lessons about both causes of and remedies for hatred in all its ugly manifestations – hatred of those with identities and/or ideas that are different from our own.

While this book is about Israel and Palestine, it could be about any conflict that hits the jugular. It addresses a crucial question: How do we engage in and facilitate rational conversations about emotional issues? Its lessons apply to all hot-button questions, ranging from immigration, to abortion, to gun control, among countless others. It should be read by everyone who cares about critical thinking and thoughtful discourse. It deserves a place on the bookshelf of every provost, and should be required reading for all incoming college students.

Nadine Strossen is a professor at New York Law School, past president of the American Civil Liberties Union (1991–2008), and a leading expert on constitutional law and civil liberties. Her acclaimed 2018 book *HATE: Why We Should Resist It with Free Speech, Not Censorship* was selected by Washington University as its 2019 “Common Read.”