

A New Syllabus for Freedom: Israel and the U.S. at 75

The Honorable Ronald Lauder

KEY TAKEAWAYS

While the Nazis tried to hide their deeds, Hamas has openly publicized the atrocities committed on October 7.

Antisemitism and support for the terrorist group Hamas have been fomented in American academia by the radical Left and by the DEI movement.

Freedom-loving Americans must take note of what is happening to the Jewish people and stand up to protect the liberties at the heart of the American project.

It is my great honor to be here at Heritage, which is directly connected to my hero, Ronald Reagan. I first met Governor Reagan in the mid-1960s in my parents' living room. That evening had a profound impact on me. I was inspired by his vision of America and his optimism.

When Governor Reagan became President Reagan in 1980, I worked in his Administration in the Defense Department. And it was Ronald Reagan who set off a chain of events that changed my life completely.

First Encounter with Antisemitism

Let me explain. In 1986, President Reagan appointed me to be the U.S. Ambassador to Austria. That was at the same time of the Kurt Waldheim controversy. Waldheim was the Secretary General of the

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UN and had just left the United Nations in disgrace for lying about his Nazi past. Instead of going away quietly, Kurt Waldheim went home and ran for president, telling Austrians he didn't do anything they didn't do, which was, of course, true, and they elected him.

As ambassador, I made a decision not to attend his inauguration because of his Nazi past. From that moment on, I was no longer the American Ambassador, I was now referred to in certain quarters as the Jewish-American ambassador. It was the first time in my life I came up against real antisemitism, and it changed me from the world's most assimilated Jew to someone who has devoted his life to protecting the Jewish people.

Greatest Loss of Jewish Life Since the Holocaust

The topic of this talk was set long ago: “The Future of the U.S.–Israel Alliance at 75.”

Over the last two weeks, that alliance has never been more important, but it has also shined a spotlight on a growing threat right here in the United States and around the world, a threat we can no longer ignore.

That's what I intend to talk about today, but first, I have to make one point crystal clear at the start. On October 7, Hamas terrorists broke through the fence separating Gaza from Israel with two aims and two aims only: to kill as many Jews as they could and to take hostages back to Gaza.

They raped, tortured, burned alive, and decapitated Jewish babies. They... decapitated babies!

Anti-Israeli Sentiment in Academia

You've heard that October 7 saw the greatest loss of Jewish life on any day since the Holocaust. But there is one huge difference. The Nazis tried to hide their crimes from the world. Hamas video-taped and even *live-streamed* their atrocities over a background of cheers. They did not hide their hatred of Jews. They were proud of it.

These awful images are right there in full color, so you would have expected the entire world to condemn it. Instead, on streets not just in the Middle East, but in London, New York, Los Angeles, almost everywhere, and shockingly on almost every college campus, we watched massive demonstrations, not in sympathy for the 1500 Israeli men, women, and children who were butchered—instead, young people are now waving Hamas flags and supporting Hamas.

They denounce Israel for being a “colonial oppressor,” and they side with these barbaric terrorists.

When 34 student groups at Harvard say “we hold the Israeli regime entirely responsible for all unfolding violence,” something has gone very wrong in our education system.

Not long ago, this hatred of Israel in academia was confined to a few far-Left socialist professors or those from the Middle East. But this upside-down logic has now spread everywhere, and almost every college president and administrator is afraid to stand up and condemn it. How did this happen? How did we get here? And what can we do to turn this around?

The Radical Left’s Infiltration of Academia

The radical change that brought us here was steady but slow; few people noticed it was even happening. It began in the 1960s when the generation of anti-war professors began teaching in colleges across the country. They would eventually head departments and cut off any differing points of view in the PhD pipeline. They began to fill colleges with people who shared their opinions. If you were working on a PhD in history and held conservative views or just opinions that differed from the crowd, there was no job for you. Then, these radical ideas spread down to secondary schools.

In 1980, a political science professor at Spellman College and a self-described “socialist anarchist” named Howard Zinn, wrote a book called *A People’s History of the United States* in which he told us it was America—from Columbus to the Robber Barons to Vietnam—that brought evil on the world. The book was not serious scholarship, but it was picked up by high school teachers who were taught by those radical professors.

Their reasoning came down to this: All opinions are equally valid. Well, all opinions are not equally valid. Some opinions are dead wrong. So now, the next generation was learning this Marxist history in high school. The book sold over two million copies. And it’s had a very negative impact on this generation.

Bill Ayers and the Weather Underground. Remember the name Bill Ayers? Ayers was a co-founder of the Weather Underground that bombed public buildings in the 1960s. He should have gone to prison for life, but the FBI botched his case.

Instead, Ayers went back to school, got a PhD, and became a professor of education. He has had a huge impact on the books that elementary students have read over the past four decades painting the U.S. as a racist and evil country.

There are many others with less famous names in schools and campuses across the country that brought us to the present day. Our wonderful colleges that were the envy of the world and trained generations of Americans who built our bridges, conquered disease, and created businesses that employed millions have now produced students who cheer for terrorists—terrorists who slaughter women and children and see America as evil.

Antisemitism at the Heart of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Over the last 50 years, colleges have taken out the core curriculum of Western Civilization that all of us learned. Instead, we now have classes in DEI, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, in every school.

Tabia Lee, an African-American and former DEI administrator, lost her job when she questioned the severe antisemitism at the center of DEI. Ms. Lee writes that DEI, at its core, believes the world is divided into two groups: the oppressors and the oppressed. Jews, DEI claims, are the oppressors, and Israel is branded a colonialist state.

That means Israelis—who built a country out of nothing, who created the only democracy in the Middle East, who defended their homeland in countless wars and who are fighting for their lives at this very moment—are now the oppressors. And don't think it's only Jews that are the oppressors. Everyone here in this room falls into this category as well.

In too many colleges, Israel is evil. The United States is evil. But the true evil of Hamas is the victim. Up is down; East is West. I should point out that there are many positive DEI programs in our corporations, especially at Estée Lauder.

When Headlines Spark Riots. But it's not just colleges where the problems lie, because they are the training ground for the rest of society. Our great newspapers have always been an essential part of our democracy, keeping citizens informed. But today they have in too many cases placed their political beliefs sometimes ahead of facts.

This was evident last week, when the hospital in Gaza was hit by a rocket. If you read the *New York Times*, the first banner headline they put up was "Israeli Strike Kills Hundreds in Hospital, Palestinians Say." That was changed to "At Least 500 Killed in Strike on Gaza Hospital, Palestinians Say," which was then changed to "At Least 500 Killed in Blast at Gaza Hospital, Palestinians Say."

Those headlines sparked riots around the world. We now know the truth: The hospital was not hit by Israel, it was hit by Hamas. It wasn't even the hospital that was hit. It was the hospital parking lot. And it wasn't 500, it was probably less than 50. But much of the world won't know this because of that headline.

Mark Twain's famous quote was never more true: "A lie can travel half way around the world while the truth is putting on its shoes." And Mark Twain wrote that over a hundred years before the internet.

This very important newspaper must realize that when headlines are not correct, it can cause the deaths of Jewish people, especially children throughout the Jewish diaspora.

Because of last week's headlines, synagogues were burned in three countries, reminiscent of Kristallnacht in 1938. And Members of Congress [Rashida] Tlaib and [Ilhan] Omar still continue to foment riots based on this lie. This is no different than the old blood libel that claimed Jews killed children to use their blood in Passover matzas. Those lies sparked pogroms which killed Jews by the thousands and burned down synagogues. Apparently civilization has not advanced one iota since the Middle Ages.

We see this throughout the media today. At NPR, CNN, [the] AP, and Reuters, but the worst is the BBC. They can't even bring themselves to call Hamas terrorists, *terrorists*. They use the more benign term "militant." How can you not call these monsters *terrorists*?

These are the same lies that cause Harvard students to demonstrate for Hamas. It's why voters elect representatives who I believe truly hate our country. And it's why we are in big trouble.

Then They Came for Me—and There Was No One Left to Speak for Me. Here is something that all of you must remember: Throughout history, whatever begins with the Jews never ends with the Jews. We are the canaries in the mine shaft. Remember, Hitler went after the Jews first, but when it was all over, more than 60 million human beings were dead and two continents destroyed. We are the canaries in the mineshaft, and look around you: The canaries are dying. Take notice.

Wokism's Dangerous Threat to Our Freedom

The fact is, we are living through another McCarthyism, this one from the radical Left, and it will aggressively attack you if you dare to question it. This new Left-wing McCarthyism or "wokism" has advanced dishonest views on gender, politics, race, history, and, especially, the core values that made the United States the beacon of freedom in the world.

We must not let this woke-McCarthyism destroy the hard-earned liberties that it took generations of Americans to achieve, liberties that drew millions to leave their homes and families to come to these shores. Liberties that drew my grandparents from Hungary. Liberties that drew all of your ancestors here as well.

America and freedom of expression are too necessary to let them just disappear in this dangerous wave of radicalism. I will not let this promise for all mankind be destroyed, and this is how I am fighting back.

Fighting Back

First, through the World Jewish Congress that defends 100 Jewish communities all over the world. I have traveled to 40 countries to meet with prime ministers and presidents, and I make them aware that we are watching everything going on in their countries for one simple reason: So their Jewish citizens can practice their faith in dignity and safety.

I also created a foundation that has opened 30 Jewish schools throughout Central and Eastern Europe where Jewish communities were destroyed. These schools have restarted vibrant new centers of Jewish life. And I am fighting this dangerous intolerance right here at home. And all Americans who care about our values, our freedom, and our children's future must be doing this as well.

My family has been deeply involved in the University of Pennsylvania since my brother and I graduated over 50 years ago. We created the Joseph Lauder Institute at Wharton that offers advanced degrees in international business. We have given millions of dollars to Penn over the years because we believed in Penn and everything it stood for.

Last month, several of Penn's departments held a conference called "Palestine Writes Literature Festival." It claimed to focus on Palestinian writers. Instead, it was the biggest anti-Israel and anti-Semitic pep rally ever held at Penn. One of the main speakers was Roger Waters of the rock group Pink Floyd, the same Roger Waters who uses a large inflatable pig that floats above his concerts. A pig with a Jewish star on it.

When I pointed out to Penn's president that this conference would tarnish Penn's reputation, she refused to cancel it, citing freedom of speech. Remember the reasoning that "all opinions are equally valid." I have to wonder if Penn would allow a conference that denounced Asians or Native Americans or Blacks. They should not. But why is it okay to say these things about Jews? Why is that acceptable? Remember, it's because we are the oppressors. It turned out to be the worst possible timing for Penn. The conference went on as scheduled, and it was as bad as we feared. And then just two weeks later, 1500 Jews were slaughtered because they were Jews.

This is part of a longer letter I wrote to Penn's president this past week: "I have spent the past 40 years of my life fighting anti-Semitism all over the world and I never, in my wildest imagination, thought I would have to fight it at my university, my alma mater and my family's alma mater."

I have been joined by other donors who have stopped their gifts to Penn, including John Huntsman, who is not Jewish. He's just an honorable man.

Every single university, every newspaper, every cable channel has to understand there are consequences to their actions. We can no longer be silent. None of us can sit back.

Albert Einstein said: "The world will not be destroyed by those who do evil, but by those who watch them without doing anything."

Let me repeat that: "The world will not be destroyed by those who do evil, but by those who watch them without doing anything." This is the time we all have to stand up and say: This insanity is over.

Standing with Israel Is Standing for Democracy

We all have to stand with Israel because it is a democracy on the front lines of a deadly war on terror, a war that did not go away after 9-11. We have to fight the Left-wing McCarthyism at our alma maters, at our children's schools, *everywhere*.

We all have to get involved. And we have to create a new syllabus to deprogram young people who have been brainwashed in our universities to believe that America is evil, that Israel is evil, that there is any merit to socialism over capitalism.

I am well aware that Heritage has been fighting this fight for 50 years, but we have to be honest: We are losing. We have to fight even harder. The good news: We are not outnumbered. The radical Left does not have more people behind them, they are just louder.

When you live in Washington or New York or California, you might think we are in the minority. But we forget that there is a great big wonderful country out there with hardworking, honest people who are generous and good, but they don't like to get shoved around, and they certainly don't like to be told what to think, especially when it's nonsense.

Let's always remember what Ronald Reagan said about that City on the Hill. That shining City is still there, it never went away, and it's still worth fighting for.

This battle is as important as any our great nation has ever fought. Let's fight it together, for the sake of our children and grandchildren—for the sake of the entire world. It's a battle we can't afford to lose.

My topic has been Israel at 75, but it's also America at 247. We will all have to work very hard to make sure both countries flourish for many, many more years to come. Together, I know we will do this.

May God bless the United States of America. May God bless Israel. And may God bless all of you. Thank you.

The Honorable Ronald Lauder is President of the World Jewish Congress. He served as the United States Ambassador to Austria during the Reagan Administration.