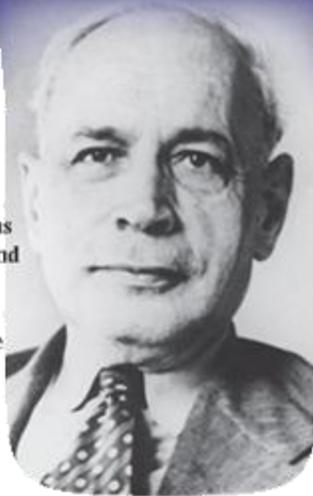


# THE CHICAGO JEWISH NEWS

## ADL at 100

It all began in the Chicago law office of Sigmund Livingston, who, with \$200, founded the organization whose mission was "to stop, by appeals to reason and conscience, and if necessary, by appeals to law, the defamation of the Jewish people. . . to secure justice and fair treatment to all citizens alike. . . put an end forever to unjust and unfair discrimination against and ridicule of any sect or body of citizens."



## ADL at 100

*By Pauline Dubkin Yearwood (11/09/2012)*

It was challenging to be a Jew in America in 1913.

Newspaper want ads frequently advised "no Jews need apply." Resorts and communities advertised "No dogs. No Jews." Newspapers and magazines routinely published stereotypical "humorous" caricatures of Jews. Universities operated on a quota system. Many industries, clubs and whole neighborhoods were closed to Jewish citizens.

Leo Frank, the Jewish manager of a pencil factory in Atlanta, was falsely accused and convicted of murdering a young Christian girl who worked at his factory. (Two years later, he would be lynched by an angry mob.)



In was in this atmosphere that a Chicago lawyer, Sigmund Livingston, decided something had to be done to protect Jews from this blatant anti-Semitism. He went to a well-established Jewish organization, formally known as the Independent Order of B'nai B'rith, which agreed to sponsor Livingston's new association.

With \$200 and two desks set up in Livingston's law office, the Anti-Defamation League was born.

As the organization – today one of the best-known and most far reaching in the Jewish world – prepares to mark its 100th anniversary, Chicago holds a special place in its collective heart.

So does the visionary Livingston, says ADL Deputy National Director Ken Jacobson. In 1913, Jacobson said during a recent phone interview from the ADL's New York City headquarters, "America was a place that in many ways was a great place for Jews compared to Europe, but also was an unfulfilled promise in many ways for Jews. There were all kinds of challenges."

Livingston's "brilliant insight," Jacobson says, was what came to be known as the ADL Charter. It stated that the organization's mission was "to stop the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment for all."

That dual mission, which has animated the organization ever since, "was very far advanced," Jacobson says, citing Jewish philosopher's Hillel's famous maxim: "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And when I am (only) for myself, what am I?"

"I don't know if Livingston thought of that, but it embodies his idea of what we refer to as our dual mission – to protect Jews and fight anti-Semitism but also to fight discrimination, stereotyping and prejudice wherever it applies," said Jacobson, who has been with the organization for more than 40 years. Livingston "came to believe that in standing up for the Jewish people, if we fight all kinds of prejudice, it will benefit the Jewish people as well."

ADL's mission shifted with the times but never fundamentally changed, Jacobson says. For instance, between 1913 until after World War II, "mainstream figures felt comfortable mouthing obvious anti-Semitism," from "radio priest" Father Coughlin to Charles Lindbergh, who blamed Jews for most of the world's ills.

After World War II and the Holocaust, Jacobson says, much of this overt anti-Semitism either disappeared or went underground. The organization then found itself involved in fighting quotas that kept all but a few Jews out of top universities.

As America began to pay more attention to the value of pluralism, he says, the organization became involved in "things that didn't appear to be Jewish issues per se but that would benefit Jews as a minority tremendously," such as issues involving the separation of church and state.

In the 1950s, Jacobson says, ADL developed its regional office structure and became a truly national organization, with diversity and anti-bias initiatives coming to the forefront of the agenda as the country became more pluralistic.

One thing that hasn't changed, he says, is that "everything starts with the ADL voice. We speak out. We see stereotypes against Jews, blacks, Muslims, gays, Hispanics, we don't hesitate. Everybody knows ADL will speak out. That voice is the underpinning for so much."

A century after Sigmund Livingston set out to address a need, the ADL, now independent from B'nai B'rith, has offices in 28 cities, including a robust one in Chicago that covers the entire Upper Midwest. While its basic mission hasn't changed, the issues it deals with are very much 21st-century issues.

One of those is cyber-bullying. Lonnie Nasatir, the Chicago ADL's regional director, cites it as among the organization's greatest ongoing challenges.

"This is where the ADL can play a prominent role, in the area of bullying and the cyber issue in particular," he says. "What we are seeing right now is that

almost every child has a device and they use them readily, and many times this technology is used in a way that can be incredibly hurtful.”

While traditional bullying still exists and is painful, Nasatir says, if it goes on in school, kids can escape it at home. But cyber-bullying “is 24/7 and has an anonymity that makes it much easier for people to be perpetrators,” he says.

So why and how does an organization founded before the television era address issues in the Apple age?

The “why” is easy – it all goes back to Sigmund Livingston’s original idea. Or, as Nasatir puts it, “it’s for the good of the greater community.” To that end the ADL’s Midwest office has created three different cyber-bullying curricula, for parents, teachers and students. The material for parents and teachers covers such items as warning signs that a child is being bullied, legal issues and how to deal with technology in a responsible way.

For students, “it involves sitting with them and explaining the impact of what (bullying) can do to those on the receiving end,” Nasatir says. “We put a lot of resources in the Midwest office to really market this to schools, to help change the culture in schools. It’s continuing to be a problem.”

That’s one corner of a multifaceted mission that now extends around the world in the broad areas of anti-Semitism, racism and bigotry; extremism; identifying and combating hate; education; religious freedom; interfaith affairs; and more.

The ADL drafted hate crime legislation that has been adopted by 45 states and maintains a comprehensive website and publications that provide the latest information on extremists and extremism, bigotry and anti-Semitism. Also available online and through the organization’s frequent publications is information on how to combat hate and bigotry.

The organization publishes “Extremism in America: A Guide,” an encyclopedia that is continually updated. Another program, Partners Against Hate, provides outreach and education in techniques designed to prevent juvenile hate-related behavior.

Through its World of Difference Institute program, the ADL provides anti-bias education and training, making curricula and materials available to schools from pre-kindergarten through university as well as community groups, businesses, civic associations, religious organizations and law

enforcement agencies. The anti-bias training programs also exist in a number of other countries, from Austria and Germany to Israel to Japan.

In another area, the organization has several programs that support Holocaust awareness and education. The Bearing Witness program, in partnership with the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, provides Catholic school educators with training and resources necessary to teach students about anti-Semitism and the Holocaust.

These goals and missions translate into action at the local level, including in Chicago.

"Where I think the ADL plays a real important role is equipping young Jewish kids with the information they need to be effective advocates for Jewish causes and for Israel in the next phase of their life, which is campus life," Nasatir says. "Many of them will experience anti-Jewish and anti-Israel sentiment when they go on campus, and we are afraid they aren't equipped to deal with it."

He cites Chicago's DePaul University and the University of Wisconsin as schools where there are well-established pockets of anti-Israel activism.

Through a program called Confronting Anti-Semitism, Nasatir explains, "we go to Jewish day camps to do our programs. That way we get hundreds of Jewish kids at the age point that we think is important. We do a lot of role-playing and explaining terms: What is apartheid? The '67 borders? Hamas? They get a good understanding of what it all means."

Calling such education "our bread and butter when it comes to anti-Semitism," Nasatir says the ADL "equips these students with the tool set to deal with different situations. It's something ADL does that is unique."

In another area, the organization works closely with law enforcement on a number of issues. When a white supremacist killed seven people in an Oak Creek, Wis. Sikh temple shooting earlier this year, "we knew about this guy," Nasatir says. "Every photo you saw on CNN and everywhere else came from the ADL. We had a file on him – we have files on thousands of people, and we gave that file to the FBI and (local) law enforcement."

In addition, the organization holds conferences to train law enforcement officers on the ideology of extremist movements, such as one that took place before this year's NATO meeting in Chicago.

Fighting extremism is a proud part of the organization's history, Jacobson, the deputy national director, says. In 1950s Georgia, for instance, the ADL led a legislative initiative, aimed at the Ku Klux Klan, to pass an anti-mask law.

Because of the guarantee of freedom of speech, "the KKK could demonstrate but they could not do it anonymously," he says. "That had an impact on one of the main hate groups of America."

The ADL's partnership with law enforcement is one of its greatest strengths, former Midwest Regional Director Richard Hirschhaut, who spent 21 years with the organization, says, "The special relationship that ADL enjoys with the law enforcement community, the training that takes place, the level of trust that is mutual and reciprocal, those are earned over time. It doesn't just happen overnight," says Hirschhaut, now the executive director of the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center.

For him, he says, "the single most shining moment when all of ADL's strengths and expertise were on display" was during what came to be called the Summer of Hate. Over several days in July 1999, Benjamin Smith, a neo-Nazi white supremacist, shot and terrorized Jews walking home from synagogue in West Rogers Park, killed former Northwestern basketball coach Ricky Byrdsong in Skokie and went on to kill a student before fatally shooting himself.

"The way the agency worked to, all at the same time, assist on the investigative side, reassure an anxious community, provide support and comfort and serve as a clearinghouse for accurate and clear information was among its greatest moments over these past 100 years," Hirschhaut says.

"That tragic episode really illuminated the unique strength and distinct expertise of ADL. We sometimes hear in the Jewish community about organizational agendas overlapping, the cry for consolidation and streamlining of organizations. That weekend and many times over, ADL has shown its mettle as well as its unique expertise. The service it provides for the Jewish community and all those who want to live in peace and with the full protection of democracy is unparalleled," he says.



He cites the creation of a series of "freedom seders," with the Jewish and African American communities joining together to celebrate Passover, as well as a National Youth Leadership Mission as other highlights of his time at the organization. That mission brought high school students to the U.S. Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C. and now takes place in a number of cities.

For Chicago's Nasatir, the organization continues to face new challenges, or new versions of old challenges.

Jacobson notes that ADL has stood strongly on the side of civil rights for all minorities, joining in the landmark Supreme Court *Brown v. Board of Education* school integration case and taking action against segregation in the South years ago.

Today, Nasatir says, the organization stands up for members of the Jewish, Muslim and Christian communities as well as forging partnerships with the black, Latino and LGBT community.

"We were right there with our LGBT partners on the civil unions bill" in Illinois, Nasatir says. "The gay community looks to the ADL for support. We took part in the gay pride parade. We believe there are many issues that confront that community that are civil rights issues. We are on record as supporting same-sex marriage."

Israel continues to be high on the organization's agenda, he says. "As the Middle East continues to be complex, we are as strong as ever in making sure Israel stays strong and safe," Nasatir says. "We are advocates for Israel

and speak out when (press coverage or speech) is unbalanced. We need to have a strong voice, with all Jewish organizations working together.”

He says that while many Jewish organizations work to strengthen the U.S.-Israel bond, “we each need to leverage our strengths. The ADL’s is law enforcement and working with the schools. We need to work collectively, and we are doing a good job in Chicago.”

Another mission, he says, is no less real but harder to define. It starts with a highly partisan, polarized country. “The more the leaders of our country continue to engage in uncivil practices, I’m concerned that that type of behavior is ultimately going to filter down,” Nasatir says.

“I think ADL can have a real role in trying to distance our younger generation from that type of behavior – teaching them to be deferential, not saying that if you believe the opposite from me you are a bad person. The behavior we are modeling for the next generation is not good, and we need to reestablish the way we can speak to each other with civility and agree to disagree,” he says. The organization’s school programs can model this positive behavior, he says.

That’s also a help as ADL looks to the next generation of leaders and puts programs in place to train them. “For any not-for-profit, a huge issue is what we are going to do about the next generation. We have put a lot of focus on investing in young people,” with the Glass Leadership Program, which trains likely leaders ages 22 to 40 in a yearlong program. Today about a third of the ADL’s regional Midwest board is composed of individuals under 40, Nasatir says.

On the national front, anybody who follows national news, Middle East news, news about discrimination or separation of church and state – you name it – knows the ADL. Its longtime national director, Abraham H. Foxman, is a forthright and sometimes controversial leader but seldom fails to speak out about issues that fall within the organization’s purview.

And while much of the blatant American anti-Semitism that led Sigmund Livingston to start the ADL may have disappeared, the organization still faces plenty of issues in the 21st century, Jacobson says.

“There is a sense of accomplishment and improvement,” he says. “But we don’t live in a simple world. As we celebrate 100 years, we are also reflecting on what some of the real significant challenges are.”

Tops on the list, he says, is "global anti-Semitism, the continued willingness of people to express anti-Semitic attitudes." He cites a fascistic and anti-Semitic political party in Greece, Golden Dawn, that "has some of the classic responses to a financial collapse. The party blames everything on the Jews. That's very disturbing 60 years after the Holocaust."

In the Islamic world, he says, the same kind of thing goes on. "The president of Iran, the deputy vice president of Iran don't hesitate not only to make anti-Israel comments but to make anti-Semitic comments, that the Jews are responsible for all the problems in the world" – most recently, that Jews are responsible for the narcotics trade.

"The farther away we get from the Holocaust, and as more and more survivors pass away, there is a loss of shame about anti-Semitism," Jacobson says. "After the pictures that came out of Auschwitz, anti-Semitism didn't disappear but people were constrained. The farther we are, the more we feel the loss of that shame."

That loss, he says, "doesn't bode well. Anti-Semitism still has a life." He cites delegitimization campaigns against Israel, and mainline Protestants' letter to Congress last month accusing Israel of human rights violations and asking that aid to the Jewish state be reevaluated. Today "people feel freer to engage in strong anti-Israel behavior," he says.

Closer to home, he says, thorny issues include the ever-growing problem of internet hate groups and hate speech. "We are very involved in monitoring it," he says. "We believe in the First Amendment and we don't believe in censorship but as internet hate is proliferating, we are struggling to find a way within the bounds of the First Amendment, to address it. It's a complicated issue and a major challenge."

Relations with the Latino community are also on the agenda, Jacobson says. "Polls show there is some element of anti-Semitism in the Latino community," he says – yet a hopeful element is that that prejudice is more prevalent among first-generation Latinos than among their children. The organization continues to work for "mutually beneficial relations" with this fast-growing group.

Then, he says, there is "the overall challenge" of "lack of civility, polarization, in society at large and within the Jewish community. People are so polarized, so one-issue-oriented – 'If you don't support me 100 percent you're not my friend.' That is not healthy for democracy and for the Jewish community. We try to address that. Not being so partisan is an important value."

With so many challenges ahead, it's not surprising that Nasatir says the 100-year anniversary shouldn't necessarily be thought of as a celebration.

He'd prefer to call it a commemoration – “of 100 years of ADL being at the forefront of fighting for the people's rights, fighting discrimination, making this a more accepting and tolerant country.”

Now, on the tasks of the next 100 years.