



100 Years On: Our Century in the Battle Against Prejudice

**Remarks by Abraham H. Foxman
National Director
Anti-Defamation League**

**ADL Annual Meeting
Chicago, IL, November 15, 2012**

Chicago is definitely the place to be to begin the commemoration of ADL's centennial. This is where it all began and this is where our headquarters were until the 1940s.

For us, "ADL at 100" is a celebration of what we have achieved and a reminder of the challenges still ahead.

The story of ADL over the last 100 years is the story of an organization; it is the story of the American Jewish community; and it is the story of America itself.

A century ago, America was already a great democracy and a melting pot, but it also fell short of fulfilling its promise.

For Jews, it was a time when universities, industry, neighborhoods and social clubs were not always open to them. It was a time when epithets like Christ-killers, kike and other stereotypes were commonplace in public and private.

For African-Americans, it was a time of segregation and lynching's in the south and rampant discrimination elsewhere.

And, while America was integrating and assimilating immigrants from many places, the country was far from showing true respect for diversity.

At that time, a Jewish lawyer from Chicago by the name of Sigmund Livingston, disturbed by stereotyping of Jews in vaudeville and newspapers, conceived of the Anti-Defamation League. He was motivated by disappointment that Jews still were treated differently. His great insight was to realize in the charter he composed for the new organization that there was an intimate connection between combatting anti-Semitism and working for equality for all citizens. This was, in fact, a very Jewish concept going

back to the words of the sage Hillel 2,000 years ago: "If I am not for myself, who will be? If I am only for myself, what am I?"

The early years of ADL, indeed the period up to and through World War II, were characterized mostly by continuing challenges.

The very year of ADL's founding witnessed one of the most egregious anti-Semitic events in American history the trial and the eventual lynching of Leo Frank, a Jew falsely accused of murder of a young woman in Atlanta.

The 1920s saw the dissemination of the infamous forgery, The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion, that document that purported to be the plans of the Jews to take over the world, by Henry Ford, America's leading industrialist. His reputation in America lent credence to the worst of anti-Jewish conspiracy theories. His Dearborn Independent newspaper made anti-Semitism respectable in circles that had not gone that way before that.

In the 1930s it was Father Coughlin, the infamous "Radio Priest" who broadcasts weekly to millions of Americans out of Royal Oak, Michigan. He shamelessly ranted week after week about sinister Jewish control and power. And then late in the 30's and early in the 40's, the voice of another American hero, Charles Lindbergh, emerged in his role as head of America First, accusing Jews of wanting to drag America into war against Germany to serve their own interests.

What was so stark about these events was how highly popular, mainstream figures could express the worst kind of anti-Jewish diatribes and still have widespread support.

The same period saw other manifestations of hatred and discrimination in the mainstream. Included were the resurgence of the KKK in the 20's, directing their vitriol more at Catholics than at African-Americans.

The passage of anti-immigration legislation in 1921 and 1924 which, among other things, prevented maybe another million or two Jews from entering the U.S. even before the rise of Hitler.

The continuing and hardening of segregation in the south. And the commonplace, through rarely acknowledged, quotas against Jews at major universities in America.

A time of challenges indeed and America was not yet ready for major change.

The war and its aftermath, however, opened America up to new possibilities. Inequality was no longer accepted as a natural part of American life. Efforts to stand up for minorities drew allies in different parts of the nation.

And so began an era of great change. ADL helped generate that change and we also benefitted from it.

This led to some of our most significant achievements. In the 1950s we initiated the anti-mask law in Georgia. This law, recognizing the right to demonstrate even by hate groups, required that KKK marchers not hide their identities behind their cloaks. It played a key role in the decline of the Klan and represented a fundamental ADL principle: the best way to fight hate and haters is to expose it to the light of day.

Also in the 50s, we initiated a project with the National Council of Education to ascertain and then expose the extent of the quota system against Jews at universities. By getting university Presidents to admit that such quotas existed, we set in motion a process that eventually led to the end of such quotas.

This was a fundamental change for the hopes and aspirations of American Jews. The recent apology by Emory University for its policies in its Dental School in the fifties, where Jews were unfairly flunked out to keep their numbers down, highlights what things were like and how far we've come.

The 1960s was the time of the great civil rights revolution in which ADL participated. Its impact was of course mostly felt by African-Americans, but it emboldened all minorities. For us it was a time when we decided to commission what turned out to be the most definitive study of anti-Semitism in America to this day. Done in cooperation with scholars from the University of California at Berkeley, eight volumes were published dealing with anti-Semitism from every angle, with such titles as: "Christian Beliefs and anti-Semitism;" "Protest and Prejudice" about anti-Semitism in the African-American community; and "The Politics of Unreason: Right-wing Extremism in America."

Of course, one of the major changes affecting Jewish life in America was the rebirth of the state of Israel. Supporting the state in the face of its challenges became part of the ADL agenda, as it was on the agenda of all major Jewish organizations. In the early years, however, our unique role was in fighting the Arab boycott of Israel which had an impact in America through pressure on US companies. Since boycotting Israel was not illegal in the early years, we exposed and shamed American companies that boycotted Israel through publicity.

Finally, in the 1970s we led an initiative with the Business Roundtable, the umbrella body for major U.S. corporations, that led to passage of anti-boycott legislation barring businesses from helping the Arab boycott of Israel in any way. This turned the tide.

There are so many other programs and policy initiatives over the years that reflected the theme of how a changing America enabled us to do significant work in new

areas and how that work further changed America for the better. I want to focus on just a few.

First is our model hate crime legislation which our civil rights division developed in the 1980s. This was one of our more significant contributions to American society for a number of reasons. It became the basis of legislation in more than 45 states. It was upheld by the Supreme Court because we distinguished between hate speech, which is protected by the First Amendment, and hate actions which are not. And it helped propel a whole field of literature on the importance of dealing with hate crimes.

Second is our Bearing Witness program through which we have trained Catholic school teachers about anti-Semitism, the Holocaust, Catholic-Jewish relations, and Israel. This is a perfect example of a program that could not have happened without external change, in this case the Vatican's opening to Jews through *Nostra Aetate* and the work of John Paul II. And it has deepened and broadened all around the country young Catholics understanding of Jews, Judaism, and the dangers of anti-Semitism. A remarkable contribution by ADL.

Finally there was the creation of our A World of Difference anti-bias program. It too was both a product of the times and of ADL expertise. Diversity was becoming more and more a reality of America and young people needed to be ready to accept and welcome diversity as a positive value. This has resulted in the training of millions of students all over the country.

All of these programs and activities were premised on ADL values:

1. Expose hate to defeat it
2. The voice of ADL against hate is critical
3. Fight hate in the short-term but change hearts and minds in the long term
4. Fight anti-Semitism and seek justice for all

Tomorrow, I'm going to speak about our greatest challenge going forward -- the resurgence of global anti-Semitism.

Other challenges loom large as well. The complexity of hate on the internet, an old challenge in very new form, is more and more occupying our time. Working with internet companies, we constantly looking for new approaches to deal with the ability of haters and extremists to use the internet to spread their message and recruit people to their cause.

And, while international terrorism remains a priority ever since 9/11, ADL never lets its guard down regarding domestic extremists and terrorists who are still responsible for the vast majority of terrorist activities in this country.

As this election just demonstrated, as if it were necessary, Latinos are becoming more and more important in American life. For us at ADL, developing good relations with the Latino community is a priority. Our contribution to their well-being through exposing how hate groups and some in the mainstream have used the immigration issue to stereotype Latinos has been recognized by American Latino organizations. And it has opened doors to activities such as missions to Israel of Latin leaders sponsored by ADL. Over time, those relationships will be important to maintain American support for Israel and in countering anti-Semitism.

Finally, I can't speak of challenges without speaking of the ongoing threats to Israel -- militarily, diplomatically, and through the media and public opinion. Protecting the well-being of the Jewish State in the face of delegitimization efforts and countering the anti-Semitism associated with it will remain at the top of the ADL agenda.

Sigmund Livingston's idea of an ADL was a brilliant one all those years ago. The best proof of that is the difference we have made through our voice, our programs, and our values. And, as we head into our second century, the mission and work of ADL remains as important and, I need say, as exciting as ever.

And so we know we will continue to have your support as we move on to fulfill our sacred mission.