

# Students Tackle Issue of Modern Anti-Semitism with 2022 None Shall Be Afraid Essay Contest

As attacks on Jews in the United States, Israel and around the world, online and in person, spiked at an alarming rate, B'nai B'rith International invited young people to respond to these incidents through the 2022 None Shall Be Afraid Essay Contest.

Open to students aged 18-22, the contest encouraged the next generation to offer suggestions on how a community can identify and stop this hatred. The essays were judged blindly by a panel from B'nai B'rith International. The three winners received scholarship funds. First place was awarded a \$2,500 scholarship, second place, \$1,000 and third place \$500.

B'nai B'rith International created the None Shall Be Afraid initiative to keep a focus on anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism in our society. None Shall Be Afraid was inspired by the 1790 letter from George Washington to the congregants of Touro Synagogue in Newport, Rhode Island, where he quoted Micah 4:4, "Everyone shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree and there shall be none to make him afraid."

The NSBA Essay Contest called on college-aged people to take their place in combating the world's oldest hatred.

First place winner Adrian Weiss, whose essay is published on the following page, is 19 years old and a sophomore at the University of Texas at Austin. He plans to graduate in 2025. Weiss wrote on the importance of identifying anti-Semitism in order to combat it, especially in a world where it comes from all sides of the political spectrum and manifests in countless forms.

Second place winner is Jennifer Karlan, 19, Harvard College, class of 2026. In her essay, she discussed anti-Zionism as a form of Jew-hatred and the importance of educating young Jewish people so they can combat this hatred.

Third place winner is Daniel Evans, 20, University of Rochester, class of 2024. Evans wrote on education and information as essential tools in the fight against anti-Semitism.

To learn more about B'nai B'rith's None Shall Be Afraid initiative, visit our section on Combating Anti-Semitism on our website, [bnaibrith.org](https://bnaibrith.org).

## WINNING ESSAY BY ADRIAN WEISS

University of Texas at Austin, Sophomore

"It's not like anti-Semitism really exists anymore," insists a boy I considered a close friend. "The Jews are just manufacturing oppression." Still dressed in my Shabbat clothes and wearing a kippah, I'm at a loss for words. I'm surrounded by liberal, college-educated social justice advocates, and not a single person notices, let alone responds to the blatantly anti-Semitic claim. These are people with whom I've gone to Black Lives Matter rallies and protested alongside for women's rights. They consider themselves anti-racist, feminists, and champions of the downtrodden. But for them, as for many other young progressives, Jews don't count.

I feel a responsibility to educate, to point out the harmful global conspiracy trope and trace its lineage to the foundational anti-Semitic text *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. But I, like many Jews, feel the futility of addressing the internalized anti-Semitism that's so prevalent in today's society.

It's not enough to bring up the neo-Nazis that linger outside the campus Hillel, the graffitied swastikas in the university bathrooms and the "from the river to the sea" chants heard during my college's annual anti-Israel protests. These are isolated symptoms of the greater disease of anti-Semitism, ingrained so deeply into the fundamental beliefs of the modern world that it's virtually unnoticeable. After all, how can you fight anti-Semitism in a society which remains largely convinced of its nonexistence?

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Adrian Weiss, who won the first prize for his "None Shall Be Afraid" essay, wrote about the anti-Semitic messages that emanate from all sides of the political spectrum.

## WINNING ESSAY BY ADRIAN WEISS

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I grew up in Austin, about a three hour drive from Colleyville's Congregation Beth Israel, the synagogue held hostage this January in one of the most recent acts of American anti-Semitic violence. In its initial response, the FBI declared the attack "was not specifically related to the Jewish community," a statement that received backlash from multiple U.S. Senators and was later updated to define the event as an act of anti-Semitic terrorism. This failure to recognize, and therefore address, acts of anti-Jewish prejudice isn't uncommon, and contributes to the survival and prevalence of the world's oldest hatred in the modern era.

Anti-Semitism is on the rise and only through clear identification as such can it truly be eradicated. There are several theories: a rise in inflammatory rhetoric and political polarization. Frankly, the cause isn't nearly as important as the response – or lack thereof. In the last decade, right wing anti-Semitism has grown exponentially more hostile in the echo chambers of the internet, transforming from regurgitated anti-Semitic tropes into widespread dissemination of conspiracy theories, inspiring numerous hate crimes and anti-Semitic incidents. In return, these attacks are met with, at most, verbal criticism from the non-Jewish community. As anti-Jewish hatred skyrockets, it's simply not enough.

But anti-Semitism isn't inherently on one side of the political spectrum – it's just a tool to unite people under a common Jewish enemy. There's an innate hypocrisy to leftist anti-Semitism, often disguised as attacking "Zionism, not Jews" as it translates what would otherwise be considered hate-speech into the language of social justice activism. Emotionally charged and inaccurate phrases like "apartheid state" or "ethnic cleansing" are overused to the point that many young, well-meaning liberals don't even realize they're parroting the centuries-old anti-Semitic tropes of Jewish replacement and the blood libel. A misplaced sense of moral righteousness lies at the heart of the anti-Zionist movement, making it even more difficult to confront. Beyond the buzzwords and Instagram activism, their words seem exponentially less harmful than the terror attacks from far-right anti-Semites.

But words have power and an insidious ability to alter our thought processes. Repeating the false claim that "Zionism = Racism" won't directly harm a Jew in the same way as a neo-Nazi's bullet, but it has equally dangerous consequences as it delegitimizes the Zionist movement, shaping the public perception of Israel and by extension, the Jewish people, singled out as ineligible for the basic human right of self-determination. Yes, there's a difference between criticizing the State of Israel and anti-Semitism. But when the rhetoric shifts from critiques of specific Israeli policy into rallying cries for the complete destruction of the country, when Jews in America, many of whom have never even been to Israel, are being attacked in the streets for their perceived Zionism, it crosses the line into Jew-hatred.

But anti-Semitism isn't just a Jewish issue, and it isn't just hate crimes. It transcends isolated incidents and fringe conspiracy theorists to strike at the heart of a democratic system of governance. The rise of anti-Semitism is a signal of social failure, its very existence incompatible with the social equality essential to liberalism. Its bigotry deconstructs democracy, framing government actions as a conspiracy run by a shadowy cabal (a word derived from kabbalah) of Jewish elites. It transforms Jews into a cultural Other, defined solely by social alienation on account of an intrinsic "Jewishness."

A society that normalizes anti-Semitism is a society which accepts individuals as inferior by virtue of ethnicity, religion, or culture. It's a society that spits in the face of social values such as tolerance and equality and creates an "Us versus Them" culture. Anti-Semitism isolates us from each other, from community participation. Anti-Jewish hatred kills Jews, but it also kills society.

So how do we fight this hate?

The first step towards preventing anti-Semitism is identifying its existence. We have a responsibility to establish a clear understanding of what constitutes an act of anti-Semitism, identify harmful rhetoric and dog whistles, and understand the structural anti-Semitism of Western society. As anti-Semitism isn't just a Jewish problem, we need to cultivate partnerships with non-Jews and inform them about the patterns of anti-Semitic discourse.

After defining acts of anti-Semitism, they need to be honestly addressed and dealt with as a form of hate crime. Authorities should be held accountable – by Jews and non-Jews alike – for their reactions, or lack thereof, toward anti-Semitic incidents. Finally, we can engage in discussions with the people around us and share our personal experiences with anti-Semitism.

In the face of hatred, we can either remain silent or stand up and fight anti-Semitism. And now, more than ever, it is time to fight.