

MUSEUMS RESPOND

STRATEGIES FOR COUNTERING ANTISEMITISM & HATE

Presenter Bios

Fraidy Aber is the Constance Wolf Director of Education and Civic Engagement at The Contemporary Jewish Museum (The CJM) in San Francisco, where she manages a team that collectively produces a suite of offerings realizing the Museum's mission to engage people of all ages and backgrounds in exploring Jewish culture, history, art, and ideas. Aber co-led the development of the *Zim Zoom Family Room* and the *Textile Lab*, teaches a graduate level course titled "Museums and Social Justice" for University San Francisco, and created the JET (Jewish Education and Technology) Teacher Institute.

Andrew S. Ackerman consults with nonprofit organizations in the arts, health, and education. He was Executive Director of the Children's Museum of Manhattan for 29 years (1990-2019). Major projects during his tenure included the national touring exhibition *America to Zanzibar: Muslim Cultures Near and Far*, and exhibitions about American Jazz and the cultures of Japan and China. The Museum installed health and learning "hubs" in 30 homeless shelters and Head Start Centers citywide. Prior to his tenure at the Museum, Ackerman was Director of the Arts in Education Program for the New York State Council on the Arts. From 1977 to 1986, he was Associate Director of The Jewish Museum and Director of Education, where he oversaw educational initiatives, curated exhibitions, and administered international projects. A graduate of Herbert H. Lehman College, he earned his M.A. from the University of Michigan.

Devon Akmon is the Director of the Michigan State University (MSU) Museum and a core faculty member in MSU's Arts, Cultural Management & Museum Studies program. Previously, Akmon worked as a senior consultant with the DeVos Institute of Arts Management, supporting over 70 clients across the country and providing expertise in artistic and strategic planning, community engagement, marketing, fundraising, and board development. Akmon also served as Director of the Arab American National Museum, significantly expanding its reach and impact nationwide. Currently, he is a board member of the American Alliance of Museums and Artspace.

Bernard Cherkasov is Chief Executive Officer of the Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center. At 13, Cherkasov and his family fled antisemitism and ethnic violence in Azerbaijan and came to the U.S. as refugees; his worldview was shaped by the courage and conviction of those who took risks to help his family and refugees like them. Cherkasov was National COO of Cradles to Crayons, an organization providing

essentials to children living in poverty and crises. Earlier, Cherkasov was CEO of Equality Illinois, the Midwest's largest civil rights organization advocating for LGBTQ equality. He was honored as a Great Immigrant by The Carnegie Foundation and was recognized by NBC as one of the Pride 30, LGBTQ global leaders. Cherkasov practiced corporate law before joining the nonprofit sector, serving as international law clerk for the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Israel. He earned his J.D. from the University of Michigan and a Master's in Theological Studies from Harvard.

Sarah A. Clunis is the new Executive Director of the Amistad Center for Art and Culture at the Wadsworth Atheneum, which offers dynamic offerings with a focus on the global African Diaspora. Previously, she was the Director of Academic Partnerships and Curator of the African Collection at the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at Harvard University. Clunis has taught art history and curated at universities and historically Black colleges and universities for over twenty years. Her research, classes, and exhibitions have focused on the history of African and African Diaspora art and display in western museum settings and the influence of African aesthetics and philosophies on the arts, religious rituals, and cultural identities of the African diaspora. Originally from a Spanish Portuguese Sephardic community in Kingston, Jamaica, she received her PhD in art history from the University of Iowa.

Vedet Coleman-Robinson is the Executive Director of the Association of African American Museums (AAAM), and an accomplished professional in the field of museum management and cultural preservation. She has dedicated her career to promoting the rich history, heritage, and contributions of African Americans. Prior to her role as Executive Director of the AAAM, Coleman-Robinson held leadership positions in several renowned museums and cultural institutions. She earned her doctorate in U.S. History with a concentration in Public History from Howard University, and speaks regularly on topics relating to African American history and museum management.

Lou Cove is the Founder and President of CANVAS, a collaborative fund dedicated to supporting a 21st-century Jewish cultural renaissance. Cove has spent his career at the intersection of contemporary culture and Jewish life. He served as both a trustee and a senior advisor to the Harold Grinspoon Foundation, and helped co-create the PJ Alliance. He is the former Executive Director of Reboot, where he oversaw the development of numerous Jewish cultural projects, including Sukkah City, 10Q, and the National Day of Unplugging. Cove was also vice president of the National Yiddish Book Center where he helped build its endowment, a new building, and a sustainable platform devoted to reclaiming a lost literary canon.

Galeet Dardashti is a renowned performer, anthropologist, and advocate of Middle Eastern Jewish culture. She leads the all-woman Sephardi/Mizrahi power-house band, Divahn, and received a Six Points Fellowship to create her acclaimed solo release, *The Naming*. In her new award-winning release, *Monajat*, she sings and composes around digital samples of her legendary Iranian grandfather. Her new documentary podcast series, *The Nightingale of Iran* (created with Danielle Dardashti), relates her family's reckoning with their Persian identity and culture. She holds a PhD and has held

Assistant Professor positions at JTS and NYU; she is currently a Fellow at University of Pennsylvania's Katz Center.

Avi Decter is the Managing Partner of History Now. He is co-editor of *Change Is Required: Preparing for the Post-Pandemic Museum* (2022) and author of *Interpreting American Jewish History at Museums and Historic Sites* (2017) and *Exploring American Jewish History through 50 Historic Treasures* (2024). He is known for interpreting difficult subjects, including labor unrest at the Boott Cotton Mill Museum in Lowell, MA; the American Civil War at the National Civil War Museum in Harrisburg, PA; and the *Shoah* at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Today, Decter moderates "Museums and Change," a twice-monthly forum for the discussion of emerging ideas in American museums.

Micaela Diamond is a Tony-nominated actress and singer. She played Lucille Frank — opposite of Ben Platt, as Leo Frank — in the Broadway production of *Parade*. She made her professional debut in the ensemble of NBC's *Jesus Christ Superstar Live in Concert* on NBC, and was understudy to Sara Bareilles as Mary Magdalene. Diamond originated the role of Babe (the youngest version of Cher) in *The Cher Show*, for which she was a 2019 Theatre World Awards honoree. Diamond starred in the world premiere of Ethan Coen's *A Play Is a Poem* at Los Angeles' Mark Taper Forum (2019), and in Williamstown Theatre Festival's world premiere of *Row* — a musical about an individual who aimed to be the first woman to row solo across the Atlantic (2021).

Jordanna Gessler, a granddaughter of Holocaust survivors, is the Chief Impact Officer at Holocaust Museum LA. With over 15 years of work in the field of Holocaust Studies, she has a track record in leading programs, research, and educational initiatives. Gessler studied Holocaust history as an undergraduate at the University of Vermont, and as a graduate student at the University of Haifa. She conducted research in the Righteous Among the Nations Department at Yad Vashem, and won the 2014 Yad Vashem Award for Research. Gessler has written articles and presented internationally on topics including contemporary antisemitism, fiction and the Holocaust, art and resistance, and teaching empathy.

Gabriel Goldstein is Interim Director and Chief Curator at Yeshiva University Museum, and the Consulting Curator of Judaic Art, North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh. An independent curator, consultant, and adjunct professor, he has worked with institutions including the National Archives, Israel Antiquities Authority, and Wesleyan University, and has curated exhibitions in the US and internationally. Goldstein previously worked at the Jewish Museum, NY, and the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto. He holds degrees in fine art history, history, Judaism, decorative arts, design history, and material culture from University of Toronto and Bard Graduate Center. He studied at Yeshivat Hamivtar, Jerusalem, and trained in aesthetic education at Lincoln Center and in Holocaust history and pedagogy at Yad Vashem.

Ben Gundersheimer (MISTER G), is a Latin Grammy Award winning artist and author. Hailed as “a bilingual rock star” by *The Washington Post*, he was originally dubbed MISTER G by his young students while pursuing his Master of Education degree. His dynamic, interactive, bilingual performances aim to dissolve borders and foster cross-cultural connections. His book, *Lilah Tov Good Night* (Penguin Random House) celebrates the beauty of our world and the spirit of resilience in a refugee family. The book has strong personal resonance; his father was born in Frankfurt and later made a harrowing escape from Nazi Germany.

Jenna Leventhal is interim Director of Programs at USC Shoah Foundation. She joined the organization in 2011, working closely with the education and communications team around the original beta launch of the *IWitness* educational website. Prior to joining USC Shoah Foundation, Leventhal worked in public history roles, including as research consultant, author, and curator at the Holocaust Museum Houston. She was research director at Boston History Collaborative, and managing editor with *The Houston Review of History and Culture*.

Cyndee Landrum is the Deputy Director, Office of Library Services, for IMLS — working with IMLS's senior leadership to support agency priorities, policy and partnerships, and provide leadership and direction for the library grant programs. Landrum oversees the agency's largest program, Grants to States, the primary source of federal funding for library services in the U.S., and the agency's discretionary grant programs, including National Leadership Grants for Libraries, the Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian program, Native American and Native Hawaiian Library Services, and the newest initiative, Accelerating Promising Practices for Small Libraries. Over her career, Landrum has served in public libraries, including as CEO-Director of the Indiana's Evansville Vanderburgh Public Library, Assistant Director for Public Services at Illinois's Oak Park Library, Assistant Director of Pittsburgh's Mt. Lebanon Public Library, and in various positions at Arizona's Glendale Public Library.

Adam W. McKinney, Artistic Director of Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre, has danced with some of the world's preeminent dance companies. Previously Associate Professor of Dance in Ballet at Texas Christian University's School for Classical & Contemporary Dance, and Co-Director/Co-Founder of DNAWORKS, an organization committed to healing through the arts and dialogue, McKinney has led dance work in North America, Africa, Asia, Europe and the Middle East. He was U.S. Embassy Culture Connect Envoy to South Africa through the U.S. State Department. His social justice and awareness projects include the Fort Worth Lynching Tour: Honoring the Memory of Mr. Fred Rouse and “The Borders Project” at the Mexico/U.S. and Palestine/Israel borders. With a BFA in Dance Performance from Butler University and an MA in Dance Studies from NYU's Gallatin School, he received the NYU President's Service Award for his dance work with populations struggling with heroin addiction.

Laura Conrad Mandel, Executive Director of Boston's Jewish Arts Collaborative, is an artist, public art advocate, and social entrepreneur. After graduating Carnegie Mellon

University with a degree in Art and English, Mandel became founding director of alumni and parent relations for the Hillel Jewish University Center of Pittsburgh. She is currently Chair of the Board of the Council of American Jewish Museums, co-chair of the Boston Lyric Stage Advisory Committee, a member of the MASSCreative Advisory Council, and the JCRC Boston Council. Mandel also writes a regular arts and culture blog for the Times of Israel.

Judith Margles is the former Director of the Oregon Jewish Museum and Center for Holocaust Education. During her 24-year tenure, she managed the 2014 merger of the Oregon Holocaust Resource Center and the Oregon Jewish Museum, the 2017 purchase of a permanent museum home and a 2023 expansion to add a new gallery focused on human rights. Her essay “Cross Cultural Engagement” appears in *Global Mobilities: Refugees, Exiles and Immigrants*. Margles is a past Board Chair of CAJM, and also served on the board of the AAM. She is a current board member of the Cultural Advocacy Coalition of Oregon.

Laura Huerta Migus was appointed Deputy Director, Office of Museum Services at IMLS in 2021. She comes to IMLS following her tenure as Executive Director of the Association of Children's Museums (ACM). Throughout her career, she has been devoted to the growth and education of children, particularly those from underserved and under-resourced communities. Under her leadership, ACM pursued innovative and effective partnerships to leverage the power of children's museums worldwide. Previously, she served as Director of Professional Development and Equity Initiatives at the Association of Science-Technology Centers and held positions at the National Multicultural Institute and National Association for Bilingual Education.

Josh Perelman is Principal of Studio Perelman and a Senior Advisor for Content and Strategic Projects at the Weitzman National Museum of American Jewish History. With more than 25 years in the cultural sector, Perelman is committed to evolving museums into destinations that invite visitors to examine their connections, participate in dialogue and debate, and share lives and dreams – in surprising and experiential ways. He previously served as the Weitzman's Chief Curator and led the planning, designing, and construction of the groundbreaking core exhibition that opened its landmark building on Philadelphia's Independence Mall. He received PhDs in Jewish Studies and American History from NYU.

Sarah Pharaon is Principal of Dialogic Consulting. As a facilitator and museum professional, she believes that how we engage matters. She has spent her career training our nation's story tellers - museums, national parks, and cultural centers - to help their visitors better discuss immigration, mass incarceration, gun violence, climate change, slavery, and both reproductive and civil rights. Pharaon's projects help audiences grapple with perspectives outside of their own lived experience, using dialogue to connect communities across difference. Prior to launching her own firm in 2020, she was a Senior Director at the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, Director of Education at the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, and founding Curator of the Arab American National Museum. She serves on the Advisory Council of CAJM,

and is a member of the Emeritus Council of the American Association of State and Local History

Kendell Pinkney is the founding Executive Artistic Director of The Workshop, a New York based arts and culture fellowship that supports and foregrounds the work of professional artists of BIPOC-Jewish heritage. He is also a theatre artist, producer, and rabbi. Pinkney's creative work has been presented or developed at venues such as Feinstein's 54 Below, Joe's Pub, The National Opera Center of America, Musical Theatre Factory, Two River Theater, and Goodspeed Opera House. A frequent keynote speaker at conferences in the US and Canada, he was among the first rabbis to offer a multi-faith invocation for the 110th First Lady's Luncheon, honoring Dr. Jill Biden. Pinkney consults with a variety of media outlets and with arts and civic institutions on Jewish and Jews of Color representation. He has received a 2023 IDEA Residency at Opera America and a commission from the "Expanding the Canon" program at Washington, DC's Theater J.

Annie Polland is the President of the Tenement Museum. She previously served as Executive Director of the American Jewish Historical Society and as Vice President for Programs & Education at the Tenement Museum. She is the co-author, with Daniel Soyer, of *Emerging Metropolis: New York Jews in the Age of Immigration*, winner of the 2012 National Jewish Book Award. She received her PhD in History from Columbia University, and also served as Vice President of Education at the Museum at Eldridge Street, where she wrote *Landmark of the Spirit* (Yale University). She also teaches at New York University.

Judith Rosenbaum is CEO of the Jewish Women's Archive, a pioneering digital archive and public history project that documents Jewish women's stories, elevates their voices, and inspires them to be agents of change. An educator, historian, and writer, Judith earned a PhD in American Studies from Brown University. As a Fulbright Fellow, she studied women's collective communities in Israel. Judith teaches and lectures widely on Jewish studies and women's studies. She also serves on the faculty of the Bronfman Fellowship and is a Schusterman Senior Fellow.

Lisa Sasaki is the Deputy Under Secretary for Special Projects at the Smithsonian Institution. She provides leadership to the institution as it plays a key role in America's semiquincentennial celebration, and in efforts to maximize its impact online and in communities across the country. Previously, Sasaki was Interim Director of the Smithsonian American Women's History Museum and Director of the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center. Sasaki has worked in the museum field for 28 years for organizations like the Oakland Museum of California, the Japanese American National Museum, and the Denver Museum of Nature and Science. She has provided further service to the field as President of the Western Museums Association's Board of Directors, and as a member of the CAJM's Advisory Council.

Marsha Semmel works with nonprofits on leadership development, strategic planning, and partnerships. In 2019, she published *Partnership Power: Essential Museum Strategies for Today's Networked World*. Her newest book, *Change Is Required: Preparing for the Post-Pandemic Museum*, was co-edited with Avi Decter and Ken Yellis. Semmel has been senior advisor to the NEH; the National Center for Science and Civic Engagement; and the Noyce Leadership Institute. She held leadership roles at IMLS and the NEH and served as faculty in the Bank Street Graduate School of Education. Semmel has been President/CEO of Conner Prairie and the Women of the West Museum. Current board service includes CAJM, the Jewish Museum of Maryland, the Museum of Contemporary Art Arlington, and Planet Word Museum.

Gretchen Skidmore is Director of Education Initiatives at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. In this role, she leads the work of the Museum to advance Holocaust education in communities and secondary classrooms across the country. She has produced numerous films and facilitated programs and workshops for professionals nationally and internationally. Skidmore oversees the creation of education resources and other work to support teachers, students, and educational partners across the U.S. Before joining the Museum, she was on the humanities faculty at the North Carolina School for Science and Mathematics in Durham, North Carolina, and served as an adjunct professor at Georgetown University and at Meredith College. She received a BA in German and history from West Virginia University and an MA in modern European history from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Sara Softness is Curator of Special Projects at the Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust in New York, where she organized the exhibitions *Boris Lurie: Nothing To Do But To Try* (2021); *Survivors: Faces of Life After The Holocaust / Photographs by Martin Schoeller* (2022); and *Courage to Act: Rescue in Denmark* (2023). Softness has held curatorial roles at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, the Brooklyn Museum, and The Walther Collection. She holds a BA from Amherst College and MA from Yale University.

Francesco Spagnolo is Curator of The Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life and an Associate Adjunct Professor in the Department of Music at the University of California, Berkeley. His research and teaching interests intersect textual, visual and musical cultures. Previously, he taught at the University of Milan and UC Santa Cruz, and was a host for Italian National Radio. At the Magnes, he has created numerous exhibitions and projects that activate the collection in new ways, as well as digital humanities programs involving archiving, storytelling, and the online dissemination of cultural heritage collections. He received a BA (equivalent) in Music from the Conservatory of Milan (1986), a Laurea in Philosophy from the University of Milan (1994), and a PhD in Musicology from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (2007), and conducted post-doctoral work at the EHESS in Paris (1995-1997).

Amy Spitalnick is the CEO of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, the national convener of Jewish coalitions working across communities to build a just and inclusive American democracy. She previously served as Executive Director of Integrity First for America, which won its groundbreaking lawsuit against the neo-Nazis, white supremacists, and hate groups responsible for the Charlottesville violence. She has extensive experience in government, politics, and advocacy, including as Communications Director and Senior Policy Advisor to the New York Attorney General and spokesperson and advisor to the New York City Mayor. She has also worked for a number of federal, state, and local officials, campaigns, and advocacy organizations.

Britt P. Tevis is the Rene Plessner Postdoctoral Fellow in Holocaust and Antisemitism Studies at Columbia University. She earned her PhD at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and her JD at the University of Wisconsin Law School. Her research examines the intersections between Jews and American law, and her work has appeared in *American Jewish History*, *American Journal of Legal History*, and the *Journal of American History*. She has held fellowships at the Yale Program for the Study of Antisemitism at Yale University, the Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies at the University of Pennsylvania, and the Center for Antiracist Research at Boston University.

Felton Thomas, Jr. has served as Executive Director of Cleveland Public Library (CPL) since January, 2009. As Director of Cleveland Public Library, Thomas has launched initiatives aimed at addressing community needs in the areas of access to technology, education, and economic development.

Eric K. Ward is Executive Vice President of Race Forward. Ward is a nationally-recognized expert on the relationship between authoritarian movements, hate violence, and preserving inclusive democracy. He brings over three decades of leadership in community organizing and philanthropy, having worked with leaders from government, law enforcement, business, and civil rights groups to advance civil rights work. Prior to Race Forward, Ward served as Executive Director at the Western States Center, a national hub for innovative responses to white nationalism, antisemitism and structural inequality. In 2021, Eric became the first American recipient of the Civil Courage Prize, adding to the awards and distinctions he has received throughout his career, including the Peabody-Facebook Futures Media Award.

Dov Waxman is the Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Foundation Professor of Israel Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), and director of the UCLA Y&S Nazarian Center for Israel Studies. He is the author of four books: *The Pursuit of Peace and The Crisis of Israeli Identity: Defending / Defining the Nation* (2006), *Israel's Palestinians: The Conflict Within* (2011), *Trouble in the Tribe: The American Jewish Conflict over Israel* (2016), and most recently, *The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: What Everyone Needs to Know* (2019). He is currently working on a book about contemporary antisemitism and the politics surrounding it.

Tsione Wolde-Michael is Executive Director of the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities (PCAH). Her work in the field of arts and public humanities has focused on developing innovative approaches to community engagement, collections management, cultural heritage, and exhibitions. She served as founding Director for the Center for Restorative History at the National Museum of American History. She started her Smithsonian career in 2011 at the National Museum of African American History and Culture, where she worked to create exhibitions, including the landmark Slavery and Freedom exhibition. Her international projects in Ethiopia, Mozambique, South Africa, and the United Kingdom have focused on collaborating with local art and history museums to reinterpret colonial collections. She holds a BA in Women and Gender Studies from Macalester College and an MA in History from Harvard University.

Melissa Martens Yaverbaum is the Executive Director of the Council of American Jewish Museums (CAJM), and has worked with museums for 30 years. Previously she served as Director of Collections and Exhibitions of the Museum of Jewish Heritage — A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, Curator of the Jewish Museum of Maryland, and Curator at the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum. Yaverbaum has curated many exhibitions about Jewish culture and history, and has authored related publications. She also worked at the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Newberry Library, the Folger Shakespeare Library, and the Field Museum.

Carole Zawatsky joined Tree of Life in November 2023 as the inaugural CEO. She oversees the public launch of the new institution and is responsible for laying down the groundwork needed for long-term success. With over 30 years of experience in the Jewish communal world, Zawatsky specializes in creating and implementing dynamic partnerships between the philanthropic community and the institutions she serves to cultivate strong, impactful organizations. Over her career, she has raised nearly \$100 million, including several multimillion-dollar gifts. She was born and raised in suburban Washington and received her BA from the University of Maryland and MA from George Washington University. She also studied at the Study Centre for the Fine and Decorative Arts at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

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