

Hello, my name is Maya Sobel. I am a proud Jew and the descendent of multiple Holocaust survivors. I am a senior at the University of Vermont and a board member of the Vermont Holocaust Memorial. I grew up attending the Rutland City Public School system. Last year I had the honor of advising the Biden administration on our nation's first ever National Strategy to Combat Antisemitism. I also recently had the privilege of visiting the UAE to talk to Emirati politicians, activists, and leaders about Holocaust education in their country and visit the only Holocaust museum in the Arab world.

As I speak to you today, I ask you to think about your own experience learning about Jews and antisemitism. How much do you know about Jews? I am not talking about your knowledge of how we were murdered over the years through mob violence, gas chambers, and human experiments. I am asking you how much do you know about our people's life?

I was talking to one of my Jewish friends at Duke University a few Summers ago. She was so excited to find out that I was from Vermont! Her roommate also happened to be from Vermont, but she had never met a Jew before moving into her dorm. We only make up 0.2% of the world population, so you can imagine that it is easy to create conspiracy about who we are. It is possible that many Vermonters, especially those in rural populations, have never met a Jew in real life. The only form of interaction they could have with us is through the education in your school systems and social media.

So did you have time to think about my earlier question? What do you know about the life of my people? Would you be able to describe to me that we are one of the world's only ethnioreligions who are genetically linked to each other no matter our diasporic population? Whether being Ashkenazim in Europe, Sephardim in the Iberian Peninsula and North Africa, Mizrahim in the Middle East, or smaller groups like the Beta Israelites in Ethiopia and the Cochin Jews in India? Could you tell me about Jewish mysticism and the Kabbalah with our rich spiritual world? What about our holidays following an agricultural cycle as a land-based people?

No. I don't think that you could tell me much about it. Jews have been so dehumanized that all the world can speak about is our death. When I was in highschool, we could choose our final history project based on any modern event. I think it's a great idea for students to study what they are personally interested in! But what do you think 16-year-olds gravitate towards the most? There were countless projects about the gruesome death and torture of Jews in the Holocaust because, for some reason, that is what my classmates were most interesting in learning. Nobody seemed to care to do a project on *how* we got to this point or how Nazi ideology had affected Jews in other countries because we are limited to only seeing Jews in the European diasporic population. There was not a single project on the Farhud, an Iraqi pogrom that was directly inspired by the Holocaust. Only learning about one type of Jew and one type of Jew-hatred gives the false impression that we are monolithic people and it does a disservice to the world's understanding of the extent of persecution we have faced in almost every society around the world for simply being Jews.

A few months ago, a group of UVM students spread a rumor about me and my Jewish identity which echoed the same language, tropes, and propaganda as The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, the Dreyfus Affair, and the rumors Hitler spread about the Jews leading up to World War II. 2022 data shows that 23% of UVM students are in-state. These are people who have been through *your* education system. They will graduate and become the next leaders of society. Congratulations for raising the next generation of antisemites.

I am not asking you to teach about the intricacies of the Jewish culture and religion, but I am telling you to do *more* than just teach about the mass murder of our people. Yes, you have an obligation to talk about concentration camps, gas chambers, and how the genocide of my people was executed, but you also have an obligation to teach about the moments in history that lead to the point where everyday people, including doctors, lawyers, and teachers were convinced that it was *required* to exterminate my people. You need to teach about the conspiracies that have dehumanized the Jews to be the scapegoat for society's problems. History is repeating itself and it is your job to redirect its course before it is too late.