

Presenter: Alvin H. Rosenfeld, Indiana University Bloomington

Title: “**Antisemitism in Today’s America: Manifestations, Causes, and Consequences**”

Panel: Contemporary History

Until recently, the United States seemed to many observers to be relatively free of the kinds of antisemitism that have been on the upsurge in numerous countries since the turn of the millennium. Individual acts of anti-Jewish violence have occurred from time to time, but these have been episodic and not on a scale that would bring most American Jews to feel uneasy about their day-to-day lives. This situation changed in the early months of 2017 when daily bomb threats were made against almost 200 Jewish community centers, synagogues, schools, old age homes, and other institutions. Suddenly, the sense of safety and security that most American Jews have experienced in recent decades could no longer be taken for granted. Even when it was revealed that these threats did not come from organized, right-wing groups, as had been suspected, Jewish feelings remained on edge. At the same time, an unexpected nationalist and populist turn in American political life went against the liberal inclinations of many American Jews and compounded their growing sense of unease. A newly energized white supremacist movement, accompanied in some instances by the public display of Nazi insignia and slogans, have added to these concerns. In the face of these developments, was the notion of “American exceptionalism,” deeply ingrained in the American psyche and national ethos, still applicable? If not, should Jews in America expect to be confronted by the kinds of hostility that Jews elsewhere have been dealing with over the past number of years?

This lecture will examine the recent history of antisemitism in the United States, identify its causes and character, compare it to antisemitic manifestations in Europe and elsewhere, and seek to assess how serious a problem it is and what needs to be done to address it effectively.