

Episode 29: Ken Stern

Guest: Professor Kenneth S. Stern, Bard Center for the Study of Hate

Host: Yusuf

Bio: Professor Kenneth Stern is the Director of the Bard Center for the Study of Hate, which also supports Bard's Berlin campus. He is a renowned author, attorney, and one of the leading experts on antisemitism and extremism worldwide. For 25 years, Prof. Stern directed the division on antisemitism and extremism at the American Jewish Committee, and later served as the executive director of the Justus & Karin Rosenberg Foundation. He was the lead drafter of the working definition of antisemitism that was adopted by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) in 2016. He was a special advisor to the defense team in the landmark London Holocaust denial case *David Irving v. Deborah Lipstadt* and has testified before the U.S. Senate in 2024 and 2025 on the rise of antisemitism. He was an invited presenter at the White House Conference on Hate Crimes. His books include *A Force Upon the Plain: The American Militia Movement and the Politics of Hate* (National Book Award nominee) and *The Conflict Over the Conflict: The Israel/Palestine Campus Debate* that was widely praised as a thoughtful must-read guide to the contemporary campus controversies. His writings have appeared in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *USA Today*, *The Guardian*, and other leading outlets.

In this episode: On the anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, Yusuf speaks with Professor Kenneth Stern about the growing threats of antisemitism, extremism, and political polarization. Stern reflects on the global rise in antisemitism since October 7, 2023, and what it means for both Jewish communities and democracy as a whole. The conversation explores how antisemitism is measured, how it manifests on campuses in the U.S. and Germany, and how to balance student safety with freedom of expression. Stern discusses the role of social media, the controversies surrounding the IHRA definition of antisemitism, and the challenge of distinguishing between legitimate criticism of Israel and antisemitic rhetoric. Drawing on his decades of work, he offers insights into the dangers of democratic backsliding, and what effective responses from governments, universities, and civil society could look like.

Links:

Stern, Kenneth S., editor. *Simply Human: Understanding Hatred and How to Combat It*. University of Toronto Press, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.3138/9781487551834> (Last accessed on October 21, 2025)

Stern, Kenneth S. *The Conflict Over the Conflict: The Israel/Palestine Campus Debate*. University of Toronto Press, 2020. <https://utppublishing.com/doi/book/10.3138/9781487507367> (Last accessed on October 21, 2025)

Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing of September 17, 2024:

https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/2024-09-17_-_testimony_-_stern.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com (Last accessed on October 21, 2025)

Sway: AI tool that helps students have difficult conversations on campus

<https://www.swaybeta.ai/demo> (Last accessed on October 21, 2025).

<https://newsroom.ucla.edu/stories/how-to-help-students-have-difficult-conversations-in-the-classroom> (Last accessed on October 21, 2025)

Judea Pearl's questions on the Settler Colonial Paradigm:

„Name me: One case of white settlers moving into a country they perceived to be the birthplace of their history. One case of white settlers speaking a language spoken in the land before the language spoken by its contemporary residents. One case of settlers whose holidays commemorated historical events in the land to which they moved - not the lands from which they came. One case of settlers who did not name towns like New York, New Amsterdam and New Wales (Israeli towns are not named “New Warsaw,” “New Berlin,” and “New Baghdad”), but after names by which those towns were known in ancient times. One case of settlers who narrated their homecoming journey for eighty generations in poetry.“

<https://thirdnarrative.org/more-on-israeli-settler-colonialism/> (Last accessed on October 21, 2025)

On Campus Antisemitism:

Harvard Caps Poll of October 19, 2023: 62% of 18-24 year olds answered that October 7 „attacks on Jews were genocidal in nature“, but 51% of them answered they were „justified by Palestinian grievances.“ (p. 43). https://harvardharrispoll.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/HHP_Oct23_KeyResults.pdf (Last accessed on October 21, 2025)

Please also check out our other episodes in the political debate chapter to explore multiple perspectives.

Dedication:

We dedicate this Podcast to all victims and survivors of October 7, the hostages and their families, to all innocent civilians killed and injured in Gaza and their grieving families and friends. To our dear guests Udi Goren, Khalil Sayegh, Sima and Mai who shared their losses so powerfully with us. To their families: Tal's wife Ella Haimi, their children Nir, Einav, Udi and Lotan, who never got the chance to meet his father. To Khalil Sayegh's mother and siblings, to Mai's and Sima's family, to her mother Bushra.

To the blessed memory of: Tal Haimi, Lara Sayegh, Jeris Sayegh, Mahmoud, Danny Darlington and Haim Perry.

Disclaimer:

In each episode of this podcast, the invited guests speak on their own behalf. They share their experiences, assessments, and expert perspectives. These contributions are central to the multiperspectivity of the project but do not necessarily reflect the views of the editorial team or producers.

Legal & Historical Anchor Episodes:

This podcast may include controversial legal terms of specific technical significance. Their legal applicability requires a thorough expert contextualization; for this, we refer to our legal chapter. All relevant terms of international law, its institutions, current controversies, and the state of jurisprudence are explained in the anchor episode with Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. mult. Claus Kreß LL.M. (Cambridge) (Episode 36). He is co-author of the Rome Statute, Special Advisor to the International Criminal Court, and Judge at the International Court of Justice in the parallel Gambia vs. Myanmar genocide case.

Historical matters are discussed from multiple perspectives in this podcast. Please check the cross-references in the shownotes of the respective episodes for details. All historically contested issues are addressed in the history anchor episode with Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. Gudrun Krämer (Episode 21), author of the comprehensive work *A History of Palestine: From the Ottoman Conquest to the Founding of the State of Israel* (Princeton 2008), a standard reference in the field. For her scholarly achievements as a historian, she was awarded the *Preis des Historischen Kollegs* in 2025, the highest distinction in her discipline in Germany.