



Contact: Nicole Rosen, 202-309-5724  
[nicole@rosencomm.com](mailto:nicole@rosencomm.com)

## **AEN Announces Groundbreaking Partnership with HBCUs to Combat Antisemitism and Strengthen the Black/Jewish Alliance**

Washington, DC, March 14, 2024 – Partnering with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), the Academic Engagement Network (AEN) today announced a groundbreaking new project it is funding to reignite the historic alliance between Black and Jewish communities and work together to combat rising antisemitism.

“As Jewish scholars fled Nazi Germany, they unfortunately found many barriers in the U.S. academy,” stated Miriam Elman, AEN’s executive director. “But an exception were HBCUs that provided visas and employment to 50 German Jewish scholars, saving their lives. Black and Jewish communities in the U.S. forged a unique bond as a result of these experiences. This initiative will draw on this inspiring history by empowering HBCUs to help combat contemporary antisemitism and disturbing efforts by extremists to create divisions between Black and Jewish communities.”

The pilot project will launch at South Carolina State University and Vorhees University this year. It will then be expanded to five-seven additional HBCUs in South Carolina next year and the following year. Each school will provide seminars to educate and train both faculty and students about the shared history of Black-Jewish solidarity, provide a deeper understanding of Jewish identity and Israel, and prepare participants to confront antisemitism out in the world.

"This grant may mark a new beginning, but the bond between our communities is not new; it is steeped in history. Our students are poised to become the future leaders of various fields, including industry, business, science, and law. It is imperative that they are equipped to combat all forms of hatred, including antisemitism," stated Vorhees University President Dr. Ronnie Hopkins.

Some of the specific topics that will be covered in professional development seminars and student-focused sessions include:

- The historic alliance in the United States between Jewish and Black communities beginning with 1909 formation of the NAACP through 2023 efforts of solidarity. Some historic and modern-day examples include the consistent and well-informed Holocaust coverage provided by Black newspapers, civil rights leaders who promoted Zionism, modern-day Black leaders who protested and continue to protest antisemitism, Jewish leadership in the founding of the NAACP, Jewish activists who fought for the Civil Rights Act and marched for equality, the Rosenwald Schools, and Jewish modern solidarity with Black Lives Matter;
- A history of antisemitism from antiquity through today, the diversity of Jewish identity, a better understanding of Israel and the role Zionism plays in Judaism, as well as ways to identify the current manifestations of antisemitism; and
- Ways our communities can unite to counter prejudice and hate facing Blacks and Jews.

Participants will be supported in creating a toolbox of policies and procedures targeted to their own campuses to foster a better understanding of Jewish identity. Selected students from each campus will receive additional training and serve as ambassadors for the project as it expands to other campuses. Each HBCU will also establish incident response teams to address antisemitism swiftly and effectively and to establish best practices.

Two University of South Carolina professors, Drs. Devin Randolph and Meir Muller, will lead the effort. AEN chose these University of South Carolina professors because of the University of South Carolina's unique position operating the only Anne Frank Center in the United States, one of only three in the world. A core component of the Anne Frank Center is to inspire young people, including college students, to make their voices heard.

Dr. Randolph explains the vision of the initiative: "At the heart of this approach is the emphasis on creating inclusive and diverse spaces. I see this endeavor as something truly invaluable, drawing from a legacy of resilience and aspirations for a future marked by understanding and progress." Muller, an ordained rabbi with a PhD in education, added, "We acknowledge that we are in a time when the alliance between our communities is strained, yet we believe that the foundation for solidarity is present and can be revitalized through educational endeavors."

Supported by AEN's [Antisemitism Education Initiative](#), Drs. Randolph and Muller join faculty at seven other schools of higher education who have recently received AEN grants to launch antisemitism awareness programs and resources on their campuses and beyond. Grant recipients are eligible for up to \$75,000 from AEN in support of their projects. The funding is designed to create sustainable mechanisms to educate and train campus stakeholders – including administrators, faculty, and students – about the diversity of Jewish experience, historic and contemporary manifestations of antisemitism, and strategies to improve inclusivity.

Antisemitism Education Initiative grants are among a number of programs and projects that AEN is supporting through its Improving the Campus Climate Initiative (ICCI), launched in 2020, which engages senior and mid-level officials in Student and Academic Affairs, DEI, and related offices on campuses throughout the country, providing expert, customized guidance, training, and best practices for understanding, identifying, and countering antisemitism on campus. The Initiative has reached over 3000 administrators through its various professional development programs.

AEN's ICCI director, Naomi Greenspan, shared, "At a time of increased antisemitism across the U.S., we are pleased to support such an important initiative to bring allies into our work against antisemitism. The work with HBCUs in South Carolina will provide an important model for similar initiatives nationwide."

**About the Academic Engagement Network (AEN):** *AEN mobilizes networks of university faculty and administrators to counter antisemitism, oppose the denigration of Jewish and Zionist identities, promote academic freedom, and advance education about Israel. It envisions a world where American higher education welcomes, respects, and supports the expression of Jewish identity and robust discourse about Israel. The organization is comprised of nearly 1,000 faculty members on more than 300 campuses. Former Canadian Member of Parliament and Minister of Justice Irwin Cotler and U.S. Representative Donna Shalala serve on AEN's Advisory Board, chaired by the former President of the University of California Mark G. Yudof. Deborah Lipstadt was an AEN Advisory Board member before taking on the role of U.S. Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism.*