

Karen Painter (karen.painter@aya.yale.edu)
654 Wentworth Ave W, Mendota Heights, MN 55118

June 17, 2024

Dear Senator Latz:

I write to provide details on antisemitism at the University of Minnesota. As I explain below, the problem goes well beyond disagreement over Israel. Even teaching about the history of complicity inside Nazi Germany is a bone of contention, and when I stand up for my academic freedom as a tenured professor, I am strongly criticized by administrators.

First, I should explain why I resigned from the advisory board of the UMN Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies. The Interim Dean of the College of Liberal Arts (CLA), Ann Waltner, offered the center directorship to an extreme anti-Zionist scholar who, among other things, within a week of the October 7 attacks accused Israel of genocide.

The circumstances of my resignation were explained in an email written to the Board of Regents by my husband, UMN law professor Richard W. Painter. I would have written to the Regents myself, but Dean Waltner only months earlier had threatened me with retaliation after I sent internal emails in 2023 complaining about race discrimination in CLA and in my unit, the School of Music. Now that President Ettinger has acknowledged the problem with Dean Waltner's process for choosing a center director and has paused the search, I believe I safely can come forward and explain what happened.

I do not know why Dean Waltner offered a public-facing directorship to someone whom many in the Jewish community view as having extreme views on Israel. This happened during an ongoing federal investigation of a December 2023 complaint to the US Department of Education about antisemitism in CLA. I attach my email announcing my resignation from the Center's advisory board and my email to the president and provost.

But I have another concerning incident to report, this one involving both CLA and the School of Music, where I am a tenured professor.

I have published and taught on antisemitism in music for my entire career. My book *Symphonic Aspirations* (Harvard University Press, 2008) discusses German music criticism from 1900 to 1945. Not everyone in the School of Music or in the broader community is supportive of this line of inquiry. Some years ago, the School of Music director invited me to a meeting with a donor who was an officer of the Minnesota Wagner Society; the donor told me we shouldn't even have a Center for Jewish Studies at the University. Richard Wagner of course is famous not just for his operas but for his extreme antisemitism.

Within my courses at the university, I teach students about the complicity of musicians in the Holocaust, including most prominently Hitler's star orchestra conductor, [Wilhelm Furtwängler](https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/the-disquieting-power-of-wilhelm-furtwangler-hitlers-court-conductor)
<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/the-disquieting-power-of-wilhelm-furtwangler-hitlers-court-conductor>

Under Furtwängler, the Berlin Philharmonic expelled all its Jewish members and played for numerous Nazi party events. Aryan orchestra members knowingly bought instruments confiscated from Jewish musicians who were deported to concentration camps. Furtwängler accepted praise from Hitler and other Nazi officials for illustrating the cultural supremacy of Germany. This was one of many examples of classical music being used as a propaganda arm of the Nazi government, a subject I address extensively in my published scholarship.

In Fall 2023, as part of my successful bid for promotion to the rank of full professor, the School of Music Director asked two faculty to observe my freshman seminar “Music in Nazi Germany and the Holocaust.” One colleague, a university band conductor, chose to attend the class session on Furtwängler’s collaboration with the Nazi government; the band conductor emailed me in advance, “Personally, I do have an incredible amount of respect for Wilhelm Furtwängler”; the band conductor’s evaluation, placed into my promotion file, criticized me for not showing “multiple angles” and more “nuanced complexities” in my teaching of Furtwängler’s collaboration with the Nazis and fate of Jewish members of the Berlin Philharmonic.

I was very concerned about this feedback as it went to the substance of what I was teaching (where I should have academic freedom). More important, I was concerned that the band conductor’s “incredible . . . respect” for Furtwängler was indicative of a broader problem in music history where all too often racism and antisemitism are concealed as we pay homage to “great music.” I shared my concerns with the director of the Center for Jewish Studies and, per his advice, a former director of the Center for Jewish Studies. Mine were legitimate concerns and should be discussed seriously within the University.

To my shock, I was harshly criticized for doing so—by the School of Music Director, who copied Dean Waltner. Dean Waltner weighed in, “I share Director Warfield’s concerns.” In sum, I was chastised by two of my supervisors for sharing with two campus leaders, both academics in Jewish studies, my concern that I was unfairly censored for my own criticism of Furtwängler, who provided more support to the Nazi regime than any other musician. I did not break any University rule or policy when I shared my concerns about this matter with campus experts. Rather, Director Warfield, with Dean Waltner’s affirmance, made sweeping statements that my doing so was somehow “unprofessional” and “unacceptable.”

I got the promotion despite my criticism of Furtwängler, but that is not the point. If we are ever to confront antisemitism at the university, faculty must be free to express themselves. That includes communicating with Jewish studies colleagues and others about potentially harmful perceptions in the university of European culture in the era of the Holocaust. I do not blame the band conductor for misguided admiration of Furtwängler as much as I blame my supervisors for telling me that it was somehow wrong of me to discuss it with our own experts in Jewish Studies.

The larger point is this: antisemitism is a serious problem at the University of Minnesota, and the problem is not limited to disagreement about Israel. It is now fashionable to diminish the importance of the Holocaust in world history, rehabilitate those who collaborated with the Nazis, and to forget what really happened. I will not forget, and in the time I have remaining on the faculty of this University until I retire, I will urge my students that they too must never forget.

Today, I am sending to the United States Department of Education Civil Rights Division a letter substantially similar to this letter, attaching emails documenting the Furtwängler incident and requesting that this information be included in the ongoing federal investigation of antisemitism in CLA.

Very truly yours,

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Karen Painter
Professor of Music
University of Minnesota School of Music



CHGS Directorship

Karen Painter <kpainter@umn.edu>

Fri, Jun 7, 2024 at 6:56 PM

To: Joe Eggers <[REDACTED]@umn.edu>

Cc: Joachim Savelsberg <[REDACTED]@umn.edu>, Natalie Belsky <[REDACTED]@d.umn.edu>, Ana Forcinito <[REDACTED]@umn.edu>, Bruno Chaouat <[REDACTED]@umn.edu>, Evelyn Davidheiser <[REDACTED]@umn.edu>, Gary Cohen <[REDACTED]@umn.edu>, Hiromi Mizuno <[REDACTED]@umn.edu>, Leslie Morris <[REDACTED]@umn.edu>, Daniel Schroeter <[REDACTED]@umn.edu>, Sheer Ganor <[REDACTED]@umn.edu>, Gabriela Spears-Rico <[REDACTED]@umn.edu>, Carrie Walling <[REDACTED]@umn.edu>

Dear Colleagues:

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to serve on the board at a time when there was a deep scholarly and ethical commitment to the study of the Holocaust and strong (apolitical) community outreach as inspired by Stephen Feinstein. I hope there is a time, in the future, when the Center leadership returns to the founding principles established under his stewardship and subsequent directors up to this point. I am resigning from the board effective immediately and will share my reasons with the Provost and President.

Thank you, Karen

On Fri, Jun 7, 2024 at 4:48 PM Joe Eggers <[REDACTED]@umn.edu> wrote:

Good afternoon,

We've received confirmation that Dean Waltner has extended an offer to Raz Segal (currently Associate Professor of Holocaust & Genocide Studies at Stockton University in New Jersey) for the Center's Directorship and the Feinstein chair position. The offer also includes a faculty position in the History Department.

Thank you to Evelyn for chairing the search process and those who served on it.

If you'd like to reach out to Raz, his email is raz.segal@gmail.com

I will share any news as I hear it.

Enjoy your weekend,
Joe

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Joe Eggers

Interim Director

Center for Holocaust & Genocide Studies

University of Minnesota

[CHGS Blog](#) - [CHGS on Facebook](#) - [CHGS on Twitter](#)

I [acknowledge](#) that the University of Minnesota stands on *Miní Sóta Makhóche*, the homelands of the *Dakhóta Oyáte*.

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Professor Karen Painter (she/her/hers—[Why is this important?](#))

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tel. 612 626 7063 (please do not leave time-sensitive messages)

kpainter@umn.edu (preferred method of contact)

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University of Minnesota Twin Cities

2106 4th St S

Minneapolis, MN 55455

The University of Minnesota Twin Cities stands on [Miní Sóta Makhóche](#), the homelands of the *Dakhóta Oyáte*



Karen Painter <kpainter@umn.edu>

Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies

1 message

Karen Painter <kpainter@umn.edu>

Fri, Jun 7, 2024 at 7:55 PM

To: Rachel Croson <[REDACTED]@umn.edu> [REDACTED] of Minnesota [REDACTED]@umn.edu>

Bcc: Bruno Chaouat <[REDACTED]@umn.edu>

Dear Provost Croson:

In light of news announced this afternoon (see below), I have resigned from the board of the University of Minnesota Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies.

Dr Segal has positioned himself on an extreme end of the political and ideological spectrum with his publications on Israel and Gaza, including an essay in which he accused Israel of genocide a week after the October 7 terrorist attacks. The CHGS director is ideally a scholar whose principal area of research and public commentary is the Holocaust itself, and certainly should not be an individual publicly identified with extremist positions on the present Middle East war. We need a center director who will bring our community together to understand how the Holocaust and other genocides occurred, not someone who blames Israel for the rape and murder of 1200 civilians, and kidnapping of hundreds more.

Educating the current generation of students about the Holocaust is critically important. Instead, an interim dean of CLA, despite substantial opposition from faculty and others, has offered the Holocaust center directorship to someone who will accomplish nothing of the kind. I also do not believe Waltner showed responsible stewardship of CLA by hastily approving a tenured search in her own home unit, History, under the guise of an external search for a center director (no one on our board had anticipated that the CLA Dean, or Interim Dean, would approve an external search at a time CLA is shrinking). The next regular CLA dean should make decisions that affect the financial health of the college. Given Waltner's handling of anti-Israel unit statements this year, it would be unsurprising if she saw such this search as a way to leave her mark politically. Predictably, the university's Holocaust experts have resigned from the board. My heart goes out to the family of the center's founder, Stephen Feinstein, since his name and posthumous reputation will be tarnished by association with the next holder of the Feinstein Chair, Raz Segal; political extremism is a terrible way to respond to a generous donor and the family of the man whom the donor wished to honor by creating an endowed professorship. As you see from my remarks submitted to the Google Form feedback request, this political extremist is not even a strong scholar.

Since the CLA unit heads, apparently, are united in their negative reaction to Waltner's candidacy as CLA Dean (an email shared with me through the grapevine), my assumption is that she has decided to lash out, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] If Segal does end up coming here, the best we can hope for is that his center directorship ends quickly and he is absorbed into the teaching ranks of the History Department—[REDACTED]

Thank you in advance for allowing me to write candidly and informally to you about my concerns. Now in my 16th year teaching a freshman seminar on Music in Nazi Germany, I have strong views about the need to consider students and community first, not act on the (dangerous) political whims of certain faculty: separating myself and my courses from the activities of the CGHS will be a sad chapter in my career at the University.

Sincerely yours, Karen Painter

----- Forwarded message -----

From: Joe Eggers <[REDACTED]@umn.edu>

Date: Fri, Jun 7, 2024 at 4:48 PM

Subject: CHGS Directorship

To: Joachim Savelsberg <[REDACTED]@umn.edu>, Natalie Belsky <[REDACTED]@d.umn.edu>, Ana Forcinito <[REDACTED]@umn.edu>, Bruno Chaouat <[REDACTED]@umn.edu>, Evelyn Davidheiser <[REDACTED]@umn.edu>, Gary Cohen <[REDACTED]@umn.edu>, Karen Painter <kpainter@umn.edu>, Hiromi Mizuno <[REDACTED]@umn.edu>, Leslie Morris <[REDACTED]@umn.edu>, Daniel Schroeter <[REDACTED]@umn.edu>, Sheer Ganor <[REDACTED]@umn.edu>, Gabriela Spears-Rico <[REDACTED]@umn.edu>, Carrie Walling <[REDACTED]@umn.edu>

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Joe Eggers

Interim Director

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