

Advocate Dershowitz tackles Duke, anti-Semitism

By MATTHEW BUDMAN
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On his way to debate David Duke on a Canadian talk show just before last week's Louisiana election, Alan Dershowitz expressed disgust over the right-wing politician's vote-getting success.

"In some respects, this marks the end of the statute of limitations on the Holocaust," Dershowitz said. "It has now become permissible to vote for a Nazi."

Pointing to the Louisiana runoff, the civil liberties lawyer scoffed at recent criticism that he "looks under rocks for anti-Semitism."

"There are no rocks" — the anti-Semites have crawled out, Dershowitz indicated in a phone interview from his Boston home.

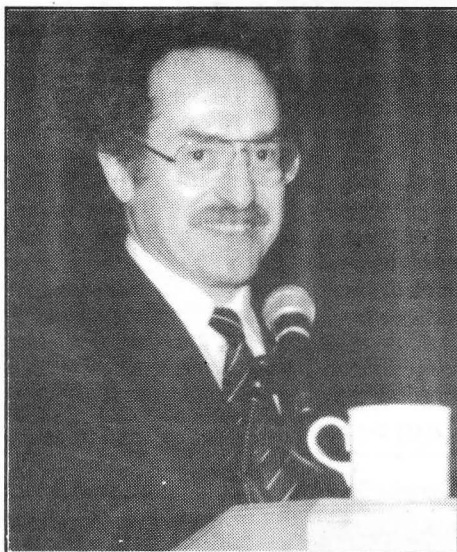
Then he predicted: "No matter how the election comes out, a majority of whites will vote for a man who's a Nazi. If [Black Muslim leader Louis] Farrakhan were running in the election, a majority of blacks might very well vote for a black candidate who's an anti-Semite. So we have a majority of people in Louisiana who would be willing to vote for an anti-Semite."

"Go on — tell me I'm paranoid."

Dershowitz, who spoke Nov. 7 at a San Jose federation dinner, also said he remains surprised and gratified at the success of his book *Chutzpah*, a strikingly pro-Jewish, pro-Israel treatise that has made the Harvard lawyer a bestselling author and the country's leading Jewish advocate.

Until *Chutzpah's* publication, Dershowitz was best known as the author of *Reversal of Fortune*, about his legal defense of socialite Claus von Bülow. Ron Silver's animated portrayal of Dershowitz in the hit movie version was the image America knew.

"I never wanted to be known for *Reversal of Fortune*," he reflected. "The Jewish part of my life has always been the most important. I'm delighted to be known more for my



Speaking in San Jose, Alan Dershowitz charges that American Jewish organizations are out of touch with their constituents.

Jewish activism [now] than for my defense of Claus von Bülow."

Still, he had no plans to raise his visibility to its current level. "When *Chutzpah* was printed, 35,000 copies were published — that's what they thought it would sell, and that's what I thought it would sell," he said. "And the widespread acceptance of *Chutzpah* took us all by surprise.

"The letters I've gotten — almost 3,000 letters now — almost all say the same thing. They almost accuse me of plagiarism. They say, 'Everything you wrote is what we've been thinking all these years.' I feel a little bit like Joe Biden. On the other hand, it's such a nice feeling to know that I have been able to articulate what many others have thought."

Reiterating a major theme of *Chutzpah*, he said his message strikes strong chords be-

cause American Jewish organizations are hopelessly out of touch with their constituents, failing to adequately support Israel or stand up to institutional anti-Semitism.

"It's because I say what I think a lot of Jews out there feel. I think what I have to say is more consistent with what many grassroots Jews believe than what the American Jewish Congress or the American Jewish Committee and other organizations have to say. I think the Jewish organizations have to do some polling, have to start talking to their own constituents, and have to find out what their organizations really want."

Given a choice of backing the book's proposed reforms or counterattacking its author, many organizational heads have taken the latter route — the wrong one, Dershowitz said.

"This is a book that is affirmatively Jewish, the first book in years that was No. 1 on the *New York Times* bestseller list that was good for the Jews. Today the No. 1 bestseller, *Den of Thieves*, is all about Jewish Wall Street criminals. And yet *Chutzpah* has been so viciously attacked by the Jewish leadership that it really raises the question of where are their priorities? The American Jewish Congress has spent more time attacking me than attacking David Duke."

The lawyer's offer last week to represent California Sen. Alan Cranston before the Senate also has made waves. "I'm doing it as a mitzvah," he said. "I think Sen. Cranston has been just wonderful for all the values that I support, ranging from the rights of poor people to Israel, and he's an older, sickly man now, retiring from the Senate, and I just felt an absolute compunction to help out on a pro bono basis. I'm going to try to help him through this."

Dershowitz's next literary escapade will tackle the questions he left unanswered in *Chutzpah*. "I'm working on a new book on

the future of the American Jewish community in the 21st century," he said. "And I'm posing the question, 'What will our community look like in the year 2025?'"

"I come to the conclusion that we're going to see two Jewish communities by the year 2025.

"On the one hand, the Chassidim will remain essentially the same and will grow in strength and proportion.

"And then we're going to see a community which consists largely of former Jews, partial Jews, Christian Jews, people with Jewish heritage, integrated Jews — much like the Jewish communities in South Amer-

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ica, in the Soviet Union and in parts of Europe, where there are very few people with two Jewish parents and synagogue affiliation. It will be a very much weaker, secular, middle-class Jewish community."

His vision of the assimilated, intermarried Jewish future, Dershowitz admitted, is a foreboding one.

"It'll be frightening in the sense that the bad news part of it is quite bad. The good news part of it is very good; one of the major reasons for this is that things have never been better for the Jewish community.

"My next book picks up where my last one left off — Jews have managed to survive millennia of oppression; can we now survive our own success? That's the question I end this book with and the question I begin the next book with."