

# The Sugar Mama of Anti-Muslim Hate

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In late April, Geert Wilders arrived in New York City to tell his quixotic tale to a rapt American audience. The far-right Dutch Party of Freedom leader—perhaps the world’s most prominent anti-Muslim populist—was poised to release *Marked for Death: Islam’s War Against the West and Me*, a memoir just out from Regnery, the right-wing US publishing house, in which he recounts his courageous efforts to stop the “Islamicization” of Europe. On his US tour, Wilders proudly portrayed himself as a man on the run—a round-the-clock security detail guarding him against radical Muslims whose violent passions he had supposedly inflamed by his truth-telling—and as a man on the rise: the exodus of his party from the governing coalition had forced new elections in the Netherlands, throwing the country’s ossified establishment into chaos.

Upon Wilders’s arrival in New York, a little-known think tank called the Gatestone Institute rolled out the red carpet for him. On April 30, before a select crowd that according to Gatestone’s website had paid \$10,000 a head, he held forth on the persecution he had endured during his recent trial for incitement to hatred and discrimination. “This charade that happened in the Netherlands for the last few years could not have happened in your great country,” Wilders said in his speech. Then he cut to the heart of his appeal: “Islam is primarily a dangerous ideology rather than a religion. This is the truth. This violent ideology wants to impose Islamic Sharia law on the whole world, including us—the Kafirs, the non-Muslims.... Islam is the largest threat to freedom which the world is currently facing.”

Some Dutch liberals have branded him a demagogue who summons the ghosts of Europe’s dark past, but Wilders counters the accusation by assiduously cultivating Jewish support. He quotes Zionist forefather Theodor Herzl and boasts of his more than forty trips to Israel, where he once toiled on a rural kibbutz. Wilders, in fact, has made a special friend of right-wing Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman. In Wilders’s world, the Jewish state represents Fort Apache on the frontiers of the war against the barbarians threatening Western civilization. “Mothers in the West can sleep safely because Israeli mothers at night worry about their sons in the army,” he told the Gatestone Institute. “Their fight is our fight. We should support it.”

At the April event, Wilders’s seamless fusion of anti-Muslim bombast and pro-Israel cant was gratefully received by the Gatestone Institute’s founder and director, Nina Rosenwald, whom he acknowledged at the top of his jeremiad as another of his good friends. An heiress to the Sears Roebuck fortune, Rosenwald spreads her millions through the William Rosenwald Family Fund, a nonprofit foundation named for her father, a famed Jewish philanthropist who created the United Jewish Appeal in 1939. His daughter’s focus is more explicitly political. According to a report by the Center for American Progress titled “Fear Inc.,” Rosenwald and her sister Elizabeth Varet, who also directs the family foundation, have donated more than \$2.8 million since 2000 to “organizations that fan the flames of Islamophobia.”

Besides funding a Who’s Who of anti-Muslim outfits, Rosenwald has served on the board of AIPAC, the central arm of America’s Israel lobby, and holds leadership roles in a host of mainstream pro-Israel organizations. As groups like AIPAC lead the charge for a US military strike on the Islamic Republic of Iran, threatening to turn apocalyptic visions of civilizational warfare into catastrophic reality, Rosenwald’s wealth has fueled a rapidly emerging alliance between the pro-Israel

mainstream and the Islamophobic fringe. (In 2003 alone the Rosenwald Family Fund donated well over half of its \$1.6 million in total contributions to pro-Israel and Islamophobic organizations.) This alliance serves to sanitize and legitimize professional anti-Muslim bigots like Wilders, allowing their ideas to mingle easily with those of neoconservative foreign policy heavyweights intent on promoting the appearance of a convergence between US and Israeli interests by invoking the specter of a common “Islamofascist” enemy. With Gatestone—which publicizes the writings of figures ranging from pro-Israel super-lawyer Alan Dershowitz to “counter-jihad” propagandist Robert Spencer, and boasts Harold Rhode, a neoconservative former Pentagon official credited, as a senior fellow, with helping to try to push the Bush administration to invade Iraq—Rosenwald has attempted to shift the alliance into overdrive.

### **Conspiracies, Witch Hunts and “Moderate Muslims”**

Over the past decade, Rosenwald’s generosity has helped sustain the pet projects of “Islamofascism Awareness Week” organizer and Stalinist apostate David Horowitz. Her largesse has also supported former Lebanese Maronite TV anchor Brigitte Gabriel, who told an evangelical audience in 2006 that Muslims “have no souls—they are dead set on killing and destruction.” The Center for Security Policy (CSP), a Washington-based think tank directed by neoconservative former Pentagon official Frank Gaffney, has also thrived as a result of Rosenwald’s beneficence. The \$437,000 in donations Gaffney reaped from the Rosenwald family enabled him to churn out conspiratorial pamphlets like his 2010 “Shariah: The Threat to America,” in which he warned that American Muslims were engaged in a “stealth jihad” to place the country under the control of Sharia, or Islamic law. At the Conservative Political Action Conference the following year, Gaffney sent his cadres to distribute fliers accusing top Republican anti-tax activists Grover Norquist and Suhail Khan of organizing a secret campaign dedicated to “the replacement of our constitutional republic...with a theocratic Islamic caliphate governing according to Shari’ah.” (David Steinmann, president of the Fund, sits on the board of Gaffney’s CSP.) Norquist is married to an Arab-American, and Khan, a former Republican Party official, is a fellow for Muslim-Christian Understanding at the Institute for Global Engagement. The American Conservative Union investigated Gaffney’s charges and declared them “reprehensible.”

Rosenwald has also used her money to support a seemingly sober set of self-proclaimed “dissident” Muslims who have seized the post-9/11 media spotlight to defend pro-Israel positions, Western military intervention in the Arab world and police spying on Muslim Americans. These beneficiaries include Irshad Manji, an openly gay Canadian TV personality and self-described “Muslim refusenik” who argued in her 2005 book, *The Trouble With Islam Today*, that “desert Arabs” and “Arab cultural imperialists” were imposing an anti-democratic, sexist and endemically anti-Semitic mindset on the rest of the world’s Muslims. In 2007 Rosenwald provided \$10,000 in seed money for Manji’s new nonprofit, Project Ijtihad, which she founded to “help build the world’s most inclusive network of reform-minded Muslims and non-Muslim allies.”

Two years later Rosenwald pumped \$10,000 into a similar but markedly more aggressive venture called the American Islamic Forum for Democracy. The group was founded by Zuhdi Jasser, an Arizona physician hailed by Glenn Beck as “the one Muslim we were all searching for after 9/11.” Despite his lack of academic or theological credentials, Jasser provided expert testimony last year before the Congressional hearing on Muslim American radicalization conducted by Representative Peter King of New York, widely criticized as a witch hunt. In early March, after the Associated Press exposed a secret NYPD unit monitoring Muslims throughout New York City and far beyond, Jasser issued a press release declaring, “We thank God every day for the NYPD.” That same day, he surfaced at a pro-NYPD rally in New York with King by his side. Then, only days later, over vehement objections from a coalition of Muslim groups, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell installed Jasser as a member of the Commission on International Religious Freedom.

But no single anti-Muslim activist has benefited more from his relationship with Rosenwald than Middle East Forum founder Daniel Pipes, bankrolled to the tune of \$2.3 million over the past ten years by the Rosenwald family's philanthropies. Pipes thanked Rosenwald for "[taking] on a leadership role when the [Middle East] Forum was yet fledgling, helping us through some tough spots." A former scholar at the Rosenwald-backed pro-Israel Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP), Pipes has made a career of advocating aggressive US and Israeli military action in the Middle East, including the razing of entire Palestinian villages. Expressing his solidarity with Wilders, Pipes echoed the Dutch politician's racial views on Muslim immigrants, describing them as "brown-skinned peoples cooking strange foods and not exactly maintaining Germanic standards of hygiene."

Pipes occupies a central position at the nexus of the pro-Israel lobby and the Islamophobic fringe. In 2001 he neatly encapsulated the zero-sum mentality that defines his view of the alliance, declaring, "I worry very much, from the Jewish point of view, that the presence, and increased stature, and affluence, and enfranchisement of American Muslims, because they are so much led by an Islamist leadership, that this will present true dangers to American Jews."

To his shame, Pipes earned eighteen citations in the manifesto of Norwegian terrorist Anders Behring Breivik, the self-proclaimed "counter-jihadist" standing trial for the murder of seventy-seven people, mostly teenagers. Drawing heavily on sources like Pipes to justify his actions, Breivik said he carried out the slaughter to punish Europe for succumbing to "Islamicization" and multiculturalism. Ranking just behind Pipes in Breivik's thought was the Middle East Monitoring and Research Institute (MEMRI), with sixteen citations from the right-wing terrorist. Founded by a former Israeli intelligence officer to monitor and selectively disseminate Arabic-language media, MEMRI has become a key source for organizations in the Islamophobic network. MEMRI provided much of the translated material in the anti-Muslim Clarion Fund's mass-distributed propaganda film *Obsession: Radical Islam's War Against the West*. The Clarion Fund and MEMRI have received handsome donations from the Rosenwald family, earning Nina Rosenwald her position as chair of MEMRI's board of directors.

"We can give Nina Rosenwald the benefit of the doubt and say that in the past she didn't know the poisonous ideological agenda of her beneficiaries," Wajahat Ali, principal author of the "Fear Inc." report, told me. "But at this point, she has no excuse for ignoring their extreme activities. So the question is why she continues to support them."

### **Birth of a Benefactor**

Who is this benefactor of Islamophobia? According to those familiar with Rosenwald, she is anything but a sophisticated Machiavellian operator—"a babe in the woods," as one of her longtime acquaintances described her to me. (Rosenwald did not respond to interview requests sent to the Gatestone Institute and her personal e-mail.) According to another acquaintance, Rosenwald has a penchant for launching into anti-Arab anti-Palestinian tirades at public forums, leaping up like "a jack in the box" to denounce the evildoers. Despite her zealotry, Rosenwald maintains a reputation as a Manhattan socialite who travels in some of New York City's most elite financial and political circles. Her wealthy friends gather for salons at upscale restaurants and in the living room of her Upper West Side apartment to meet major league political personalities, including former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, neoconservative former UN Ambassador John Bolton (an associate of the Gatestone Institute) and the late right-wing media provocateur Andrew Breitbart.

Rosenwald counts among her closest friends Norman Podhoretz, the octogenarian neoconservative activist and former *Commentary* magazine editor who argues that Jewish Democrats are heretics betraying their religious duty to support the Jewish state. Rosenwald, according to one friend, is also

close to Podhoretz's daughter, Ruthie Blum, a right-wing columnist who lives in the illegal West Bank settlement of Har Adar and writes a column for Israel Hayom, a newspaper published by far-right billionaire Sheldon Adelson, a chief financial supporter of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Father and daughter echo the line of Likudnik Greater Israel ideology and anti-Muslim fanaticism, with Podhoretz urging the Western world to wage "World War IV" (the title of his post-9/11 polemic) against what he and Blum call "Islamofascism." Blum has called for an Israeli war against Iran on the grounds that "Iran is soon to have atomic bombs with which it will attempt to impose Shariah law on the rest of the world—after wiping out the Jewish state." Rosenwald has sustained Commentary (now edited by Podhoretz's son John) with regular donations of up to \$15,000—a modest but important sum for a right-wing Israel-centric magazine with an increasingly minuscule readership.

Through her affiliation with the Washington-based Hudson Institute, where Norman Podhoretz is an adjunct fellow, Rosenwald established a branch of the think tank in New York City. Operating under the Hudson banner, Rosenwald brought Wilders to town in 2008 to warn against the Muslim plot to "rule the world by the sword." Wilders's tirade during that visit against the prophet Muhammad, whom he described as "a warlord, a mass murderer, a pedophile," was strident even by the standards of the hawkish Hudson Institute. By 2011, well before Wilders's return visit this year, Rosenwald separated Hudson New York City from Hudson's national branch, changing her organization's name to the Gatestone Institute. Today, Rosenwald maintains a seat on Hudson's board of directors.

Nina Rosenwald's influence is based on the fortune her grandfather Julius earned at the turn of the century as co-owner of Sears, Roebuck & Company. Julius Rosenwald, renowned for his liberal philanthropy, used his fortune to nurture the careers of African-American leaders from Booker T. Washington to W.E.B. Du Bois and writers Langston Hughes and Claude McKay. Like many Reform Jews of his time, Rosenwald kept a cautious distance from Zionism, which organizations like the American Jewish Committee treated as a potential threat to Jewish assimilation in America.

Julius's son, William, continued the philanthropic tradition his father inaugurated. With rabbis Abba Hillel Silver and Jonah Wise, two early leaders of the American Zionist movement, William Rosenwald helped form the United Jewish Appeal for Refugees and Overseas Needs to "fortify the Jews of all countries against anti-Semitic onslaughts." Rosenwald's efforts to resettle imperiled European Jews vaulted him into a lifetime of leadership of major Jewish organizations. In the aftermath of the 1967 war, when Israel began its illegal military occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Golan Heights, Rosenwald, like most Jewish institutional leaders, intensified his commitment to the cause of Zionism.

Following their father, Nina Rosenwald and her siblings became active in the pro-Israel community. While her sister Elizabeth has assumed a lower profile, there is hardly a single major pro-Israel organization that does not provide Rosenwald with a seat on its board of directors. Thanks to her financial generosity, Rosenwald sits on the board of influential neoconservative groups from WINEP and AIPAC as well as Hudson. She is the vice president of the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs, which has provided training to thousands of American law enforcement and military officials from Israeli intelligence and police officers.

While entrenched in the pro-Israel establishment in the United States, Rosenwald has funneled hundreds of thousands of dollars into some of the Jewish state's more unpleasant—and legally dubious—ventures. The Rosenwald Family Fund has provided at least \$100,000, for example, to the Golan Fund, an initiative of the Israel Land Fund that aims to increase the "Jewish presence" in Israel's Galilee region and the occupied Golan Heights by "obtain[ing] more of that [Arab] land for agricultural use," according to its website. Extending its influence across the Green Line, the

Rosenwald Family Fund has also provided financial support to the College of Judea (now Ariel University Center of Samaria) in the Israeli mega-settlement of Ariel; the Beit El yeshiva, a religious nationalist school situated in a West Bank settlement that instructs students to disobey government orders to abandon illegal settlement outposts; and to the Central Fund for Israel, a New York City-based nonprofit that serves as a major funding artery between American-based donors and the hardcore settlements of the West Bank.

According to Henry Siegman, a former executive director of the American Jewish Congress who serves as president of the US/Middle East Project, the Rosenwald family's rightward trajectory reflects a generational shift within the Jewish American establishment. "The trend is not something that just emerged recently," Siegman told me. "Over the last few decades, the Jewish Federations and AIPAC have played a significant role in shaping this reactionary move by advancing the notion that we should support any government in Israel and any policy that the government espouses. The Jewish organizations that opposed this line and took the opposite position were punished financially by the wealthy donors AIPAC was able to put together."

As Islamophobia consumes broad sectors of America's pro-Israel community, leading Israel advocacy groups are dispatching anti-Muslim speakers to college campuses across the country. Chief among them is StandWithUs, an organization that Danny Ayalon, Israel's deputy foreign minister, says his government uses to "amplify our power." In May StandWithUs sent Rosenwald beneficiary Jasser to appear beside a cast of neoconservative activists at a University of California, San Diego, event dedicated to condemning established human rights groups. Earlier in the year, StandWithUs dispatched Nonie Darwish, an ex-Muslim convert to evangelical Christianity who calls Islam "a poison to our society," to speak at the University of New Mexico.

According to Siegman, the Jewish establishment's loyalty to an Israeli government drifting irrevocably toward the far shores of the right has taken a terrible toll. "Islamophobia has gained many followers in the Jewish establishment and at this point has infected American Jewish life," he commented. "The neocons are to a large extent responsible for that. And they did this at the price of alienating the younger generation, which is falling away."

## **Max Blumenthal**

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