

Thank you, Arthur for that incredibly kind introduction. Arthur has been my mentor for more than 30 years and I regularly and frequently look to him for both legal advice and career advice. For those of you wondering how I was convinced to leave Goldman Sachs after nearly 20 years and return to Fried Frank, it was Arthur. He invited me to lunch and explained to me not only why chairing Fried Frank was a great opportunity, and a natural step in my career, but also why it was my obligation to assume the responsibility of leading the Firm. So, really, I had no choice!

I have a lot of others to thank as well. First, I want to thank AJC and its leadership for tonight's event. I also want to thank the co-chairs Rich Friedman, Casey Cogut, Eric Friedman and my Fried Frank partners Jon Mechanic, Ken Rosh, Brad Scheler, Bob Schwenkel and Jamie Wareham. A big thank you to the vice-chairs and to my Fried Frank partners for their tremendous support for AJC and me; and a special thank you to the Fried Frank staff members who worked so hard to make this event a success.

I have had the honor and pleasure of working for two fabulous organizations in my career – Fried Frank and Goldman Sachs – and I want to recognize my colleagues from Goldman Sachs who are here tonight and thank all of you for your support. And I want to thank everyone else here tonight, some of you traveled a great distance to be here, and I appreciate it.

My final thanks are for my wife Beth, for her support and encouragement in everything I do, and for my wonderful daughters, Hilary and Emily, Hilary's fiancé Ari and Emily's boyfriend Michael, and my sister Shelley and her husband Larry for coming tonight.

I am honored to receive the Judge Learned Hand Award from AJC, an organization that I have admired throughout my career. Since its founding in 1906, AJC has been instrumental in advancing democratic values in this country and around the world. It has been a powerful advocate of civil liberties for Jews and has worked to combat extremism and to safeguard the rights and freedoms of all people.

I accept this award tonight, not just as an individual and a lawyer who believes in AJC's mission, but as chairman of Fried Frank. Diversity, inclusiveness and the rights of the individual are core principles that underpin Fried Frank's culture. The people who founded our firm were German Jewish immigrants. They steadfastly promoted equality and denounced violence and hatred. We are justifiably proud of that heritage, and we continue to uphold and advance it.

It is particularly humbling to stand here and accept this award named after one of the most influential judges in American history, a man known for his strong adherence to the principles of fairness, tolerance and social justice. Like AJC, Judge Hand relentlessly defended the rights and freedoms of all people and espoused the core values of democracy.

Tonight, I want to speak about a core democratic value: the right to free speech. In particular, I will talk about free speech in an era of social media and non-stop breaking news and the connection between those sources of information and intolerance.

Throughout his career, Judge Hand wrote a number of important opinions regarding free speech. What he understood so keenly is that because we live in a democracy in which the right to free speech is protected, we have the opportunity to discuss openly the most important topics of our time, including what we stand for as a society.

As a free and open society, we should welcome opportunities to engage with each other, including with those who hold ideas that differ from our own. It is precisely this willingness to engage, and to make real efforts to understand other people's perspectives, that has enabled our country to effect change and make significant progress in promoting our values of equality and justice in the nearly 60 years since Judge Hand retired as an active judge in 1951.

But the world today is much different from the one Judge Hand experienced. Today's world is more highly globalized. Advances in technology, including the internet, round the clock breaking news and the creation of social media, have provided us with platforms to more easily and widely disseminate our ideas and opinions. They also provide us with the ability to more easily access this information.

The potential of social media to effect change was first, and perhaps best, demonstrated by the Arab Spring, which started in 2010. Social media was used as a tool for young protesters to share many of the injustices they were facing and to coordinate their activities. I am sure many of you at that time, like me, thought, 'this is great,' and 'how did we live without social media?'

Recently we have had opportunities to think about how this affects Americans as well. From employers and our school systems, to Hollywood, Congress, and news organizations, bad actors are being exposed, and abuses, such as bullying, intolerance and sexual harassment, are being addressed head-on and more quickly than ever before, thanks in large part to social media networks and the 24 hour news cycle that connects our society.

But this connectivity has been accompanied by a lack of engagement on issues in a shared space. The ideal of civil dialogue to exchange and debate different views seems to be fading, despite its importance. Rather, we talk with people, watch news shows and engage with others on social media only when they have the same views that we have. Living in these different bubbles, or echo chambers, does not further understanding and dialogue. And it most certainly does not facilitate change.

We have also learned that the effective use of social media is not limited to the forces of good and the American Way. It is also available to the country's adversaries and to anti-Semites, white supremacists and other racists and bigots. Although we can now easily and inexpensively identify societal injustices and communicate our opposition in real-time, our adversaries are equally able to harness this innovation to advance their own agendas and disseminate misinformation and hate.

The tragic events in Charlottesville earlier this year are a clear example of the impact of technology and social media, for both good and evil. The white supremacists and their followers used social media to organize and spread their hateful message. Their opponents, leveraging technology, shed light on a disturbing display of intolerance. By taking it upon themselves to document and distribute evidence of the hateful actions on social media, the anti-racist protesters used the power of technology to bring the ugly underbelly of our society out of the shadows and, in this case, literally exposed white supremacists for who they are. It was harrowing to see so many young people marching and chanting hateful things.

Social media has, without question, drastically changed the landscape in which many of our battles will now be fought, and it is making our biggest challenges even more difficult to address. In that regard, I think our greatest challenge is one that has deep roots in our history, and is one we have faced for generations. It is intolerance.

Consider this: as vastly different as we think modern America is from prior eras and despite the progress we have made, Charlottesville highlighted that we are still fighting the exact same adversary – the racism, bigotry and intolerance of “the other,” people who are somehow different. Ultimately, despite all the social change, all the technological advances and all the great strides we have made in reducing racism and the demonization of the other, intolerance persists and seems to be impervious to our best efforts to root it out. This is exactly why our work needs to be consistent and relentlessly focused on the long term.

Let me be clear: what happened in Charlottesville, streamed in real time, and in high definition, was an assembly of hate aimed at dividing a country that has been working hard so that we do not repeat the mistakes of the past. I believe our values are being challenged in a way we have not seen in many years. Unless we act upon our shared moral obligation to take a stand and make our voices heard, and engage with those whose opinions differ from ours, this decade will risk being remembered equally for an explosion of intolerance and for our failure to respond to it. We cannot allow bad actors to manipulate and twist our democratic values into something perverse and corrosive.

Social media and technology enable racists and bigots to exercise their free speech rights and readily communicate their intolerance and hate to millions of people. Civil society must exercise our right of free speech to vigorously denounce the hatred that has reared its ugly head, not because we don't respect the right of freedom of expression, but because of what hatred can lead to – injustice, violence and death. We have many examples of the dreadful consequences of hatred – from the Holocaust, to the genocide in Rwanda, the conflict in Kosovo, and current events in Myanmar.

As a result, the need for organizations such as AJC to be actively involved on both the national and global stage is now greater than ever. Social media will, and should, continue to serve as a tool to call out injustices and bring about change. But we must also resolve to counter falsehoods with truth, to assist those who are victims of intolerance, and to combat anti-Semitism and extremism through education, and, if necessary, the courts.

I am confident that the critical advocacy work undertaken by AJC – with support from the legal community – is making a real difference. I am proud to work with a vitally important organization that is making significant progress in countering intolerance in our society.

I am grateful to all of you for your continued support, which is critical to advancing AJC's mission.

Thank you again for being here tonight and supporting AJC.