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Greetings Members of the Northwestern PhD Admissions Committee,

I am a first-generation American, and my family is scattered across the world because we will not let history repeat itself. I am an atheist Jew, and my name honors Holocaust survivor Max Michelson, an advocate for refugees through the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS). He was one of the first people my family met when they moved to the U.S., and his commitment to justice profoundly shaped my beliefs. My father's side of the family immigrated to America in 1969, at a time when racial quotas limited the opportunities for people like me to access higher education at my undergraduate.

Growing up in the American Bible Belt, I experienced White supremacy, and antisemitism firsthand. These encounters gave me a personal understanding of how prejudice can infiltrate a community. These experiences deeply motivated me to advocate for marginalized voices, fostering understanding and solidarity between diverse groups.

I acknowledge the privilege of being able to study abroad, and the freedom it has given me to encounter new viewpoints and engage with different cultural contexts. Studying abroad, first as an undergraduate in Toronto and now during my master's in Amsterdam, has broadened my perspective in ways I could not have imagined had I remained in the U.S. I feel particularly impacted by the warmth of the Iranian community. People, I would never have met, had I stayed in the U.S.

In 2022, I was invited to serve as an expert panelist at an Anti-Defamation League (ADL) conference on antisemitism in New York. The ADL, the world's largest organization combating antisemitism, provided me with a platform to share my experiences and insights on confronting hate and fostering inclusion.

The most meaningful initiatives during my undergraduate studies at the University of Toronto was organizing a webinar with the Nobel Peace Prize-nominated founders of Combatants for Peace, a group of former Israeli and Palestinian fighters turned peace activists. The event emphasized the transformative power of shared humanity. In Amsterdam, I continued this work by organizing a joint Israeli-Palestinian vigil and peace rally, and inviting peace activists from Standing Together to speak about their efforts in Amsterdam.

Science, democracy, and anti-racism are interconnected by foundational values. Science is grounded in evidence and critical inquiry, democracy flourishes with open debate and the exchange of ideas, and anti-racism requires the courage to challenge societal norms and confront personal biases. These shared values drive humanity's pursuit of progress.

I see radio interferometry as a powerful example of how collaboration across cultures, space, and time is fundamentally important for science. Projects like Very Long Baseline Interferometry (VLBI), which unite telescopes worldwide, highlight the collective effort required for groundbreaking discoveries. At Northwestern, I will prioritize equity, inclusion, belonging, and cultural humility, and I am eager to contribute to a campus environment where all voices are heard and respected, while engaging in the critical conversations necessary for progress.

What is an ocean, but a multitude of drops?

Maxwell A. Fine

(he/them)

