

Introduction:

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Aug. 1919

THE

The recent campaign of American public opinion against the part the Jews have been taking in world events, has seemed to warrant the Department in undertaking a preliminary study of the particular matters in controversy and also the influence of the Jews of Jewish land in world affairs.

"JEWISH THREAT"

I The authenticity of the so-called Jewish plan, purported to set forth a Jewish plan, constructed by the Jews.

The question of the far-reaching influence of the Jewish, not only the Soviet Government, but also in all the other countries of the world, and in the United States.

III The various phases of the Polish question:

(a) Whether the Jewish anti-Polish propaganda in the United States has led to actual widespread Jewish agitation in Poland, or

(b) Whether the Jewish propaganda, the stirring of



ANTI-SEMITIC POLITICS

OF THE U.S. ARMY

JOSEPH W. BENDERSKY

The “Jewish Threat”

*Anti-Semitic Politics
of the U.S. Army*

Joseph W. Bendersky



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The “Jewish Threat”

Also by Joseph W. Bendersky

Carl Schmitt: Theorist for the Reich
A History of Nazi Germany

For
Carmen

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PROLOGUE

The Jewish Files

ON MAY 2, 1919, CAPTAIN JOHN B. TREVOR sent an urgent request to the director of military intelligence in Washington under the title "Plans for the Protection of New York in Case of Local Disturbances." To underscore its gravity, he followed up with a telephone call from his military intelligence office at 302 Broadway. In the hysterical atmosphere of the Red Scare just beginning to spread across America, Trevor was convinced that a Bolshevik revolt was imminent in his home city of New York and that "the force available is utterly inadequate to meet a serious uprising in the congested district."¹

Fearing local troops would be "overwhelmed by a great superiority of numbers," Trevor sought "prompt action" from headquarters. The expedited response from Washington the next day alleviated some, though not all, of his mounting anxiety. The good news was that "6,000 Springfield rifles" had already been shipped from Augusta, Georgia. But he had also asked for machine guns, which he intended to organize "into a Machine Gun Battalion with two motor trucks capable of carrying eight guns and crews." The probable deployment of the desired Machine Gun Battalion was in the area he identified as "most strongly permeated with the Bolshevik movement."²

These particular sections of New York were clearly outlined on the secret "Ethnic Map" Captain Trevor had drawn up months before. Pondering these areas of the city, he easily visualized the threat in human form—for he had encountered them personally in the streets for decades and had kept them under intense surveillance for more than a year. Outsiders, alien in appearance, language, and behavior, they threatened, in his mind, not only his country's heritage, culture, and political institutions but the continued predominance of the very race that had created and maintained advanced civi-

lization itself. And these sections of Trevor's "Ethnic Map" specifically denoted "the congested districts chiefly inhabited by Russian Jews."³

The very day of his request to Washington, Trevor's secret agent had again confirmed that radical gatherings were "90% Jewish."⁴ Accordingly, "it would be eminently desirable," Trevor had notified headquarters, "to have sufficient force available to enclose the area and localize the outbreak."

As a patrician New Yorker, Trevor had watched with dread as waves of new immigrants poured into his city in the decades before World War I. A good part of his wartime service with the Military Intelligence Division (MID) was devoted to surveillance of these newcomers, particularly Jews. After leaving the military, he would become one of the most prominent and influential figures in the anti-immigrant and anti-Communist movement in the United States. Yet Trevor's paranoid nativism and susceptibility to conspiracy theories, though perhaps accentuated by personal experience in New York, differed very little, if at all, from the values and perspectives of career officers throughout the American army in the first half of the twentieth century.

Thus, army intelligence headquarters questioned neither the veracity of Trevor's reports nor the alarmist tone that permeated each paragraph of his request. They contained nothing surprising or unusual. It all fitted quite well into a general pattern emerging from information ascertained through various official and unofficial sources. About the same time, the American military attaché in Switzerland, Colonel William Godson, had sent similar intelligence on the dangers posed by Jewish Bolsheviks in Europe. Godson, one of the army's most valued intelligence officers, wrote from Poland:

The connection between the Jews and the Bolsheviks at Vilna seems to be proven without a shadow of a doubt. When the Bolsheviks entered the city they were taken to the houses of the wealthy by the Jews and apparently had this matter arranged beforehand.⁵

Even more horrifying than the seizure and destruction of property were eyewitness accounts of barbarism and butchery by these Bolsheviks. Typical of the atrocity stories that filled pages was that of "the man and woman who lived on the estate . . . [who] had been killed and frightfully mutilated. The woman had her head cut off and the man had his eyes gouged out and his ears and nose cut off." Accompanying photographs depicted Bolshevik mutilation of two captured Polish soldiers. Here were

naked bodies with butchered flesh, hanging upside down from trees, while “the Bolshevik soldiers were laughing and grinning and standing about.”⁶

That event embedded such an indelible image on the mind that two years later, Godson would write passionately:

I am so thoroughly convinced of the reality of a Jewish movement to dominate the world that I hate to leave a stone unturned.⁷

Although the precise nature of the phenomenon was still murky and contradictory information impeded definitive conclusions, the evidence had been mounting for more than a year of a “Jewish International” movement. Some “highly reliable sources” and officers indicated a link between Zionism and radical Jewish activity; others argued that wealthy international Jewish bankers financially backed the Bolshevik Revolution. In effect, the accumulating files at MID identified a myriad of institutions and individuals that could be drawn upon and formed into various malleable combinations when necessary to substantiate one theory or another.

The credulity with which much of this information was so readily accepted and manipulated revealed a critical predisposition toward Jews that extended beyond mere prejudice. It was part of a broader worldview in the army officer corps that was quickly becoming institutionalized. This worldview embodied aspects of xenophobic geopolitics, anticomunism, and racial theories. It presumed a superior “true American” society and government of Anglo-Saxon heritage under siege by various radical alien forces and particularly racially inferior Eastern European immigrants. The mixture of biological racism with national security issues would prove instrumental in creating the impression of a Jewish threat at home and abroad. In turn, the need to counteract this alleged danger furnished both the motivation and justification for officers to extend their spheres of operation far beyond the legitimate mission of either the army or military intelligence.

Intelligence officers had created separate classifications for “Jews” to accommodate pertinent reports, memoranda, and correspondence. The MID subject index “Jews: Race” would eventually fill over 200 large index cards, containing citations to close to 2,000 referenced reports on Jewish activities between 1918 and 1941. Scattered throughout related categories in a truly immense records system, these reports were routinely stamped secret or confidential. By policy and established procedure, they went directly to the office of the chief of staff, where intelligence officers decided

on their dissemination to interested governmental and military agencies for information or action.⁸

MID File 245, however, was a special central dossier reserved for data deemed, for one reason or another, particularly significant to the "Jewish Question." Compiled primarily in the early 1920s, with a few additions thereafter, this truly remarkable file housed an amazing array of documents ranging from the routine to the fantastic.⁹

During the 1920s, File 245 contained letters between officers, secret agents, state secretaries, and embassies abroad exchanging the latest information on Jews. Among these would be interspersed lists compiled of prominent Jews who supposedly dominated or influenced German banking, industry, and politics. Far more numerous lists would be gathered of Jews supposedly controlling the Soviet government as MID became preoccupied with the link between Jews and Bolshevism. Although Zionism and Palestine received attention, much more concern was displayed toward Jewish refugees and immigration to the United States. Certain prominent American Jews, including Supreme Court Justice Louis D. Brandeis, Felix Frankfurter, and Rabbi Stephen Wise, were considered sufficiently important to warrant individual scrutiny. Most incredible, though, were lengthy, meticulously documented reports with titles such as "The Power and Aims of International Jewry."¹⁰

The dubious assumptions and specious arguments manifested in these documents were matched only by the marginalia added as they circulated throughout MID, for officers occasionally punctuated their concurrence by remarking that recent world events seemed to offer proof of these assertions.

Most official reports in File 245, like those indexed elsewhere under the subject heading "Jews," were written or compiled by officers of longtime professional military service. And the attitudes and preconceived notions about Jews that prompted military intelligence to see the necessity, indeed the virtue, of establishing separate investigative classifications for Jews were by no means confined to a relatively small coterie in MID. Neither were they held only by a limited number of anti-Semites in the officer corps generally. Over time, hundreds of officers made direct contributions to this endeavor or worked with this material, including the military attachés in American embassies around the world, who collected and shared a good deal of this information.

Since Military Intelligence by its very nature was the most politically conscious and engaged of any section of the army, it provided some of the most articulate and fully developed illustrations of this perspective. MID's

area of expertise (data collection and analysis) also ensured that it would accumulate and preserve the most abundant documentation on this subject.

Nonetheless, no significant differences in attitude are discernible between those officers who spent their entire careers, or substantial portions of them, in intelligence and those from other parts of the army who rotated in and out of MID. And evidence drawn from numerous sources besides MID records suggests how pervasive, institutionalized, influential, and enduring this worldview was throughout the army.

Reaching into the highest echelons of the army hierarchy, such attitudes permeated all ranks of the officer corps. This included the director of military intelligence in Washington, who held the rank of assistant chief of staff and personally handled a considerable amount of the work related to Jews. In MID, few below the rank of colonel or major were actually involved in such endeavors. During the 1920s, reports and analyses relative to Jews were routinely exchanged with top officials at the Departments of State, Immigration, and Justice.

The worldview of the army officer corps predated the Red Scare of 1919, and it persisted long after the anti-Communist and antiforeign hysteria of the nativist 1920s had subsided. Of course, its tenets received more open and fuller expression during these years, for the apprehensive psychological climate of the period added credibility and urgency to policies, laws, and other governmental actions that these beliefs seemed to dictate in the face of foreign danger from within and abroad. But most of these assumptions and characteristics had clearly manifested themselves among officers long before World War I. And once they were reinforced and further developed through additional theoretical studies and historical experience in the 1920s, they were thereafter perpetuated for decades—well into the Cold War era—through attitudes and institutions within the army.

The careers of many officers that extended into the 1940s attest further to the continuity of these viewpoints. Many of those who participated in these Jewish investigations in early or midcareer, or who left traces in other historical records of anti-Semitic attitudes expressed when it was acceptable, even fashionable, to do so, subsequently rose to important positions. Some became generals in World War II. If new generations of officers entering the military after World War I did not already hold such ideas or attitudes, they would have ample opportunity to absorb them in the army either through direct instruction or from the general institutional culture to which they were expected to adapt themselves.

For most of this century, these significant dimensions of the army's past remained unknown to all but the participants themselves. File 245 and other MID records on Jews were kept classified until the mid-1970s and stored with tons of other military intelligence material until recently examined.¹¹ Yet when studied in conjunction with an abundance of evidence from other sources, the Jewish files reveal that a racial anti-Semitic worldview persisted in the officer corps of the army through World War II and affected the perspectives and activities of some retired officers long thereafter. There was an enduring susceptibility to Jewish conspiracy theories on the part of certain officers. Indeed, biological-racial anti-Semitism had not, as historians generally contend, "virtually disappeared from the American scene" after 1924.¹² For Jews continued to be perceived in racial terms.

Thus, while focusing on the army and specifically on officers in the first half of the twentieth century, this book makes a contribution to the broader debate over anti-Semitism in American history. The pre-World War II historiographical tradition had been to view anti-Semitism as outside America's mainstream and as a problem attributable to fringe groups or declining social classes, with limited impact on major developments. Other historians have since challenged these assumptions, arguing that the persistence and pervasiveness of anti-Semitism had important ramifications for Jewish social progress in America.¹³ But even among these recent scholars, there are still serious disagreements over the extent to which anti-Semitism explains the failure of America's response to the Holocaust.¹⁴ Many of these interpretive differences are due to the peculiar nature of American anti-Semitism, which, as David Gerber noted, has been less visible and reputable than European versions and has never been sanctioned by government or official ideology.¹⁵

Such distinctive features have made American anti-Semitism both insidious as a social force and problematical to study. This is particularly true regarding anti-Semitism within the institutions of government, where documenting prejudice and then demonstrating its effect on policy have proven exceptionally difficult.¹⁶ The Jewish files and other extensive evidence have, however, provided the foundation for a fully documented case study of a functioning anti-Semitic worldview within an American governmental institution.

This documentation shows that even though anti-Semitism never became official policy or law within the American government, its pervasiveness within the culture of the army officer corps affected much more than the direction of intelligence gathering. The anti-Semitism of army of-

ficers had an important impact on critical legal and policy decisions concerning immigration, the fate of European Jews during and after the Holocaust, and the establishment of the state of Israel.

Varying from simple prejudice to theoretically sophisticated dogma, the anti-Semitism of army officers fluctuated with changing times, circumstances, and historical experiences. At certain points it manifested itself through sweeping condemnation and dread of all Jews. At other times it was more nuanced, distinguishing between the acceptable assimilated Jews and the "dregs" from Eastern Europe. Changing American sensibilities after World War II and the Holocaust also altered attitudes and their expression. The vehement racial anti-Semitism flaunted so arrogantly by many officers in the 1920s would later be expressed only privately or in more subtle forms after Nazism made such views disreputable within an increasingly progressive American society. Often, anti-Semitism appeared under the guise of patriotism and seemingly sound assessments of national interests at home and abroad.

Although in some respects the anti-Semitism of these officers reflected the prejudices of Americans generally, army views lagged far behind changes in societal attitudes. Indeed, the army, particularly its senior officers, remained a bastion of both racial and other forms of anti-Semitism much longer than indicated by either popular memory or previous historical studies. The persistence of such anti-Semitism would have serious ramifications.

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CHAPTER 1

The Officers' Worldview, 1900–1939

The trouble is, the “Master Race” is on the decline and gradually ceasing to be master in its own house; it is being swamped by . . . Mongrels, greasers, whelps, and hounds.

—COLONEL WILLIAM A. MCCAIN TO
COLONEL GORDON JOHNSTON, MAY 20, 1920

ALTHOUGH COLONEL MCCAIN WROTE THESE WORDS IN 1920, he was actually expressing a trepidation that had been widespread among officers of the United States Army since the late nineteenth century.¹ Like him, many in the officer corps feared that the “true Americans” were losing control of something they rightfully possessed by conquest, merit, heritage, and even divine providence.

This fear was rooted in a set of attitudes that, by the early twentieth century, constituted nothing less than a worldview among members of the officer corps. They had been imbued with a common set of general assumptions, beliefs, attitudes, and values related not only to their military avocation but to the broader context of human behavior. Officers shared definite ideas about their American heritage, contemporary events such as the rise of Bolshevism, human motivation and psychology, the characteristics of racial groups, and the nature of politics and government. They believed these ideas to be well founded. Their validity could easily be demonstrated by “common sense” and “experience” or, if more elaborate