

CONTEMPORARY Antisemitism

CANADA AND
THE WORLD

Edited by

DEREK J. PENSLAR
MICHAEL R. MARRUS
JANICE GROSS STEIN



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Preface

This volume grew out of a conference, *Antisemitism: The Politicization of Prejudice in the Contemporary World*, held at the Munk Centre for International Studies at the University of Toronto in February 2003. The conference took place in a heated political climate of international tension and war and was shaped by intense concerns about the revival of forms of prejudice that, many thought, had been consigned to the dustbins of history. Among these, antisemitism, the focus of this volume, is reappearing in new ways and in unexpected strength. However assessed, this resurgence is of deep concern to the academic community and to informed citizens everywhere. And yet, we know too little. Is contemporary antisemitism an eerie echo of the past, or is it driven by new combinations of political, economic, and religious forces? How powerful are the anti-Jewish trends that so many have detected? And how should liberal democratic societies respond? At the University of Toronto, we tried to map the antisemitic terrain, to make important distinctions, and to put various strategies of response into critical perspective.

This volume is the product of intense and fruitful collaboration within the University of Toronto. In particular, the Faculty of Arts and Science, the Faculty of Law, the Jewish Studies Program, the Joint Initiative in German and European Studies, and the School of Graduate Studies provided leadership and financial support. Without their generous help, we could not have mounted the conference. We would especially like to thank President Robert Birgenau, Vice-president and Provost Shirley Neuman, Dean of the Faculty of Law Ronald J. Daniels, Acting Vice-president for Research and International Affairs Carolyn Tuohy, and Vice-president for Advancement Jon Dellandrea, all at the University of Toronto, for their willing assistance and support.

The conference brought together leading academics in Canada and the United States to discuss the contemporary meaning of antisemitism – a ques-

tion that has, unfortunately, again become pressing for those who have watched events unfold in North America, Europe, and the Middle East at the end of the last century and the beginning of this new one. The two days of discussion and debate that followed were enriched by the breadth of knowledge and the diversity of perspectives of our contributors. Our thanks go to Leonard Dinerstein, Todd M. Endelman, Susan Gross Solomon, Jeffrey Kopstein, Mayo Morgan, Ed Morgan, Richard Simeon, Peter H. Solomon, Jr, Mark Tessler, Robert-Jan Van Pelt, Morton Weinfeld, Lorraine E. Weinrib, Piotr Wróbel, and Steven J. Zipperstein.

Antisemitism is not, of course, only for scholars to analyse. It is a living problem for those engaged in political and legal decision making. Our discussions were enriched by the voices of people who have spent much of their long careers in public life. We thank the Honourable R. Roy McMurtry, Chief Justice of Ontario, and Mr Hershell Ezrin, chairman and chief executive officer of GPC International, for their contribution. We are especially grateful to the Right Honourable Brian Mulroney, a past prime minister of Canada, who opened the conference with an unprecedented and searing examination of Canada's official past. The speech, and the moment, were historic.

As editors, we had an extraordinarily difficult time choosing from among the rich array of contributions. We hope that we have fashioned a volume that is accessible to the interested public, representative of recent research and thinking in North America on antisemitism, and open-minded in its analysis of a long-standing problem. We regret that we could not include all the excellent scholarship that was presented at the conference.

Our thanks go to the following: Ms Mary Lynne Bratti and her assistant, Ms Ilona Milner, at the Munk Centre, who organized the conference with graciousness and skill; Mr Scott Bohaker, who dealt deftly with the conference's challenging technical requirements, from live webcasting to the production of audio compact discs; and Dr Joshua D. Goldstein at the Munk Centre, who helped prepare the manuscript throughout the editorial process. We are grateful, as well, to many colleagues both within and outside the University of Toronto whose scholarly commitment and engagement make them partners in our inquiry and, we hope, critical readers of the pages that follow.

Derek J. Penslar, Director, Jewish Studies Program
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CONTEMPORARY ANTISEMITISM

Introduction

Derek J. Penslar

Antisemitism resists rational explanation and dispassionate inquiry. It is enduring yet protean, featuring undeniable continuities yet also staggering diversity across time and space. Antisemitism not only corrupts those who are seduced by its hateful teachings but can also cloud the judgment of those who strive to combat them. Antisemites and their opponents, whether Jewish or Gentile, regard each other in what is at times an oddly symmetrical fashion: just as the former see the Jew as eternal malefactor, so can the latter perceive antisemitism as embedded into the cultural foundations of Christian and Muslim civilization. The antisemite and his victim might well agree to the presence of a common structure underlying the critique of Judaism and Jews across the ages: the theologically driven antipathies in early Christianity and Islam, the demonization of the Jew as child-killer in medieval Europe, the association in modern times of Jews with both capitalism and communism, and, in our own day, the frequent identification of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as a cosmic struggle between good and evil. However, whereas for the antisemite the common element is *der ewige Jude* himself, the 'eternal Jew' of Nazi propaganda, his opponent runs the risk of creating a mirror image, the everlasting antisemite, a permanent fixture in a world that will never be free of hatred of the Jews.

It is all too easy for a sane and fair-minded individual to respond to antisemitism through condemnation and dismissal rather than engagement. Because the antisemite's arguments are by their very nature illogical, inaccurate, and indefensible, it might appear a waste of time, even a dangerous legitimization of the antisemite's enterprise, to take the arguments seriously, reconstruct their internal logic, and probe their rhetorical texture. Literary deconstruction, the 'unpacking' of texts, hardly appears warranted when what is being unpacked is a bag of filth. But condemnations of antisemitism based on its existence and harmful effects alone are of only limited benefit. Just as the successful cure of a

disease depends on knowledge of its physiological origins, so does an effective response to any social ill require a sound understanding of its causes. Although in the popular imagination antisemitism is often viewed somewhat like a syndrome – a multiplicity of symptoms with a single underlying pathology – on closer examination antisemitism appears quite the opposite, as a symptom with many possible causes.

Scholars have long been aware of this complexity and have produced a vast literature on the history and sociology of antisemitism. When research on antisemitism began in Europe and North America in the late nineteenth century, it was carried out largely by functionaries in Jewish organizations and well-intentioned Gentiles who considered antisemitism to represent a threat to a liberal society and a state based on the rule of law. The first studies of antisemitism were primarily defensive and apologetic, more interested in refutation than social analysis. The pamphlet and the press, manipulated so cleverly by antisemitic publicists, were mobilized by activists eager to serve an embattled minority.¹ Intellectuals were reluctant to engage the subject of antisemitism until the rise of Nazism, the Second World War, and the Holocaust forced them to confront it as a source of the collapse of Western civilization. During the Second World War, Theodor Adorno and other German-Jewish émigré intellectuals took part in the Berkeley Project on the Nature and Extent of Antisemitism, from which emerged the mammoth volume *The Authoritarian Personality*, published in 1950. As the book's title suggests, antisemitism was placed within a broad framework of psychological and sociological dysfunction that promoted authoritarian and prejudiced behaviour of various types. Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, published in the same year as *The Authoritarian Personality*, devotes its first section to antisemitism, considering it, along with imperialism, chauvinism, and the collapse of stable class structures, to be one component of several behind the development of the Nazi and Stalinist states.² Along a parallel track with the work of Arendt, Adorno, and other German-Jewish émigré intellectuals reacting to the Holocaust, American social scientists, repelled by segregation against blacks, pioneered comparative research in antisemitism and racism as forms of intergroup prejudice. In books such as Gordon Willard Allport's *The Nature of Prejudice* (1954), bigotry and prejudice are considered to be harmful, yet ameliorable, aberrations from the liberal order.³

Antisemitism's centrality in the sociology of prejudice began to be questioned in the 1960s, however, as discriminatory barriers against North American Jews fell far more quickly than those against blacks. In the United States, while Jews enjoyed unprecedented social mobility and access to positions in the federal government, Ivy League universities, and prestigious hospitals, blacks

raged against their stagnating and ghettoized conditions. A host of other factors – American involvement in the Vietnam War, Israel's crushing victory in the 1967 war and subsequent territorial expansion, and a flourishing of anticolonial movements throughout the world – led in the West to a radicalization of academic politics and the rise to prominence of ethnic and postcolonial studies in which the issue of antisemitism was pushed to the periphery. Tellingly, from the late 1960s, in the academic lexicon the word 'prejudice' was replaced by 'racism': the former refers to an act of prejudgment of an individual's character based on assumptions about the group (religious, ethnic, national, or racial) with which (s)he claims affiliation, whereas the latter transforms race into a prism through which all cognition and self-awareness is refracted. Since Jews are, by and large, considered 'white' – not just in the sense of pigmentation but, more broadly, in their class and cultural milieus – they do not easily fit into what has become the dominant academic framework for the study of intergroup antipathy. To be sure, from the 1960s to our own day, a vast body of scholarship on the history of antisemitism has been produced, but this literature treats antisemitism as a historical, not a living, phenomenon, and its producers are for the most part scholars in Jewish studies and theologians who, however worthy their projects, speak mainly to each other and to like-minded members of the educated public and exert little impact on academia as a whole.⁴

Throughout much of the postwar period, the distancing of antisemitism from the academic radar screen has appeared to be justified by broader social trends. For more than half a century after 1945, levels of antisemitism in North America steadily declined. In the United States, in 1964 29 per cent of Americans believed that Jews held 'too much power'; by 1998 the figure had dropped to 12 per cent, and in 2000 the Democratic candidate for the presidency, Al Gore, saw only benefit in the path-breaking choice of a Jew, Joseph Lieberman, as his running mate. In North America antisemitic incidents occurred regularly, but they were the work of a minuscule minority. Rarely involving personal assaults, they took the form of vandalism, as in the spate of attacks against synagogues and Jewish cemeteries in 1960, or, more frequently, threatening and hateful speech, which from the 1970s onward was often associated with Holocaust denial. Antisemitism took a more violent turn in Europe, largely because of a greater vulnerability to terrorist activity growing out of the Arab-Israeli conflict. But even in Europe, outside of the Soviet Union and its satellites, classic antisemitism was no longer socially acceptable and was opposed by the political elites.

In the last three years, however, the stability of the postwar environment has been threatened. Since 2000 there has been an alarming increase of hate crimes

directed against Jews and Jewish spaces (synagogues, schools, cemeteries) throughout the world. Several incidents related to the Middle East – the onset of the second Palestinian uprising in September 2000; the destruction a year later of the World Trade Center by terrorists from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and Lebanon; and the Israeli reoccupation of the West Bank in April of 2002 – served as proximate causes for attacks against Jews in places as far-flung as Los Angeles and London, Marseilles and Mombasa. In Europe, antisemitism has been stimulated by not only external factors but also internal ones, such as anti-immigrant sentiment in the West and aggressive nationalism in East European lands recently freed from the Iron Curtain.

Few academics in North America, and fewer still in Europe, have addressed the question of a revived or intensified antisemitism in the post-9/11 world. As in previous decades in the postwar era, antisemitism is believed to be a marginal phenomenon that pales in comparison with racism and misogyny, and anti-Jewish hate crimes, although deeply regrettable, are usually conceived as manifestations of unresolved ethnic conflicts (as in France, where disaffected North Africans are responsible for most antisemitic incidents) or as a spillover from the Arab-Israeli conflict, whose political and territorial dimensions are thought to remove it from the framework of classic antisemitism. Threats to global stability caused by unequal relations of power and wealth between the West (particularly the United States) and the developing world or by the politicization of Islam are more likely to attract sustained scholarly attention than the situation of the Jews.

As was the case a century ago, when Jewish activists assumed the burden of confronting antisemitism, so today critical discourse on recent outbursts of antisemitism has been dominated by leaders of Jewish organizations and defenders of Jewish causes. Recent works by the political activist Phyllis Chesler, Harvard law professor Alan Dershowitz, and Abraham Foxman of the B'nai Brith's Anti-Defamation League argue that current manifestations of antisemitism, including those spawned by the Arab-Israeli conflict, are deeply rooted in earlier forms of Jew-hatred and that contemporary antisemitism presents a grave threat to the well-being of Jews worldwide.⁵ These books make a number of valid claims, but by their very nature, as apologetic and polemical works, they leave little room for nuance, disinterested analysis, or a multiplicity of perspectives.

Thus the need for this book, which seeks not merely to describe antisemitism in our own day but to interrogate it; to depict how, where, and why it flourishes; to demonstrate its multiplicity of forms and causes, its links and breaks with the past; and, based on all this information, to suggest how it can be addressed. It brings together pronouncements by public figures and the ruminations of schol-

ars. The essays gathered here represent multiple points of view. Some support, albeit in a more nuanced fashion, Chesler's and Foxman's claim that contemporary antisemitism is of a piece with its earlier manifestations and that antisemitism lies at the heart of most of the critical public discourse on Israel. Other essays stress rupture more than continuity, and describe public sensibility about the Arab-Israeli conflict as moulded by not only venerable forms of Jew-hatred but also contemporary expressions of political and ethnic animosity. Just as the articles in this volume do not offer a monolithic explanation for the sources and nature of contemporary antisemitism, neither do they agree about the level of threat it presents or its future course.

The essays progress from the terrain most familiar to the reader – contemporary Canada – to the Western world as a whole, and thence to the Middle East, the most important source of, or at least justification for, antisemitism today. This volume is unusual in that it combines the voices of scholars with those of political and judicial leaders (who have also, as a whole, been slow or unwilling to speak out firmly against recent anti-Jewish hate crimes). Part I offers two moving essays by Canadian leaders. It begins with an address by former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, who combines an erudite analysis of the sources of modern antisemitism with an unsparing critique of Canada's chequered historical record in confronting antisemitism both at home and abroad. Whereas Mulroney focuses on the role of elected officials in protecting our open society, R. Roy McMurtry, Chief Justice of Ontario, analyses the role of the Canadian judicial system in restraining antisemitic activity and expression.

The book's second and major component is a series of essays by scholars of antisemitism throughout the globe. It begins with a paper by sociologist Morton Weinfeld, who provides the context for Mulroney's and McMurtry's remarks by employing demographic and survey data to offer a valuable comparison between antisemitism and other forms of group hatred in contemporary Canada and by observing the limits as well as the extent of antisemitism in Canadian society. The essays that follow broaden the focus to include the United States and Europe. Two scholars of modern Jewish history, Steven Zipperstein and Todd Endelman, demonstrate multiple areas of continuity and rupture between contemporary and previous forms of antisemitism. The essays differ in focus and tenor. Endelman focuses on the sources of antisemitism in contemporary Europe and notes the role that hostility to Israel plays therein. Zipperstein's approach is more expansive, ranging across North America and Europe and intertwining the definition and analysis of antisemitism with questions of Jewish perceptions thereof. Derek Penslar's essay completes the book's historical offerings, building a conceptual bridge between European antisemitism and Arab anti-Zionism throughout the twentieth century. In the book's final essay,

political scientist Mark Tessler returns the reader's focus back to the present, here offering fascinating public-opinion data that challenge much of the conventional wisdom about the nature of Arab antisemitism and the role of politicized Islam in fomenting it.

Although three of the seven essays in this volume are the work of historians, the focus of the book is contemporary. Historical analysis is driven not by a thirst for abstract knowledge but by the belief that, consciously or not, historical thinking underlies our social consciousness and the way we make sense out of current affairs. In politics, as in art, framing and perspective are inextricably linked. If, for example, in the collective memory antisemitism is viewed as eternal and fundamentally unchanging, then attitudes towards the present situation will be far different than if it is seen as a manifestation of specific historical circumstance, more as a symptom than a syndrome. The question of appropriate response – fatalism, passivity, activism, and if the last, what sort of activism – can be answered only through an understanding of the nature of antisemitism in a particular time and place.

The problem of how one frames, and thus perceives, antisemitic discourse, policy, or acts of violence is literally an ancient one. In 38 CE, the city of Alexandria was engulfed by anti-Jewish riots fuelled by Egyptian resentment against Roman rule and the favourable political status of Jews in the city. Some of the Roman Empire's greatest figures – Cicero, Tacitus, Juvenal – decried Judaism as a superstitious and intolerant religion and Jews as clannish and disloyal. Were these incidents and expressions 'antisemitic' – that is, motivated by an irrational yet coherently structured matrix of anti-Jewish sensibilities? If so, were they representative of Gentile feelings about Jews in pagan antiquity, or did they represent the exception to the rule? (After all, Jewish life flourished for more than four centuries in ancient Alexandria, and under the Roman Empire Judaism was a widely popular, proselytizing religion.)

Anti-Jewish rhetoric alone provides poor evidence about the overall viability of Jewish communities across time and space. After the Christianization of the Roman Empire in the fourth century CE, Jews were frequently subject to discriminatory legislation, and a picture of Jewish life in early Christendom derived from those texts alone would be grim indeed. Yet throughout the early centuries of Christianity, close social contacts between Jews and Gentiles continued, much to the consternation of the Church Fathers, whose vicious diatribes against the Jews were at least in part the product of frustration that Christians were socializing with Jews and visiting synagogues. In certain times and places (e.g., Charlemagne's empire), Jews enjoyed greater economic and legal liberties than many Christians. One encounters a similar set of contradictions when examining the fate of Jews in the founding period of Islam. On

the one hand, Muslim foundational texts are replete with anti-Jewish imagery; yet on the other, Jews flourished in medieval Islam as nowhere else since the heyday of pagan antiquity.

As is well known, in the late Middle Ages and early modern period Jews in Europe were frequently the targets of mob justice, government-sponsored torture and execution, and expulsion. Once again, however, the issue of framing is crucial. As the historian David Nirenberg has observed in a study of Jewish life in medieval Christian Spain, mob action against Jews most often took the form of restrained and ritualized displays of superiority: the shouting of epithets, the throwing of stones at the doors to Jewish homes.⁶ This is not to minimize the extent of antisemitism, but in an environment suffused with group hatreds, blood feuds, and honour killings, the position of Jews was not necessarily more precarious than that of many others. In the great Jewish civilization that flourished in early modern Poland and Lithuania, Catholic antisemitism did not, in and of itself, impinge upon the liberties of a population that, unlike the Christian peasantry, experienced considerable freedom of movement and occupation. Even in the nineteenth-century Russian Empire, home to state-sponsored antisemitism and, towards the end of the century, the site of numerous bloody pogroms, Jews were, in virtually every way, better off than the masses of serfs.

Comparative approaches to the study of antisemitism are threatened with paralysis as they approach the subject of the Holocaust. The words 'however,' 'on the other hand,' and 'in comparison with others' appear to lose their credibility when confronted by the greatest tragedy in the history of the Jewish people. In fact, comparative studies of the Holocaust and other genocides are highly valuable, partly in their explication of the common societal and technological forces that make modern genocide possible, but also in their highlighting of the unique qualities of the Nazi genocide. More relevant to the purview of this volume, however, is the necessity not to conceive of Jewish history in a deterministic, teleological manner, in which the Holocaust becomes a diabolical telos to which the diaspora Jewish experience inexorably led. The editors would stress the contingent qualities of historical development, which, although explicable in terms of broad socio-economic or collective-psychological forces, is not beholden to them. History has many futures. It is precisely this way of thinking that illustrates the magnitude of the horror of the Holocaust: modern Jewish history did not have to lead to Auschwitz because Auschwitz did not have to be built.

The Nazis' murderous antisemitism had nothing to do with real Jews; rather, it was a mixture of irrational phobias and fantasies. The Nazis drew upon both traditional Christian Jew-hatred and modern political antisemitism. The latter,

which emerged in the 1880s, presented Jew-hatred as a systematic ideology, an 'ism,' a secular world view on par with the great competing ideologies of the era, liberalism and socialism. Political antisemitism identified the Jews as responsible for all the anxiety-provoking social forces that characterized modernity: ruthless capitalism, revolutionary communism, avant-garde artistic modernism. Modern antisemitism was, thus, far more than yet another form of bigotry or xenophobia. It was, as the historian Shulamit Volkov has put it, a 'cultural code,' a signifier of social protest by individuals unwilling or unable to confront the real sources of their anxiety and despair.⁷ As some of the essays in this volume point out, there are lines of continuity between the old antisemitism and the new in the role that anti-Jewish sentiment plays in the antiglobalization movement and the extent to which Israel is considered by many people the world over to be the prime source of international instability. But along with the continuities come differences as well – essential ones – for the Arab-Israeli conflict, a dispute involving an empowered Jewish state, does introduce heretofore unknown factors into the antisemitic equation. Moreover, in North America and Europe today antisemitism is not state-sponsored or sanctioned. It is, for the most part, socially unacceptable, and its flare-ups are minuscule in comparison with the daily humiliations and limitations with which Jews had to contend even in the most enlightened Western countries from the late nineteenth century through the mid-twentieth centuries.

Underlying the public debate in Canada today about antisemitism are profound, yet usually unconscious, differences in approach to the relationship between the present and the past. Many individuals operate under the assumption that change over time is more epiphenomenal than substantive, that the course of history resembles, if not a circle, then a fractal, a geometric form that may have the most variegated appearance but any part of which embodies the fundamental mathematical structure of the whole. According to this world view, the widely varying contexts in which antisemitism has flourished over the ages are merely a superstructure constructed upon a base of Judeophobia that has been ingrained into Christian and Muslim civilization since their inception and that lives on today, albeit in an often secularized form. The editors of this volume acknowledge that there is some truth to this perspective, for certain antisemitic motifs, like viruses, are transmitted across vast distances of time and space, periodically mutating into ever more lethal forms.

Yet we would like readers to consider an alternative view, one that conceives of history as filled with ruptures as well as continuities, with quantum changes in perception and definition. Upon closer view, what Lord Acton called the seamless web of history actually resembles a vast jigsaw puzzle, a coherent