

1 Antisemitism and Antisemitic Conspiracy Theory in Modern America

May 8, 2008

2 I. The Origins of Antisemitism

- ◆ In competition with Judaism, early Christian leaders blamed Jews as a group for the murder of Jesus & labelled them sons of Satan, followers of the Anti-Christ.
- ◆ Later Jewish diaspora made them one of few ethnic groups spread throughout world, with links among Jewish communities, but no home country they controlled.
- ◆ European Catholics were taught that Jews were Christ-killers. In medieval times, stories spread that Jews ritually murdered Christian children (“blood libel”), worshipped the devil, used black magic, & actively sought to destroy Christianity.
- ◆ Barred from most trades & limited in where they could live, Jews lived together in urban neighborhoods & took up occupations despised by or barred to Christians (moneylending, shopkeeping). Many became entrepreneurs & some got rich.
- ◆ In self-fulfilling fashion, Jews got reputation as wealthy, greedy “Shylocks,” con men, cutthroat businessmen who exploited non-Jews & had no loyalty except \$.
 - “International bankers” as Antisemitic code word, based on Rothschild family.
- ◆ Because their communities were clustered in major cities and capitals, Jews were often thought to have great behind-the-scenes political influence (even in countries that allowed Jews no rights!).

3 II. The Jewish World Conspiracy Myth

- ◆ The Transformation of Antisemitism in the 19th-Century
 - Added to other myths was the Jewish World Conspiracy, idea that a secret Jewish government existed controlling banks, press, etc., & planned world domination.
 - ❖ European conspiracy theorists linked Jews to Illuminati & Masonic

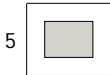
- conspiracies.
- Jews blamed by those who hated 19th-century economic & social changes
 - ❖ Jews gained rights from political liberalization, so it was thought they must be responsible for revolutions. [“Who benefits?” motif]
 - ❖ Traditional reputation as financiers & entrepreneurs made it easy to blame Jews for hardships brought by industrialization, including poverty & economic crashes.
- Political antisemitism: Aristocrats, monarchs, & right-wing often blamed Jews to keep masses on their side. Ultra-nationalists attacked them as foreign influence.
 - ❖ Dreyfus affair in turn-of-the-century France
- The rise of the “pogrom”: organized mob attacks on or massacres of Jews, typically condoned, encouraged, or fomented by governments.
 - ❖ 100,000s displaced or killed in Russia after assassination of tsar in 1881, failed revolution in 1905, during civil war following the Russian Revolution of 1917.
 - ❖ Pogroms led to emigration of Russian Jews to US.
- ◆ “Proof” of the Jewish conspiracy: *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*
 - Claimed to be minutes of a meeting in which Jewish leaders plan world conquest.
 - Based on an 1868 novel & miscellaneous other materials, rewritten to focus on Jews and pasted together by Russian secret service agents in the 1890s.
 - Published in Russia, Germany, & throughout the world, early 1900s on, justifying pogroms, expulsion, restrictions on Jewish rights, & the Nazi Holocaust.



III. Antisemitism in America

- ◆ Always existed but never bad until large-scale Jewish immigration after 1890.
 - Jews harshly treated by Catholic immigrant groups, especially Irish cops.
- ◆ Picked up on rhetorically by rural radical movements such as the Populists.
 - Composed of farmers who felt abused by capitalist system, especially banks & railroads. Hurt by arid lands and low farm prices. Jews as symbols of international financial interests.
 - One issue was the “Crime of ‘73,” government’s decision to stop making silver coins and return to the gold standard to hold down credit & inflation.
 - ❖ Came to be partly blamed on a “gold conspiracy” involving Jewish bankers.
 - ❖ Farmers became convinced that silver coinage would expand credit & raise farm prices.
 - Silver became main issue in the 1896 presidential campaign. The “Cross of Gold” speech, most famous statement of Democratic/Populist candidate William Jennings Bryan, had antisemitic overtones.

- ◆ WASP elite discovered a “Jewish problem” in early 20th century.
 - Fears that Jews were *too* intelligent, cunning, hard-working, ambitious, to the point that WASPs could not compete. Like other immigrants, Jews were accused of “dual loyalty.”
 - ❖ Muckrakers warned of the dangers of the “Jewish invasion.”
 - ❖ “Blackballing” of wealthy Jews from elite clubs & neighborhoods.
 - ❖ Discrimination against Jews in universities & professions.
 - ❖ Second, northern-based KKK (from 1920s) targeted Jews and Catholics as well as blacks.
 - In 1920s, Henry Ford owned *Dearborn Independent*, newspaper that published the “Protocols” & more. Then Ford wrote *The International Jew*, blaming Jewish conspiracy for declining morals of youth, ruining Christmas. Ford & his book became a favorite of Nazis.
- ◆ Economic hardship and antisemitism: Father Charles Coughlin attacked Jews to working-class Catholic audiences during Great Depression.
- ◆ In 1930s & 40s, US government & press ignored evidence of Holocaust.

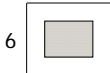


IV. Antisemitic Conspiracy Theories & Conspiracies in Recent Times

- ◆ After WW 2, open antisemitism virtually disappeared among white Christians in western Europe & America, except among white supremacist/neo-Nazi fringe.
 - Antisemitism came to find its largest constituencies among groups who felt victimized by American/Western European racism & imperialism.
 - ❖ Muslims, American blacks (through Nation of Islam), Eastern Europeans
- ◆ Some sources of recent antisemitism
 - Conditions in shifting U.S. urban neighborhoods: Jewish property owners & shopkeepers left over from previous eras resented by poorer black residents
 - Rise of Zionism & the founding of Israel – necessary response to Holocaust but also one imposed on Muslim population of Palestine by western imperialism.
 - ❖ European involvement in Middle East went back centuries (Crusades, missionaries) but serious colonization only really began with WW I & advent of petroleum era.
 - Balfour Declaration (Nov. 1917) – British endorsed Zionist goal of Jewish national home in Palestine.
 - After Ottoman Empire’s defeat in WW 1, Britain & other European powers carved up Middle East into quasi-colonies or “mandates” originating many modern nations in region.
 - Jewish migration into region begins, sparking sporadic Jewish-Arab violence.
 - Mufti of Jerusalem (Muslim leader) allied himself with Nazis during WW 2.
 - ❖ Helped by western money & arms, Israel established as new European nation

in heart of Muslim world, displaced existing Palestinian population, resented by much poorer neighbors.

- Facing hostile Muslim nations, Israelis won brilliant military victories (1948, 1967, 1973), took Jerusalem & Arab territories, set off long-term refugee crisis among Palestinian Muslims.
- ❖ Situation bred virulent antisemitism across Muslim world, and various forms of anti-Jewish & anti-western terrorism, from left-wing nationalist groups like the PLO (founded 1964) to Intifada uprisings to modern Islamist organizations like Hezbollah & Al Qaeda.
 - Groups believed in conspiracy theories & mounted real conspiracies like attack on 1972 Munich Olympics, 9/11, & numerous skyjackings and suicide bombings (tactics evolved).



IV. Antisemitic Conspiracy Theories & Conspiracies in Recent

Times (cont.)

- ◆ The Rise of Holocaust Denial (or “revisionism”)
 - Early motive: Vindicate Nazism & Fascism as systems of government, excuse Germans & certain other European peoples of their misbehavior during the war.
 - Competitive victimology: desire to destroy moral authority & other political benefits that come from being victims of history’s greatest atrocity.
 - Evolution of Holocaust Denial
 - ❖ In immediate postwar period, crude and openly antisemitic & pro-Nazi.
 - ❖ Gradually picked a few academic supporters (usually not historians): Arthur Butz, Austin App
 - ❖ Used typical bag of conspiracy theory tricks (argument by anomaly, negative subjunctive reasoning, non-falsifiable claims) plus more than the usual amount of outright lies.
 - Ex. of Fred Leuchter gas chamber “controversy”: chambers “could not” have worked as execution devices, only lice were killed. One problem among many: lice are harder to kill with gas than people.
 - Leuchter was recruited to be “expert” witness in hate crimes trial of Canadian neo-Nazi Ernst Zundel, author *The Hitler We Loved* and *UFOs: Nazi Secret Weapons?* (Answer: yes!)
 - ❖ Evolved into a simulation of respectable academic scholarship that used innocent-sounding names & a mix of straight with antisemitic & conspiracy material to fool uninformed readers
 - Leader: “Institute for Historical Review” and the *Journal of Historical Review*, which also promote anti-FDR conspiracy theories about Pearl Harbor.
 - Holocaust deniers claimed that they were objectively giving the “other side” of a legitimate historical controversy & so deserved a hearing. Often even denied they were antisemitic or pro-Nazi.
 - 2000: British denier David Irving sued Emory U. historian Deborah Lipstadt for libel after she explained the antisemitic nature of his writings in a 1994 book. Irving lost big.
 - ❖ Deniers’ efforts unfortunately succeeded in widely disseminating their ideas, and the *Protocols*, to new audiences: skinheads, respectable conservative columnists (Pat Buchanan), Muslims angry about Israel & U.S. intervention,

leftists opposed to U.S. & British colonialism and wars.

– 2006 Holocaust denial conference in Iran

- ◆ The “Jewish Lobby” or Israel Lobby conspiracy theory
 - Charge that Israeli spies and disloyal American Jews have given Israelis control of U.S. foreign policy, hurting U.S. interests.
 - Israel does indeed have many U.S. supporters & great influence in D.C. (via AIPAC & neocons), but the U.S.-Israel alliance requires no sinister explanation: Israel is a friendly, democratic, pro-western nation in the Middle East.
 - ❖ Unfortunately some of Israel’s U.S. defenders have a habit of calling even reasonable critics antisemites and/or conspiracy theorists.

7  **“Daughters of Revolution”**
(painter **Grant Wood’s** satire on the **DAR**)

8  **Jewish Emigration from
Russia in Response to the
Pogroms**

9  **The Jewish World
Conspiracy**