

The Persisting Question

Sociological Perspectives and Social
Contexts of Modern Antisemitism

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Dimensions of Antisemitism:
Attitudes, Collective Accusations, and Actions

Definition and Dimensions of Antisemitism

Although it has been one of the most persisting and deadly currents in western civilization, antisemitism has received little sustained attention nor any continuing theoretical discussion among social scientists except as it can be discerned in the individual as an attitude. Waves of interest and interdisciplinary discussion involving sociologists since 1938¹ most often reflected contemporary demands to evaluate events rather than attempts to develop new or exploit existing social-scientific theory. Yet, attitude research rests upon an implicit theory which we will explicate and discuss along with recent findings.

To begin with, we need a conception of the elements or levels of antisemitism to postulate how attitudes might relate to action hypothetically. I propose to define antisemitism as a persisting latent structure of hostile beliefs toward *Jews as a collectivity* manifested in *individuals* as attitudes, and in *culture* as myth, ideology, folklore, and imagery, and in *actions* – social or legal discrimination, political mobilization against the Jews, and collective or state violence – which results in and/or is designed to distance, displace, or destroy Jews as Jews. (Hence, it is assumed that Jews are people who are socially labeled as Jews as well as people who identify themselves as Jews, regardless of the basis of ascription.)

This definition is compatible with the explicit or implicit definition of antisemitism used by most survey researchers, but differs radically from

Walter de Gruyter · Berlin · New York
1987

¹ Isacque Graeber and Steward Henderson Britt (eds.), *Jews in a Gentile World: The Problem of Anti-Semitism*, Westport, Conn., 1942. Charles H. Stember, *Jews in the Mind of America*, New York, 1966. Melvin M. Tumin, *An Inventory and Appraisal of Research on Anti-Semitism*, New York 1961. Leonard Dinnerstein, *Anti-Semitism in the U.S.*, New York, 1971. Talcott Parsons, "Postscript to 'The Sociology of Modern Anti-Semitism,'" *Contemporary Jewry* 1, 1980, pp. 31–38.

that of Langmuir and (less radically) from Weil's usage herein. Langmuir would restrict the term antisemitism to chimeric assertions about Jews, arguing that "the endurance and intensity of xenophobic hostility against Jews does not mean that it has been different in kind – in basic nature and causes – from xenophobia directed against other major groups, including Jewish xenophobia against other groups." I do not assume there is a difference in the social and psychological dynamics of stereotyping and prejudice or hostility against Jews and others. I do, however, assume that the recurrence or continuity of hostility against the Jews, the interaction of its causes (nicely analyzed by Langmuir), and the recurring use of attitudes, accusations, and myths justifying or reinforcing hostility toward Jews as a collectivity as grounds for political mobilization against Jews (which has led to recurring violence) demand a specific explanation.² What is needed are both specific theories of antisemitism relating the development of an ideology justifying Jew-hatred to dominant ideologies, organizations and social structure,³ and more general explanations of how hostility, discrimination, mobilization, and violence against Jews and comparable minorities are related to the political and economic roles they play; the latter is discussed in Part 3. Each type of theory enables us to probe the adequacy of the other.

Weil discriminates traditional (i.e., Christian) and modern nationalistic or political antisemitism from hostility based on intergroup conflict involving Jews which he would not label as antisemitism (nor would Langmuir), where it is free from expressions of prejudice, stereotyping, and hostility; nor would I. Weil further discriminates among types of expressed antisemitism, believing that social, religious, and economic antisemitism is of little import while political antisemitism is of substantive concern; my previous comments and observations in Parts 3, 4, and 5 herein indicate why I oppose *a priori* or premature judgments about the significance of types of antisemitism.

My definition differs from previous definitions first in its discrimination of levels – intra-individual, cultural, and social or institutional – without any assumption of how they are related. Tumin distinguishes forms (or levels) only *within individuals*:

² Comments about specific researches in the introductions to Part 3, 4, and 5 illustrate the usefulness of discriminating the grounds of accusation but also show how xenophobic and realistic hostility may feed or lead to more psychopathic or chimeric accusations justifying destruction of the Jews.

³ see Introduction, Part 1.

We mean by anti-Semitism – to offer a minimal and enumerative kind of definition – that sentiment or action which maligns or discriminates against persons called Jewish on the ground that, being Jewish, they possess certain undesirable features. We make a distinction here among three forms of reaction: inner feelings, or prejudice, withdrawal or maintenance of distance from, and the active exclusion of, or discrimination against⁴.

Simpson and Yinger, on the other hand, define antisemitism as action: "Anti-Semitism may be defined as any activity that tends to force into or to hold Jews in an inferior position and to limit their economic, political, and social rights."⁵

Secondly, the definition differs from previous usage of some scholars who distinguish antisemitism as an historically-specific ideology, restricting the term to the social movement labeled antisemitic by Wilhelm Marr in 1879 and to its heirs; some distinguish between "racial", "Christian", "socialist" and other varieties of antisemitism, and still others distinguish between antisemitism and anti-Judaism. I use the term antisemitic to denote belief or behavior oriented toward Jews as a collectivity which is intended or serves to *distance, displace, or destroy Jews qua Jews*, not distinguishing whether the ideological justification of attack is anti-Judaic, anti-capitalist, or antisemitic by its own profession. My assumption is that there is no reason why the attackers' justifications should define the phenomenon to be explained in a scientific explanation. The alleged justification or ideology is not an explanation of an antisemitic movement or behavior but an example of the data to be explained.

Thirdly, the definition excludes instances in which interest-groups, social classes or status groups (among whom there are large proportions of Jews) view their interests as endangered because of the programs, ideologies, actions, or social policies instigated by other interest-groups, social classes, ethnic or status groups, *unless Jews are attacked as a collectivity*.⁶

⁴ Melvin M. Tumin, "Anti-Semitism and Status Anxiety: A Hypothesis," *Jewish Social Studies* 4, 1971, p. 309.

⁵ George E. Simpson and Milton Yinger, *Racial and Ethnic Minorities*, 4th ed. New York, 1972, p. 253.

⁶ In that competition and conflict between classes and groups over the distribution of resources and opportunities is a regular characteristic of social life in multi-ethnic societies, there is no special reason to classify actions which affect the interest of people as workers, consumers, owners, taxpayers, or residents of particular neighborhoods as antisemitic simply because those workers, consumers, owners, taxpayers, or residents include many Jews. Thus, controversies over housing regulations, the price of kosher meat, licensing criteria, U.S. "affirmative action" programs and quotas to enlarge participation of racial minorities which may affect the interests of individual Jews as tenants, consumers, producers, or competitors are not inherent instances of antisemitism, nor are they necessarily

What most researchers seem to assume is a positive relationship between attitudes and action, or that “ideology-in-readiness and ideology in words and action are essentially the same stuff.”⁷

Their scales assess “ideology-in-readiness” or attitudes – prejudgments, cognitions, stereotypes, social distance, and self-prediction. The terms attitude, stereotype, and prejudice are often used interchangeably but it is useful to begin by discriminating and relating them. An attitude involves “a mental and neural state (2) of readiness to respond, (3) organized (4) through experience, (5) exerting a directive and/or dynamic influence on behavior.”⁸ Three dimensions of attitudes are conventionally discriminated in analysis: cognitive (knowing), affective (feeling), and conative (doing) components. Public opinion surveys tap cognition about Jews – what people think they know – by agreement with factive statements about Jewish characteristics, including themes from antisemitic propaganda. We know what people say they will do – not what they do – from their responses to social distance scales which ask how close one is willing to get to Jews: would one admit them into one’s country, neighborhood, workplace, or family; would one vote for a qualified Jew for public office, marry a Jew. (Similar questions are asked on more recent surveys about other minorities to put social distance towards Jews in a comparative perspective.) Affect is evaluated by positive or negative judgments of what are seen as Jewish traits and generalized judgments of Jews: are Jews more/less/as honest as other businessmen, do they have too much power, are they as loyal as other citizens? Sometimes, respondents are asked to rank feeling about Jews and other groups at the same time. Negative stereotypes are also cognitions expressing affect. Antisemitic attitudes are inferred from cumulative agreement with generalized negative stereotypes and judgments and expressed desire to avoid Jews in certain relationships.

Antisemitic attitudes were most often labeled prejudices. Langmuir reviews the history of attitude research and criticizes past usage of racism and antisemitism as explanations. He also challenges the use of prejudice as a catch-all concept; it presumes norms of rationality in evaluating our

instances of “racism” although they affect the interest of non-White minorities. If class or status-group conflicts divide people on ethnic lines, they may become reinforced or surcharged by antisemitic charges (or charges of antisemitism) and especially prone to polarization and violence.

⁷ Theodor W. Adorno, et. al., *The Authoritarian Personality*, New York, 1950, p. 5.

⁸ William J. McGuire, “The Nature of Attitudes and Attitude Change,” in Gardner Lindzey and Elliot Aronson (eds.), *Handbook of Social Psychology*, vol. 3, Reading, Mass., 1969, p. 142.

experience to which most of us don’t usually adhere, evades the question of the validity of perceptions and stereotypes in general, and is ahistorical or tempocentric. Studies of prejudice, he asserts, fail to discriminate between the “psychopathologically prejudiced persons and mere conformists;” nor have such studies “explained the dynamic relation between them.”

Langmuir presents a unique analysis of the structure and function of assertions about out-groups, discriminating realistic, xenophobic, and chimeric assertions which is illustrated by analysis of assertions about Jews. According to Langmuir, realistic assertions may correspond to realistic perceptions of Jewish behavior experienced in contact and/or competition. Hostile but realistic assertions about groups may be produced by the “self-fulfilling prophecy,”⁹ in which the dominant group casts the minority or out-group in roles that evoke behavior confirming its expectations. When minority group members succeed in terms of the values and norms of the dominant group, “in-group virtues” are construed by a double-standard to be “out-group vices.”¹⁰ Langmuir then proposes an explanation of why certain oppressed and exploited groups (such as Jews and Blacks) become culturally defined as “fundamentally inferior.”¹¹

Such stigmatized out-groups are singularly susceptible to chimeric assertions. Both xenophobic and chimeric assertions attack all Jews for the alleged violations of some, but chimeras are accusations based on fantasy, Langmuir says, “figments of the imagination, monsters which . . . have never been seen and are projections of mental processes unconnected with the real people of the outgroup.” However, chimerical accusations against Jews – the myth of ritual murder, pollution of the host, well-poisoning, world-conspiracy – differ from chimerical assertions against Blacks; the usual charge against Jews is of aggression while Blacks are charged with incapacity or deviation from white norms.

Uniting both assertions and the ideologies justifying Jew-hatred is the *collective accusation*. In thematic analysis of three classics of Jew-hatred –

⁹ Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structures*. 2nd ed. Glencoe, Ill., 1957. pp. 421–424.

¹⁰ *ibid.* pp. 426–430.

¹¹ One may also view Jews and Blacks as pariah castes (see discussion, Introduction to Part 1) and/or potential subjects for exploitation and oppression because they were both excluded from the sanctified western Christian universe of obligation determining reciprocity and inclusion in the community. See Helen Fein, *Imperial Crime and Punishment: British Judgment on the Massacre at Jallianwala Bagh 1919–1920*, Honolulu, 1977, pp. 9–14; George M. Fredrickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History*, Oxford, 1981, pp. 70–79.

Martin Luther's *About the Jews and Their Lies* (1543), Edouard A. Drumont's *La France Juive* (1885) and Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf* (1925–1927), and Norman Cohn's analysis of the spurious "Protocols of the Elders of Zion" (*A Warrant for Genocide*, 1969),¹² one finds several repeated accusations elaborated in different times and places:

- 1) the Jew is a betrayer and a manipulator (perhaps labeled as the Judas image);
- 2) the Jew is an exploiter personifying usury or modern capitalism (the Shylock image);
- 3) the Jew is a skeptic, an iconoclast, a revolutionary, undermining faith and authority (the Red Jew);
- 4) the Jew is non-human or a diabolic-murderer, poisoner, polluter (the demonologic image);
- 5) the male Jew is a sexual aggressor and pornographer and the Jewish woman is a seducer (the lecherous Jew).

The first three types of accusation might be either xenophobic or realistic, but the fourth is clearly chimeric. Ruether, Langmuir, and Katz show how these accusations have developed and changed over the last two millennia.

The fifth accusation, of sexual rapacity and sensuality (attributed to Jewish men and women, respectively) seems based on projection of the desires of the dominant Christian community and parallels the "sexual racism"¹³ found in Black-White race relations and imagery in the western world, raising both the sexual attractiveness of the "Jewess" to Gentile men and the dangers Jewish men pose to Gentile women. This is a specifically European image not noted in the United States where, historically, id stereotypes incorporating sensuality have been projected onto Blacks, and superego stereotypes (of cunning and egotism) have been projected on Jews.¹⁴ Only when united with the Nazi race ideology did this last accusation lead to the prohibition against sexual union and close social interaction between Jews and Gentiles as "*Rassenschande*" (institutionalized

¹² Martin Luther, "Von den Juden und ihren Lügen," in *Werke*, Bd. 53, Weimar, 1920 (1543). Edouard A. Drumont, *La France Juive*, 14th ed, Paris, 1885. Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. by Ralph Mannheim, Boston, 1971 (1927). Norman Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide: The Myth of the Jewish World-Conspiracy and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, Boulder, Colo., 1969.

¹³ Charles H. Stember, *Sexual Racism*, New York, 1978. Winthrop D. Jordan, *The White Man's Burden: Historical Origins of Racism in the United States*, London, 1974. pp. 18–21, 69–86.

¹⁴ Gordon Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice*, Cambridge, Mass., 1954, pp. 199–200.

in the Nuremberg laws in 1935). Ordinarily, sexual racism makes the woman of the subjected minority more desirable, not less.

A rudimentary paradigm for analysis of collective accusations is based on these questions:

1. What is *the Jew* accused of?
2. What is this attributed to? (Possibilities include religion, culture, race or innate essence, experience.)
3. Can their behavior/nature be changed? (This is logically related to the basis of attribution.)
4. Who is the accuser?
5. What events/acts/contexts are said to instigate the accusation?
6. What are the expressed (or implicit) punishment/policies advocated to redress Jews' behavior?

The attribution of Jewish violations to an intrinsic or racial quality in the late nineteenth century reinforced the earlier antisemitism of Christian origin and justified categorical elimination of the Jews. The new chimera or accusation of a Jewish world-conspiracy became, as Cohn asserts, "A Warrant for Genocide" (1969) leading to Nazi murders before the Holocaust.

The collective accusation is an example of what Neil Smelser labels "hostile beliefs" which are used to mobilize hostile behavior.¹⁵ Collective accusations serve as "sanctions for evil,"¹⁶ authorization of collective violence against the other who has been previously excluded from the "universe of obligation,"¹⁷ and a means of dehumanization.¹⁸

Attitude research on antisemitism does tap belief in accusations about Jewish loyalty, power, and trustworthiness which stem from the first two classes of accusations enumerated (the Judas and Shylock images), and the range of xenophobic assertions about Jews. Survey researchers have not sought to tap belief in chimeric assertions about Jews, nor discriminated which cognitions simply reflect conventional stereotypes without hostile

¹⁵ Neil J. Smelser, *Theory of Collective Behavior*, London, 1963, p. 226.

¹⁶ Nevitt Sanford and Craig Comstock (eds.), *Sanctions for Evil: Sources of Social Destructiveness*, San Francisco, 1971.

¹⁷ Fein, 1977, *op. cit.*, pp. 112–115.

¹⁸ Herbert C. Kelman, "Violence without Moral Restraint: Reflections on the Dehumanisation of Victims and Victimizer," *Journal of Social Issues* 29, 1973, pp. 25–61. Israel W. Charney, *How Can We Commit the Unthinkable? Genocide: The Human Cancer*, Boulder, Colorado, 1982. Leo Kuper, *Genocide: Its Political Use in the Twentieth Century*, New York, 1981.

affect, and which are usually or intrinsically hostile accusations which justify violence or discrimination against Jews. Weil, Wuthnow and Quinley and Glock¹⁹ also recognize that not every negative stereotype and/or dislike of Jews is necessarily hostile or of political import. Thus, it must be kept in mind in evaluating attitude research on antisemitism – as on other questions – that what we find depends in some measure on what is asked and on the assumptions inherent in definition, indexing, and evaluation of antisemitism. Most sophisticated researchers do not draw conclusions on the basis of response to single questions alone.

¹⁹ Frederick Weil, herein. Robert Wuthnow, herein. Harold E. Quinley and Charles Y. Glock, *Anti-Semitism in America*, New York, 1979, p. 195.