Antisemitism in North America

New World, Old Hate

Edited by

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Addendum

Daniel Kaplin and Florette Cohen-Abady

Hoffer’s aforementioned quote in the Conclusion emphasizes the double standard between the Jewish nation and other nations of the world. It is important as well to understand Hoffer’s shift from the term “Jew” to “Israel.” Written a half century ago, we now understand the change has been used to justify antisemitic beliefs and attacks. Along those lines, Judit Bosker Liwerant and Yael Siman add, “the complexity [of all conceptualization] is embedded in antisemitism, anti-Zionism and anti-Israelism as interacting and overlapping social realities and categories for analysis in a globalized and transnational world.” They continue expanding with,

...mutually reinforcing antisemitic, anti-colonial and anti-imperialist meanings get transferred and reinforce each other, through a historical and now transregional and transnational cultural substratum. Thus, in a wider spectrum, antisemitism has become a transnational phenomenon of global concern that in some instances gets expressed through criticism of Israel as the embodiment of collective Jewry. Thus, anti-Zionism connects people across countries, regions and continents, operating through the political agenda of social movements performing at the local, regional and global levels.

North American antisemitism is gentler and kinder than its European counterpart. Survey and media reports demonstrate that antisemitism continues to exist. Yet antisemitism and its latest iterations are taking an academic backseat despite the need. This current edited volume provides a comprehensive review of modern antisemitism throughout North America from historical, psychological, Judaic studies, and political perspectives and thus will prove to be a significant contribution to the revival of empirical antisemitism studies and literature.

Identifying antisemitism has been the subject of mainstream commentary for several years. This book presents real world discourse while at the same time reviewing the scientific research to date that helps to identify when a belief does or does not reflect antisemitism or if it is indeed influenced by antisemitism. In real world situations it is impossible to know with certainty whether demonic portrayals of Israel and her leaders is antisemitism given the
reality of present-day political discourse. This knowledge requires peering into the portrayer’s heart and mind, which is naturally impossible.

As of yet, academia has not acquired the tools to do this; however within the context of the laboratory, social scientists can experimentally create conditions which lead people to develop antisemitic attitudes and beliefs that manifest themselves in anti-Israel activism and which, in turn, may or may not reflect antisemitism. Nevertheless, this research is essential because if we stop putting a focus on antisemitism and antisemitism continues to develop, whether overtly or implicitly, Jews will be at risk of double standards, bigotry, hate crimes, and potentially even future holocausts.

Although the rebirth of antisemitism research is relatively recent, this text highlights the reality that antisemitism has infiltrated itself into mainstream education, various social media outlets and popular culture, and despite its egalitarian society, American Jews view antisemitism in the United States as a continuous problem. The review of experimental research provided further insight into the psychological underpinnings of antisemitism while recent incidents of antisemitism reflect the continuing need for this discussion.

Most importantly, the question we should all be asking after a recapitulation of the literature is, “Are Jews safe in North America?” or is there validity to that question that creeps into the minds of Holocaust survivors, “Could it happen here?”

Jews in Weimar Germany experienced religious, economic and political freedom unparalleled elsewhere in Europe. Jews as popular war heroes, government officials, professionals, academics, artists were not unknown. The parallels to current North American Jewry are obvious. Should Jews in North America feel safe and secure? Or, should Jews be cautiously optimistic that while they are currently experiencing unprecedented prosperity and freedom anything can happen at any given time with very little if any notice at all? Collectively, North Americans, Jews and non-Jews alike, must be diligent in their understanding of what is and is not antisemitism and cut it off before it fester. As an epilogue to the current volume, this chapter aims to recount the history, research, awareness and prejudice combating strategies which are necessary tools for distinguishing between tolerance and true acceptance while maintaining a diligent fight for the survival of Jews in North America.

The story of North American Jewry may be known but bears repeating. In 1492, the Inquisition forced at least a quarter of a million Spanish and Portuguese Jews to convert or face expulsion or death. These were practicing Catholics but in their basements, they were Jews. When the limpieza de sangre (blood purity) laws considered old Jews and New Christians perverts by blood,
Judaism and crypto-Judaism became forbidden and left no acceptable way for Jews to safely live among their Christian neighbors. This compelled these Jews to leave Europe in search of a new world free from persecution. Many left as under their concealed identities as converses (those who converted), anusim (forced ones), marranos (pig, dirty, forbidden), New Christians, or crypto-Jews, yet, the goal was to be able to worship and live as Jews in a new environment. Initially life was safer as a New Christian in the New World than in the old, but not for long. Until the late 19th century, Jews were allowed to practice Judaism freely in the Americas. Because the North American region is known to be the least antisemitic in the world a general understanding of antisemitism may be achieved by tracing the earliest beginnings of Jews in North America, broken up by four sub-regions: the Caribbean, Mexico, Canada and the United States.

Antisemitism today is global. This is no less true within the North American region itself. There is no disputing that at AIPAC’s major annual policy meeting in Washington e.g. 2012 both Republican and Democratic leaders, including Vice-President Joseph Biden and President Barack Obama stressed that the United States has “been there” for Israel.

Yet synagogues throughout the North America still continue to be vandalized, “death to the Jews” are chanted at Toronto al-quds day rallies, anti-Israeli and antisemitic commentary are printed daily throughout Mexico mainstream newspapers. It is hard to agree with those writers who convey the theme that antisemitism is really too minor an issue to think about?

There continues to be more questions than answers. Firstly, what constitutes antisemitism? What is the connection between antisemitism and global affairs, particularly those concerning Israel? Secondly, what may be understood from a society in which antisemitism is all but non-existent? To even begin to scratch the surface of these questions research must be conducted to investigate the modern concept of antisemitism. Can the Jewish identity be differentiated from Jewish nationalism? What does it mean to be tolerant in a global society? During the Inquisition Jews converted but did not assimilate or truly accept the Christian way of life and continued to practice Judaism in secret and as a result were persecuted. After the Inquisition ended Jews were not only accepted as Jews but invited into society’s elite as equals. As equals these Jews became open to the ideas of their non-Jewish counterparts and more willing to adopt their cultural norms and worldviews; in reality they were actively recruited into society and invited to assimilate.

Antisemitism has occurred for millennia for many different and sometimes contradictory reasons. After the Romans destroyed the second temple, many Jews found refuge by migrating to different geographical regions throughout
Europe, Asia, Northern Africa. At times, Jews were well-received but more often than not, they faced persecution, non-citizen status, expulsions and death. With the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, came new forms of anti-semitism. Today Israel is sanctioned and scrutinized by the United Nations at disproportionately greater rates than any other country. Moreover, the anti-Israel political cartoons presented in Arab and Western newspapers highlight this newer form of antisemitism. More specifically, criticism of Israel is sometimes used to exhibit antisemitic attitudes. But from where do these manifestations of antisemitism originate?

Prejudice has always been a major area of research within the field. Allport, Adorno and Millgram among others pondered at the atrocities of the Holocaust. The research questions often stemmed from how could human beings treat other human being in such a cruel fashion? What were the driving psychological forces that would lead a seemingly sane society to murder another? Empirical research investigating the psychological underpinings of antisemitism was a huge topic of research in the 1950’s and then tapered off in the 1960’s in favor of more pressing social issues only to experience a revival over the last ten years with the emergence of new modern forms of antisemitism. Antisemitic incidents, including but not limited to hate crimes, antisemitic rhetoric and antisemitic websites are monitored by governmental and nongovernmental agencies i.e., American Jewish Committee and the Anti-Defamation League.

For some commentators, including more than a few Jews, “collective Jewish paranoia” provides the most convincing explanation of heightened Jewish fears about the possibility of increased antisemitism. While most acknowledge that this so-called obsession has a genuine historical foundation, such analysts also maintain that there is no longer much realistic basis for Jewish anxiety e.g, Avraham Burg’s “The Holocaust is Over.” One need not reject either those who argue that data-based and political foundations or support for egalitarian principles are key.

North American public opinion is, despite its favorable central tendencies, far from unanimously positive on any matters of vital concern to Jews. There is always the possibility that minority antisemitic positions could escalate. There are several cases in the United States and Canada where speakers who were invited to discuss the geopolitics of Israel were interrupted and intentionally derailed from their points. One cannot say with certainty that this reflects antisemitism, but the traditional antisemitic stereotypes, slurs and defamations are frequently used in these incidents, and that perpetrators sometimes slip and speak derogatorily of “Jews” rather than of “Israelis” or “Zionists.
In order to determine whether a statement reflects genuine criticism of the State of Israel or a subtle form of antisemitism, it is essential to establish appropriate criteria. If the criticism is laced with classic antisemitic stereotypes, double standards for Israel, generalizing and blaming all Jews for the actions of Israel, or suggesting that Jews are engaging in similar practices as the Nazis aka Holocaust inversion, it is reasonable to suggest that these reflect antisemitic attitudes.

Kenneth Marcus has observed that it is not uncommon for Jews to be blamed for human rights violations, similar to the blame they experienced during the Holocaust. Critics equate Jews to Nazis, accuse Israel of apartheid, genocide, and war crimes. Kenneth Lasson poses a key question, “Must writers and speakers who deny the Holocaust be guaranteed equal access to curricula and classrooms?”

The misuse of freedom of speech and expression through offensive content, libelous claims, and the disregard for college policies by these groups are well documented. This could create both a hostile working and learning environment for all. As such, greater oversight and regulation should occur on the college campus to protect the safety of its Jewish students.

The disinformation campaign continues unabated. Syrian author Muhammad Nimr Al-Madani alleges that during WWII, both sides (Allies and Axis) were seeking Jewish extermination; Brooklyn Sheik Fadhel as Sahlani, contends that all aspects of the Holocaust are exaggerated. Alabama attorney general Darby agrees citing typhus as the perpetrator of six million Jews.

Antisemitism presupposes that the Jews are radically “other.” This simple central point is a universal, timeless characteristic of antisemitism. Treating Jews as an out-group is significant because this is used as a foundation for prejudice and discrimination. On one level, people generally show favoritism towards their own group over an out-group. However, treating a Jew as an out-group, often leads to denigration.

It is easier to be a Jew in the New World than in the Old, especially in France where record numbers are leaving due to Islamist attacks. Europe’s Jews are moving to Israel and places less likely to fall victim to the Islamist led virus called, anti-Israeli campaign.

Exactly how the 6 million North American Jews are going to assist the remaining 8 million Jews and convince the world’s 7 billion non-Jews that they are being misinformed is not clear. Never has “Never Again” appeared so formidable.