

## The Functions of Anti-Semitism

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*Ruth R. Wisse*

THIS SUMMER, NAZI SYMBOLS and the slogan “Jews will not replace us” at a rally of white nationalists in Charlottesville, Virginia, generated a rare clarifying moment in an otherwise politically scrambled time. Since the United States led the Allies to victory in the Second World War and the Nuremberg Trials condemned the perpetrators of genocide, Nazism has been the most powerful symbol of evil in our culture and Jews its most identifiable victims. Though it may be said in some sense that “both sides” at Charlottesville—the demonstrators and counter-demonstrators—bore some responsibility for the event, President Trump’s failure to single out the Nazi element in his condemnation of the two was perceived by many Americans as a moral offense against his country, let alone against its Jewish citizens. Those who enlist Nazism for the advancement of their political goals deserve harsh, unequivocal censure. The president ought to have led, not followed, in singling them out.

Yet the very clarity of judgment on Nazism threatens to obscure graver threats to our constitutional democracy. Jews in particular are harmed by the exclusive identification of anti-Semitism with Nazism, which is so far the only form of anti-Jewish politics that has gone down to defeat. Just as tuberculosis is no longer our chief medical hazard, so Nazism is no longer the main threat to the Jews and what they represent. The tale of evil enshrined in the Holocaust Memorial Museum has been overtaken by more sinister political forms of grievance and blame.

Before Charlottesville, some politicians, professors, and community leaders had begun to address the escalation of anti-Jewish politics

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*RUTH R. WISSE is professor emeritus of Yiddish literature and comparative literature at Harvard University and a senior fellow of the Tikvah Fund. She is also the author of Jews and Power.*

in America. But those initiatives could use a sharper focus on the real character of anti-Semitism. On December 1, 2016, for instance, the United States Senate passed the “Anti-Semitism Awareness Act,” or AAA, framed as an extension of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Civil Rights Act was originally designed to combat discrimination against African Americans. It sought to cover all its bases in protecting them through its triple targeting of discrimination on the basis of “race, color, or national origin.” Title VI focuses particularly on institutions that receive federal funds, and includes protections against discrimination on college campuses. But over several decades, the prime targets of hostile discrimination on American campuses from Brooklyn College to the University of California, Irvine, ceased to be traditional racial minorities and became instead the most habitual of scapegoats—the Jews—though they are themselves a diverse group of many colors and national origins.

Well before the passage of the AAA, interpretation of the original Civil Rights Act had already been stretched by the Departments of Justice and Education to prohibit “discrimination against Jews, Muslims, Sikhs, and members of other religious groups when the discrimination is based on the group’s actual or perceived shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics.” The Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights (OCR) duly investigated hundreds of claims of harassment, threats, and intimidation against Jewish students on college campuses under this interpretation. Yet despite the broadly extended definition and the documented causes for concern, the OCR failed to identify any violations against Jews because anti-Semitism did not comfortably fit the original legislative framework of the Civil Rights Act. The AAA was therefore passed in an attempt to further empower the OCR to protect Jewish students.

But there has always been a problem with the logic of this well-intentioned exercise. Anti-Semitism cannot be subsumed into the framework of the Civil Rights Act because anti-Semitism is not discrimination. It may exhibit the key features of prejudice, bias, and bigotry—and therefore result in discrimination. But it is different in kind. Anti-Semitism is a modern political phenomenon—an ideology that anchors or forms part of a political movement and serves a political purpose. It arose alongside other ideologies like liberalism, conservatism, socialism, communism, anarchism, and (somewhat later) fascism, opposing some of them and merging

with others. Anti-Semitism was the most protean of these ideologies and was therefore valuable in forging coalitions even among otherwise competing groups. To take anti-Semitism seriously, let alone to subdue it, requires first recognizing its political nature.

An ideology may be defined as a system of beliefs or ideals, a shaping concept in politics, held by an individual or a group. As a political ideology, anti-Semitism enjoys the protection of the First Amendment of the United States Constitution, which prohibits laws abridging “the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble.” This provision affords champions of an ideology like communism the right to free speech and assembly even though they aim at the destruction of our liberal democracy, so one can hardly deny the same protection to champions of anti-Semitism ostensibly targeting only the Jews.

The AAA was no sooner passed than protests against abridgment of the right to free speech arose, including from administrators of colleges that had seen some of the worst harassment of Jewish students. They asked, in effect, whether Jews must be protected at the expense of the First Amendment. They deserve an answer. But such an answer would require looking into just what anti-Semitism is.

#### ANTI-SEMITISM AS ANTI-LIBERALISM

The study of anti-Semitism properly belongs to the study of politics, though it has rarely been taken up this way. Traditionally, political thought and academic political science did not address the political nature of the Jews because, having lost their sovereignty in the land of Israel 20 centuries ago, they were deemed to exist outside politics. Politics—defined as the activities associated with the governance of a country—ignored a people that did not govern its own country and appeared to lack political power. Political thinkers often consigned Jews to some negative or reactionary position in history without recognizing that their very need to do so acknowledged the Jewish people’s disturbing presence in their midst.

In fact, Jews had developed a unique arrangement—call it a political experiment—that allowed them to remain a people outside their country with almost all the properties of a nation. Jews had their own languages (always more than one), religion, calendar and holidays, culture, code of law, and legal authorities. And they sustained a

determination to return to their homeland, which, of course, they finally did. What is more, Jews remained politically potent. Thanks to their belief in God as the ultimate (though not necessarily immediate) guarantor of their power, they could indefinitely postpone recovery of their land with the certainty that they eventually would return to it. The political experiment of the Jews simultaneously allowed them to prosper among other nations and allowed for the organization of politics against them. Yet just as political thinkers ignored the political nature of the Jews, so they ignored the exceptional political utility of anti-Jewish politics.

To fully understand anti-Semitism, one would have to appreciate the Jewish political experiment, but we will concentrate here only on the response to it—that is, on the modern organization of a politics against the Jews, which has become known as anti-Semitism. The so-called “Jewish Question” or “Jewish Problem” is in reality the problem of anti-Semitism.

Indeed, the origins of anti-Semitism are not mysterious: It emerged under particular circumstances at a specific time and place. Germany in the 1870s was in the process of national consolidation, with many constituencies vying for power. Although culturally impressive, Germany had lagged behind other European countries in the development of liberal democracy and constitutional guarantees of rights.

Whether he invented or adopted the term, Wilhelm Marr laid out the platform of anti-Semitism in an 1879 pamphlet *Der Weg zum Siege des Germanenthums über das Judenthum* (“The Way to Victory of Germanism over Judaism”) that went through a dozen editions within the year. Marr did not scorn the Jews. To the contrary, he magnified their power, claiming that, unlike other conquerors that came with the sword, Jews would use the country’s emerging rights and freedoms to “conquer Germany from within.” Note the political terminology and the ascription to the Jews of a superior form of power.

Marr was not the first to look at Jews in material terms; Karl Marx had done this earlier when he wrote, “Let us not look for the secret of the Jew in his religion, but let us look for the secret of his religion in the real Jew. What is the secular basis of Judaism? *Practical need, self-interest.* What is the worldly religion of the Jew? *Huckstering.* What is his worldly God? *Money.*” By thus deconstructing Judaism and reducing Jews to their economic function, Marx made them the negative force of his

progressive program. Anti-Semitism enlarged this idea of their “secret” to denounce the comprehensive aspects of Jewish power. Rather than concentrate on the deficiencies of German governance and its need for reform, anti-Semitism shifted attention from domestic failures to their alleged cause — the menacing Jews. While other ideologies prescribed socio-political improvements, anti-Semitism professed to contain, eliminate, or reverse the damage that liberalization would produce.

In effect, anti-Semitism became a stand-in for opposition to liberalizing reforms, and a substitute for real evidence of harms done by liberalism to the societies in which it was advancing. Marr recast the promise of emancipation and equal opportunity as a Jewish conspiracy to effect a bloodless conquest. He was a man of the left who had participated in the 1848 Revolution — a disillusioned revolutionary turned German nationalist. He insisted that his focus on *das Judenthum* was not prompted by religious bias or personal hatred but was the result of rational analysis — hence his need for a new vocabulary to distinguish it from Christian anti-Judaism and folk demonization. Though he indisputably drew on earlier prejudicial images, his new terminology was geared to a new political reality. Democracy was sweeping away the old regimes, but democracy need not necessarily remain liberal. It could be used for competing political ends if one could win over the people with persuasive arguments and satisfying explanations. Marr did this by defining liberal democracy negatively, fingering Jews as the explanation for what was going wrong. Jews were both a perceptible presence and a malleable political representation of unwelcome encroachment.

Organizing politics against the Jews offered many advantages: Anti-Semitism discredited the apparent value of equal rights and opportunity by framing them as a form of anti-German sabotage. The threat of the Jews reinforced the need for national unity. An anti-Jewish politics also held out the promise of an anti-liberal coalition spanning left and right, religious and secular, traditionalists and moderns. And Jewish subversion offered a simple explanation for the complex hardships of modernization and urbanization, and for the socio-economic problems of a country in flux. Anti-Jewish aggression siphoned off dissatisfaction and violence that would otherwise have been directed at those in power. And unlike competing ideologies that articulated positive goals, anti-Semitism was the ultimate negative campaign. To the

extent that politics is war, this movement had the easiest of adversaries—a group that could unite its various opponents but not offer any meaningful resistance.

In addition to its political usefulness, of which this is but a sampling, the Jews' inability to resist anti-Semitism was part of the movement's appeal. Jews could not on their own "defeat" it for the very reasons they were chosen as its foil: Their political strategy of accommodation made them seek acceptance and protection from the people among whom they lived. They had no incentive for counter-aggression and every apparent reason to appease their attackers. Jews had previously sought protection from rulers; democracy meant they had now to win the protection of the masses by persuading them that they were a force for good, a useful minority. But the better they were at proving themselves useful, including even by joining the military, the more they appeared to prove Marr's point that they were conquering the country from within its key institutions. Anti-Semitism was thus a bid for political control unilaterally pitched against a group that had no reason, will, or ability to compete against its assailants.

Finally, anti-Semitism had the advantage of clarity—the Jews were a clear culprit and target for a politics of grievance and blame. A single explanation answered a multitude of dissatisfactions. But the clarity was rooted in deception. Jews were neither the cause of the problem they were said to constitute, nor could their removal provide its solution. Instead, the misattribution of causality prevented the amelioration of the country's real difficulties. Anti-Semitism was therefore bound to generate mounting dissatisfaction and frustration. Stoked to the point of violence, the public assailed the Jews, but the violence could never find satisfaction in them because they were not, in fact, the source of the malaise. Fatal in the long run, but seductive in the here and now, anti-Semitism was a form of political prestidigitation, pointing away from the actual bid for power toward its alleged usurpers. The more attention it focused on the Jews, the less perceptible became the manipulator's appropriation of power.

Anti-Semitism thus gained public support by keeping the Jews on perpetual trial. Because the aggression aimed *only* at the Jews, it was not taken as seriously as it would have been had it been aimed explicitly at the liberalism that was its true target. The rest of the population, even those sympathetic to the Jews and what they represented, tended to

belittle or ignore the aggressors. The Jews could not win the fight alone, and others were disinclined to fight for what seemed a “foreign” cause.

Marr’s movement was not confined to Germany. The anonymous forgery known as *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* accused Jews of plotting to conquer the entire world. This became a text of choice in tsarist Russia, and by the 1920s it had penetrated even the United States. Nationalists of several European countries likewise used the alleged threat of the Jews to promote restrictive legislation and protectionist policies. Not all anti-liberals were necessarily anti-Semitic, but all anti-Semitic politics was anti-liberal.

Whatever terms we use — liberality, toleration, equal rights, modernization, competitive economy — “Jew” came to stand in for all of them. It is hard to overstate how immensely useful this mode of argument proved to be to various forms of anti-liberal politics.

#### THE ANTI-LIBERALISM OF THE LEFT

Hannah Arendt’s study of totalitarianism begins with anti-Semitism as the common feature of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia, the two most extreme anti-liberal political systems that were also most extreme in their opposition to the Jews. But the anti-Semitisms of the right and left differed in some important respects.

Despite its official repudiation of the label, Marxism forged its own brand of anti-Semitism. The way Jews became negatively associated with capitalism is well set out by Jerry Muller in his *Capitalism and the Jews*. Having cast the Jews as the embodiment of the allegedly sinful mercantile (or middleman) minority, Marxists highlighted their role in exploiting the working class. Revolutionaries in Russia hailed anti-Jewish pogroms as kindling for the peasant proto-proletarian revolution. Jewish revolutionaries fell in line with this political calculation, putting the universal cause ahead of their parochial loyalties.

From Judaism’s perspective, the assault from the left was the more threatening, since its attack on the immorality of Jewishness cut deeper than the customary expropriations, expulsions, and massacres. Explicit attacks by nationalists, churchmen, or anti-liberal politicians peeled some Jews off through conversion but drove most of them back on their own resources. Pogroms, restrictive decrees, and the rise of anti-Semitism helped inspire the Zionist movement. Attacks from the right also pushed many Jews into the left, which unlike Christianity required

no formal conversion. For their part, socialism and communism invited Jews to transcend their insular group by joining a more advanced human project. This had a shattering—and enduring—effect on Jewish moral self-confidence.

Marxism followed Christianity in its commitment to universal redemption, and once communism solidified its authority, its internationalism—even more than its anti-capitalism—sealed the fate of the Jews. When the Bolsheviks established the Soviet Union, they were forced to implement their policies across more than 90 ethnic minorities and nationalities—Tatars, Ukrainians, Chechens, and the like. But since Jews had no territory, their insistence on remaining a people was seen as the prime example of *reactionary* nationalism, of moving backward in history instead of forward with the International. The indissoluble fusion in Judaism of nationality and religion made Jews suspect on both religious and national grounds, and the negative image of Jews—carried over from tsarist policy—made them as convenient an organizing political target as they had been for anti-Semitism in Germany. The Soviet Union outlawed Hebrew as the language of Jewish nationalism *and* religion. The Zionist movement, then in its ascendancy, and the Jewish vanguard in Palestine that was establishing the infrastructure of a state embodied everything the Soviet Union stood against. The leftist form of anti-Semitism thus became anti-Zionism—opposition to Jewish political self-determination and to the recovery of Jewish sovereignty in the land of Israel.

The difference between anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism was shaped by what each political movement opposed. Fearing the competitiveness of an open society, anti-Semites wanted to block the advancement of the Jews in their midst: If Jews wanted to remove themselves and settle in Palestine, so much the better for the rest of the Germans, Austrians, Poles, Hungarians, Dutch, French—to name only some of the nationalities influenced by the movement. But Soviet communism gave Jews full rights of citizenship or, rather, it restricted Jews to the same degree that it restricted all others from practicing their religion, traveling freely, engaging in trade, expressing alternative views, or forming political parties. But nonetheless, Jews remained a special case. They were the archetypal middlemen or capitalists that communism pledged to eradicate, and they were internationalists of an alternative kind, forging close familial and national ties across political boundaries. The Soviets

exploited the “Jewish International” for spreading communism abroad through Jewish connections, but the very success of this practice also aroused the Soviet leadership’s paranoia.

The decisive moment in the maturation of anti-Zionism came in 1929 when the Mufti of Jerusalem incited major pogroms in Palestine. Joseph Stalin, who was then consolidating the communist dictatorship, saw domestic and foreign advantage in hailing the anti-Jewish slaughters as the start of the Arab communist revolution, much as the earlier Russian revolutionaries had done with the anti-Jewish pogroms under tsarist rule. By taking the Muslim Arab side against the Jews, he appealed to the large internal Soviet Muslim population, and by lumping Jews with the British as imperialist occupiers, he reinforced the Soviet war against the West.

So concerned was the Soviet leadership about resurgent Jewish nationalism that, at the end of the 1920s, it created an artificial Jewish territory near the Manchurian border and tried to make Birobidzhan the legitimate Jewish homeland of the new international order. The plan was mad, but it was not immediately a failure. Growing up in Montreal at the fringes of communist circles, my family sang the songs of the pioneering Jews of Birobidzhan with the same gusto that Western journalists greeted the collectivization of the kulaks. Communist and liberal writers dutifully touted the advantages of this remote outpost and correspondingly vilified the Jewish community of Palestine. The slogans of today’s anti-Zionism were forged in the Soviet Union and made their way back into Arab Palestine through figures like Mahmoud Abbas, current leader of the Palestinian Authority, who was educated at Patrice Lumumba University in Moscow in the 1950s. The ideological form of anti-Zionism was advanced by the Soviet-Arab axis at the United Nations in the 1960s and ’70s, and culminated internally in the formation in 1983 of the Anti-Zionist Committee of the Soviet Public.

Earlier in the century, with Hitler’s rise to power in Germany, the Soviets claimed to be the only defense against fascism. The Depression of the 1930s boosted the notion that capitalism had failed in America and produced Nazism in Germany. Soviet anti-Zionism, which promised international brotherhood, economic justice, and true universal equality, accused Zionist Jews of betraying this optimism with their insular national religion and imperialist colonization of the land of

Israel. The demonizing terminology of this internationalist and anti-Western anti-Zionism, rather than the more nationalist anti-Semitism of the right, remains the parlance of most contemporary anti-Jewish politics today. Though curiously, as anti-Zionism declined with the rest of communist ideology in Russia, it grew in the United States to record heights.

Anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism—combined into the modern phenomena of anti-Semitism/Zionism—can best be described as the organization of politics against the Jews. Whether the ideological justification precedes or follows its political implementation, it furthers the goals of parties and regimes by using Jews as scapegoats. Anti-Jewish politics is fluid and flexible, directed at what Jews are said to represent. Appearing to oppose *only* the Jews is essential to its political success. Whatever its auspices, it is always anti-liberal, anti-pluralistic, and against free-market competition in goods and ideas.

#### ANTI-SEMITISM / ZIONISM

In its hybrid form, anti-Semitism/Zionism has been the cornerstone of pan-Arab politics since the Second World War. The Arab League organized in 1945 around common opposition to a Jewish state, and, despite growing chasms in the original coalition, this remains its strongest actual and potential source of unity. Arab anti-Semitism/Zionism opposed the principle of co-existence and promoted regional or religious hegemony, targeting Jews and the Jewish state as foreign representatives of Western values. Anti-Semitism had arisen in Europe to combat domestic liberalizing forces; it was enlisted in the Middle East to prevent the entry of those forces. Arab and Muslim leaders launched anti-Semitism/Zionism with the terminology of right-wing threat (“We will drive Jews into the sea”) but then substituted left-wing remonstrance (“Jews are Western imperialists and colonial occupiers of Palestinian land”). They simultaneously drove Jews from their embedded communities in Arab lands and tried to destroy their place of refuge.

Palestinian ruin is not chimerical; Palestinian Arabs are real victims. But they are to a great extent the victims of the anti-Semitism/Zionism that requires their perpetual suffering as evidence of Jewish guilt. They are of value to some among their fellow Arabs—and nowadays, to various other anti-Israel coalitions—only as long as they remain conspicuous casualties.

Anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism had always identified *victims* of Jewish usurpation—the proletariat, the Polish middle class, the Russian peasantry, and, for Richard Wagner, German music—but these were abstractions compared to the Palestinians. And the existence of actual human victims has been enormously useful to the negative coalition that depends on anti-Semitism/Zionism for its cohesion. The Palestinians can never be returned to anything resembling a normal existence as long as anti-Semitism/Zionism needs them to sustain its coalition. And anti-Semitism/Zionism can never be defeated unless at least some of the responsibility for Palestinian suffering is redirected back to the political leaders and political ideology it serves.

Anti-Semitism/Zionism is the first anti-Jewish movement to take root in North America. And it has flourished in the groves of our academy. Not since the war in Vietnam has there been a campus crusade as dynamic as the movement of Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions against Israel. BDS unites faculty radicals from that earlier struggle with a new generation of self-styled progressives. In fact, one might see the contemporary movement as a reincarnation of the New Left's Students for a Democratic Society that had lost its original socialist purpose but has found a leaner *raison d'être*. Opposition to Israel gives the coalition its best political target since the end of the U.S. military draft in 1973.

Students and faculty from Arab and Muslim countries constituted the original driving engine of anti-Israel propaganda on campus, but the coalitions of boycott and divestment have been anchored more recently by leftist faculty members at elite schools. "Intersectionality" now enfolds all self-professed victim minorities so that, for example, gays and lesbians can take up the cause of an Arab society that does not tolerate them, and Jewish leftists can join those dedicated to destroying the Jewish homeland.

Along with the standard political advantages that anti-Semitism/Zionism offers today's left-wing campus coalitions, it also allows activists to distract attention from actual forces in the Middle East that are less than convenient to various radical agendas—from the war in Syria to ISIS tortures, ongoing slavery in Sudan, suppression of women and religious minorities, Iran's export of terrorism, ubiquitous political repression, and the need for reform in a region that has yet to begin the long and painful process of enlightenment.

ANTI-SEMITISM AND AWARENESS

And yet, even if the foregoing is granted—or rather, especially if it is granted—we are left to consider how opponents of anti-Semitism/Zionism can effectively counteract its influence in an open society that guarantees political ideologies their right to compete.

We begin by noting that college administrators affect false innocence when they ask whether Jews must be protected at the expense of the First Amendment. It is they who incubate anti-Semitism/Zionism by hiring its ideologues as classroom instructors, sponsoring programs that spread its ideology, and humoring students known to expound its virtues without challenging their ideological premises. The schools often glorify an image of diversity and multiculturalism that thrives—as does the United Nations—by uniting its dissident factions against the Jewish state. They are at some level responsible for the perversion of Middle Eastern Studies, of which the best that historian Martin Kramer can say is “Not every Middle East center is a shameful disaster.”

Kramer’s 1998 book *Ivory Towers on Sand* documented the failure of Middle Eastern Studies in America, but, as far as I am aware, it provoked not a single investigation into this academic debacle. Anti-Semitism/Zionism spread from Middle Eastern Studies through cognate departments of anthropology, history, and literature so that their academic associations now seriously debate resolutions boycotting Israeli goods and scholars. Schools that subsidize the spread of an anti-liberal ideology cannot claim to be protecting free speech. Awareness of anti-Semitism requires confronting the fact that anti-Semitism/Zionism is central to the politics of almost the entire Arab and Muslim sphere of influence, and seeing how that influence can be exposed, resisted, and overcome.

As evidence of the need for the AAA, co-sponsor Senator Bob Casey, a Democrat from Pennsylvania, refers to examples of anti-Semitism such as “[c]alling for, aiding, or justifying the killing or harming of Jews,” demonizing Israel, and judging it by a double standard. But these have been staples of anti-Israel warfare sponsored by Arab and Muslim leaders for almost eight decades. Casey further cites as a form of anti-Semitism “[a]ccusing the Jews as a people, or Israel as a state, of inventing or exaggerating the Holocaust.” Yet among Middle Eastern Studies departments and many politicians, Mahmoud Abbas, the current head

of the Palestinian Authority, is considered a “moderate” — the same Abbas who wrote *The Other Side: The Secret Relationship between Nazism and Zionism*, which claims that the Zionists abetted the Nazi slaughter. (The book is based on the dissertation he wrote for his doctorate in Moscow and was republished in 1984.) Because anti-Semitism/Zionism is the warp and woof of modern Arab and Muslim political culture, the problem on American campuses cannot be addressed without acknowledging where it originates and how it spreads.

The evolution of anti-Jewish politics offers two precedents for breaking the current impasse, and neither seems quite pertinent to our circumstances. In the 1930s, right-wing anti-Semitism was on the rise in America, fueled by Nazi ideologues including local members of the German American Bund. It subsided only when America went to war against Nazi Germany, and then was quashed when America won that war. Revelations of the death camps after the German surrender (though not before) gave anti-Semitism so bad a name that even ancillary forms of anti-Jewish discrimination in American society abated and had all but disappeared by the 1960s. In the quarter-century following the Second World War, Jews were a popular liberal cause.

Then the Cold War set America firmly against the Soviet Union and communist ideology, emphatically including its anti-Zionism. The Soviet Jewry movement of the 1960s and '70s — the movement to permit Jewish practices in Russia and the right to emigrate to Israel — became one of the levers for weakening communist rule within the Soviet Union and a rallying call against the Soviet Union from outside the country. When Israel defeated the Arab Soviet client states in the wars of 1967 and 1973, it further solidified the bond between Israel and the United States, the smaller democracy proving its worth to the superpower. In both cases, U.S. opposition to anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism coincided with this country's opposition to their main sponsors — Nazism and communism. There was no independent enthusiasm for attacking anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism until America considered itself at war with the enemies of the Jews and Israel.

The United States is not at war with and has no intention of going to war with Arab states or Islam, and this wholesome reluctance has led some administrations to view Israel as an impediment to forging stronger ties with other Middle Eastern countries. When the United States launched Operation Desert Storm in 1991, for instance, it fought

on behalf of several client Arab states but did nothing to change their anti-Israel ideology. Indeed, one of the most disturbing and symptomatic American actions in this regard was President George H. W. Bush's forbidding of Israel to retaliate when Iraq waged war against it. Israelis had to huddle in gas masks and intercept missiles fired against them without taking action because America did not want to antagonize the Saudis on whose behalf it was fighting Saddam Hussein. And unlike the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor that drew America into the Second World War, the attack on America of 9/11 set off what has been called a "War on Terror" to distinguish it from conflicts with countries that may well be behind the terror.

There have been serious reasons for all of this. My aim is not to question the wisdom of American policy but to show how far the American government may go *not* to offend the anti-Israel ideology it knows exists. The preposterous disproportion between the two sides in the unilateral Arab campaign against Israel makes one better understand why most Europeans did not rush to help Jews who were under German attack in the 1940s. Anti-Semitism/Zionism has powerful adherents.

The same pattern of accommodating belligerents holds true for most citizens wary of conflict. They may expect Israel to put an end to the hostilities; some would consider Israel's disappearance a small price to pay for the universal peace expected to follow. So-called realists in foreign policy argue that American interests lie with the Arab-Muslim world because of the obvious demographic, economic, and political advantages of siding with it. This gets back to why anti-Semitism/Zionism chooses the smaller target in its war against liberal democracy rather than fighting America directly. But whether Americans acknowledge it or not, the war against the Jews is being waged against *them* and what used to be known as the American way of life.

#### A WILLFUL BLINDNESS

Fifteen years ago, not long after he was installed as 27<sup>th</sup> president of Harvard University, Lawrence Summers addressed the rise of anti-Semitism in the academic community. This was soon after MIT and Harvard faculty members had circulated a petition calling for divestment from Israel, and Summers raised concerns about their proposal. "Serious and thoughtful people are advocating and taking actions that are anti-Semitic in their effect if not their intent," he argued. Whereas anti-Semitic and anti-Israeli views

were traditionally confined to “poorly-educated right-wing populists,” they were now finding support in “progressive intellectual communities.”

Reported in the *New York Times* under the headline “Harvard President Sees Rise in Anti-Semitism on Campus,” the story gave equal prominence to those who objected to Summers’s use of his authority in this nefarious way. The progressive war against Summers that forced him from Harvard’s presidency four years later began with this charge that the call for divestment had nothing to do with anti-Semitism, and that by calling it anti-Semitic Summers was stifling free speech. Because Summers ultimately became a casualty of that broader assault against him, his warning was politically discredited so that by the time he was ousted it functioned less as a wake-up call than a cautionary example to other university administrators.

Summers was partially mistaken in his characterization of anti-Semitism, which had always been spearheaded on the right and the left by educated and often brilliant people, like those who formulated the divestment petition at the universities he attended. As Max Weinreich has shown in his book *Hitler’s Professors*, since the organization of politics against the Jews is predicated on misdirection and inversion, it often appeals to people attracted to complexities, emphatically including university elites.

The flip side of the Harvard case was Yale University’s termination of the first attempt to give anti-Semitism/Zionism the academic investigative attention it deserves. In 2006, Professor Charles Small founded the Yale Initiative for the Interdisciplinary Study of Antisemitism, the first such research center on anti-Semitism at a North American university. As its director, he ran a graduate and post-doctoral fellowship program that sponsored public lectures and conferences, the most penetrating of which was held in 2010, with over 100 participants, emphasizing contemporary and Middle Eastern rather than historical manifestations of the phenomenon. Within the year, Yale announced that the research center would be closed. Protests from Arab groups about the inclusion of lectures on the most active contemporary sources of anti-Semitism/Zionism prompted the provost to shut down the program, citing its lack of academic rigor. (Any such absence of rigor was surely due at least in part to the university’s refusal to incorporate this program in the first place.) At Yale, the administration appears to have been rewarded for sparing the faculty and the anti-Semitism/Zionism movement the embarrassment that played a part in bringing down President Summers at Harvard.

In the face of protest, what Yale created instead is an anodyne Program for the Study of Anti-Semitism, headed by a professor of French literature, which stays away from any such “controversial” issues as the role of anti-Semitism/Zionism in Arab and Muslim political culture today. As if on cue, this year’s conference will be dedicated to “Racism, Antisemitism, and the Radical Right,” focusing on fringe alt-right groups so that the near-universal problem of Arab-and-Muslim-sponsored, United Nations-featured, academically driven anti-Semitism/Zionism can be obscured. The university has gone from ignoring the most potent ideology of our time to actively blocking its study.

The Anti-Semitism Awareness Act may better protect Jewish students from physical harassment and intimidation. But as long as our actual awareness of the roots and character of anti-Semitism in contemporary America remains shallow and poorly informed, it will not lessen the clear and present danger. What we require is less a law to punish discrimination than a commitment to foster awareness of the facts. We might imagine that the academic world would foster just such a commitment. But we would know better if we understood the political character of anti-Semitism.

Politics organized against the Jews has been practiced, at one time or another, in every Western society and throughout the Middle East for more than a century. This organizing principle has been adapted to the purposes of communism, fascism, pan-Arab nationalism, and progressivism, and it has persisted as an anti-liberal force that appeals to extremists on the right and the left. Not in the name of special pleading on behalf of the Jews, its proximate target, or the liberal order, its larger enemy, but even simply because anti-Jewish politics is such an enduring and ubiquitous force, and because it has not yet been adequately studied as a political strategy, it is time for scholars of political and social life to bring to it the same urgency and rigor they have brought to virtually every other meaningful political phenomenon. That is what real awareness would require.