

Earl Raab

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ANTI-SEMITISM: MORE OR LESS?

One Jewish agency has registered a larger number of anti-semitic episodes than in the recent past. At the same time, the American people register as *less* anti-semitic: *fewer* Americans than before believe that the Jews have too much power, or that Jews are less honest than other people; or that Jews are responsible for the country's troubles.

Of course, many people will believe what they want to believe. If they want to believe that there's more anti-semitism, they will use the fact that more anti-semitic acts were registered -- and will ignore the fact that fewer Americans register as anti-semitic. If they want to believe that there is less anti-semitism, they will use the latter fact, and ignore the former.

Neither index should be ignored, but they are both flawed. Neither index adequately measures the extent or nature of the current anti-semitic danger.

With respect to reported individual anti-semitic acts, law enforcement agencies long ago discovered that central national statistics were skewed because city A was reporting crime more assiduously than city B -- and was reporting crime more assiduously one year than the last. Crime rates -- especially in those categories which didn't *have* to be reported to the police -- were as often the result of differential stimulation of crime *reporting* than of actual differences in rates of crime *commission*.

On the other hand, one would do well not to draw too much comfort from the fact that fewer Americans hold anti-semitic beliefs. That condition can be altered in a relatively short time. The largest anti-semitic movements have not been composed of people who joined the movement because they were anti-semitic. They joined for other reasons but were willing to go along with the anti-semitism. Very few Americans say they are willing to join an anti-semitic movement, but as many as a third say that if they wanted to join a political movement for some *other* reason, its anti-semitism would make "no difference" to them.

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The Coughlinite movement of the 1930s has been America's largest anti-semitic movement. But, by actual measurement, there was no significantly higher percentage of anti-semites in that movement than in the rest of the population. Most of them just "went along" with Coughlin's anti-semitism, because he seemed to be addressing their *other* concerns. That was no comfort; anti-semites or not, they were strengthening a political movement which was, among other things, virulently anti-semitic.

"Movement," of course, is the key word. Our basic and ultimate concern is with the development of an anti-semitic *movement*. There are always individual anti-semites; and there is always a percentage of emotionally disturbed people. As the population grows, and becomes more compacted, there are just more people committing senseless and violent acts, some of them anti-semitic. That is a serious problem and must be dealt with as strenuously as possible. But it does not constitute the *main* problem of *anti-semitism*. We would be too complacent if we thought that it did.

The ADL astutely pointed out in its report that nearly all the registered incidents "appear to be the work of hostile individuals acting without organizational direction." In fact, *the state of organized anti-semitic movements* should be the chief standard by which we measure the state of anti-semitism. At the moment, there is no major mass-based anti-semitic movement in America. The KKK, probably the leading candidate at the moment, is overwhelmingly rejected by Americans who still put their chips on one of the mainstream parties.

However, in the world's present condition, we cannot afford to be complacent. The struggle against anti-semitism must be intensified. And the major struggle is not against isolated anti-semitic episodes, which indeed must be more effectively handled. The major struggle is against those conditions which will allow an anti-semitic *movement* to flourish.

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