

# Anti-Semitism in the 1980s

EARL RAAB

The events of 1982, especially around the Lebanese war, suggest that in the matter of anti-Semitism Jews have something to worry about. But too often they worry about the wrong thing.

Given their close study of the Holocaust, it is astonishing how naive so many Jews are about the nature of anti-Semitism. Yet naivete is an even worse defense in history than it is in the law, and naivete is at the root of dazzling confusions about the state of anti-Semitism in this country today.

Americans Jews have been supplied evidence that anti-Semitic attitudes are decreasing while anti-Semitic incidents are increasing. In their innocence, many Jews believe that these two signals are incompatible. They are not. Jews perceive no real growth in economic or social discrimination against Jews, nor in neo-Nazi groups; but public expressions of anti-Semitism seem more common, along with warnings about growing anti-Semitism from their non-Jewish friends. Complacency derives from reliance on one set of signals; despair arises from reliance on another set. Neither mood is warranted.

Some Jews hold that the negative media treatment of Israel during the Lebanese war was a pure product of anti-Semitism. Other Jews hold that the media treatment had nothing to do with anti-Semitism. Neither belief is justified.

Jewish innocence on the subject of anti-Semitism stems from a stubborn failure to understand the extent to which anti-Semitism is a commodity — an article that under certain circumstances is instrumental and profitable as distinct from a sacred article of belief that is never traded on the market.

There are several ways to measure the state of animosity towards Jews at any given time. There is the survey measurement of attitudes towards Jews, a relatively new technique that at best may reveal a piece of truth. Then there is the measurement of behavior, by way of episodes or incidents, which at best may reveal another piece of truth. And, of course, there are commonsense impressions, which more often than not feature the worst flaws of attitude and episode measurement, being merely narrower versions of them.

There are only a couple of ways to measure the *prospects* of anti-Semitism. There are the trends presumably revealed by comparing current measurements with past

measurements. And there is the assessment of those social conditions identified by experience as high risk conditions for anti-Semitism. Here, least of all, are we in the realm of science; still, neither need we be gripped by blind ignorance.

What are we really interested in measuring? Our concern with anti-Semitism is not abstract. We are not running for Most Favorite Ethnic Group. We are interested in the disabling effects of anti-Semitism on Jewish lives. We are interested in *active* anti-Semitism, from bullying to Nazi-like oppression, and that requires a more dynamic assessment, relating one measurement to another. It is only the chemistry of anti-Semitism, not the isolation of inert elements, that can tell us what we really want to know.

The basic elements of that chemistry are no mystery. There is the "Target Factor": the raw susceptibility of the Jew to becoming a target. How negative is the general populace's attitude towards Jews? How prone are they to becoming hostile towards Jews? Some might call it passive anti-Semitism. There is the "Trigger Factor": the precipitating set of events that can turn not only passive anti-Semitism but neutrality into an active state. And there is the "Control Factor," critical for any active pathology in human society: in this case, the strength or weakness of those civilizing elements that inhibit the activation of anti-Semitism even when triggered.

What do Americans actually think about Jews? On that narrow subject there are some conclusive findings. The cumulative evidence of Gallup, Roper, NORC, Cambridge and Yankelovich, and their colleagues is overwhelming: the traditional negative attitudes towards Jews, the prejudiced stereotypes among Americans, have diminished steadily since the end of World War II.

There has been a steadily decreasing proportion of Americans who believe that Jews are more dishonest than other people, that Jews are more sinister or distasteful. There has been a long-range decline in the percentage of Americans who believe that the Jews have too much political power, even though there are mixed reports on the question of Jewish business power. In general, there are more Americans who profess favorable images of Jews, fewer who profess unfavorable images.

The usual explanation for this transformation is gen-

EARL RAAB is Executive Director of the San Francisco Jewish Community Relations Council.

erational. There were more committed anti-Semites among the younger generations in the 1930s than among the same age group in the 1950s; and more committed anti-Semites among the younger generations in the 1950s than among the same age group in the 1980s. The implication is that committed anti-Semites do not fade away, they just die. Anti-Semites are not swayed to virtue by events or good-will messages. But, since the end of World War II, each generation has had fewer of these anti-Semites.

The usual explanation for this generational change has been general education. The one factor which constantly correlates with decreasing anti-Semitism is increased levels of educational attainment. There are strikingly fewer anti-Semites among college graduates than among those who graduate only from high school. Since each generation has registered a higher level of educational attainment than the preceding generation, the decline in the numbers of anti-Semites could have been anticipated, all other things being equal.

It is significant that this raw target-susceptibility of the Jews has dropped to a low point in modern American history. Theoretically, zero levels of such prejudice would guarantee an end to anti-Semitic movements, whether other things were equal or not. Short of such zero susceptibility — an unlikely fantasy — the most reassuring state of affairs for Jews, at least, would be for them not to stand out as one of the most susceptible groups in society.

According to some surveys we seem to be near that state of affairs. As far as negative stereotypes are concerned, Jews have apparently reached a state of parity with other white ethnic groups — all of which are in a more favored position than blacks or Asians. Jews are, for example, seen to be just as honest, and just as unobjectionable as neighbors or Presidents, with no more excessive political influence than Italian-Americans.

But of course, both history and commonsense suggest otherwise. It would be hard to believe that Jews are not more likely targets of serious bigotry than Italian-Americans. The standard limitations of survey truth have been pointed out often enough: different results can be obtained with different wording of questions. The time-frame is often significant: Americans don't feel the same about Iran post-hostage as they did pre-hostage.

Survey results on anti-Semitism probably stand up to both of those standard limitations. Over the past 40 years or so, the same questions have been asked often enough by so many different interviewing agencies to validate the trends noted. By the same token, those questions have been asked in many different time-frames, before and after many different kinds of events.

But that may merely mean that the kinds of events which might reverse the trend have not yet taken place. And, in that connection, the most fundamental limitation of survey results is pertinent: they do not usually

measure the strength or emotional quality of the attitudes expressed. Nine out of ten people might state, when asked, that their attitudes are highly favorable towards both chocolate cake and their mothers, but conditions would probably more easily dislodge their conviction about the one than about the other.

The indications are that there is a small percentage of hard-core anti-Semites — that is, people for whom anti-Semitism has some active role in their belief systems. And there may be a small percentage of hard-core philo-Semites, who have some abiding commitment towards Jews as such. However, most Americans are "soft" on the subject of Jews, they don't think about it very much one way or another, though they express opinions when queried.

The survey results are convincing that the percentage of hard-core anti-Semites has continued to diminish in this country, as has the percentage of soft-core anti-Semites. It would be foolish for us to ignore the evidence on this score, even though in this case some would like to kill the messenger when he brings good news.

This evidence is an indication of where we stand today. It is also an indication that anti-Semitic attitudes are not intrinsic, inevitable, or fixed. They are subject to diminution by changing conditions.

But, by the same token, anti-Semitic ranks are subject to expansion by changing conditions. We have learned that not only the soft-core anti-Semites but even the larger neutral and indifferent population can be activated into anti-Semitic expressions or movements by other risk factors.

**I**f anti-Semitic prejudice has been diminishing, how can we explain the reported increase in anti-Semitic incidents?

Actually, the empirical evidence about anti-Semitic incidents is rather shaky, compared with the attitudinal evidence. The ADL Audit reported 974 episodes of anti-Semitic vandalism in 1981 — mainly swastika daubings and anti-Jewish graffiti — as compared with 377 in 1980, 120 in 1979, and 49 in 1978. This is clearly the case of a needed reporting system being slowly whipped into shape, rather than a reporting system which has reached accuracy. There were not even the same number of states reporting in 1980 as reported in 1981. It took the FBI which is not dependent on volunteer reporters, a number of years to pull together an adequate crime reporting system whose statistics were comparable from one year to the next.

Though hard systematic evidence that anti-Semitic episodes have been increasing is lacking, there is convincing impressionistic evidence from around the country of an increase on a couple of specific fronts.

Acts of economic discrimination against Jews must be counted as anti-Semitic behavioral incidents, because that is exactly what they are. But there is no evidence

that such behavioral anti-Semitism is on the increase. Indeed, the scattered evidence, including some recent examination of Jewish presence in the higher reaches of local banking circles, suggests that economic anti-Semitism has also been diminishing.

By the same token, there is scattered evidence that more Jews are being elected to public office than ever before in jurisdictions with small Jewish populations, another inescapable index of behavioral anti-Semitism or its lack. (See the 1982 Congressional election.)

However, it would be difficult to gainsay the strong impressionistic evidence of those who span a couple of generations that public expressions of anti-Semitism, while markedly less frequent than in the 1930s, are clearly more frequent than in the 1950s.

For almost two decades after the war against Hitler, public expressions of anti-Semitism were considered bad taste. It is significant that negative public references to Jews emerged around two different foci: a period of sharp domestic turmoil and general social decontrol; and a crisis in American-Israeli relations. The first shock came from Left-ideological forces of upheaval during the "troubles of the 1960s." There were such memorable items as anti-Semitic plays by LeRoi Jones, and anti-Semitic poetry recited on a New York radio station by a child. The silence was broken. And later, of course, in a different context, General Brown complained publicly about the excessive power wielded by American Jews on behalf of Israel. Today we hear a U.S. Senator refer publicly to a Jewish colleague as the "Senator from B'nai B'rith." And we see a California State Senator write publicly about the "hard Jewish" faces he saw in an opposition audience. Such references are heard more often than they were in the two "sanitary" decades after World War II.

On this specific phenomenon, there is a trend — or, in another idiom, a momentum. With perhaps somewhat less assurance, one could also safely guess that there is a parallel momentum with respect to the matters mainly featured in the ADL Audit: there are more swastikas scrawled and more Jewish buildings vandalized with prejudice than there were in the 1950s — although, again, fewer than in the 1930s.

Given that the proportion of Americans holding anti-Semitic attitudes has continued to shrink during this period, how can we explain the rise in level of these particular acts and expressions?

**T**he apparent contradiction is not difficult to penetrate. The clear evidence is that there are fewer committed anti-Semites in America, but that there is greater license for those who are anti-Semites, or for those who find anti-Semitism useful. The distinction is of real and practical importance. If the problem is one of shrinking control, rather than a cancerous growth of anti-Semitism per se, then a different pattern of remedies is

to be prescribed. We should at least understand the nature of our affliction.

The operative axiom is this: whether people like or dislike Jews is less important than whether people are constrained, "socially controlled," from violating the rights of Jews. Such constraints are both internal and external. The face source of external constraint is the law, which sets the mode as well as the specific prohibitions: the most important protection for American Jewry is the integrity of the constitutional law.

By that standard, the most important internal constraint has to do with an allegiance to the law and its concomitant ideals. That is undoubtedly one point at which the factor of education enters, with resultant heightened cognitive acquaintanceship with the law, the history that surrounds it, and the consequences that might attend its abandonment. The surveys are clear about the fact that the quality of this society which Americans most consciously cherish is that of individual freedom; the more educated, the more cherishing.

But, of course, there is also a relationship between educational level and status in society. People with education normally have a better position and a greater stake in society — and therefore a more unflinching allegiance to the laws and ideals of that society. Of course, if the educated lose their sense of allegiance to society, they are doubly dangerous; they often become the sophisticated ideologues of anti-Semitism. The group which has least dramatically followed the formula of more educated/less anti-Semitism has been the black population. This deviation suggests the extent to which the affective factor, the sense of stake in a society, intersects the cognitive factor with respect to the laws and ideals of the society.

Developmentally, this kind of social decontrol has to do with a loss of general civility; an increased license to flout the laws and ideals in general, without any necessary reference to anti-Semitism. But there is a direct relationship between this general breakdown of constraint and active anti-Semitism. American Jews felt that shock of recognition during the open social ruptures of the late 1960s and early 1970s. In American society, a general loss of social control is a necessary but not sufficient, condition for virulent anti-Semitism.

**A**t some stage of such a climate of decontrol, the hard-core anti-Semites will come out of the closet. And indeed, at some stage, the "utility" of anti-Semitism — and like phenomena — will come into its own, not just for the soft-core anti-Semites, but, even more importantly, for those who do not even qualify as soft-core by the usual measurements.

At the most dangerous stage, we know that those who will chiefly make or break the success of any anti-Semitic movement are those who are indifferent to anti-Semitism. When asked how they would vote in the case

of a Congressman who ran on an anti-Jewish platform more than 30 percent of Americans said frankly that it "wouldn't make any difference."

We have learned nothing in the last 50 years if we have not learned that. Not only the soft-core, but even the larger indifferent population can be triggered into active anti-Semitism. Jews have always been "targets of opportunity" for the out-of-control indifferent, whether they are juvenile vandals or politicized adults who are disaffected. Anti-Semitic movements have become mass movements only when they recruited the indifferent.

It is suggested then that the increased public expression of anti-Semitism, and certain anonymous behavioral forms of such expression — graffiti and vandalism — are mainly, in origin, a function of the loss of social control. It is anti-Semitism nonetheless, insofar as it couples with the reservoir of anti-Semitism, but it comes from one direction rather than another. And most significantly, these particular manifestations are notably connected with impassionate commodity anti-Semitism.

One model of commodity anti-Semitism can be found in a recent episode of suburban vandalism. A synagogue was broken into, damaged, and swastika-scrawled, and a group of teenagers was apprehended. They had gone on a vandalistic spree, violating a school, a church, and the synagogue. They violated the synagogue anti-Semitically, that is, with swastikas, because they knew that would hurt the most. They were not ideologues, they were out to hurt. Anti-Semitism was useful to them, and they were indifferent to the consequences.

Another model of commodity anti-Semitism has been even more disturbing to American Jews, since it segues into the matter of identified public expression of anti-Semitism. One of the elements in the commonsense, impressionistic measurement of anti-Semitism has to do with the "third-party syndrome." Many Jews are reporting that their non-Jewish acquaintances, especially those with political connections, are saying, with horror, that they have never heard so much anti-Semitism in their circles. Typically, a top Republican in one state told his Jewish friend: "I am terrified by the amount of anti-Semitism I hear. I hear it everywhere. I get several calls a week, asking why the Jews are causing so much trouble. Really, why do the Jews have to come out on everything? This might be a good time not to do so." The reference was not only to the AWACS debate, which had just taken place, but also to the highly public protest the Jewish community had recently made about anti-Semitic remarks publicly uttered by an elected Republican official. The Democrats were gathering political hay as a result. The reference was classic third-party syndrome: "philo-Semites" reporting to Jews, with great dismay, that they are hearing anti-Semitism. There is a familiar anticipatory version of third-party syndrome: the dismayed prognostication by "philo-Semites" that anti-Semitism will grow in their circles if

certain developments occur.

These third-party references, although sometimes exaggerated, are not necessarily fabricated. There are undoubtedly more non-Jew to non-Jew remarks of that kind being made, just as more of them are slipping into the public arena. And there are more people, hard- or soft-core, who feel free to make them. But insofar as so many of those reported remarks are made in a political context, triggered by political events in which the remarkers have a stake, connected to political acts of Jews, a special perspective is provided. Commodity anti-Semitism is at its flower when such third-party references — actual, exaggerated, anticipated, stimulated — are used as a form of intimidation to inhibit Jewish political action.

It is also obvious that the loss of social control associated with commodity anti-Semitism is inextricably tied to specific historical and social events.

**I**t is significant that the "sanitary decades" following World War II were broken by two different kinds of triggers: a social upheaval in American society, and a crisis in American-Israeli relations.

The first, social and economic breakdown, is one with which Jews have been long acquainted. Pre-Nazi Germany was the monstrous prototype, but every mass political movement in America which featured anti-Semitism — from the Ku Klux Klan to Father Coughlin's Social Justice movement — was built on mass dislocations related to objective conditions in society. Social decontrol was the inevitable result, feeding extremist political movements which threatened the letter and spirit of America's constitutional laws and ideals.

The disruptions of the late 1960s and early 1970s were limited to a specific portion of the population; there was no general economic breakdown. In fact, the economic well-being of the nation at large permitted a certain amount of upward mobility for the disadvantaged population, so that the danger was muted. Indeed, every extremist movement in American history has broken against subsequent economic recoveries in the nation. What lies in America's future on this score is unpredictable. American Jews are always vaguely uneasy about the possibility of some major economic and social breakdown, but no pertinent extremist movement is yet on the horizon — and American Jews are more actively concerned about another anti-Semitic trigger: a breakdown in American-Israeli relations.

Strains in American-Israeli relations have not yet triggered any measured anti-Semitic trends. There is no automatic relationship between feelings towards American Jews and feelings towards Israel. The survey literature indicates that many Americans who are prejudiced against Jews are sympathetic to Israel; and many Americans who are unprejudiced against American Jews are hostile towards Israel; and vice versa. The overall statis-

tics show some relationship between the two feelings which can be largely accounted for by the hard-core anti-Semites, who dislike Jews wherever they are. When the ADL recently analyzed the mail received by 96 U.S. Senators in connection with the AWACS sale, it found that only 7 percent of the mail supporting that sale had any anti-Semitic implications, no more than the hard-core quotient.

In 1973, when Arab nations imposed an oil embargo on America, ostensibly because of this country's support of Israel, many Jews mistakenly expected the long and frustrating gas lines to produce a spurt of anti-Jewish feeling. The American people blamed the oil companies, then their own government, then the Arabs, but very few blamed Israel, much less American Jewry. Some Jews expected 1981 to be different, partly because they believed the propaganda of the "intimidators" who tried to frighten the American Jewish community away from activity against the AWACS sale by expressing sorrowful but loud concern that such visible activity would cause anti-Semitism — the anticipatory phase of the third-party syndrome.

Jewish activity on behalf of Israel in general and against the AWACS sale in particular was highly visible; some Jews were aware that one-quarter to one-third of the American people had long believed that American Jews felt closer to Israel than to the United States. In at least one survey that figure seemed to be rising.

But, as long as Americans are themselves more sympathetic to Israel than to the Arab cause, most of them do not feel hostile towards a special Jewish attachment to Israel. And since 1967, Americans have been consistently more sympathetic towards Israel than towards the Arabs because Israel is the only Western society in the Middle East, and because they were told that Israel is a significant partner in America's venture to keep the Soviet Union from dominating the area.

In another apparent paradox, Israel was getting increasing measures of support from the American people at the same time that Americans were reacting more critically to specific actions by the Israeli government. The American people, by and large, were not allowing their passive beliefs that Israel was mistreating the Arab refugees to interfere with their active belief that support of Israel was important for American national interest. And that belief was heavily based on what they heard from Washington, D.C.

Of course, that is not an immutable belief, any more than are the levels of anti-Semitic belief immutable. In the case of the AWACS debate, after all, an overwhelming proportion of the House of Representatives voted against the sale; a majority of the American public indicated their opposition; and it became clear that much of the Senate voted on the issue of Presidential power. However, it is entirely likely that a series of hostile changes between Israel and the United States, acerbated and attended by more prolonged and ex-

PLICIT statements by American officials that Israel was standing in the way of oil, jobs and American national interest, generally could lead to a downward spiral in American public opinion.

The tragic events in Europe during 1982, and the developments during the Israeli movement into Lebanon provided some sharp clues. On one level, the renaissance of European anti-Semitism corroborated the proposition that anti-Israel sentiment can serve as a primary trigger factor for anti-Semitism. On another level, that renaissance of anti-Semitism demonstrated the importance of the control factor in deterring anti-Semitism.

In October, 1982, one Jewish agency pointed out that since Mitterand had come to power, there had been 115 terrorist acts in France, 29 of which had been directed against the Jews. The number of terrorist acts suggested a general decline in social control. In such a climate of diminishing self-restraint, the Jews are traditionally in the way of harm. Indeed, while most of the terrorism was not directed against Jews, a disproportionate amount was. And furthermore, the violence against the Jews was triggered not so much by their economic status, as in the 1930s, but by their connection to Israel.

The anti-Israel bias in significant quarters of continental Europe, connected with both a pro-Palestinian bias and an anti-American bias, clearly spilled over onto the Jews in general. It was more a case of anti-Israel sentiment turning into anti-Semitism, than of anti-Semitism turning into anti-Israel sentiment.

In short, the spilling-over of anti-Israelism into anti-Semitism has not widely taken place in the United States because Americans are still largely supportive of Israel as an ally; but the spilling-over has taken place among many Europeans intolerant of Jewish activity on behalf of Israel because of a more prevalent antipathy towards Israel.

Of course the breakdown of social control in Europe is not complete by any means. The governments condemn the violence against Jews and presumably seek out the culprits. The terrorists remain underground. As long as that condition obtains, there is a qualitative difference between the Europe of the 1930s and the Europe of the 1980s. But the anti-Israelism is above-ground, and the climate deserves some deep concern, especially if the growth of political extremism is accelerated by deteriorating economic conditions.

There is a concomitant phenomenon which affects the media everywhere, including the American media. In a seminar with foreign press correspondents in Israel in late October, there was a general denial that "bias" had played any role in the media coverage of the Lebanese war. The newspapermen generally held that the war was covered "objectively" in what seemed to be a somewhat sensational manner because that was the nature of war — although there was an admission that the intrinsically sensationalist mode of competitive televi-

sion coverage had influenced the newspapers.

But pressed further, at least one veteran European correspondent admitted that there was an additional factor. "There is no such thing as judgment-free reporting," he said. "Since the 1967 war, there has been a growth of pro-Palestinian, a decline of pro-Israel thinking, among the circles in which the European correspondents travel. Therefore it is natural for correspondents to gain points with their colleagues, and sometimes with their bosses, by reporting in ways which reflect that viewpoint." He claimed that the reporting was still "objective" because reporters did not make up or exaggerate facts — but they reflected an anti-Israel viewpoint by selecting the stories which they chose to report or emphasize.

An American correspondent in Israel, from the *Washington Post*, held that the American media had become "muckrake"-minded in general, on all fronts, especially with respect to revered institutions. Since Israel fell into that category, because of its close and familial relationship with America, Israel was especially vulnerable to that muckraking impulse. However theoretically benign that version of the "double standard" might be, it is not objectively comforting. One Israeli editor proposed that there was a special edge to the muckraking against Israel because it enabled the non-Jewish world to definitively wriggle out from under the guilt of the Holocaust. And there is reason to believe that many American correspondents, like their European counterparts, "travel in circles" which are less sympathetic in Israel than is the American public in general.

The disproportionately negative media treatment of Israel during and after the Lebanese war was disturbing in itself. The motivation was undoubtedly mixed. But the evidence suggests that this negative treatment emerged less directly from anti-Semitism than from some form of anti-Israelism, overt or subtle, including that of double-standard muckraking. However, in the European mode, this kind of media anti-Israelism could be handmaiden to a growing American anti-Semitism if American-Israeli relations were to be projected by the American government as radically more negative. The damaging effect of media "muckraking" — with respect to both Israel and the activity of the American Jewish community — would then be unchecked. And the concomitant negative treatment of the American Jewish community — by both government officials and the media — would fall squarely into the category of "commodity anti-Semitism."

It is against that background that the "foreboding syndrome" prevalent among American Jews must be seen, both in its reality base and in its aspects of innocence.

**A** 1982 regional study researched by Joseph Buckley in California illustrates the phenomenon. In this large

random sample of Jews, about 9 out of 10 agreed that "anti-Semitic acts are increasing in the United States." And about 6 out of 10 agreed that "the neo-Nazi movement in America is today a major threat to the Jews of this country."

However, there were some apparent internal contradictions. Only one-quarter of those who believed strongly that the neo-Nazis were a major threat, felt that Americans were becoming "more and more negative about Jews." And only a few agreed strongly that the anti-Semitic acts taking place in this country were being committed by organized groups. When asked why they thought the neo-Nazis were a major threat, only 1 out of 10 who thought so gave as their prime reason that the neo-Nazis or any Nazi-like group was actually becoming stronger in this country. Rather, most of them indicated that what they really meant was that they were afraid of the possibility that under certain circumstances an organized anti-Semitic movement could grow strong.

These kinds of answers don't jibe, unless you translate that question about neo-Nazis so that it asks about the potential rather than the present actuality of the danger. The tendency of contemporary American Jews to translate the actual in terms of the potential, and the concomitant tendency to interpret that potential in pessimistic terms, is of such striking prevalence that it might fairly be called a foreboding syndrome.

An old Jewish joke dramatizes the nature of the foreboding syndrome. A little old man on a train sighing deeply and moaning, "Oy, am I thirsty." After the tenth repetition, a fellow-passenger can't stand it anymore. The young woman brings him several cups of water, which he drains gratefully until he quenches his thirst, and she returns to her book. A few minutes later she hears him sigh deeply and moan, "Oy, will I probably be thirsty!" *That's* a foreboding syndrome.

"Foreboding" is often a realistic concern, not to be equated with paranoia. A person lost in an endless desert would be a fool not to be filled with foreboding about future thirst — it would be a different matter if Noah were filled with foreboding about future thirst. Hence any evaluation of this Jewish sense of foreboding depends partly on an evaluation of the degree to which that characteristically *pessimistic* assessment of the potential for future anti-Semitism is realistic.

There are two sharply different streams of Jewish thought about the nature of that anti-Semitic potential. One group's foreboding is based primarily on the expectation that if society breaks down (or if American-Israeli relations radically break down) then it is quite likely that political anti-Semitism will emerge. The other group's foreboding is based primarily on the expectation that under *any* social situation it would only take some active propaganda to rouse the innate anti-Semitism dormant in most non-Jews. The first group emphasizes *situational* anti-Semitism, commodity anti-Semitism, the trigger factor. The second group empha-

sizes the prevalence of *innate* anti-Semitism, the target factor in anti-Semitism.

These are two radically different views of the nature of anti-Semitism. The first foreboding thesis — the situational approach, anti-Semitism as a commodity is well-documented in modern history; it is foreboding well worth holding onto. The critical majority of the people who make a mass anti-Semitic movement successful are not hard-core anti-Semites for whom anti-Semitism is of prime importance. They are largely made up of the indifferent, the amoral, if you will, who don't join a movement because of its anti-Semitism — but who are willing to embrace it as part of a larger political platform. On the other hand, the foundation of the second foreboding thesis, related to the universally innate character of anti-Semitism, is not so well documented. On the contrary, the evidence is that fewer and fewer Americans have had anti-Semitism at the forefront of their consciousness. There is no reason for complacency to be found in either foreboding thesis, but as a basis for Jewish action against anti-Semitism, there are significant differences between them.

The foreboding thesis based on innate anti-Semitism engenders a "Jewish Fortress" approach: everyone is out to get us; we have to pull up the bridges over the moat, and defend ourselves against the world from the parapets. That is a frame of mind which is not only flawed in its perceptions, but self-destructive. At times, it gives the illusion of putting us on the offensive — but in fact it puts us on the defensive, and takes our chief offensive weapons away from us.

American Jewry's ability to distinguish between fact and foreboding in the matter of anti-Semitism is becoming blunted. Jews are assailed by too many apparently conflicting signals. They are deliberately manipulated by commodity anti-Semitism, even as practiced sometimes by Jewish institutions and office-seekers in pursuit of money or support. This is all happening in a time period which is volatile and confusing enough. But it is also happening against the background of an innocence about the nature of anti-Semitism which is still prevalent among the Jewish public. The innocence was epitomized by the recent statement of an Israeli religious leader who said that the Jews must continue to "dance before the wicked, vicious goy like the beautiful yid of old, while never forgetting that the goy is nothing but a vicious, mass murderer." That is a stark version of the folk belief that if you scratch a non-Jew you will find a hard-core anti-Semite.

The essence of such innocence is the belief that anti-Semitism is some kind of unitary well-structured passion which most non-Jews have imbedded in their souls. This perception is finally de-Judaizing in its oversimplification of Jewish self-pity, Jewish xenophobia, and Jewish fright. But, more to the present point, it makes

difficult any precise or useful analyses of the dangers of anti-Semitism — and therefore reduces the Jewish ability to cope.

There is no flood-tide of popular anti-Semitism in America today; if anything, there is an ebbing. There is no rise of hard discrimination against Jews; if anything, there is a decline. There is on the horizon no mass-based anti-Semitic political movement. The weight of official America has not shifted away from those values which protect the Jews: the California State Senator was stripped of his chairmanships because of his anti-Semitic remarks; police departments around the country have responded affirmatively to Jewish community requests for special personnel to handle any problems; the accommodation of employers to Jewish religious observance has been mandated by the courts and agencies; and so forth.

These are facts. They are *reversible* facts, and no cause for going to sleep, but they are facts.

It is also reasonable to suppose that *these* are facts: there is some increase in the public expression of anti-Semitism; there is some increase in anti-Semitic graffiti and vandalism; there is some increase in the public criticism of the American Jewish community, in relation to its activity on behalf of Israel; there is some increase in third-party reporting of anti-Semitic comment, especially in political circles. These latter manifestations are not related to a broadening base of anti-Semites, as much as they are related to a loosening of constraint for those who are already in the anti-Semitic ranks — and a spurt in commodity anti-Semitism around specific issues.

There are practical reasons for making the distinctions. The "intimidators," during the AWACS debate, for example, clearly used anti-Semitism as a commodity. The burden of their message was that those "anti-Semites" are out there waiting for an excuse to revert to type. As we have seen, that's not the way it is. Even those Americans who make the connection will turn against the American Jews only if those Americans turn against Israel first.

By the same token, the criticism of Israeli foreign policy, as in Lebanon, will spill over into anti-Semitism only if Americans lose their sense of Israel as an important ally. The task, then *in the fight against anti-Semitism*, is not for the Jewish community to withdraw from the fight for Israel — or to engage the criticism of Israel as though it always originates in anti-Semitism — but to redouble its efforts to support Israel and to effectively interpret Israel's importance for America. Any other understanding, based on a misdirected understanding of anti-Semitism, would be self-defeating.

At the very least, the Jewish community will better be able to manage a fight against anti-Semitism, as well as its own psyche, if it is not plied with either irrelevant complacency or irrelevant fright. It would be futile and wrong-headed to dismiss or attack the Jewish "Sense of

Foreboding" as such. It is a fact as well as a metaphor of Jewish life.

A Jewish sense of foreboding is appropriate, perhaps necessary — as long as there is maintained some distinction between fact and foreboding. An animal which finally cannot make the distinction between the rustle of the wind and the rustle of predators is in trouble. And an animal which is faced with the constant, unremitting

specter of danger finally becomes paralyzed or goes berserk.

But the events of 1982, particularly in Europe and in the media reporting of the Lebanese war, suggest that the Jewish community would do well to keep its sense of foreboding well-honed — as long as it is bedded in the unembellished facts and in a realistic understanding of the situational origins of modern anti-Semitism. ■

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## European Movements

CHARLES FISHMAN

Cordoba to Hamburg · Bordeaux to  
Strasbourg · Marseilles to Rome · Bucharest  
to Belgrade · Kalisz to Lublin · Vienna to  
Kishinev · Cracow to Lvov · Nomads,  
why so restless? Did you hear the voice  
of Midsummer lightning? All that back-  
breaking portage: Granada to Corfu · Genoa  
to Salonika, tireless! Always hurrying  
from one black patch to another: Cologne  
to Bialystok · Prague to Kiev · Lisbon to  
Amsterdam · Tallin to Polotsk: ceaseless  
in your translations! Dear malcontents,  
unsettled on dark nights under the moon  
of horses: Soncino to Posen · Chernigov  
to Frankfurt · Avignon to Tarnopol · Berdichev  
to Worms · Exiles! Black Sea transports ·  
Crimea Express · Zhitomir to Copenhagen  
Helsinki to Antwerp · Starodub to Brest  
whirling lights clustered at Satmar · in  
the galaxy of Warsaw · starstreams · time  
travelers on the dead continent · wrapped  
in languages · in the Law's endless bindings  
Why didn't you stay put in the whale's  
belly? Why didn't you pull the white sky  
of silence over your heads? Did the golden  
bells of Chelmno charm you? the meadow flowers  
of Maidanek bend their fiery cups? Did you  
rise to the black psalteries of Ravensbrück?  
Wanderers! such desire for a life of Christian  
culture! such anointings with sacred oils,  
bathings in blessed waters!