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0521773083 - Roots of Hate: Anti-Semitism in Europe before the Holocaust

William I. Brustein

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION:
ANTI-SEMITISM IN EUROPE
BEFORE THE HOLOCAUST

In the months following Nazi Germany's annexation of Austria in March 1938, Nazi persecution of Jews in Austria climbed dramatically. Jewish property was destroyed, persecution and violence against individual Jews became commonplace, and hundreds of Jews were marched off to prisons and concentration camps. These crimes against Jews drew worldwide attention. During the spring and summer of 1938, tens of thousands of Austrian Jews swelled the ranks of Jews seeking to flee pre-*Anschluss* Germany. In the early summer of 1938, Nazi Germany offered its Jews to the world. At the same time, neighboring Hungary and Yugoslavia closed their borders with Austria, while fascist Italy, which had recently permitted German and Austrian refugees to enter the country, halted Jewish immigration. Belgium, the Netherlands, and Switzerland allowed small numbers of these Jewish refugees to enter; Great Britain instituted a special new visa requirement sorting out Third Reich Jews from other refugees.¹

President Franklin D. Roosevelt, responding to pro-refugee sentiments in the United States, called an international conference on refugees. Delegates from thirty-two countries assembled in the French resort town of Evian-les-Bains between July 6 and July 14, 1938, to discuss ways to help Jewish refugees fleeing the Nazi Third Reich. Many delegates attending the Evian Conference publicly professed their sympathies for the Jewish refugees, and the conference chairman, Myron C. Taylor, a former head of U.S. Steel, invoked a plea to those assembled that governments act and act promptly to address the refugee problem.

¹ Michael Marrus, *The Unwanted: European Refugees in the Twentieth Century* (New York and Oxford, 1985), 167–69.

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However, most countries, including Australia, Great Britain, and the United States, offered excuses as to why they could not accept more refugees. The Australian delegate, explaining his country's refusal to increase its quota of refugee Jews, stated that the entry of more Jews would disturb his country's racial balance. Frederick Blair, representing Canada, proposed that the Evian delegates do nothing to alleviate the Jewish refugee crisis in order to force Nazi Germany to solve its Jewish Question internally. The official delegates from Hungary, Poland, and Romania used the opportunity to propose that they too be relieved of their Jews. Several Western delegates, seeking to justify their countries' reluctance to accept more Jews, emphasized the fear that a change in existing quotas would prompt some Eastern European governments to expel tens of thousands of their unwanted Jews. In the end, only the representatives of the Dominican Republic and later Costa Rica agreed to increase their quotas. That the world seemed to turn its back on the German and Austrian Jewish refugees, not surprisingly, provided the Nazi regime's anti-Semitic campaign a propaganda bonanza.²

The failure of the delegates at the Evian Conference to aid European Jewry was not exceptional as an example of worldwide indifference to the fate of European Jews on the eve of the Holocaust, for in the aftermath of the Evian Conference, indifference to the fate of Europe's Jews reached epidemic levels. Both Hungary and Czechoslovakia refused to give refuge to the expelled Sudetenland Jews. The American government failed to fulfill its immigration quotas for Austria and Germany; the Wagner-Rogers Child Refugee Bill, which would have admitted to the United States 20,000 Jewish refugee children from Europe, failed, after acrimonious debate, to reach the floor of Congress; and U.S. authorities refused to admit the 936 German-Jewish refugees aboard the ill-fated ship the *St. Louis*. Shifting from its earlier policy, the British government decided in the spring of 1939 to close off Palestine to Jewish immigration, while offering no alternative haven for Jewish immigration. The French government of Prime Minister Daladier declined to offer even a symbolic objection to Nazi Germany's barbaric *Kristallnacht* pogrom, and the governments of Argentina and Brazil reneged on pledges made to papal

² Arthur D. Morse, *While Six Million Died: A Chronicle of American Apathy* (New York, 1968), 214; John Weiss, *Ideology of Death: Why the Holocaust Happened in Germany* (Chicago, 1996), 331; Saul Friedlaender, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, vol. 1, *The Years of Persecution, 1933–1939* (New York, 1997), 248–50; Marrus, *Unwanted*, 170–72; A. J. Sherman, *Island Refuge: Britain and Refugees from the Third Reich 1933–1939* (London, 1973), 101.

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authorities to accept baptized Jews into their countries. Even as late as April 1943 at the Bermuda Conference, American and British representatives in possession of knowledge of Nazi atrocities against Europe's Jews, gathered by British and American intelligence services, continued to display little interest in altering existing policies on Jewish refugees. Across the globe, as the magnitude of anti-Semitic incidents grew exponentially during the 1930s, few public protests against the mistreatment of European Jewry occurred.³

On the eve of the Holocaust, apathy toward their rapidly deteriorating plight was not the only injustice experienced by millions of Europe's Jews. The introduction of official anti-Semitic policies and bans and the incidence of violence against Jewish persons and property climbed to levels unprecedented in the modern age. Violence against Jews took place not only in the German Third Reich and Eastern Europe. Marrus and Paxton⁴ have observed that demonstrations against Jews, including physical attacks, occurred in September 1938 in Paris, Dijon, Saint Etienne, Nancy, and in several locations in Alsace and Lorraine. These anti-Semitic manifestations in France led the grand rabbi of Paris to caution his co-religionists during the High Holy Days of the autumn of 1938 to refrain from gathering in large numbers outside of synagogues.⁵ By 1938, Germany and Austria did not stand alone in Europe in terms of the enactment of anti-Semitic laws. Anti-Semitic laws found a home in Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia. Finzi⁶ notes that in Poland, which contained one of Europe's largest Jewish communities, the 1930s ushered in a systematic economic boycott of many Jewish producers and a series of prohibitions excluding Polish Jews from several

³ Friedlaender, *Nazi Germany*, 265–66, 299–300; George Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism* (Madison, 1985), 231; Marrus, *Unwanted*, 285–89; Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston and New York, 1999), 51–52; Sherman, *Island*, 265; Geoffrey Field, "Anti-Semitism with the Boots Off." In H. A. Strauss, ed., *Hostages of Modernization: Studies on Modern Antisemitism 1870–1933/39 Germany–Great Britain–France*, vol. 3/1 (Berlin and New York, 1993), 325; Paul Bookbinder, "Italy in the Overall Context of the Holocaust." In I. Herzer, ed., *The Italian Refuge: Rescue of Jews During the Holocaust* (Washington, DC, 1989), 106–07; Louis Golding, *The Jewish Problem* (London and Aylesbury, 1938), 117.

⁴ Michael Marrus and Robert Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews* (Stanford, 1981), 40.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁶ Roberto Finzi, *Anti-Semitism: From Its European Roots to the Holocaust* (New York, 1999), 108.

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occupations and educational opportunities. In Romania, the formation of the Goga-Cuzist government following the December 1937 national elections produced Europe's second anti-Semitic regime.

These examples of insensitivity to the fate of persecuted European Jews and of anti-Jewish acts on the eve of the Holocaust point to an extraordinary depth and breadth of European anti-Semitism before the Holocaust and thus raise a number of important questions regarding anti-Semitism.⁷ How and why had antipathy toward European Jewry reached such extreme heights? How did the levels of anti-Semitism in the 1930s compare to those of earlier decades? There appears to be a scholarly consensus that, beginning in the 1870s, European anti-Semitism entered a dramatically new phase. If this is indeed true, what brought about the post-1870s rise in anti-Semitism? Did anti-Semitism vary in content and in intensity across societies? In other words, did ordinary Germans embrace anti-Semitism in a way that ordinary American, British, French, Italian, Polish, or Romanian citizens did not, as has been suggested in a number of relatively recent works on German anti-Semitism?⁸

We have accounts of how thousands of ordinary non-Jewish citizens and, in some cases, high ranking government officials in a few European countries under Nazi occupation or allied with Nazi Germany during World War II risked their lives to help the persecuted Jews. Here are three well-known examples: King Boris of Nazi-allied Bulgaria and his country's Orthodox Church refused to hand over to the Nazis the country's fifty thousand Jews. Officers of the fascist Italian military during World War II resisted efforts by Croatian anti-Semitic paramilitary groups and

⁷ I do acknowledge that insensitivity is not necessarily a precursor to anti-Semitic hatred.

⁸ Daniel J. Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (New York, 1996); Weiss, *Ideology*. In a provocative study of the role of ordinary Germans in the Holocaust, Goldhagen claims that German anti-Semitism was indeed qualitatively different by virtue of its eliminationist character and the extent of its embeddedness in German culture and society before 1945. Goldhagen's work suggests that pre-World War II popular anti-Semitism was both qualitatively and quantitatively different outside of Germany. Some might dismiss the value of the comparison, given that the Holocaust was perpetrated by Germans and not by other Europeans. However, the fact that Germans organized the Holocaust does not by itself demonstrate that German popular anti-Semitism was sui generis. For is it not unreasonable to argue that if a political movement like the German Nazi Party with its agenda of eliminating Europe's Jewish population had come to power in another country, a genocidal campaign against the Jews might have been undertaken?

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Vichy French forces to arrest and deport thousands of Jews. And the Danish police, unlike their counterparts elsewhere in Europe, actively participated in the successful efforts to rescue almost all of Denmark's estimated 7,200 Jews during the Nazi occupation. Do these instances of remarkable benign treatment of Jews by Bulgarians, Italians, and Danes, which occurred at a time when ordinary citizens of so many other nations displayed apathy toward the plight of European Jewry or willingly participated in the slaughter of millions of Jews, indicate societal variations in anti-Semitism?

Finally, how does anti-Semitism differ from other forms of religious, racial, and ethnic prejudice? More specifically, is Jewish hatred similar to the antipathy manifested against the Arabs in Israel, the blacks in the United States, the Chinese in Indonesia, the Gypsies or Roma throughout Europe, or the Irish in Great Britain? If not, why? These are some of the key questions I will explore in this work.

The proposed study of anti-Semitism will focus on what I call "popular anti-Semitism." By "popular anti-Semitism," I mean hostility (as expressed in sentiments, attitudes, or actions) to Jews as a collectivity rooted in the general population. Stated in another fashion, this study of anti-Semitism seeks to understand the anti-Semitic beliefs and behaviors of average citizens, rather than simply those of the elites. Jewish hatred has a long and infamous lineage in the Christian West. This study endeavors to cover a small but significant slice of this anti-Semitic heritage.

Though some attention will be given to earlier centuries, the bulk of this study concerns itself with European anti-Semitism during a span stretching from the 1870s through the 1930s. Why this period? These seventy years, culminating in the Holocaust, marked a high point in popular anti-Semitism in Europe. This period signals a reversal in Jewish-Gentile relations within Europe that had begun with the European Enlightenment of the late eighteenth century. Between 1791 and 1870, European Jews experienced rising toleration and emancipation. Throughout Europe, ghetto walls came down; obstacles to professional advancement disappeared; and Jews became members of the highest echelons of the economic, social, cultural, and political elites. This is not to suggest the complete eradication of Western anti-Semitism. Indeed, there were some notable anti-Jewish incidents momentarily souring Jewish-Gentile relations between 1791 and 1870, such as the "hep hep" riots of 1819 in western regions of Germany, the Damascus Affair in 1840, and the Mortara Affair of 1858. These anti-Semitic events,

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however, galvanized significant public outrage in Europe and led many to characterize them as unfortunate vestiges of an unenlightened medieval past. Overall, the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century witnessed a high-water mark in the movement toward Jewish civil and political equality in Europe.

Thus, the sudden emergence after 1870 of anti-Semitic social and political movements, the widespread popularity of anti-Semitic pamphlets and books, and the growth in anti-Semitic violence stunned many Jewish and Christian observers, who, on the eve of 1870, had been predicting a further blossoming of enlightenment and emancipation.⁹ Among the more prominent anti-Semitic occurrences of the 1870s were the public declarations of Gyozo Istoczy, a Liberal Party Hungarian parliamentarian, who mentioned the possibility of a “mass extermination” of the Jews in the mid-1870s; the establishment of the anti-Semitic Christian Socialist Workers Party in 1878 by Adolf Stoecker, a German Lutheran pastor and the Kaiser’s court chaplain; and the 1879 publication of Wilhelm Marr’s *The Victory of Judaism over Germanism*, in which the term “anti-Semitism” first appears. What began in the 1870s lost no steam in the 1880s and 1890s. During these two decades, anti-Semitic pogroms erupted in czarist Russia, culminating in the westward movement of millions of Eastern European Jews; a new wave of the “blood libel” accusation against Jews unfolded in Central Europe; anti-Semitic parties in Austria, France, Germany, and Hungary experienced stunning electoral successes; *La France juive*, Edouard Drumont’s scathing anti-Semitic tirade, appeared; and the infamous Dreyfus trial grabbed worldwide attention.¹⁰ The new wave of European anti-Semitism would wane briefly between 1898 and 1914. But with the successful Bolshevik

⁹ David N. Smith, “Judeophobia, Myth, and Critique.” In S. D. Breslauer, ed., *The Seductiveness of Jewish Myth: Challenge or Response* (Albany, 1997), 125–26; Herbert A. Strauss, “Introduction: Possibilities and Limits of Comparison.” In Strauss, ed., *Hostages of Modernization*, vol. 3/1 (Berlin and New York, 1993), 6.

¹⁰ Jacob Katz, *From Prejudice to Destruction: Anti-Semitism, 1700–1933* (Cambridge, MA, 1980), 9, 257–78; Richard J. Bernstein, *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question* (Cambridge, MA, 1996), 49, 62; Robert F. Byrnes, *Antisemitism in Modern France*, vol. 1 (New Brunswick, 1950), 81–82; Albert S. Lindemann, *The Jew Accused: Three Anti-Semitic Affairs (Dreyfus, Beilis, Frank) 1894–1915* (Cambridge, 1991), 92; Claire Hirshfield, “The British Left and the ‘Jewish Conspiracy’: A Case Study of Modern Antisemitism,” *Jewish Social Studies*, vol. 28, no. 2, Spring 1981, 95; Max I. Dimont, *Jews, God, and History* (New York, 1962), 313; Meyer Weinberg, *Because They Were Jews* (New York and Westport, London, 1986), 93.

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Revolution in Russia, the post–War World I collapse of empires, and the toppling of the world economy, anti-Semitism surged to unprecedented levels between 1933 and the Holocaust. The year 1939 will serve as the end point of this study, for that eventful year witnessed the outbreak of World War II and a qualitatively new phase in anti-Semitism leading to the near-annihilation of European Jewry.

In pursuit of an explanation for the rise of modern anti-Semitism and societal variations in anti-Semitism before the Holocaust, the present study endeavors to carry out a comparative and empirical examination of anti-Semitism before the Holocaust. A comparative study of popular anti-Semitism in Europe before the Holocaust could easily include any number of European countries. For compelling reasons, I have chosen to examine popular anti-Semitism in France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, and Romania. The inclusion of these five countries appeals for a number of important reasons. Each of these countries was politically autonomous during the years between 1879 and 1939, and each permitted contested elections for much of the period (Italy's last free election occurred in 1921, and Germany's last free election occurred in 1933).¹¹ By including Italy, we have the added advantage of examining a society much like Germany, in that it too accomplished its unification relatively late, and it too came under fascist rule during the interwar period.¹² Moreover, the countries included offer what many scholars assume to be a wide range of anti-Semitism: Germany and Romania are ranked as high; France is ranked as intermediate; and Italy and Great Britain are ranked as low. This sample also includes significant variations in levels of economic development (Great Britain and Germany were quite advanced, and Italy and Romania were less developed) and religion (Great Britain and Germany were substantially Protestant; France

¹¹ There are a large number of other European countries, including Austria, Hungary, Poland, and Russia, that would have been ideal candidates for a comparative study of anti-Semitism in Europe before the Holocaust. Unfortunately, these countries were not included in my study because they were not politically autonomous for the entire period of the study, did not possess a relatively open and competitive press, or reappeared after World War I as a significantly different political or national entity.

¹² Late unification has been cited as a possible contributor to acute nationalism and racism by Martin Woodroffe, "Racial Theories of History and Politics: The Example of Houston Stewart Chamberlain." In Paul Kennedy and Anthony Nicholls, eds., *Nationalist and Racialist Movements in Britain and Germany before 1914* (London, 1981), 152–53.

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and Italy were predominantly Roman Catholic; and Romania was largely Orthodox).

Did European anti-Semitism vary temporally and spatially before the Holocaust? Is there empirical proof of societal variations in pre-World War II anti-Semitism? More specifically, how are we to empirically ascertain if popular anti-Semitism was more widespread in Germany than in Italy, or if it was more intense in France between 1930 and 1934 than between 1924 and 1928? Over the course of several years, my international research team has coded and analyzed data on anti-Semitic acts and attitudes within France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, and Romania, between 1899 and 1939. In order to compare popular anti-Semitism as expressed through acts and attitudes within Europe across space and time, this study systematically examines two rich sources of data. One of the most invaluable historical sources of information on Jewish issues and Jews is the *American Jewish Year Book* (AJYB). The *American Jewish Year Book* has been published annually since 1899 and contains a section dedicated to summarizing leading news events of the previous year (a year follows the Jewish calendar – autumn to autumn) from around the world.¹³ This section usually focuses on events involving Jews. Included among the types of events covered are promotions of prominent Jews, accomplishments of Jews, special religious events, changes in laws pertaining to Jews, and accounts of violence against Jews. With rare exceptions, the news events are categorized by country, and, with a few exceptions, the events are identified by the day, month, and year in which they occurred. Because, among other things, the *American Jewish Year Book* served as a digest of anti-Semitic acts, it is an excellent source of historical information on anti-Semitic events. However, as is the case with much historical data, we must proceed with caution, given the limitations of these data. While we have no means to ascertain thoroughly the accuracy of the reported events, we should assume that the reported events are only representative of all anti-Semitic events, for the editors of the *American Jewish Year Book* probably selected to include events that they found of significance. Moreover, the reports of events from around the world were sent to the editors by local and national Jewish organizations, and the accuracy of the reports may have

¹³ While the volumes of the *American Jewish Year Book* correspond to the Jewish year (autumn to autumn), years from the Christian calendar are noted in the volumes. Thus, coding the data according to the Christian calendar was not problematic.

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some reliability problems. Nevertheless, given the absence of alternative sources of information on popular anti-Semitism, the information contained in the *American Jewish Year Book* can serve as a useful tool to examine variations in popular anti-Semitic acts across space and time.

The present study has extracted information on anti-Semitic acts from the yearbooks and sorted the acts by country, year, and type of anti-Semitic act. My typology of acts consists of thirteen categories, ranging from false accusations against Jews to murderous riots. Occasionally, I encountered an act that could realistically fit into more than one category. In such cases, I generally went with the more serious category or further examined the context of the act. For example, a serious assault within a riot could be tallied as a violent act, but since the assault was in the context of a riot, I recorded the act as a “riot resulting in physical injury to Jews.” Additionally, my typology of anti-Semitic acts does not fully capture variations among acts in terms of their magnitude. The *American Jewish Year Book*, for instance, reports the *Kristallnacht* pogrom of November 1938 in Germany as four acts. One of the four acts mentions the destruction of 600 synagogues. Rather than count this act as 600 individual acts, I decided to collapse the multiple acts into one act. Fortunately, as it pertains to my examination, *Kristallnacht* was the exception and not the rule. The completed data file on anti-Semitic acts consists of (1,295) anti-Semitic acts spanning the forty-one-year period (1899–1939). These data from the *AJYB* provide us with a preliminary estimation of the spatial and temporal variation in anti-Semitic acts in France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, and Romania for the period 1899 to 1939.¹⁴

My investigation of the *AJYB* revealed significant variations across the five countries of interest. Figure 1.1 compares the average number of anti-Semitic acts per million people for the forty-one-year period across the five countries, and it suggests that Great Britain, France, and Italy had relatively few anti-Semitic acts, recording less than .05 acts per million people. Yet the number of anti-Semitic acts in Germany was

¹⁴ To account for population variance in the five countries, I have standardized anti-Semitic acts. In most analyses, I measure anti-Semitism as the number of acts per million people in the respective countries. This standardized variable allows a more fruitful comparison over time and between countries and allows us to pool our data for multivariate analyses.

TABLE 1.1. *Types of anti-Semitic Acts in Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, and Romania, 1899–1939*

Type of Anti-Semitic Act	Country					Total
	Great Britain	France	Germany	Italy	Romania	
Riots and demonstrations (no violence or vandalism reported)	7 (10%)	10 (20%)	27 (4%)	0 (0%)	46 (11%)	90 (7%)
Vandalism or destruction of property	7 (10%)	1 (2%)	20 (3%)	0 (0%)	13 (3%)	41 (3%)
Formation of anti-Semitic groups, protest speeches, leafletting	7 (10%)	4 (8%)	54 (8%)	3 (8%)	36 (8%)	104 (8%)
Boycotts or strikes	2 (3%)	1 (2%)	21 (3%)	0 (0%)	10 (2%)	34 (3%)
Laws/acts against Jewish practices	5 (7%)	4 (8%)	35 (5%)	1 (3%)	20 (5%)	65 (5%)
Laws/acts against Jewish immigration or naturalization; expulsions, citizenship reversals, or deportations	2 (3%)	7 (14%)	56 (8%)	0 (0%)	36 (8%)	101 (8%)
Laws/acts of discrimination	8 (11%)	1 (2%)	195 (28%)	11 (28%)	75 (17%)	290 (22%)
Media attacks	19 (26%)	11 (22%)	39 (6%)	12 (31%)	6 (1%)	87 (7%)
Violent acts against people; murder	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	22 (3%)	0 (0%)	41 (10%)	64 (5%)
Raids, confiscations, or shutdowns; dissolved organizations	2 (3%)	2 (4%)	29 (4%)	2 (5%)	8 (2%)	43 (3%)
False accusations, arrest, or imprisonment	2 (3%)	3 (6%)	21 (3%)	4 (10%)	5 (1%)	35 (3%)
Riots with vandalism, destruction of property, physical assault, and/or murder	4 (6%)	1 (2%)	20 (3%)	0 (0%)	91 (21%)	116 (9%)
Laws/acts forcing Jews to leave posts or appointments or to lose businesses	8 (11%)	3 (6%)	164 (23%)	6 (15%)	44 (10%)	225 (17%)
Total	73 (100%)	49 (100%)	703 (100%)	39 (100%)	431 (100%)	1295 (100%)

Note: Column percentages in parentheses.

Source: *American Jewish Year Book*.