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

William I. Brustein

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ROOTS OF HATE

On the eve of the Holocaust, antipathy toward Europe's Jews reached epidemic proportions. Jews fleeing Nazi Germany's increasingly anti-Semitic measures encountered closed doors everywhere they turned. Why had enmity toward European Jewry reached such extreme heights? How did the levels of anti-Semitism in the 1930s compare to those of earlier decades? Did anti-Semitism vary in content and intensity across societies? For example, were Germans more anti-Semitic than their European neighbors, and, if so, why? How does anti-Semitism differ from other forms of religious, racial, and ethnic prejudice?

In pursuit of answers to these questions, William I. Brustein offers the first truly systematic comparative and empirical examination of anti-Semitism in Europe before the Holocaust. Brustein proposes that European anti-Semitism flowed from religious, racial, economic, and political roots, which became enflamed by economic distress, rising Jewish immigration, and socialist success. To support his arguments, Brustein draws upon a careful and extensive examination of the annual volumes of the *American Jewish Year Book* and more than forty years of newspaper reportage from Europe's major dailies. The findings of this informative book offer a fresh perspective on the roots of society's longest hatred.

William I. Brustein is Professor of Sociology, Political Science, and History and the director of the University Center for International Studies at the University of Pittsburgh. His previous books include *The Logic of Evil* (1996) and *The Social Origins of Political Regionalism* (1988).

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ROOTS OF HATE

ANTI-SEMITISM IN EUROPE
BEFORE THE HOLOCAUST

WILLIAM I. BRUSTEIN
University of Pittsburgh



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To the memory of and with inspiration from
David Cooperman, Herbert Goldfrank,
and George L. Mosse.

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P R E F A C E

The genesis of this work had several sources. As an American Jew and a scholar of political extremism, I could never quite fathom how people of the Jewish faith had remained the objects of such intense scorn in Western societies for close to two thousand years. It seemed equally perplexing that in many of the same societies in which the progressive thinking of the Enlightenment had found fertile soil, the level of anti-Semitism had reached epidemic proportions. Rather than receding as time passed, anti-Semitism, according to the historical record, increased during the last quarter of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century. On the eve of the Holocaust, one could make a strong case that antipathy toward Jews had reached unprecedented levels. I wanted to understand the bases of anti-Semitism.

Other factors drove my quest. My previous research endeavors had not focused specifically on the phenomenon of anti-Semitism. In my earlier research on the social origins of the Nazi Party, I had posited that Nazi supporters were no different from citizens anywhere who select a political party or candidate they believe will promote their economic interests. I suggested that anti-Semitism, while certainly present in Nazi propaganda between 1925 and 1933, could not satisfactorily explain why so many million Germans adhered to the Nazi Party. I intimated that we err if we attribute the Nazi Party's success to its professed anti-Semitism. Prior to 1933, the Nazi Party's anti-Semitism lacked originality and shared strong similarities with that of many other Weimar political parties and of numerous ultranationalistic political movements and parties throughout interwar Europe. However, nowhere in my book *The Logic of Evil: The Social Origins of the Nazi Party, 1925–1933*, did I systematically test the importance of anti-Semitism as a motivation for joining the

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Nazi Party, nor did I methodically compare German anti-Semitism to anti-Semitism elsewhere.

In the same year that my book on Nazi Party membership was published, a book by Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*, appeared. Among other things, Goldhagen implied that German anti-Semitism, by virtue of its eliminationist character, differed from antipathy to Jews found elsewhere in Western societies. But Goldhagen's account failed to compare systematically German and non-German anti-Semitism. In fact, as I was soon to discover, while much has been written on the subject of anti-Semitism, there has never been, with the notable exception of Helen Fein's superb 1979 book, *Accounting for Genocide: National Responses and Jewish Victimization during the Holocaust*, a comprehensive empirical study of societal variation in anti-Semitism in Western societies.¹

The present book represents an initial effort to examine anti-Semitism systematically and empirically across space and time. This book does not focus directly on the Holocaust; rather, it seeks to explore the roots of Jewish hatred that, in many ways, prepared the ground for the Holocaust. Among the many questions to be confronted are: how and why had antipathy toward European Jews reached such heights on the eve of the Holocaust; how did the levels of anti-Semitism on the eve of the Holocaust compare to those of earlier decades; did anti-Semitism vary in content and in intensity across societies; how does anti-Semitism differ from other forms of religious, racial, and ethnic prejudice; and, how likely is it that worldwide anti-Semitism could once again reach epidemic levels?

My argument is that anti-Semitism is a multifaceted form of prejudice. Anti-Semitism contains religious, racial, economic, and political manifestations. These manifestations, which had become embedded in Western culture generally over the course of centuries, would periodically erupt at moments of large-scale Jewish immigration, severe economic crisis, or revolutionary challenge to the existing political and social order. At times and in places where a popular consciousness marked by the four forms of anti-Semitism to be explored here converged with

¹ Fein focused on national variation in Jewish victimization rates during the Holocaust. She found that the variable strength of pre-World War II anti-Semitic movements played a significant role in explaining differing levels of Jewish victimization. Fein's study did not attempt to explain the rise of and variations among European pre-World War II anti-Semitic movements. These objectives are central to the present study.

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an increase in Jewish immigration, severe economic malaise, and/or revolutionary upheaval, anti-Semitism should have been most intense, I will argue. The countries that will constitute the cases for this study are France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, and Romania. These countries were selected for important theoretical and methodological reasons. The primary time period examined covers the years from 1879 to 1939.

The organization of the book is straightforward. In Chapter 1, I explore several of the better-known explanations of the rise of and societal variation in European anti-Semitism, along with my own theory, and I present empirical evidence supporting the contention that anti-Semitism as measured by acts and attitudes varied across time and space before the Holocaust. Chapter 2 examines the religious root of anti-Semitism, and Chapters 3 through 5 investigate its racial, economic, and political roots, respectively. In the book's concluding chapter, I present, among other things, some brief reflections on the generalizability of my findings and on the uniqueness of anti-Semitism as a form of prejudice, a comparison of anti-Semitism and hatred of Gypsies, and some conjectures about anti-Semitism's future.

Over several years, I have accumulated many debts in the writing of this book. The research would not have been possible without the efforts of a superlative group of research assistants, largely comprised of American, German, Italian, French, and Romanian students and scholars. Within this wonderful group of assistants, Ryan King, whose help was immeasurable, holds a singular place. During the past five years, my many assistants worked tirelessly examining the volumes of the *American Jewish Year Book*; reading and coding the major daily newspapers from France, Great Britain, Germany, Italy, and Romania; and analyzing the data from these various sources. In particular, I deeply appreciate the contributions of Rita Bashaw, Marit Berntson, Denis Cart-Lamy, Dan Cazanacli, Haim Culer, Katharine Dow, Nicoletta Ferrario, Ariane Fiesser, Lisa France, Michael Kirschner, Paula Kramer, Kelly A. McDermott, Tina Newcomb, Sarah Noble, Aileen Crowe Oden, Julie Paisnel, Amy Ronnkvist, Jennifer Sartorius, Lorna Sopcak, and Marion Thurmes. I owe an additional special thanks to Marit Berntson, Ryan King, and Amy Ronnkvist, who assisted me in the organization and analysis of the large data collection. I give special thanks to Alex Grigescu, Claire Piana, Nicola I. Duehlmeier, and Maria D'Anniballe for checking and correcting my French, German, Romanian, and Italian spelling, and to Janet Helfand for her helpful editorial suggestions.

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Without the invaluable assistance of J. Mark Sweeney of the Library of Congress and, especially, Melissa Eighmy of the University of Minnesota's Interlibrary Loan Department, who oversaw the ordering of the multitude of newspaper microfilm reels over a three-year period, the research for this book would have been impossible. Hilda Mork Daniels was a godsend for her unmatched skill at managing the budgets of the numerous grants that funded this research.

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I have benefited greatly from the comments of many faculty colleagues and students who attended my guest lectures at the College of William and Mary, Duke University, Emory University, the Jagellonian University, Northwestern University, Pennsylvania State University, Stanford University, the University of Helsinki, the University of Minnesota, the University of Pittsburgh, the University of Toronto, the University of Trento, the University of Washington, and the University of Wisconsin at Madison.

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