



**Blaming the Jews**  
**Do we face a new anti-Semitism, or the return**  
**of the old anti-Semitism?**

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Never Again?  
The Threat of the New Anti-Semitism  
by Abraham H. Foxman  
HarperSanFrancisco, 305 pp., \$24.95

The Return of Anti-Semitism  
by Gabriel Schoenfeld  
Encounter, 193 pp., \$25.95

Keeping track of anti-Semitism is steady work. The next instance is always lurking in the wings--and those who point it out will always seem to be exaggerating and making matters worse by playing into the hands of "real" anti-Semites. Yet the people who worry about anti-Semitism know a big thing: Anti-Semitism thrives on denial. The work of those who keep track of it

is therefore not only steady but mandatory, and both Abraham Foxman's *Never Again? The Threat of the New Anti-Semitism* and Gabriel Schoenfeld's *The Return of Anti-Semitism* are worthy endeavors.

The books could hardly help overlapping. Each offers a diagnosis of the alarming increase of anti-Semitism since the end of World War II, and each surveys the current scene. To a great extent they feature the same cast: One can't write such a book without referring to Arafat in the Middle East, Jörg Haider in Austria, Louis Farrakhan in the United States, and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion just about everywhere--but especially in Arab countries.

What is more, both books agree on a wide array of facts and assessments: that anti-Semitism was given a bad name, as it were, by Hitler and therefore went into a lull after the Nazis' defeat, for example. But it did not vanish, and all the signs point to a continuing upsurge today. That upsurge received a boost by the onset of the second round of the intifada in Israel in 2000. Today's anti-Semitism may not be identical with anti-Zionism, but it is inseparably linked to it--and, because of the situation in the Middle East, it is on the verge of becoming indistinguishable from it. This calls for alarm, especially since even the United States, historically blessed by the unparalleled weakness of anti-Semitism within its borders, today shows signs of a spreading infection of the disease.

Does all this mean that one can speak of a new anti-Semitism? On this point the authors disagree. Foxman refers to the "new anti-Semitism" in his subtitle; Schoenfeld speaks of the "return of anti-Semitism." The difference is real. Abraham Foxman is the national director of the Anti-Defamation League, for which he has worked since 1965; in the public mind he is the Anti-Defamation League. Both he and his organization tend to view anti-Semitism as fundamentally a right-wing phenomenon.

Thus "the Right" appears in the title of two of his book's chapters, and Foxman repeatedly mentions Mel Gibson and his popular new movie, while Gabriel Schoenfeld mentions Gibson only in one footnote. Thus, too, Foxman is more concerned than Schoenfeld about breaches in the wall of separation between church and state--believing, with less than compelling evidence, that any breach is bad for the Jews (and the nation) and not acknowledging the complexity of the Constitution on this point.

Still, Foxman recognizes that the newness of the new anti-Semitism is in large part due to the great upsurge of left-wing hatred of the Jews. Anti-Semitism today has learned to speak in terms of Jewish racism and Jewish colonialism. As he puts it: "In today's new mutant strain of anti-Semitism, traditional elements of the extreme right and the extreme left are working together, often in concert with immigrants of Arab descent and terrorist organizations based in the Middle East."

The term "new anti-Semitism" may have the advantage of drawing attention to current misdeeds, but it has the disadvantage of tending to sever those crimes from the past and thereby make denial easier. Thus when young thugs in France desecrate cemeteries and burn synagogues they can be reprimanded for their "misguided" acts instead of being charged with murderous hatred of Jews. Schoenfeld does not fall into this trap, although he does not at all deny that there is something new in the air. Indeed, at one point he speaks of "an unexpected twist in the helix of anti-Semitism's DNA."

Foxman's book is more immediately personal than Schoenfeld's book. That is not surprising, because Foxman is more active in the public forum. Also, he likes to talk about himself. At one point, when he writes about his childhood, he tells a most moving story. Born in Poland in 1940, he was, for his safety, put in the care of a Polish Catholic woman by his parents, a woman whose obvious decency did not always eradicate her bias against Jews. At other times he fails to be as touching, as when he shows himself as exceptionally partial to the limelight, a man whom Jerry Falwell calls "Abe" and who redeems Dolly Parton from talking thoughtlessly about the Jews. At times he is simply unfair, as when he accuses William F. Buckley Jr. of either latent anti-

Semitism or a flirtation with it, without deigning to offer any evidence whatsoever. These reservations are not meant to deny that Foxman has fought the good fight for many years; he has been dogged and fearless in holding public figures to account. But he might have written a better book if he had used a tone less brash.

Gabriel Schoenfeld's tone is perfect. He has thought deeply about the dreadful phenomenon he ponders. In spite of some similarities to Foxman's book, *The Return of Anti-Semitism* is really quite different. Foxman dwells on the public sphere; Schoenfeld specializes in the domain of theory, of thought that molds and sometimes determines practice. He deals deftly with dozens of intellectuals and their ideas. Thus one finds in his book mentions of names like Noam Chomsky, Edward Said, Norman Cohn, Karl Marx, Tony Judt, and Stanley Hoffman, all of whom fail to appear in Foxman's book.

Schoenfeld's heavy emphasis on the intellectual sphere is compelling. There may be no such thing as an entirely new hatred of Jews, but the disease today has a different visage than it did in the first half of the twentieth century: "One is less likely to find anti-Semites today in beer halls and trailer parks than on college campuses and among the opinion makers of the media elite."

Schoenfeld begins his dissection of the disease with an analysis of what he calls "the Islamic strain." That is a sensible and even obvious start, but not an inevitable one, for anti-Semitism has a long history. Christianity must bear some responsibility for spreading it, a fact acknowledged of late by the Vatican, but one finds anti-Semitism even before Christianity: when Haman in the Book of Esther plots against "a certain people," for instance, and when even as wise a Roman as Tacitus indulges it. In

a cruel historical irony, the Muslim world inherited a long and dishonorable European legacy at a time when the illness at last showed signs of abating in Europe itself.

Nobody, certainly not Schoenfeld, denies that the state of Israel, productive and free and modern, is an irritant to the Arab world, a thorn in its side. Nobody, certainly not Schoenfeld, denies that Israel's policies and deeds are not always what they ought to be. Nevertheless, hatred of Zionism and Israel are today the core and essence of anti-Semitism. Israel is judged by standards not applied to any other country in the world, and only Israel (with the possible exception of the United States) is the subject of limitless calumny.

Some, of course, say they are harsh on Israel and the Jews because they expect more of Jews and their country. That might excuse the Biblical prophets, who gave evidence of their steadfast love of the Jews. Where is the love of Israel in the authors who issue after issue castigate it in the *New York Review of Books*? Having more or less exported modern anti-Semitism to the Muslim world, Europe has been reinfected by the disease it sent abroad. (That was a sad story, brought home to me personally when I realized I no longer felt comfortable visiting Paris, one of the cities of my dreams.)

*The Return of Anti-Semitism* tells a sad story that becomes especially worrisome toward the end, when Schoenfeld forces himself and the reader to consider the possibility of "the end of the American exception." He does not mean that we have ever been completely free of anti-Semitism; he knows all about Henry Ford and Charles Lindbergh. He worries about the combination of a new virulence and respectability. We would do well, all of us, to worry with him, as we brace our-

selves against what he calls "a descent into delusion."

The only cure for delusion is understanding. One should not blame these books for their failure to offer complete understanding. Fully to understand anti-Semitism would mean fully to understand the Jews, and such understanding may well not be accessible to reason. It is surely not available to the vocabulary and methods of social science that are dear to Abraham Foxman, who has too much faith in surveys and in terms such as "stereotype." It eludes even Gabriel Schoenfeld, at least here. Neither book tells us enough about the Jews.

That may be wise, for both authors know to beware the insidious view, so chic in many circles, that where there are executions the victims are at least in part to blame. Nevertheless, one must occasionally ask what it is about the Jews that has made them such targeted victims from time immemorial. When one delves into their mysterious history, one begins to suspect that they are chosen--chosen, as Gershom Scholem once put it, by somebody for something. Many Jews have trouble believing that. Sometimes they have more trouble believing that than their enemies.

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