



Antisemitism

The Power of Myth

A word is not a crystal, transparent and unchanging; it is the skin of living thought and may vary greatly in color and content according to the circumstances and time in which it is used.

Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., 1918

Antisemitism is on the rise. A number of international organizations have documented a surge in crimes against Jews. In its 2002 report on antisemitism in Europe, the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights observes, “Hate speech—spoken, broadcast, and published—provides a motor and a backdrop to antisemitic violence.” This set of lessons explores the relationship between hate speech and violence.

Historically, Jews and other minorities have been vulnerable in times of crisis. At such times, they have often been treated as scapegoats—that is, held responsible for almost every misfortune from plagues to wars and acts of terrorism. The attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, were no exception. Despite a mountain of evidence to the contrary, rumors falsely allege that Jews who worked in the Twin Towers were warned of the attacks and over 4,000 stayed home that morning. Other false rumors claim that the attacks themselves were not the work of Islamic terrorists but of the Mossad—Israel’s intelligence agency.

These rumors, as rumors often do, try to explain an emotionally charged event by linking it to an old myth. In this case, the rumor connects a terrorist attack on the United States with the myth that Jews are engaged in an international conspiracy. In times of crisis, many people find comfort in myths that simplify a complicated world by providing a clear enemy. Yet another reason for the increase in anti-Jewish sentiment has its roots in the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. In reflecting on the relationship between antisemitism and the crisis in the Middle East, Steven Lubet, a professor of law and comparative literary studies at Northwestern University, writes:

It would be foolish to suggest that all criticism of Israel is motivated by anti-Semitism, but it would be irresponsible to believe that none of it is.

Consider the continued insistence of New Jersey poet Amiri Baraka that “4,000 Israeli workers at the Twin Towers” were told to stay home the day that the World Trade Center was attacked.

Mr. Baraka carries on the ancient tradition of blaming the Jews for all types of disasters, from plagues to poisonings, in this case repeating a canard that was first issued by a Lebanese radio station. It is flatly a lie, but it is not merely a lie. In fact, it is a malignant new myth, linking classic anti-Jewish slanders with contemporary anti-Israel politics.¹

British publisher Harold Evans offers yet another explanation for the rise in antisemitism. He traces the spread of rumors and accusations to “the aura of authenticity provided by technology, by the Internet.” Evans quotes an editor in Pakistan who when asked why people there blame the Jews replies, “It is quite possible that there was deliberate malice in printing [these stories.] I also think it has to do with the Internet. When you see something on a computer, you tend to believe it is true.”

Wilhelm Marr, a German journalist, coined the word *antisemitism* in 1879 to describe the hatred of Jews as members of a separate and dangerous “race.” The term combines older stereotypes about Judaism with the racist thinking of the 19th century. In earlier times, Jews were hated because they refused to accept the religion of the majority. Jews who converted, or so the reasoning went, were no longer outsiders. They belonged. By the late 1800s, Jews were increasingly seen as perpetual foreigners, because conversion does not alter one’s race. Race is one of the labels that has been attached to Jews even though Jews see themselves as individuals who share a religion and to some extent a culture. Most scholars today agree. They regard race as a meaningless concept in science; human beings, regardless of their so-called race, are more genetically alike than different.

What does it mean to be viewed as a perpetual foreigner beyond a nation’s “universe of obligation” — the individuals and groups toward whom it has obligations, to whom its rules apply, and for whose injuries it seeks justice? That question is central to this set of readings. The focus is on antisemitism. Yet, by substituting a few words or phrases, the readings could apply to almost any vulnerable minority. Several focus on recent events on college campuses, because in many ways colleges and universities have long been “barometers” of where a society is heading. From the Civil Rights Movement to the War in Vietnam and beyond, college campuses have been at the forefront of change.

¹ “Divesting in Israel” by Steven Lubet. *Baltimore Sun*, October 18, 2002.

1. **Defining Antisemitism:** How does one determine whether an act is antisemitic? Who makes the decision?
2. **Confronting Antisemitism:** Who is responsible for speaking out against antisemitism and other forms of racism? What are the consequences of a strong stand? What are the consequences of silence?
3. **More than a Lie:** How do myths become weapons in a war of words? What power do myths have to turn neighbor against neighbor? How does one confront a myth? Is it enough to expose it as a lie?
4. **Rumors, Lies, and the Media:** What responsibilities does the media have to expose myths, verify rumors, and challenge stereotypes? How do journalists determine which stories to tell and how those stories will be told?
5. **A “Student Movement:”** What responsibilities do students have as they examine new ideas and challenge old truths?
6. **Academic Freedom:** How important is the right to exchange ideas freely in the classroom, to explore and disseminate new knowledge, and to speak openly about the issues of the day to the life of a university? What are the responsibilities associated with that right?
7. **Education in a Democracy:** How can we engage in conversations that promote an understanding of one another’s views? How can we educate our students for democracy?



Defining Antisemitism

Reading 1

Although we see ourselves as unique individuals, we tend to see others as representatives of groups. It's a natural tendency, psychologists tell us. Although it is natural to generalize, stereotypes are offensive. A *stereotype* is a generalization about an individual based *solely* on the real or imagined characteristics of a group. Stereotyping dehumanizes individuals by denying their individuality. Frank Wu, a law professor at Howard University, believes that there is a “slippery slope” leading from stereotypes about foreign governments, races, and ethnic groups to individuals by way of the catch-all phrase “you people.” In his view, stereotyping can often lead to violence, because there are no clear stopping points on that “slippery slope.”¹

In 1913, Jews who understood the dangers of the “slippery slope” that Wu describes founded the Anti-Defamation League (ADL). In their experience, hateful words too often led to hateful acts. Yet not every crime against a Jew is an antisemitic act. How does one decide when a crime is an expression of hate for an entire people? Abraham Foxman, the national director of the Anti-Defamation League, offers one response:

Obviously, when an antisemitic expression is used in connection with an act, judgment is easy. Vandalism with a swastika or hateful anti-Jewish rhetoric are common examples. Also fairly simple is when Jewish institutions are attacked. If tombstones in a Jewish cemetery are overturned, if a synagogue is vandalized, then even without any articulation of the motive it is safer to categorize it as an anti-Jewish act.

Things get stickier when the motives are not self-evident. In our extensive work on the subjects of prejudice and hate crimes, we have always been careful to oppose the notion that simply because something bad happens to an individual who belongs to a minority that it must be because of prejudice. A Jew mugged on a street in New York is not necessarily the victim of a hate crime. Indeed, we believe the tendency to cast everything in racial, ethnic, and antisemitic

¹ *Yellow: Race in America Beyond Black and White* by Frank H. Wu. Basic Books, 2002, p. 88.

terms undermines the important efforts to combat and rally support against true manifestations of hatred.

Nor should the Jewish community expect law enforcement to rush to judgment when there is legitimate doubt about whether a crime was indeed an antisemitic hate crime. . . .

In other words, credibility can be undermined in two ways: by calling every act against a Jew antisemitism, and by denying the obvious motivation of Jew-hatred when it does exist.

Why does it matter? The answer lies in the fact that a crime against a Jew *because* he or she is a Jew — an act of antisemitism — traumatizes the entire Jewish community. When Jews across France face a rash of synagogue burnings, vandalism of Jewish institutions and personal attacks on individuals, while French leaders refuse to label these crimes what they obviously are — antisemitism — Jews face a double hit. The trauma of the incidents themselves is coupled with the unwillingness of officials to acknowledge the antisemitism and, hence, to act on the understanding that Jews are in jeopardy.

In this time of crisis for world Jewry, we have before us a classic challenge to stand up with all our strength to explore and counter the manifold old and new manifestations of antisemitism, while not succumbing to the temptation to see every action affecting Jews adversely as antisemitic.²

CONNECTIONS

How does Foxman define the word *antisemitism*? How is his definition similar to the one created by Wilhelm Marr in 1879? (See Introduction.) What differences are most striking? How do you define the term? Create a working definition of antisemitism. A working definition is one that grows and deepens as you read and reflect.

Note: In writing the word *antisemitism*, many people place a hyphen after the prefix *anti*. Facing History and many others spell the word without the hyphen. Wilhelm Marr hyphenated the word *antisemitism* because he believed that Jews belonged to the “Semitic race.” There is no such thing. The word *semitic* refers to a group of related languages, not to a people.

In a 1998 report issued by the American Psychological Association, criminologist Jack McDevitt calls hate crimes “message crimes.” “They are different from other crimes,” he argues, “in that the offender is sending a message to members of a certain group that they are unwelcome.” To what extent is McDevitt’s definition of a hate crime similar to Foxman’s definition of antisemitism? According to Foxman, what other characteristics distinguish a hate crime from other crimes? What

² “When Is a Crime Against a Jew Antisemitic,” by Abraham Foxman. *Forward*, August 10, 2002, op. ed..

would you add to the list? Record your ideas in your journal or on a sheet of paper. You may wish to add to your list or revise it as you continue reading.

State legislatures have often defined a *hate crime* as the use of force or the threat of force to willfully injure, intimidate, interfere with, oppress, or threaten an individual because of his or her actual or perceived “race,” color, religion, ethnicity, or gender. Some have also included crimes committed against individuals because of a physical or mental disability or their sexual orientation. What does the way a hate crime is defined suggest about who is included within a nation’s “universe of obligation” —the individuals and groups toward whom it has obligations, to whom rules apply, and for whose injuries it seeks justice?

In April 2002, vandals threw a cinder block through the glass doors at Hillel, the Jewish community center at the University of California at Berkeley, and spray-painted antisemitic graffiti around the building. Jessica Oleon, the president of the Jewish Students’ Union, said of the incident, “The rest of campus doesn’t always feel so safe for Jewish students, so this was really a violation of a space that is safe. It’s important to have Hillel as a home base.” Student Daniel Frankenstein told a reporter, “It’s tough to go from being so comfortable to being actively afraid of violence.” What message did the vandalism send to Jewish students at Berkeley? How did a message sent by a few vandals affect the way many Jewish students viewed themselves in relation to the university as a whole? How do your responses explain why Foxman believes it is important to identify hate crimes because “a crime against a Jew *because* he or she is a Jew — an act of antisemitism — traumatizes the entire Jewish community”? How might his remarks apply to hate crimes against individuals who belong to other vulnerable groups?

Who decides whether a crime against a Jew is an antisemitic act? Who decides whether any crime is a hate crime?

What message do the law enforcement agencies send when they respond aggressively to hate crimes? When they refuse to acknowledge antisemitism or other forms of bigotry? What does their response suggest about the way the society as a whole defines its universe of obligation?

Some people argue that attacks on individuals are a crime everywhere and that hate crime legislation is therefore unnecessary. As a result, a number of states have refused to pass hate crime laws. Even those that have such laws have sometimes resisted including crimes committed against some individuals and groups in their definition of a hate crime. For example, the federal government recognizes only crimes committed because of the victim’s “race,” color, religion, or ethnicity as hate

crimes. It does not recognize crimes committed because of a disability or sexual orientation. If hate crimes send a message, what is the message sent by crime legislation to victims, perpetrators, and bystanders? Find out more about hate crime legislation in your state. Who is protected? Who do you think should be protected?



Confronting Antisemitism

Reading 2

What responsibilities does a society have to protect everyone in the community or nation? To what extent is a crime against one group in a community a crime against the community as a whole? In the foreword to a report on antisemitism in Europe published by the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, Executive Director Michael Posner reflected on those questions:

A year ago the United Nations convened the third World Conference on Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance in Durban, South Africa. The conference was intended to highlight particularly serious patterns of racism and racial discrimination around the world and to shape appropriate global responses. The meeting succeeded in raising public attention with respect to some particularly egregious situations—not the least the plight of 250 million victims of caste discrimination (among them the Dalits of India—the so-called “broken people,” or “untouchables.”)

Further, the conference provided a long overdue acknowledgment of the criminal nature of slavery (“that slavery and the slave trade are a crime against humanity and should always have been”) and recommendations for the repair of its lasting consequences for people of African descent around the globe.

The conference also made clear that racism and racial discrimination need to be placed more squarely on the international human rights agenda. But what was positive in the conference process was seriously undermined when the World Conference itself became the setting for a series of antisemitic attacks. Directed primarily against representatives of Jewish groups, these attacks were fueled by the heated debates at the meeting concerning Israeli practices in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. But the racist anti-Jewish animus displayed represented considerably more than criticism of Israeli policies and practices.

Most of the offensive behavior occurred during meetings of the nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and individual participants in a forum that paralleled the intergovernmental conference. Throughout the five-day NGO forum, antisemitic cartoons and materials were distributed widely and on display, tolerated by the forum’s nongovernmental

organizers. Representatives from Jewish organizations were denied access to some meetings—either physically excluded or shouted down and attacked when they were present and tried to speak. Efforts to put antisemitism on the nongovernmental agenda were roundly defeated by an assembly of representatives and individual participants in procedures that were neither democratic nor principled.

Rather than serving as a forum for correcting racial and religious intolerance and hate, the public meetings and exhibition halls of the Durban conference became a place where pernicious racism was practiced and tolerated. Important recommendations adopted by the conference despite this environment, with a real potential to advance the fight against antisemitism—and other forms of racism—have as a consequence received inadequate attention. . . .

The outbursts at Durban reflect a growing trend toward antisemitic expression and violence in many parts of the world. . . . There is an alarming rise in antisemitic violence in Europe: but it is on the rise in other parts of the world as well. Unfortunately, with the notable exception of Jewish organizations and a number of other human rights and antiracist groups and institutions, the world community—governments, intergovernmental organizations, and nongovernmental organizations alike—has not responded adequately to this growing problem. Antisemitism is racism. Antisemitic acts need to be confronted more forcefully and treated as serious violations of international human rights. . . .

We define antisemitism as hatred or hostility toward or discrimination against Jews as a religious, ethnic, or racial group. Governments and intergovernmental organizations need to routinely incorporate facts about antisemitic assaults, arson, vandalism, desecration of cemeteries, and the proliferation of antisemitic materials on the Internet into a wide range of existing human rights reporting mechanisms. Though some Jewish organizations, like the Anti-Defamation League and the American Jewish Committee, are doing excellent reporting on these issues, their involvement does not relieve governments, the United Nations and its regional organizations, or private human rights groups of their obligations to address antisemitism as an integral part of their work.

. . . Too often European leaders have downplayed antisemitic acts as inevitable side effects of the current crisis in the Middle East. We reject this reasoning as an abdication of responsibility. Criticism of Israeli policies is not inherently antisemitic. But when such criticisms and related actions take the form of broadside attacks against “Jews” or the “Jewish State,” they become racist.¹

¹ “Foreword” by Michael Posner. *Fire and Broken Glass: The Rise of Antisemitism in Europe*. Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, 2002, pp. ii-iii. The full report is available at www.lchr.org.

CONNECTIONS

Michael Posner argues that “governments, the United Nations and its regional organizations, and private human rights groups” have an obligation to speak out against antisemitism. In the early 1900s, Emile Durkheim, a French sociologist, took a similar position. He maintained that no society can survive unless its members are willing to make sacrifices for one another and their community. He argued that altruism is not a “sort of agreeable ornament to social life” but the basis of society. What are the two suggesting about the obligations we as individuals and as members of groups have to one another? What do they suggest are the consequences of our silence?

What message do national leaders send when they respond aggressively to antisemitism and other forms of racism? What effect do you think a strong response would have on the victims? The perpetrators? Bystanders? What message do leaders send when they fail to acknowledge antisemitism or other forms of bigotry? What does a government’s response to acts of racism reveal about the way the nation as a whole defines its universe of obligation?

Over 70 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from mainly Central and Eastern Europe protested “the blatantly intolerant anti-Semitic spirit” at the World Conference Against Racism in Durban. Among those groups was the European Roma Rights Center, which is based in Budapest, Hungary. Although the group was pleased that the conference drew attention to discrimination against the “Gypsies,” who call themselves the Roma, the organization was disturbed by the treatment of Jews. Director Veronika Leila Szente Goldston said in an interview, “Although it is correct that our activities focus on Roma, we are also a human rights organization. As such we can not stand at the sideline when we see another vulnerable group suffering under what can only be described as discrimination and racism.”² How do she and her organization define their “universe of obligation”?

In 1933, Martin Niemoller, a minister in Germany, supported the Nazi party. By 1938, he was in a concentration camp. After the war, he is believed to have said:

In Germany, the Nazis came for the Communists, and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t a Communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t a Jew. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t a trade unionist. Then

² “NGO’s Protest Anti-Semitism at World Conference” by Stefan J. Bos. ASSIST News Service, September 6, 2001. www.assistnews.net.

they came for the Catholics, and I didn't speak up because I was a Protestant. Then they came for me, and by that time there was no one left to speak for me.

How does Niemoller's statement explain why the Roma spoke out? What is Niemoller suggesting about the role of the bystander in a community? About the importance of the way a community defines its universe of obligation? Would Posner agree? See also "The Hangman," which is reprinted on pages 204-206 of *Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior*. It is also available on video. For information on these and other resources, go to www.facinghistory.org.

How does Posner define antisemitism? How does he distinguish between "criticism of Israeli policies" and antisemitic acts? What does his definition add to your working definition?



More than a Lie

Reading 3

The Introduction described some slanders as not merely lies but “malignant new myths” that link “classic anti-Jewish slanders with contemporary anti-Israel politics.” How do such myths become weapons in a war of words? What power do words have to turn neighbor against neighbor? Nowhere have these questions been more heatedly debated than on college campuses, places where young people traditionally encounter new ideas and are encouraged to challenge old truths.

In the spring of 2002, college campuses in northern California were at the center of demonstrations and counter-demonstrations over the crisis in the Middle East. Feelings ran particularly high at schools like San Francisco State and the University of California at Berkeley. Both schools have a long history of social activism and many students with ties to the Middle East.

In April, a flier caused an uproar at San Francisco State. After seeing it, Robert A. Corrigan, the president of the university, demanded that the flier be removed from campus. In a message to students, faculty, and staff on April 12, Corrigan explained why:

Earlier this week, major campus rallies dealing with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict drew audiences as large as 1000 to Malcolm X Plaza. We had on and off-campus speakers, strong and often hostile words, and a march. In marked contrast to events on other campuses, these were non-violent—a tribute to many people of differing views who united to make sure this was so. There was, however, one absolutely unacceptable action. Some of you have heard of it, and I am writing to let you know what happened and how we have responded. A flier put out by several student groups promoting one of the rallies contained an ugly, antisemitic section. I do not want to give its words or images further visibility by describing them in detail; suffice it to say that they referred to the ritual slaughter of babies. I have written individual letters to each of the groups and University Dean of Human Relations Ken Monteiro is meeting with them as well. We are repeating a familiar message: Hate speech is not free speech. Antisemitism is as ugly and unallowable as racism or scapegoating of Muslims, Arabs, or any other group. None are

protected unless all are protected. We remain wholly committed to maintaining this campus as a place where all feel safe and supported.

In reporting on the incident in *The New Republic*, journalist Karen Alexander writes:

The head of the Muslim Students' Association at SFSU, in a qualified apology to the university president, placed blame for the April "blood libel" flier on non-students despite the fact that the poster was advertising an event sponsored by his group. "Please understand that the flier was actually designed by a non-student community member," one student leader wrote. "We in no way intended nor desired to have this obviously offensive and injurious phrase on our flier." But Jewish students complain that the apology was never sent to any of the Jewish groups on campus. And when SFSU President Robert A. Corrigan condemned what he called "[a] small but terribly destructive number of pro-Palestinian demonstrators, many of whom were not SFSU students" for "abandon[ing] themselves to intimidating behavior and statements too hate-filled to repeat," pro-Palestinian activists from SFSU and [the University of California at Berkeley] held a joint press conference to denounce Corrigan for "capitalizing on the atmosphere of fear and fostering intolerance against Arabs and Muslims on campus."¹

A libel is a slander—an image or statement that maliciously damages the reputation of an individual or a group. "The blood libel" is a lie about Jewish ritual practice that has led to the murder of countless Jews over the centuries.

Some scholars trace the story to Norwich, England in 1144. That year, Christians there claimed that the Jews had kidnapped a Christian child, tied him to a cross, and then crucified him. The charge was false. There was no evidence that anyone had been murdered, let alone murdered for religious purposes. Although the accusation was false, its long-term consequences were devastating. Throughout the 1100s, similar accusations were made against Jews not only in England but also in France. By the 1200s, the libel had spread to Spain and Germany. In almost every instance, the accusations resulted in the torture and death of Jews.

In the town of Fulda, the site of a famous German monastery, the lie took a new turn in 1235. On Christmas Day, a miller and his wife returned from church to find their mill burnt to the ground and the charred bodies of their five sons in the ruins. The Jews of Fulda were immediately accused of the crime. According to various chroniclers, they not only murdered the boys but also drew off their

¹ "San Francisco Dispatch: West Bank" by Karen Alexander. *The New Republic Online*, posted June 14, 2002.

blood and placed it into waxed bags. The chroniclers offered no proof in support of their accusation. Although most did not even suggest a motive for such a horrendous crime, a few claimed that the Jews needed the blood for medicinal or religious purposes.

The chroniclers did describe how the townspeople placed the bodies in a cart and carried them to the emperor, Frederick II, as evidence of what the Jews had done. At a time when few people traveled more than two or three miles from home in a lifetime, Christians from Fulda made a 150-mile journey to the emperor's castle. At every stop along the way, they told their story. Medieval historian Gavin I. Langmuir describes what happened next:

[Because] rumors were flying around Germany, [Frederick] summoned the magnates of the empire to discuss the charge. Since they expressed diverse opinions, he then sent letters to the kings of Europe, asking them to send converts from Judaism to Christianity to determine the truth. He did all this very quickly, for on 24 February 1236 Henry III of England wrote back to Frederick, remarking that he had never heard of such a crime before.

When the converts Frederick had requested assembled in Germany in the spring of 1236, they declared that both the Bible and the Talmud made clear that Jews were not greedy for human blood, but rather considered any blood to be polluting, and human blood even more so. Nor, as they commented acutely, would Jews endanger themselves by such conduct. Frederick then proclaimed the accusation false. In July of 1236 at Augsburg, Frederick issued the famous imperial bull [an edict or order] that extended to all Jews of Germany the privileges granted by Frederick I to the Jews of Worms, and which categorized the Jews of Germany as serfs of the imperial chamber. At the end of the privilege, he reported the results of his investigation, absolved the Jews of Fulda and Germany of the charge against them, and forbade any cleric or laymen to make such accusations against Jews in the future.²

Despite the emperor's order, the accusations continued. In March of 1247, two Franciscans accused the Jews of Valréas near the French border of crucifying a child and using the youngster's blood for ritual purposes. Several Jews in the town were tortured and many others were killed. The survivors appealed to the pope for help and he responded. Langmuir writes:

On 28 May 1247, Innocent IV condemned the persecution in strong language. Then on 5 July, 1247, he responded to the pleas of the Jews in Germany who were being attacked in various localities because they were alleged to share the heart of a murdered child while solemnizing Passover. Innocent declared the accusation false, and four days later, on 9 July, he reissued the

² *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism* by Galvin I. Langmuir. University of California Press, 1990, pp. 264-265.

general papal bull of protection for Jews with a new addition. Noting that Jews had been killed at Fulda and in several other places because they were accused of using human blood in their religious rites, he expressed his disbelief and strictly forbade such accusations in the future.³

Despite the pope's order, the accusations and the punishment of Jews continued well into the 20th century and beyond. Why? Langmuir notes that the first blood libel occurred at a time of great political and social unrest. It was also a time when the pope and other religious leaders were encouraging monks and abbots to build support for a new crusade against the Muslims and other "non-believers." In their zeal, some told horrifying stories about the religious practices of heretics or unbelievers, including Muslims and Jews.

As a result of such stories, "the Jew" became "a symbol of depravity and sub-humanity." In many European countries, Jews were now required to live in a ghetto—a section of a city or town that was enclosed by high walls and guarded by Christian gatekeepers. As Langmuir notes, that isolation "made it all the easier for people outside to perceive them, not as individual human beings, but as walking symbols of those social and personal threats that people could not confront in themselves but could attack directly when projected toward Jews."⁴

How did a lie that originated in Germany in the 13th century reach a California college campus in the 21st century? The answer can be found on the Internet. In June of 2002, San Francisco State closed the website of the General Union of Palestinian Students (GUPS) because it was linked to sites that promoted antisemitism. Among those sites was "the Muslim directory"—which contains articles referring to the Holocaust as "the lie of the century" and claims of a Jewish ritual murder in Chicago in 1955. According to reporter Joe Eskenazi, the GUPS site was also "linked to the Hamas Web page, the Holy Land Foundation – a "charitable" organization whose assets were frozen by the United States for allegedly operating as a terrorist front— and an online copy of the anti-Semitic hoax "The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion."⁵

CONNECTIONS

³ *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism* by Galvin I. Langmuir. University of California Press, 1990, p. 265

⁴ *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism* by Galvin I. Langmuir. University of California Press, 1990, p. 309

⁵ * "SFSU Yanks Pro-Palestinian Web Site Denying the Holocaust" by Joe Eskenazi. *Jewish Bulletin of Northern California*, June 21, 2002.

What limits did Corrigan place on free speech at San Francisco State? Where is the line drawn at your school? Where do you draw the line? How do you distinguish between free speech and hate speech?

What does Corrigan mean when he tells students, faculty, and staff, “None are protected unless all are protected”? How is he defining the university’s “universe of obligation”? What is he suggesting about the impact of hate speech on the university as whole? On society as a whole? What is the role of a leader in creating a community where everyone feels safe?

A leader of the Muslim Students’ Association at San Francisco State claimed his group was unaware that the flier slandered Jews. He placed the blame on a “non-student community member” who designed the flier. What responsibilities do groups have for words issued in their name, including words that appear on posters and fliers? Is it enough to say, “We didn’t know”?

Why do you think the pro-Palestinian groups that distributed the flier apologized only to the president of San Francisco State? Should they have apologized to Jewish organizations on campus? Israelis? All Jews? How important are such apologies?

What distinguishes a libel from other lies? What does this reading suggest about the way a lie becomes a “malignant myth”?

In her novel, *A Boy of Old Prague*, Sulamith Ish-Kishor imagines the effects of the separation of Jews from Christians on a young Christian boy named Tomas in the 1500s. (Multiple copies of the book are available from the Facing History Resource Center.) Tomas grows up accepting without question all that he has heard about the Jews until the day his master sends the frightened boy to work for a Jew. Convinced that he will be killed so that the Jews can drink his blood, he gradually discovers that Jews are not demons but people much like he is. How does Tomas’s story explain why the words of leaders like Frederick II and Innocent IV did not have greater impact? What does the story suggest about the power of myth? How does one counter a myth? Is it enough to expose it as a lie?

During the Middle Ages, rumors spread from person to person. Inexpensive books, magazines, and newspapers speeded up the process in the late 1800s. In the 20th century, radio and television accelerated the rate at which rumors traveled even more. How has the Internet affected the way rumors spread in the 21st century from person to person, community to community? In your experience, what is the best strategy for separating fact from fiction on the Internet or anywhere else

that rumors fly? Share your ideas with your classmates and as a group develop a list of strategies that you and others can use to make useful distinctions.

The “blood libel” is not the only slander with a long and murderous history. In the 20th century, the Russian secret police concocted their own myth about the Jews— *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. They offered the document to the world in 1905 as “proof” that “the Jews” were plotting to take over the world. In doing so, the secret police hoped to strengthen the position of tsar Nicholas II by exposing his opponents as part of a massive conspiracy. The police took the story from a novel written by Hermann Goedsche, a German antisemite. He, in turn, plagiarized the work of Maurice Joly, a French writer who, in 1864, wrote a political tract accusing the followers of Napoleon III of conspiring to take over the world. Goedsche's contribution was to replace French plotters with Jewish ones.

The document was exposed as a fake as early as 1921. Yet throughout the 20th century, leaders used the *Protocols* for political advantage. For example, Adolf Hitler cited the *Protocols* as “proof” that Jews were dangerous. In recent years, the book has been translated into Arabic where it has found a new audience. In 2002, Dream TV, one of Egypt’s two privately-owned stations, produced a 41-part TV series that traces the history of the Middle East from 1855 to 1917 by incorporating ideas from *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Why would a TV station in the 21st century use a known forgery as the basis for a history of the region? One of the writers told Al Jazeera television that whether or not the document is authentic is not the issue: “Zionism exists and it has controlled the world since the dawn of history.” He insisted that many of the book’s predictions have been borne out and that it would be “stupid” not to consider the possibility that the book is true, even if the chance was “one in a million.”

According to Samir Raafat, a writer in Cairo, “Once it goes on television it enters everyone's living room, and that's where the danger is. You are spoon-feeding them more hate propaganda. This is not conducive to tolerance of the other or knowing the other. There's a price going to be paid.” What is that price? What does the history of the *Protocols* suggest about the way leaders use myth to enhance their own power by turning neighbor against neighbor?



Rumors, Lies, and the Media

Reading 4

When Adolf Hitler came to power in the 1930s, he used “the blood libel” and other myths to justify the Holocaust. Julius Streicher, a staunch member of the Nazi party and the publisher of the magazine *Der Stürmer*, gave life to those charges. In article after article, he printed lurid tales of ritual murders and claimed that “the Jews” were responsible. After the Holocaust, an international tribunal put Streicher on trial for turning neighbor against neighbor. Unlike other Nazi defendants, he was not a government official nor did he set government policy or carry out government orders. His only weapons were words. Yet he was found guilty. The court held him responsible for “inciting of the population to abuse, maltreat, and slay their fellow citizens.” The judges warned that stirring up “passion, hate, violence, and destruction among the people themselves aims at breaking the moral backbone even of those the invader chooses to spare.”

Despite the warning, the same lies that Streicher published in the 1930s and 1940s are being circulated today. “In the thirties, [Secretary of State] Cordell Hull complained of print and radio that a lie went half way round the world before truth had time to put its trousers on,” observes British publisher Harold Evans. “Nowadays it has been to Mars and back before anyone is half awake.”

The continued spread of old myths, including “the blood libel,” raises questions about the responsibilities of journalists and others in the media to their audiences. How do reporters and editors choose which stories to tell? How do they decide how those stories will be told? What obligation do they have to verify rumors, debunk lies, and challenge stereotypes?

On October 28, 2000, *Al-Ahram*, a popular Egyptian newspaper, published an article titled “A Jewish Matza Made from Arab Blood.” The article made the outrageous claim that Jews in Israel were killing Arab children so that their blood could be used to make unleavened bread for Passover. In the spring of 2002, a newspaper in Saudi Arabia devoted two issues to similar claims—this time that Jews

murder Christian and Muslim children so that they can use their blood in preparing for the Jewish holidays of Purim and Passover.

In the summer of 2002, the French charged the editor of the Egyptian newspaper and the newspaper itself with distributing materials that promote hatred and antisemitic violence—a serious crime in France. An Associated Press report noted:

Al-Ahram, one of Egypt's main dailies, said its government-appointed editor-in-chief, Ibrahim Nafie, received the French summons earlier this week over an article the paper published nearly two years ago. The article repeated centuries-old anti-Semitic myths that Jews use Christian blood in their rites.

The Egyptian press, much of it controlled by or close to the government, often has been accused of stepping over the line from criticism of Israeli policies to attacks on Jews and Judaism.

Nafie devoted almost an entire page of *Al-Ahram's* daily Arabic edition and a shorter column in his weekly English edition to his defense yesterday.

Marc Levy, a lawyer for the Paris-based International League Against Racism and Anti-Semitism, said the group had considered filing a complaint when the article was found on *Al-Ahram's* website in 2000. He said the article was later removed from the Web site, but that French investigators pursued the case after finding that 1,100 copies of the newspaper containing the article had been distributed in France.

French law forbids the “incitement of hatred and anti-Semitic violence.”

Nafie said the Oct. 28, 2000, article was based on 19th-century legal and historical records of reports a rabbi in Syria killed a priest and used his blood for a holiday pie. The article Nafie wrote linked the tale to criticism of present-day Israeli policies toward Palestinians.

Nafie described the article in detail in his Arabic commentary but did not refer to it in the English edition, which is aimed mainly at foreigners.

The court case “can be considered a form of ideological terrorism and a way to cripple freedom of the press in Egypt and the Arab world,” Nafie wrote.

Levy said the article was “shocking” because it implied that Israel's army today was carrying out ritual murders of Palestinians.

“It is offensive to truth and peace,” Levy said.¹

¹ “French Court, Egyptian Spar over Anti-Semitic Article,” by the Associated Press. *The Boston Globe*, August 2, 2002., p. A25.

Although the Associated Press article describes the blood libel as a “centuries-old anti-Semitic myth,” it relates without comments or explanations Nafie’s claim that his article is “based on 19th-century legal and historical records of reports a rabbi in Syria killed a priest and used his blood for a holiday pie.” Many other news outlets take a similar approach. In an editorial, Judith Apter Klinghoffer, a professor of international relations at Rutgers University, argues that it might have been more enlightening if reporters had provided the following historical context:

The weird charge that Jews (who may not even eat rare meat) murder non-Jewish children to obtain blood for the making of matzot for Passover . . . reached the Islamic world in 1840. That year, the Capuchin order of monks charged that Jews had kidnapped and murdered two men to use their blood in Passover matzoh. Under torture, two “witnesses” named several prominent Damascus Jews as the killers. The accused were arrested, tortured and sentenced to death. Local officials then seized 63 Jewish children to compel others to reveal where the blood was hidden.

In *Islam and Dhimmitude: Where Civilizations Collide*, Bat Ye’or, the leading scholar of Muslim relations with Dhimmis (Jews and Christians), quotes a letter sent by Secretary of State John Forsyth to U.S. Consul John Gliddon in Alexandria on August 14, 1840:

Sir: - In common with all civilized nations, the people of the United States have learned with horror, the atrocious crimes imputed to the Jews of Damascus, the cruelties of which [the Jews] have been the victims. The President [Martin Van Buren] fully participates in the public feeling, and he cannot refrain from expressing equal surprise and pain, that in this advanced age, such unnatural practices should be ascribed to any portion of the religious world, and such barbarous measures be resorted to, in order to compel the confession of imputed guilt; the offenses of which these unfortunate people are charged, resembles too much those which, in less enlightened times, were made the pretexts of fanatical prosecution or mercenary extortion, to permit a doubt that they are equally unfounded. . . .

The Damascus affair, Bat Ye’or explains, exploded during negotiations conducted by the Quadruple Alliance (England, Prussia, Russia and Austria) to evict France’s man, Muhammad Ali of Egypt, from Syria. By November, the Egyptian army had left Syria and the Sultan ordered the liberation of the Jewish prisoners. The Ottoman Sultan also issued a declaration that the blood libel had “not the least foundation in truth” and that hence Jews “shall possess the same advantages and enjoy the same privileges” as his other subjects, especially the free exercise of their religion. Blood libels were hurled in other places throughout the decade, including in Jerusalem in May 1850.

In 1983, in the wake of the Lebanon war, Syrian Defense Minister Field Marshal Mustafa Tlas revived this most vicious anti-Semitic canard in a book entitled *The Matza of Zion*. Tlas told *Der Spiegel* [a German magazine] that the accusation was valid and that his book is “an historical

study ... based on documents from France, Vienna and the American University in Beirut.” The American ambassador in Damascus tried to meet with Tlas to protest the publication of the book, but was rebuffed. During a three-day congress to combat “religious intolerance,” held in Geneva in 1984, the Saudi Arabian delegate regaled the audience with a diatribe filled with references to the 1840 Damascus blood libel.²

Why don't magazines like *Der Spiegel* or news services like the Associated Press place inflammatory charges in an historical context? Why don't reporters challenge sources like the ones Nafie or Tlas use? Such questions trouble British publisher Harold Evans. In a speech, he explained how he has tried to track down the sources of the rumor that 4,000 Jews stayed home from their jobs at the World Trade Center on the morning of September 11, 2001 and what he learned from his investigation. After tracing the rumor to a website called InformationTimes.com, “an independent news and information service” in Washington, he asked the editor in chief, Syed Adeeb, for proof that the rumor was true and was told the source was Al Manar, a TV station in Lebanon. When Evans asked if Adeeb had “any qualms about relying on Al Manar because it was a mouthpiece for the terrorist group Hezbollah, which exists ‘to stage an effective psychological warfare with the Zionist enemy,’ Adeeb's reply was: ‘Well, it is a very popular station.’” When Evans noted that there were Jews who died in the towers, Adeeb conceded that one or two might have died, but he found it sinister that nobody could tell him just how many.

In his book *Longitudes and Attitudes: Exploring the World After September 11*, journalist Thomas L. Friedman relates a story told to him by a Pakistani friend about that same rumor. Friedman writes that his friend's children told him that they had heard from their classmates at their private school in Islamabad, Pakistan, that 4,000 Jews were supposedly warned not to go to work at the World Trade Center on September 11. Friedman continues:

My Pakistani friend, a thoughtful and decent man, told me he sat his kids down and explained to them why this could not possibly have been true. Who would have a master list of all the employees from hundreds of different companies located in the World Trade Center? And how would you identify who was Jewish on such short notice and then get all their home phone numbers and call them all on the night before September 11 and not have one of them call the police or wonder that something suspicious was going on? And how could you warn four

² “Blood Libel” by Judith Apter Klinghoffer. History News Network. April 8, 2002. <http://hnn.us/articles/664.html>

thousand people not to go to work and have not one of them, not one, be identified afterward by name? It didn't make any sense.

My Pakistani friend told me his kids listened and seemed to understand and went back to school with that message. A week later, though, he got word from the school that the views of his children were out of step with those of the rest of their classmates and that he needed to tell them to stop challenging the story that four thousand Jews were warned not to go to work; otherwise his kids would be ostracized.³

CONNECTIONS

Julius Streicher was found guilty of turning neighbor against neighbor. What message did the judges hope his conviction would send to others eager to stir up hatred in similar ways?

Nafie views the charges against his newspaper as “a form of ideological terrorism and a way to cripple freedom of the press in Egypt and the Arab world.” What is “ideological terrorism”? By pressing charges, are the French violating Nafie's right to express his views in public? Does freedom of the press include the right of newspapers and other media to spread lies? Does it include the right to incite hatred?

After World War II, France passed a law banning the “incitement of hatred and anti-Semitic violence.” In the United States, the First Amendment to the Constitution protects freedom of speech and freedom of the press. Does that mean that individuals in the United States have the right to incite hatred? To spread falsehoods? Find out how U.S. courts have set limits on free speech.

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) reported on the suit filed against the editor of *Al-Ahram* in a French court in a story dated August 1, 2002 (emphasis added):

[The] article cited an incident which **occurred** in 1840 and was first reported by the French orientalist Charles Laurand in his book “The Murder of Father Toma and His Servant Ibrahim Amara”... He cites two Greek **witnesses** who said the French priest was kidnapped by Jews, killed and had his bones ground and his blood brewed to be used in cooking a matzo, the Jewish unleavened bread traditionally eaten during Passover.

After complaints from readers, the BBC revised the article to read as follows (emphasis added):

[The] article cited an **allegation** by a 19th century French author, Charles Laurand, that a French priest and his servant had been killed by Jews in Damascus. He **claimed** that their bones and

³ *Longitudes and Attitudes: Exploring the World After September 11* by Thomas L. Friedman. Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2002, pp. 318-319.

blood had been used to cook a matzo, the Jewish unleavened bread traditionally eaten during Passover. ⁴

How do the changes alter the meaning of the paragraph? How do they affect its accuracy? What sentence was omitted from the revised version? What effect does the omission have on the story? What changes if any would you have suggested the BBC make? What changes if any would you have made to the Associated Press story? If readers cannot rely on the media to challenge lies and avoid half-truths, how can we as citizens make informed judgments? What does Friedman's story suggest about how citizens might begin to do so? What does the story suggest about the dangers of remaining silent? How important are retractions like the one made by the BBC? Do they work?

What responsibilities do journalists have to check the accuracy of stories they publish? To provide evidence in support of allegations? How does the Internet complicate that process?

How did President Martin Van Buren define his "universe of obligation" and that of the American people in 1840? What effect did his stand have in making Jews feel welcome in the United States? What part do leaders play in creating a society that values and protects the rights of every citizen?

In an article entitled, "The Arabs and Anti-Semitism," published on December 14, 2001 in the London Arabic-language daily *Al-Hayat*, columnist Hazem Saghiyah argues, "Anti-Semitism in Europe was a popular belief that started from the bottom up. In contrast, in Arab/Muslim [countries] it often descends from the top down." What is the difference between "top-down" antisemitism and "bottom-up" antisemitism? How does that difference affect the responses of victims, perpetrators, and bystanders?

What is the moral of the story Thomas Friedman's Pakistani friend told? What does it suggest about the dangers of an antisemitism that comes from the "top down"?

In November, 2000, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) urged Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak to publicly condemn the spread of the "blood libel" and other antisemitic propaganda in the Egyptian press. The article published on October 28, 2000, in *Al-Ahram* particularly outraged the group. Mubarak never responded to their request. What message was he sending to Egyptians? To Jews? To the world at large? In Saudi Arabia and Egypt, the government controls the press. Political leaders have a say in what is published and what is not. What are the dangers in a state-controlled media?

⁴ http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/not_in_website/syndication/monitoring/

Professor Judith Apter Klinghoffer and many others regard Holocaust denial as a form of antisemitism. In writing about antisemitism in the Middle East, she notes:

Some Arabs engage in Holocaust denial. Indeed, French Holocaust denier Roger Garaudy became a darling of the Arab media. A convention of Holocaust deniers was planned to take place in Beirut in 2001. Other Arabs assert that the Jews got what they deserved. An April 18, 2001 editorial in the Egyptian daily *Al-Akhabar* declared: “Thanks to Hitler, of blessed memory, who, on behalf of the Palestinians revenged in advance the most vile criminals on the face of the Earth. Although we do have a complaint against him, for his revenge on them was not enough.”⁵

The Holocaust happened within living memory. It is one of the most documented events in history—documented by not only the victims and bystanders but also the perpetrators. Why would someone deny a fact? Why would a newspaper give space to someone who insists on doing so?

Under international pressure, the convention in Beirut was canceled. However, newspapers, magazines, and TV programs in the region continue to publicize claims that the Holocaust did not happen. Based on your knowledge of other myths, what effect might such unchallenged claims have on ordinary people? What responsibilities does the media have to print the truth?

⁵ “Blood Libel” by Judith Apter Klinghoffer. History News Network. April 8, 2002. <http://hnn.us/articles/664.html>



A “Student Movement”

Reading 5

Universities have long been places where ideas, theories, and even long-held truths are scrutinized and often hotly debated with each side mustering proof in support of its position. Such debates are central to the work of a university—the advancement of knowledge and the search for truth. In the spring of 2002, Laurie Zoloth, the director of Jewish Studies at San Francisco State, felt that some students and teachers at her university had crossed an important line between criticism of Israeli policies and bigotry. She expressed her views in an e-mail describing what it was like for her and her students “to walk across campus daily, past maps of the Middle East that do not include Israel, past posters of cans of soup with labels on them of drops of blood and dead babies, labeled ‘canned Palestinian children meat, slaughtered according to Jewish rites under American license,’ past poster after poster calling out ‘Zionism=racism, and Jews=Nazis.’”

Zoloth declared, “This is not civic discourse, this is not free speech, this is the Weimar Republic with brown shirts it cannot control. This is the casual introduction of the medieval blood libel and virulent hatred smeared around our campus in a manner so ordinary that it hardly excites concern—except if you are a Jew, and you understand that hateful words have always led to hateful deeds.”

Todd Gitlin, a professor of sociology and journalism at New York University, wrote the following essay in response to Zoloth’s e-mail:

I read Zoloth's words with horror but not, alas, complete amazement. [Recently,] two students of mine at NYU wondered aloud whether it was actually true, as they had heard, that 4,000 Jews didn't show up for work at the World Trade Center on September 11. They clearly thought this astoundingly crazy charge was plausible enough to warrant careful investigation, but it didn't occur to them to look at the names of the dead.

Wicked anti-Semitism is back. The worst crackpot notions that circulate through the violent Middle East are also roaming around America, and if that wasn't bad enough, students are

spreading the gibberish. Students! As if the bloc to which we have long looked for intelligent dissent has decided to junk any pretense of standards.

A student movement is not just a student movement. It's a student movement. Students, whether they are progressive or not, have the responsibility of knowing things, of thinking and discerning, of studying. A student movement should maintain the highest of standards, not ape the formulas of its elders or outdo them in virulence.

It should therefore trouble progressives everywhere that the students at San Francisco State are neither curious nor revolted by the anti-Semitic drivel they are regurgitating. The simple fact that a student movement—even a small one—has been reduced to reflecting the hatred spewed by others should profoundly trouble anyone whose moral principles aim higher than simple nationalism—as should be the case for anyone on the left.

It isn't hard to discover the sources of the drivel being parroted by the students at San Francisco State. In the blood-soaked Middle East of Yasser Arafat and Ariel Sharon, in the increasingly polarized Europe of Jean-Marie le Pen, raw anti-Semitism has increasingly taken the place of intelligent criticism of Israel and its policies. . . .

This is no incidental issue, no negligible distraction. A Left that cares for the rights of humanity cannot cavalierly tolerate the systematic abuse of any people— whatever you think of Israel's or any other country's foreign policy. Any student movement worthy of the name must face the ugly history that long made anti-Semitism the acceptable racism, face it and break from it.

If fighting it unremittingly is not a “progressive” cause, then what kind of progress does progressivism have in mind?¹

CONNECTIONS

It has been said that college campuses are “barometers” of where society is heading. Barometers measure atmospheric pressure and are therefore useful in forecasting the weather. To what extent, do issues and trends on college campuses forecast the issues that are likely to become important to the nation as a whole?

Todd Gitlin writes, “A student movement should maintain the highest of standards, not ape the formulas of its elders or outdo them in virulence.” What does he believe that students must do to maintain those standards?

¹ “The Rough Beast Returns” by Todd Gitlin. June 17, 2002. Motherjones.com

Laurie Zoloth compares her campus to “the Weimar Republic with brown shirts it cannot control.” Chapter 3 of the Facing History Resource Book, *Holocaust and Human Behavior*, explores how Adolf Hitler and his followers used the freedoms they enjoyed during the Weimar Republic to incite hatred against Jews and take over Germany so they could build a “racial state.” The readings show that in times of political unrest, social stress, or economic upheaval, people often feel powerless and angry. How do some leaders turn those feelings against vulnerable minorities?

Laurie Zoloth’s e-mail was read by thousands of people she never met or heard of, because her e-mail was posted on hundreds of weblogs or blogs. Anyone with access to a website can create a weblog that promotes all sorts of opinion and links readers to other online sources. Bloggers not only read Zoloth’s account but also debated its meaning. In response to these conversations, one blogger noted:

In the midst of acknowledging complexities and conducting analyses, it is vital not to ignore that *at least one person* felt threatened and in harm’s way—not *only* one person, but *at least* one person. And when one person feels threatened simply because of who [he or she is], that should be enough for *all people* to take [the person’s] feelings seriously, at least until the situation is understood.

What does the blogger mean by the statement that it is “vital not to ignore that *at least one person* felt threatened and in harm’s way—not *only* one person, but *at least* one person”? To what extent do you share his views?



Academic Freedom

Reading 6

In the television series *The Ascent of Man*, Jacob Bronowski, a scientist and humanist, describes universities as places where individuals come together not “to worship what is known but to question it.” That spirit is central to academic freedom. For hundreds of years, scholars and students have struggled to obtain and then carefully protect the right to exchange ideas freely in the classroom, explore and disseminate new knowledge, and speak openly about their views both in a professional capacity and as private citizens.

The importance that universities place on academic freedom was evident throughout 2002 as disagreements over the growing conflict between Palestinians and Israelis became more and more heated. In response to the tensions at his own university, Harvard President Lawrence Summers gave a speech on September 17 that was in many ways a defining moment in the debate. He chose the setting for his speech carefully. He did not speak at a faculty meeting or at a student convocation. Instead he gave his address at a traditional event at Harvard. At the beginning of each school year, the president of the university gives a talk at Tuesday Morning Prayers in a small chapel on campus. Summers chose his words with equal care:

I speak with you today not as President of the University but as a concerned member of our community about something that I never thought I would become seriously worried about—the issue of anti-Semitism.

I am Jewish, identified but hardly devout. In my lifetime, anti-Semitism has been remote from my experience. My family all left Europe at the beginning of the 20th century. The Holocaust is for me a matter of history, not personal memory. To be sure, there were country clubs where I grew up that had few if any Jewish members, but not ones that included people I knew. My experience in college and graduate school, as a faculty member, as a government official—all involved little notice of my religion.

Indeed, I was struck during my years in the Clinton administration that the existence of an economic leadership team with people like Robert Rubin, Alan Greenspan, Charlene Barshefsky

and many others that was very heavily Jewish passed without comment or notice—it was something that would have been inconceivable a generation or two ago, as indeed it would have been inconceivable a generation or two ago that Harvard could have a Jewish president.

Without thinking about it much, I attributed all of this to progress— to an ascendancy of enlightenment and tolerance. A view that prejudice is increasingly put aside. A view that while the politics of the Middle East were enormously complex, and contentious, the question of the right of a Jewish state to exist had been settled in the affirmative by the world community. But today, I am less complacent. Less complacent and comfortable because there is disturbing evidence of an upturn in anti-Semitism globally, and also because of some developments closer to home.

Consider some of the global events of the last year:

- There have been synagogue burnings, physical assaults on Jews, or the painting of swastikas on Jewish memorials in every country in Europe. Observers in many countries have pointed to the worst outbreak of attacks against the Jews since the Second World War.
- Candidates who denied the significance of the Holocaust reached the runoff stage of elections for the nation's highest office in France and Denmark. State-sponsored television stations in many nations of the world spew anti-Zionist propaganda.
- The United Nations-sponsored World Conference on Racism—while failing to mention human rights abuses in China, Rwanda, or anyplace in the Arab world—spoke of Israel's policies prior to recent struggles under the Barak government as constituting ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. The NGO [non-governmental organization] declaration at the same conference was even more virulent.

I could go on. But I want to bring this closer to home. Of course academic communities should be and always will be places that allow any viewpoint to be expressed. And certainly there is much to be debated about the Middle East and much in Israel's foreign and defense policy that can be and should be vigorously challenged.

But where anti-Semitism and views that are profoundly anti-Israeli have traditionally been the primary preserve of poorly educated right-wing populists, profoundly anti-Israel views are increasingly finding support in progressive intellectual communities. Serious and thoughtful people are advocating and taking actions that are anti-Semitic in their effect if not their intent.

For example:

- Hundreds of European academics have called for an end to support for Israeli researchers, though not for an end to support for researchers from any other nation.

- Israeli scholars this past spring were forced off the board of an international literature journal.
- At the same rallies where protesters, many of them university students, condemn the IMF [International Monetary Fund] and global capitalism and raise questions about globalization, it is becoming increasingly common to also lash out at Israel. Indeed, at the anti-IMF rallies last spring, chants were heard equating Hitler and Sharon.
- Events to raise funds for organizations of questionable political provenance that in some cases were later found to support terrorism have been held by student organizations on this and other campuses with at least modest success and very little criticism.
- And some here at Harvard and some at universities across the country have called for the University to single out Israel among all nations as the lone country where it is inappropriate for any part of the University's endowment to be invested. I hasten to say the University has categorically rejected this suggestion.

We should always respect the academic freedom of everyone to take any position. We should also recall that academic freedom does not include freedom from criticism. The only antidote to dangerous ideas is strong alternatives vigorously advocated.

I have always, throughout my life, been put off by those who heard the sound of breaking glass, in every insult or slight, and conjured up images of Hitler's Kristallnacht at any disagreement with Israel. Such views have always seemed to me alarmist if not slightly hysterical. But I have to say that while they still seem to me unwarranted, they seem rather less alarmist in the world of today than they did a year ago.

I would like nothing more than to be wrong. It is my greatest hope and prayer that the idea of a rise of anti-Semitism proves to be a self-denying prophecy— a prediction that carries the seeds of its own falsification. But this depends on all of us.¹

Summers' speech sparked both criticism and praise not only at Harvard and other universities but also in the larger community. Much of the controversy focused on his comments about a "divestiture petition" that a number of professors at Harvard and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology had signed in the spring of 2002. The petition called on the university to sell off stocks and other investments in companies that do business with Israel. In an article that appeared in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Thomas Bartlett tried to summarize responses to the talk:

¹ Copyright © 2002 Harvard University

Mr. Summers caught almost everyone at Harvard by surprise with his speech. For Alan M. Dershowitz, a professor of law at Harvard and an outspoken defender of Israel, the surprise was a pleasant one. He congratulated Mr. Summers for “saying it like it is.” And he issued a challenge in *The Harvard Crimson* to debate any of the professors who had signed the divestiture petition, which he called “a form of anti-Semitism.” He added, “There is no other rational basis why a university would want to divest from Israel but not from Jordan or from China. ... Singling out the Jewish nation for this kind of de-legitimization is bigotry.”

Ken Nakayama was among those caught off-guard by the speech, but for a very different reason. The professor of psychology at Harvard helped create the petition. “It is upsetting, because it is the president of the most important university in the United States, and one would hope he would have a more balanced view about the free exchange of ideas, rather than questioning the motives [of those who signed the petition] and linking them in a vague way with terrorists and anti-Semites,” Mr. Nakayama says.

No faculty member has asked to have his or her name removed from the petition since the address, Mr. Nakayama says. In fact, he says, he has received e-mail messages from several professors asking whether they can add their signatures. The speech also has put a media spotlight on similar petitions, which are circulating at about 50 colleges. Over the past few months, the movement seemed to have lost its momentum.

In fact, a petition against divestiture was signed by 439 Harvard professors and 143 MIT professors, far more than those [who favored divestiture]. Mr. Summers had previously said there would be no divestiture of Israel-related stocks at Harvard— and no college appears to be moving in the direction of divestiture. ...

The Harvard president's speech has attracted nationwide attention. An editorial in *The Wall Street Journal* applauded him for speaking his mind with “clarity, precision, and force.” Jewish organizations, like Hillel, a national student group, praised the comments as timely and accurate. “President Summers is saying, correctly, that hate speech is hate speech even when it is uttered on a college campus,” Richard M. Joel, Hillel's president, said in written statement.

Other college leaders— several of them, like Mr. Summers, Jewish—commended Harvard's president for raising the issue of anti-Semitism. Among them is Stephen Joel Trachtenberg, president of George Washington University, who says that while he hasn't seen evidence of increased anti-Semitism on his campus, it is important to remain alert to signs of bigotry. “The two heads-up occasions recently are San Francisco State and Concordia,; he says, referring to recent unrest on those campuses.

At San Francisco State University, some students yelled “Death to Jews!” and “Hitler should have finished the job,” while at Montreal's Concordia University, a speech by Benjamin

Netanyahu, former prime minister of Israel, was canceled after protesters smashed windows in the building where he was to speak. “Both of them give us reason to pay attention to what Summers has said, and to be proactive,” says Mr. Trachtenberg.

But Mr. Trachtenberg warns against linking divestiture— which he is against— with anti-Semitism: “It is possible to be anti-Israel without being anti-Semitic. It is also possible to be pro-Israel and not be particularly pro-Jewish. Politics make strange bedfellows.”

Arthur Levine, president of Teachers College of Columbia University, agrees with Mr. Summers that anti-Semitism appears to be on the rise. Recently, when visiting a state college in the Northeast, he says, he noticed graffiti on a men’s-room wall that said, “Let’s kill the Jews.” He said he looked in several stalls and found other graffiti, both anti-Jewish and anti-Islamic. (One of the messages said, “Let’s kill Osama bin Laden and everybody who looks like him,” according to Mr. Levine.) “The best way I’ve found to gauge the climate of a university is to look at the walls of its men’s rooms,” he says.

Like Mr. Trachtenberg, however, Mr. Levine was not willing to support Mr. Summers’s contention that those who support divestiture from Israel-related stocks are anti-Semitic. “I can’t go as far as that,” he says. ...

Professors across the country who support divestiture reacted to the speech with shock and anger. “I thought [Summers’s comments] were preposterous and quite ludicrous,” says Edward Said, a professor of English at Columbia University, whose advocacy for the Palestinian cause includes years of service on the Palestine National Council. “It’s the classic Zionist ploy to defame people by identifying criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism. It just ain’t so.”

Ian S. Lustick, a professor of political science at the University of Pennsylvania, is against divestiture but nonetheless condemned Mr. Summers’s comments. “I think it’s absolutely unfair to think of the divestment issue as anti-Semitic,” he says. “It’s crippling to debate, and it’s particularly objectionable for people of responsibility in American universities to say things that cripple debate.”²

CONNECTIONS

Underline the key words in Summers’ speech. Use the underlined words to write a summary of the speech. Then use your paragraph to evaluate both criticisms and praise for Summers’ speech. Choose one individual quoted in the article and write a sentence or two describing his characterization of the speech. What similarities do you notice? How do you account for differences? To what extent do your findings reveal why the speech is often seen as a defining

² “A Surge of Anti-Semitism or McCarthyism? By Thomas Bartlett. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, vol. 49, p. A14. © 2002 by The Chronicle of Higher Education. <http://chronicle.com>

moment—a moment that changes the direction of a debate? What parts of the speech sparked the most controversy?

In response to Summers' speech, the students who edit *The Harvard Crimson* wrote:

Accusations of bigotry, whether launched at those who oppose Israeli policy or at those who oppose affirmative action, cast a dark shadow on public discourse. They threaten to mar the reputation of those they target and, as a result, can intimidate opponents into retreating from their views. Such accusations chill debate, in effect if not in intent. . . .

Summers has every right to speak his mind on political issues, to be sure. But it is incumbent upon him to do so responsibly, in a way that protects the “academic freedom of everyone to take any position,” as he himself puts it.

Such freedom requires that indictments for bigotry should be held up to the strictest burdens of proof. Summers is prescient to point to “an upturn in anti-Semitism globally,” which is a dangerous threat that must be fought vigorously. But we have seen no evidence for the link he proposes between this worldwide trend and the students and faculty who support divestment at Harvard.³

The students and Summers agree that there is “an upturn in antisemitism globally” and it must be fought. How do you fight antisemitism? Was Summers's speech an attempt to do so? According to the editors of *The Harvard Crimson*, what standards must individuals and groups meet before they charge someone with bigotry? Why do the students believe that failing to meet such standards can “chill debate, in effect if not in intent”? Do you agree? Did Summers speech chill debate or did it spark discussion?

The editors of *The Harvard Crimson* saw a relationship between words that tend to “chill debate” and threats to academic freedom. Until 1940, there was no official definition of the term *academic freedom*. That year the American Association of University Professors and the Association of American Colleges jointly developed a definition that states in part:

Teachers are entitled to full freedom in research and in the publication of the results, subject to the adequate performance of their other academic duties. . . .

Teachers are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subject, but they should be careful not to introduce into their teaching controversial matter which has no relation to their subject. . . .

³ “Summers Stifles Israel Debate” by the Crimson Staff. *Harvard Crimson*, September 23, 2002.

College and university teachers are citizens, members of a learned profession, and officers of an educational institution. When they speak or write as citizens, they should be free from institutional censorship or discipline, but their special position in the community imposes special obligations. As scholars and educational officers, they should remember that the public may judge their profession and their institution by their utterances. Hence they should at all times be accurate, should exercise appropriate restraint, should show respect for the opinions of others, and should make every effort to indicate that they are not speaking for the institution.⁴

What does Bronowski's definition of academic freedom add to the one created by American professors? How are both views reflected in Summers' speech? To what extent are they reflected in the editorial that appeared in *The Harvard Crimson*?

How does Summers describe himself in his speech? Why do you think he chose to share his personal story with his audience? What does he want his listeners to understand about him and how he came to hold the views he shares in his talk? How does he define *antisemitism*? What does he mean when he says that "serious and thoughtful people are advocating and taking actions that are antisemitic in their effect if not their intent"?

⁴ "1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure." American Association of University Professors.



Education in a Democracy

Reading 7

Conversation, discussion, and debate are central not only to universities but also to democracies. Such exchanges depend on a free and independent press that takes its responsibilities seriously. They also depend on informed citizens willing to listen to and learn from one another. Philosopher Hannah Arendt once wrote that democracy is based on the assumption that we do not all think alike and there is value in our differing points of view. She noted, “To hold different opinions and to be aware that other people think differently on the same issue shields us from that god-like certainty.” Arendt’s words take on special importance at a time when conversations both at universities and in the nation as a whole often degenerate into heated debates that assume that there are only two sides to every story and one of those sides is totally wrong.

An essay by Imre Kertesz, a Holocaust survivor who was awarded the 2002 Nobel Prize for Literature, reveals what is at stake in those discussions.

My subject is the freedom of self-definition, which entails the simple notion that each and every member of society has the right to be what he or she is. No one should become the object of derision or the victim of discrimination on account of his birth or the way he chooses to regard himself—even if such discrimination is condoned, openly or in secret, by the powers that be. At the same time, of course, no one should enjoy unfair advantages due to his origins, beliefs, thoughts, or simply because of who he is. Here in Europe, you presumably take these freedoms for granted; you enjoy them in your everyday life as basic human rights and may not see the need to talk about them.

But it is necessary to discuss the question, for even in western democracies, freedom of self-definition is not the satisfactorily resolved issue it may first appear to be. It is true that the concept of human rights, the most fundamental of which is the right to liberty and dignity, was first formulated by western civilization. But the totalitarian state also has its origins here. For 20th-century dictatorships, it was natural to do away with individual rights, to confine people like sheep in giant folds, and to attach to them easily recognizable, garish labels—the all-too-obvious emblems of a privileged or stigmatized state. One usually thinks of the extreme ends of such

defining enclosures. But there were dozens of others in between, representing various forms of discrimination.

We cannot overestimate the damage done by the institutionalization and practical application of this system of collective labeling - how it distorted people's views, poisoned their relationships with one another, and perverted their own self-images.

The system of symbols devised by the Nazis was in a way the simplest and most transparent. Their aim was to exterminate certain people while encouraging others to breed as though they were brood mares. In communist dictatorships, the situation was more complicated. Here the officers doing the selection were always inside the enclosures, and they kept sending people from one pen to another. It sometimes happened that, in the middle of the selection process, the officer in charge was grabbed from the back and rudely thrust into one of the unpleasant pens, into which, until that moment, he had been busy shoving others.

In reflecting on the 20th century, Kertesz exposes what the labels and stereotypes try to obscure:

In the universities and colleges of a cruelly truncated Hungary, discriminatory laws were put into effect, and, in 1938, more sweeping anti-Jewish legislation was enacted. In 1944, they put a yellow star on me, which in a symbolic sense is still there; to this day I have not been able to remove it.

I admit it must seem astonishing that more than 10 years after the elimination of the last European totalitarian states, more than 10 years after the introduction of representative democracy in this part of Europe, I should still say this. The truth is that it wasn't easy to face up to this fact, and it was even harder to try to come to terms with it. Such painful states of mind, it seems, automatically produce their own pathology without our being fully aware of it. For example, you get the feeling that the world around you is intangible, ghost-like, even though it's you yourself who has become unreal and spectral.

Or the opposite happens: you perceive your own self as foreign, though all you've done is blend in with your alienating surroundings. My wife, who is American and therefore free of these east European maladies, has noticed that, when we are abroad, I undergo a complete personality change. In foreign countries, I feel at home while, at home, I act like a stranger.

With foreigners, I converse freely, but, with my own countrymen, I am ill at ease. In the dictatorship called socialism, this was a natural state, and I more or less learned to live with it. Getting accustomed to racism in a democracy takes more time. But at least I am now getting to the bottom of a problem, which, I believe, is not only mine.

In my daily life, I must constantly respond to disturbing stimuli that come my way from the world around me; they are like mild electric shocks that prickle the skin. Metaphorically speaking,

I am forever scratching myself. We are all familiar with Montesquieu's famous dictum: "First I am a human being, and then a Frenchman." The racist—for anti-Semitism since Auschwitz is no longer just anti-Semitism—wants me to be first a Jew and then not to be a human being any more.

At first, in our confusion, we grope for arguments with which to defend ourselves and find that we talk to and think about ourselves in a most primitive manner. No wonder: what we are up against is above all primitive. If we are shoved into an animal cage, we have to fight like animals. The debased thinking we protest against leads us to think about ourselves in lowly ways; after a while, it's not ourselves we're thinking about but somebody else. This process, in short, distorts our personality. The ultimate and most painful self-defense of such a distorted personality is also familiar: confronted with inhuman ideologues, the hapless victim is bent on proving his own humanity. There is something pathetic in these exertions, for the very thing ideologues want to rob him of is his humanity. But once he accepts racist categories, he becomes a Jew, and the more he tries to prove that he is human, the more pitiful and less human he becomes. In a racist environment, a Jew cannot be human, but he cannot be a Jew either. For "Jew" is an unambiguous designation only in the eyes of anti-Semites.*

How can we protect our right to self-definition—our right to be viewed as an individual? It is a question that haunts educators at home and abroad. Shareeq Ghabra, the former director of Kuwait's public information center and now a professor at Kuwait University, believes that answer lies in the traditional openness of American universities. He writes of his own college education in the United States:

When I first came to the United States I was a leftist and had in me all the anti-American slogans of the Vietnam War and the Palestine struggle. My American professors surprised me with their tolerance. Even when the professors were hard-core Republicans or fundamentalist Christians—I studied for one year at a very small junior college in the Midwest—the fair-mindedness was consistent. It amazed me.

In graduate school, in the 1980s, the most Zionist of all my teachers would listen with empathy to my opinion and my difference of perspective, then argue. This opened the way for respect, learning, and understanding. Tolerance, even without accepting the other view, does have a moderating power on people and permits for the repetition of the cycle of understanding.

* ©Imre Kertész Translated by Ivan Sanders. Edited extract from "The Freedom of Self-Definition," which will appear in *Witness Literature: Proceedings of the Nobel Centennial Symposium*, ed. by Horace Engdahl, to be published by Scientific World Publishing, Singapore, in December 2002. *The Guardian*, October 19, 2002.

Tolerance breeds tolerance. As a professor of political science at Kuwait University, I practice my old professor's technique on my own fundamentalist students.*

Tolerance is central to learning and to a free society. So is respect for others. The Center for Humanistic Education at The Ghetto Fighters' Museum in Israel was founded in 1997 to promote respect, learning, and understanding among Israelis, Druse, and Arabs. On April 30, 2002—in the midst of violence and acts of terrorism—young graduates of the program held a reunion and issued a statement. It says in part:

We are a group of Arab and Jewish youth who work together in the framework of the Center for Humanistic Education at The Ghetto Fighters' Museum. Together we studied the emotionally charged and painful history of both our nations. Here we learned to listen to the other side, and we discovered that they had problems we knew nothing about. Today we understand that despite the difficulty, we must let go of our personal pain, fear, desire for revenge, and not allow the scars of the past to rule our lives. We must continue moving forward, based on the faith that will lead each of us to act: we will continue to meet and talk in order to understand each other.

From our limited experience as teenagers, we understand today that in order to understand you need to look at the person in front of you not as a Jew, not as an Arab, not as a Palestinian, American, Afghani or Rwandan, but as a human being—as Shachar, Morad, Amira, Sachar, Raja, and Reut. Let us not give in to despair, let us hang on in these difficult moments, in the hope that ordinary people will be able to overcome the threatening extremism and hatred.

In the story of the Tower of Babel, G-d commanded people to speak in different languages so that they would not understand each other. We pray that the day will come when people again speak the same language and begin to rebuild the tower...the tower of peace.

This is not an attempt to change the world, it is an attempt to find a common language, to look people straight in the eye and ask: "Hey brother, how are you?"*

CONNECTIONS

* "What Catastrophe Can Reveal" by Shafeeq Ghabra. *The New York Times*, August 26, 2002, op-ed. page.

* "Summing Up the Graduates Reunion" by participants in the meeting of Center for Humanistic Education. Ghetto Fighters' House Museum, April 30, 2002.

What does Imre Kertesz mean when he writes, “In 1944, they put a yellow star on me, which in a symbolic sense is still there; to this day I have not been able to remove it”? What is he suggesting about the power of labels? What power do words have—particularly words that are used to define or label us? How do those words shape our attitudes, values, and behavior?

Ghabra was “surprised” by his professors’ tolerance and the willingness of “the most Zionist of all my teachers” to show empathy. What do his words reveal about his own stereotypes? About the role his education played in challenging those stereotypes? What allows stereotypes to flourish? What part do leaders play in keeping them alive? What part does education play?

What does it mean to be free to define yourself? How important is freedom of self-definition to the way you see yourself? To the way you view others? What kinds of dialogues allow individuals to define themselves? How important are such dialogues to democracy? What rules would you set for engaging in such conversations?

In Reading 1, Frank Wu, a professor of law, was quoted as saying that there is a “slippery slope” leading from stereotypes about foreign governments, “races,” and ethnic groups to an individual by way of the catch-all phrase “you people.” Stereotyping often leads to violence, because there are no clear stopping points on that “slippery slope.” What kind of education avoids that slippery slope?