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# Foreword

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Elie Wiesel was a survivor of and witness to the Holocaust, as well as an academic, an intellectual, and a humanitarian. He would often impress on scholars, students, and policymakers that antisemitism is not just a parochial problem affecting the Jewish people and the State of Israel, but an early-warning system for the stability of society and the protection of basic notions of citizenship, including legal equality, democratic principles, and human rights. According to Wiesel, antisemitism begins with the Jews but never ends with them. Once this hatred is unleashed upon society, it knows no boundaries. When the leaders of forty-five nations gathered to mark the seventy-fifth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz in January 2020, they warned collectively of a new and dangerous increase in antisemitism globally. The academy must engage with this “oldest hatred” in a vigorous and scholarly manner that has a profound impact on education and academic curricula, as well as on policy development and implementation.

Antisemitism is one of the most complex and at times perplexing forms of hatred. It spans centuries of history, infecting different societies, religious, philosophical, and political movements, and even civilizations. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, some have even argued that it illustrates the limitations of the Enlightenment and modernity itself. Manifestations of antisemitism emerge in numerous ideologically-based narratives and constructed identities

of belonging and otherness, such as race and ethnicity, as well as nationalist and anti-nationalist movements. In the contemporary context of globalization and postmodernism, antisemitism has taken on new forms that need to be decoded, mapped, and exposed. In fact, the emergence of populism and radical social movements on the extreme left and the far right, both religious and secular, including political Islam, pose a significant threat to all societies. These movements use antisemitism as a central element of their ideologies and political objectives. Moreover, this is happening in a context in which the academy has been too slow to engage with this subject matter in an open, free, and honest manner.

For a long time, experts and scholars believed that this oldest of hatreds would not infiltrate American society. The current and alarming upsurge in antisemitism in the United States has therefore caught many of them off guard. Against this background, *Poisoning the Wells: Antisemitism in Contemporary America* is a timely and important collection of essays that analyze, map, and decode contemporary antisemitism in the United States. The Institute for the Study of Global Antisemitism and Policy (ISGAP) is honored to publish this collection, which has been expertly curated by Corinne E. Blackmer and Andrew Pessin, and provide a platform for the dissemination of high-caliber scholarship on contemporary antisemitism, breaking the apparent taboo of silence on this issue within academic publishing and the academy. The publication of this volume of intelligent and revelatory essays thus forms the latest step in ISGAP's ongoing mission to combat antisemitism on the battlefield of ideas.

*Charles Asher Small*

*Founder and Executive Director of ISGAP*

## Introduction

# The End of Jewish Innocence: Antisemitism in Contemporary America

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Corinne E. Blackmer and  
Andrew Pessin

In May 2021, as Hamas rained rockets and explosives on Israel, half a world away, those claiming to be anti-Zionist, not antisemitic, targeted diasporic Jews for harassment, vandalism, intimidation, threats, and physical assault, in the evident belief that Jews needed to pay for Israel's acts and must be held guilty for the widespread conviction that Israeli self-defense is indefensible. Following this deadly fighting, American Jews have become increasingly concerned about their safety to an extent that would have been unimaginable—even unthinkable—at an earlier time. Indeed, whatever remained of American Jewish innocence after the near-unprecedented onslaughts of the past five years or so came to an abrupt, catastrophic, and globally publicized end. These attacks were not isolated but rather fit into a disquieting, escalating pattern of antisemitism manifesting itself in many ways, ranging from the shunning, silencing, and bullying occurring on campuses, in houses of worship, and on the internet, to graffiti and vandalism, destruction of property, assault, and even killing. Antisemitism, presumed by most, including many Jewish Americans, to be buried in the infamies of European history, has regained a firm foothold in the nation that Yiddish-speaking Jewish immigrants had once called *Die Goldene Medina*.

Hearing about or bearing witness to frequent, intense incidents of anti-Jewish animus from the right *and* the left, Jewish people are living at an inflection point where the distinction between antisemitism and anti-Zionism

verges on collapse, no matter what any particular American Jew might think or feel about the Jewish state. Open-minded, well educated, humanitarian, and at the forefront of every social justice movement in America, Jews have found that they risk becoming outsiders if they defend fellow Jews, Israel, or themselves; a phenomenon which has led many to fearful silence, isolation, and demoralization.

Anti-Defamation League (ADL) CEO Jonathan Greenblatt has described the recent surge in antisemitism as “particularly dramatic and violent,” and “believes strongly that our leaders need to do more to prevent further incidents.”<sup>1</sup> Analysis from the ADL’s Center on Extremism found that antisemitic incidents in the United States had more than doubled since the military conflict and its immediate aftermath. Indeed, the number for May 2021 stands at 305—a 115% increase from the same period in 2020—and includes 190 cases of harassment, fifty cases of vandalism, and eleven assaults.<sup>2</sup>

In that fateful month alone, a pro-Israel protester had his kippah stolen and burned in an apparent hate crime in Cleveland. In South Florida, a group of teenagers hit a man walking home from a Chabad synagogue with a rock. That same week, a man tossed a bag of feces at a Chabad House, also in South Florida, while yelling antisemitic slurs, including “Jews should die.”<sup>3</sup> A stranger in Las Vegas called the Jews “baby killers” who “are not going to exist” before assaulting a Jewish man.<sup>4</sup> In Los Angeles, at the end of the Jewish festival of Shavuot, two cars draped in Palestinian flags chased a lone man wearing Orthodox Jewish dress. In West Los Angeles, on the following night, a pro-Palestinian caravan targeted a small group of Jewish diners, throwing objects and hurling epithets at them, while a well-known kosher restaurant was vandalized—its front door smashed to bits. As a man left a synagogue in New Jersey with his wife and daughter, a group of men in a car started tossing garbage and hurling antisemitic slurs at them, including sexual threats: “Free Palestine!”; “Die Jew!”; “I’m gonna rape your wife!”<sup>5</sup>

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1 Quoted in Jemima McEvoy, “American Jews Still Reeling from Rise in Anti-Semitism after Israel-Hamas Conflict, Survey Shows,” *Forbes*, June 14, 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jemimamcevoy/2021/06/14/american-jews-still-reeling-from-rise-in-anti-semitism-after-israel-hamas-conflict-survey-shows/?sh=b7392811d6f>.

2 “Following Start of Mideast Conflict, Antisemitic Incidents More Than Double in May 2021 vs. May 2020,” *adl.org*, accessed June 7, 2021, <https://www.adl.org/resources/blog/following-start-mideast-violence-antisemitic-incidents-more-double-may-2021-vs-may>.

3 Samantha Mandeles, “List of ‘Pro-Palestinian’ Violent Attacks on Jews in the U.S. and Canada,” *Legal Insurrection*, May 26, 2021, <https://legalinsurrection.com/2021/05/list-of-pro-palestinian-violent-attacks-on-jews-in-the-u-s-and-canada/>.

4 “Following Start of Mideast Conflict.”

5 Mandeles, “Pro-Palestinian Violent Attacks.”

Meanwhile, New York City, home to one of the largest Jewish populations in the world outside of Israel, has also witnessed a massive spike in antisemitic attacks. Pro-Palestinian demonstrators lobbed a firebomb at Jews in Manhattan, and a teenager bearing an Israeli flag was hospitalized with a concussion and an injured jaw after protestors beat him. On May 20, a day replete with other violent protests, a man named Waseem Awawdeh badly injured and pepper-sprayed a man wearing a kippah and, after the police charged him with felonious assault and a hate crime, said he had no regrets and bragged he would do it again if he could. Synagogues, Jewish community centers and schools, and kosher restaurants across the nation have been vandalized.<sup>6</sup>

May 2021 saw not only an explosion of antisemitic crimes against persons and property but also an unprecedented onslaught of academics condemning Israel and calling for BDS, for example in letters with hundreds of signatures from faculty and student governments at major universities, including Georgetown, Princeton, Brown, Stanford, the University of Washington, and Rutgers. More than 150 women, gender, and sexuality studies departments have signed on, as have eight departments and more than forty faculty at UC Davis, four hundred plus academics from North Carolina universities, the University of California Press, and the editors of the *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*. At Harvard, eighty-nine student groups and nearly nine hundred students joined to condemn Israel.<sup>7</sup> And if that were not enough, the local chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine at Rutgers made a stunning statement that condemned the school's chancellor and provost for their letter condemning antisemitism, in part because they failed to mention Palestinians.<sup>8</sup> After repudiating their statement, the chancellor and provost caved in to these intemperate student demands and even apologized.<sup>9</sup>

These recent attacks on the Jewish state are taking place against a backdrop of ever-escalating BDS assaults on Israel, not only in higher education but also in otherwise politically progressive K-12 school districts and unions. The campus antipathy against Israel, which often serves to disguise antipathy towards Jews, has persisted and even increased during the Covid-19 pandemic, even as the Zoom call

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6 Ibid.

7 Raquel Coronell and Dohyon Kim, "Palestinian Student Groups, Faculty Denounce Israeli Government's Use of Force against Palestinians," *Harvard Crimson*, May 26, 2021, <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2021/5/26/statements-denounce-israeli-government/>.

8 Students for Justice in Palestine—Rutgers New Brunswick, Instagram, May 27, 2021, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CPYayWbjVQj/>.

9 Greg Price, "Rutgers University–New Brunswick Chancellor, Provost Apologize after Condemning Uptick in Anti-Semitic Attacks," *The Daily Caller*, May 27, 2021, <https://dailycaller.com/2021/05/27/rutgers-chancellor-apologizes-antisemitism-email/>.

replaced the face-to-face classroom. Student leaders and others invited terrorists to virtual lectures and denounced Zionism as racism in official organizational statements. To give but one example, at the University of Pennsylvania, the professor of a mandatory class on racism gave students a so-called privilege quiz. Next to each identity, the quiz listed a positive or negative value, and the higher the identity the more the students needed to check their presumed privilege. Not surprisingly, under the religion category, the quiz ranked Judaism as the most privileged of all, with twenty-five points assigned.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the BDS movement has begun to spread in K-12 schools. The resolution in San Francisco claims that public school educators have a special responsibility to “stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people because of the 3.8 billion dollars annually that the US government gives to Israel, thus directly using our tax dollars to fund apartheid and war crimes.” Endorsing BDS and calling on Israel to end its “bombardment in Gaza and stop displacement at Sheikh Jarrah,” a neighborhood in East Jerusalem where a property dispute helped ignite the recent conflict between Israeli Jews and Palestinians, the resolution never once mentions the Hamas rocket attacks on Israeli civilians that forced the counterstrikes to begin with.<sup>11</sup>

In politics, leftist elements of the Democratic Party and right-wing Republicans have both exhibited their animus towards Jews. Originally composed of Democratic representatives Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ilhan Omar, Ayanna Pressley, and Rashida Tlaib, the Squad, has grown increasingly influential and emboldened. In 2019, over two hundred rabbis accused Omar of playing identity politics and warned against putting her on the Foreign Affairs Committee, where she blamed reaction against her antisemitic, anti-Zionist statements which equated Israel with Hamas on prejudice against her as a Muslim person of color.<sup>12</sup> Three members of the Squad referred to Israel as an “apartheid” state. Omar described “Israeli air strikes killing civilians in Gaza” as “an act of terrorism” during fighting between Israel and Palestinian armed groups in the Gaza Strip.<sup>13</sup>

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10 Blake Flayton, “The Hate That Can’t Be Contained,” *Tablet*, November 25, 2020, <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/news/articles/hate-cant-be-contained>.

11 Gabriel Greschler, “San Francisco’s Teachers Union Becomes First K-12 Union to Endorse BDS Movement,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, May 26, 2021, <https://www.jta.org/2021/05/26/israel/san-franciscos-teachers-union-becomes-first-k-12-union-to-endorse-bds-movement>.

12 Elad Bernari, “Rabbis Urge Pelosi to Remove Omar from House Foreign Affairs Committee,” *Arutz Sheva*, June 17, 2021, <https://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/308237?fbclid=IwAR3ab18NpewmaNdl7R3HgtBAvrjd9mPRpRvp-la906YE mvo-4jYcoXpia7s>.

13 Zachary Evans, “Four House Dems Label ‘Squad’ Statements on Israel ‘Antisemitic at Their Core,’” *National Review*, May 26, 2021, <https://www.nationalreview.com/news/four-house-dems-label-squad-statements-on-israel-antisemitic-at-their-core/>.



Four House Democrats labeled these statements as antisemitic to their core but also condemned those of Republican Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene, who sent out a tweet comparing a Tennessee grocery store's rule requiring employees to display their vaccination status to the Third Reich's requirement for Jews to wear a yellow star. Republican leaders Kevin McCarthy and Mitch McConnell joined in condemning Greene. "Marjorie is wrong, and her intentional decision to compare the horrors of the Holocaust with wearing masks is appalling," McCarthy said.<sup>14</sup> However, while Democrats and Republicans blamed each other for condoning antisemitism, both parties failed to respond in a coherent, non-partisan fashion. Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi demurred from removing Omar from the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and Republican leaders did not formally censure Greene.

The internet, where, in previous years, the world's oldest hatred flourished, has recently witnessed an avalanche of antisemitism, with comments advocating a second Holocaust, or lauding Hitler and exhorting Muslims to unite for a violent jihad. Just before these most recent manifestations, the Covid-19 pandemic inspired some innovative expressions of Jew-hatred. For instance, the internet saw the evolution and explosive growth of online conspiracy theories blaming Jews and other minorities—particularly Asian Americans—for spreading the coronavirus.<sup>15</sup> While many of these theories originated in white supremacist forums, they swiftly migrated to mainstream venues, as people, feeling anxious and trapped, spent hours upon hours online, where they found scapegoats for the lockdowns, mask requirements, and other restrictions on their day-to-day lives.<sup>16</sup>

Since antisemitism serves as the canary in the coal mine of societal polarization and political unrest, the harrowing election year, culminating in the January 6 Capitol attack, provided further fuel to ignite anti-Jewish sentiment. Online QAnon conspiracy theories achieved unprecedented influence over Americans, informed by antisemitic tropes, with Jews as the traditional hate

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14 Caroline Downey, "GOP Leaders Condemn Marjorie Taylor-Greene's Holocaust COVID-Restrictions Comparison," *National Review*, May 25, 2021, <https://www.nationalreview.com/news/gop-leaders-condemn-marjorie-taylor-greenes-holocaust-covid-restrictions-comparison/>.

15 "Coronavirus Crisis Elevates Antisemitic, Racist Tropes," *adl.org*, accessed March 17, 2020, <https://www.adl.org/blog/coronavirus-crisis-elevates-antisemitic-racist-tropes>.

16 "On Social Media, Haredi and Orthodox Jews Are Scapegoated and Blamed for Covid-19," *adl.org*, accessed April 29, 2020, <https://www.adl.org/blog/on-social-media-haredi-and-orthodox-jewish-communities-are-scapegoated-and-blamed-for-covid-19>.

target of choice.<sup>17</sup> The antisemitic trope of blood libel, the allegation that Jews murder Christian children during Passover for ritualistic purposes, grounds the QAnon belief that a global “cabal” conducts rituals of child sacrifice.<sup>18</sup> In addition, QAnon shares with the Right in general a profound antipathy against George Soros, a wealthy, which philanthropist whose name conjures presumed Jewish influence in global affairs, that dovetails with their antisemitic conviction that international bankers seek to dominate the world.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to these deeply hostile developments in education, politics, and on the internet, recent crime sprees in May 2021 connected to the Hamas-Israeli conflict have precedents in often fatal hate crimes and acts of domestic terrorism, particularly those against the New Jersey Kosher Market and the Poway (San Diego) and Tree of Life (Pittsburgh) synagogues. In New Jersey, two assailants with ties to the Black Hebrew Israelites, who regard themselves as the true descendants of the biblical Jews and despise Ashkenazi Jews as fake, killed a police detective and three people inside the JC Kosher Supermarket.<sup>20</sup> In another act of domestic terrorism, a man bearing a machete and screaming “I’ll get you” burst into the house of a Hasidic rabbi in Monsey, New York, and stabbed and wounded five people who had gathered to light candles for Hanukkah.<sup>21</sup> Yet another shooter, yelling antisemitic slurs, stormed into a synagogue in Poway, a quiet suburb north of San Diego, on the final day of Passover, killing a sixty-year-old woman and injuring three others, including the rabbi. Mayor Steve Vaus regarded the timing of the shooting, a little more than a week after leaders hosted an interfaith event aimed at building strength across the religious communities of the city, as “a bit of a twisted irony.”<sup>22</sup> Elsewhere, a

17 Richard J. Evans, “Anti-Semitism Lurks behind Modern Conspiracy Theories,” *Irish Times*, February 16, 2021, <https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/anti-semitism-lurks-behind-modern-conspiracy-theories-1.4485495>.

18 *Jewish Virtual Library*, s.v. “Blood Libel,” accessed June 22, 2021, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/blood-libel>.

19 “Jewish ‘Control’ of the Federal Reserve: A Classic Antisemitic Myth,” *adl.org*, accessed June 22, 2021, <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounders/jewish-control-of-the-federal-reserve-a-classic-antisemitic-myth>.

20 Jason Hanna and Madeline Holcombe, “Jersey City Shooters Fueled by Hatred of Jewish People and Law Enforcement, State Attorney General Says,” *CNN.com*, December 12, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/12/12/us/jersey-city-new-jersey-shooting-thursday/index.html>.

21 Rebecca Liebson, Neil Vigdor, Michael Gold, and Eliza Shapiro, “5 Wounded in Stabbing at Rabbi’s House in N.Y. Suburb,” *New York Times*, December 28, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/28/nyregion/monsey-synagogue-stabbing-anti-semitic.html?fbclid=IwAR1MLh9qBcrhJYc890tSMOa4803jfrzXbI9aQ0PgSphSNP6UzvMLfojcvLM>.

22 Jill Cowan, “What to Know about the Poway Synagogue Shooting,” *New York Times*, April 29, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/29/us/synagogue-shooting.html>.

group of men punched and threw to the ground two Hasidic Jews on the same day in Crown Heights—only one of a sizeable number of violent incidents that have occurred over the past three years.

Those who are visibly Jewish feel particular anxiety and fear, especially around street violence, as Nathan J. Diamant, executive director for public policy at the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations in America, testified before Congress.<sup>23</sup> David Niederman, another rabbi, noted that “we thought the things that happen in Europe would never happen in the United States and definitely not in New York City . . . but unfortunately, we were in dreamland.”<sup>24</sup>

The most lethal recent episode occurred in October 2018, during Shabbat morning services at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh. A lone gunman fired multiple weapons for approximately twenty minutes, shouting “All Jews must die!”<sup>25</sup> He killed eleven mainly elderly Jewish congregants and wounded another seven, including two SWAT team officers, some critically. FBI special agent Bob Jones said that the crime scene was the worst he had seen in twenty-two years with the FBI.<sup>26</sup> It was also the deadliest antisemitic hate crime in United States history.<sup>27</sup>

Other public manifestations of antisemitism had preceded this watershed event, which rather than serving as an apex turned out to be merely a prelude to continuously escalating antisemitic acts. A year before, at the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, alt-right protesters bearing flaming torches had shouted out in unison, “The Jews will not replace us!” and “Blood and soil!”<sup>28</sup>

When American Jews—along with their friends and allies—subsequently grieved, mourned, and held vigils across the country, when they participated in conversations about the adverse political environment and increased need for security at Jewish institutions, it wasn’t just about the immediate massacre, then. It was also about the dawning realization that they were an imperiled minority

23 Liam Stack, “Most Visible Jews’ Fear Being Targets as Anti-Semitism Rises,” *New York Times*, February 17, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/17/nyregion/hasidic-jewish-attacks.html>.

24 Ibid.

25 John Altdorfer and Chriss Swaney. “Gunman Targeting Jews Kills 11 in Pittsburgh Synagogue,” *Reuters*, October 27, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-pennsylvania-shooting/at-least-four-reported-dead-12-injured-in-shooting-at-pittsburgh-synagogue-idUSKCN1N10J6>.

26 Ibid.

27 Julie Turkewitz and Kevin Roose, “Who Is Robert Bowers, the Suspect in the Pittsburgh Synagogue Shooting?,” *New York Times*, October 27, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/27/us/robert-bowers-pittsburgh-synagogue-shooter.html>.

28 Wikipedia, s.v. “Unite the Right rally,” accessed January 12, 2019, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unite\\_the\\_Right\\_rally](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unite_the_Right_rally).

that could no longer consider themselves safe in America—in *America*, long regarded as *the* safe harbor for Jews. As we believe, and as this volume attests, the sobering fact is that antisemitism, often having new objects and in unfamiliar camouflage, has returned in force—on campuses, in religious doctrines and resolutions, in feminist and African American organizations, in social theories, on the internet, in hate groups both on the right and left, and in much anti-Israel activism.

To return to the Tree of Life massacre, the police finally succeeded in wounding and capturing the gunman, who did not fit the stereotype of the lunatic lone-wolf killer whose heinous acts have little larger social or political resonance. During interrogation, he gave voice to the paranoid conspiratorial theory that he had acted because the Jews were committing genocide against “his people.”<sup>29</sup> This theory was not something of his own making, but rather widely propagated on the hate-disseminating web platforms on which he regularly socialized, such as Gab, a friendly space for neo-Nazis, white supremacists, and the alt-right, 4chan, and 8chan. Through his interactions on such sites, the killer, like others after him, gradually transitioned from staunch conservatism to strident white nationalism. There, he attacked interracial dating, joined in conspiracy theories concerning George Soros, and, along with others, decried the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS). He might have criticized Donald Trump as a globalist surrounded and manipulated by Jews, but, as documented by Ashley V. Reichelmann, Stanislav Vysotsky, and Jack Levin in chapter 13 of this volume, he simultaneously took advantage of Trump and other mainstream politicians who spread the same kind of hate against non-white immigrants and racial minorities that ultimately promoted his brand of Jew-hatred. He targeted Jews because Jews—perhaps due to their ethical and religious convictions, the Torah’s repeated reminder that “you, too, were a stranger in a strange land,” together with their historical experiences—are generally disposed to protect the refugee or stranger.<sup>30</sup> Thus Jews sponsored National Refugee Shabbats and were supportive of the Central American caravans that, according to him—and to Trump—were invading white America. Thus, he averred that “there is no

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29 Alex Amend, “Analyzing a Terrorist’s Social Media Manifesto: The Pittsburgh Synagogue Shooter’s Posts on Gab,” Splcenter.org, October 28, 2018, <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2018/10/28/analyzing-terrorists-social-media-manifesto-pittsburgh-synagogue-shooters-posts-gab>.

30 Amanda Paulson, Martin Kuz, and Noble Ingram, “For Love of Strangers: Behind the Jewish Legacy of Welcoming Refugees,” *Christian Science Monitor*, October 31, 2018, <https://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Society/2018/1031/For-love-of-strangers-Behind-the-Jewish-legacy-of-welcoming-refugees>.

#MAGA as long as there is a kike infestation.” On his final post on Gab before he committed the massacre, he claimed that, “HIAS likes to bring invaders in that kill our people. I can’t sit by and watch my people slaughtered. Screw your optics. I’m going in.”<sup>31</sup>

That the Tree of Life killer was in fact no lone wolf, but rather the tip of an iceberg consisting of thousands of virtual sympathizers and supporters, is no accident. As Joel Finkelstein, Corinne E. Blackmer, and Charles Rubin explain in chapter 4 of this volume, the websites and message boards he frequented represent the ever more frightening future of antisemitism. For there, the radical fringe not only has new powerful resources through which to incubate Jew-hatred in its many forms but also the means to disseminate that hatred and “infect” mainstream spaces in an alarming fashion. Not surprisingly, the Network Contagion Research Institute (NCRI), along with more traditional organizations like the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), has documented an overall rise in online antisemitic hate that spiked sharply around the election of Trump and the Charlottesville Unite the Right rally, only to spike much further since. Indeed, the internet presents a whole host of challenges to those who wish to combat hatred, as the aforementioned chapter goes on to explore, not least the lack of distinction between high- and low-quality information and between niche and mainstream opinion. But rather than reach for the counterproductive tool of censorship, the NCRI advises direct online engagement, particularly since censorship does not capture the far more prevalent if still less deadly forms of contemporary *leftist* antisemitism.

It is common—if not accurate—to think of left-wing groups as defenders of those targeted by hatred. And to be sure, antisemitism is just one of various forms of hatred that are on the rise in America. In fact, the Tree of Life killer was not the only person who had exchanged talk for action around that same time, who had decided on “going in.” That same week there were not only several mail bombing attempts targeting Democratic figures from former President Obama to Hillary Clinton, but there was also the Jeffersontown Kroger shooting, a deadly hate crime that targeted two older African Americans.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, while all forms of hatred must be combatted, one must note that the FBI recorded a significant 37% spike in antisemitic hate crimes in 2016–2017 and that Jews were, at 57.1%, the most frequently targeted religious group in the

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31 Altdorfer and Swaney, “Gunman Targeting Jews.”

32 “Suspect in Deadly Shooting at Jeffersontown Kroger Appears in Federal Court,” *wlky.com*, last modified January 7, 2019, <https://www.wlky.com/article/suspect-in-deadly-shooting-at-jeffersontown-kroger-appears-in-federal-court/25783811>.

country.<sup>33</sup> In New York City, for example, antisemitic incidents constituted half of all hate crimes in 2018.<sup>34</sup> In comparison, there were four times as many crimes motivated by bias against Jews as there were against blacks, and twenty times as many as there were against transgender people. One must further note that, contrary to the common perception, hateful acts directed at Jews come not only from right-wing figures but also—and perhaps even primarily—from the left. In October 2018 the *New York Times* reported, shockingly, that over the preceding twenty-two months in New York City, “not one person caught or identified as the aggressor in an antisemitic hate crime [was] associated with a far right-wing group.” One must not minimize the existence, pervasiveness, and threat of right-wing antisemitism, as the Tree of Life massacre demonstrates, but one must also not blind oneself to the existence, pervasiveness, and threat of those versions of antisemitism emanating from the left either.

Extremist versions of right- and left-wing antisemitism converge at several points, including in the promulgation of various conspiracy theories and Holocaust denial. Unlike the right, however, the left generally camouflages its antisemitism under the guise of “progressivism” or “human rights,” often going so far as to explicitly deny that it is antisemitic—even claiming that it is *opposed* to antisemitism—which typically requires recognizing as antisemitic only the right-wing Jew-hatred associated with Nazi symbols and white supremacism. Similarly, rather than openly calling for violence against Jews, the left prefers the tactics of silencing, isolating, shaming, disavowing, and professionally injuring—particularly but not exclusively—Jews who are supportive of Israel. This effort in turn typically requires distinguishing between “good Jews” and “bad Jews,” where the former are “progressives” who support the marginalized and oppressed in America (i.e. *not* Jews) and the latter are conceived of as white and powerful and supportive of Israel’s shortcomings in addressing the oppression of marginalized people, including persons of color and Palestinians. Often, though, the distinction is blurry, and leftists end up, despite protestations to the contrary, being plain antisemites.

Indeed, many of these features of leftist American antisemitism were on display in a recent controversy surrounding left-wing icon Alice Walker, author of *The Color Purple* (1982). Although Walker has long been recognized as rabidly anti-Israel (going so far as to refuse to have her famous novel translated

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33 Erin Donoghue, “New FBI Data Shows Rise in Antisemitic Hate Crimes,” cbsnews.com, updated November 13, 2018, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/fbi-hate-crimes-up-new-data-shows-rise-in-antisemitic-hate-crimes>.

34 Ginia Bellafante, “Is It Safe to Be Jewish in New York City?,” *New York Times*, October 31, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/31/nyregion/jewish-bias-safety-nyc.html>.

into Hebrew), she used the once-prestigious vehicle of a fawning *New York Times* interview in December 2018 to elaborately praise the work of the British antisemitic conspiracy theorist David Icke. For just one example, Icke argues in his book *And the Truth Shall Set You Free* (2004) that the Jewish people funded the Holocaust, which probably never took place at all. Yet strikingly, both Icke and Walker deny they are antisemitic. For his part, Icke claims that his book refers to twelve-foot-long lizard “people”—most of whom “happen” to be Jewish—rather than alluding to “real” Jews. For her part, Walker claims that remaining “open-minded” about the possibility that the Holocaust never occurred stands as the mark of an “impartial” and “courageous mind,” willing to buck conventional views in the pursuit of “truth”—a position that she as a woman of color can particularly understand and respect.<sup>35</sup>

Piercing the façade of these denials does not take much work. Yair Rosenberg, for example, promptly responded to Walker’s interview by documenting the impressive extent of her Jew-hatred. For just one example again, in 2017 Walker composed a conspiracy poem titled, “It Is Our (Frightful) Duty to Study the Talmud,” in which she blames the ills of the world, from Israel to America, on the Talmud, the ancient Aramaic compendium of Jewish law and lore, and makes use of most of the traditional antisemitic tropes, from attacking Jews as Christ-killers to claiming that Jews view gentiles as “sub-human.”<sup>36</sup> Naturally, the Talmudic Jewish project culminates (in her eyes) in the creation of the evil Jewish state as the primary vehicle for Jewish malfeasance. In a moment of harmony between the right and left, her research for the poem was quite clearly derived from various white supremacist and neo-Nazi websites that have long made these claims about the Talmud by misunderstanding, distorting, taking out of context, and sometimes outright fabricating quotations from the text.<sup>37</sup> But in Walker’s mind she cannot be antisemitic because she has various Jewish friends—“good Jews”—who renounce the Talmud and Israel.

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35 Constance Grady, “The Alice Walker Anti-Semitic Controversy, Explained,” *Vox*, December 20, 2018, <https://www.vox.com/culture/2018/12/20/18146628/alice-walker-david-icke-anti-semitic-new-york-times>.

36 Yair Rosenberg, “The New York Times Just Published an Unqualified Recommendation for an Insanely Anti-Semitic Book,” *Tablet*, December 17, 2018, <https://www.tabletmag.com/scroll/277273/the-new-york-times-just-published-an-unqualified-recommendation-for-an-insanely-anti-semitic-book>.

37 See “The problem isn’t the NYT or David Icke—It Is Alice Walker herself,” *Elder of Zion* (blog), December 20, 2018, <http://elderofzion.blogspot.com/2018/12/the-problem-isnt-nyt-or-david-icke-it.html>. For responses to the specific ludicrous charges against the Talmud, see “The Real Truth about the Talmud,” *angelfire.com*, accessed January 10, 2019, <http://www.angelfire.com/mt/talmud>.



This leftist pattern of disavowal of antisemitic passions—sometimes taking the form of denying that one personally harbors antisemitism, sometimes denying that it still exists tout court—forms an important part of many of the chapters in this volume, in particular when it comes to antisemitism with respect to Israel. We especially believe that leftist attacks on Israel cross the line into antisemitism when they go beyond legitimate critique of particular Israeli policies and practices and instead represent that country as a unique incarnation of pure evil that one must ruthlessly castigate, isolate, and delegitimize.<sup>38</sup> Like the classic antisemite's Jew, leftist antisemitism sees Israel as bloodthirsty, devious, conspiratorial, ruthless, and guilty of the most outrageous crimes against humanity. The interest is not in critiquing or improving Israel, but in destroying it. Yet for many on the left who pursue this path there is nothing antisemitic about this unique hostility towards the world's only Jewish state: they don't hate Jews, they will say, only Zionists. And they don't hate Zionists because of any animosity toward Jews, they say, but only because of the terrible things those Zionists do and have done.

One phenomenon that perhaps facilitates this move is described by Andrew Pessin in chapter 11 of this volume, which analyzes the unconscious or "epistemic" antisemitism of otherwise "decent" people, one that remains dangerous and hard to combat because it pertains not to the content of beliefs per se but rather to the cognitive processes that produce beliefs. Manifested as an "ethnic bias," the symptoms of this epistemic antisemitism can include, among other things, disproportionate obsession with Jews and Israel and hyper-focus on the alleged misdeeds of only the Jewish side of the Middle East conflict.

Another subtle, if pervasive, form of antisemitism is explored by Cary Nelson in chapter 9, where personal "micro-boycotts" that violate codes of professional conduct and compromise academic freedom proliferate. In brief, pro-Israel faculty and students are prevented from pursuing their academic goals in matters such as obtaining letters of recommendation and thesis advisors, publishing, presenting at conferences, inviting speakers to campus or being invited elsewhere, to the point where many individuals now resort to self-censorship and "passing" so that their Israeli or pro-Israel views are not detected. The Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement claims

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38 Here we follow the US State Department and the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, themselves inspired by Natan Sharansky's "3D test" to determine when criticism of Israel may be counted as antisemitism—namely when it demonizes, delegitimizes, or applies double standards to Israel. See Natan Sharansky, "3D Test of Anti-Semitism: Demonization, Double Standards, Delegitimization," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 16, nos. 3–4 (Fall 2004), <https://www.jcpa.org/phas/phas-sharansky-f04.htm>.



it targets institutions rather than individuals, but in practice these two are impossible to separate. When scholarly organizations such as the American Studies Association, among others, pass BDS resolutions, micro-boycotts gain currency and legitimacy—and largely pass under the radar of public scrutiny.

In this vein as well, Kenneth Waltzer, in chapter 16, describes the prevalence of antisemitic anti-Israel activities on University of California (UC) campuses, which include sometimes violent interruptions of invited speakers and thus the denial of academic freedom of speech. The situation became so grave that the UC system implemented a series of principles against intolerance. These were a good beginning, but problems with definitions and implementation persist, which means that education and training have become essential, particularly around the meanings of free speech and its traditions. This chapter explicitly examines the overlap between antisemitism and anti-Zionism, which “converge and interact” to form what is often termed a “new” antisemitism, in which Israel has become to the world what “the Jew” was to the medieval era.

A particularly fascinating element of the left-wing campus antisemitism focused on Israel is the prevalence of Jews among its vocal propagators. In chapter 1, Edward Alexander tackles the issue as it is manifest among a number of prominent Jewish American academics, whose vitriol toward Israel, often expressed as arising from their perspective “as Jews,” knows few bounds. This same attitude is also front and center in chapter 3, where Miriam Elman analyzes the leftist anti-Israel organization Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP). Founded in 1996 but becoming particularly prominent only in recent years, JVP now serves to whitewash the overall antisemitic nature of the anti-Israel movement by showing that “even Jews” can be hostile to Israel. Like other leftists it too rejects its own antisemitism by conceiving antisemitism as only a right-wing phenomenon. Most troubling—and most dishonest—of all, JVP goes even further, by claiming that its opposition to the Jewish state itself stems from Jewish principles. Thus, while the traditional Christian form of antisemitism that dominated Europe for centuries sought to convert Jews to Christianity, JVP now engages in a form of identity theft of Jewish observances and traditions, aiming to transform Judaism itself into a radical pro-Palestinian religion.

On behalf of the Palestinians, moreover, JVP frequently joins coalitions on campuses with other marginalized or oppressed groups in order to attack not just Israel but those Jewish students on campus who may be supportive of Israel. Such attacks rely heavily on the increasingly popular notion of “intersectionality,” the theory that all oppressions are intrinsically connected, thus giving rise to the idea that all such groups on campus should fight on behalf of the Palestinians and against the (Israel-supporting) Jews. In chapter 5, Elliot Kaufman explores

the history and the use of this notion, arguing that it isn't merely a theory or intellectual framework but specifically a tool for political organizing—and one that inevitably produces the antisemitic idea that Jews are powerful oppressors of the marginalized and the consequent backlash against Jews who support Jewish rights (among others).

As Charles Asher Small and David Patterson explore in chapter 14, the activities of JVP have a campus counterpart in those of National Students for Justice in Palestine (NSJP), a campus organization founded with the help of the American Muslims for Palestine and the US Palestinian Community Network. Research into NSJP reveals that the organization supports terrorism and engages in and spreads virulent forms of antisemitism across American campuses, which constitutes its core political ideology and mission. Its annual national conference, which always takes place on the campus of a major university and is attended by over two hundred local Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) chapters, promotes the spread of antisemitic discourse throughout the US and Canadian college system. In keeping with their missions, universities are intended to be places where individuals can learn and express themselves without fear of discrimination or prejudice. However, the fact that SJP members and chapters are able to convene on the campuses of highly respected universities to disseminate the organization's hateful message demonstrates that many institutions of higher education are either unaware of or actively ignoring this problem, which promises to worsen with time.

Many of the themes above come together in Melissa Landa's case study of Oberlin College in chapter 8. Small liberal arts colleges have served as central breeding grounds for much campus antisemitic anti-Israelism. Landa documents how her once beloved alma mater has descended, in recent years, from being a bastion of truly progressive thought to being one, instead, where Jewish students fear to stand up for themselves and for Israel.

Still within the academy but moving out of the campus "trenches," so to speak, Neil Kressel investigates in chapter 7 how contemporary American social scientists, who once took great interest in antisemitism, have now come to see it as having been successfully historicized and thus ignore it. This despite the fact that, in its cautious if comprehensive 2014–2015 survey, the Anti-Defamation League found that there are approximately *1.09 billion* antisemites in the world! Misconceptions about the nature of antisemitism lead scholars to bypass it for reasons of academic survival and due to the effects of pervasive anti-Zionism, which in turn causes them to remain silent about the most prevalent forms of contemporary antisemitism among Muslims, ethnic minorities, the left, and religious communities. In brief, there is a misguided reluctance to pursue the study of anti-social beliefs among groups who themselves have been

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