



# The Death of American Antisemitism

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# **The Death of American Antisemitism**

*SPENCER BLAKESLEE*

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For Barbara, the embodiment of the expression *beshera*. Through her comes my strength. With her comes my joy.

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## Preface

It is likely that a great many people reading this book's title will say, "Wait a minute, antisemitism is dead? I remember something antisemitic that happened just a few years ago," or, "One of my best friends is Jewish, and she says antisemitism is always a threat." Just as often they will then go on to relate something awful that happened to someone in their family, a neighbor, or a coworker that was clearly antisemitic. Their tales would be true, regardless of how dated they might be, and I could add several examples from my own experience. Others will ask, "What about Crown Heights [1991], wasn't that antisemitism at its worst?"<sup>1</sup> This book is not about individual incidents of antisemitism, as appalling as they may have been, but about the overall safety of America's Jews at the beginning of the twenty-first century. It examines the emotional significance antisemitism continues to exert on the consciousness of substantial numbers of American Jews and the political necessity antisemitism continues to exert on a small group of Jewish advocacy organizations (JAOs) that purport to represent Jewish interests. All of this emotion and political necessity in spite of the statistical reality that since the end of World War II anti-Jewish beliefs have almost disappeared from the American cultural scene. The vast majority of Americans are simply not antisemitic!

But a caution is also in order at this point. The near disappearance of antisemitism in America over the past sixty years does *not* mean it has disappeared in other parts of the world. A careful examination of the sociocultural fabric of several European countries (not to mention the Arab countries) quickly reveals the tenacity and persistence of antisemitism in these parts of the globe. A few examples will serve to highlight the extent of the problem.

Fifty years after World War II a young woman writes a book (and movie) about the nascent antisemitism in her small Austrian town (*Nasty*

*Girl*). The duplicity of the Swiss banking institutions and their treatment of confiscated Jewish wealth were brought to light in a series of sweeping legal and moral indictments. There is uneasiness in Germany over the reality of pro-Nazi fringe groups and the reign of terror they brought against recent immigrants. There is persistent fear on the part of Polish peasants that “the Jews will come back,” and this in a country with no more than four to five thousand Jews—down from 3.3 million in 1939! Finally, the recent rash of synagogue desecrations in Russia, and the openly antisemitic stance of the Russian National Unity group as reported on December 16, 1998 in the *Boston Globe* by David Fillipow in an article entitled “Public Discontent Fuels Hate in Russia.” It is a sorry list, indeed, and no one, Jew or non-Jew, of conscience can ever safely ignore these rumbling undercurrents of Jew-hatred. No, antisemitism is not gone from the world’s stage, but it is nearly so from the American scene. It is to this limited but enormously powerful world citizen (the United States) that I have turned an analytical eye in regard to its emotional and political understanding of a disappearing prejudice.

This book is about the continuing necessity for the real or imagined presence of antisemitism and the impact that presence has on the twin issues of Jewish identity and organizational necessity. It is an attempt to urge America’s Jews and their organizations to move toward issues of greater importance to them that will assure their continuance in both the twenty-first century and beyond. Does this sociological assessment of Jewish identity and survival mean that the individual Jew and his/her opinion about antisemitism and his/her own identity count for little in a decidedly large discussion? Not at all. Those individual opinions have never been more important than they are today in a period of escalating intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews, and the low birthrates among Jewish families.

The present birthrate for Jewish families (approximately 1.8) is not sufficient to even replace the current population of American Jews. The exception to this arithmetic average is the Orthodox Jews. They are opposed to abortion and many forms of birth control and are consciously seeking a higher birthrate. It currently stands at approximately 3.4 children per family. Added to this biological reality of underreproduction among the larger population of American Jews are the ongoing tensions embedded in the question, “Who is a Jew?” The divisiveness among the major branches of Judaism (Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, and to a much smaller degree, Reconstructionist) is incredibly painful to those religious Jews who want to worship according to their conscience but still remain one with their coreligionists. Added to the religiously observant Jews are the millions of Jews who claim the right to their identity as Jews, but who want nothing whatever to do with the religion of their forefathers and -mothers. Are all of these Jews in fact *Jews*? If they are, how are these differences in interpretation to

be reconciled in the face of an inevitable assimilation that results in more and more Jews (of whatever stripe) opting out each year?

A clear implication of these multiple pressures is that every Jew in this country will have to decide what being Jewish means to her/him, or if there is any reason to continue to identify oneself as Jewish. In a very real sense, the decisions today's Jews make about their identity will shape the content and expression of American Jewry for decades to come. Whether or not the numerous Jewish organizations in the United States, and in particular, those held in high reverence for their pioneering work in Jewish defense, will play any role whatever in this identity/continuity challenge turns on a number of complex factors. This book addresses several of those factors and represents an attempt to contribute to our collective understanding of the rapidly changing textures of American Jewish life.

As each succeeding group of "strangers to these shores" (Parrillo, 1997) was assimilated, the memories of prejudice, discrimination, and physical attacks that often marked their journey into America's mainstream did not immediately abate. Long after they had assimilated as Americans, individual members of these social/ethnic groups held on to their memories of those outrages, and frequently the "idea" of those prejudices outlived (by decades) the pain of actual experiences. A residual belief often persisted in those communities that as good as life was, there was always the possibility that they could once again find themselves objects of renewed attack. Nowhere was that sentiment more prevalent than in the Jewish community.

For Jews, this victimization and revictimization had occurred frequently during their long diaspora history. These were a people who had justly earned a near permanent sense of foreboding about their safety and tranquility. But, in contrast to other countries in which Jews settled, America proved to be a very different experience for the Jew. White, Protestant America did not welcome Jews with open arms, but neither did it greet them with pogroms, or government policies specifically written to drive them out. As Jews steadily adapted to this new world, success followed in a number of occupations, and Jews (like every other ethnic group before them) began assimilating into the general population. America proved to be more than a safe place in which to pursue a livelihood. In time it produced the most successful Jewish community history had ever seen! But with that success came a larger question—can Jews accept that success and still call themselves Jews?

It was the plight of Jews in other parts of the world that prompted small groups of prosperous American Jews early in this century to form defense organizations as formal mechanisms to protect and advocate for the interests (and sometimes the lives) of their coreligionists overseas. The influence of prominent leaders in these American Jewish organizations was substantial in terms of the help they were able to extend both to afflicted Jews still in Europe and increasingly to the fast growing population of newly arrived Jews in this country. The issue of Jewish safety in America differed in very

significant ways from what Jews had experienced in Europe. The crudeness of American nativists when combined with the imported mentality of a European bred antisemitism was no less disruptive, if not as physically destructive, to the peace and tranquillity of America's Jews. Protection from a variety of direct physical assaults was necessary, as was the advocacy for dealing with the frustrations of being denied a host of basic civil rights. It was the Jewish defense organizations that led the fight for Jewish safety and the legal battles for obtaining those common civil liberties; and antisemitism was at the core of the mission statements of these organizations. In all four of the JAOs examined in this study, antisemitism was their *raison d'être*. The history of these organizations and the importance of antisemitism as their primary mission are discussed in detail in parts one and two of this book.

Chapter one briefly describes the history of the Jewish experience in America, and the antisemitism that often accompanied it. This brief history lesson is followed in chapter two with a detailed description and discussion of sixty years of tracking antisemitic opinions and, in more recent times, the occurrence of antisemitic incidents. Chapters three, four, five, and six focus on the history and organizational characteristics of the American Jewish Committee (AJC), Anti-Defamation League (ADL), American Jewish Congress (AJCg), and Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC); the four JAOs discussed in this study. Chapter seven pulls together these organizational characteristics into a portrait of the JAOs and the influence the lay leaders hold over their day-to-day operation and their decision-making process. It is here that we learn the extent of the political importance antisemitism carries for these organizations.

Perhaps the best way to observe all of these complex factors is to examine them during the JAOs' involvement in actual antisemitic incidents. Part three does that, giving the reader firsthand exposure to advocacy techniques and results. Chapter eight presents the first of three antisemitic incidents in which these four organizations involved themselves. In the first incident, the American Jewish Committee withdrew, at the last minute, from a long-awaited black/Jewish historical exhibit because the Nation of Islam had inserted several antisemitic panels into the exhibit material.

In the second incident, described in chapter nine, a black professor at one of the "seven sisters" colleges insisted on using a highly volatile book compiled by the Nation of Islam as a textbook in his Black History Course. In the third incident, the focus of chapter ten, the fiery leader of the Nation of Islam, Minister Louis Farrakhan, gave a speech to an overflow crowd at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. The next day the JAOs held a joint press conference to make sure that several of the antisemitic allegations he had made after the press had left the night before were not omitted from the extensive media coverage the speech received.

All of the data presented to this point suggest that several conclusions can be made, and having made them, they must, in turn, lead the JAOs and America's Jews to consider new directions they can pursue in the future. Further, these conclusions should prompt a serious effort to create a new basis for understanding the threat of antisemitism. Part four addresses those conclusions and their implications.

Chapter eleven discusses the paradox of public opinion of attitudinal antisemitism, which is at an all-time low, and the inexplicably high levels of Jewish foreboding about the supposed threat of American antisemitism. It discusses what we know about antisemitism, what we don't know about antisemitism, and what we don't want to know about antisemitism in the United States. It tackles the elusive problem of defining antisemitism and the pressing need for new and better polling instruments. The black community is examined as a case in point.

It is unreasonable to conclude, chapter eleven argues, that these JAOs, still deeply influenced by an immigrant mentality (and the antisemitism that went with it), are equipped to assume a role in the mounting dilemma of Jewish identity or continuity in America. This last chapter illustrates the inroads that 100 years of assimilation have made on American Jewish identity. Given these inroads, it stands to reason that if, at some point in the future, there are no, or very few, Jews, then there is little reason for any Jewish organizations, let alone the JAOs examined in this study. On the other hand, if American Jews decide to continue identifying themselves as Jews, by whatever formula, can the JAOs survive without making substantial changes in the way they do business?

### **A NOTE ON SPELLING "ANTISEMITISM"**

Richard S. Levy (1991) points out that "Jew-hatred," Jew-baiting," and "Judaophobia" existed long before the term "antisemitism" came into vogue in late nineteenth-century Germany. Antisemitism is a descriptive expression for Jew-hatred coined by the failed German journalist and full-time antisemite Wilhelm Marr in 1879. Europe's other political agitators, and their presses, quickly adopted this new expression. It didn't contain the word "Jew," and it gave their collective expressions of repugnance for Jews a pseudoscientific cachet. Jews could now be considered as bearers of obvious (if impossible to define) racial attributes, rather than members of a specific religion or as people of undefined national origin. Such a distinction is ludicrous since there is no such thing as a "semitism" that an "anti" could oppose. It is an expression that never refers to any of the other members of the semitic family of languages. It refers only to Jews, and only in negative ways. Throughout this book antisemitism connotes attacks against Jews as individuals and Jews as a community.

### **NOTE**

1. In four days of rioting in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn, New York, following the accidental death of a seven-year-old black child, a Jewish scholar was murdered and millions of dollars in damages were done to Jewish homes and businesses. The neighborhood is almost equally divided between Hasidic Orthodox Jews and blacks.

## Acknowledgments

There are a great many people one encounters while writing a book, and this has been no exception. There are too many of these people who have given me assistance at one point or another to recall with complete accuracy or fairness. However, there is a group of people to whom I am deeply indebted for different forms of assistance, support, and critiques that they provided at different times during the writing of this manuscript. They include Jack Wertheimer, Jerome Chanes, Jonathan Sarna, Earl Rabb, Gary Tobin, Daniel Elazar (deceased), Helen Fein, Ron McAllister, Michael Brown, Gordana Rabrenovic, Debra Kaufman, Sherry Israel, Arnold Dashefsky, Henry Tischler, Barbara Weiss, Arlene and Howard Weintraub, and Calvin Goldscheider. In the early days of this effort there was the spiritual and intellectual companionship of Rabbi Bernard Mehlman, and throughout the writing there has been the support, patience, and encouragement of my colleagues and students at Northeastern University and Framingham State College. They patiently endured what must have seemed like endless conversations about various portions of this book. Four of my students, Christina Cain, Erin Feeley, Beth Grupposo, and James Leach, must be recognized for their willingness and enthusiasm in undertaking the tedious task of checking citations, bibliographic references, and misspelled words. To all and each of these stalwart souls I am deeply grateful for their wisdom, guidance, and patience. There is my deep appreciation to the professional leadership of the four JAOs discussed in this study, Dr. Lawrence Lowenthal (AJC), Mr. Martin Goldman (formerly AJC), Mr. Leonard Zakim (deceased, ADL), Ms. Sheila Decter (AJCg), and Ms. Nancy Kaufman (JCRC). Their honesty and candor about themselves and their organizations could only have come from dedicated leaders who have only the best interests of their constituencies in mind. Not surprisingly, we often saw issues differently, but



they never withheld key information or their cooperation throughout the long months of interviews. Their help was valuable beyond words. A special note of appreciation is made to Ms. Cyma Horowitz, principal librarian at the American Jewish Committee's Blaustein Institute for Human Relations in New York City. No matter how short the notice, she always had the requested material (and often more) waiting for me. Thank you for your help, Cyma.

There is one individual who deserves special praise because of the unique mentoring role he extended that was of critical value in helping me think through problems of logic and common sense. He is Dr. John Weiss, a distinguished historian and authority on the ideological roots of European antisemitism that culminated in the Holocaust. He patiently helped me understand that an author need not lose commitment to his subject simply because there was a more direct, jargon-free way of telling the story. Thank you, John!

There are family or kinship systems that provide support and nurture to the first-time author, and I have been particularly blessed with a large network of supportive people. They have included my granddaughter (Isabel Rose) and her mom (Nance) and dad (Steven) in Olympia, Washington, a Hebrew calligrapher of breathtaking talent who is also my brother Lawrence, a dear group of stalwart friends my wife and I have come to think of as "our crowd," and the editorial staff at Greenwood Publishing, Dr. Jim Sabin, my acquisition editor, Ms. Maralee Youngs, copyeditor, and Ms. Elizabeth Meagher, my production editor, who disproved the belief that writers and their editors are natural antagonists; they are natural collaborators, and thank heaven for it. The inevitable errors of judgment that appear here and the conclusions I put forth in this book are solely my responsibility.

I have dedicated this book to my beautiful wife, Barbara, and in doing so have, perhaps, introduced some readers to the wonderful Yiddish word *besherta*. In the infinite reaches of the universe there is the knowledge that some souls must have time together on earth (*besherta*), and G-d allows that to take place. This has been the blessing that came to me late in my life in the person of Barbara. Her patience, prodding, and never-flagging love has made my life a miracle.

## Abbreviations

AAUP	American Association of University Professors
ACLU	American Civil Liberties Union
ADL	Anti-Defamation League
AIPAC	American Israel Public Affairs Committee
AJC	American Jewish Committee
AJCg	American Jewish Congress
<i>AJYB</i>	<i>American Jewish Year Book</i>
BBURG	The Boston Banks Urban Renewal Group
<i>BG</i>	<i>Boston Globe</i>
CCI	Council on Community Inter-Relations
CCNY	City College New York
CJF	Council of Jewish Federations
CJP	Combined Jewish Philanthropies
CLSA	Commission on Law and Social Action
<i>EJ</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i>
FEPC	Fair Employment Practices Commission
FHA	Federal Housing Authority
JAO(s)	Jewish Advocacy Organization(s)
JCC	Jewish Community Council (predecessor to the JCRC)
JCRC	Jewish Community Relations Council
JPS	Jewish Publication Society
JTS	Jewish Telegraphic Service
KKK	Ku Klux Klan

NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NJCRAC	National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council
NJPS	National Jewish Population Survey
NOI	Nation of Islam
NORC	National Opinion Research Center
NOW	National Organization of Women
NPOs	nonprofit organizations
RHSPAC	The Roxbury Heritage State Park Advisory Committee
SR	<i>The Secret Relationship between Blacks and Jews</i> , Vol. 1
UAHC	Union of American Hebrew Congregations
UJA	United Jewish Appeal
WJCg	World Jewish Congress

*Part One*  
**Introduction**

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# Chapter 1

## Jews, America, and Antisemitism

### INTRODUCTION

On November 25, 1998, the *New York Times* ran an ad sponsored by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL). It proclaimed, “One out of eight Americans has hard-core Anti-Semitic feelings. Does this sound like a problem that doesn’t exist?” The day before the *Boston Globe* ran an eight-paragraph article from the Associated Press entitled, “Blacks More Antisemitic than Whites, Survey Finds.” There was more that was not said in these two items than that was said. For example, in the instance of the *Boston Globe* article, the reader does not find out how the survey (sponsored by the ADL) of black attitudes toward Jews was conducted, what questions were asked, or what the results were that led the ADL to make the claim it did. Nor did the article reveal what depth this antisemitism had assumed among blacks, or in what areas, or, for that matter, how antisemitism was understood in the black community.

What the article did do was send a not-too-subtle message that blacks are antisemitic, and that is nonsense. America’s black community is not monolithic. The variations in the black community are as wide and deep as those in the Jewish community. This kind of reporting suggests that the antisemitism that does afflict certain portions of the black community is actually endemic to the entire community; it is reckless to suggest such a thing. To begin with, there is no such thing as “black antisemitism.” Certainly there are blacks that are antisemitic, just as there are Asians, Hispanics, feminists, or labor leaders who are antisemitic. The big difference between those groups and “black antisemitism” is that we never read about “Hispanic antisemitism” or “feminist antisemitism.” It is time for the ADL and the other Jewish advocacy organizations (JAOs) to get much more specific about who

in the black community it is they think is antisemitic, and more important, what level of threat they believe this poses for Jews. In addition to blacks and other whites another readership (America's Jews) was important to the ADL, and I will say more about the impact these ads and articles have on them in a moment. Second, what is the reader to conclude after reading the ADL's ad?

The ad boldly claims, "One out of eight Americans has hard-core Anti-Semitic beliefs." The ADL goes on to say that these one out of eight persons who are hard-core antagonists toward Jews total approximately 35 million Americans. There are 35 million Jew-haters—I'm more than a little skeptical of such a claim. I don't believe it, and I am not convinced that the ADL does either (based on the comments made to the author during the research for this book). Also, precisely what are those "hard-core beliefs," and at what level of intensity do they differ from moderate- or mild-core beliefs? We never find out. What the reader can safely conclude from both the article and the ad is that the last months of any year are active fund-raising months for organizations that depend on donations and contributions (approximately 40 percent of all charitable giving occurs during the last two months of the year). This includes the ADL and other Jewish organizations, and this is the time to take advantage of the tax deduction a contribution to their efforts to fight antisemitism represents.

Several days after the first article appeared in the *Boston Globe*, a longer article by Julia Goldman entitled "Anti-Semitism in U.S. Drops, but Stays High Among Blacks" appeared between November 27 and December 3, 1998 in Boston's *Jewish Advocate* and hundreds of other Jewish newspapers across the country. The article revealed that the ADL's statistics came, once again, from the same eleven beliefs about Jews it had constructed in 1964! The other important issue in this debate is, "What was the likely impact those statistics had on a certain segment of American Jews?" As these findings did in the past, they once again could be counted on to raise already high levels of apprehension among some Jews to still higher levels. As reported in chapter two, there are significant numbers of American Jews who know they have never been safer from attack or calumny than they are in America, but they continue to feel a powerful sense of "foreboding" about their future based on the past. Antisemitism has raised its ugly head on more than one occasion in this country, and it could again. So, these fears are not entirely groundless, but when placed in the context of an ethnic group that is almost totally accepted as mainstream Americans, it is not unreasonable to conjecture that these continuous reminders of the past only serve to fuel an almost baseless paranoia. It is time for the Jewish advocacy organizations to stop fueling this anxiety and turn their attention (and money) to more productive and positive Jewish venues. Those are the issues this book addresses—the continuing political and emotional necessity of a threat that has virtually vanished from the conscious mind of most Americans. Framed as

a question it becomes, “Why does antisemitism continue to serve substantial emotional and political needs for some of America’s Jews, and most decidedly for the organizations that purport to serve the best interests of America’s 5.5 million Jews?”

To answer this question it is necessary first to go back in time and examine the American Jewish experience, and the antisemitism that frequently dogged that experience, and then to come forward to the present time when the threat of antisemitism has largely disappeared, but the emotional and political purposes it serves are still healthy and thriving. That is where the research for this book began.

In 1992, I found myself exceedingly puzzled over the apparent escalation of antisemitism in the black community. Over the next several months my puzzlement escalated to scholarly curiosity, and it rose, yet again, to what became a broader and deeper examination of the reality of antisemitism in America today, and the ways in which it impacts everyone it touches, for example, Jews and non-Jews, formal and informal organizations alike. What was it that had fueled my puzzlement about the status of antisemitism in America to begin with? It started with a full-page essay in the July 22, 1992 *New York Times* (op-ed section) entitled “Black Demagogues and Pseudo-scholars,” by Henry Louis Gates, the chair of Harvard University’s Afro-American Studies Department.<sup>1</sup>

Gates clearly and convincingly disavowed the antisemitism, demagoguery, and pseudoscholarship of a handful of strident black separatists led by Minister Louis Farrakhan, the fiery leader of the Nation of Islam (NOI). Farrakhan has been aided in his campaign of twisted allegations of supposed Jewish wrongdoing by a small coterie of devoted mouthpieces such as Khallid Muhammad, Professor Leonard Jeffries (City University of New York), Professor Tony Martin (Wellesley College), and Steve Coakley of Chicago.

Their main source of “reliable” information about the Jews comes from an incendiary book compiled by the Historical Research Department of the NOI (and soundly thrashed by Gates in his article) entitled *The Secret Relationship between Blacks and Jews* (1991, hereafter *SR*). Its 334 pages and 1,275 footnotes form a strange compilation of frequently distorted snippets of information taken from different Jewish sources that reminds one of ransom notes constructed from words cut out of magazines and newspapers and then pasted together to form a ransom demand. In this case the people being “held up” are unsuspecting members of the black community. The book has become the bible of black separatist groups and is sold wherever the NOI is speaking, and in some bookstores catering to Afrocentric clientele. As infuriating as its overall antisemitic portrayal of the Jews and the issue of slavery is, its content is so muddled that only a few stalwart individuals have made any attempt to debunk the book allegation by allegation. One refutation was provided by David Brion Davis, the Yale



University black history scholar, in 1992 (“Jews in the Slave Trade”); and a second one in 1994 by Harold Brackman, a Holocaust scholar at the Simon Weisenthal Institute in Los Angeles.<sup>2</sup> On first reading the Gates article, I thought, “Who are these people, and why are they saying such terrible things about my people?” Up to that day I had never thought of the black community as antisemitic, but perhaps I was wrong.

In the same time frame in which the Gates article appeared, four incidents of antisemitism (three of which are reported in detail in this book) occurred in Boston, Massachusetts. The one incident not reported in complete detail in this book was actually the first in this series of antisemitic incidents, and it took place on the campus of Tufts University in Boston, Massachusetts. In the spring of 1992 the Tufts Islamic Society, in conjunction with the Middle Eastern Studies Group and the university’s Vice President’s Office, invited Kahlid Abdul Muhammad of the NOI to speak on the subject of “Israel’s relationship with South Africa.” Muhammad claimed that “Israel and South Africa had a biblical mandate to oppress Palestinians and black people; that Jews own the world-wide transit of gold and precious gems, and with names like Goldstein and Silverstein it is understandable why they call it Jewelry”; and finally that “Jews were never slaves in Egypt and that blacks are the real Chosen people.” He had used the Tufts forum as an opportunity to rail against Jews, who he said were the principal benefactors in the enslavement and transport of millions of black slaves to America during the despicable middle passage. Much to their credit the Tufts University Islamic Society later rescinded their support when several members expressed discomfort with Muhammad’s brand of Islam.

The reaction by Jews in the audience to Muhammad’s comments was stunned disbelief and outrage. But it was a reaction that did not reach outside the campus, except to a small group of Jewish scholars and Jewish organizational professionals who were informed of the incident. Muhammad’s performance became one in a collection of speeches and talks by strident and noisy spokespersons for black separatism. Over the next three years their inflammatory rhetoric grew more inventive and crude in their allegations of Jewish wrongdoing toward blacks.

The JAOs in Boston took no action in the aftermath of the Tufts incident, but in fairness to them, they had not been invited to the talk. Nobody at the Tufts Hillel, or in the Jewish organizations, felt there was any reason for concern; they all had been caught off-guard. What most impressed me about the entire incident was the level of outrage, fear, and paranoia it triggered in the Tufts Jewish community, and among the Jewish organizational professionals who learned of it.

The Tufts incident became a focal point during a national meeting on antisemitism (The Salzberg Conference on Anti-Semitism, November 6, 1992) in Waltham, Massachusetts. During this meeting loud demands rang out in the room for justice, or at least a lawsuit against the NOI and possibly

Tufts University. Other participants lamented, “After all we [Jews] have done for the blacks, why have they turned on us in this way?” A third group voiced the fear that antisemitism was staging a frightening comeback, and added, “What are we going to do about it?” The other three incidents reported in chapters eight, nine, and ten followed the Tufts incident in quick succession. As I listened to the outrage, fear, and paranoia that Muhammad’s remarks had generated, I wondered how extensive antisemitism was in the black community. After several months of analyzing what historical/statistical data was available on antisemitism in the black community, it turned out that the results were confounded by a number of factors, for example, how do blacks understand antisemitism as compared to whites, do the items in the survey mean the same thing to blacks that they do to whites, and, finally, what level of threat to Jewish security do these antisemitic blacks carry for Jews?

As the other three antisemitic incidents began to unfold, my interest moved increasingly away from any real or latent antisemitism among blacks to the more intriguing question of how prominent Jewish advocacy organizations made decisions about antisemitism, regardless of its origin. How did they decide what had to be done, and who made those decisions? What processes did they go through in carrying out those decisions? Did they collaborate in confronting incidents of antisemitism? As a result of their vigorous advocacy, were these JAOs able to construct any mechanisms to prevent the reoccurrence of antisemitism in the future?

Over the next three years, dozens of interviews were conducted with key Jewish professionals in these organizations, as well as others connected with the three antisemitic incidents. Added to these interviews was the historical information found in archival material from the four organizations, as well as letters, memos, documents, and even scraps of note paper, if they seemed relevant to increasing my understanding of how Jewish organizations actually dealt with antisemitism, and why it continued to absorb so much of their time and effort. What emerged from all of this interviewing and reading was the conclusion that antisemitism continues to possess substantial emotional and political weight for large numbers of America’s Jews and the organizations that purport to represent their interests. Three key questions reached out for answers:

1. What are the internal politics that persuade these JAOs that antisemitism is a continuing threat to Jewish safety in the United States, when in reality, Jews in America today have never been safer, or less likely to find themselves the object of an antisemitic attack or canard? The fact is that since the end of World War II antisemitism, by whatever measure you choose, has dropped to near-negligible levels! Coupled to these facts is another question that asks, What factors continue to shape the opinion of substantial numbers of American Jews that antisemitism is still a substantial threat to their safety?

2. How are organizational politics distorting the JAOs' moral capacity to serve other more important issues in the Jewish community?
3. How many Jewish organizations does it take to fight antisemitism in America today?

Not for the first time did I discover that the needs of select individuals in an organization often overrode whatever its public relations material said was its stated mission. This self-service has substantial implications for how problems are defined by these organizations, who decides something is a problem to begin with, and how the problem, incident, or issue is finally acted upon.

Integral to this discussion are the implications these questions carry for America's Jews, and their quest for an explainable identity in a highly pluralistic society. America's Jews are casting about for new forms of organizational leadership in their struggle for identity and continuity in the face of massive assimilation into late twentieth-century American society; they are not finding it! Does this failure of leadership on the JAOs' part call for new organizations, or a rethinking in some strategic way the mission and goals of the present organizations? Certainly a compelling element in this discussion is the way, or ways, in which these JAOs will continue to represent themselves to the Jewish and non-Jewish communities. This becomes an important question in light of the escalating level of the Jewish intermarriage rate and the impact this is having on the number of Jews that will exist in the next century. If the Jews of America are so nearly assimilated into the general society that they virtually disappear, then what use is there for the JAOs, no matter how successful they were in the past?

Finally, there is the question always asked of social scientists about any "regional" study: Can the results generated by this study be generalized to organizational behavior on a national basis? Yes, it can. The organizational characteristics and decision-making processes reported here are replicas, in all respects, of the JAOs' structure and behavior at the national level. Furthermore, we can expect to see the same patterns of organizational decision making and leadership in the face of antisemitism regardless of where in the United States it occurs. Three of the four organizations discussed in this book (American Jewish Committee [AJC], ADL, and the American Jewish Congress [AJCg]) are branch offices with national headquarters in New York City. The fourth, the Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC), has no national office, and is a local entity. The National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council (NJCRAC), located in New York City, is an umbrella group that provides an advisory and public relations function to the 114 Jewish Community Councils throughout the United States. It has no power or authority to directly influence the decision making of any of these community councils. The Boston JCRC was an important ingredient in this study because it was directly involved in the two of three

antisemitic incidents, and its participation tells us much about Jewish organizational structure, whether or not it has a national office. If, as this book proposes, antisemitism is an artifact of a recent past in American society, where did it come from to begin with?

To properly understand the motivations that energized these JAOs in their confrontations with American antisemitism, it is necessary to understand the Jewish migration to America and the antisemitism that was part and parcel of that resettlement process. It is also important to understand the centuries-long influence that the ideological form of European antisemitism imposed on the mind of every non-Jewish immigrant who came to America from the several countries of Europe.

### **EUROPEAN ROOTS OF AMERICAN ANTISEMITISM**

Throughout this book I will make a distinction between “ideological” antisemitism and “attitudinal” antisemitism. The former was a product of centuries of European bigotry and Jew-hatred, and was sanctioned by official state and church policy. Through these political and ecclesiastical processes the Jew was marginalized in countless ways, and his death at the hands of mobs was frequently ignored, or directly ordered by the state. By contrast, the latter expression, “attitudinal” antisemitism, is a variant of that earlier European brand of bigotry and discrimination. It formed the background mentality of what would become American antisemitism. As vituperative, and infrequently deadly, as this American brand of antisemitism was, it never became official state or federal policy, and that is a powerful distinction to keep in mind.

No political candidate, however antisemitic, has been successful in placing an openly anti-Jewish plank in an American political platform. Unlike Europe, no antisemitic political party has successfully captured the attention of any more than a disturbed fringe element in American society, and none of these groups has been successful in making it to the election ballot. In spite of these clear differences, it is essential to understand the pivotal role this European legacy played in shaping the foundational base of the JAOs’ operations, and the residual memory that antisemitism still carries for large numbers of American Jews. In combination, they have formed the yin and yang of a political/emotional nexus that continues to define the identity of both groups in unique ways.

The Jews who came to America were the Jews who had fled the countries of Europe to make a better life for themselves and their families and to escape the prejudice and discrimination of those native lands. The Europeans who populated America (from its earliest days) were the same Europeans steeped in an ideological antisemitism that had discriminated against the Jews in their native lands for centuries. The European antisemitic predispositions arrived in this country long before the huge influx of Jews began to

arrive in any numbers in the mid-nineteenth century. However, there was a major difference in the anti-Jewish hatred that had festered in Europe for centuries, and the ways in which those images of centuries-old antisemitism would shape the attitudes of Americans toward Jews.

In Europe, anti-Jewish hatred was an ideology legitimated by church and government policies that restricted the Jews' movements, the Jews' incomes, and the Jews' occupations. In America, however, it was the "idea" of the Jew (not an ideology) that came here with the English, German, and French settlers. It was anti-Jewish sentiment that was embedded in the teachings of the Christian denominations, their sacred documents dating back centuries, and the shared beliefs of clergy and congregant alike about "the Jew." It was an image tightly bound to the New Testament injunctions about Jews as "Christ killers!" It also was an image that manifested itself in unsavory liturgical depictions of Jews that was eventually extended into an unflattering portrayal of Jews in plays, books, and poetry. Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* is one example.

It is in Europe we must look to find the source of the most pernicious and destructive myths about the Jews. Myths that acquired increased legitimacy as the Christian world expanded and Jews struggled to maintain a presence. But, anti-Jewish hatred did not start with Christianity. Attacks on Jews predated the Christian variety by hundreds of years. There was the Jew-hatred of Roman emperors intent on expunging the presence and the power of Jews in pre-Christian times. For example, in 167 BCE ("Before the Current Era") Antiochus Epiphenus desecrated the temple in Jerusalem by broiling a pig and pouring its juices over sacred Jewish scrolls, the Torah. He defended his actions by proclaiming that the Torah was inimical to the interests of the empire (Wistrich, 1991; Seltzer, 1980).

In spite of these national desecrations, the Jews often enjoyed a quiescent, if sometimes tenuous, relationship in the states (that would eventually become Europe) in which they resided over many of the next thousand years. The Jewish Diaspora had started long before the destruction of the second Temple in 70 CE ("Current Era"). Jews were an active part of Greek society dating back to the fourth century BCE. They had arrived in the Crimea and France at the very dawn of the Christian era. Jews settled in Italy in the second century BCE, in Germany in the fourth century CE, and Poland in the tenth century CE. But this accommodative coexistence with their Christian neighbors changed dramatically in the thirteenth century.

Early in the thirteenth century, Jewish safety and privacy was permanently disrupted with the founding of the mendicant friars—the Dominicans and the Franciscans (Cohen, 1982). For the next three hundred years, the Catholic Church advanced its anti-Jewish agenda through these mendicant friars.

The principal activities of the mendicants were conversion, teaching, and itinerant preaching. In these various capacities, they also taught intolerance for the Jews to local clergy and laity alike. They overlooked no opportunity

to preach anti-Judaic homilies, and in their quest to rid Western Europe of the Jews, they directly contravened the earlier Church dictates of Augustine of Hippo (354–430). Hippo’s teaching provided much of the substance for medieval Christian thought, and he instructed that “God had ordained the survival of the Jews, in order that their presence and continued observance of Mosaic Law might aid the Church in its mission to the Gentiles” (Cohen, 1982:14). The Church neither discouraged nor interfered with the friars’ attacks on Jews, and eventually the Church entrusted the entire leadership of the inquisition to those same mendicant friars. They were quick to spread any distortion or calumny about the Jews as they traveled across Europe. The collection of medieval falsehoods that grew out of their enmity formed the basis for an ideological Jew-hatred in Europe that lasted for centuries, and remnants of it can still be seen today in various European countries and Russia. A handful of these myths deserve separate comment because they ultimately played a powerful role in the formation of American anti-Jewish beliefs.

“Deicide,” literally one who killed God, plus the New Testament belief that Jews were people of the past and Christians were people of the future, provided the foundation for centuries of Christian anti-Jewish bigotry. While a handful of Jewish priests colluded with Roman authorities in the crucifixion of Jesus, it was a Roman decision and a Roman execution that killed Jesus, not “The Jews.” Furthermore, that collusion cannot be passed down to their descendants, regardless of the high priest’s cavalier attitude toward future generations of Jews. Over the centuries that this myth flourished, culminating with the Holocaust, the last words Jews about to be murdered frequently heard was “Christ killer!” (Poliakov, 1965:25).

“Well poisoning” grew out of the fiction that a Christian child had been drowned in a town well as part of a secret Jewish rite of sacrifice that was a part of a larger plot to kill all Christians. This myth was often heard in the aftermath of large scale deaths from such diseases as typhus. The average citizen’s knowledge of the conditions that bred these devastating diseases was negligible, but frequently, Jews paid for that ignorance with their lives. A terrifying variant of the well poisoning myth occurred in the fourteenth century with the appearance in Europe of the Black Plague.

Physicians, kings, and religious leaders were all stymied by the appearance and ferocity of the Black Death; its origins remained a mystery until recent times. It was variously attributed to something in the air or something contracted from being out-of-doors, so people crowded into already cramped and unsanitary quarters, only aggravating the spread of the disease still further. Nothing they did seemed to forestall the agony and disfiguring death that marked the plague. According to Norman Cohn ([1968] 1996), “it was ... concluded that some group of people must have introduced into the water supply, a poison concocted of spiders, frogs, and lizards—all of them symbols of earth, dirt, and the Devil—or else maybe of basilisk-flesh. As the