

Introduction to the Special Issue on Anti-Semitism

Jeffrey A. Schaler

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I am pleased to welcome my colleague and friend, Rita J. Simon, as co-editor for this special double-issue of *Current Psychology*, here devoted to the theme of anti-Semitism the world over in the twenty-first century. We are both honored to publish such erudite and thought-provoking contributions by the distinguished scholars who kindly accepted our invitation to write on this important topic.

Whenever we address something with the intention of changing policy, I believe we owe our audience an explanation about why we are doing so. What are our potential biases, investments, and interests in writing or speaking about certain topics, especially controversial ones? We must “go inside” and search our hearts, take an honest look at what we stand to gain or lose. I can only speak for myself.

The history and origins of the Holocaust have always been a deep personal interest of mine. My father’s family was victimized by the Nazis before they fled in two and a half attempts to get to America from Gotha, Germany. My father, a boy of about fifteen, had already scuffled with Hitler Youth on several occasions, and things were clearly getting worse. He was sent first to live with an aunt in Albany, New York. My aunt and grandmother later escaped through Berlin and France, and they finally made it to New York City via Portugal.

My grandfather was arrested in their home before they left, in the middle of the night, by the Gestapo. It was “Kristallnacht.” He was imprisoned at Buchenwald. My aunt—who died recently—kept the piece of bread her father used to soak up rainwater, to drink, while in Buchenwald. Amazingly, he was released from Buchenwald and dumped by the Gestapo on the front steps of the family home back in Gotha, after being beaten nearly to death. My aunt and grandmother bathed him and cared for his wounds through the night. He was released because he had received the Iron Cross in World War I. That kind of luck would not last long for

J. A. Schaler (✉)
Department of Justice, Law and Society, School of Public Affairs,
American University, 4400, Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.,
Washington, DC 20016, USA
e-mail: schaler@american.edu

him or for anyone, though. He made it to England after his wife and daughter arrived in New York. He was again a prisoner in an English internment camp, this time because he was German. And the Canadian ship that carried him from England with hopes to join his family in America was either torpedoed or sunk in a storm. I could never figure out which it was. They never saw him again. I wish I had known him.

My father learned English quickly, he became president of his high school in Albany about two years after arriving there, and he joined the U.S. Army to go back to Europe, this time to kill Nazis. He was sent to the Pacific theater instead because he was German.

Clearly, my family on my father's side was haunted by memories of the Nazis the rest of their lives. If my father couldn't kill Nazis in Europe, he fought them, like so many Holocaust survivors, in his dreams, right up until when he died seven years ago. Their experience of the Holocaust was, of course, passed from generation to generation.

Much of my teaching and academic interests remain focused on how the Holocaust could happen. I remember asking my father about what people were thinking in Germany when the Nazis were building the political machine that came close to destroying the world. He said "no one believed it could happen." No one ever does; radical anti-Semitism always seems surreal. As the essays in this volume attest, anti-Semitism is alive and well.

Certain essays and conversations over the recent years caught my attention more than others and stimulated my skepticism and concern about anti-Semitism. For example:

And if Israel alone is cheering for this war, what might that fact suggest? Well might we consider whether the present U.S. war policy constitutes still another case of the American dog being wagged by the tail of its Israeli Protectorate. If so, do the American people really want it? (Higgs 2003).

People seemed to protest too much when I suggested they might be expressing anti-Semitism. This was true for Jews, too, perhaps even more so. After all, how could a Jew hate Jews? The same way Blacks can be racist, the way people with a homosexual orientation can feel hatred towards gays. At least people are questioning the use of derogatory and racist rhetoric in hip-hop and rap music. And the ever-increasing news exposing evangelical leaders and Congressman who were publicly critical of gays and gay marriage, and then got caught engaging in homosexual activities themselves, is in the consciousness now of people who likely had never considered such contradictions were possible before. "Reaction formation" and "identification with the aggressor" are terms of academes. It is unlikely, much as people seem to like pop psychology, that they will become household terms, much less used as tools for self-examination. "Self-hating Jew" has become a worn expression, more prescriptive than descriptive, and it rarely seems to encourage people to take an honest look at themselves, regardless of how the phrase is delivered.

What caught my attention and fueled my increasing interest in anti-Semitism and its relation to the Holocaust over the years is that there rarely seemed to be any consideration of honest introspection when the suggestion or accusation was made. Why do people get so upset when we suggest that they may be anti-Semitic? Why

do people get upset when I suggest that they sound anti-Semitic? Why not just let the suggestion roll off as something dumb and inaccurate if that's what it really is to them?

I do not mean to suggest that every criticism of Israel and Israeli politics is anti-Semitism in disguise. Certainly people can be critical of Israeli politics and not be anti-Semitic or a "self-hating Jew." Criticism of Israel *can* mask feelings of anti-Semitism, though. Why is it, I asked friends who criticized Israel, that most every country in the world was established through violence and aggression, yet somehow Israel ends up being more evil in their eyes than any other country? "Two wrongs don't make a right," is the response I kept receiving. Israel was always singled out, especially among people I know on the political left, and especially people I know who tended to call themselves libertarian. I reread history. Why aren't people blaming the United Nations, the British, or the Turks when it comes to discussing Israel's right to exist? Why are the Jews and the Israelis always to blame? Why is "Zionism" considered such a dirty word?

I shared my concern about this double standard with colleagues. One sent me a pre-publication version of the article by Edward H. Kaplan and Charles A. Small (2006), subsequently published in the *Journal of Conflict Resolution*. It reinforced my suspicion that criticism of Israel was often, if not always, a dodge for anti-Semitism. Their study provided evidence that "anti-Israel sentiment consistently predicts the probability that an individual is anti-Semitic, with the likelihood of measured anti-Semitism increasing with the extent of anti-Israel sentiment observed." Again, this doesn't mean that anyone and everyone who criticizes Israel is anti-Semitic.

My understanding of projection deepens my understanding of anti-Semitism. I see the past in the present. My teaching focused more and more on the nature and function of scapegoating. As my good friend Dr. Thomas Szasz had written years ago, scapegoating is a way of expelling evil and affirming the dominant ethic (Szasz 1974). Anti-Semitism is clearly a form of scapegoating. The Nazis blamed the Jews for their problems-in-living and convinced Germans that by controlling and getting rid of Jews (among others) they could control and get rid of their problems.

The Nazis used medical rhetoric to justify murder and the persecution of "lives not worth living." I integrate the Nazis' use of medicine and medical rhetoric in a class I teach called "Deprivation of Liberty." Oddly, some academic colleagues seem furious with me for pointing out the role of psychiatrists in the Holocaust. These are historical facts. My interest in anti-Semitism and the origin of the Holocaust is strengthened as a result:

In October 1939 the first euthanasia applications were sent to psychiatric institutions, where they were evaluated by forty-eight medical doctors....The first executions of adult mental patients were carried out during the military campaign against Poland. (Proctor 1988, p. 189).... Doctors were never ordered to murder psychiatric patients and handicapped children. They were empowered to do so, and fulfilled their task without protest, often on their own initiative (Ibid., p. 193).

By addressing the nature, history, and incidence of anti-Semitism we are necessarily investigating the origins of the Holocaust and totalitarianism. How do

we keep it from happening again? By studying and drawing attention to “the pedigree of ideas.” This kind of vigilance does not come easily. As Lord Acton stated, “Few discoveries are more irritating than those which expose the pedigree of ideas.”

Three of the contributions in this volume highlight the extent, intensity, and history of anti-Semitism throughout the world, and in certain areas in particular: Cuba, Montreal, and across college campuses. Another examines in depth the relationship between Holocaust denial and anti-Semitism, what we should and should not do about it. Another examines Muslim anti-Semitism from a historical perspective. All of these contributions can be used to increase our knowledge and awareness of anti-Semitism, which can in turn affect policy on multiple levels.

As Shakespeare wrote, the past is prologue. A good analyst knows this. Awareness of the influence of our past relationships can help us to interrupt the cycle of repeating what was done to us and positively affect our own experiences with our children. I hope that knowledge and awareness of political practices can keep us from repeating the mistakes of the past. The wisdom contained in the essays here is published with that goal in mind. I am not overly optimistic.

We know that anti-Semitism spells trouble, especially when it is sanctioned by the state. But what of the “seeds of anti-Semitism,” as Michael Gerson recently opined in *The Washington Post*. Gerson referred to a paper written by Stephen Walt of Harvard and John Mearsheimer of the University of Chicago, accusing the “‘Israel Lobby’ of having ‘unmatched power’ and managing to ‘manipulate the American political system’ into actions that undermine U.S. interests,” a.k.a., another example of the tail (Israel) wagging the dog (America):

Accusations of disproportionate Jewish influence are as old as the pharaohs. The novelty here is the endorsement of respected, mainstream academics.... Walt and Mearsheimer are careful to say they are not anti-Semitic or conspiracy-minded. But their main inference—that Israel, the Israel lobby and Jewish neoconservatives called the shots for Bush, Cheney, Condoleezza Rice, Stephen Hadly, Colin Powell and Donald Rumsfeld—is not only rubbish, it is dangerous rubbish. As ‘mainstream’ scholars, Walt and Mearsheimer cannot avoid the historical pedigree of this kind of charge. Every generation has seen accusations that Jews have dual loyalties, promote war and secretly control political structures.... These academics may not follow their claims all the way to anti-Semitism. But this is the way it begins. This is the way it always begins (Gerson 2007).

One myth about scapegoating is that it is something that others do, something that was practiced in the past—we don’t scapegoat problems on others today. For those courageous enough to think otherwise, scapegoating is as popular today as it ever was. To the psychologist, finding fault and blame in the other is often intricately linked to feeling good about oneself. Scapegoating and boosting one’s self-esteem are often two sides of the same coin.

Jewish people, Judaism, Jewish beliefs and practices, have all been blamed for the suffering others experience in the world. Like a paranoid person, there is always evidence to support unprovable accusations and vain attempts to show how much attention others are paying him. Anti-Semitism is a form of scapegoating, and Holocaust denial, as we shall see, is a form of anti-Semitism.

The Holocaust is gone and not forgotten. Psychiatrists played an important role in the initial murders; psychologists can now play an important role in keeping the monster from returning. The writings here are important steps in that direction. Psychologists, I believe, should consider the historical and political contexts within which interpersonal and intra-personal conflicts exist—not as extensions of the state, for if that were to happen, I'm afraid we would see history repeating itself. But by writing and reflecting on conflict within the context of human events and activities; by paying attention to the bigger picture—not the putative conflict between neurons, but the actual conflict between nations; not the conflict between parents and children, but the conflict between the state and adult citizens; that, too, is why I saw fit to make anti-Semitism the theme of this special issue of *Current Psychology*.

Brecht wrote the following as an epilogue to his play, *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* (1981). I believe it serves as an appropriate prologue to this volume.

Therefore learn how to see and not to gape.

To act instead of talking all day long.

The world was almost won by such an ape!

The nations put him where his kind belong.

But don't rejoice too soon at your escape—

The womb he crawled from still is going strong.

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Jeffrey A. Schaler a psychologist and analyst in private practice since 1974, teaches full-time as a professor in the Department of Justice, Law and Society at American University's School of Public Affairs. The Executive Editor of *Current Psychology*, he is General Editor of the *Under Fire* series published by Open Court (Chicago). His books in that series include most recently *Peter Singer Under Fire: The Controversial Philosopher Faces His Critics*; *Howard Gardner Under Fire: The Rebel Psychologist Faces His Critics*; and *Szasz Under Fire: The Psychiatric Abolitionist Faces His Critics*. Schaler is the author of *Addiction Is a Choice* (Open Court, 2000) and editor of *Drugs: Should We Legalize, Decriminalize, or Deregulate?* and co-editor (with Magda E. Schaler-Haynes) of *Smoking: Who Has the Right?* (both published by Prometheus in 1998). He is currently writing a book on psychiatry, psychology and law for Open Court.