

Fall 2021

From the Outside Looking In: Mass Media Representations of Jews in the U.S.

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Recommended Citation

Guttman, Evyatar, "From the Outside Looking In: Mass Media Representations of Jews in the U.S." (2021).
Senior Projects Fall 2021. 33.

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From the Outside Looking In
Mass Media Representations of Jews in the U.S.

Senior Project submitted to

The Division of Social Studies

of Bard College

by

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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

December 2021

Acknowledgements

Professor Jurgens, thank you for bearing with me over this long period of time and always finding a way to help me keep working and improving, whether I sent you one page to help me with or ten, and helping me think about the bigger picture and what it was that I hoped to explore in this project

Professor Kuznitz, thank you for giving me the inspiration to learn more about antisemitism and to think about what it means to be Jewish in America through studying Jewish history both at home and abroad

Professor Stamatapoulou-Robbins, thank you for your guidance throughout my years at Bard and for showing me that I could work to overcome my academic challenges

Alejandra and Frankie, thank you not only for actually getting me excited about going to work at the computer lab, and for showing me what it looks like to put all your energy into such a long project, but also for your friendship that has made these past years so much better

Ima and Aba, thank you for raising me to care about these issues and teaching me to always question everything and to confront the issues that matter

Shauli and Uri, thank you for all the phone calls and conversations that helped me maintain my sanity in the midst of a pandemic

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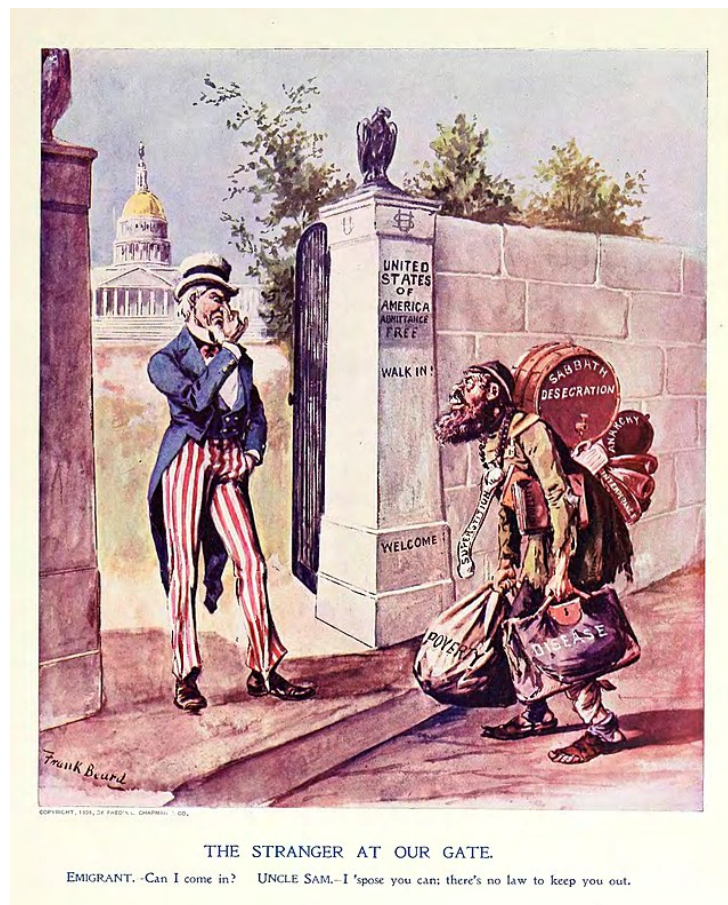
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Introduction

The Jewish relationship with American identity has, throughout its history, been a complex and ever-changing one. The ways in which Jews understood their identity in America was never the result of one single factor, but was informed by everything from their lived experiences, family histories, cultural backgrounds and their socioeconomic status in both the Old World and the New, to their level of education and degree of religious observance, to name only a few. The impact of these factors in determining the identities of American Jews cannot be overstated, and how these conditions shaped Jewish identity is an important question in its own right. The overriding purpose of this senior project, however, is to answer a somewhat different question: how did media representations of Jewish people shape their lived and imagined relationships with American identity? And moreover, how were these representations in turn shaped by the material forms of mass media and the processes by which they were produced and received? In this paper I will make use of sources ranging from the articles of *The Dearborn Independent* to the film *Gentleman's Agreement*, as well as the work of anthropologists and other scholars including Leo P. Ribuffo, Lila Abu-Lughod, Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Joel Rosenberg and Brian Larkin, in order to respond to these questions.

In this project I argue that throughout the twentieth century and into the present, media representations of Jews located Jewish people as both definitively outside the American nation-state and ambiguously within it; however, they did so in ways which were layered, uneven and often contradictory. At no point has there been an easy, straightforward shift from the exclusion of Jews from the nation's citizenry and body politic to their unqualified belonging.

Furthermore, the material forms of mass media have shaped not only collective representations but also the authority and legitimacy that consumers grant them. While media forms such as newspapers are assumed to possess a certain claim to the truth, others such as films tell emotionally compelling stories that can place fictional events within the context of a national timeline. Throughout this project I will focus on media representations that portray Jewish people from non-Jewish perspectives. This is because most media representations of Jews have been and continue to be produced by non-Jewish people about Jews, rather than for them. 98% of the American audience is non-Jewish, and according to Pew research roughly 40% of Americans do not know anyone in their personal lives who is Jewish (Lipka 2014); this being the case, it is necessary to examine media representations of Jews from a non-Jewish perspective. As the Frank



Beard cartoon above from 1890 illustrates, producers of media relied on various degrees of

symbolism and subtlety when creating representations of Jews for a non-Jewish audience. The cartoon above clearly forgoes subtlety in favor of deliberately instructive elements, with the artist literally labeling which parts of the image the viewer is supposed to focus on and take issue with. And if there was any doubt as to who this illustration's audience was intended to be, the caption, "The stranger at our gate," makes very clear who the creator, Frank Beard, wanted the image and its message to be viewed and interpreted by. Those who were behind "their gate," Americans who at the very least were neither immigrants nor Jewish, the groups mainly under attack in Beard's illustration, were his audience. The content of the cartoon was clearly created with an intended audience in mind, and this is a trend that reappears throughout the works I examine in the course of this project.

The inspiration for this project was a decidedly personal one, as a number of the issues that I discuss in this project are ones that I am connected to in various ways. The first chapter of this project discusses representation of the Jewish immigrant as the ultimate unwanted outsider in turn-of-the-century America through analyzing the series of articles known as "The International Jew"; I am both of those things, Jewish and also an immigrant with immigrant parents, and the research I did concerning the representation of those Jewish immigrants of the early twentieth century struck a chord with me. The idea of Jewishness as it pertains to migration is something that I had thought about often, as beyond my immediate family all but one of my grandparents are immigrants as well, albeit to Israel rather than the United States, and in turn many of their parents were immigrants themselves. This internationality, in many ways rooted in the discrimination facing Jews in so many of the places they reside, was attributed by Henry Ford in *The Dearborn Independent* to the inherent nature of a nefarious, nationless people

without allegiances or feelings of responsibility or attachment to anyone but themselves, bent on achieving world domination by spreading to as many countries as possible.

My second chapter deals largely with the 1947 Oscar-winning film *Gentleman's Agreement*, one of the first major movies to tackle the subject of antisemitism in the United States, the movie's influence on the American public, and how both its content and reception were inextricably tied to the production and distribution processes of the burgeoning American film industry. The Jews that appear in the movie are, without exception, assimilated Jews newly accepted into the ranks of white America. As the plot of the movie portrays them, their redeeming qualities are just how similar they are to the rest of "us," and that because they are sufficiently assimilated into American culture, activities and institutions, there is no reason to treat them like outsiders. This portrayal reflects a much more modern, if very narrow, representation of the typical Jewish American, in comparison with the disheveled, impoverished foreigners mixed with shadowy titans of industry that made up Jewish representation in earlier decades. And while the movie wasn't nearly as offensively antisemitic as, say, the content of "The International Jew," nevertheless I was once again placing myself into the positions of the Jewish characters, or imagining them as friends and people I know.

Despite being an immigrant, I have grown up in the U.S. for the large majority of my life, and find myself relating to all-American Jewish figures like Dave Goldman, who appear in *Gentleman's Agreement*. I had to try to remember my positionality and how it could very easily cloud my judgment of the research I was doing, and so I knew I had to watch the movie with an eye to the content: what was the overarching message the movie was trying to make about antisemitism? In answering that question, I intended to examine how the mechanisms of the film industry influence the content that appears on the screen, how politics and prejudice and personal

gain factor into the way that Jews were represented on the big screen. Then I wanted to find how these mechanisms and ideological influences in turn influenced the reception of such films, and *Gentleman's Agreement* seemed as appropriate a subject as I could have hoped for.

In my third chapter I give a great deal of attention to the events surrounding the January 6, 2021 insurrection that took place at the United States Capitol in my hometown of Washington, D.C. The events that occurred that day were perhaps the single most significant moment in terms of influencing my decision to write this project, and demonstrated to me clearly that this was no longer an issue I could take lightly. Moreover, it demonstrated to me the power of the internet and social media in organizing hate groups and the antisemitic far right, and how their images and rhetoric can so easily, and at the same time so forcefully, become actualized as the decorations of a full-fledged insurrection. These events happened, literally, very close to home, and I was concerned for my father's safety as he is a journalist for an Israeli news channel and was, to my surprise, driving towards the scene as it was unfolding in order to cover the event for his employers. It wasn't enough that he was a member of the media, holding a microphone at a rally of people generally furious about supposedly biased media coverage, but on top of that he was speaking Hebrew, and with Hebrew clearly printed on his microphone, in a crowd swarming with antisemites wearing shirts with slogans such as "Camp Auschwitz" and carrying weapons. Thankfully he reported from a safe distance and remained unscathed, but for a moment I was truly fearful of what could happen, and there is simply no separating the events of January 6th from the mechanisms of sites like Twitter and Telegram that allowed for this rhetoric to take such a strong hold. This was the most immediate sign to me that this was the project I should write; two years earlier a gunman had fired off a shot at a local pizza place I frequent in order to save the children supposedly being trafficked there according to a far right, white nationalist

conspiracy theory, and two years before that white nationalist demonstrators had marched one hundred miles to the southwest of my house in Charlottesville, declaring for the nation to hear that the “Jews will not replace them.” All of these instances together inspired me to write about the role of mass media and representation in American antisemitism, which led me to ask the questions that form the basis of this project.

It was difficult to read many of the articles in the *The International Jew* series while trying to maintain my objectivity, without thinking about how the incessant and abhorrent accusations leveled against Jews on every page were ultimately being directed at myself and members of my community. The accusations of *The International Jew* were not just being directed at a faceless collective or invisible elite without average Jews being held to blame, but rather they specifically targeted Jewish Americans as individuals time and again. I was vividly aware that my goal was not to write a project debunking forty different antisemitic conspiracy theories and canards, but it was hard not to, for lack of a better term, take things personally. Ultimately my goal in this project was to write about the structural forms of mass media and how these material conditions shape the representation of Jews in the U.S., along with public opinion regarding Jews; these media representations in turn shape public opinion and Jewish American identity. I hope that this project can serve as a resource for anyone looking to examine how these interwoven relationships can be traced not only in the history of America in the 20th century, but in the world today as well.

Chapter One: Henry Ford and The International Jew

The Goal of “The International Jew”

Henry Ford’s decision to purchase the Dearborn Independent and turn it into his own personal soapbox raises a number of questions on its own; when one considers the nature of what he was publishing, his almost obsessive focus on the supposed Jewish threat becomes more puzzling still. One question in particular that I intend to answer in this chapter is, what exactly did Ford and the journalists at *The Dearborn Independent* seek to accomplish with the “International Jew” series? The staff of the *Independent* made their answer to this question abundantly clear in their preface to the series, a somewhat snide introduction loaded with condescension as well as an overview of their supposedly ethical justification for the series. If we are to take the Independent’s explanation of what motivated them to publish *The International Jew* at face value, the intention was nothing short of saving America. The authors of the series, and especially Henry Ford as the overseer, were writing under the auspices of revealing a hidden scourge that, if not addressed swiftly and mercilessly, would most assuredly spell disaster for Christian America through the demise of the spirit, independence and moral order of American society. If everything were to go according to the plans of the international Jewish elite, the series contends, then no element of American existence would be spared from their influence, with Christians going to war for Jewish financial gain and being corrupted by Jewish deviancy through their television screens.

Despite the doomsday-like gravity of the accusations that make up the core of the series, the preface to “The International Jew” oscillates between vocal disdain towards the aforementioned Jewish machinations, and claiming that the series in no way reflects any kind of anti-Jewish bigotry or even so much as subjectivity on the part of its authors.

“The motive of this work is simply a desire to make facts known to the people. Other motives have, of course, been ascribed to it. But the motive of prejudice or any form of antagonism is hardly strong enough to support such an investigation as this. Moreover, had an unworthy motive existed, some sign of it would inevitably appear in the work itself.” (IJ Collection Volume 1: 6).

Beyond the somewhat amusing assumption on the part of the author that the articles themselves would be compelling proof of the pure motives of the series, the positioning of the coverage as a fact-finding investigation informs us to what Ford and the authors at the Independent may have been hoping to achieve with “The International Jew”. Henry Ford’s problems with the press had begun in the years prior to his purchase of the Dearborn Independent, a time in which he had been ridiculed in major newspapers for his failed political ambitions and even embarrassed by the lawyers of the *Chicago Tribune* when he took them to court for defamation and, despite winning, was awarded only six cents after having his intelligence questioned by the Tribune’s legal team. As Leo P. Ribuffo argues in his article “Henry Ford and the International Jew”, this dark period might have been a major factor not only in Ford’s decision to purchase the Independent, but also in his antipathy towards major news publications that would influence the content of “The International Jew”. This contempt is apparent when the nameless author derides the media for being biased towards Jews, just as Ford believed it was biased against him personally. Any mystery as to who Ford blamed for unfair coverage was decisively answered by this passage in the article “The Jew in Character and Business”:

“They (Jews) absolutely control the circulation of publications throughout the country. Fewer than any race whose presence among us is noticeable, they receive daily an amount of favorable publicity which would be impossible did they not have the facilities for creating and distributing it themselves” (IJ Collection Volume 1: 11).

In light of Ford’s clear vision of a country falling prey to nefarious Jewish plans and a media that was already in the hands of the Jews and therefore unable to expose the truth, it seems as though Ford took it upon himself to purchase the Independent and launch the “International Jew” series, to serve not only as a collection of his personal opinions but to offer a counter narrative to what he perceived as the dominant narrative being pushed by Jews in their own interest. That might go some way to explaining the surprising intensity with which Ford pursued the issue of the international Jew; without such a grandiose driving motive it is hard to imagine why the paper continued to publish new additions to the series week after week over the span of nearly two years, from May 20th, 1920 until January 14th, 1922 (Ribuffo 1980: 446). The writers at the Dearborn Independent were tasked with revealing a far-reaching Jewish conspiracy that impacted every aspect of society as they knew it, and the sheer number and variety of articles published in the name of this mission is a testament to just how deeply Ford believed in what he was doing. Over the span of its publication, “The International Jew” constructed an alternative historical narrative which served as the basis for the overarching argument of the series, that Jews were the foremost threat facing the American people and way of life.

A Compelling Concept

Another one of the key questions concerning the series of articles is what made it plausible, or even compelling, to so many readers when it was first published in the early 1920s? Leo P. Ribuffo offers context regarding not only the American landscape at that moment in

history, but also about the historical American predilection towards conspiratorial thinking, in “Henry Ford and ‘The International Jew’”. These aspects worked in tandem to produce an environment where readers felt particularly drawn towards a conspiracy theory which had a shadowy Jewish international and financial elite as the culprit. Ribuffo writes,

“From Colonial times through the Civil War, warnings against sinister plots by monarchists or Jacobins, Catholics or Masons, abolitionists or slaveholders diffused through all classes, sections and political groups. The social and intellectual turmoil of the late nineteenth century, what Robert Wiebe calls ‘search for order,’ nurtured a new wave of countersubversive theories... Many white Protestants agreed with Rev. Josiah Strong that unassimilated immigrants from southern and eastern Europe imperiled ‘our country’” (Ribuffo, 1980: 438).

The idea that there might be a secretive minority group working behind the scenes against the common man was hardly novel to Americans when Ford and the writers at the Independent launched “The International Jew,” which is not to say that it was universally beloved or welcomed with open arms; to the contrary, notable figures such as President William Taft came out against the series publicly. But controversy notwithstanding, business was booming for Ford’s newspaper, and every week without fail there was a fresh installment of his antisemitic brainchild right on the front page. As Harold Earl Quinley and Charles Young Glock write in their book *Antisemitism in America*, Henry Ford was actively pushing antisemitism even further into the American mainstream with the Independent, with its audience in the twenties surpassing 700,000 readers each week (Quinley & Glock, 1983: 168). The message was so resonant that Ford was even gaining support as a possible presidential candidate, at a time when his newspaper was publishing articles with titles such as “Did the Jews Foresee the World War?” and “Jewish Plan to Split Society by Ideas” driving home the point that the antisemitic and conspiratorial rhetoric of “The International Jew” was one which many Americans were attracted to. Given the

history of representations of Jewish people in the United States, and particularly in the years leading up to the publication of the series, Ford could be fairly secure that there was a substantial audience to market to that had already proven itself to be receptive to antisemitic and conspiratorial rhetoric. America had already been riddled with antisemitism well before the time of the Dearborn Independent; this tradition placed America alongside the majority of Christian Europe throughout history, which doesn't come as a surprise. Concerning the history of American antisemitism, Ribuffo writes,

“Among American Christians, mixed feelings about Jews had existed since the Colonial period. Although Protestant creators of holy commonwealths might identify with Old Testament Hebrews, they also inherited a tradition that blamed Jews for Christ's crucifixion and numerous subsequent crimes. By the mid-1800's, evangelists derided Jewish 'rebels against God's purpose,' politicians sneered at 'Judas Iscariot' Benjamin, the Confederate Secretary of State, and the New York Times called financier August Belmont an 'agent of foreign Jew bankers'" (Ribuffo 1980: 439).

While antisemitism obviously predates the United States and never reached a level of violence in America that it did in Europe, it is nothing more than a myth that the country was a haven for Jews as a nation founded by Puritans fleeing religious persecution in Europe themselves. So in addition to its history of embracing conspiracy theories, there was enough precedent for a publisher such as Henry Ford to launch a campaign like “The International Jew,” with the assumption that it would capture the attention of the American public. Ribuffo sees a connection between the massive wave of Jewish immigration in the late 19th century and this increase in public declarations and manifestations of antisemitism. He writes,

“As immigrants poured in from Eastern Europe after the Civil War, actors, clergymen, dime novelists, and serious writers routinely portrayed Jews as libertines, enemies of true religion and cheats. Some agrarian radicals held foreign Jewish bankers responsible for tight money and depressions. Theologically conservative Protestants said that Jews would return to the Holy Land, possibly in alliance with the Antichrist. On a less abstract level,

antagonism ranged from demonstrations against merchants to innuendo in the press about ‘obnoxious’ Jewish traits” (Ribuffo 1980: 439).

As the Jewish population of the country grew exponentially around the turn of the century, Jews entered into the public and literary spheres primarily as objects of derision and prejudice. Jews were subject to much of the same stereotyping that other immigrants from southern and eastern Europe faced in the major cities of the eastern seaboard, but simultaneously were charged with a whole array of characteristics which singled them out in particular for discrimination. Jewish immigrants in Manhattan’s Lower East Side were depicted as members of the impoverished masses, with tattered clothes and alien customs, while other Jews were accused of engineering the entire capitalist system to their advantage. Moreover, this animosity did not limit itself to the realm of the written word, with economic retribution being doled out as a form of collective punishment for Jewish wickedness. Antisemitism played out in more than just the interpersonal realm, with discussions of Jewish conspiracy reaching the highest levels of government. This side of antisemitic discourse in the United States grew in significance after the first World War, when the notion of the Jewish threat and the Communist threat became increasingly intertwined.

“Commentators and members of Congress increasingly associated Jews with radicalism in general and Communism in particular. For example, Dr. George A. Simons, a former missionary in Russia, told a Senate committee that the so-called ‘Bolshevik movement’ was ‘Yiddish.’ Simons’s allegations... were largely endorsed by other witnesses, including a Northwestern University professor, a Commerce Department agent, two representatives of National City Bank, a YMCA official and vice counsel in Petrograd, and several Russian emigres” (Ribuffo 1980: 441).

The prominence of not only the Senatorial audience but the witnesses testifying before them illustrates Ribuffo’s earlier claim that antisemitism pervaded even the highest social classes

in America. Moreover, the positionality of the different witnesses, be they Christian missionaries or agents of the Department of Commerce, demonstrates that histories are invariably informed by whoever is telling them. Indeed, the missionary Dr. Simons who testified to the ‘Yiddish’ nature of Bolshevism was himself inspired by one especially resonant historical narrative, namely the one presented in the now-infamous *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Ribuffo writes,

“To Simons, ‘Yiddish’ Bolshevism seemed to ‘dovetail’ with the plot outlined in The *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*... for almost two thousand years, the elders had been ‘splitting society by ideas’ while manipulating economic and political power.”

Here we can see a clear demonstration of how the telling of history shapes the present. The history constructed in The *Protocols* served to inform Dr. Simons’s stance on so-called ‘Yiddish Bolshevism,’ thereby making its way directly to the attention of the United States Senate, the legislative body that holds the rights to vote on issues such as minority rights and immigration restrictions, amongst many others.

Producing “The International Jew”

In order to undertake the rigorous endeavor that was the publication of “The International Jew”, Ford and his staff didn’t waste their time reinventing the wheel. Instead, they took their inspiration from an earlier work of antisemitic literature which has come to be known as one of the foremost examples of the genre. *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* was published and distributed by supporters of the Russian monarchy around the turn of the century, growing in popularity in the years leading up to the Russian civil war in 1919, when it was further disseminated by White Russian forces. Emigrants and returning foreigners brought copies with them to the US, at a time when commentators were depicting Jews as the main forces behind the Bolshevik threat; it was precisely at this moment that the *Protocols* began to be widely translated

in the US. The piece itself was a fabricated ‘leak’ of a meeting between the “Elders of Zion,” meaning the leaders of the Jewish elite, wherein these elders were discussing the status of their ongoing plot to subjugate the Christian world through control of the global economy and to bend world governments to act in their interest. However implausible it may sound, the *Protocols* became immensely popular in Europe and, through the transatlantic exchange of people and ideas, quickly spread to American audiences.

Ford employed a team of investigators to find and report back on evidence of nefarious Jewish activities, and these investigators were the ones who came into contact with the *Protocols* through their connections with Europeans both abroad and in the states. From July of 1920 onwards the *Protocols* served as the major point of inspiration for *The International Jew*, with some of the tropes being adapted to align more closely with what Ford viewed as the problems facing America. The series held Jews responsible for corporate monopolization, government responses to market activities, the “filthy tide” of immorality supposedly emanating out from Hollywood into the American home, and the dissolution of the American family; furthermore, the paper accused the massive influx of Jewish immigrants of diluting the original meaning of America, and accused Jews of controlling media narratives in order to “corrupt collective opinion”. *The Independent* proclaimed rising national debt as further evidence of the hold of Jews on the American people, and Jews were described as the only ones to have profited from WWI through their financial investments in countries across Europe. In a shift from the original *Protocols*, however, *The International Jew* declared America as the country most under Jewish influence, with only Germany coming close. Moreover, the series provided its own version of Jewish history in the New World, tailored to fit neatly into the narrative of Jewish control over every aspect of society, both in America and across the globe.

Constructing Historical Narratives

In order for the team behind “The International Jew” to thoroughly convince their audience that their claims regarding Jews were well-founded, they had to do the considerable work of constructing a narrative of Jewish history, and of American history, which confirmed and expanded upon common antisemitic tropes. These stereotypes and canards that informed the argument of the series were retroactively transposed onto historical moments, taking the form of suspicious Jewish interlopers and nameless Jewish industrial magnates. In the third article of the series titled “Jewish History in the U.S.” the Independent proclaimed that Jews financed Columbus’ voyage to the Americas with a loan to Queen Isabella, that Jews have run the tobacco industry since their arrival in Cuba, and that Jews first reached North America after fleeing from military participation in Brazil. Regarding Columbus’ 1492 voyage across the Atlantic, the article’s author writes,

“The pleasant story that it was Queen Isabella’s jewels which financed the voyage has disappeared under cool research. There were three Maranos or ‘secret Jews’ who wielded great influence at the Spanish court... these worked unceasingly on Queen Isabella’s imagination, picturing to her the depletion of the royal treasury... until the Queen was ready to offer her jewels in pawn for the funds” (International Jew Volume 1: 33).

Here lies a perfect illustration of how the authors of the “International Jew” series constructed their own history that fell in line with the claims being advanced in their writing. First, there is the claim of authenticity; that the truth about Jewish involvement has been revealed as a result of the level-headed, ‘cool research’ that has come to dispel the naive and pleasant stories which the international Jew strategically employed to lull the gentile masses into a false sense of security. Next, there is the injection of Jewish conspiracy, which is presented as a reflection of an objective historical fact rather than as a claim or argument to be delivered. The

conspiracy involving Queen Isabella's jewels demands not only that the reader believes that there were three influential financiers in the Spanish court who alone convinced the Queen to pawn her jewels, but also that these men were, in fact, "secret Jews," as well.

While it would be fair to say Ford was constructing a historical narrative by producing "The International Jew", that doesn't quite get to the heart of the issue: more than anything he positioned the series as a counter narrative, an antidote to the supposed barrage of Jewish propaganda that Ford seemingly imagined his audience to be inundated with. These competing productions and reproductions of history are more than just historical commentary, for in many ways they are themselves what constitutes history. In his book *Silencing the Past*, Michel-Rolph Trouillot writes that narrators of history are simultaneously historical actors, in the sense that 'history' can mean "that which is said to have happened" rather than simply "what happened". In other words, the ability to 'make history' is not limited to the actors in the sociohistorical process, but in fact also rests in the hands of those who describe the events within that process. Trouillot also explains that a substantial part of historical construction occurs outside of academia, especially in the realm of popular media. While on its surface a newspaper seems like an odd vehicle for the construction of history, it is no less equipped to do so than the grade school textbooks and national monuments that are most often associated with the definition and presentation of history. History in one sense consists of the telling of history, and in the daily lives of most Americans history is told more often through the television than the academic paper, and more emphatically ingrained into our collective psyche through movies than standardized tests. By producing and presenting their own account of history for "The International Jew", the staff at the Dearborn Independent were effectively repositioning Jewish history in America and delivering this new history right to the doorsteps of their readers.

The production of history requires, as Trouillot emphasizes in his book's title, the silencing of the past. He references the example of Holocaust deniers, or revisionists, who insist that far fewer than six million Jews died at the hands of the Nazis, if any at all. This narrative demands an incredible amount of silencing, even more than it does actual positive evidence to support it. It is impossible to argue that the Germans did not orchestrate an organized genocide without actively deciding not to include or acknowledge the countless firsthand and secondhand accounts of the death camps. In a similar vein, in order for Ford to construct a historical narrative in the *Dearborn Independent* which sufficiently demonized and ostracized Jewish people, it was imperative that a huge amount of silencing be done in its formation. For every reference to a wealthy Jewish industrialist meant to signify inordinate Jewish control over American economics, there is the conscious decision being made not to mention the millions of Jews living in poverty across eastern Europe, the Mediterranean region and the United States; there is also no mention made of Christians who may otherwise occupy similar roles as the Jews which the series lambasts. Ribuffo lists off a number of examples illustrating just how partial the facts behind "The International Jew" were:

"(The Independent) condemned acts by Jews which, if done by Christians, would have been considered innocuous, legitimate or admirable. The wartime ban on German and the fundamentalist effort to drive Darwin from the classroom were acceptable; Jewish objection to *The Merchant of Venice* violated 'American principles.' George Creel's chairmanship of the Committee on Public Information did not prompt a discussion of Protestant traits; Carl Laemmle's production of *The Beast of Berlin* for the same committee was a 'lurid' attempt to profit from war. Jacob Schiff's use of dollar diplomacy on behalf of Russian Jews seemed sinister; efforts by E.H. Harriman to squeeze concessions from the Czar passed without comment. Similarly, Irish-American agitation about the Versailles Treaty went unremarked; Jewish concern elicited complaints about the 'kosher conference.' The immigrant's willingness to change his name was seen as evidence of duplicity, not of a desire to assimilate" (Ribuffo 1980: 454).

This selective silencing and intentional inclusion of different moments and phenomena in the sociohistorical process is precisely the moment in the process of historical production where Trouillot maintains that power dynamics first enter the equation. These dynamics begin long before the newspaper article is published and before the words even hit the page, for the flow of power begins with the creation of facts and sources (Trouillot: 29). While some facts are supported by their materiality, in the form of the physical remnants that are left behind such as graveyards and buildings, “censuses, monuments, diaries and political boundaries,” all facts leave behind traces into the future that define the scope of a history.

This is essential to the duality of historicity: past occurrences leave behind evidence which sets the stage for historical narratives to be constructed. Facts are inherently meaningful and significant, because there is always a reason for a particular fact to be included in the telling of history. By paying attention to these inclusions and exclusions, and keeping in mind the narrator’s background, positionality, beliefs and intentions, one can better understand how history works and what goes into the production of it. In the case of Henry Ford and the Dearborn Independent, the historical narrative that was produced depended heavily on the positioning of conjecture and vague accusations as factual.

Reception and Responses to “The International Jew”

As with all conspiracy theories, opposition from prominent voices only served as fuel for the series; after President Taft derided the articles, The Independent described him as simply being a “gentile front,” as if his criticism was further evidence of just how far-reaching the influence of international Jewry was. The idea of there being such a thing as a gentile front, in the form of influential Christians beholden to the demands of their hidden yet powerful Jewish

counterparts, helps to shed light on the way that the editorial staff at the Independent constructed a particular historical narrative throughout the “International Jew” series of articles. The history of Jews and their arrival in the United States was recast in order to portray Jews as a conniving, selfish and lazy people, to name a few of the negative characteristics that the articles attributed to Jewish people. Consequently, the writers at the Independent set out to establish nefarious Jewish influence wherever there was any event or development that might oppose their central claim; if President Taft came out in opposition to the series, then it had to have been because he was doing the bidding of the all-powerful Jews that control the upper levels of American politics. Criticism of the series extended far beyond Taft alone, with well over one hundred well-known Christians signing onto a petition aimed at Ford, signed “The Perils of Racial Prejudice” (Ribuffo 1980: 459).

Among the noteworthy signers of the petition were not only President Taft, but also Woodrow Wilson and William Cardinal O’Connell, who was one of America’s foremost Catholic authorities by virtue of his status as a Cardinal as well as the Archbishop of Boston, home to one of the largest Catholic communities in the nation. The major interdenominational Christian organization of the time and the predecessor to today’s National Council of Churches, the Federal Council of Churches, publicly denounced the series. In light of the well-documented history of Christian antisemitism in the United States, these reactions from portions of the Christian mainstream are fairly surprising; less so are the supportive reactions from other members of the American public.

“Colonel Charles S. Bryan of the War Department appreciated particularly the attack on ‘East Side Scum.’ The journalist W.J. Abbot expressed ‘sympathy’ with Ford’s views and critic John J. Chapman hailed the ‘lucidity and good temper’ of volume II. C. Moberly White, an ‘authority’ on revolution for the National Civic Federation, urged supplementary publication of the *Protocols*” (Ribuffo 1980: 469).

The series of articles drew a wide range of responses from across the political and professional spectrum, with seemingly the only unifying factor being the degree of interest, both positive and negative, being generated by “The International Jew”. One group which was not exactly polarized by the coverage were the Jews themselves, disagreeing only as to what measures ought to be taken against Ford. Ribuffo describes how a number of Jews who felt favorably towards Ford prior to the series preferred to believe that Ford had no part in its creation, a notion that Ford himself was quite willing to encourage. But despite his behind-the-scenes persona when it came to the Dearborn Independent, Ford was the one who had to face the criticism, and receive admiration, for promoting antisemitic conspiracies so tenaciously and consistently.

Why the Medium Matters

Trouillot argues that history is produced through a myriad of non-academic productions including popular movies and literature, and of course the mighty newspaper. The unique constraints and requirements of the weekly newspaper as a form of media inevitably shape the historical narrative being produced on its pages. For one, a weekly newspaper has to be far more selective with the content it chooses to publish than a twenty-four hour public radio station. Unlike the radio station, and even more so unlike the Twitter feed or news blog of the current day, newspapers such as the Dearborn Independent were presumably trusted by their readers to provide a curated selection of the most pertinent and captivating stories that had transpired that week, whether it be on the regional, national or global scale. This in turn meant that those articles that did make it all the way to the printed copy of a weekly newspaper were by the very virtue of their publication presumed to be particularly pressing matters. The importance of every article in

a weekly newspaper is also underscored by the uniquely competitive nature of the newspaper industry. Unlike competition between television shows or radio stations, a newspaper's audience could not so easily 'change the channel' whenever they become disinterested or taken aback by the material they were being provided with. A subscription to a newspaper was intended to be a lasting investment, and loyalties to specific papers were built on the basis of politics and ultimately trust, accumulated over time. These newspaper-reader relationships were complicated in the case of the Dearborn Independent by Ford's preexisting status as an automobile magnate; article topics were tailored to his personal financial interests, and papers were distributed by Ford's employees at his auto plants across the Midwest. Given the format of the Independent, the sheer longevity of "The International Jew" was particularly effective in presenting "the Jewish question" as the preeminent topic of discourse to the paper's substantial audience. When the news arrives once per week in the form of a paper on the doorstep, and for two straight years the door opens on Sunday morning to the sight of a new article detailing the Jewish plot to control the global capitalist system, it is difficult to imagine anyone but the most skeptical readers as being immune to its message.

Chapter Two: Jews on the Big Screen

Introduction

The twentieth century saw unprecedented changes in the social, economic and even racial status of American Jews. It is no coincidence that this was also a time of major social, economic and racial change for the country as a whole, and these changes occurring at the national level had major impacts on the position of Jewish people stateside. Moreover, the American non-Jewish public at large began to shift its perception of Jewish people in the wake of increasing assimilation following the end of World War Two. These changes were shaped, molded and mediated by popular forms of art and media, which, just like so many other aspects of American culture, were themselves rapidly evolving. As technology advanced in the early decades of the twentieth century, the newspaper was sidelined by the radio, and the radio in turn was later overshadowed by another, more exciting format: the motion picture, projected onto a larger-than-life screen for any eager customer who could afford the price of admission. Movies became not only a staple of the American cultural experience, but also influenced and were influenced by American attitudes towards Jews.

Over the course of the first half of the twentieth century the way that Jews appeared on the screen began to change and diversify, which in turn impacted the changing racial and social position of Jews within America. Jews were able to play a role in the film industry, and in turn to have their story conveyed to the public, due to the changing boundaries of whiteness and political and economic forces which lifted barriers that were preventing Jews from full political

participation and upwards mobility, both elements of the processes of acculturation and assimilation (terms that I will define later in this chapter). In this chapter I will refer to the introduction to *Media Worlds* (2002) by Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod and Larkin, to connect my study of media representation with the contextual framework these authors set forth regarding the anthropology of media. In particular, I will focus on the areas of media which to these authors form the backbone of media anthropology: its production and reception, and specifically the technologies associated with these processes. I will use this framework to explore the impact of these technologies on the production of collective Jewish identity in America. I will also refer to Joel Rosenberg's article "Jewish Experience on Film - an American Overview" for its organizational structure dividing the history of Jews and film in America into four distinct periods, delineating different shifts in both Jewish involvement in the industry itself as well as Jewish representation on screen, in phases that ostensibly correlate with the changing position of Jews in American society and collective imagination. While these chronological categories serve as a starting point for my analysis, I will not be adhering to them strictly as they overlap to a certain extent, and lack sufficient context about societal changes affecting Jews outside of the film industry; nonetheless, Rosenberg's analysis is useful in tracking the trajectory of American Jews' relationship to film as a medium and an industry.

The shifting attitudes towards and status of American Jews, and the conception of antisemitism in twentieth century America, were extensively reproduced and shaped by the film *Gentleman's Agreement*, the award-winning film from 1947 that brought the idea of antisemitism to the American public as never before. In this chapter, I will examine the evolving identity of American Jewry and the Jewish experience in regards to the burgeoning film industry, referring to *Gentleman's Agreement* and Karen Brodtkin's *How Jews Became White Folks and What That*

Says About Race in America in order to argue that Jewish assimilation into whiteness was reflected in depictions of Jews in American film in the twentieth century, and that this newly attained whiteness in turn is what created the environment for Jewish representation in film in the first place. I will also argue that the role of film as a medium played a significant role in influencing how these Jewish stories were told and how they were received by largely non-Jewish American audiences, whose perception of Jews was directly influenced by these representations.

Early Days of Film

From its earliest days, the movie industry was composed of a number of major studios founded primarily by first and second generation Jewish Americans. Joel Rosenberg describes the background of these companies in his article “Jewish Experience on Film - An American Overview,” as part of a neatly distinguished chronology of Jewish representation in American film over time. Rosenberg cites the filmmaker and professor Stuart Samuels’ idea of the four sequential phases of the American Jewish relationship to film and entertainment in the twentieth century: “alienation, acculturation, assimilation and acceptance” (Rosenberg 1996: 8). During the initial period of alienation, which Samuels describes as the early decades of the twentieth century, Jews would mainly appear as stereotypical figures such as money lenders and tailors, and as ethnic outsiders along with other immigrant caricatures that were present, such as the Irish and Italians. He makes the point that while many of the characteristics ascribed to Jewish characters in this period were uniquely antisemitic, other negative attributes were instead reflective of broader xenophobic beliefs concerning newly arrived immigrants from southern and eastern Europe. Sometimes Jewish characters would appear as stingy moneylenders or conniving

scam artists, while at other times they would simply be ridiculed for either their lack of English skills and knowledge of American customs, or for their impoverished living conditions, amongst other cliches. These ‘nickelodeon’ films were not only intended to amuse “native-born, middle-class” audiences but were in fact quite popular with immigrants themselves, according to Rosenberg. As the authors explain in the introduction to “Media Worlds,” the imagined communities created by movie theaters, a concept first written about by Benedict Anderson, are integral in the production of collective national identities, and through their participation as audience members in the nickelodeon theaters a wide range of both immigrant and non-immigrant Americans were at least momentarily constructed as equal members of the same, American movie-going public.

Portrayals of Jews in theater productions and early motion pictures at this time, the early years of the twentieth century, both reflected and impacted public attitudes toward a new population of Eastern European Jews that had significantly shifted the demographics of several major East Coast and Midwestern cities by the 1910s. Rosenberg describes the era as,

“The period of New World immigrant life in the early decades of this (twentieth) century, when the mainly Yiddish-speaking East European Jews lived as a ghettoized minority among other immigrant minorities, in large urban areas, often in conditions of severe poverty, pursuing small-scale entrepreneurship and trades, and representing a bold contrast both to the Anglo-Saxon mainstream of American culture and to the largely assimilated and prosperous German and Sephardic Jews who had been absorbed into American life decades earlier” (Rosenberg 1996: 8).

While Jews clearly were not entirely new to the American ethnic and religious milieu, clearly there was something markedly different about the influx of Jews who arrived en masse in the decades following 1880. Of course there was the dramatic separation between the economic standing of the ‘new Jews’ and the ‘old Jews,’ with many members of the much more recently

arrived majority living in poverty in overcrowded tenements while more established Jews whose families had arrived by the mid-19th century from Germany and the Netherlands were generally more affluent. But on another, deeper level than mere economic circumstances, the newer Jewish immigrants were regarded as less refined, civilized and well-mannered, than their German Jewish counterparts, and by extension white Christian Americans.

These inter-communal biases had their origins in the dynamics between the geographically and economically distinct Ashkenazi Jewish populations within Europe. Historically, Ashkenazi Jewish communities in modern-day Germany were culturally juxtaposed to the larger subset of Eastern European Ashkenazi Jews, in a binary that was informed by Orientalist modes of thinking. The discourse regarding the relations between the wealthier, more assimilated German Jews and the overwhelmingly poor, culturally conservative Eastern European Jews was largely parallel to how the primitive, emotional, passionate Easterner was positioned against the rational, logical, cool-headed Westerner in the general Orientalist discourse. Jews from Eastern Europe, be it Poland, Galicia or the Russian Empire, were mocked for supposedly being loudmouthed, superstitious, provincial and uneducated by German Jews, who in turn were mocked for supposedly being overly rigid as well as pretentious, as Limor Shifman and Elihu Katz amusingly examine in their article “‘Just Call Me Adonai’: A Case Study of Ethnic Humor and Immigrant Assimilation”. This sort of rhetoric already positioned German Jews separately, and often ‘above’, other Ashkenazi Jews in many contexts, and after successive waves of immigration to the United States these same patterns of perception and representation converged with overwhelming economic disparities between the two groups as well as a xenophobic society with its own ethnic parameters classifying Europeans by geography.

Within this context of marginalization, Jewish characters on the stage and screen were confined to one-dimensional roles consisting mostly of prepackaged stereotypes (Rosenberg 1996: 9).

Upward Mobility

The second phase in Samuels' history of Jews in American entertainment is what he refers to as acculturation, taken here to mean "a long period of upward social mobility for the offspring of immigrant Jews, from about 1907 onward," (Rosenberg 1996: 9). For Rosenberg, Jewish acculturation into American society in the early 20th century was inseparable from the establishment of a distinct Jewish presence in the entertainment industry. This presence manifested both on screens and behind the scenes, as Jewish Americans began to occupy prominent positions both as actors and as the heads of a number of the largest studios in the industry. While the relationship between Jewish assimilation into American cinema and American society was not a causal one, the case of the movie industry certainly serves as a uniquely visible example of some immigrant Jews and their children finding great success in what was in many ways a uniquely American business. Rosenberg's list of Jewish entertainers who rose to fame in the early 20th century is impressive: Al Jolson, George Burns and the Marx Brothers, to name a few.

Al Jolson stands as a particularly resonant example of the conflicting and evolving social boundaries of the time period. One of the brightest stars of the early sound era in film, Jolson played mostly non-Jewish roles to great acclaim in the 1920s and 1930s. However, that is not to say he played only white, Christian roles: on the contrary, Al Jolson was and continues to be regarded as one of the foremost actors of the Blackface or 'minstrel show' genre, wherein white

actors would paint their faces in outlandishly exaggerated renditions of common Black features, and act as offensive and intentionally ignorant and unintelligent characters intended to mock Black people. What, then, does it mean that Asa Yoelson, a Jewish immigrant from the Russian Empire, was able to get away with not only passing himself off as the Anglicized 'Al Jolson,' but also to participate in the public proclamation of racial superiority that was Blackface? Jolson's career and personal background strongly demonstrate that as the twentieth century progressed, American Jews were increasingly participating in the institutions that define whiteness in America.

In addition to prominent actors, the list of studios started by American Jews in the same time period is truly astonishing.

“These included (the founders of) MGM, Paramount, Columbia, Warner Brothers, Universal Pictures, and 20th century, later merged with Fox. These founders were immigrants or children of immigrants, and all were Jews” (Rosenberg 1996: 10).

I would caution against placing too much stock in the Jewish origins of these studios, as of course the typical Jewish American did not become a movie mogul or studio executive in the 1930s and 1940s; to the contrary, antisemitism continued to be a pressing issue and discrimination against Jewish people was still nothing short of rampant. Indeed, it is in this time period where the earliest depictions of the challenges facing Jewish immigrants begin to appear in movies such as *Hungry Hearts* and *The Jazz Singer*, from 1920 and 1928 respectively.

Rosenberg points out the shift in portrayals that is already evident in this small period of time between the two movies: in the former, “a Jewish immigrant mother, living in a squalid New York City tenement, is gouged repeatedly for rent money by her cruel, stony-faced landlord” and ends up going insane and destroying her apartment. Meanwhile, in the latter, “entertainer Jake Rabinowitz (Al Jolson) is torn between appearing in the opening night of a Broadway show on

Yom Kippur (his first and best chance at stardom) and filling in for his dying cantor father by singing Kol Nidre at the synagogue” (Rosenberg 1996: 14). In the end of *The Jazz Singer* Rabinowitz is able to do both the Broadway show and the Yom Kippur service, suggesting that acculturation is possible if you make concessions in both directions, while *Hungry Hearts* from only a few years earlier seems to suggest that there is no such hope.

During this time period many Jews did see their standard of living improve with increased access to education and literacy in English, as well as a growing number of Jews who were beginning to move away from their traditional inner-city ethnic enclaves into more mixed, white Christian neighborhoods. These changes occurred over generations, as one immigrant father’s job as a fishmonger cleared the way for his son’s job as a store owner, and with that income he moved the family from the Lower East Side to the Jersey suburbs, where English replaced Yiddish as the language of daily use and Jewish children were named Samuel instead of Shmuel. The heads of the studios mentioned above were representative of these changes themselves, as Rosenberg notes.

“Possessing little formal education but a vast amount of experience as entrepreneurs (Goldwyn had started as a glovemaking and salesman; Mayer as a scrap-metal and junk dealer; Zukor and Harry Kohn as furriers; Jack Warner as a cobbler, butcher and bicycle merchant; Laemmle as a bookkeeper and clothier; Fox as a sundries peddler and later, as a clothier; Schenck as a drugstore-chain owner and amusement park impresario; Schulberg as a reporter and trade publisher), the studio pioneers were quick to sense the mass appeal of films, and they correctly understood that the success of the industry depended on building a viable system of distribution, through firm links with Jewish-owned banking houses -- among others, Warner Brothers with Goldman Sachs, Paramount with Kuhn and Loeb, and Universal with S. W. Strauss” (Rosenberg 1996: 10).

From their origins working trades that were accessible to immigrants with limited resources and with moderate profits, these men quickly became no less than titans of industry

although “in a certain sense it was an industry ideally susceptible to the genius of ambitious immigrants, Jewish and otherwise” (Rosenberg 1996: 11). While the vast majority of Jewish Americans, just like the vast majority of Christian Americans, were not studio pioneers, the ascent of these Jewish studio pioneers not only represented the changes taking place in regards to how Jews were perceived and treated in America, but also played a role in the further representation of Jews in the American public through their studios.

Rosenberg makes an interesting point regarding the movie theater as a sort of equalizing factor, anonymizing its attendees while they are in the darkened theater and recasting them as spectators; he argues that the creation of the film spectator was a crucial stage in the development of the bourgeois American ideology of escaping the constraints of one’s personal identity through the stories on the screen (Rosenberg 1996: 12). The ability of movies to so vividly place its audience into the heart of the story is part of what makes them so important to study, and which stories are being told, for which audience. Take, for example, the emergence of nickelodeon theaters in the first decade of the twentieth century. These earliest of movie theaters were noteworthy not only for their small size and rudimentary technology, but also for their affordability: at only five cents, anyone could watch a movie at the nickelodeon theater, and in Manhattan they were strongly associated with the working class of the crowded, mostly Jewish Lower East Side. Moreover, these theaters changed the very format of motion pictures entirely, and only after they gained popularity did longer-form movies begin to be produced. In “The Materiality of Cinema Theaters in Northern Nigeria,” anthropologist Brian Larkin explains that movie theaters serve as the site for a wide range of different social interactions and the exchange of ideas, and that the material nature of the movie theater itself shapes the way that movies are experienced and how audiences conceive of themselves.

While Larkin's chapter focuses on the role of cinema theaters in postcolonial cities specifically, his analysis is useful in understanding how movie theaters operated in the early days of film in the United States. He argues that the sensory nature of the movie theater, with its darkened lights, large screens and true-to-life speaker systems, so thoroughly disrupts the perception of the local physical environment that it "threatens the local construction of space" (Larkin: 320). In this threatened, liminal space created by the movie theater, social hierarchies and personal identities are put on hold in one sense, and yet reinforced in another. While the dark environment of the theater obscures any visible differences between audience members, their very presence in the theater is dictated by social conventions which historically have attracted and excluded different groups. In the case of American Jews, they were more than welcome to walk in and enjoy a screening at the nickelodeon theater, and for them this participation in the essentially American activity of going to the movies signified a sense of increased belonging into the American mainstream. However, at these same movie theaters, Black viewers could not enter, and the audience was largely male. These social stratifications determined which Americans could participate in this nationalizing experience, and once they were inside those theaters the immersive technology allowed viewers to truly feel as though they were just as much a part of America as any native-born Protestant.

As the authors of "Media Worlds" explain, the process of audience formation and reception is informed by the sites of reception, i.e. movie theaters, as well as the sites of production, means of distribution and so on. And, crucially, movie theaters themselves are far from the sole sites of reception, even though they may be the site where a film is first viewed and understood. The process of reception continues to occur long after the audience member has left the movie theater, and is influenced by their social setting, interactions and context of the film

within their personal lives. In the same vein, the film studio is not the only site of production: rather, production begins long before, with the economic commitments of studio executives, their politics, and the politics of regulatory committees with state interests, such as the Hays office. The acculturation of Jewish Americans into middle-class white American society coincided with their advancement in the movie industry and the advancement of the movie industry, and this meant that there were several factors influencing the changes in how Jews and Jewish stories were told through movies in the years approaching the middle of the twentieth century.

Emerging Whiteness

I find that Samuels' idea of a period of acculturation, which was marked by upward mobility of Jewish Americans both in society at large as well as in the entertainment industry, largely bleeds into and is coextensive with his notion of the period of assimilation that was to follow. Jewish characters were less frequently portrayed as such outlandish stereotypes, and even more subdued and 'realistic' Jewish identifiers such as accent and dialect were often done away with (Rosenberg 1996: 19). When Jews did appear in stories it was most often under the premise of striving for upward advancement through entrepreneurship and business savvy, or as characters who were only suggestive of being Jewish at the most. This was the case with Jewish directors as well, such as the director Ernst Lubitsch whose stories mostly featured characters with names like "Meyer from Berlin" yet who otherwise never made any explicit reference to their background or religion. These toned-down portrayals reflect the Jewish assimilation into whiteness which was taking place, as well as the nuance of the idea of assimilation, as it is opposed to acculturation. While I feel in the context of Rosenberg's argument that the ideas are overlapping, there is inherently a difference between the two ideas: acculturation implies the

acquisition of skills necessary to function in one's new society, whereas assimilation implies the erasure of noticeably different attributes and the absorption into a larger, uniform group.

There were signs of rebellion against the status quo, and even Lubitsch himself eventually wrote a film with a blatantly Jewish character, and one who speaks out against the Holocaust at that. However, the forces preventing directors from describing the atrocities that had been committed against the Jews of Europe were not just societal ones, but legal as well. The Motion Picture Production Code, now more commonly referred to as the Hays Code, was a set of content guidelines that severely restricted the freedom of directors to feature what the code deemed to be immoral content, which included content perceived to be damaging to the "rights, history and feelings of any nation" (Rosenberg 1996: 20). Will H. Hays, for whom the code was named, began drafting it in the 1920s before it was eventually universally implemented in 1934. This was directly interpreted by the Hays office to mean that any criticism of Nazi Germany was grounds for rejection and revision, whereas the same protections notably did not extend to all nationalities and ethnic groups equally. As Rosenberg writes,

"In practice, this regulation was not as fair-minded as it purported to be. Blacks, Asians, and decidedly non-Anglo foreigners (Slavs, Hungarians, Turks, Arabs, Gypsies) were continually stereotyped in American film of the 1930s, and the plight of European Jewry was largely ignored during a time when some attention to it might have made a difference. Studio heads were reluctant to invite the ire of the U.S. Congress, where diatribes against Hollywood, and especially against Hollywood's Jews, were becoming fashionable, and where a spirit of isolationism on American foreign policy prevailed" (Rosenberg 1996: 20).

And yet it was against this backdrop of censorship and prejudice that American Jews were nevertheless becoming more and more assimilated into mainstream American society, or, in other words, into whiteness. Rosenberg makes the point that the process of Jewish assimilation that took place in the early twentieth century was not simply a case of white Christians eagerly or

graciously accepting a newly upwardly mobile minority population into their midst, but instead a series of battles and negotiations between studio heads and censorship boards, Congressional committees and movie directors and morally concerned Presbyterian elders like Hays himself. This period of assimilation saw mixed amounts of progress for American Jews both on and off the big screen, and the severely stifling effect of the Hays code was one of the reasons why relatively little changed in terms of nuanced Jewish representation in movies from the late 1920s up until the onset of World War II.

In the context of this atmosphere of suppression, it is crucial to also realize that the very ability of Jews to be treated as legitimate actors in these battles for mainstream acceptance was contingent on the same racial classifications which simultaneously provided for their discrimination. The Jewish status in 1920s and 1930s America as ‘ethnically inferior,’ if not entirely nonwhite, placed them firmly below the white Protestant “old-stock” Americans and in a suspicious position in the American racial hierarchy of the time. Yet even their status as ‘inferior’ or ‘suspect’ Europeans put American Jews in a position to advance in different fields and industries that was simply not allowed for non-white-passing minorities, including Black Americans, Indigenous Americans as well as the majority of Asian Americans and Hispanic Americans. In her book *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America*, anthropologist Karen Brodtkin explores in depth the historical background and process of Jewish racial and cultural assimilation in the United States, arguing convincingly that the primary factor in shaping racial status was state policy allowing certain European immigrant groups to become “whitened” while preventing other immigrants and minorities from having the same opportunities. These include the segregationist redlining policies of the FHA (Federal Housing Administration), racially restrictive immigration policies and even Social Security

coverage policies, to name a few (Brodkin: 1999). Brodkin begins by challenging what she recalls as the prevailing narrative of her generation of Jewish Americans who grew up in the 1950s, namely, that Jewish assimilation and economic progress was thanks to their tight-knit community, value placed on education and Old World work ethic. She writes,

“I am willing to affirm all those abilities and ideals and their contribution to Jews’ upward mobility, but I still argue that they were far from sufficient to account for Jewish success... Instead I want to suggest that Jewish success is a product not only of ability but also of the removal of powerful social barriers to its realization” (Brodkin 1999: 19).

Some of these social barriers that Brodkin is referring to include occupational restrictions which had originally kept Jews out of teaching positions, quotas on Jews in higher education which had been removed in the City University of New York and other institutions, and the widespread removal of antisemitic neighborhood and housing covenants. In the absence of these and other hurdles Jews were able to advance both economically and racially in the early and mid-twentieth century.

In order for studios such as Warner Brothers and Metro Goldwyn Mayer to go up against the puritanical and discriminatory Hays code in the first place, American Jews such as Goldwyn, Mayer and the Warner brothers themselves first needed to benefit from what Brodkin described as the greatest affirmative action project in American history, one targeted at ‘Euromales’ with the intention of bringing them forth into the white American mainstream. Indeed, Jewish assimilation was distinctly gendered, and much of it took place in the lives of Jewish men in male-dominated workplaces and other public settings. Brodkin illustrates that just as the state was capable of reproducing racial inferiority through its policies, it was also capable of selectively elevating groups to whiteness, and in the first half of the twentieth century that is precisely what happened to groups ranging from Ashkenazi Jews to the Poles, to the Greeks and

the Italians and many other groups of southern and eastern Europeans. This assimilation was selective in that the mechanisms by which Europeans were able to assimilate were not afforded to Black Americans, for example. Housing restrictions would prevent Black residents but not Italian ones from moving into white neighborhoods, thereby determining who was able to join the white geographical environment. At the same time, whatever government resources were apportioned to social welfare were overwhelmingly concentrated in poor and working class white or Euro-immigrant neighborhoods, and rarely Black, Hispanic or Asian ones. The process was not the same for Jews as it was for Serbians or Spaniards, but it was within the context of this expansion of whiteness to many formerly racialized European immigrants that American Jews suddenly began to see their community members leading major studios, writing bestselling novels, and even threatening Babe Ruth's home run record.

Gentleman's Agreement

During World War II, Jews began to appear alongside other 'ethnic' Europeans in 'platoon films' which glorified the multi-ethnic unity of the soldiers and furthered the notion that these men were sufficiently patriotic and honorable to be deserving of equality. These included 1943's *Air Force* as well as *Pride of the Marines*, released in 1945: both these films and others in the platoon film genre depicted Jewish characters as no different than any of the other ethnically distinct protagonists, and also subverted commonly-held stereotypes of Jewish cowardice (Erens 1984: 170).

In the aftermath of the war, however, any new solidarity was replaced with the suspicion brought about by the Cold War, and again Jews were targeted for their proximity, both real and imagined, to socialist and communist causes. This was the era of blacklisting, when the Christian

moralizing of the Hays office converged with the anti-leftist fervor of McCarthyism, and America was grappling with the position of Jews as further assimilation brought with it further scrutiny and suspicions (Rosenberg 1996: 22). At the same time, there was a growing awareness of the genocide that had taken place across the Atlantic, and American viewers finally witnessed actual footage of the atrocities of the death camps as well as images of those who had survived and were approaching death from starvation. These factors had a tangible impact on American public consciousness, and set the stage for films that would take a deeper dive into antisemitism and its implications for not only American Jews but for the entire nation's democratic principles.

One such film, *Gentleman's Agreement* from 1947, is easily one of the most significant films released about American antisemitism in the history of American cinema. Never before had a movie about Jews reached the level of box office or critical success that *Gentleman's Agreement* found, let alone a movie about antisemitism: the fact that the movie pointed a finger at American antisemitism in such a pointed manner was truly unprecedented. Directed by Jewish director Elia Kazan and released by Metro Goldwyn Mayer, the film starred the A-list, very much Christian actor Gregory Peck as a reporter who goes undercover as a Jew to write an article about the impact and prevalence of antisemitism on American society. What Peck's character, Philip Schuyler Green, discovers is that antisemitism is ubiquitous and leaves little untouched in the daily life of the American Jew, and over the course of the film we see the Christian protagonist struggle with the idea of antisemitism and gain a new sort of sympathy for American Jews, as he becomes painfully aware of the antisemitism being condoned and openly promoted by his own loved ones. Kazan's choice of naming for the main character is noteworthy: the Schuylers were a prominent and wealthy Protestant family in New York since the colonial era, the polar opposite of the recent Eastern European Jewish immigrant. Meanwhile, the

surname Green is intentionally ambiguous, and serves to add to the movie's recurring theme that there is little to nothing that uniquely distinguishes Jews from other white Americans.

The ideas of difference, belonging and American-ness are at the forefront of the movie from its outset. Once Schuyler Green and his family move to New York at the beginning of the film, we are introduced to his inquisitive and naive son, whose questions about and later experiences with antisemitism make *Gentleman's Agreement* that much more emotionally resonant. When he asks his father to explain more about the project he's working on, Schuyler tells him that antisemitism is hatred of Jews; he then fields his son's follow-up questions and explains what Jews are and that they worship at a synagogue, just as Catholics worship at one "type of church" and their own family worships at yet another type of church. Then comes the more serious question, the one which, unfortunately, isn't dealt with to any considerable extent in the story: why do people hate Jews?

"Well," says the elder Green, "some people hate Catholics, and some people hate Jews."

Looking up at his father, the son replies, "And nobody hates us because we're American!"

This positioning of religious identity in regards to national belonging may be nothing more than an innocent misconception on the part of a small child, yet the director is clearly foreshadowing the attitude that Green will come to encounter time and again in the course of *Gentleman's Agreement*. One vocal opponent of antisemitism in the film is Green's boss and editor, the one who tasked him with investigating antisemitism in the first place. Specifically, the editor alludes to the idea that there is already a surplus of news coverage and stories about antisemitism, most of which tell the same story and fail to reach audiences in a meaningful way. Green's article, according to the editor, should be fundamentally different. Instead of telling

another story of extremist antisemitism for average Americans to dismiss as the bigotry of a reactionary few, the editor wants the article to speak directly to the type of people “who would never go near an antisemitic meeting or send a dime to L.K. Smith,” in reference to the Presidential candidate and prominent Nazi sympathizer. Indeed, one of the main messages of *Gentleman’s Agreement* is that antisemitism in America is not simply the fault of the vocal extremists, but rather it is the silent majority of comfortable bystanders, self-proclaimed liberals and intellectuals and other members of polite society who are largely responsible for the perpetuation of stateside antisemitism.

These apathetic white Christians appear in the film as a number of characters, such as Green’s love interest and niece of the editor, Kathy. As the film progresses, we see more of Kathy’s prejudices and true values come to light. Whereas at first she is supportive of Green’s article, she becomes inexplicably taken aback, almost disgusted, when she learns that he will be going undercover as a Jew. Later, after coming around to the idea (or at least claiming to), Kathy nevertheless resists keeping her family back in Connecticut out of the loop, clearly fearful of what their reactions might be to meeting her boyfriend who, unless she were to blow his cover, would for all intents and purposes be a Jew in their eyes. When pressed on the matter she assures Green that her friends and family are “just grand,” not prejudiced at all, but that she was only worried about any other friends that they might bring. Clearly Green would not be accepted in the WASPy environment of Kathy’s family’s country club in Darien, which is obvious to his Jewish friend Dave Goldman, yet out of both journalistic tenacity and righteous indignation Green insists on attending anyway. What he finds is what he might have expected, as his room in the hotel is canceled on the spot when hotel staff inquire as to whether he is “of the Hebrew religion,” to which he refuses to answer and in return asks if the notoriously segregated

establishment is “tolerant of all religions”. Later, he arrives at the exclusive country club event hosted by Kathy’s family, where instead of overwhelming prejudice he encounters overwhelming absence; the majority of the invited guests cancelled their plans under a number of questionable circumstances, clearly unwilling to so much as be in the same event as the ostensibly Jewish Philip Green.

Dave Goldman, Green’s Jewish childhood friend turned military officer, serves as the basis for much of Green’s, and the film’s, understanding of Jews in America. Early in the movie, Green comes up with the idea to go undercover after thinking about how his old friend Dave would react to his article. Dave, he realizes, is “The kinda fella I would be as a Jew”. The two of them grew up in the same neighborhood, shared many of the same experiences and the same external social environment, and so Green decides to view antisemitism how he imagines Dave Goldman would. He has a sort of epiphany, suddenly aware that more than simply considering the issue from the eyes of someone like Dave, he himself could become someone like Dave. “Dark hair, dark eyes: same as Dave. No mannerisms, no noticeable accent: just like Dave,” Green exclaims out loud, and the premise of the article and the film is born. By and large, Dave represents Green’s defense of American Jews, and his counterargument to the antisemitism he bears witness to. Dave is by every outward indicator no different than Schuyler, and therefore every bit as deserving of full equality and acceptance; if anything, Dave goes above and beyond worthiness by serving as an officer in the war overseas, clearly an intentional choice in the creation of his character. He is not “one of the k***-y ones,” as Green’s covertly Jewish secretary Elaine Wales (real name Estelle Walovsky) describes the unassimilated Jewish masses. She explains that they are “too loud and with too much rouge,” and that they will ruin all the hard work she and other assimilated Jews had done to blend in enough to where they could find

employment among the Christians. None of these Jews appear in the film outside of Elaine's descriptions, and aside from her the only other Jewish characters are Dave Goldman and one Jewish editor at Green's magazine. In a movie that argues that Jews are fundamentally American and as a result should be treated as equals, it is unclear whether the same argument is extended for these faceless Jewish masses, "the objectionable ones" as Elaine goes on to describe them.

The movie is groundbreaking and interesting for a number of reasons, not least of which is the number of parallels between the events of the movie and the actual story behind its production. *Gentleman's Agreement* tells the story of a Christian who pretends to be a Jew, despite the warnings of many of those close to him; Gregory Peck, the Christian actor who played this role, was himself discouraged from accepting it by his agent, who worried it would hurt his chances of finding future employment. Furthermore, in the film, one notable voice opposing the editor's idea to write an expose of antisemitism is the one noticeably Jewish member of the magazine's executive board, who cautions that the article won't do any good and would only serve to cause more trouble than it was worth. Off screen, one major voice who was concerned with releasing the film was none other than Samuel Goldwyn himself, of Metro Goldwyn Mayer, who similarly feared that the movie would do more harm than good. And finally, in both the plot of the movie and the story of its release, the general reception to the public examination of antisemitism is critical acclaim. Schuyler Green's article from his time undercover is portrayed as being particularly powerful and moving; meanwhile, *Gentleman's Agreement* took home Best Picture in the 1947 Academy Awards, amongst other Oscars it was awarded that night, and critics and audiences alike were moved by the message of the movie.

That message, however, is not quite so straightforward as it may appear. While the movie certainly centers itself around the impact of antisemitism on American Jews, the overarching

theme of the movie is one of the beauty and potential of America, as it both aspires to be and claims to be the land of equality and opportunity for all. It isn't that America is presented as free from discrimination or bigotry, but rather that these are presented as moments of departure from the true spirit of the nation rather than being reflective of systemic biases and intentional, institutional discrimination. And when antisemitism does rear its ugly head in *Gentleman's Agreement*, the outrage seems to center around the idea that Jews are no different than any other (white, Christian) Americans, and therefore shouldn't be mistreated. This is, in my opinion, a critical distinction: the movie at no point presents the idea that Jews may be different than other Americans and yet still deserving of equality, only that they are American enough that they are no longer deserving of discrimination.

Conclusion

The twentieth century was a time of widespread social change in every rung of society, within nations as well as between nations and in broader global developments. Locally, significant amounts of immigration from southern and eastern Europe changed the demographic makeup of America and eventually, of white America; at the same time, major events such as the Great Depression and both World Wars fundamentally changed how Americans saw themselves and who they saw as the other. In the context of these all-encompassing changes, so too changed the status and collective identity of American Jews.

As decades went by the majority of Jews in America went from living in crowded, urban ethnic enclaves to living in white suburbs composed of a number of different ethnicities, both the established and the newly whitened. At the same time, the media changed as technology advanced, and film served as a novel means for ideas about Jews to be transmitted and

reproduced. Changing definitions of whiteness and changes in the film industry contributed to a climate of evolving identity and acceptance of American Jews, while antisemitism remained a rampant problem; movies such as *Gentleman's Agreement* serve as useful examples of attitudes towards Jews and their place in America at the social crossroads that was the early and middle twentieth century. The materiality of the movie theater shaped the stories that were told about Jews to Americans, and these perceptions themselves shaped the content of those representations of Jewish people.

Chapter Three: Jewish Online Representation in the 21st Century

Introduction

As technological advances began to appear exponentially throughout the late twentieth century and into the twenty-first, the dominant forms of media and communication transformed as well. The internet ushered in a new era of social interactions and novel platforms for the sharing of information, ideologies and any number of cultural or political interests. In *Media Anthropology for the Digital Age* (2018), Ana Cristina Pertierra describes the development of the study of the internet within anthropology, and traces its progression from an initial emphasis on the myriad of possible future uses and implications of the technology, to a more grounded examination of how the internet and digital culture had already transformed people's lives in significant ways (Pertierra 2018: 1). New technologies enabled new forms of media to surface in the digital age, including anonymous online message boards and forums like 4chan and Reddit, as well as the major social media networks such as Instagram, Facebook and Twitter.

In this chapter I will examine how media representations of Jews on internet and social media platforms both shape and are shaped by the lived and imagined relationships between Jewish people and American identity, as well as how these representations are shaped by the material forms of these media and the processes involved in their production and reception. I will argue that while there are a seemingly ever-growing number of pages devoted to combating antisemitism or presenting Jewish interests and stories fairly, many depictions of Jews online and on social media continue to place them firmly as outsiders in the American nation. Many of these representations simultaneously depict Jews as dangerous interlopers whose supposed

entrenchment in the machinations of power represent nothing less than an existential threat to an America that is assumed to inherently be white and Christian.

The Insurrection

It would be impossible for me to discuss the subject of online antisemitism and the proliferation of hate groups on the internet without considering one of the more frightening moments in American history which in no small measure served as an inspiration for the subject and scope of this project. On a cold, overcast day in Washington, January 6th, 2021 to be precise, an angry mob of hundreds of Trump supporters broke through the barricades and invaded the United States Capitol, disrupting a Congressional session with the aim of overturning the results of a democratic election. I was over two hundred miles away at the time, yet the sight of the U.S. Capitol building, always a symbol not only of my hometown of D.C. but of the very foundation of American democracy, appearing before me on my television screen utterly helpless at the hands of an increasingly violent and agitated mob, brought me to a level of shock, utter disbelief and ultimately fear, which I have rarely experienced either before or since that date.



Compounding this fear was the knowledge that many members of the crowd outside and, astonishingly, inside the Capitol were decked in antisemitic imagery and signage, ranging from Q-Anon posters (a group I will discuss in greater depth later in the chapter) to one man captured on camera and relayed back to me via my Instagram feed with surprising speed, whose imagery was distinctly less subtle than the others: the man (pictured above), an older white man with disheveled hair and a long beard, wore a black sweatshirt adorned with the words “Camp Auschwitz” and the phrase “Work Brings Freedom” underneath, an English translation of the phrase “Arbeit Macht Frei”. This was the slogan which greeted Jewish and Romani prisoners on their way into the Nazi concentration camp at Auschwitz, where over a million people were killed in a genocidal campaign of ethnic cleansing unprecedented in its industrial methods of

murder. The wording of the phrase “Camp Auschwitz” on the man’s sweatshirt is a reconfiguration of the way the actual camp was referred to, and is much more reminiscent of the classic naming format of American summer camps which would often feature an indigenous name at the end. This choice of words, combined with the crossed canoe paddles substituted into the skull-and-crossbones design, all signify a summer camp atmosphere that plays on the primary mechanism of genocide within the Holocaust, the concentration camp.

Such semiotically rich imagery is hardly uncommon among the far right, as Cynthia Miller-Idriss describes in *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*. Miller-Idriss writes about far-right youth culture in Germany, and the ways in which it has been commercialized and communicated through pieces of clothing which, despite not usually being explicitly far right or racist (unlike the man’s sweatshirt pictured above), make the wearer’s political beliefs apparent to anyone who is clued in to the symbolism at play in their outfit. Both in Germany and the United States, Nordic and Viking imagery has come to represent white nationalist ideologies, and harkens back to what many white nationalists see as a masculine European ideal that has supposedly been corrupted over time due to race mixing and, of course, nefarious Jewish influence. In the case of the Camp Auschwitz sweatshirt, the symbolism is different, and much more explicit, from that of stores like Tromso in Berlin and major brands such as Thor Steinar (Miller-Idriss 2018:1). Nevertheless, this type of far-right commercialized declaration shares a referential and symbolic style with its Nordic-inspired counterparts. The darkness of the concentration camp at Auschwitz is juxtaposed with the light-hearted imagery of an all-American summer camp, and this juxtaposition is intended to appeal to an alt-right sense of humor, and furthers the overall message which is that the Holocaust is a source of comedy and object of ridicule for members of the far right and white nationalists (Lavin 2020: 42). This attitude of ridicule exists for a number

of reasons, as white nationalists believe that Jews are overly concerned with the Holocaust and just can't seem to get over it, have intentionally inflated the number of victims of the genocide in order to bolster a particularly tragic narrative, and that Jews use the Holocaust in order to play the victim so that they can distract the gentiles from their vice grip over the worlds of industry and politics (Lavin 2020: 42). As such, the Holocaust plays a large role in the world of antisemitic memes and tropes that is so prominent within alt-right and white nationalist online platforms. This may go some way towards explaining the particular relevance of such a sweatshirt to the January 6th Capitol insurrection, beyond the shared interest in both issues common amongst members of the crowd that afternoon.

White Genocide

Specifically, there is a popular conspiracy theory among the alt-right concerning an imagined plan being conspired and carried out by Jews in order to bring about the end of the white race through racial intermarriage and "race mixing," referred to using the terminology of a "white genocide," or a "Great Replacement" (Lavin 2020: 71). This conspiracy might help explain the connection between the sweatshirt's reference to the major Jewish genocide of the last century and its owner's presence at the January 6th insurrection. According to the logic of this conspiracy, Jewish people have a vested interest in "weakening" the white race so that the otherwise strong and resilient whites will be more susceptible to the plans that the conniving Jewish elites have in store for them. As the story goes, in order for the Jews to "weaken" the white population sufficiently, they (the Jews) are using their connections and positions in the hidden upper echelons of society to influence both culture and politics with their leftist agenda (Lavin 2020: 83). The conspiracy holds that in the area of politics, Jews are responsible for

pushing policies that favor increased immigration and refugee resettlement, and that oppose crackdowns on undocumented immigrants and increased security (such as Trump's holy grail "wall") on the southern border. This sentiment rose to the surface when Donald Trump claimed in October of 2018 that the so-called "migrant caravan," a group of mostly Central American migrants headed through Mexico for the U.S. border, were being paid by George Soros to enter the United States. Furthermore, Jews supposedly support leftist racial justice and identity politics such as increased recognition of transgender and non-binary people, affirmative action, Black Lives Matter and the secularization of public schools.

In the arena of popular culture and media, Jews are held responsible for increased representation of racially mixed families and relationships on television and in movies, as well as for a supposed rise in popularity of both sexually explicit and non-heteronormative music and visual media. Beyond offending the so-called family values that are championed by conservatives in America, the conspiracy theory at question maintains that Jews promote these media products as part of a plot to desensitize the white Christian youth to their methods of weakening the purity of the white race and the cohesion of the white family unit. Even if as a hypothetical exercise we were to entertain the claim that Jews support these politics, let alone are responsible for their implementation at the national level, then that support on its own would be enough to draw the contempt of most conservative, anti-immigration Americans; however, the accusation being levied against Jews in the context of the white genocide conspiracy goes beyond mere political disagreement. The conspiracy theory holds that Jews support these immigration policies in order to alter the demographic makeup of the United States in favor of non-whites and immigrants, so that eventually white Americans will no longer make up the

majority of the population, thus allowing the Jewish scheme to subjugate the white race (and ultimately the western world as a whole) to be fully realized.

Internet Materiality

Recently, when I searched again for the Camp Auschwitz image to include it in this chapter, I was given a chilling indication of the impact an image like the photo of that man can have. Upon typing the words “Camp Auschwitz” into my search engine, my browser preemptively completed my inquiry with a suggestion based on the most commonly searched phrases containing those words, as is now standard procedure on most devices: apparently, when an internet user types “Camp Auschwitz” into their search bar, the most common search they end up making is for “Camp Auschwitz hoodie on ebay” (sic). Clearly this points to the commercialization of far-right, white nationalist ideology as referenced by Miller-Idriss. Moreover, this further illustrates just how important the reception of an image is; while this image may have initially ‘gone viral’ at least in part because of users’ outrage towards the hateful message displayed on the sweatshirt, clearly there was also a segment of the population which regarded the display with admiration rather than contempt. The relationship between the message on the man’s shirt and the very reason for his visibility, his participation in an insurrection at the Capitol, might seem murky at first, if not entirely disconnected. But the material forms of the media that went into the organization of the insurrection help explain the seemingly disparate ideologies that were on display that fateful Wednesday.

Online right-wing communities exist in spaces where a range of issues are discussed as threads or posts yet these very same posts are linked inextricably to a greater ideology encompassed by the forum or platform itself, be it a subreddit or 4chan forum or any one of a

number of such sites. Moreover, trending topics on platforms such as Twitter and Instagram are grouped together by virtue of the hashtags the poster includes with their image or tweet. As Yarimar Bonilla and Johnathan Rosa write in “#Ferguson: Digital Protest, Hashtag Ethnography, and the Racial Politics of Social Media in the United States,” hashtags are at once organizational tools which are helpful from a clerical perspective, and yet simultaneously serve as semiotic markers which seek to prescribe a certain reading or interpretation of the post that they are associated with (Bonilla & Rosa 2015: 5). When a major news event first becomes made aware to the media or members of the public and is tweeted about by Twitter users, it is their hashtags that index their tweets as pertaining to the topic at hand, regardless of whether the event or subject is mentioned explicitly in the content of the tweet itself. This means that when, for example, a celebrity such as Kobe Bryant passes away, users can scroll through countless tweets of other users reacting to or simply sharing the news of his passing by searching #KobeBryant, so long as those tweets are marked with the appropriate hashtag. But moreover, hashtags are semiotic in the sense that they impart meaning on the tweet itself by their presence in association with the tweet. To return to the previous example: on its own, a tweet from January of 2020 simply reading “It’s been a rough day” could be taken to mean any number of things, or simply that the user had a bad day at the office. But, the exact same tweet followed by #KobeBryant clearly indicates what the person is upset about; the hashtag has visibly placed the sentiment in the category of condolence and tribute tweets in honor of the athlete. The way hashtags can impart such distinct meanings on otherwise polysemous tweets and posts reflects the power of secondhand reception and repositioning of images and writing that is not only possible but inherent to social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram. That is why, for example, when one of Donald Trump’s tweets goes viral, the number of retweets does not reflect the

number of people who supported his thoughts so much that they wanted to share them to their own page. Indeed, many retweets come from users who share the tweet with their own commentary attached, often below the original tweet which retains center stage nonetheless. This means that a user is just as likely to write “Get a load of this nonsense” under their repost as they are to write “I wholeheartedly agree with this,” but either reaction lends the original tweet the same amount of popularity as the other.

Alt-right groups such as the Proud Boys and believers of Q-Anon were in attendance at the Capitol riot on January 6th, and their rhetoric was highly influential in the movement to overturn the election results to begin with. The Proud Boys in particular are a white nationalist “fraternal organization,” designated as a terrorist group by the Canadian government in direct response to their involvement on January 6th. While they officially disavow any connections to the broader alt-right movement, in practice their Islamophobic, xenophobic, racist and antisemitic tendencies, combined with their passionate hatred of establishment Democrats and liberals, place them squarely in the realm of alt-right hate groups that have proliferated in the wake of Donald Trump’s first Presidential campaign. Founded by the same man who founded the popular counterculture magazine *Vice*, Gavin McInnes, the Proud Boys not only played major roles in orchestrating the January 6th insurrection, but were also largely responsible for the infamous “Unite the Right” rally in 2017, wherein hundreds of white nationalists took to the streets to protest the removal of confederate statues from Charlottesville, Virginia. From these rather specific complaints the demonstration became a violent, hate-fueled march complete with actual pitchforks and torches, as a massive surge of angry white men marched through the streets of the southern college town, chanting the slogan “The Jews will not replace us!” in direct reference to the white genocide/Great Replacement conspiracy theory, over and over as violence

erupted all around. One counterprotester, Heather Heyer, was murdered by the white supremacist James Alex Fields when he ran her over; 35 others were injured in his terror attack that day. The



seemingly differing motivations and ideologies at play within alt right groups such as the Proud Boys reflect the wide range of influences and beliefs that make up the ideological basis of the alt right: these disparate politics are clearly reflected in the image above, taken from the Unite the Right rally as it passed through the heart of Charlottesville on August 12th, 2017.

While ostensibly a rally in support of the Confederate cause, or the American political right writ large, the signage and flags on display appear to complicate this assumption. Three of the flags, the Confederate ones, seem relevant to one of the stated causes of the rally, in opposition to the removal of Robert E. Lee's statue from the city. But the larger motivation for the rally, and the one which lent the rally its name, was the goal of uniting the various factions that make up the right wing and white nationalist political circles. This intent is manifested here

by the various flags and symbols taken together. The Gadsden flag, featuring a coiled snake and the words “Don’t Tread On Me,” is a symbol of the Libertarian party, the second largest right-wing political party in the United States after the Republican party. On the right side of the picture there is a man holding a circular, wooden shield with an avian icon, in the Norse style; on the farthest right side of the image a man in a grey sweatshirt and track pants holds a flag depicting Thor’s hammer, another Nordic symbol co-opted by the alt right to identify with what they see as the epitome of the strong, courageous and racially pure European warriors that they should strive to emulate. Then, right in the focal point of the image, a slight man in a white polo shirt holds what can only be described as the centerpiece of the cluttered, visually exhausting image, in the form of that cherry red flag known all too well by racists, antisemites and their respective victims for the past 75 years.

So what is it that neo-Nazis, libertarians, Confederate sympathizers and white nationalist neo-pagans have in common? Something about the material form of the internet, which was absolutely instrumental in the organization of the Unite the Right rally and January 6th insurrection, produces an environment where this sort of ideological cross-contamination is not only possible, but common enough that a shared feature of many of the largest alt-right rallies and incidents in recent memory is a surprising diversity of signage and symbolism amongst their attendants. I believe that the polysemous nature of online and social media posts, produced by the ambiguity and layers of meta-references inherent to their material form, mean that imagery from a range of sources are reappropriated online by members of the far right and alt right and imbued with new meanings in this process.

Antisemitic Conspiracies of the Online Far Right

Groups like the Proud Boys and many others whose ranks were strongly represented on January 6th, saw a direct link between the supposed plot to steal the election from Donald Trump and a greater scheme, or set of schemes, by an invisible yet powerful Jewish cabal to enact their harmful agenda on White America. These plots range from the Jewish plan to destroy the white race by influencing immigration policy and promoting interracial relationships and families in Hollywood, to the Pizzagate conspiracy, in which a pedophilic and Satanic cabal of leftist Washington insiders are accused of running a child trafficking operation out of a Northwest Washington pizza joint, and with strong implications of the antisemitic blood libel (now under the guise of ‘adrenochrome harvesting’). The important thing to note, as Pertierra explains in her chapter, is that even communities which are formed entirely online oftentimes organize and take action offline, in the “real” world; in the case of Pizzagate, the conspiracy theory culminated in one believer driving from North Carolina and firing shots in the pizza place, hoping to save some of the children he was sure were being kept in the basement.

The issue is, Comet Pizza & Ping Pong has no basement, and I know this because, in a strange turn of events, it has been my local pizza place ever since I went to elementary school two blocks away. Suddenly, these conspiracies were playing out not only in the real world, but in my world, and that knowledge informed my fear when I heard the news on January 6th. I wasn’t afraid for myself, several states away in New York, but for my father, someone who I knew was going to put himself into considerable danger by going to the insurrection in-person. A reporter for an Israeli broadcasting network, he had no choice but to report on history in the making, but as a member of the news media, one reporting in Hebrew at that, I was afraid for his safety. In the end he was fine and unharmed, but from that day I became acutely aware of the danger of online antisemitism and conspiracies, and interested in learning more.

It is important to examine how these antisemitic conspiracies, with their deep roots drawing from sources like the *Protocols* and the Nazi party, can gain such traction in modern alt-right and white nationalist organizations. The alt-right groups that were present on January 6th are overwhelmingly structured around online communities where members are recruited and radicalized, and on these platforms antisemitic texts, rants, videos, memes and other images are posted and shared (Lavin 2020: 20). As Talia Lavin explains in *Culture Warlords*, the materiality of these platforms lend themselves to the transmission of racist and antisemitic content that would be taken down or even see the poster banned on the major social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram or Twitter. Platforms such as 4chan, 8chan, Telegram and Gab pride themselves on their freedom of expression for users and position themselves against what they see as the draconian, leftist censorship policies of the aforementioned major platforms (Lavin 2020: 20). As such, there is little to no moderation of the content that users post and share, and it is hardly surprising that alt-right and white nationalist groups have not only taken root in these lawless corners of the internet, but have actually proliferated to a startling degree.

Digital Media Technologies

This illustrates once more how the material ‘architecture’ of different online platforms directly influences the distribution, circulation and reception of antisemitic media, which in turn impacts Jewish identity in relation to American-ness and Jewish representation in popular consciousness and collective discourse. Platforms like Twitter are structured in such a way that polarizing or controversial tweets are rewarded to an extent that demonstrably influences the content that is shown to users: in addition to a “heart” button which is the hallmark of Instagram and plays a similar role to Facebook’s “like” button, Twitter prominently features a “retweet”

option under each tweet, marked instructively with the widely understood recycling symbol. Although Facebook also allows users to share other users' posts and other sites may have similar features as well, no platform has popularized the sharing feature so prominently as Twitter. What this means is that tweets which draw ire from one side of the aisle while drawing admiration from the other do exceptionally well on Twitter, because every retweet by an outraged user captioning the original tweet with their words of disagreement nevertheless boosts the popularity of the offensive tweet just as much as the retweet of someone who fervently believes in what the tweet says. A tweet containing a politically polarizing message that is attention-grabbing in either its controversy, explicit and offensive nature or downright extremism is thus more likely to gain retweets and be boosted to the front of users' feeds, as compared to a more benign tweet about policy or legislation or speaking dates. While both tweets may draw similar support from their side of the aisle, only the more outrageous tweet will be shared by members of the opposition to express their disdain, and thus tweets of that nature will more often than not dominate the "timelines" of users (timelines being the stream of tweets a user sees upon opening the app).

Donald Trump became known for his Twitter usage before his presidential campaign, but during that campaign he leveraged the platform to his immense advantage, with his unprecedentedly brash and explosive rhetoric driving him to the top of the Republican party and, eventually, into the White House. Many so-called "establishment Republicans" expressed their shock and concern at his meteoric rise, and their downright confusion, yet his style of verbal attacks and snappy put-downs is exactly what made him so popular on Twitter, which then became a major instrument on his path to political success in 2016. In addition to rewarding controversy, the architecture of Twitter also rewards punctuality; in fact, it demands it, despite

doubling the maximum length of a tweet from 140 to 280 characters back in 2017. This means that particularly lengthy, thorough, or expansive insights or commentary are much less likely to fare well in comparison to punctual, direct tweets that quickly convey only one or two key ideas and which users are therefore more likely to share to their own pages, either in support or out of criticism. This immediate style of communication is even more effective when combined with an offensive sense of humor directed at others which draws indignation from supporters of the subject as well as laughter from others. It just so happens that this combination of derisive, punctual, polarizing and personal tweets is what the former President Donald Trump specializes in, or rather, specialized in: Trump was permanently banned from Twitter following the events of the January 6th insurrection, when he used his massive authority not only as a President but as a bona fide social media influencer to direct his supporters to overturn the results of the American Presidential election.

This censorship brings us back to platforms such as Telegram, 8chan and Gab, where antisemitic representations of Jews are trafficked in freely by white nationalists and members of the far right (including the alt right), not to mention passersby who may be curious or interested in these hateful, online-based groups and are drawn into the web of memes and in-jokes and snarky references and white/male/Christian solidarity that draws so many isolated or otherwise troubled young white men in America to join such groups (Lavin 2020: 20). On these platforms, there is hardly the sort of censorship that landed Trump in what many refer to as “Twitter jail,” and so there is no limit to how explicitly hateful a message can be. The material form of Twitter dictates that antisemitism takes the form of Donald Trump tweeting an image of Hillary Clinton over a backdrop of hundred dollar bills next to a large Star of David, with the words “Most Corrupt Candidate Ever!” printed right on top of it, all summarized on top with Trump’s

trademark efficiency: “Crooked Hillary -- Makes History!” While this is about as explicitly



antisemitic as an image can be while still being considered to be “coded,” it is nonetheless far more benign than the sort of explicit content that exists on sites such as the one where the image that Trump tweeted originated, the 8chan messageboard /pol/ that has become a major haven online for the far right, white nationalists, neo-Nazis and every other shade of right-wing extremist (Smith 2016). However, the fact that a Presidential candidate tweeted such an antisemitic image originating from the online white nationalist universe indicates just how strongly representation of Jews on sites like these directly influences the popular conversation about Jewish belonging in America, even at the very highest levels imaginable.

On sites like 8chan and Gab and Telegram, the way that Jews are represented is decisively more extreme than would ever be allowed on Twitter for any length of time (that is to

say, the length of time it would take for the tweet to be reported for inappropriate content). As Lavin describes in *Culture Warlords*, when the structure of a platform such as Telegram allows for unmoderated extremism, extremist content is what flourishes. In the wake of the Charleston church massacre of 2019, in which a white nationalist named Dylann Roof murdered nine Black churchgoers, Roof's manifesto which he published before committing the atrocity was widely and proudly circulating on far-right online platforms including Telegram (Lavin 2020: 21). As reflected in the brazen multiple-murder that he committed in broad daylight, most of Roof's hatred was focused on African Americans (Lavin 2020: 21). But as with most white supremacist rhetoric, antisemitism finds its way into the equation, and Lavin explains that Roof did in fact have some thoughts on the "Jewish issue" in America. In his manifesto, the killer wonders what would happen if all Jews in America literally turned blue for a day: supposedly, this would reveal how these otherwise 'invisible,' assimilated whites were actually treacherous nonwhites in disguise, as well as in all the important positions of power; as Lavin succinctly puts it,

“(A) persistent white-supremacist idea: that Jews are everywhere in the halls of power, subverting the popular will to their own nefarious ends” (Lavin 2020: 22).

On Facebook and Twitter and Instagram, content such as the racist manifestos of mass-murdering teenagers is regulated and not meant to circulate amongst users, but on platforms such as Telegram such content circulates freely. Moreover, because it is an online platform for a younger audience, memes and other images play a large role in the content being shared on Telegram, and so quickly users on the site took Roof's ideas to heart and began using digital software to make images of blue Jews (Lavin 2020: 22). This then became a viral meme on Telegram, and just like that, the antisemitic dreams of Dylann Roof were realized, albeit in a comparatively small corner of the ever-expanding, impossibly vast online dialogue. Again, the

structural format of Telegram is what allowed for this meme to be born and circulate, since the users responsible for it were frequenters of the site and it is there that they almost certainly came into contact with hateful content like Roof's manifesto in the first place. And while images such as those of Jewish Americans rendered blue amongst groups of otherwise white people would likely not make it very far on a site like Twitter, platforms such as Telegram become spawning grounds for such images, and as they gain popularity many trickle through the censoring and content filters of more mainstream platforms and become incredibly viral, until the imminent President of the United States tweets an antisemitic meme of his (Christian) political opponent from 8chan, for his many millions of followers (and detractors) to see and share themselves.

Conclusion

The documented increase in antisemitic content online in the years during and following the Trump campaign was part of a larger cultural moment in the United States where the rhetoric of Donald Trump, not only the leading political figure but a notoriously brash and reactionary man, demonstrably shifted the public discourse in the United States dramatically to the right. There is no question that the representation of Jews on far right and white nationalist platforms online directly inspired Donald Trump, the most influential man in America at the time. We know this not from conjecture or speculation but because he himself has tweeted images directly borrowed from their platforms, and has publicly refused to condemn violent mobs of white nationalists who are vocal supporters of his. The material conditions of social media platforms and online forums and message boards allow for distinct processes of media production, distribution, circulation and reception which invariably influence the relationship of Jews to American identity and the Jew in the collective consciousness of the American public.

Twitter's structural constraints favor controversial and concise posts that draw in multiple audiences by attracting both positive and negative reactions, thereby boosting such tweets to the top of people's screens. These are the material conditions that set the stage for the soon-to-be President to post as blatantly antisemitic an image as he could get away with while staying just far away enough from the sun to not be banned from the platform entirely, and for Trump to use the language of the white nationalist and antisemitic online far right and shape the tone of the national conversation regarding Jews and antisemitism. Meanwhile, it is the materiality of sites like Telegram that foster the creation of such antisemitic representations in the first place, and it is through their widespread influence on popular representations of Jews that such an image made its way all the way to Trump in the first place. The materiality of every social media platform to a great extent determines the way in which images of Jews are presented to the American public, and how that public perceive Jewish people in turn. That is why the "Good people on both sides" that Trump referred to were chanting about Jewish replacement in Charlottesville, and why a man getting ready to invade the American Capitol wore a sweatshirt bearing the title "Camp Auschwitz".

Conclusion

As I began to write this project, I came in with many opinions about antisemitism and how Jews are represented in mass media and what I thought was a thorough understanding of the processes associated with these representations. Having undertaken this project and the research associated with it, I see that there were fundamental aspects of this relationship between Jewish identity, American identity and the mechanisms of mass media representation that I was entirely or almost entirely unaware of. Structuring this project by examining a different form of mass media each chapter allowed me not only to compare and contrast the processes of production and reception that took place in these different cases, but also to trace the trajectory of Jewish representation in American media over the span of the 20th century, from the earliest decades of the 1900s to our modern day. As the technologies used to produce media evolved over time, so too the relationship between Jews and American identity evolved over the course of time encompassed by my research. The material conditions of Jews in America changed as well, and the demographic boom of impoverished Jews arriving around the turn of the century gave way to more established second and third-generation Jewish American households with more financial capital and education, and the way that Americans thought about Jews, and how Jews saw themselves, changed as well.

Within the scope of my guiding questions I worked to give due consideration to these socioeconomic factors and to consider them in relation to the way Jewish representation was changing as well. Through examining different forms of media and how Jews were represented using those forms, I wanted to take a look at not just how Jews were doing financially, or

whether they were living predominantly in Jewish inner cities or white suburbs, or what proportion Jews made up of Columbia's graduating class in a particular year. Rather, this project was focused around an interest in how Jews are positioned in both the most popular and contemporary forms of media in relation to American identity, and whiteness and generally belonging as Americans. Furthermore, it was important to also understand how that positionality changes not only as the decades pass but as the modes of technology shift and create space for new representations and circulation of media.

What I found over the course of this project is that there is a deep history of Jews being represented as outsiders in America, and while the extent of vitriol in those depictions can and does vary dramatically, more often than not the common thread tying mass media representations of Jewish people in the United States is the positioning of Jews as fundamentally, if in a complex and often contradictory way, outsiders. In the early 1900s, Henry Ford was representing Jews not only as outsiders but as a malicious outside force of unseen power, determined against all odds to destroy the very fabric of American society and pervert the machinery of power for their greater plan of complete domination. In the middle of the twentieth century, when *Gentleman's Agreement* was released, the most favorable thing that could seemingly be said about Jews, at least according to the movie, was that they were such well-adjusted outsiders that there was no longer any reason to treat them as such. Even that film, which took the issue of antisemitism head-on at a time when that was uncommon to say the least, absolutely takes for granted that Jews are understood as outsiders by the viewing public to begin with.

Meanwhile, in the 21st century, digital media has expanded to encompass the roles once filled by media like the aforementioned newspapers and movie theaters as well as countless other, newer roles; social media allows for the rapid and often unchecked transmission of ideas

and content and information between users separated by any amount of distance, class barriers or social boundaries. This unprecedented mode of technology has altered the processes of media production, consumption and reception dramatically, and consequently has changed the way Jews are represented in popular media. And yet despite these shifts in communication and material forms, what continues to tie Jewish representation in America today to the way Jews were represented in the past, is the fact that in the 21st century Jews continue to be depicted as tenuously belonging to American identity when they belong at all, whether it be by mass murderers on Telegram or U.S. Presidents on Twitter. When members of fundamentally internet-based alt-right organizations like the Proud Boys march en masse in the streets of Charlottesville, chanting “The Jews will not replace us,” the message to Jews is clear: there is an “us,” you are outside of it, and “we” are very suspicious of you.

Whether at a newsstand in Detroit in 1918, a movie theater in New York in 1947, or on 8chan in the 21st century, the material form of the mass media at hand decides not only how collective representations are formed but also the way that they are received by audiences. A newspaper reader expects a different degree of veracity from the content they are consuming than someone watching a major motion picture, and the content of those media reflects these expectations. Moreover, mass media is invariably influenced by contemporary public opinion, meaning that the stories told about Jews in America are more often than not told by people whose own perception of Jews is colored by the ways that they’ve seen Jews represented in mass media. This influence combines with the influence of the technological materiality of the different forms of mass media to determine how representations of Jews are produced and received, and have historically and currently had the effect of maintaining the Jewish status in

America as a foreign, conflicted, suspicious, conditionally welcome and unwelcome character:
only ever on the outside looking in.

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