

Henry Ford and the Jewish Question

[Henry Ford and the Jews:
The Mass Production of Hate](#)

Neil Baldwin
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The International Jew:
The World's Foremost Problem

Henry Ford
Dearborn, MI: Dearborn Independent, 1920-1921

416 pp.

Reviewed by Kevin MacDonald

Part I: The Education of a Midwestern Industrialist

Neil Baldwin's book on Henry Ford begins by sketching the "McGuffeyland" world of Ford's childhood — a world of courageous, honest, abstemious, hard-working boys. Ford's beloved mother read the McGuffey readers to her favorite son, and in his adult life Ford became an avid collector not only of McGuffey first editions but of other

Americana as well. This bespeaks Ford's strong identification with the mid-western culture of his youth, and, in Baldwin's view, that is a big part of the problem, because part of that mid-western culture was a subtle anti-Semitism. The McGuffey readers contained passages from *The Merchant of Venice* in which Shylock is described as an "inhuman wretch, incapable of pity," a man filled with irrational hatred for the Christian Antonio. Baldwin implies that given such a culture, it is a small step to Ford's "mass production of hate."

Beginning in 1881, this perceived idyllic Anglo-Saxon culture of Ford's youth began to be invaded by a wave of Eastern European Jewish immigrants. This provided an additional impetus to anti-Jewish feelings, culminating in the immigration restriction legislation of 1924. In Baldwin's view, the nativism and xenophobia of the period were

the results of the compulsion to find a "stereotyped other" against whom endangered Christians could measure themselves. In the strange, nervous netherworld blurring the end of one century and the beginning of the next, with the American economy continuing to suffer bewildering fluctuations and booms followed by depressions, there was a vague sense that unseen, hidden, and irrational 'market forces' were determining the course of personal destiny.

Christian identity was under siege in the rapidly

changing modern Promised Land. “The Jew was conveniently at hand,” enabling the character of early-modern racism in America to be formed on the notion that people who were “different” could be actual instruments of change and therefore could be held accountable for otherwise inexplicable trends in the culture of modernity. Once that blame was affixed, antisemites had latched upon a real reason to criticize, contain, or even control the Jews. (pp. 34–35)

Baldwin thus proposes that Ford’s anti-Jewish animus derives from the need for a scapegoat upon which to blame all disapproved forms of modernism. As is typical of writing on such topics these days, there is no honest assessment of the extent to which Jews were in fact responsible for the changes deplored by Ford and his ilk. Instead, Baldwin traces the anti-Jewish tenor of the series of newspaper articles on Jewish issues sponsored by Ford and published as *The International Jew: The World’s Foremost Problem*, solely to “a thousand-year continuum of Jew hatred, thick taproots sunk deep into the archetypal, richly poisoned soil of medievalism.” (p. 106)

Medieval, religious Jew-hatred evolved into modern anti-semitism . . . They should be recognized as different factors within the same tradition. Both passions are infused with a pathological requisite to find someone to *resent* (p. 107).

As we shall see, this is neither a fair nor an accurate description or analysis of the contents of *The International Jew*.

Ford is presented as an assimilationist, not a racist. He eagerly sought immigrant labor for his automobile factories, but also wanted a culturally homogeneous citizenry, seeking “to impress upon these men that they are, or should be, Americans, and *that their former racial, national, and linguistic differences are to be forgotten*” (p. 41; emphasis in text). In the early part of the century, Ford workers from a wide range of Eastern and Southern European countries (including 12,000 Jews recruited to work in the automobile industry in Detroit) were required to attend Americanization schools aimed at impressing upon them a common American culture. In a 1919 column in the *Dearborn Independent*, the writer complained,

The problem [with the melting pot] is not . . . with the pot so much as it is with the base metal. Some metals cannot be assimilated, refuse to mix with the molten mass of citizenship, but remain ugly, indissoluble lumps. How did this base metal get in? . . . What *about* those aliens who have given us so much trouble, these Bolsheviki messing up our industries and disturbing our civil life? (p. 80; emphasis in text)

Baldwin terms this a “disturbing euphemism” (p. 80).

A major intellectual influence on Ford was David Starr Jordan, first president of Stanford University and

a prolific writer on racial and cultural issues. (Louis Marshall, president of the American Jewish Congress, considered Jordan to be the main source of Ford's "insane prejudice" [p. 50].) Jordan was a eugenicist who advocated peace for racialist reasons—that war decimated strong people from the gene pool. Jordan, writing in 1912, also developed the view that financial manipulators, mainly Jews, were driving Europeans to war. (Ford became a leader of the peace movement during World War I, stating to another peace activist that the "German-Jewish bankers caused the war" [p. 59].) Jordan (1912) described an "unseen empire" of international finance, largely composed of Jewish banking firms originating with the Rothschilds. Behind these firms were Jewish families "allied to one another by so many close ties of blood, marriage, and business" (pp. 19–20), including Bischoffheim (France), Bleichröder (Germany), Camondo (Italy), Goldschmid and Stern (England, Portugal), Günzberg (Russia), Hirsch and Wertheimer (Austria), Cassell (Europe, Egypt), Sassoon ("Rothschilds of the Orient), Mendelssohn and Montefiore (Australia).

According to Jordan, because of massive national debts, the financiers effectively controlled the countries they operated in, either by threatening to withhold loans or by making conditions on loans. Ultimately Jordan blamed the borrowers for their profligacy and shortsightedness. As a pacifist, Jordan was deeply concerned that the military spending of his day would bring about an Armageddon. In general, he

saw the financiers as eager to loan money for weaponry but opposed to actual war. His clear message, however, is that this unseen empire of finance has a very large influence on the ability of governments to wage war. He presented several examples where wars ended because financiers refused to loan any more money for the effort. Given this intellectual environment, and given the gruesome reality of what was then called simply “the Great War,” Ford presumably inferred that Jewish financiers must at least have allowed it to happen, and indeed this is the argument made in *The International Jew (TIJ)*.

It is noteworthy that ideas of eugenics, racially motivated pacifism, and belief in the power of international financiers were entirely respectable at the time. Baldwin recounts Ford’s journey to the West Coast in 1915 to attend a “Race-Betterment Conference” in San Francisco. Speakers included Luther Burbank, the renowned plant breeder; Jordan; and Charles Eliot, president of Harvard. Attendees included Thomas Edison, and millionaires like John Harvey Kellogg (of the cereal company) and Harvey Firestone (of the tire company). Edison had fairly moderate views on Jews: Jews held to a very clannish social structure that separated them from other peoples; they were also very intelligent, keen businessmen with a penchant for becoming wealthy, and this sometimes provoked hostility.

There was considerable intellectual interaction going

on among nativists during the post-World War I period, including some of the military intelligence figures portrayed in Joseph Bendersky's "*The Jewish Threat*": *Anti-Semitic Politics of the U.S. Army*. For example, Houghton Harris, a military physician, worked closely with Boris Brasol, the Russian refugee from Bolshevism, in producing an English version of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. In turn, Brasol impressed himself on the editors of *The Dearborn Independent*, Ford's newspaper, which published an article by Brasol depicting the horror of the Bolshevik takeover of Russia.

The two people who actually wrote *TIJ* were Ernest Liebold and Billy Cameron. Liebold was a college-educated bank president before he became Ford's personal secretary and alter-ego. Cameron was a journalist who subscribed to an early version of the Christian identity movement, which holds to the view that the Anglo-Saxons descended from one of the lost tribes of Israel. The British were therefore the true Chosen People, destined by God to rule the world, and Great Britain and the U.S. were Holy Lands given by God to his Chosen People. (The corollary that today's Jews are not really descended from the people described in the Bible appears in *TIJ*. "The Jews are not the Old Testament People. . . . They are a Talmudical people" [3/12/1921].) The main force behind the articles, then, besides Ford, was Liebold, but he was careful to give credit to Cameron as the person who compiled the data and actually wrote the

articles.

Typical of the period, the Jewish response to the series of articles appearing in *The Dearborn Independent* was formulated by prominent and wealthy Jewish activists associated with the American Jewish Committee: Jacob Schiff, Louis Marshall, and Cyrus Adler. Schiff, the consummate Jewish activist of the period, had carried on a personal campaign against the tsarist government for years, including financing the Japanese war effort against Russia in 1905, financing anti-tsarist revolutionaries, and supporting Germany in World War I until the tsar was overthrown in the spring of 1917. Schiff worried that waging a high-profile attack on *TIJ* might backfire: “If we get into a controversy we shall light a fire, which no one can foretell how it will become extinguished, and I would strongly advise therefore that no notice be taken of [the articles] and the attack will soon be forgotten” (p. 112). However, Schiff’s death on September 25, 1920, signaled a change to a more proactive stance, led by Louis Marshall.

In an event reminiscent of the pressure exerted on St. Martin’s Press to rescind publication of David Irving’s biography of Goebbels, Baldwin recounts the pressure by Louis Marshall to rescind publication of *The Cause of World Unrest*, a commentary on the *Protocols* that had originally appeared in the *London Morning Post*. The publisher, Major George Haven Putnam, caved in after originally arguing in favor of publication on the basis of free speech, the book’s opposition to

Bolshevism, and prior publication by a respectable British publisher. At the same time, the American Jewish Committee purchased copies of John Spargo's book attacking Ford, *The Jew and American Ideals*, "in lots of 10,000" (p. 150). Spargo, who was not Jewish, was a well-known socialist and advocate on labor issues who had developed a reputation as a muckraking journalist. Spargo also composed a statement titled *The Perils of Racial Prejudice* and solicited signatures from over 100 prominent "citizens of Gentile extraction and Christian faith," including presidents (Taft, Wilson, Harding), secretaries of state, ecclesiastical dignitaries, businessmen, and writers. Among the signatories was David Starr Jordan, whose writings on the "unseen world" of Jewish international finance had been a major influence on Ford. *The Perils of Racial Prejudice* was published in newspapers across the country on January 16, 1921 with the headline "President Wilson Heads Protest Against Anti-Semitism."

In early 1922, Ford, while not disowning them, abruptly put a stop to the articles. His reasons for doing so remain mysterious. Baldwin suggests that Ford was concerned about negative repercussions of *TIJ* on his auto business and that he harbored political ambitions that would be compromised by the series. In any case, there was no change in Ford's attitudes, and anti-Jewish references and articles continued to appear occasionally in the *Dearborn Independent*. For example, Julius Rosenwald, chairman of Sears,

Roebuck, was criticized for encouraging black migration from the south to Chicago by providing inexpensive land and housing. This linkage between “Jewish money and ‘the Negro problem’ ” resulted in “corrupting the neighborhood, driving away older owners, and leading to the race riots of 1919” (p. 201).

Ford eventually apologized for *TIJ* in conjunction with settlement of a libel suit brought by Aaron Sapiro, a Jewish activist on farming issues, who was the subject of several articles in 1924. (The first article was titled, “Jewish Exploitation of Farmers’ Organizations—Monopoly Traps Operate Under Guise of ‘Marketing Associations.’”) In 1927, after a mistrial had been declared because of allegations that a juror had been bribed by a Jew, Ford declared an end to *The Dearborn Independent* and settled his lawsuit with Sapiro. Again, the reasons for this sudden change remain uncertain, although Baldwin suggests that it was motivated by the upcoming introduction of the Ford Model A prompted by lagging sales of the Model T. It seems unlikely that the prospect of losing a libel verdict for a relatively trifling sum to an immensely wealthy man would be sufficient motivation for so abrupt a move, especially since the article was not part of the original *International Jew* series. According to Gerald L. K. Smith, the anti-Jewish political organizer, Ford himself claimed that he did it “because of an attempt by New York Jews . . . to take over the Ford Motor Company” (p. 306). A similar claim was also published in 1927 by the *Völkischer Beobachter*,

Hitler's newspaper, edited by Theodore Fritsch (see Reznikoff, 1957, p. 387), but there is no independent corroboration for this theory.

Ford signed an apology for the articles that had been drafted by Louis Marshall in which he issued a complete retraction and asked for forgiveness. The apology also stated that he "was fully aware of the virtues of the Jewish people as a whole, of what they and their ancestors have done for civilization and to mankind and toward the development of commerce and industry, of their sobriety and diligence, their benevolence and their unselfish interest in the public welfare" (p. 239). Ford signed the letter without reading it, and there can be little doubt that he did not change his mind about Jewish issues. (In his letters, Marshall recounts a personal meeting in 1928 with Ford in which Ford "showed that he sincerely repented. He expressed his readiness to do anything that I might at any time suggest to enable him to minimize the evil that had been done." Marshall also wrote that Ford told him that Cameron was "out of a job and had indicated his willingness to write on the Jewish side of the subject. I replied that we did not need his help" [in Reznikoff 1957, 388].)

In 1938, Ford received the Grand Cross of the German Eagle and kept it despite a wave of protest from the Jewish press. (Another recipient was Charles Lindbergh, whose conversations with Ford dealt mainly with Jewish issues.) Ford later provided financial support for Gerald L. K. Smith, who

continued publishing *TIJ* well into the post-World War II period. After the closure of the *Dearborn Independent*, Ernest Liebold, Ford's alter ego, fed information on Jewish issues to Charles Coughlin, the Catholic priest whose radio broadcasts and publications during the 1930s carried on many of the themes of *TIJ*.

After Ford died, his company distanced itself from his anti-Jewish writings. The Ford Motor Company became a generous supporter of Jewish charities and the state of Israel, and in 1997 the Ford Motor Company sponsored a commercial-free telecast of Stephen Spielberg's *Schindler's List*.

Baldwin discusses how he started writing the biography of Ford as an aspect of his own awakening Jewish identity. The book shows a strong emotional engagement between the writer and his material, and there is an apologetic stance regarding anti-Jewish attitudes. For example, Baldwin notes that early in the series, *TIJ* claimed that the behavior of the Jews had given rise to

the Jewish Question, but not once is there any reference to a single, well-defined question. By invoking "the Jewish Question" in this reactive manner, without defining it—or for that matter, asking it—the *Dearborn Independent* took another giant step into antisemitic rhetorical tradition (p. 130).

This is an exaggeration at best. As described below,

TIJ discusses a great many Jewish issues in considerable detail. Indeed, a reader of Baldwin's book would have almost no idea of what *TIJ* actually claimed about Jews or about the quality of the evidence used to support the claims. Instead, Baldwin quotes a Yiddish newspaper which had the following analysis of Jewish activism:

One hears from Jewish leaders in every movement because they are the most talented; therefore one hears from Jewish activists in every new trend because they are the more feeling, idealistic, and—purer. And precisely because of this, they hate us. *Only* because of this!!! (p. 132; emphasis added).

The comment is completely in line with Baldwin's implicit analysis throughout: There are no conflicts of interest between Jews and non-Jews. Indeed, Jews have no interests at all; they are completely divided among themselves and unable to act coherently on any issue. When they do act, they act out of purely idealistic motives, for the good of all. Anti-Jewish attitudes and behavior must therefore be completely irrational.

Amazingly, Baldwin argues against the idea that Jews were unified by showing dissension within the American Jewish Committee (AJC) on how to respond to *TIJ*: Should the AJC distribute copies of a recent book titled *Jewish Contributions to Civilization*? Advocate a consumer boycott of Ford products?

Compile a dossier of anti-Jewish incidents possibly instigated by the series? But the broader issue of Jewish influence and whether Jews are unified on certain issues is much more complicated than suggested by Baldwin. *TIJ* does indeed overestimate the extent to which the Jewish community was unified at the time, particularly in its discussions of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in which Jews are portrayed as consciously seeking to subjugate the non-Jewish world with a very detailed plan of conquest. However, the *Protocols* are only one aspect of *TIJ*. There are a great many areas where *TIJ* documents a great deal of unanimity within the Jewish community, as in campaigns to remove public displays of Christianity or language suggesting the United States is a Christian nation, withdrawing literature and other cultural artifacts deemed anti-Jewish (e.g., the campaign to remove *The Merchant of Venice* from the high school curriculum), open immigration, U.S. foreign policy toward countries perceived as anti-Jewish (e.g., toward Russia prior to the fall of the Czar and the Bolshevik Revolution; toward Poland and Romania after World War I). These remain areas of broad Jewish consensus in the contemporary United States (Goldberg, 1996; MacDonald, 1998b, Ch. 8). Moreover, the issue of Jewish influence is not dependent on Jewish unanimity. For example, even though there was a split in the Jewish community of the period over the issue of Communism and support for the Soviet Union, this does not imply that Jewish Communists were not critically important to the

success of Bolshevism, nor does it imply that Jewish Communists were not typically motivated by their Jewish identity, as indeed they were (MacDonald, 1998b, Ch. 3).

TIJ makes its case for Jewish unity primarily by citing Jewish sources advocating the need for Jewish organization on Jewish issues and by arguing that during this period the New York Jewish community was organized as a *Kehilla*, the traditional form of Jewish social structure in the Diaspora. As *TIJ* notes, the Kehillah was organized in response to the comment by General Bingham, the chief of police of New York City, that Jews were responsible for 50% of the crime in the city. *TIJ* states that “The Kehillah is a perfect answer to the statement that the Jews are so divided among themselves as to render a concert of action impossible” (2/26/1921). *TIJ* shows that the Kehillah had strong links to the main national Jewish organization, the American Jewish Committee, and had representatives from a wide range of Jewish organizations. The membership of the Kehillah consisted of all gradations of Jewish religious observance, from Orthodox to secular leftists. The Kehillah divided the city into eighteen districts comprising one hundred Jewish neighborhoods. In addition to attempting to prevent Jewish crime, the Kehillah served as an activist organization in advancing Jewish causes. For example, the Kehillah was a prominent force in the attempt to remove Christian symbolism from public places—a major

irritant in the eyes of *TIJ*.

In general, the less said of Baldwin's book the better. It is an apologetic work with a depressingly familiar and predictable take on the anti-Jewish attitudes of the period. Baldwin writes that *TIJ* descends into the "antisemitic rhetorical tradition," but his book descends into another tradition, a tradition in which the anti-Jewish attitudes and behavior of earlier generations are ascribed entirely to irrational pathologies having nothing to do with Jewish behavior. It is a tradition based on caricature, exaggerations, and misrepresentations of what these people actually believed.

This review will be continued with "Part II: the *Dearborn Independent* Series in Perspective" in the Winter 2002 issue of *The Occidental Quarterly*.

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