

ANTISEMITISM HERE AND NOW

Resisting Anti-Semitism and Xenophobia in Europe: Testimony Before Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, Energy, and the Environment

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Antisemitism is a prejudice and, as such, it is an irrational sentiment. Antisemitism is not something random. It is not disliking a Jew. It is disliking someone *because* they are a Jew.

The etymology of the word prejudice makes its irrationality quite clear. To *pre*-judge, to decide what a person's qualities are long before meeting the person him or herself. It is unrelated to what Jews do. The person who claims that he does not like Jews because of the actions of a certain Jew is engaging in antisemitic behavior. To hate an entire group because of the behavior of one person or even a group of people makes no sense.

Antisemitism has a structure. It is not just a haphazard conglomeration of sentiments. It generally has three to four essential elements: wealth, cunning (smarts used nefariously), and power beyond their "legitimate number" (punching above their weight).

While antisemitism is a prejudice and, therefore, shares many of the characteristics of prejudice in general, it has certain unique characteristics that set it apart from these other hatreds.

First of all, it is rooted in a conspiracy theory. As such, the Jew is not just to be loathed but it to be feared. We see this notion on the far right. According to the antisemite on the far right the Jew is engaged in a conspiracy against others, a conspiracy designed to destroy white Christian culture by replacing whites with people of color. This notion of a conspiracy against

white Christians is what motivated the murders at Pittsburgh, San Diego, and Halle, Germany. This is what the demonstrators in Charlottesville meant when they chanted Jews “will not replace us.”

Secondly, antisemitism is unique because it comes, not just from the right but also from the left. The antisemite on the left sees Jews as privileged and white -- which is ironic on two accounts. First of all , there are substantial numbers of Jews who are not privileged. Secondly, there are many Jews of color (12% of the American Jewish population, over 50% of the Jewish population of Israel). Finally, as just mentioned, antisemites on the far right consider Jews to be decidedly non-Caucasian.

Today, however, we see it, not just on the right and the left, we see it from Islamist extremists and, particularly in Europe – in countries such as Belgium, France, Germany, and the UK – from some, and I emphasize *some*, members of the mainstream Muslim community, not extremists, who, while they may never engage in violent action against Jews have been inculcated with a hatred of Jews.

Irrespective of whether these charges come from the right or the left, Christians, Muslims or atheists, they always rely on the same themes: the nefarious Jew, unscrupulously manipulating matters behind the scene acting to his own advantage and to the detriment of the non-Jew, particularly the white Christian.

What then can we do about it? If it is irrational must we simply throw up our hands in defeat? I think not. We must challenge others who engage in it. We must demand that it be taken seriously.

In Halle Germany there was no police guard outside the synagogue because the mayor of the town rejected the community's request for protection. That's not taking the threat seriously

In 2017, Sara Halimi, a retired 65-year-old physician, mother of 3, was murdered in her Paris apartment by a man who shouted ""shut your mouth", *Allah Akbar*, and "I killed the Shaitan" during the murder. The suspect claimed insanity. In a shocking decision, one decried by President Macron, last month the Paris Court of Appeal, while officially acknowledging the antisemitic nature of the murder, decided that the murderer was "criminally irresponsible" because "he was too high" to understand what he was doing. He understood enough to find the one Jewish resident of the building. He understood enough to declare that he had killed the Satan. He did not randomly go and kill people. He sought out the Jew. That's not taking the threat seriously.

I fear that one of the greatest results of antisemitism is Jews are increasingly going underground. A synagogue in the Netherlands no longer posts the time of services. It has no website and no sign outside its door indicating it is a synagogue.

A few days ago, a senior professor at a prestigious American university, a specialist in Jewish history, told me that she and her husband recently took an extended trip to Portugal. She needed to pack an umbrella. She reached into her closet and took one but quickly rejected it. It had the logo of a Jewish museum on it and she was fearful of carrying anything that openly identified her as a Jew.

Some students of mine who wear kippot were discussing their plans to travel in Europe. Without prompting they told me that they planned to wear baseball caps, rather than kippot, while traveling.

Friends have asked me whether my decision, prompted by these aforementioned events, to wear a Jewish star is wise. "Is it safe?" one very sober, rational, person asked me recently.

I have heard from parents on the Upper East Side of New York, in Berlin, and London that they are considering taking their children out of the very fine pre-schools they attend because they are *Jewish* schools and they fear for their children's safety.

After the Shoah, it is inconceivable that, once again, Jews feel safer hiding their Jewish identity. This is not healthy for Jews or for the societies in which they live.

We must fight antisemitism for all these reasons. But there is an even more important one. We must do so because antisemitism is a lethal threat to democracy. Wherever antisemitism has flourished democracy has suffered.