

THE FIVE DEGREES OF ANTI-SEMITISM

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A nuanced terminology is needed to distinguish among anti-Semitic acts based on their intent and impact. As in criminal law, anti-Semitism should be divided into categories, predicated on the belief that physical violence is more objectionable than verbal insult.

The word "anti-Semite" reverberates with all kinds of ominous meanings. As Jews, at least adult ones, we know that an anti-Semite is someone who has, is, can, and/or will harm us.

And yet, for all the foreboding or dread the word evokes, it eludes precise definition. Sure, calling the likes of a Haman or Hitler an anti-Semite is easy, as their anti-Semitic feelings, words, and deeds are one and their victims many. The same goes for loners like Buford Furrow, who went on a killing rampage at a California Jewish Community Center and who, if he had the power, would have no hesitancy in killing multitudes of Jews and other minorities.

But what of people whose anti-Semitic feelings and beliefs are not converted into violent actions, or of people who wittingly or unwittingly make an occasional anti-Semitic observation? Surely, they are not anti-Semites the way Hitler, Haman, or Furrow was.

Too often the term "anti-Semite" is used as a catchall, which acknowledges no differences in the degree, intent, or impact of anti-Semites. As a result, the intensity of the lesser anti-Semite is exaggerated while that of the greater anti-Semite is diminished. The youngster who in an argument calls a classmate "a f---ing Jew" is not equal to that politician or neo-Nazi who yells "Kill the Jews." Nor is the supervisor who says of an alleged wrongdoer, "Just like a Jew" equal to the neo-Nazi who attacks Jews both verbally and physically.

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When the range of anti-Semitic actions are viewed, there are clear differences among them, and it is also clear that a more nuanced terminology is needed to distinguish them. Therefore, as in criminal law, anti-Semites should be divided into categories, ranging from first to fifth degree, predicated on the belief that physical violence and destruction are more objectionable than verbal violence and insult.

FIRST-DEGREE ANTI-SEMITISM

This category includes persons, groups, organizations, or governments who in thought, word, and deed attack Jews and/or their institutions. Whether it be murder, robbery, physical violence, or property damage, their actions are maliciously aforethought and justified, reflecting a pattern of repetitive animosity toward Jews as a group or individuals. In private and public, such people or organizations have no qualms about asserting their belief or encouraging others to believe that all Jews are evil, deserving to be excluded, expelled, attacked, deported, or killed.

Prime examples are Nazi Germany, Tsarist and Communist Russia, Muslim extremists, and assorted local and international skinheads, neo-Nazis, and white supremacists. At present, the number of hate groups has been increasing, from 474 in 1997 to 537 in 1998. Equally ominous, hatred is being transmitted over the Internet within seconds to all parts of the world, with the number of hate sites increasing from 163 in 1997 to 254 in late 1998.

The differences in the anti-Semitism within this classification are in the forms expressed

and the number of actual victims, not in their passions and desires.

SECOND-DEGREE ANTI-SEMITISM

Anti-Semitism in this category lacks the element of premeditated, direct physical violence, but still reflects a pattern of hostility. This category encompasses people, groups, religions, and governments that propound, applaud, and/or distribute anti-Semitic literature; teach and preach the sinfulness of Jews; contribute funds to hate organizations; mail threatening letters to Jewish businessmen, politicians, teachers, or neighbors; deny the Holocaust ever occurred; and/or write anti-Semitic messages on Jewish or public buildings.

Included in this group are a variety of characters who differ in education, socioeconomic status, religion, and ways of expressing their intense dislike of Jews: secular and religious leaders, such as industrialist Henry Ford, Father Charles Coughlin, David Duke, and Louis Farrakhan; assorted academic and artistic leaders like the poet Ezra Pound and composer Richard Wagner; and teachers, police, officials, and politicians who make, approve of, or deliberately ignore anti-Semitic acts.

THIRD-DEGREE ANTI-SEMITISM

Anti-Semitic acts in this category lack both a pattern of intense hatred and premeditated violence, but still reflect an anti-Jewish animosity, which is basically emotional, verbal, limited in time and situation, and usually expressed among friends, family, and colleagues. Third-degree anti-Semites do not like Jews as neighbors, work associates, family members, or political candidates.

Although such people do not harm Jews physically, they have little hesitancy in defaming them. At times, they may even repress, deny, or rationalize their animosity in public settings, not wanting other people to think them prejudiced or sinful. If challenged, they may well ask, "What's wrong with preferring to associate with people of one's own kind?" Or, "Why can't I criticize

a Jew without being called an anti-Semite?" Or, "I was only joking. Can't Jews take a joke?" Or, "I louse up a lot of groups, including my own." Or, "I've heard Jews say the same (or worse) things about themselves." Unfortunately, such complaints are too often belied by their prior nasty and stereotypical comments about Jews.

Included in this group are such people as Charles Lindbergh, Pat Buchanan, Marge Schott (an owner of the Cincinnati Reds baseball team), and the Rev. Al Sharpton, all of whom have made intemperate, malicious, or biased remarks about Jews.

And yet, ironically, some third degree anti-Semites have actually helped or rescued Jews, as during World War II, when they did so because it was the honorable or Christian thing to do. Happily, with some people benign principles outweigh malevolent feelings. At other times, they may change their views because of education, public pressure, or fear of a lawsuit. After having made some defamatory remarks about New York Jews, the Rev. Jesse Jackson first denied doing so, then apologized, and since then has called for improving black-Jewish relations and has volunteered to help free Jews imprisoned in Iran.

FOURTH-DEGREE ANTI-SEMITISM

This category includes people who to varying degrees hold positive and negative views of Jews—both liking and disliking, accepting and rejecting, admiring and fearing them. There are Southerners who like "their" Jews and "Jew stores," but not "those" New York or Yankee Jews. There are Christians who love Jewish patriarchs and prophets, but not contemporary Jews. And there are people who admire a Jewish doctor but dread a Jewish landlord.

For example, actor Marlon Brando in a television interview criticized Jews for owning and running Hollywood and lacking sufficient sensitivity for "people who are suffering," but also credited them with having "contributed more to American culture than any other single group." Likewise, some

Christian fundamentalists affirm a love for Jews and Israel, but hope that all Jews will convert to Christianity.

FIFTH-DEGREE ANTI-SEMITISM

Least harmful, and most common, is fifth-degree anti-Semitism, which includes people whose anti-Semitic verbal slips, references, stereotypes, or observations are incidental to their overall character, reflecting an insensitivity, ignorance, momentary anger, or thoughtless conformity with social upbringing, religious education, or the society about them. It is their thoughts and words rather than their behaviors that are anti-Semitic.

When such people are challenged for what they said, they may well express genuine regret. They may respond that they did not mean what they said or they were joking or they were just angry and wanted to strike back. Included in this group are both youngsters and adults, as well as some rather prominent people, such as Shakespeare, Gen. Ulysses Grant, Mark Twain, and Richard Nixon, each of whom said some nasty things about Jews, either in public or private.

Fifth-degree anti-Semites evoke the most difference of opinion among Jews as to whether they are really anti-Semites. For example, when Nixon's secretly recorded tapes revealed many disparaging references to Jews, some Jews defended him, saying he was not really an anti-Semite, the proof of which was his many appointments of Jews to high office (such as Arthur Burns, Herbert Stein, Alan Greenspan, William Safire, Henry Kissinger, and Leonard Garment). Likewise, Harry Truman, according to his biographer David McCullough, sometimes privately referred to Jews as "kikes" and Miami as a place of "hotels, filling stations, Hebrews, and cabins," but was nevertheless publicly supportive of Jews and Israel.

Jews themselves can be found in each of the five anti-Semitic categories. Throughout history, some Jewish converts to Christianity or Islam scurrilously denounced Jews and Judaism; anti-religious Jews (Communists and universalists), such as Karl Marx, bit-

terly rejected their roots; Jews deliberately hid their Jewish roots—and disdained the Jewishness of others; Jews had contradictory feelings and beliefs about Judaism and the Jewish community; and Jews, in humor, sarcasm, or anger, hurled anti-Semitic epithets at other Jews.

A few Jews have been members of anti-Semitic organizations, such as Daniel Burros, who in the mid-1960s was the King Kleagle of the New York Ku Klux Klan and then committed suicide when a newspaper exposed his Jewish roots. More recently, Andrew Britt Greenbaum, of Westwood, Massachusetts, denied his Jewish roots, changed his name to David Wolfgang Hawke, and formed a neo-Nazi Internet group called "Knights of Freedom."

RESPONDING TO ANTI-SEMITISM

Equally complex distinctions exist when discussing how to respond to anti-Semitism. Should it be ignored or confronted, and if the latter, how? By personal denunciation or physical counterattack, reporting the anti-Semitism to an official or supervisor, seeking some kind of revenge, or ignoring the entire matter?

As a general rule, anti-Semitism should be repudiated because it is evil and/or illegal, and because not responding to it contributes to a societal tolerance, validation, and spread of more and worse forms of anti-Semitism. The law as well as conventional wisdom says, *Qui tacet consentire*—silence implies consent. However, not all instances of anti-Semitism should be responded to or responded to in the same way.

For the first two degrees, which are most dangerous, local and federal civil rights laws and hate crime laws have been enacted or recommended, which provide fines and imprisonment or enhanced penalties for those guilty of intentionally attacking people or property because of their actual or perceived race, color, national origin, ethnicity, gender, disability, or sexual orientation.

Even then there are differences between first- and second-degree anti-Semitism, at

least if one agrees that physical and murderous assaults are more injurious than passionate words. First Amendment defenders usually quote Oliver Wendell Holmes, who urged eternal vigilance "against attempts to check the expression of opinions that we loathe and believe to be fraught with death, unless they so imminently threaten immediate interference with the lawful and pressing purposes of the law that an immediate check is required to save the country."

Recently, Alan Dershowitz, the famed Harvard law professor, said he would not defend the free speech right of an avowed racist and anti-Semite because he had "advocated or incited violence." To clinical psychologist Dr. Alvin Poussaint, extreme haters like Buford Furrow are mentally ill and should be so described and treated. Others have rationalized a person's bigotry, as in the case of Richard Wagner, whose music they hail while denouncing his views of Jews, saying he never killed any Jews and was not responsible for Hitler's admiration of him. The same goes for Ezra Pound, whose anti-Semitic World War II statements and radio broadcasts are rationalized as the mutterings of a paranoid or as totally unrelated to his poetic genius.

More vague are third-, fourth-, and fifth-degree instances of anti-Semitism, which involve occasional, incidental, exceptional, or random behaviors. What action should be taken against a youngster who makes an anti-Semitic remark in jest or anger, or an adult who says he does not want Jews in his social club, or a politician or public official who makes a defamatory remark about Jews, or a comedian who ridicules some Jewish custom? Likewise, what about people who express both philo- and anti-Jewish views, or who apologize for having said something anti-Semitic and indicate that some of their best friends are Jews?

Certainly these people are not anti-Semites the way first- or second-degree ones are, even though the psychic pain they cause may be as strong. The Anti-Defamation League has acknowledged that by law not all anti-Semitic incidents are crimes, noting that "neo-Nazi pamphlets or slurs directed against Jewish individuals are both protected free speech."

In all cases of anti-Semitism one must consider the intent and impact of the anti-Semite. A teacher, police officer, public official, or aspiring politician who publicly defames Jews should be subject to a greater penalty than a youngster, taxi driver, or clerk who does so privately. A Charles Lindbergh or Pat Buchanan who publicly accuses Jews of having unpatriotically urged our entry into World War II deserves greater reprobation than an obscure street-corner crank or jackbooted skinhead. The public position and larger audience of an anti-Semite add credence to their defamation. With such people, public exposure, censure, and a demand for an apology or removal from office are in order.

With fifth degree anti-Semites, correction, repudiation, laughter, or even ignoring what was said may be proper, especially if it was in private or overheard inadvertently. One does not have to yell "anti-Semite" in an auditorium every time it is encountered in the gutter or in an argument. Some anti-Semitic remarks are simply too minor, stupid, ignorant, or mindless to deserve a response.

In short, differences abound in the kinds, degrees, and durations of anti-Semites and anti-Semitism. Not all acts of anti-Semitism are equal in intent or impact, and to suggest otherwise is to distort reality, diminish the severity of the most anti-Semitic, and inflate the anti-Semitism of the least guilty. The result is a loss of credibility in the accusation of anti-Semitism and a confusion about how best to deal with it.