

As a young man growing up in the 1950's and '60's, I had little direct experience of anti-Semitism. I knew that there were certain residential neighborhoods in Baltimore where Jews were not able to purchase homes and that the medical schools at both Johns Hopkins University and the University of Maryland were suspected of having a quota limiting the number of Jewish students whom they accepted. In an earlier time, Jews had encountered anti-Jewish hostility more frequently and more blatantly. Men of my father's generation spoke of Jewish boys having to fight off attacks by the Catholic kids in the neighborhood who called them "Christ-killers". My father told me about a high school teacher who delighted in taunting the Jewish students in his class by referring to Park Heights Avenue, the main thoroughfare of Jewish Baltimore, as "Park Kikes Avenue", about beaches along the Chesapeake Bay, where he had wanted to go swimming with my mother and which had signs posted, "No Jews or Dogs Allowed", and about disparaging remarks made by some of the non-Jews with whom his work brought him into contact. My boyhood was the era of school desegregation, of white flight to the suburbs, and of civil rights activism, and most of the overt hate speech and bigotry in Baltimore was targeted at blacks. My parents, while hardly without prejudice themselves, had an instinctive understanding that someone who expressed hostility toward blacks more than likely harbored the same sentiments toward Jews. As a Jewish journalist recently wrote regarding the current upsurge in xenophobia, nativism, and bigotry, "it may not start with us Jews but eventually it will end up with us and touch us personally."

The Holocaust was a singular horror within the annals of Jewish history, the ultimate consequence of Jewish powerlessness and the culmination of two millennia of discrimination and persecution. Shock and revulsion at the horrors inflicted on the Jewish people in the Shoah as well as the realization that the Nazis, the enemies of the Jews, had also been the foes of freedom and democracy resulted in a honeymoon period, during which blatant discrimination and overt expressions of anti-Semitism were no longer respectable. Jews who had served in the military and fought against the Nazis had proven their American patriotism and were adamant that they were not going to return home and suffer the hostility, the discrimination and the prejudice that were akin to the policies of the evil regime they had battled. Honeymoons, however, do not always last, and recent years have seen an increase in anti-Semitism – in hate speech as well as in threats of violence and in acts of vandalism directed at Jewish institutions. Some of the

upsurge emanates from radical Muslims, some from the political left (where it might be expressed under the guise of anti-Zionism), and some from the political right- neo-Nazis, white nationalists, and members of the Ku Klux Klan.

The resurgence in anti-Semitism is a world-wide phenomenon. In France, radical elements within the Muslim immigrant community have been responsible for brutal and horrific crimes against Jews that have spurred an increase in *aliyah* to Israel. Throughout much of Europe, immigrant Muslims have replaced Jews as the prime target of nativists and xenophobes. That is hardly a comforting thought for us, however, because such sentiments stereotype and threaten an entire community that is diverse in its practices and beliefs, most of whom seek nothing more than to live their lives in dignity and peace. Moreover, the lineage of European nativism traces back to leaders and ideologues who were quite open and frank regarding their hostility to Jews. Marine Le Pen who polled significant support in the recent French presidential elections is the daughter of Jean Le Pen, notorious for his anti-Semitism and minimization of the Holocaust. Other nativist movements manage to hate Jews and Muslims at the same time. And even when Jews are not explicitly mentioned, the extremist fringe of these movements attracts anti-Semites. In Poland and Hungary, right-wing parties traffic in authoritarianism, disrespect for democratic institutions, and demonization of minority groups. Throughout Eastern Europe, there is a refusal to confront history and to acknowledge the extent to which local populations collaborated with the Nazis as well as an effort to honor nationalist leaders of the past as patriots and heroes, even when it involves whitewashing their anti-Semitism and complicity in the Shoah.

We speak of a current rise in anti-Semitism, but it may be closer to the truth to say that it has always been there and that it is merely emerging now from the woodwork. Nativism and contempt for the other have a long pedigree in American history. The Know-Nothing political party of the 1840's was hostile to Catholic immigrants from Ireland and from German-speaking regions of central Europe. It saw them as a threat to their vision of a Protestant America. The Ku Klux Klan, established to roll back through the deployment of violence and terror the advances in rights obtained by African-Americans in the Reconstruction era following the Civil War, was revived in the 1920's, targeted Jews and Catholics as well as blacks, and had widespread support even outside of the South. Henry Ford circulated vicious conspiracy theories about Jews in the

newspaper he published during the 1920's. And even as Hitler rose to power in the 1930's, established a totalitarian dictatorship and threatened the independence of neighboring countries, he had many admirers here in America who shared his hatred of Jews. One of the books my parents owned and that I frequently looked at was titled *Under Cover*, written by a journalist who, feigning an interest in pro-Nazi, anti-Semitic and extremist groups, attended their rallies and meetings to gather information that would enable him to expose them. The historian Richard Hofstadter spoke of a "paranoid style in American politics" with deep roots in our national history, characterized by anger and by "heated exaggeration, suspiciousness and conspiratorial fantasy." Jews have surely been prominent among those targeted by practitioners of the paranoid style.

Anti-Judaism within Western civilization, as the University of Chicago historian David Nirenberg shows, has an even longer history, going back to antiquity. For the Church fathers of early Christianity, for some among the 18th century European Enlightenment thinkers, for revolutionaries intent on overthrowing capitalism, for populists disdainful of intellectual elites, or for members of the establishment fearful of radicals and subversives, Jews have served as the classic "other". Whatever the group in question feared, whatever they found threatening was attributed to the Jews – materialism, heresy, over-intellectualism, unenlightened superstition, the excesses of unregulated capitalism, or the upheaval of revolution. It made no difference at all whether there were any Jews at all residing in a particular locale or whether Jews were significantly represented in the trends and movements that were perceived as threatening; Jews, even if they were what Nirenberg refers to as "imaginary Jews" served as a convenient explanation for whatever evoked fear or horror. It is no surprise that current fears of and discussions about globalization have been associated with a rise in anti-Semitism.

The past year has seen hundreds of bomb threats that led to the evacuation of Jewish Community Centers across the country (as it turns out attributable for the most part not to anti-Semites but allegedly to a disturbed Israeli teen), vandalism of synagogues, of Holocaust memorials and of Jewish cemeteries in St. Louis and in Rochester, N.Y, harassment of Jewish journalists on the Internet (who sometimes found their likenesses photoshopped onto pictures of Nazi crematoria), the emboldening of racists and anti-Semites to demonstrate and express their

hateful sentiments in public, and the prominence of such hatemongers as Ku Klux Klan Grand Wizard David Duke and white nationalist leader Richard Spencer.

The culmination was the rally held in Charlottesville, Virginia on an August weekend. Billed as a rally to “unite the Right”, its ostensible purpose was to protest the removal of Confederate statues. Demonstrators marched with Nazi banners and Confederate flags and chanted “Jews will not replace us.” The most horrifying spectacle took place in proximity to the local synagogue where worshipers were gathered for Shabbat morning services. Men in military uniforms brandishing semi-automatic weapons were marching outside, and the rabbi and congregants felt sufficiently threatened that they removed the Torah scrolls to a place of safekeeping and exited the synagogue building by the back door, when services were concluded. Neo-Nazis posting on social media had spoken of setting the synagogue on fire. A peaceful demonstrator was killed when a young man, apparently inspired by neo-Nazi websites, rammed his car into a crowd of people.

A word about the Confederate monuments and about the flag. I do not believe that they are a matter of history or of heritage. They celebrate a war that was waged to preserve the institution of slavery, which, no matter how writers from the neo-Confederate school of thought try to whitewash it, involved the forced displacement of millions of human beings from their homelands, their transportation across an ocean, their being sold on the auction block as property and being subjected to a brutal regime of servitude and abuse, with slaves often being separated from their spouse or children at the whim of a master. It was hardly a benign institution, and to think that it was beneficial to blacks because they were in need of the benevolent tutelage of a white master to uplift them is the height of white supremacist thinking. A Confederate flag evokes for an African-American the same feeling that I as a Jew have when I see a swastika. Claims that the Civil War was fought over the issues of economics or of states’ rights are disproven by the articles of secession adopted by the various Southern states, which make explicit mention of slavery. Many of the monuments were put up not in the immediate aftermath of the war (when it could be claimed that their purpose was to memorialize the fallen) but at a later period, either as an assertion of white supremacy or a symbol of resistance to the civil rights movement.

Some nuance and qualification is called for. Yes, there are anti-Semites on the political left and within the Muslim and Arab worlds, and they are rightly to be condemned along with those on the right. And, yes there are antifascist counter-demonstrators who espouse violent tactics and an authoritarian outlook, who do no service to the cause of fighting racism and bigotry. Or, as a magazine article I came across put it, “punching a Nazi is really punching your own cause.” I am a believer in civil liberties and, unless there is a clear threat to public safety or a direct incitement to violence, I endorse the right of individuals and groups to free speech, to advocate for beliefs and opinions with which I disagree or which I find abhorrent. Weapons are a different matter entirely; they are intended solely for intimidation. Political demonstrations should be gun-free zones, and obtaining a permit to demonstrate should be contingent on that understanding. I would prefer that we avoid violent and direct encounters with hate groups and refrain from making them martyrs for the cause of free speech. However, neither the anti-Semitism on the left nor the thuggishness of some of the counter-demonstrators preclude our obligation and that of our leaders to denounce, to condemn and to call out by name the Nazis, the Klan, the neo-Confederates, the racists, the nativists and the bigots in our country.

My grandparents, born in the late 19th century in the Russian Empire, were -all four of them – immigrants, who came here to this land of freedom and opportunity. That is why I am sympathetic to the young people known as Dreamers, who were brought here as children by their parents, who are overwhelmingly engaged in schooling or productive work, and who relied on the promise that if they registered with the government, they would not be subject to deportation; and why I was appalled by the rescinding of DACA, the deferred action for childhood arrivals program, and why I am earnestly hoping that Congress and the Administration might enact immigration reform that would reinstate DACA and benefit the Dreamers. There is also talk now of reducing the quotas for legal immigration, which leads me to recall that between 1924 and the 1960’s there were immigration quotas which discriminated against eastern and southern European people and prevented many Jews who might have escaped the Shoah from finding refuge in America.

Democracy in America is some 240 years old; but its endurance is not to be taken for granted. Some have little patience for the effort required to be an informed citizen, for the subtle nuances of fashioning public policy, and for the compromises that are sometimes necessary to

address the challenges of governing a diverse nation and would willingly surrender their civic responsibility to an authoritarian leader. Some feel threatened by the prospect of white Christians losing their status as a majority, but America is not a race or a religion, rather an idea of rule by the people and equality before the law. Democracy, as was pointed out in connection with the lifting of the Iron Curtain and the struggle to build democratic regimes in eastern Europe as well as later with the failure of the Arab Spring, is more than elections and majority rule. Democracy must be buttressed by civil society, by an independent judiciary, and by a free press. Political discourse needs to be based on respect for truth, and citizens must learn the critical skills to distinguish fact from lurid conspiracy theories.

I understand the frustrations, the hopelessness and despair experienced by many of our citizens who feel left behind, isolated, and disdained, who have been by-passed by modernization, globalization and the transition from a manufacturing to an information economy. The challenge of economic inequality is a real one. But their cause is not served by scapegoating or by a politics of anger and resentment that rips apart our social fabric. Anger is sometimes justified, but our Sages warned about its dangers and considered it tantamount to worshipping an idol. Anger clouds clear thinking, diverts us from planning effective strategies to achieve our goals, and often hurts the one who harbors it as much as the intended target.

In our holiday worship we pray for God to reign over the entire world and hope to see the day when all creatures will acknowledge that God has fashioned them and that God's rule extends over all creation. The corollary of God's universal rule is the recognition that all humans share a common kinship through our Creator and that all are entitled to be treated with dignity and compassion and to be judged not on the basis of their race, creed or ethnic origin but on the basis of their individual character. May we, our leaders, and our fellow citizens affirm and honor these ancient truths now and always. Amen!