

Mark Collett, Stormfront and Facebook: Anti-Semitism in the 21st Century

Nicky Woolf investigates the ways in which anti-Semitism has adapted to the post Holocaust, post September 11 age of Facebook, White Supremacy forums like Stormfront and BNP activists like Mark Collett

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***Nicky Woolf* investigates the ways in which anti-Semitism has adapted to the post Holocaust, post September 11 age of Facebook, White Supremacy forums and the BNP.**

Facebook's upcoming 'Hug-a-Jew-day' has more than 150,000 people listed as attending it, both Jewish and otherwise. As such internet groups do, it has instigated some interesting discussions. Many have accused the group of encouraging anti-Semitism, saying that it highlights a difference; the hugger and the huggie. Others have defended the group; it is about spreading 'the love', they say, and that accusations of anti-Semitism highlight a serious oversensitivity. A worrying number have taken the opportunity to make racial slurs; one comment simply says "damn kikes".

The creator of the 'Hug-a-Jew' event, Nadav Karon, from Atlanta, Georgia, is quick to point out that the group was "just for fun". He casts aside my suggestion that the concept of the event might be construed as anti-Semitic. "I wrote in the description for the event that anyone who has something against Jews or Israel should not join the group," he insists. "All they are doing is making more work for me on deleting the posts. I believe that people who are anti-Semitic are using another people, Jews in this case, to blame for their personal problems and faults."

There is some precedence for this. Rabbi Alan Garber, the Jewish Students' Chaplain for Yorkshire and Humberside, says: "The Jews are the moral conscience of the world. That comes from, to a certain extent, the claim that Jews have of being the 'chosen people'." "So often people who are not that moral will be anti-Semitic," continues Garber, "because as long as a Jew exists then that stands as a conscience against what they want to do in the world."

It seems an odd claim for any one group of people, purely by merit of religion or race, to be able to be morally superior or inferior to another. In any case, surely any moral high-ground is sullied by the inarguably aggressive defence strategies adopted by the state of Israel? I put this question to Garber, and his answer is disappointingly inconclusive. "The media doesn't report all the good things that come out of Israel. The state of Israel still has a moral conscience, even though in the media it is not often perceived like that."

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The state of Israel, at its inception, was constructed as a defence from anti-Semitism following the Holocaust. If it has since been attacked on a disturbingly regular basis, it does not necessarily follow that these attacks are anti-Semitic; but neither does it follow that they are not. Rabbi Garber seems unsure: "Even now the Palestinians, the Arab neighbours, would not want to recognise Israel as a Jewish state. That's not because of territory, that's an anti-Semitic thing." He pauses. "Well, it's a bit of both. But it's not solely a territorial thing."

Rabbi Aharon Cohen of the anti-Zionist sect Neturei Karta gave a controversial talk at the University of York in February last year entitled "Anti-Zionism is not Anti-Semitism". He claimed that the inception of the state of Israel ignored the fact that the massive influx of Jewish settlers would be "depriving the Palestinians of their hope for self determination on the land they had occupied for centuries," and expressed his hope that "the state known as 'Israel' be totally peacefully dissolved, to be replaced by a regime fully in accordance with the aspirations of the Palestinians, [so that] Arab and Jew will be able to live peacefully together as they did for centuries."

Garber argues that Israel is "very important for the growth of the Jewish people, the growth of Jewish culture, the idea of self, the idea of security and national pride of the people. Most Jewish people relate to Israel. I think it's very, very important." Its importance is because the stakes in the Middle East are now so high; but they were not always. If the state of Israel was created as a safeguard against anti-Semitic attacks, it has succeeded in creating a new group of anti-Semites where before there were none. It makes identifying anti-Semitism incredibly difficult. Where does racial hatred stop and hatred of the occupation tactics of a powerful military force begin?

Richard Bessel, a History Professor at the University of York specialising in the aftermath of the World Wars, clarifies the fact that the late 20th Century saw "the mixing of hostility towards Israel with hostility toward Jews, and the framing of contemporary anti-Semitism within political and cultural hostility to Israel in large measure as a result of Israeli expansionism in the Middle East."

The relative merits of Israel's existence are far too complex to debate here. There is no doubt, however, that secular, territorial issues are behind a section of modern anti-Semitism. This means that a seed-change has occurred; for before the holocaust and the subsequent founding of the state of Israel, Jews were a transient race with no national identity that could be pinned down to a specific geographical location.

I ask Bessel what effect the Holocaust had on anti-Semitic feeling. "It spelled at least temporarily - and one hopes more than temporarily - if not the end then the downfall of popular racist anti-Semitism," he tells me. "Obviously there are still people out there who think there is a racial hierarchy of human worth and might frame their anti-Semitism within that, but my sense is that the era of racial anti-Semitism as both a meaningful concept and a political power stretches more or less until the middle of the 20th Century. What we have seen post-1945 are rather different concepts."

Some of the most high-profile people who still subscribe to what Bessel describes as "racist anti-Semitism" are the British National Party, who now control 46 council seats in the UK. Mark Collett, one of

the more vocal Nazi-supporters amongst the BNP's leadership, told a reporter from Channel 4: "I'm going to level with you. I'd never say this on camera, yeah, and you can say this to whoever you want, 'cos it's true; the Jews have been thrown out of every country, including England. There's not a single European country the Jews have not been thrown out of. And let's face it, when it happens so many times it's not just persecution. There's no smoke without fire."

Assuming therefore we can write people like Collett and his cadre of Hitler-fetishists off as either delusional psychotics or dinosaur throwbacks from a bygone age, there are still several visible types of anti-Semitism around.

I ask Bessel to elaborate on his "rather different concepts." "It strikes me as undeniable," he says, "that hostility to Israel does get mixed in with hostility to Jews. There is a fair amount of hostility to Israel in and around the Middle East and in the Muslim world which is all mixed in with hostility to Jews. We also know that The Protocols of the Elders of Zion is being published in Arabic and is being circulated in Muslim countries in a way that it really isn't any longer in Europe."

The Protocols of the Elders of Zion is a pamphlet originally published in Russian in the early 20th Century which purports to be the transcripts and decisions of a meeting of Jewish elders in which a plan for world domination was set out. It's all very conspiracy-theory, but it was a catalyst for many of the pogroms and massacres in Eastern Europe in the early 20th Century. That the Arab media are reprinting this text, and circulating copies of Mein Kampf, is extremely interesting. It implies that anti-Semitism in the Middle East is a fairly new affair finding grounding in older Eastern European anti-Semitic literature.

Bessel, however, is not sure that's all. He comes to the conclusion that "there's more to it than just Nazism and contemporary anti-Zionism." If he's right, there is a new thing to identify; an anti-Semitism that is not racially-motivated, at least not in the way that the Nazis or even the perpetrators of the Clifford's Tower massacre in York more than 800 years ago were.

The Facebook 'Hug-a-Jew-Day', meanwhile, has gained another 25,000 members since I began writing. One comment on the group's forum meekly asks: "Is it me or is this group horribly racist?" Another simply says: "Uncool." Yet another asks "So you're saying... no-one else is worthy of hugging?"

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When I dig a little deeper on the page, I find comments that are more worrying. "I'm gonna wear my face mask because I don't want to get my eye poked out by a hook nose," says a student at the University of Texas who goes by the surreal alias of Reverend Diamond. He defends his statement further down with his bizarre statement of what he obviously thinks is a fact: "No Jews were killed in the 9/11 attacks. The alleged hijackers were never confirmed to be deceased. Number of wrongs the Jews did to Adolf Hitler: 911. Coincidence? Or just evidence that America is a farce controlled by dirty, hook-nosed, circumcised Jew bastards". A schoolboy asks: "In the process of the hug, will the Jew claw come out and take my money?" Another states: "Stereotypes are usually true, because all Jews have large noses and large saving accounts. Stereotypes don't just come out of thin air."

While this seemingly provides evidence of the remnants of a Jewish conspiracy theory, its language seems to be updated for a post-September 11 world. Meanwhile, the more racial-trait based abuse is much older; imagery of clawed hands, hooked noses and the concept of "penny-pinching".

A Jewish student named Jason answers Diamond's post. "This is a group about trying to bring everyone together... I don't understand [how] so many people can hate one another based on their beliefs," he argues. "I'm a scientologist," replies the Texan. "It's better than all religions because poor people can't really be a part of it, and Jews don't like spending money so there aren't many of those in it either."

Is the internet home to the emergence of a new kind of casual anti-Semitism? Or has it simply allowed grass-root anti-Semites like Diamond to contact others, giving them a forum on which to rant on Facebook? There are lots of white-supremacist pages dotted around the web; I checked out one of the larger ones, Stormfront.org. Carrying the tagline "White Pride World Wide", its conversation topics make for unpleasant reading; terms like "race mixing", "holohoax" abound. As far as I can tell, however, the internet racist community seems to be little more than a few distasteful but ultimately harmless shut-ins, ranting and raving about "negroville" and "the jew", than anything more sinister. Racism, like radiation, at a fairly safe background level.

Mr. Diamond on the 'Hug-a-Jew-Day' forum fits this profile of 'internet wacko' neatly. When challenged on the Scientology question, his answer is wonderfully bizarre. "My parents couldn't afford to transcend to the next operating thetan," he writes, "and they disappeared, and my dianetics advisor told me that they were consumed by the ghost-slaves of Xenu."

That's not to say there isn't a more mainstream internet anti-Semitism issue. Debbie Addlestone, of the Leeds Zionist Council, tells me of her own internet experiences: "When just playing online bridge, you get people abusing each other and it's usually with anti-Semitic, vitriolic language. Complete strangers who don't know each other at all, when they start being displeased about something in the game, they'll suddenly start with 'you Jew' and things like that. It's really shocking, and it's happened a few times."

This is the most mysterious of all kinds of anti-Semitism, and the hardest to pin down. "Jew" as a slur, often, but by no means always, still linked to the old implications of financial miserliness and large noses, is still used; though often harmlessly between friends. It is used almost in defiance of any challenge; accusations of over-sensitivity may be levelled at anyone who objects to the idea that a Jew is a different entity, with identifiable characteristics. It is now possible for discussion groups to exist identifying "my favourite Jew" without any hint of irony; or for lists to be made of Jewish celebrities or Jewish "hotties". While it does highlight a difference, this may well be anti-Semitism in a dying form. Often, the same words are used but the malice seems to be gone.

It is certain that anti-Semitism has undergone fundamental changes in the last half-century. Radically altered by the existence of the state of Israel and the internet, it has separated into several separate components; the remnants of Nazism, territorial anti-Zionism and a strange new form of informal, vernacular anti-Semitism. Discounting the issues surrounding Israel, it may just be possible to foresee the end of anti-Semitism, at least in any guise that would have been familiar to the Nazis, in our lifetimes.



2 comments

Dovy

23 Jan '08 at 6:17 pm

As an Orthodox Jew opposed to Zionism I am amazed at the naivete of Zionists, who hold Palestinians to a standard higher than that of the Zionists themselves. After hammering the Palestinians mercilessly for 60 years, ethnically cleansing many and confining the rest to ghettos and second-class status, what do Zionists expect? That the Palestinians will only express love and adoration for "Jews"? It is only Zionist political narcissism that can expect this. It makes me sick.

[Report](#)

Truth

4 Feb '08 at 6:28 am

I heart all the immediate accusations of anti-Semitism. Most ignorant people do not understand that criticizing Judaism, criticizing violent Zionism, and criticizing Israel are all distinct. Also, Arabs are the Semitic brethren of Jews. So the term anti-Semitic really encompasses prejudice against Jews and Arabs;

you rarely if ever hear this.

 Report

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