

# Reframing the Narrative of American Antisemitism



# Reframing the Narrative of American Antisemitism:

*Beyond the Myth of Jewish  
Exceptionalism*

By

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This book is dedicated to the memory of Yaakov Micha Chaim Burstein, Z"L, who was the only member of his family to escape the horrors of the Holocaust alive. Through my work, I strive to honor his memory and the memories of all those who perished.



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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Described by Robert Wistrich as “The Longest Hatred,” European antisemitism culminated in the systematic extermination of six million Jewish men, women, and children by the Nazi regime during the Holocaust, but the hatred of Jews was not a belief system unique to the Third Reich. To the contrary, it was built on the foundation of centuries of violent precedents and deeply-engrained myths that were rooted in xenophobia and superstition. Although these long-held ideas followed European emigrants as they migrated across the globe during the colonial period, it was somewhat tempered in the nations in which they settled. This was particularly true in the United States, where these prejudices did not disappear but instead adapted to fit the new social, political, and economic landscape. This ongoing process manifested in distinctly American forms, reflecting the pluralistic ideals yet exclusionary practices of the United States. Antisemitism is conspicuously absent from much of the mainstream historical narrative of the mid-late twentieth century due in part to American Jewish Exceptionalism, the notion that American Jewish experiences were uniquely free and largely unburdened by systemic antisemitism. In the chapters that follow, this study seeks to explore that development and demonstrate that, although less overtly pervasive, antisemitism is not uniquely an Old-World issue, but rather a reflection of the prejudices faced by European Jews that followed them to the New World.

Before exploring the phenomenon of antisemitism in America, an attempt to put forth a definition of the term should be made. This task is a difficult and at times controversial one, as defining the phenomenon has proven problematic due to its divisive and dynamic nature as well as various degrees of hatred ranging from a slur muttered behind closed doors to intense violence. There are political, religious, academic, and popular conceptions and ideas about the term, but even amongst these groups there is dispute as to how to define it. The word itself was first popularized in the 1870s by German journalist Wilhelm Marr in his book, *Judenspiegel*

(*Mirror to the Jews*), in which he used the term to express the prejudice that he and other like-minded individuals felt towards Jews based on “social, economic, political or ‘racial’ considerations” rather than religious motivations.<sup>1</sup> Marr coined the term, which first appeared in America in 1881, in response to Jewish emancipation in an effort to prove that Jews were unworthy of citizenship.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, he sought to legitimize the newly-christened pseudoscience of antisemitism by shifting the stated focus of the hatred from Judaism as a religion to Jews as a social and/or ethnic group. This change implied that Jewishness was racial, and therefore immutable.

Adding to the problematic nature of classifying Jews as a race was the Darwinian idea of “the survival of the fittest” that evolved to include not only species of animals, but people, ethnic groups, and even nation states.<sup>3</sup> As this idea spread across Europe, antisemitism increasingly became motivated by racial versus religious criteria with Jews being unable to avoid persecution by conversion or assimilation. This new “scientific” antisemitism and classification of races was embraced across Europe, and a racial hierarchy soon emerged in which Jews were classified as an inferior race.<sup>4</sup> The European model of racial hierarchy, which developed during the era of colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade, was easily integrated into American society, where flawed biological theories and anti-Black racism had been used to first rationalize slavery and later segregation.<sup>5</sup>

The definition of anti-Semitism has remained consistent for decades: “hostility toward or discrimination against Jews as a religious, ethnic, or racial group.”<sup>6</sup> In 2004, however, the European Union Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) met to discuss the lack of a collectively agreed upon definition, and in 2016 the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), comprised of thirty-one member countries, produced a working definition of antisemitism, which was later codified into law by the U.S. Congress under the Combating European Anti-Semitism

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<sup>1</sup> Robert S. Wistrich, *Antisemitism: The Longest Hatred* (Pantheon Books, 1991), xv.

<sup>2</sup> Britt P. Tevis, “‘Jews Not Admitted’: Anti-Semitism, Civil Rights, and Public Accommodation Laws,” *Journal of American History* 107, no. 4 (2021): 861, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jahist/jaaa461>.

<sup>3</sup> David M. Crow, *The Holocaust: Roots, History, and Aftermath* (Westview Press, 2008), 53.

<sup>4</sup> Athena S. Leoussi, *Encyclopaedia of Nationalism* (Transaction Publishers, 2001), 3.

<sup>5</sup> George M. Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton University Press, 2015), 85.

<sup>6</sup> *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, “Anti-Semitism,” accessed October 11, 2025, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/anti-Semitism>.

Act of 2017. This definition states: “Anti-Semitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of anti-Semitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.”<sup>7</sup> The name of the act focuses on “European Anti-Semitism,” evoking the notion of American Jewish Exceptionalism. Anti-Jewish prejudice and discrimination, however, is not only a European problem, although antisemitism in America has frequently been dwarfed by its counterpart across the Atlantic, resulting in it being largely marginalized and diminished within the wider scope of American history. Rather than analyzing American antisemitism as a systemic ideology or collective social phenomenon, much of the historiography has prioritized studying the experiences of individual Jews, framing their stories in isolation from the broader cultural, political, and institutional forces that shaped that discrimination. A secondary goal of this research is therefore to examine the gaps that such an approach has created while simultaneously situating it within the context of American history as a whole.

Antisemitism in the United States has frequently been relegated to little more than a footnote in the context of American historical studies. As such, scholars of American history have generally reduced antisemitism in the U.S. to specific examples rather than a larger issue with deep underlying and pervasive roots due to what historian Johnathan Sarna called a “patriotic illusion.”<sup>8</sup> It has been only recently in the wake of incidents such as the 2017 Unite the Right Rally, where protestors chanted “Jews will not replace us,” and the 2018 attack on the Tree of Life Synagogue that historians have begun to realize that American antisemitism does not solely exist in the extreme margins of America and, therefore, its history should be revisited.<sup>9</sup> This is not to say that the topic has been completely ignored. Oscar Handlin, the first Jewish historian to be granted tenure at Harvard, wrote one of the first books on Jewish history in his 1954 monograph, *Adventure in Freedom*.<sup>10</sup> By framing the American Jewish experience as an “adventure

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<sup>7</sup> Congress.gov, "H.R.672 - 115th Congress (2017-2018): Combating European Anti-Semitism Act of 2017," Jan. 14, 2019, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/672>.

<sup>8</sup> Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism: A History*, 2nd ed. (Yale University Press, 2019).

<sup>9</sup> Jonathan D. Sarna, “The Long, Ugly Antisemitic History of ‘Jews Will Not Replace Us,’” published Nov. 19, 2021, <https://www.brandeis.edu/jewish-experience/jewish-america/2021/november/replacement-antisemitism-sarna.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Oscar Handlin, *Adventure in Freedom: Three Hundred Years of Jewish Life in America* (McGraw-Hill, 1954).

in freedom,” Handlin presents a rather optimistic view of that experience, minimizing the antisemitism experienced by American Jewry and overstating the opportunities available to them when he writes, “in every area of life the confining regulations fell away and man was left free, within the rules general to all, to pursue his trade and calling, to act as man and citizen without interference from the state ... in this spirit, democracy became a way of life that reordered the Jewish communities.”<sup>11</sup> Another book written that same year, which coincided with the three hundredth anniversary of a documented Jewish presence in America, was *The Jews in America: A History* by Rufus Lears. This popular history, however, was not intended for an academic audience. It painted a picture of American Jews who, although they retained their Jewish identity and history, became integrated and contributing members of American society.<sup>12</sup> As noted in a 1955 academic review of the two books, “with almost no exceptions, there are no definitive monographs in any area of American Jewish history, and, obviously, there was no basic history of American Jewry available to Handlin and Lears.”<sup>13</sup> In 1957, John Higham published his pioneering article “Anti-Semitism in the Gilded Age: A Reinterpretation” in which he attempted to provide a “more balanced understanding of the whole picture” rather than the narrower approaches taken by earlier historians on the topic.<sup>14</sup>

A few later scholars have written extensively on the topic, such as Leonard Dinnerstein and Robert Michael, but their early work in particular, which has significantly shaped the field of American antisemitism studies, is still somewhat lacking. Dinnerstein’s research, while comprehensive and thorough, tended to primarily explore the Christian roots of antisemitism in America rather than the secular. His 1995 book, *Antisemitism in America* has been touted as the first comprehensive study on the subject “from the

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<sup>11</sup> Oscar Handlin, *Adventure in Freedom: Three Hundred Years of Jewish Life in America* (McGraw-Hill, 1954), 260.

<sup>12</sup> Peter Romanofsky, “Book Review: *The Jews in America: A History*,” *International Migration Review*, 1973, 340–341  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/019791837300700313>.

<sup>13</sup> Jacob R. Marcus, “*Adventure in Freedom, Three Hundred Years of Jewish Life in America*, by Oscar Handlin, McGraw Hill Book Company, Inc., New York, 1954, xiv, 293 pp. *The Jews in America: A History*, by Rufus Lears, The World Publishing Company, Cleveland, Ohio, 1954, xiv, 282 pp. (Book Review),” *Judaism* 4, no. 3 (1955): 278, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1304347462>.

<sup>14</sup> John Higham, *Anti-Semitism in the Gilded Age: A Reinterpretation* (Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, 1957), 559.

colonial era to the present.”<sup>15</sup> While his research is thorough and well-evidenced, it focuses on the ideological background at the expense of other factors as he asserts that, “it cannot be emphasized too strongly...that all aspects of American antisemitism are built on this foundation of Christian hostility toward Jews.”<sup>16</sup> Michael’s work similarly centers on the Christian ideological foundation of American antisemitism. Even in his more recent monograph on the subject, *A Concise History of American Antisemitism*, the focal point of his research is the phenomenon’s theological roots, as he explains in his preface: “negative Christian beliefs about Jews serve as the bedrock on which antisemitism has been built.”<sup>17</sup> Although he does acknowledge social, political, and economic factors as driving forces of American antisemitism, he looks at them primarily in relation to their religious origins.

Additionally, much of the previous literature on the topic has looked at the subject through a similarly single-focus and outdated lens, placing the emphasis on the experiences of individual Jews in America rather than examining it as a collective phenomenon or investigating the ideology that led to those experiences. For example, works chronicling Jewish lives in urban centers such as New York City can overlook the larger institutional forces at play as well as discount the systemic nature of antisemitism. Additionally, such an approach attempts to paint the big picture with a small brush, which is problematic because Jews are not a monolithic group. There is a vast array of variety in the personal experiences, types and degree of religious observance, as well as a racial and ethnic diversity of Jews across the globe. Likewise, America is not comprised of one singular people, but rather a diverse mixture of different races, nationalities, religions, and regional cultures; a visibly identifiable orthodox Jew in Mississippi may have very different experiences than an assimilated Jew in New York. Understanding Jewish experiences in America, therefore, requires a broader, more nuanced approach that considers both the diversity within the Jewish community and the complex, multifaceted nature of American society.

Building upon that understanding, it is also necessary to examine the historical forces and contemporary influences that shaped Jewish identity and perception in other parts of the world. In recent years, scholars

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<sup>15</sup> Leonard Dinnerstein, *Antisemitism in America* (Oxford University Press, 1995), ix.

<sup>16</sup> Leonard Dinnerstein, *Antisemitism in America* (Oxford University Press, 1995), xiii.

<sup>17</sup> Robert Michael, *A Concise History of American Antisemitism* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), xix.

such as Tony Michels and David Sorkin have increasingly critiqued the concept of American Jewish Exceptionalism by highlighting the parallels between the experiences of Jewish communities in the United States and those in Europe. Michels encourages a broader examination of the topic that includes an integration of scholarship produced outside of the field of Jewish studies, which he asserts “yields a picture different from the one presented by most Jewish historians” because “taken together, this scholarship shows that American antisemitism assumed forms and patterns similar to that in significant portions of Europe.”<sup>18</sup> David Sorkin, on the other hand, argues that the issue of emancipation is at the heart of American Jewish Exceptionalism. He contends that a comparison between Europe and America in general terms is not an accurate comparison, but rather he argues for a more precise comparison by examining similar specific circumstances. He points to the Sephardic community of Bordeaux and Bayonne and “Port Jews” in cities such as Amsterdam and London, where Jews were able to obtain extensive rights prior to formal emancipation.<sup>19</sup> This challenges the previously long-standing narrative that American Jews followed a uniquely privileged path that was completely dissimilar from their European counterparts. This study sets out to demonstrate that these so-called exceptional privileges of American Jews have frequently been overstated, while the anti-Jewish prejudices and inequalities they have experienced have been historically understated.

Although most often thought of today as the embodiment of tolerance and the foundation of American ideals, the Enlightenment had devastating effects for European Jewry. The culture and society of Europe was changing, and religion was being replaced by the reason of science. This shift towards secularism created a world that the Jews did not have a place in as they maintained their visible ritualism and religious and dietary practices. This not only further alienated the Jews, but as rational thought and scientific observation took center stage, the mysticism, superstition, and blind adherence to religious dogma was viewed as archaic and irrational. As a result, Judaism was seen as an antiquated system of belief that was holding mankind in a backwards state of being and a roadblock which was preventing the rest of society from moving into modernity. This point of view was emphasized by Enlightenment philosophers such as Voltaire, who

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<sup>18</sup> Tony Michels, “Is America ‘Different?’ A Critique of American Jewish Exceptionalism,” *American Jewish History* 96, no. 3 (2010): 212, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ajh.2011.0007>.

<sup>19</sup> David Sorkin, “Is American Jewry Exceptional? Comparing Jewish Emancipation in Europe and America,” *American Jewish History* 96, no. 3 (2010): 178-179, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ajh.2011.0006>.

viewed the Jews as inferior in every way and that every generation carried the shortcomings of the generations before them.<sup>20</sup> One of his central criticisms of Judaism was that its adherents were preventing the betterment of society. For Voltaire, Jews were the “enemies of mankind.”<sup>21</sup> These pivotal moments in European history significantly contributed to the circumstances that led to Jews finding themselves in the position of having to navigate a world increasingly hostile to their traditions and collective existence.

By the twentieth century, anti-Jewish hatred became an even more complicated phenomenon, especially as it developed in the United States. As a result, it is necessary to analyze its complex, and at times, paradoxical application. In order to fully understand the “anatomy” of antisemitism, according to Frederic Jaher, it must be broken down and examined according to its scope, intensity, change, and causes.<sup>22</sup> This study, therefore, will explore the ways in which antisemitism during the interwar period not only increased but mutated to adapt to the evolving social, political, and economic climate in America. It will also investigate the external forces that influenced and shaped that transformation, either by accident or by design. Furthermore, it will look at parallels between the ways in which antisemitism historically manifested in Europe and presented itself in America during this time. This can, for instance, be seen in accusations against the Jews regarding global control and the financial calamity of the Great Depression. These conspiracy theories were also often customized to appeal to the audience being addressed; for example, groups and individuals who saw people of color as a danger to White America were targeted to perceive Jews as a threat to Christian America. At the heart of the false narratives was the belief that Jews are a collective threat and must be confronted as such. It is, however, the perceived danger of Jewish world domination that was prevalent both in America and throughout the western world in the thirties and forties that is the focus of this study. By examining these pervasive and evolving narratives, this analysis will additionally explore the ways in which antisemitism during this period not only reflected existing prejudices but also served as a tool for mobilizing fear and reinforcing societal divisions both in America and abroad.

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<sup>20</sup> Jacob Katz, *From Prejudice to Destruction: Anti-Semitism, 1700–1933*, (Harvard University Press, 1982), 42.

<sup>21</sup> Robert S. Wistrich, *Antisemitism: The Longest Hatred* (Pantheon Books, 1991), 45.

<sup>22</sup> Frederic Cople Jaher, *A Scapegoat in the New Wilderness: The Origins and Rise of Anti-Semitism in America* (Harvard University Press, 1994), 1.

The origins and legacy of this conspiracy theory can be found in what is today referred to as the Simonini Letter, written in 1806 by an Italian army captain named Giovanni Battista Simonini to French priest Abbé Augustin Barruel, outlining so-called proof of how the Jews orchestrated events to bring about the French Revolution.<sup>23</sup> Published in 1878 in a Catholic magazine, this letter was a precursor to one of the most well-known and extensively circulated antisemitic texts, *The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*. This series of twenty-four chapters were alleged to be an actual transcript of secret meetings of a power-hungry Jewish cabal. These seven “Learned Elders of Zion” were purported to be all-powerful Jews orchestrating world events with the ultimate purpose of creating a global Jewish dictatorship.<sup>24</sup> First published in Tsarist Russia in 1903, the *Protocols* were quickly translated and disseminated worldwide, including to the United States. Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel said “If ever there was a script that could arouse mass hatred, it is this ... There are only lies and slander in this book.”<sup>25</sup> The *Protocols* were initially printed in a Russian newspaper but were soon translated and distributed across Europe and the world, with translated editions reaching Germany by 1918.<sup>26</sup> The text was embraced by antisemites across the globe, and it became a key weapon in the anti-Jewish propaganda arsenal in both America and abroad. While antisemitic texts like *The Protocols* fueled hatred and suspicion globally, the unique history of Jews in the early years of the United States offers a contrasting narrative rooted in the idealized principals of religious freedom and tolerance.

The experience of Jews in the United States differed from their counterparts in Europe because they did not undergo an emancipation process through which they needed to prove themselves worthy of citizenship. They became citizens at the founding of the republic without special consideration, the beneficiaries of progressive policies of the country’s early leaders. This tolerance can be seen in figures such as President George Washington, who following a visit to the Touro Synagogue in Newport, Rhode Island, wrote a letter addressed “To the Hebrew Congregation in

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<sup>23</sup> Leonidas Donskis, *Forms of Hatred the Troubled Imagination in Modern Philosophy and Literature* (Brill, 2003), 37–38.

<sup>24</sup> Keith Sward. *The Legend of Henry Ford* (Rinehart & Company, 1948) 149.

<sup>25</sup> Elie Weisel, “Protocols of the Elders of Zion,” recorded at Boston University, Nov. 6, 2005, 52:31, *WBUR*, Boston University World of Ideas, <https://www.wbur.org/worldofideas/2005/11/06/the-protocols-of-the-elders-of-zion>.

<sup>26</sup> Leni Yahil, *The Holocaust: The Fate of European Jewry, 1932–1945* (Oxford University Press, 1991), 39.

Newport” dated August 18, 1790, in which he reaffirmed the newly established United States of America’s commitment to religious tolerance and freedom by writing:

The Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens in giving it on all occasions their effectual support ... May the children of the stock of Abraham who dwell in this land continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other inhabitants – while everyone shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree and there shall be none to make him afraid.<sup>27</sup>

The ideals of religious equality espoused by founding fathers like George Washington, however, often fell by the wayside against the pervasive antisemitism that manifested in social, institutional, and private practices during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

One such example that contradicts the idea that Jews did not face any legal barriers to their political rights can be found in several state constitutions, including Delaware, Massachusetts, Maryland, and Pennsylvania.<sup>28</sup> For example, the requirement of “a declaration of belief in the Christian religion” in order to hold public office was written into Maryland’s state constitution in 1776.<sup>29</sup> The intent of this clause was made clear in the 1864 debates of the Constitutional Convention of Maryland, which was convened in order to draft a new constitution during the Civil War. Delegate Daniel Clarke unsuccessfully moved to remove this clause, “which especially singles out the Jew.”<sup>30</sup> Although no longer enforceable due to legislative and judicial actions against the so-called religious test, this clause is still included in the Maryland Constitution today.<sup>31</sup> Another example can be found in General Issue Number 11, issued by General Ulysses S. Grant on December 7, 1872, expelling all Jews from the military district under his control, which included parts of Kentucky, Mississippi, and Tennessee. This order read:

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<sup>27</sup> George Washington to the Hebrew Congregation in Newport, Rhode Island, Aug. 18, 1790, <https://loeb.columbian.gwu.edu/george-washingtons-letter-hebrew-congregation-newport-rhode-island>.

<sup>28</sup> Michael Carlton Tolley, *State Constitutionalism in Maryland* (Garland Pub., 1992), 56.

<sup>29</sup> Edward Otis Hinkley, “The Constitution of the State of Maryland” (J. Murphy & Company, 1865), 18.

<sup>30</sup> William Blair Lord and Henry Martyn Parkhurst, *The Debates of the Constitutional Convention of the State of Maryland*, (R. P. Bayly, 1864), 372.

<sup>31</sup> Dan Friedman, *The Maryland State Constitution* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 72.

I. The Jews, as a class, violating every regulation of trade established by the Treasury Department, and also Department orders, are hereby expelled from the Department.

II. Within twenty-four hours from the receipt of this order by Post Commanders, they will see that all of this class of people be furnished passes and required to leave, and any one re- turning after such notification will be arrested and held in confinement until an opportunity occurs of sending them out as prisoners, unless furnished with permit from Head Quarters.

III. No permits will be given these people to visit Head Quarters for the purpose of making personal application for trade permits.<sup>32</sup>

Grant later rescinded this order on January 6, 1863 on the orders of General Henry W. Halleck at the behest of President Lincoln.<sup>33</sup>

The idea that American Jewish exceptionalism stems from an absence of a formal emancipation process is misleading, and this perspective overlooks historical patterns of oppression and downplays ongoing struggles for equality. This text argues that although they do exist, the unique privileges enjoyed by American Jews are overstated, and that the anti-Jewish prejudices and inequalities they faced have been historically understated. There were no federal laws in early twentieth-century America that were explicitly anti-Jewish, but antisemitism was, nevertheless, still present in the public consciousness, social spheres, and private spaces. Discriminatory practices were not uncommon in residential areas, employment opportunities, institutional quotas, and private organizations and clubs. Widespread social and institutional discriminatory practices included restrictive practices such as gentlemen's agreements and selective marketing, and Jewish access to educational and professional opportunities were commonly limited by quotas and exclusionary policies. While the more subtle and common prejudice and discriminatory behavior that exists within social customs and community practices has been historically more widespread in American than overt anti-Jewish actions and rhetoric constructed by ideologues, both had significant impact on American Jewry and serves to further highlight the multifaceted and changing nature of the phenomenon.<sup>34</sup>

The tendency of most American historians has been largely to place the focus on the experiences of individual Jews in America rather than

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<sup>32</sup> qtd. in Sarna, *When General Grant Expelled the Jews* 7

<sup>33</sup> Sarna, *When General Grant Expelled the Jews* 155

<sup>34</sup> John Higham, "Social Discrimination Against Jews in America, 1830–1930," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 47 (1957): 2–3, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43059004>.

as a collective phenomenon or to study the ideology that led to those experiences. This research seeks to examine the gaps that such an approach creates by using multiple critical lenses and reconsidering antisemitism as a dynamic force that has both shaped and been shaped by American Jewish experiences. Anti-Jewish rhetoric and discrimination, which has a long history that extends from the colonial era, grew in the last decades of the nineteenth century following the Civil War, spiked in the twentieth century during the interwar period, and peaked in the final years and in the immediate aftermath of World War II.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, this project's primary focus will be on the interwar period between the First and Second World Wars and will include the year leading up to World War I, concluding with the immediate aftermath of World War II and the Holocaust. The intense antisemitism that took root during World War I was not an isolated phenomenon, but rather a resurgence of long-standing prejudices. This heightened hostility towards Jews laid the groundwork for subsequent waves of discrimination and violence in the decades to come. The war merely provided the catalyst for these age-old prejudices to resurface and intensify, setting a dangerous precedent for future expressions of antisemitism.

In order to survey the scope and manner of the transformation of American anti-Jewish sentiments during this time frame, the relevant historical context prior to the period must be considered both in the United States and Europe. One fundamental component of that understanding is the dramatic increase in Jewish immigration in the decades before and after the turn of the twentieth century. Jews had been in America since before the nation's founding, with the first documented Jews arriving as a small group of Sephardic refugees fleeing Spanish Brazil who arrived to New Amsterdam (modern day New York) in the mid-seventeenth century. The number of Jews in the U.S. remained relatively small until the arrival of a few hundred thousand Jews, primarily German-speaking Central European Jews between 1820-1860.<sup>36</sup> That all changed in the 1880s when there was a dramatic shift in both primary origin and numbers of Jewish immigrants fleeing persecution in Tsarist Russia. For historical context, the Jewish populations in Russia soared during the eighteenth century due to migrations from Western Europe and the partitioning of Poland. By 1772, Russia had the greatest concentration of Jews in Europe when they absorbed 200,000

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<sup>35</sup> Leonard Dinnerstein, *Antisemitism in America* (Oxford University Press, 1995), 134.

<sup>36</sup> Daniel Walkowitz, "The Jewish Working Class in America," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History*, published Nov. 29, 2021 Oxford University Press, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.013.935>, 2.

Polish Jews from the regions they had recently partitioned from Poland.<sup>37</sup> Later that year, Tsarina Catherine the Great of Russia addressed the Jewish populations under her control by creating the Pale of Settlement.<sup>38</sup> This was more clearly delineated in April of 1835, Tsar Nicholas I passed legislation which formally created the Pale. This more than one million square kilometers in the western provinces of Russia included the territory that had been partitioned from Poland which spanned from the Baltic to the Black Seas that contained the largest Jewish population in the world.<sup>39</sup>

Life in the Pale was not easy, however, and as a result, between 1881 and 1924, more than two and a half million Jews immigrated to America,<sup>40</sup> considerably raising Jewish presence in the overall makeup of the American population. By 1917, the Jewish percentage of the population in America had swelled from less than one percent in 1877 to over three percent.<sup>41</sup> Consequently, in the years between 1890-1915, Jews comprised nearly half of all Russian immigrants to the United States.<sup>42</sup> Subsequently, Russian immigrants became synonymous with Jews and Bolshevism, which was alarming for many Americans. This will be particularly impactful when considering the ways in which the First Red Scare (1919-1920) affected American Jews in Chapter 2.

The examination of this period will be divided chronologically as follows. Chapter 2 will be bracketed by the Leo Frank Affair (1913-1915) and the economic crash of 1929. The Leo Frank Affair must be considered within the context of the Dreyfus Affair, from which many similarities can be found. In 1894, a Jewish French Army officer named Alfred Dreyfus was falsely accused and convicted of selling state secrets to the Germans. The sensationalized trial and conviction of Captain Dreyfus was less about him and the crime that he was charged with than it was about the symbolism associated with the trial. His case brought the antagonisms of the left and

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<sup>37</sup> Walter Laqueur, *The Changing Face of Antisemitism: From Ancient Times to the Present Day*, (Oxford University Press, 2006), 79.

<sup>38</sup> *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History*, eds. Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz (Oxford University Press, 1995), 377.

<sup>39</sup> *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History*, eds. Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz (Oxford University Press, 1995), 379.

<sup>40</sup> Ronald Sanders, *The Downtown Jews, Portraits of an Immigrant Generation*, special ed. (Barnes & Noble, 2009), 15.

<sup>41</sup> Beverly S. Williams, "Anti-Semitism and Shreveport, Louisiana: The Situation in the 1920s," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 21, no. 4 (1980): 387.

<sup>42</sup> Eli Lederhendler, "Classless: On the Social Status of Jews in Russia and Eastern Europe in the Late Nineteenth Century," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 50, no. 2 (2008): 511, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27563679>.

the right to the surface and served as a political tool for both to use against each other in order to promote their own ideologies and goals. The Dreyfus Affair deeply divided France for years and served to spread antisemitism both within France as well as throughout Europe. The polarizing impact of the Dreyfus Affair in Europe parallels the rise of nationalism in America, which fostered exclusionary attitudes that frequently situated Jews as perpetual outsiders.

The concept of nationalism and the modern nation state that developed and took hold of Europe by the nineteenth century, also filtered into American society in the form of nativism. The appeal of a shared culture, universal national identity, and a common language created a hierarchy of immigrants based on their nation of origin, serving to mobilize and foster the political and ethnic awareness of Americans. This idea of a common language binding people together did not entirely extend to Jews, however. In 1850, German Composer Richard Wagner wrote the essay “Das Judentum in der Musik” in which he stated, “the Jew speaks the language of the nation in whose midst he dwells from generation to generation, but he speaks it always as an alien.”<sup>43</sup> People began to identify themselves not only by what they were but by what they were not.

One result of this idea was the passage of the Immigration Act of 1924 (The Johnson-Reed Act), which used the 1890 census as the benchmark to set national origin quotas limited to two percent of the recorded population in the US at the time, which was a year with just over 400,000 Jews, compared to roughly three and a half million in 1920.<sup>44</sup> By the time that the relatively open immigration policies of the United States ended with the passing of this act, approximately three million foreign Jews had found refuge in the U.S.<sup>45</sup> America, a nation of immigrants itself, began to selectively shut its doors. Calls for immigration reform did not target Jews specifically, but rather countries in Eastern Europe with large Jewish populations, such as Poland and Russia, which were viewed as culturally and/or racially “inferior.” Additionally, although Europe had a long history of having quotas restricting Jewish enrollment at universities, it did not become commonplace in America until Columbia, Harvard, and Yale began limiting Jewish enrollment in 1920. This and subsequent chapters will,

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<sup>43</sup> Sander L. Gilman, *Smart Jews: The Construction of the Image of Jewish Superior Intelligence* (University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 45.

<sup>44</sup> “The Immigration Act of 1924 (The Johnson–Reed Act),” Office of the Historian, accessed October 11, 2025, [history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/immigration-act](https://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/immigration-act).

<sup>45</sup> Hasia R. Diner, *Jews of the United States, 1654 to 2000* (University of California Press, 2004), 75.

therefore, examine evidence of such quotas and other similar restrictive measures taken against Jews.

Chapter 3 will span the Great Depression until the start of World War II and will be sectioned into two parts. Part I will begin with the stock market crash on Black Thursday, October 24, 1929, and end with the Nazi Party's rise to power in 1933. The sudden economic downturn following the prosperity of the Roaring Twenties coincided with a significant increase in Jewish immigration, especially in major urban areas like New York City. This demographic shift made the Jewish community more visible and, as a result, a convenient scapegoat for the financial hardships that followed the economic crash. The increased presence of Jews in these urban centers, coupled with the abrupt end of the era's prosperity, made them a more accessible target for blame and resentment among some segments of the population. Labor unions and professional organizations barred Jewish membership, particularly in the building trades. Prior to the large-scale immigration of Eastern European Jews to the United States, Jewish Americans were predominantly of Western and Central European origin, often engaged in white-collar professions rather than blue-collar building jobs. Additionally, non-Jewish immigrants who came from the same region tended to be rural unskilled peasants, while the Jewish immigrants were significantly more likely to be skilled workers.<sup>46</sup> The economic and social advancement of successful Jewish immigrants was perceived by certain non-Jewish Americans as taking from opportunities that they believed rightfully belonged to non-immigrant, non-Jewish Americans. This perspective framed the achievements of Jewish immigrants as a form of appropriation, implying that their success came at the expense of the established non-Jewish American population.

Subsequently, Part II of this chapter will investigate the ramifications of the New Deal and end with Germany's invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939. Although relatively few Jews held political positions in the 1930s, President Roosevelt's administration was perceived to be disproportionality filled with and therefore controlled by Jews. The misconception led many critics to refer to the New Deal as the "Jew Deal."<sup>47</sup> This chapter, then, will have a general focus on the parallels between the rise of fascism in Europe, with particular attention being paid to the rise of Nazism in Germany and the surge in right-wing extremists in the United States. Hitler's appointment as chancellor of Germany in 1933 is a watershed moment in history, and it

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<sup>46</sup> Will Herberg, "The Jewish Labor Movement in the United States," in *American Jewish Year Book* 53 (1952), 4.

<sup>47</sup> Leonard Dinnerstein, "Jews and the New Deal," *American Jewish History* 72, no. 4 (1983): 461, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23882507>.

was the beginning of one of the worst events in human history: the Holocaust. Prior to 1933, there were approximately nine million Jews living across Europe; by 1945 there were only three million left alive.<sup>48</sup> The Nazi Party's anti-Jewish ideology became the state doctrine upon Hitler's appointment to the chancellorship. In September of 1935, Hitler issued the Nuremberg Laws, the first of many anti-Jewish laws which restricted the rights and citizenship of Jews. The Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor stressed the importance Hitler placed on the purity of German blood and not only forbade the marriage of Jews and non-Jews, but it also made the sexual interaction between a person of pure German blood and a Jew a criminal offense which was enforced by harsh penalties.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, American anti-miscegenation laws used legal frameworks to criminalize interracial relationships on the basis of flawed notions of racial purity and superiority. Although they targeted different groups, at their core, both systems sought to enforce and preserve racial hierarchy. The corresponding legal systems in Nazi Germany and Jim Crow-era America demonstrate how racist ideologies can be institutionalized through legislation. These parallel methodologies to enforcing racial boundaries emphasize the universal nature of systemic racism during this time.

The years leading up to Germany's invasion of Poland included several important events in Europe that would have ripple-like effects on American Jews. On March 12, 1938, Hitler and German Wehrmacht troops advanced into Austria without military resistance and were greeted by excited throngs of Austrians welcoming his arrival.<sup>50</sup> After the Anschluss of Austria, Nazi anti-Jewish laws were quickly instituted in Austria. Shortly thereafter, another event occurred that stunned the world and alarmed Jews in Germany, across Europe, and globally. Kristallnacht, or "Night of Broken Glass," was a nation-wide series of violent pogroms in Germany and the recently-annexed Austria that occurred on the night of November 9, 1938. This was a coordinated series of attacks on Jewish businesses, homes, and synagogues in both Germany and Austria.<sup>51</sup> Although not officially instigated, Nazi Propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels had announced that "the Führer has decided that ... demonstrations should not be prepared or

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<sup>48</sup> Yehuda Bauer and Robert Rozett, "Estimated Jewish Losses in the Holocaust," in *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, ed. Israel Gutman (Macmillan, 1990), 1799.

<sup>49</sup> Wolfgang Benz and Thomas Dunlap, *A Concise History of the Third Reich* (University of California Press, 2006), 142–143.

<sup>50</sup> Roderick Stackelberg, *Hitler's Germany: Origins, Interpretations, Legacies* (Routledge, 2000), 170.

<sup>51</sup> Wolfgang Benz and Thomas Dunlap, *A Concise History of the Third Reich* (University of California Press, 2006), vii.

organized by the Party, but insofar as they erupt spontaneously, they are not to be hampered.”<sup>52</sup> These two events had a significant impact on American Jews, primarily by deepening their anxieties about the plight of the European Jewish community and incentivizing them to ramp up their efforts to assist refugees.

In an attempt to address this looming immigration crisis, President Roosevelt convened the Évian Conference, which was held from July 6–15, 1938 in Évian-les-Bains, France. Roughly two hundred representatives from thirty-two countries and numerous humanitarian and relief organizations gathered to discuss how best to respond to the mounting Jewish refugee crisis. Rather than talking about people, however, they used impersonal terms such as quotas and numbers. For the benefit of the many reporters in attendance, there were countless expressions of sympathy and regret that their countries could not accept larger numbers of European refugees by the representatives present, despite the growing peril that they faced if they were not allowed to leave. In his diary, Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King wrote that Canada must “keep this part of the Continent free from unrest and from too great an intermixture of foreign strains of blood,” as to do so would be “creating an internal problem in an effort to meet an international one.”<sup>53</sup> Historians Richard Breitman and Allan Lichtman aptly summarized the results of the conference:

Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Honduras, and Panama stated that they wanted no traders or intellectuals, code words for Jews. Argentina said it had already accommodated enough immigrants from Central Europe. Canada cited its unemployment problem. Australia said that it had no “racial problems” and did not want to create any by bringing in Jewish refugees. Imperial countries such as Britain, France, and the Netherlands said that their tropical territories offered only limited prospects for European refugees. League of Nations High Commissioner Sir Neill Malcolm was openly hostile to the idea of a new refugee organization . . . *The Washington Post* headlined one story on the conference, “YES, BUT—.” It noted, “it has been a disappointment, if not altogether a surprise . . . that delegates take the floor to say, We feel sorry for the refugees and potential refugees but—.”<sup>54</sup>

Motivated by a mixture of political and humanitarian reasons, President Rafael Trujillo of the Dominican Republic was the only nation who offered

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<sup>52</sup> “Kristallnacht,” in *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, last edited Sept. 3, 2025, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/kristallnacht>.

<sup>53</sup> Irving M. Abella and Harold Martin Troper, *None Is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe, 1933–1948* (University of Toronto Press, 2012), 17.

<sup>54</sup> Richard Breitman and Allan J. Lichtman, *FDR and the Jews* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), 109.

assistance. With help from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, a philanthropic organization that focused its efforts on aiding Jews in need throughout Europe, an agrarian settlement was created in the town of Sosúa, where seven hundred and fifty Jewish men, women, and children found refuge.<sup>55</sup>

Chapter 4 will span the beginning of World War II in Europe following an official declaration of war on September 3, 1939, through the immediate aftermath of the war. This chapter will be divided into three parts: Part I will cover the period prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor, and Part II will pick up after America entered the war. Part III will examine how the Holocaust and the early post-war period affected both American Jews as well as how it altered the socio-political climate in which they lived. Generally, there was widespread reluctance among Americans to become emmeshed in another European conflict following the devastation of World War I. Many clung to their isolationist views, preferring to focus on domestic issues rather than international affairs. Additionally, there were concerns about the degree of Jewish influence in American politics, and fears existed that that influence might be wielded to push the United States into an interventionist position.<sup>56</sup> Adding to this environment of fear and suspicion of Jews, the Alien Registration Act of 1940, referred to colloquially as the Smith Act because it was first introduced by Representative Howard W. Smith (D-VA), required all non-citizens fourteen and older living in the U.S. to register, be fingerprinted, and provide various types of personal information and affiliations.<sup>57</sup> This served to highlight and amplify the sense of otherness than many Jewish immigrants felt in their new homes.

Once America was drawn into the conflict, there was a concerted effort to curb Jewish refugees being admitted, even after irrefutable evidence of the atrocities being committed in Nazi-occupied Europe. As a result, the National Community Relations Advisory Council (NCRAC) was founded in March of 1944 by the Council of Jewish Federations with the purpose of aiding Jewish well-being and protecting their rights through active public

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<sup>55</sup> Josh Mack, "Sosúa: A Refuge for Jews in the Dominican Republic," published June 21, 2023, <http://mjhnyc.org/blog/sosua>.

<sup>56</sup> Edward S. Shapiro, "The Approach of War: Congressional Isolationism and Anti-Semitism, 1939–1941," *American Jewish History* 74, no. 1 (1984): 45, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23882497>.

<sup>57</sup> Elizabeth Burnes, "1940 Alien Registration," published May 20, 2021, <https://historyhub.history.gov/genealogy/immigration-and-naturalization-records/b/immigration-naturalization-blog/posts/1940-alien-registration>.

and legislative advocacy.<sup>58</sup> This chapter will, therefore, delve into the anti-war and pro-Nazi movements within the U.S. that were fighting with both words and deeds to keep America from joining forces in Europe against Germany. It will additionally explore how those forces intersected with and influenced the progression of antisemitism in the United States.

Examining the ways in which antisemitism in America evolved and manifested during this time period provides an incomplete picture unless also investigating what influenced that progression. To that end, each chapter will examine internal influences such as media coverage of anti-Jewish rhetoric and activities in Europe as well as the external forces that sought to sway popular sentiment and ultimately public policy. In the next four chapters, this text will therefore confront the notion of American Jewish Exceptionalism in an effort to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of antisemitism's role in American history while challenging conventional narratives of Jewish experiences in the United States.

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<sup>58</sup> Leonard Dinnerstein, "Anti-Semitism Exposed and Attacked, 1945–1950," *American Jewish History* 71, no. 1 (1981): 137, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23882008>.

## CHAPTER 2

# THE LEO FRANK AFFAIR AND ANTISEMITISM IN WORLD WAR I ERA AMERICA

The far-reaching consequences of the First World War profoundly shaped global politics, society, and culture for decades to come. The war brought about the collapse of four imperial dynasties, the death of millions of soldiers and civilians, and was considered so devastating that it became known as “the war to end all wars.” The impact of this cataclysmic event reverberated through all levels of society, profoundly affecting both those who fought on the battlefields in Europe and those who remained on the home front in America. The war not only redrew the map of Europe and shifted global power dynamics, but it also ushered in an era of social upheaval and unprecedented challenges to individual freedoms, as fears of foreign and domestic threats to the United States led to increased scrutiny and control of its citizens. Amid this atmosphere of heightened suspicion and social tension, longstanding racial biases deepened, and new forms of discrimination emerged, with antisemitism in particular gaining a more visible foothold in American society.

Initially, President Wilson held to the United States’ long-standing policy of isolationism, urging Americans not to sow division amongst themselves by picking sides in his Declaration of Neutrality on August 19, 1914. In that speech, he remarked, “The people of the United States are drawn from many nations, and chiefly from the nations now at war.”<sup>59</sup> This was especially true for Jewish Americans, as there had been an exponential increase in Jewish immigration from Europe in recent decades. The American Jewish Committee (AJC) produced a comprehensive report in 1914 that revealed a dramatic surge in the American Jewish population, documenting an increase from an estimated 251,000 in 1881 to approximately 2,350,000 by 1910, accounting for both births and deaths. More than one and a half

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<sup>59</sup> Woodrow Wilson, “August 19, 1914: Message on Neutrality,” transcript of speech delivered to Congress in Washington, D.C., Aug. 19, 1914, <http://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/august-19-1914-message-neutrality>.

million of that growth was from immigration, primarily from Eastern Europe.<sup>60</sup> One year later, the executive committee of the AJC remarked in its *Eighth Annual Report*, “the tragedy [of the war in Europe] becomes one of personal concern to every member of our faith.”<sup>61</sup> As previously discussed, many of the prominent Jews in America were from well-established families of German descent, while a growing number were from recent emigration from Eastern Europe. These foreign associations proved to be more than simply a “personal concern” for many American Jews, as their loyalty and patriotism were called into question when America entered the war two years later.

During World War I, there was a notable surge in anti-Jewish rhetoric, which was expressed in several noteworthy ways, including the use of stereotypes, scapegoating, and allegations of being in league with the enemies of the United States and in opposition to its ideals. During the war, anti-Jewish propaganda depicted Jews with familiar imagery and tropes of disloyalty, orchestrating the war to serve their own purposes, and profiteering from the suffering and sacrifices of other “real” Americans.<sup>62</sup> For example, the U.S. Military’s *Manual of Instructions for Medical Advisory Boards*, published February 14, 1917, contained a section entitled “Causes and Motives of Malingering” that stated, “the foreign born, and especially Jews, are more apt to malingering than native born; eastern Europeans more than western Europeans.”<sup>63</sup> In response, the president of the American Jewish Committee (AJC) sent a telegram on March 1, 1918, to President Wilson and the offices of the secretary of war, provost marshal, and surgeon general demanding the removal of the language that “gives official sanction to race prejudice and religious intolerance [and] constitutes an insult to men who have proven their devotion to our country.”<sup>64</sup> The revised 1918 edition of the manual removed the offensive content, stating in its preface that the instructions had been included “through an inadvertence.”<sup>65</sup> In fact, records indicate that rather than being prone to malingering, nearly half of Jewish

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<sup>60</sup> Joseph Jacobs, “Statistics of Jews,” *American Jewish Yearbook* 16 (1914): 342, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23600932>.

<sup>61</sup> “Eighth Annual Report of The American Jewish Committee: November 8, 1914,” *American Jewish Year Book* 17 (1915): 359, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23600776>.

<sup>62</sup> “Hang the Jew, Hang the Jew,” Anti-Defamation League, published Aug. 6, 2015, <https://www.adl.org/resources/news/hang-jew-hang-jew>.

<sup>63</sup> *Manual of Instructions for Medical Advisory Boards* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1918), 92.

<sup>64</sup> “Twelfth Annual Report of The American Jewish Committee,” *American Jewish Year Book* 21 (1919): 634, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23601024>.

<sup>65</sup> *Manual of Instructions for Medical Advisory Boards* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1918).

servicemen soldiers served in high-risk positions on the front lines in the infantry at a significantly higher-than-average rate, surpassing the Army-wide average of twenty-seven percent.<sup>66</sup>

In an article that appeared in February of 1919 in the *New York Times*, Governor Alfred E. Smith was quoted as saying “The man or men who doubt the loyalty of the patriotism or the devotion to our cause of the Jewish people of the east side speak without knowledge. In every way they have done their full part.”<sup>67</sup> For instance, approximately 200,000 Jews served in the American armed forces during the conflict, which constituted four percent of the total military personnel. This representation was proportionally higher than the three percent of Jews in the overall American population at the time.<sup>68</sup> Despite this, Jewish service members continued to encounter antisemitism within the military, ranging from subtle prejudice to overt discrimination by both fellow soldiers and superior officers. A Jewish soldier in the 77th Division of New York, Z. Sher, wrote to the *Forward* in 1919 that his company had “no lack of anti-Semites among the Christian boys.”<sup>69</sup> He described one of the men in his company, “an imbittered anti-Semite” named Truslow, who “believed that the Jews had crucified Jesus [and are] traitors to the land where they live.”<sup>70</sup> Such virulent antisemitism that was cultivated during World War I set the stage for further acts of prejudice and violence against Jews in the years that followed, but it was simply another expression of a phenomenon that existed long before.

By the early twentieth century, antisemitism was deeply ingrained in American culture; its manifestations, however, varied in both their explicitness and intensity. There were extreme instances of antisemitism, such as the Leo Frank Affair, which became a keystone moment in twentieth-century America that affected racial tensions in general and antisemitism in particular. Frank’s trial in 1913 and subsequent lynching in August of 1915 garnered a great deal of publicity in the media at the time, but he soon faded into the background of history. Although the case is one of the most scrutinized and much-debated legal episodes in American history, relatively few members of the general public in America today are

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<sup>66</sup> Lee J. Levinger, *Anti-Semitism in the United States: Its History and Causes* (Greenwood Press, 1973), 344.

<sup>67</sup> “Praise Patriotism of East Side Jews,” *New York Times*, Feb. 17, 1919, 4.

<sup>68</sup> Lee J. Levinger, *Anti-Semitism in the United States: Its History and Causes* (Greenwood Press, 1973), 343.

<sup>69</sup> Richard Slotkin, *Lost Battalions: The Great War and the Crisis of American Nationality* (H. Holt, 2005), 105.

<sup>70</sup> Richard Slotkin, *Lost Battalions: The Great War and the Crisis of American Nationality* (H. Holt, 2005), 105–106.

aware of the details of the case, and even fewer realize the long-lasting ramifications that resulted from what transpired both during and after his trial. If mentioned, it was often in the context of something else, or simply as “a victim of an anti-Semitic public.”<sup>71</sup>

Prior to Leonard Dinnerstein’s 1966 monograph on the Leo Frank case, which he called “one of the most infamous outbursts of anti-Semitic feeling in the United States,” there was little academic focus on Jewish life in America that did not concentrate on Jewish assimilation and prosperity.<sup>72</sup> While later historians acknowledge the role that antisemitism played in the trial, conviction, and lynching of Frank, some, such as Albert Lindemann, raise questions of whether or not it was of “decisive importance.”<sup>73</sup> Others have highlighted Franks role as an outsider – not only as a Jew, but as a wealthy, Northern industrialist. Historian Eugene Levy, for example, emphasized the interplay and conflict of race, referring to the Frank case as “the first well-focused incident of national interest in which the needs of blacks and of Jews seemed to have been in direct conflict.”<sup>74</sup> He clarified this statement with the following explanation:

Under stress such as produced by the Frank case, blacks and Jews, each viewing themselves as at the mercy of the majority society, usually sought to protect their own. For some Jews that meant substituting the “black brute” for Leo Frank. For some blacks it meant saving Conley and allowing that “Hebrew with millions for defense behind him,” to go to his death. Each group sensed its own weakness, and instinctively sought to offer up the other by emulating the prejudices of the majority.<sup>75</sup>

Nancy MacLean offered a new perspective lens through which to view the case, as she emphasized the roles of gender and sexual politics. This text recognizes the complexity of these multifaceted frameworks and therefore attempts to incorporate them all into the study. By utilizing a diverse set of viewpoints through which to examine the case, this work aims to provide a

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<sup>71</sup> Leonard Dinnerstein, *The Leo Frank Case*, revised ed. (University of Georgia Press, 2008), xi.

<sup>72</sup> Leonard Dinnerstein, *The Leo Frank Case*, revised ed. (University of Georgia Press, 2008), 7.

<sup>73</sup> Albert S. Lindemann, *The Jew Accused: Three Anti-Semitic Affairs (Dreyfus Beilis Frank) 1894–1915* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 237.

<sup>74</sup> Eugene Levy, “‘Is the Jew a White Man?’: Press Reaction to the Leo Frank Case, 1913–1915,” *Phylon* (1960–) 35, no. 2 (1974): 212, <https://doi.org/10.2307/274709>.

<sup>75</sup> Eugene Levy, “‘Is the Jew a White Man?’: Press Reaction to the Leo Frank Case, 1913–1915,” *Phylon* (1960–) 35, no. 2 (1974): 212–22, <https://doi.org/10.2307/274709>.