

Conspiracy

Henry Ford and the Jews: The Mass Production of Hate

by Neil Baldwin

Public Affairs. 432 pp. \$27.50

Reviewed by
Jonathan D. Sarna

WHY DO they hate us? This question, all too familiar from today's headlines, is not dissimilar to one asked by American Jews in the 1920's about a home-grown purveyor of hatred, the famed industrialist Henry Ford.

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Ford was no terrorist, and his depredations were verbal rather than physical, but as Neil Baldwin demonstrates in this timely book, the automaker's anti-Semitic ravings, published serially in the newspaper he owned, along with the mass distribution he gave to the notorious forgery known as *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, wrought untold damage in their day.

The series began in Ford's paper, the *Dearborn Independent*, on May 22, 1920, continued for 91 successive weeks, and was published immediately in book form as *The International Jew* (4 volumes, 1920-1922). The result was a palpable increase in anti-Semitic discrimination: to cite but one example documented by the historian Leonard Dinnerstein, the number of "Christians-only" advertisements in newspapers rose sharply.

In Germany, Adolf Hitler read Ford's writings in translation in the 1920's and cited them approvingly. He subsequently hung Ford's portrait in the waiting room of his private office, and in 1938, as chancellor, awarded him the *Verdienstkreuz Deutscher Adler*, "the highest honor given by Germany to distinguished foreigners." To this day, Ford's writings are sold in some Arab countries as well as in Latin America. All told, *The International Jew* has appeared in sixteen different languages and has been distributed in millions of copies. Like so many other classic works of hatred, it is now accessible to fanatics everywhere on the Internet.

THE FACTS concerning Henry Ford's virulent anti-Semitism, the humiliating public apology he was forced to make in 1927, and his subsequent private sponsorship of such notable hate-mongers as Father Charles Coughlin (the "radio priest") and the Reverend Gerald L.K. Smith (the "minister of hate") have been addressed by a number of writers. Neil Baldwin ably synthesizes the literature and adds fresh details.

Thus, Ford's highly publicized apology (drafted for him by Louis Marshall, then the president of the American Jewish Committee) turns out to have been motivated not only by a fear of lawsuits, several of which had been brought against him by Jews whom he had unfairly maligned, but also by a desire to shift the public's perception of him and his company. Anti-Semitism, in short, had proved bad for business.

In his apology, Ford promised "that the pamphlets which have been distributed throughout the country and in foreign lands will be withdrawn from circulation [and] that in every way possible I will make it known that they have my unqualified disapproval." As Baldwin shows, that never happened. Ford did very little to stop the spread of *The International Jew* abroad, and even warned on at least one occasion that "I might have to go after those Jews again." Complaining to friends that "the Jews" were persecuting him, he remained enmeshed in anti-Semitic activities down to his death in 1947.

But how and why did this brilliant inventor, who knew scarcely any Jews at all before he was twenty, come so to hate them? What caused him to see the "international Jew" as the "virtual ruler of many countries" and the fountainhead of all of the world's problems, from war to economic woes to changing sexual mores?

The answer is hardly obvious. Previous writers on the subject have had to content themselves with calling the origins of Ford's anti-Semitism "obscure," his motivations "unclear." The absence of critical Ford company records, many of which were intentionally destroyed, only deepens the mystery. Yet Baldwin, who has written illuminatingly on Thomas Alva Edison and his prejudices (some of them also anti-Semitic), is not easily daunted.

Baldwin begins in "McGuffeyland": the "ordered, rigid, and straightforward" world conjured up

for millions of 19th-century American schoolchildren by the famed *Readers* compiled by William Holmes McGuffey. Ford first encountered Jews through McGuffey, and the Jews he encountered there included the "alien" Shylock ("an inhuman wretch, incapable of pity"), the opponents of the apostle Paul ("the Jews caught me in the temple and went about to kill me"), and a variety of other unfortunates lusting for gold and "strangers to the morality contained in the Gospel."

Ford, it seems, memorized much of McGuffey, collected and reprinted his works, and in 1934 even had McGuffey's birthplace reassembled and enshrined at Greenfield Village, his quirky museum of Americana. Throughout his life, Baldwin suggests, the automaker carried with him the stereotypes that he had imbibed from McGuffey.

Of course, Baldwin goes on to acknowledge, "it is one matter to be exposed to biased images and received impressions," as millions of McGuffey-reading Americans were. It is "quite another to harbor them, and then quite another to assimilate, believe—and give vent to them." Here he summons to the witness stand two of Ford's most trusted lieutenants: Ernest G. Liebold and William J. Cameron. These men, he argues, played a central part in tipping Ford toward public anti-Semitism. Without them, he, like Edison, might have kept his prejudices more to himself.

Liebold, a German Lutheran known in Ford's circles as "the Prussian martinet," served as Ford's personal secretary and alter ego. He screened Ford's visitors, answered his correspondence, shielded him from critics, and in general carried out his dirty work. He also introduced him to known anti-Semites and coined the phrase—"the international Jew"—which would become Ford's best-known contribution to anti-Semitic rhetoric. As Baldwin demonstrates conclusively, Liebold not only pushed his boss's

anti-Semitism to new heights but also concealed from him the firestorm of criticism it ignited.

Cameron, a gifted journalist and wordsmith, added liberal doses of his own theology to Ford's populist, anti-intellectual brew. He was a follower of a 19th-century British religious movement, the "British Israelites," which held that the Anglo-Saxons had descended from the ten lost tribes of Israel and were God's true chosen people, whereas "Modern Hebrews" were subversive usurpers. Anticipating Nazi-era theologians, the British Israelites insisted that Jesus himself was not a Jew but an Anglo-Saxon or Celt. As Ford's paper duly reported, the two nations, Israel and Anglo-Saxondom, representing respectively the forces of evil and good in the world, were ultimately destined to clash in a great war, "the real Armageddon."

How much of this Ford read or

understood is debatable. As previous biographers have shown, his mind never expanded much beyond McGuffey's *Readers*. For most matters, he preferred to rely not on books but on intuition, and when that failed he would borrow ideas from trusted associates.

A possible exception was Ford's specific conviction, developed sometime around World War I, that "Jewish moneylenders" had gained control of the world's economy and that "German-Jewish bankers" were plunging the world into war. Baldwin believes (as did Louis Marshall) that the prime influence here was not Liebold or Cameron but David Starr Jordan, the first president of Stanford University, a world-renowned ichthyologist, and a leading pacifist and racist. In a 1912 book, Jordan argued that an "unseen empire" of Jewish bankers had gained control of the financial affairs of Europe,

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and was determining questions of war and peace. His ideas added still another ingredient to the stew dished up by Ford a few years later.

AS WITH all conspiracy theories, Ford's reduced the world's complexity to simplicity, personified the "unseen" forces that were destroying traditional ways of life, and fashioned an appropriately demonic scapegoat. The irony, largely overlooked by Baldwin, is that the man who thus took the lead in championing the old, pre-industrial world against modernity and all its works was himself a prime agent of the changes he decried. Even as Ford's newspaper attacked large corporations, Ford presided over one of the largest. Although the very word "international" was a term of abuse in Ford's lexicon, his company's interests reached around the world. And as for the social mores that Ford denounced and blamed on the Jews—changed styles in dress and music, the transformation of home and family life, the recasting of American business and agriculture, and much more—the automobiles and tractors that rolled off his assembly lines actually played a far greater role in introducing them.

At an unconscious level, then, did Ford's hatred of Jews mask an ambivalence over what he himself had powerfully helped to bring into the world by exploiting and extending the forces of modernization? Preferring to let the facts speak for themselves, Baldwin largely avoids such theorizing. Only in his afterword does he speculate, not altogether persuasively, that Ford found in the Jews "a target to blame for his boredom, disillusionment, and middle-aged unhappiness." Even less persuasively, he writes that with the decline of anti-Semitism in America, the story of Henry Ford and the Jews has begun "to take on an antique patina as an object lesson representing a bygone era." Reading this book about a millionaire industrialist turned obsessive fanatic, I

found the object lesson, in the aftermath of September 11, anything but antique.

Grand Strategy

Special Providence:
American Foreign Policy and
How it Changed the World
by Walter Russell Mead

Knopf. 345 pp. \$30.00

Reviewed by
Jacob Heilbrunn

FEW NOTIONS have been more persistent than the idea of American innocence abroad. The British historian and diplomat Lord Bryce once likened America's interest in the rest of the world to the traveler's report about snakes in Ireland: "There are no snakes in Ireland." More recently, Henry Kissinger has written that in its international dealings, the U.S. has been "torn between nostalgia for a pristine past and yearning for a perfect future," and thus "has oscillated between isolationism and commitment." Since September 11, such verdicts have acquired new force as the news media depict the country as having been on holiday for much of the 1990's.

Yet the last decade was not a period of American withdrawal from the world. On the contrary, the Clinton administration invaded Somalia, stationed a flotilla off Haiti, drove the Serbs from Kosovo, and bombed Somalia, Afghanistan, and the Sudan. As for the new Bush administration, the main complaint from Europe before September 11 was not that the U.S. was disengaged but that it was unilateralist, wantonly exercising its hegemonic power.

Nor were the 1990's exceptional

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in some way. As Walter Russell Mead argues in *Special Providence*, America has *never* been indifferent to foreign affairs. A senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, Mead seeks to trace and explain the rise of American power, and to endorse its more vigorous use. For Mead, whose first book, *Mortal Splendor* (1987), argued that the U.S. had overextended itself in the world and was headed for a crash, this represents something of a U-turn. As he now sees things, the key to America's continued success in international affairs is a fuller appreciation of our own considerable foreign-policy traditions.

SOME OF Mead's most illuminating chapters cover early American diplomacy. Not only has foreign policy always occupied a prominent place in our national councils, but most of the country's early statesmen spent a good part of their careers dealing with foreign powers. Of the first nine Presidents, Mead reminds us, six had served previously as secretary of state, and seven as ministers abroad. Still others—George Washington, Andrew Jackson, William Henry Harrison, and Zachary Taylor—had earned fame for commanding troops in the field. Experience in war, whether against the British, Indians, or Mexicans, was the norm, not the exception. In light of this record, Mead observes, it is little wonder that "within a generation after the Civil War, the United States became a recognized world power while establishing an unchallenged hegemony in the Western hemisphere."

Why have these chapters of our history been scanted or ignored? When it comes to European observers, Mead believes, sheer snobbery accounts for much of the disdain expressed for U.S. achievements in foreign policy. At home, he blames the "deep lack of interest in the history of American foreign policy" on the pervasiveness of European classical-realist thought in