

Handout: Anti-Semitism in the Second Empire

[Heinrich von Treitschke](#) (1834-1896) was one of the most prominent historians of nineteenth-century Germany and also the most politically engaged. "**The Jews are Our Misfortune**" (November 15, 1879)

"[. . .] Among the symptoms of a deep change of heart going through our nation, none appears so strange as the passionate movement against Jewry. A few months ago the oft-heard cry "Hep-Hep"¹ still echoed in Germany. Anyone is permitted to say unabashedly the harshest things about the national shortcomings of the Germans, the French, and all the other peoples, but any who dared to speak about the undeniable weaknesses of the Jewish character, no matter how moderately or justly, was immediately branded by almost the entire press as a barbarian and a religious bigot.² [...] Antisemitic leagues are banding together. The "Jewish question" is being discussed in excited meetings. A flood of anti-Jewish libels³ is inundating⁴ the book market. There is all too much dirt and crudity in these activities, and it is nauseating⁵ to note that many of those inflammatory writings apparently stem from Jewish pens. [...] But is all that hides behind this noisome⁶ activity really just the coarseness of the mob and business envy? Are these outbreaks of deep, long-restrained anger merely an ephemeral excrescence⁷, as hollow and baseless as the Teutonic Jew baiting of 1819? No; in fact, the instinct of the masses has correctly identified a serious danger, a critical defect in the new German life. It is no empty formula when we speak today of a German Jewish question.

When, with disdain, the English and French talk of German prejudice against Jews, we must answer: You don't know us. You live in fortunate circumstances that make the emergence of such "prejudices" impossible. The number of Jews in western Europe is so small that it cannot exert a palpable influence upon your national mores. However, year after year, out of the inexhaustible Polish cradle there streams over our eastern border a host of hustling, pants-peddling⁸ youths, whose children and children's children will someday command Germany's stock exchanges and newspapers. The immigration grows visibly, and the question becomes more and more grave: how can we amalgamate⁹ this alien people? The Israelites of the west and south belong mostly to the Spanish branch of Jewry, which looks back on a comparatively proud history and has always adapted rather easily to Western ways. In fact, they have become for the most part good Frenchmen, Englishmen, and Italians. This is true to the extent that we can appropriately expect from a people of such pure blood and such pronounced peculiarity. But we Germans have to deal with that Polish branch of Jewry, which has been deeply scarred by centuries of Christian tyranny. As a result of this experience, it is incomparably more alien to the European and, especially, the German essence.

What we have to demand of our Israelite fellow citizens is simple: they should become Germans. They should feel themselves, modestly and properly, Germans – and this without prejudicing their faith and their ancient, holy memories, which we all hold in reverence¹⁰. For we do not want to see millennia of Germanic morality followed by an era of German-Jewish hybrid culture. It would be sinful to forget that a great many Jews, baptized and unbaptized, were German men in the best sense. [...] But it is equally undeniable that numerous and mighty circles among our Jews simply lack the goodwill to become thoroughly German. It is painful to speak of these things. Even conciliatory words will be easily misunderstood. Nevertheless, I believe that many of my Jewish friends will concede, though with deep regret, that I am right when I assert that in recent times a dangerous spirit of arrogance has arisen in Jewish circles. The influence of Jewry on our national life, which created much good in earlier times, nowadays shows itself in many ways harmful. Just read the History of the Jews by Graetz.¹¹ What fanatical rage against the "arch-enemy," Christianity. What lethal hatred against the purest and mightiest representatives of the Germanic essence from Luther right up to Goethe and Fichte! And what empty, insulting self-glorification! [In Graetz] it is demonstrated in constant, spiteful tirades that the nation of Kant was educated to humanity only through the Jews, that the language of Lessing and Goethe has become receptive to beauty, intelligence, and wit through Heine and Börne. What English Jew would dare defame the land that shielded and protected him in such a way? And this benighted contempt against the German goyim¹² is in no way merely the attitude of an isolated fanatic." [http://www.germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/pdf/eng/411_Treitschke_Jews%20are%20Misfortune_112.pdf; 06/02/12]

Task: Take notes on Treitschke's view of the "Jewish question". Focus on his demands & accusations concerning the Jews. How does he refute the argument that anti-Semitism is just "coarseness of the mob and business envy"?

1 Supposedly of medieval origin, the "Hep-Hep" cry was the signal for the anti-Jewish riot.

2 fanatic

3 A false publication that damages a person's reputation

4 flooding

5 disgusting

6 very offensive

7 flüchtige Aufwallung

8 hosenverkaufend

9 incorporate

10 respect

11 Heinrich Graetz (1817-91) wrote the first general history of the Jews in eleven volumes, the last of which appeared in 1875.

12 non-Jew

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Reasons for anti-Semitism in the Second Empire:

- Jewish “threat to the nation” (rooted in century-old anti-Jewish tendencies):
 - International appeal (cultural network independent from state borders): Jews “people without roots” → opposed to national cause
 - Success in business: Jews enter upper class
 - Jewish participation in liberal movements (opposed to nationalism)
 - Expansion of Jewish community in Germany (especially in Berlin)
 - Jews are blamed for economic struggles (1873), allegedly manipulating social & economic order

Means of discrimination:

- Employment of stereotypes: e.g. usury(= charging excessive rates of interest), blood-libel myth(=accusation of child murder for religious purposes)
- Racial distinction of Jews
- Demagogic rhetoric:
 - Language: “Jewish parasitism”, “Jewish conspiracy”, Jewish ““lust for world domination”
 - March 1879: Wilhelm Marr (journalist) coins the term “anti-Semitism”, and proclaims in a pamphlet the “Victory of Jewry over Germandom”
 - Heinrich von Treitschke (professor of history in Berlin): “The Jews are our misfortune” (1879)
- Treitschke's influential polemic sparked Berlin Antisemitism Conflict: Public assaults on Jews in Berlin; discussion of the “Jewish question”
- Inclusion of anti-Semitic ideas in party programmes and election campaigns, e.g. Christian Social Workers' party (led by Adolf Stöcker)

Bismarck's attitude:

- Initially, he supported liberalism (because it advocated unification), the Jews being mostly liberal
- After unification, Bismarck did not depend on liberals any longer, turned towards conservatism/autocratic rule
 - He targets Jews as part of Germanization (e.g. Settlement Law, 1886)
- Bismarck corresponds courteously(= politely) with anti-Semites, gives them indirect encouragement

Reactions:

- April 11, 1880: Jewish lawyer Emil Lehmann addresses Leipzig Jews on the Anti-Semitic Movement
 - Explains absurdity of conceiving of Jews as “Semites”
 - Accuses Adolf Stöcker, the leader of an anti-Semitic party, and the composer Richard Wagner of furthering anti-Semitism in Germany; sees general hostility (in religious, political, and social terms)
 - criticizes Heinrich von Treitschke’s polemical attack on the Jews (“The Jews are our misfortune”)
 - Proposes ideas on how to improve integration and assimilation of Jews in Germany
- November 12, 1880: 75 well-known scholars and other public figures sign a declaration against anti-Semitism, published in Berlin's *National-Zeitung*
 - Turning point in “Berlin Antisemitism Conflict”: More liberal middle-class people voice their resentment of anti-Semitism
- Outcome: Insufficient popular support prevents predominance of anti-Semitism in Germany
 - Jews do not lose their faith in a congenial relationship between Christians and Jews in the Second Empire

Further information:

http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/subpage.cfm?subpage_id=98

<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/1603-anti-semitism#anchor7>

<http://remember.org/guide/History.root.modern.html>