

Is Trump good for the Jews?

Paul Morris

'President Trump is the greatest President for Jews and for Israel in the history of the world, not just America, he is the best President for Israel in the history of the world...and the Jewish people in Israel love him...' (Retweet, Donald J. Trump, 2019):

"But you're not going to support me because I don't want your money. ... You want to control your own politicians, that's fine. ... I'm a negotiator like you folks; we're negotiators. ...Is there anyone in this room who doesn't negotiate deals?" (Donald Trump, Republican Jewish Committee, 2015):

"A lot of you are in the real estate business, because I know you very well. You're brutal killers, not nice people at all ... But you have to vote for me – you have no choice." (Donald Trump, Israeli American Council, 2019):

"I think any Jewish people that vote for a Democrat – I think it shows either a total lack of knowledge, or great disloyalty." (Donald J. Trump, 2019):

"The only kind of people I want counting my money are short guys that wear yarmulkes every day." (John O'Donnell quoting Donald Trump, c1987):

"I am the least anti-Semitic person that you've ever seen in your entire life." (Donald Trump, 2017):

"I know nothing about white supremacists." (Donald Trump, 2016):

Introduction – Is modernity good for the Jews?

The President of the United States features strongly in the Jewish imaginary.⁸ American presidents appear in poems, plays and novels, and Jews scrutinise their every word and gesture for hidden prejudice or implicit stereotyping, that is, for the potential positive or negative impact on Jews. This interrogation, of course, is not

limited to presidents but extends to all sentient life and situations. Jews feature strongly in the imaginary of the forty-fifth US President, Donald Trump, as evidenced by his frequent references, pro-active courting of Jewish lobbies and groups, and his attempts to politicise antisemitism along party lines. Jewish copy is equally obsessed by Trump, spurred on by the ways in which Jews feature as one of his most recurrent obsessions.

The long history of Jewish political life lived under the tutelage of other empires and powers has been a litany of forced slaughter, exile, and conversion. With few exceptions of restricted autonomy and excluding degrees of communal self-governance, Jews have lived on sufferance, that is, at the whim and grace of the rule of others. Jews have sojourned under Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks, Romans, Christians, Persians, Muslims – diverse sultanates and caliphates - and again under Christians – monarchs, bishops and barons – and then under post-Christian rulers. Jewish survival has often been dependent on highly placed Jewish intermediaries who advocated for their community, from Moses and Daniel to the Court Jews (*Hof Juden*) of the European principalities.

These political models and experiences are deeply embedded in Jewish scripture and liturgy. Security has been temporary and fragile. The new pharaoh in Egypt enacts a new policy of enslavement and exclusion, and as the *Haggadah*, the text of the Passover Seder Night, exhorts us to remember, the Jewish suffering in Egypt while provisionally relieved by the Exodus, is but part of an endless pharaonic series, 'in every generation', when once again 'they stand up against us to destroy us'.⁹ Or again, in the biblical *Book of Esther*, Haman, the king's chief minister, considers the Jews to be 'aliens and outsiders', a threat to be annihilated, however, the people are saved by the intervention of Esther and her uncle Mordecai. These annals of a colonised people rendered them highly attuned to signs and indications of changes in the attitudes of those who ruled over them, or those who sought to influence such rulers. Survival so often depended on competently reading the zeitgeist – will it be good for the Jews?

Modernity for Jews has been marked by three unprecedented and unplanned developments. First, the rise of a new model whereby Jews would no longer be a despised, colonised minority but could fully participate as equal citizens in the life of post-Christian democratic states, a process that began with the French and American revolutions. Secondly, the rise of Zionism, a political, and later cultural and religious, programme for Jewish autonomy in the land of Israel, leading to the

establishment of *Medinat Yisrael* in 1948. Third, the rise of political and racial antisemitism culminating in the Shoah and the murder of six million. This third development undermined the first, and served to promote the second.

America, particularly in the aftermath of the pogroms at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and again following the decimations of holocaustic Europe, came to play an especial role as the exemplar of this new dream of suffrage, inclusion and freedom as opposed to sufferance, bondage and exclusion. America was indeed the *goldene medina*, the golden land of liberation from the antisemitic histories of Europe, and beyond. Has America been good for the Jews? The answer since the settlement in late nineteenth century has been an unequivocal yes.

The democratic pluralism of the European polities did not fully survive the destruction of the heartland of European Jewry, except in Britain, and France; Germany is an exceptional case. More recently the dramatic rise of antisemitism across Europe, and in both these countries, has led Jews to question the continued viability of these diaspora communities. In France, the Jewish community has been subjected to a series of terrorist attacks and the rise in antisemitic attitudes and actions by both the populist right and by some among the Muslim communities. Jewish emigration from France to Israel and elsewhere is at an all-time high. In Britain, the reported left-wing intersectional antisemitism within the Labour Party, seemingly sanctioned by its last leader, Jeremy Corbyn, became both a major electoral issue in 2019, and led the Jewish community to question the security and certainty of their future inclusion in British life. Half of British Jews reported that they would consider leaving a Britain led by Corbyn and Jewish enquiries about emigration are at unprecedented levels. Is Europe good for the Jews? This is a live and urgent question on the agenda for the numerically declining Jewish communities across Europe.

With comparatively high birth rates and immigration, the population of Israel has doubled since 1980, currently to a shade over 9 million in 2020, some 6.7 million of whom are Jewish, out of an estimated world Jewish population of just over 14.5 million. Outside of Israel, the vast majority of Jews live in America, with these two growing at the expense of other communities, with a few exceptions, such as Australia. Zionist ideology, particularly after the Holocaust, highlighted the fragility and uncertainty of diasporic Jewish life, and predicted the inevitable rise of antisemitism and the ensuing existential dangers for Jewish communities. Crudely,

the stark, and getting starker, choice for Jewish futures, until recently was Jewish majority-rule in Israel, or inclusion in democratic pluralistic America. Are Israel and America good for the Jews? The answer for the last seventy years has been a resounding yes.

So-called religiously motivated terrorist attacks – Muslim, and populist, white ‘Christian’ nationalist – have risen globally, in the aftermath of the immigration crisis of 2015-16 and following the 2016 US presidential election. Antisemitism has become a mainstream political thematic in Hungary, France, Austria, Poland and Italy, and the outlawing of shechita (Jewish animal slaughter) and male infant circumcision is on legislative agendas in a number of Western European and Scandinavian countries sending the message that Jews cannot be at ‘home’ there and that post-Holocaust Jewish inclusion across Europe is not guaranteed.

Trump, Israel and the Jews – Antisemitism in the White House?

Donald Trump is as yet a not fully explicated phenomenon – populist, out of his depth fool, incapable and incompetent, a political game-changer, champion of the dispossessed, carpet-bagger, a limited repertoire reality television entertainer, racist, white nationalist, anti-Semite, psychopath, pathological narcissist, or a combination of some or all of these? For example, his direct and daily communication via Twitter is wholly new, in terms of both reach and response, and is still being studied systematically. What can be asserted with confidence is that he has presided over the rewriting of the codes for the acceptable norms of public, political and civic behaviour and discourse, directly and indirectly fostering an incivility that revels in prejudice, shallow two-dimensionality, and brutal gnostic bifurcation.

To return to our question, is Trump good for the Jews? How would we determine this? While there are no absolute measures, the aim is to assess whether Trump has in fact been a good or a bad thing for Jews by explicating Trump’s relationship with Jews; his understanding of Jews and use of stereotypes about Jews; his policies about Jews; and, to contextualise these in terms of a series of significantly impactful marker-events and the Jewish and other responses to these. While the focus is explicitly on Jews, it is the case that the persecution of other minorities and prejudice directed against them, or anti-immigration policies generally, or the entertaining of racial and religious stereotypes, all negatively impact Jews. Even with this qualification, the analysis is fraught with complications and

complexities. Does a Trump retweet have the same significance as an original? Can Trump's actual positions be read from his public statements and how important are the different contexts, such as tweets, speeches or rally addresses? How changed is President Trump from his own earlier incarnations? Can we hold Trump to the usual standards of consistency or coherency? What is the metric for 'good for the Jews'? Here, it minimally refers to the experience of security and safety on the part of American Jews in the sense of life lived without the wide scale or government sponsored antisemitism of the past, with genuine opportunities for pluralistic participation, and the positive recognition and inclusion of Jewish religious and ethnic difference.

Trump grew up in Queens, one of the boroughs of New York with a sizeable Jewish population. His developer father had associations with Jewish contractors and businesses and is reported to have been a donor to a number of Jewish causes. In 1927 Fred Trump was arrested and discharged for disturbing the peace at a Klu Klux Klan rally, although the rally may have been directed at Catholics.¹⁰ Fred Trump was a sometime worshipper at New York's Marble Collegiate church, whose pastor, Norman Vincent Peale, the progenitor of positive thinking, presided at the wedding of Trump and Ivana in 1977, and is part of Donald Trump's positivity being often devoid of reality reflecting his tendency to conflate thinking that it is so, with it actually being so. Donald Trump has had extensive dealings with Jewish developers, property, legal, and business people in New York, and a number of these transitioned with him to the White House, including Jason Greenblatt, David Friedman, and the now infamous, Michael Cohen.

Beginning with the 2015-16 electoral campaign, Trump courted Jewish voters directly and indirectly. Directly by addressing major Jewish lobbies and other groups and indirectly by highlighting policies designed to enlist evangelical Christian voters in relation to support for Israel. With the latter, he was remarkably successful, securing four out of five evangelical votes, with such voters accounting for a quarter of all US voters. He was notably less successful with Jewish voters, three-quarters of whom voted for his Democratic opponent, much like other ethnic and religious minorities.¹¹ The profile of Orthodox Jewish voters, however, in terms of family and other conservative values, and unreserved support for Israel, is closer to that of white evangelical Protestants than the majority of American Jews, and it was only among these minority Orthodox Jewish communities that Trump fared appreciably better.¹²

While Israel does loom large in the American Jewish consciousness, it often appears to be just as, or even more, important to evangelicals, so much so that a sizeable element of the so-called Israel lobby actually consists of Christian supporters for Israel.¹³ An American evangelical pilgrim that I met in Jerusalem last year explained that there were two promised lands, the US which was based upon the biblical model of the other promised land, the State of Israel; equally “gifts of God” and “objects of love and support.”¹⁴

At the Republican Jewish Coalition’s candidates forum in Washington D.C. in late 2015, Trump shocked and dismayed American Jews with his use of classic antisemitic tropes of Jews as seeking to control “their” politicians with “their” money; as a community consisting of wheelers and dealers; and, as a community duty bound to “like” him because his daughter was Jewish. Watching the video, Trump appears oblivious to the offence and seemingly admires “negotiators” and those who want political control and favours in return for their support – as if everyone knew Jews were like this, and isn’t that wonderful! At a meeting last year (2019), he returned to this theme of Jews primarily motivated and wholly obsessed by money, who would not vote for Elizabeth Warren because it would impact negatively on their wealth.

His three charisms to his evangelical base – the transfer of the American Embassy to Jerusalem; the withdrawal from the Obama/Iran nuclear agreement; and, the firm undertaking not to ‘reward’ those deemed Palestinian terrorists – were all gifts initially offered to Jews at the March 2016 AIPAC (American Israel Public Affairs Committee) conference. At this gathering, Trump offered a fourth charism to Jews and evangelicals with his announcement that “when I become president the days of treating Israel like a second-class citizen will end on day one”.¹⁵ The first three, and perhaps the fourth too, have been fulfilled since 2018. For some evangelicals there is a messianic quality to the Trump-driven dramatic changes that have transformed the politics of the Middle East, enhanced by the recent ‘deal of the century’ (aka, the Israel and Palestine peace plan) presented without formal or official Palestinian consultation.¹⁶ Trump is indeed significantly more popular among Israeli Jews and many diaspora communities than among American Jews.¹⁷ Is Trump good for Israel? The majority of Israelis and non-American diaspora Jews say yes, while American Jews are more cautious.

Parallel to his attempt to appeal to evangelical and Jewish voters, Trump courted the “patriot” populist nationalist voter. Introducing his vision for America’s

place in the world, candidate Trump announced that “‘America First’ will be the overriding theme of my administration,” and referred to his policy as “America First”. This strongly resonated with the 1940 America First Committee led by the notorious anti-Semite aviator, Charles Lindbergh. The associations were immediately clocked by Jewish commentators and organisations and also by right-wing and antisemitic groups. It is interesting to reference, Philip Roth’s novel, *The Plot Against America* in which Lindbergh, chair of the America First Committee, defeats Franklin D. Roosevelt in the 1940 presidential election, forges a treaty with Hitler, and introduces America First Party policies to Americanise Jews.¹⁸ Roth’s fiction uncannily predicted the new leader of the party of America First, President Donald Trump, and the policies of some of his followers.¹⁹

Trump’s populist campaign also brought to the fore his provocative and exclusionary account of an American identity under siege, threatened by an overwhelming number of culturally different criminal and terrorist Muslim or Mexican migrants. In a series of events, he challenged the legitimacy of the identities and loyalties of Hispanic, Middle Eastern and South Asians Americans, with the suggestion that the integration of these and other migrants could never be to such a degree so as to be assured of their unreserved, patriotic loyalty to America. For many Jewish commentators, Trump revived historical memories of earlier prejudices and exclusions and raised anew the questions of whether Jews were (still) white or fell into the category of those who would or would not belong in the great again America. Jewish voices opposed his anti-immigration and exclusionary rhetoric in support of the vision of an America open to migrants and refugees, as it had been for their parents and grandparents.

As his presidential campaign continued, Trump, from behind in the polls, progressively resorted to this unconscionable use of antisemitic tropes, language and imagery. Within the broader context of his increasingly vitriolic campaign against immigrants and immigration, Trump’s white nationalist and racist retweets proliferated alongside the rising focus on the antisemitic canard of a Jewish billionaire-funded conspiracy pulling the strings behind globalism, immigration, Wall Street and the American economy, and that was also, of course, bank-rolling and controlling candidate Clinton. These tendencies were explicitly encapsulated in Trump’s retweeted visual poster of Hilary Clinton with a six-pointed Star of David emblazoned with the words “most corrupt candidate ever” amid overflowing piles of

cash – conveying the total control of Clinton by Jewish monied interests. After extensive criticism the tweet was taken down.

Towards the end of his campaign, Trump's desperate team reached the climax of its antisemitic outreach with a widely condemned advertisement nakedly utilising anti-Jewish tropes and expressly designed to appeal directly to white nationalists and antisemitic conspiracy theorists without the usual reservations and restraints. The advertisement, that aired on all major networks, portrayed the Jews controlling world politics and the global economy. It promoted the narrative that Jewish international financiers were illegitimately grasping the wealth of hard-working Americans by focusing on the faces of three very prominent and very rich Jews: Goldman Sachs head, Lloyd Blankfein; Board of the Federal Reserve Bank chair, Janet Yellen; and, billionaire broker George Soros. These three were referred to by the authoritative narrator's voice as "those who control the levers of power in Washington" and, represent "global special interests", before condemning those that "partner with these people who don't have your good in mind" (aka Hilary Clinton). At President Trump's inauguration alongside his chosen pastors and priests was Los Angeles/Hollywood celebrity Rabbi Marvin Hier, the director of the Simon Wiesenthal Centre, and Trump supporter and potential court Jew ("He is the most important person in the world. What he does can not only affect American Jewry and world Jewry, it also affects the state of Israel very much"), and Trump's new team included a number of prominent Jews, including Stephen Miller, Gary Cohn and Steven Mnuchin.²⁰

From these earliest days, Trump generated considerable unease for America's Jews. In January 2017 Trump gave an address at the UN Holocaust Memorial Day that omitted to mention that the Jews were victims of the Nazis. The appointment of Stephen Bannon, the former editor of Breitbart News, a principal platform for the alt-right and other antisemitic and racist ideologies, including explicitly antisemitic financial conspiracy theories, as the President's senior strategist, was also the cause of considerable Jewish disquiet. Bannon himself espoused antisemitic views and had extensive personal links and relationships with antisemitic figures across America, and beyond. Breitbart was, however, pro-Israel in an evangelical fashion while being racially exclusive and exclusionary for America, that is, Israel is good for all Jews when they choose or are forced to live there.²¹

Eight months into the Trump presidency, a protest about a historical monument in Charlottesville led to the 'Unite the Right' rally, organised in large part

by alt-right leader Richard Spencer. Spencer had taken part in a November 2016 Trump electoral victory conference at the National Policy Institute in Washington where he claimed that Jewish power had forced the media to restrict its reporting of support for Trump, and that white America under its new President was finally “awakening to their own identity”. He concluded with “Hail Trump! Hail our people! Hail victory!” which led to a standing ovation and a plethora of Hitler salutes making for disturbing media coverage. Spencer’s attempt was to bring together the alt-right, neo-Nazis, Aryan nations, American Renaissance, KKK chapters, militias and survivalists, white supremacists, white nationalists, the newer Identitarian and other groups. There were also discussions about forging links with the populist parties in Hungary, Poland, France, Holland, Italy, England, and with Identitarian and other white nationalist groups in Europe. It was planned as a turning point in American political history with a new President unbelievably open to right-wing racist and populist ideas, whereby the marginal would transition to the political mainstream. Unprecedented and until then unthinkable, a march led by armed neo-Nazis bearing torches and singing “Jews will not replace us”, an ‘army”, made their way through an American city. At one point a synagogue with Jews inside was surrounded and setting fire to it was mooted. There were clashes with Antifa and other antifascists. The police witnessed but effected little intervention. A neo-Nazi drove his vehicle deliberately into anti-fascist protesters killing 32-year-old Heather Heyer, and injuring others.

The horror of the televised march and the killing led even Spencer to concede that this was most likely the last rally of this kind and that the general American public was not yet ready for the realities of the “race war”, at least not in the attempt to retake the American street. American Jews, and Jews around the world, were shattered and shocked at the actual footage, more like images from the 1930s than twenty-first century America. The vehemence and hatred of the racist marchers who had travelled the country to be there was visceral and their numbers hard to dismiss as local fringe elements. Right-wing and racist websites and social media instantly proffered and maximally reposted the fake news that the violence had been deliberately orchestrated by Soros solely to undermine Trump. Right-wing racism had gone populist and public and while the majority of Trump supporters were clearly not rabid antisemitic racists, almost all the white nationalist racist groups supported him and heralded him as their champion.

The marchers were widely condemned in the US and across the world. In a turning point for Trump, he told the press with total sincerity that there were “very fine people” on both sides. The President’s staggeringly inadequate and morally inappropriate response displayed a primary failure of understanding prejudice, antisemitism or racism, and this, as much as the events at Charlottesville served to intensify Jewish, and progressive and minority, anxieties and fears.

Addressing Jewish audiences, Trump continually conflates Jews and Israelis, as if they were simply interchangeable, by referring to Netanyahu as “your prime minister” and Israel as “your land”, and he castigated his stereotyped Jews “for not loving Israel enough”.²² He party-politicised his support for Israel in response to his claims of antisemitism on the part of four progressive Congresswomen of colour – Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY), Ilhan Omar (D-MN), Ayanna Pressley (D-MA), and Rashida Tlaib (D-MI) – for their vocal and intersectional support of Palestinian groups and condemnation of Israel. Trump informed American Jews that “... any Jewish people that vote for a Democrat, I think it shows either a total lack of knowledge or great disloyalty”, and “if you vote for a Democrat, you’re being disloyal to Jewish people and you’re being very disloyal to Israel.” The charge of dual loyalty – that Jews will put Jewish ethnic and co-religionist interests before that of their country – has a long antisemitic history co-terminus with the possibility of citizenship for Jewish minorities in France after the revolution. And, it surfaced there and elsewhere in Europe after 1870, in antisemitic populism and in show trials such as that of French Jewish army captain Alfred Dreyfus in 1894. This claim of the widescale Jewish disloyalty to America was picked up widely and endorsed on antisemitic and racist sites. The revival of this antisemitic charge was roundly condemned by the Anti-Defamation League and other Jewish groups.²³

In December 2019 in front of an audience largely consisting of evangelicals, Trump signed an executive order designed to address the protection of Jewish students from “antisemitism”, in particular boycotts of Israel, on American campuses: “It shall be the policy of the executive branch to enforce Title VI against prohibited forms of discrimination rooted in antisemitism as vigorously as against all other forms of discrimination prohibited by Title VI.” This entailed extending Title VI of the Civil Rights Act to include Jews under the provisions outlawing discrimination on grounds of race and/or nation-origin, thus allowing the US government to withhold funding from colleges and universities if they fail to address such discrimination against Jewish students. Opposition by American Jewish groups objected to Jews

being defined in this way and viewed as an ethnic or national rather than religious group under this law. Again, whatever Trump's intention – and his self-portrayal as the defender of his Jews – and some Jewish commentators indeed welcomed his innovative extension of protection for Jewish students, this redefinition was endorsed by some Christian and antisemitic groups and confirmed for them that Jews do constitute a non-American 'alien nation'.

George Soros, a powerful Jewish negotiator and dealer, who displays just the sort of qualities that Trump might be thought to admire, plays a pivotal role in Trump's imaginary. Trump has claimed time and again that Soros is financing the 'caravan' that menacingly is ever-approaching America's southern border, and that will only be finally stopped with his wall, or the demise of Soros. Trump's repeated suggestion that Soros is funding the 'refugee caravan' grants credence to the antisemitic myth that world Jewry is conspiring to bring immigrants into America to replace white people, as reflected in the "Jews will not replace us" refrain. When asked outside the White House whether Soros was funding the migrant caravan, Trump replied, "I wouldn't be surprised. A lot of people say yes." Besides backing the Democratic Party and all manner of progressive causes, Soros was also falsely accused of funding the campaign against the appointment of Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court. More importantly, Trump has repeatedly accused the near omnipotent Soros of being behind 'Russiagate' and the Mueller Report, and the Ukrainian affairs that led to his impeachment. There is evidence to support the view that Trump genuinely believes in Soros' power and reach.²⁴ Trump's demonic Soros draws on the demonised Soros that has played such a significant role in Hungarian populist politics since the 1990s. The arch-demon Soros also features heavily in racist politics in Poland, Italy and across Europe alongside the alt-right and racist right in the US where Soros is held to be personally responsible for the Washington 'swamp', the call for greater immigration, and for funding Antifa and other anti-fascist groups that attempt to counter right wing street violence. Trump has repeatedly called out Soros for his real and imagined support of migrants and other causes, a clarion call perpetuating antisemitic conspiracy theories in the echo chambers of the racist right. This Soros link plays a murderous role in the mindset of the man behind the single most devastating antisemitic attack to have taken place so far during Trump's presidency.

In October 2018, a white nationalist opened fire in and around the Tree of Life synagogue centre in Pittsburgh during a sabbath morning service killing eleven

Jewish worshippers and injuring others in the deadliest antisemitic act in American history. The terrorist, Robert Bowers, legal owner of more than twenty weapons including an AR-15 style assault rifle, had been a regular poster and re-poster on Gap, a platform for racists, white supremacists, anti-Semites and conspiracy theorists, committed to the 'freedom of speech'. He was spurred to action to address the "slaughter of my people" by the "migrant caravans" of "invaders" funded and led by Jews, "the enemies of white people". These Jewish "children of Satan ... control the nation", and fund and orchestrate bringing "Muslims into the country" via HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society), a refugee protection NGO, run by the "Jewish international oligarchy" – his version of the Soros conspiracy. He also expressed his reservations about the president, "Trump is a globalist, not a nationalist. There is no #MAGA as long as there is a kike infestation", perhaps a reference to Jews in the White House. There have been many further attacks mooted on social media and a further synagogue murder outside San Diego. That attacker rhetorically demanded: "Is it worth it for me to live a comfortable life at the cost of international Jewry sealing the doom of my race?" More recently there have been a spate of attacks on Jews in Jewish neighbourhoods in the New York area. Overnight Bowers had transformed synagogues and Jewish neighbourhoods from places of communal security and physical and spiritual sanctuary to places of potential threat and deadly danger for America's Jews.

Trump thus has an "alarming tolerance for antisemitic supporters and even a tone-deaf enthusiasm for some of their iconography" and time and again has been slow to condemn the white nationalist racism or the antisemitism of his source tweeters, neo-Nazis, David Duke, the alt-right, the antisemitism and racism of Republican representatives and senators. This is nowhere more hauntingly evident than in his response to Charlottesville.²⁵ This tolerance has proved to be a recurring feature of his presidency. To take two very recent examples. The White House afforded press credentials to Florida pastor Rick Wiles of the TruNews organisation in order to report on Trump at the 2020 World Economic Forum in Davos. Wiles has a long history as a preacher and propagator of antisemitic conspiracy theories. Referencing that Schumer, Nadler and Schiff are all Jewish, as were a number of the principal witnesses against Trump, he designated the impeachment of the president last year as a "Jewish coup" planned by the 'Jewish cabal' as accurately predicted in the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.²⁶ And of course, Trump's own repetitions of "Shifty Schiff", and so on, and the fact that his own lead lawyer is also Jewish although

acceptably so as he's also an evangelical messianic Christian preacher. The only other outlet sharing these fantasies of Jewish power were the Israeli press but not without caution as to the dangers of such views.²⁷

Most recently the blogosphere and social media and the protest rallies of those swing-state 'liberators' from Covid 19 restrictions have claimed links between the Jews and the virus. These range from the conspiracy theories that Jews run the World Health Organisation, via the false news that Jews brought the virus to New York, to the Jewish globalist plot to cull white European populations. At the Columbus, Ohio, liberation rally one poster portrayed a rat wearing a Star of David with the message, "the real virus". The Jewish press, blogosphere and social media have fretted and kvetched over Trump's many designations of the coronavirus as the 'invisible enemy'²⁸ Is Trump aware that he is using the language of the medieval libels against the Jews? Does it matter? Is this a dog whistle for the extreme right? Is there a connection between this rhetoric and the conviction that the real plague is the Jews, or that they are behind it? Is the Easter timing of Trump's message merely accidental, or deliberately Judas time? The president's Easter promise was that as soon as "the invisible enemy" is banished "prosperity and good times" for all will return as it is only the invisible enemy that is thwarting all our efforts for the great economic boom.²⁹ The medieval version proclaimed that ridding the world of the Jews would bring Christ's return and heaven on earth. There is evidence of a pattern in which Trump's tweets or retweets generate extensive further and more extreme social media traffic which sometimes impacting behaviour too.

Trump and his Jewish family

President Trump's relationship with Jews is both "unique and personal."³⁰ He counts Jews among his closest advisers and supporters, such as Sheldon Adelson, and is the first US president to have a Jewish family. How can he be antisemitic with a Jewish daughter, son-in-law and three Jewish grandchildren? His daughter converted to Orthodox Judaism and subsequently married Jared Kushner, a real estate magnate, son of a real estate mogul, in an Orthodox Jewish ceremony. The Trump-Kushner family are strongly Zionist, keep the sabbath, observe the Jewish holy days, and maintain a kosher home. The Kushners represent a new development in American Jewry, a post-Holocaust generation that retains Orthodox identity, in its modern Orthodox form, the law (*Halakah*) together with worldly knowledge and ways. This new generation and the next are supporters of the more explicitly

nationalist parties in Israel, most often *Likud* with strong personal and religious links to Israel and in particular, to religious Zionism. This community has been hugely supportive of Jewish day schools in America and traditional Jewish textual education in Israel and America.³¹ Domestically, this new generation, weaned on business rather than the progressive union politics of the early part of the twentieth century, are increasingly Republican supporters sharing values, agendas and activism with evangelical Protestants. Andrea Bernestein explores the rise of the Kushners alongside the Trumps as an interesting but rather uncritical narrative of the American dream in her recent *American Oligarchs: The Kushners, the Trumps and the Marriage of Money and Power*.³² Ivanka is the most powerful Jewish woman in America as a special advisor to her father, a position she shares with her husband, who has a staggeringly broad array of portfolio responsibilities. Jared operates in many ways like a court Jew to the Trump monarch, in that his position is entirely dependent upon Trump's personal support. Trump was reported as being upset as to why his beloved daughter had "to convert to anything". Trump himself and his supporters frequently claim that his Jewish family precludes the possibility of antisemitism on his part, however, the evidence is that this family affair has not limited his antisemitic attitudes or discourse. And the same could be said about his extensive network of Jewish acquaintances and advisors.

Conclusion – Is Trump good for the Jews?

Trump's flawed strategy which he appears to consider ingenious is to continually distance ('ingenious distancing') himself from his own rhetoric and associations. He doesn't know people he knows and didn't intend the responses to his sometimes very thinly disguised racist and antisemitic attacks. He was misunderstood, misrepresented, his earpiece was faulty, or he never said it. His own antisemitism, that is, generalising selected characteristics and attributing these to all Jews, frequently and naturally using stereotypes, insisting on defining Jews and their beliefs rather than listening to them, or allowing for their demonstrable diversity, and propounding conspiracies by invisible enemies secretly controlling the world guided by nefarious plans for total domination. Trump has used Soros and other Jews shamelessly in this fashion, strategically and something more than that, with horrendous consequences. At the same time, Trump in his own words "loves Jews", and he does seem to, or at least to love his stereotypes of them.

Is his antisemitism, the philosemitism of the East Asian popular publications that extol Jewish stereotypic values like acquiring money, being business savvy and control of global markets? Or, is Trump's love/hate attitude to Jews more like Zygmunt Bauman's idea of allo-Semitism?³³ This does go some way to capturing the ambiguities of Trump's seemingly paradoxical attitudes in the sense of his being both philosemitic and antisemitic simultaneously. But a closer look, suggests that Trump means it when he reports his love for Jews and for Israel too. But equally this same love is inflected with the crudest of hateful stereotypes. Jews are dealers, rich, motivated solely by money, astute and good with money, tough, loyal, family-minded and he loves them for all these tropes, that are all too readily and seamlessly incorporated into conspiracy theories and gnostic worlds of absolute good and evil - it is good to be good with money but evil to be too rich and use your money for the devil's democratic or educational purposes. It is not that Jews don't fit easily into fixed categories; they so readily do.

In the last three and a half years of the Trump presidency the unthinkable has happened. Antisemitism has returned to American public life in ways not seen since the 1930s. Hatred of Jews and things Jewish has been legitimated not only in the discourse of the racist and populist right but increasingly in mainstream political discourse. Additionally, the conscious degrading and undermining of the mainstream media as fake, owned, and wholly unreliable, mutes the reporting of racism and antisemitism, just at the time when antisemitic conspiracies appear to abound in the mythic narratives of both the political right and left. Social media antisemitic trolling and doxing have reached new levels destabilising the right of Jewish actors to safely attempt to counter the rising antisemitism. The freedom of speech for antisemites is effectively denying this same right to others. Jews were massacred in Pittsburgh and San Diego, and there have been hundreds of attacks against Jews in New York, Los Angeles and other cities alongside thousands of other reported and unreported antisemitic incidents. Paradoxically, the Jews most likely to support Trump have been the most likely to be assaulted and attacked.

Antisemitism is back in America again, even if it never really departed it was marginalised and muffled by the unwritten boundary lines of acceptability that respected freedom rather than the licence for extreme provocation and hate. You knew where to find it. The security and safety of Jewish life in America has been questioned as never before. The Trumpian radicalisation of American politics into core and periphery, included and excluded, rich and poor, white and other, Christian

conservatives and progressive globalists, has served to deny the American Jewish community its once assumed sense of axiomatically belonging as fellow Americans. When at rallies American white supremacists openly replace 'USA' with the refrain 'Jew SA', this is their call is to reclaim their beloved USA from Jewish control. The emancipation contract implicit in the modern Jewish democratic participatory model that so relied on America as its exemplar, has now been foundationally challenged raising again the limits of this formerly robust sole alternative to Zionism.

Increasing numbers of Americans subscribe to versions of 'the great replacement' plan by liberal multiculturalists to replace European stock with non-European immigrants.³⁴ In the US, replacement theory has become linked in a novel way with the older myths of Jewish programmes for world domination focused on the 'caravan' looming ever closer to the American southern border. Jewish financiers, it is claimed, are funding the caravan to effect the American version of the great replacement.³⁵ Here the old and new forms of white supremacy are seamlessly and creatively blended to rally the marginalised around their genuine fears concerning immigrants and then to understand this as part of a larger orchestrated plan linked to the progressive Left and their Jewish billionaire puppet-masters. Thus, the very attempt at uniting the disparate, spectral, white racist, right-wing elements has generated new intersectional forms of racist antisemitism that have found a much broader bandwidth.

I am not suggesting that American Jewish community is on the verge of collapse but only that the challenging of assumptions of Jewish modernity has created a new gap. And, like America itself, the Jewish community is hugely divided between supporters and opponents of Trump, albeit in rather different proportions than the nation. One of the impacts of Trump's perceived antisemitism has been to generate new relationships and bonds based on this adversarial identity among the American Jewish Left which, while not as unified as it often triumphantly claims, has developed new solidarities in opposition to Trump's racist populism.³⁶

In summary, the first three and a half years of Trump's presidency have witnessed an unprecedented rise in the number of violent and fatal attacks directed at obvious Jews, in synagogues or when wearing items of distinctive Jewish clothing.³⁷ The FBI reports that for 2018 the overwhelming proportion of religious attacks in America were directed at Jews. The antisemitism and conspiracy-theory laden fringe have impacted steadily and heavily on the sense of wellbeing of American Jews. And, while 'Unite the Right' failed to integrate and mobilise middle

America to openly proclaim that 'Jews will not replace us', their views have more and more main street traction as they border on becoming commonplace and normalised.³⁸

Trump has managed to reopen the very question and options of modernity for many Jews. Assumptions that have lasted are shaky and America might not be as *goldene* a destination as it once was. Jews in America happily come to understand themselves as a religious or ethnic group, a designation that is unthreatening to the collective American national identity, only for Trump to kick this into touch by raising again the Jewish nationality of American Jews. This effectively challenges and potentially undermines the safe spaces that Jews have inhabited for seven decades or longer and propels American Jews into a new, uncharted and potentially unsafe space. Bernard-Henri Lévy, writing as a French Jew fully aware of the post-revolutionary emancipation contract, seemed overblown and overly bleak with his, "I wish to warn my Jewish American brothers and sisters of the danger I perceive from the vantage point of a French Jew all too familiar with antisemitism. I wish to warn them that they are under siege." This now seems apposite and prophetic.³⁹ But it is not the antisemitism that is as important as the challenge to the agreement that kept them safe and it is this question that Trump has raised, challenging American Jewry's greatest asset, optimism about Jewish life in America. Jewish colonised history has twenty-five centuries of duration and Trump thumpingly reminds us that the new democratic deal for Jews is only a little over two centuries old in a history that seems less linear by the minute. Trump is a threat to the American Jewish community, and he has so far singly failed to bring security or prosperity to Israelis or Palestinians, and actually might have further destabilised the region. And while we can clearly see that Trump is part of a much wider populist challenge built on the failure of existing democratic systems to deliver, is Trump good for the Jews? No.

References

Oliver Ayers, 'Fred Trump, the Ku Klux Klan and Grassroots Redlining in Interwar America', *Journal of Urban History* (2019), pp.1–26.

Zygmunt Bauman, 'Allosemitism: Premodern, Modern, Postmodern', in Bryan Cheyette and Laura Marcus (eds), *Modernity, Culture, and "the Jew"* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1998).

Andrea Bernestein *American Oligarchs: The Kushners, the Trumps and the Marriage of Money and Power*. (New York, W.W. Norton & Company, 2020).

- Aomar Boum, 'A Moroccan Kabbalist in the White House: Understanding the Relationship between Jared Kushner and Moroccan Jewish Mysticism', *Jewish Social Studies*, 22/3 (2017), pp.146-157.
- Judith Butler, 'Why Is Bannon's Antisemitism Considered Alright?', *Jewish Social Studies*, 22/3 (2017), pp.182-185.
- Renaud Camus, *You Will Not Replace Us!* (Paris, Chez l'auteur, 2018).
- Sean Durbin, *Righteous Gentiles: Religion, Identity, and Myth in John Hagee's Christians United for Israel* (Leiden, Brill, 2018).
- Jonathan Safran Foer (ed) and Nathan Englander (tr), *Haggadah* (Penguin, Hamish Hamilton, 2012).
- Jonny Geller, *Yes, But Is It Good For The Jews? A Beginner's Guide, Volume 1* (New York, Penguin, 2006).
- Nahum Glatzer (ed), *The Passover Haggadah* (New York, Schocken, 1979).
- Bernard-Henri Lévy, 'Jews: Donald Trump Is A Huge Threat', January 22, 2019, <https://forward.com/opinion/417936/wake-up-american-jews-donald-trump-is-a-huge-threat/>.
- Douglas Murray, *The Strange Death of Europe: Immigration, Identity, Islam* (London, Bloomsbury, 2018).
- Philip Roth, *The Plot Against America* (New York, Houghton Mifflin, 2004).
- Armin Rosen, 'Trump's Jews', *The Tablet*, July 15, 2016 <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/news/articles/trumps-jews>.
- David Rubin, *Trump and the Jews* (Shiloh, Shiloh Israel Press, 2018).
- Binjamin Segel, *A Lie and a Libel: The History of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (London, University of Nebraska Press, 1995).
- Jake Turx, 'The Exclusive Ami Magazine Poll //What Orthodox Jews really think about President Trump' *Ami Magazine*, December 11, 2019. <http://www.amimagazine.org/2019/12/11/the-exclusive-ami-magazine-poll/>.
- Jonathan Weisman, *(((Semitism))) Being Jewish in America in the Age of Trump* (New York, St Martin's Press, 2018).

¹ DonaldJ.Trump@realDonaldTrump August 21, 2019. Trump retweeted the shock jock, conservative talk radio host and conspiracy theorist, Wayne Allyn Root's hyperbolic praise.

² <https://www.npr.org/2015/12/03/458329895/trump-to-jewish-republicans-im-a-negotiator-like-you-folks>.

³ <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2019/12/donald-trump-anti-semitic-remarks>

⁴ <pic.twitter.com/E3jSpxMH7>.

⁵ John O'Donnell, the former president of the Trump Plaza Hotel & Casino, as reported in *Trumped! The Inside Story of the Real Donald Trump – His Cunning Rise and Spectacular Fall* (New York, Simon & Schuster, 1991).

<https://ew.com/article/1991/05/31/trumped-inside-story-real-donald-trump-his-cunning-rise-and-spectacular-fall/>. Other examples of explicit antisemitism include Trump's tweet (April 25, 2013)

concerning the 'Daily Show' and its host's Jewish background: "I promise you that I'm much smarter than Jonathan Leibowitz — I mean Jon Stewart @TheDailyShow. Who, by the way, is totally overrated", <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/327076720425451523?lang=en>.

⁶ <https://www.cnbc.com/2017/02/16/donald-trump-i-am-the-least-anti-semitic-racist-person-that-youve-ever-seen.html>.

⁷ <https://www.timesofisrael.com/donald-trumps-anti-semitism-controversies-a-timeline/>.

⁸ The use of the definitive article in the title and the first sentence in relation to 'the' Jews both reflects the usage by Jews and their enemies, and, of course, always requires qualification. Is it good for the Jews? Is both the framework for serious, albeit religio-centric or ethnocentric, enquiries, and also a species of Jewish in-jokes. Jonny Geller proffers the science of Judology: "It's easy to answer the question is it good for the Jews. Add the 'Anti-Semitic Potential' that is, the open and obvious threat to the Jews to the 'Impact on the World', 10 years or more; then multiply by the 'The J-Factor', the level of 'Jewishness' this equals the potential Tzurus (trouble) indicator; and then finally divide by the mystical Kabbalistic number 'seven", Jonny Geller, *Yes, But Is It Good For The Jews? A Beginner's Guide, Volume 1* (New York, Penguin, 2006). In the 1996 general election in Israel, in the final stages of Benjamin Netanyahu's first electioneering for prime minister, he launched a successful chutzpah filled advertising campaign, 'Bibi is good for the Jews!"

(Nahum Glatzer (ed), *The Passover Haggadah* (New York, Schocken, 1979), p.31; or for a more contemporary version, Jonathan Safran Foer (ed) and Nathan Englander (tr), *Haggadah* (Penguin, Hamish Hamilton, 2012), p.35.

⁹ See, https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/mvke38/all-the-evidence-we-could-find-about-fred-trumps-alleged-involvement-with-the-kkk for details of Trump's possible involvement; also, for context, Oliver Ayers, 'Fred Trump, the Ku Klux Klan and Grassroots Redlining in Interwar America', *Journal of Urban History* (2019), pp.1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0096144219858599>.

¹⁰ However, it was hardly a victory for Clinton who received a historic low 'Jewish vote' largely due to her support for the Iran deal and Obama's Middle East policies. The Jewish democratic vote may have played a role on her losses in Ohio, Pennsylvania and Florida. The US voters residing in Israel (30,000) split their vote: Trump 49% and Clinton 44%.

¹¹ Jake Turx, 'The Exclusive Ami Magazine Poll //What Orthodox Jews really think about President Trump' *Ami Magazine*, December 11, 2019 <http://www.amimagazine.org/2019/12/11/the-exclusive-ami-magazine-poll/>. Turx traces the growing support by Orthodox American Jews for Trump, highlighting policies supporting Israel, religious freedom for their communities, particularly in relation to the education of their children, and parallels their tolerance of Trump's links to the racist right with

evangelical acceptance of Trump's evident moral flaws. For an earlier snapshot from the same Orthodox publication, see <http://www.amimagazine.org/2018/08/01/trump-and-the-orthodox-jewish-community-an-independent-poll-by-ami-magazine/>.

¹³ 76% of American Jews have an emotional attachment to Israel and 95% of them report favourable views of Israel (Gallup, <https://news.gallup.com/opinion/polling-matters/265898/american-jews-politics-israel.aspx>).

¹⁴ For an insightful and excellent theological reading of American Christian Zionism, see, Sean Durbin, *Righteous Gentiles: Religion, Identity, and Myth in John Hagee's Christians United for Israel* (Leiden, Brill, 2018).

¹⁵ <https://time.com/4267058/donald-trump-aipac-speech-transcript/>.

¹⁶ Franklin Graham, son of Billy Graham counselled America's millions of evangelicals that they could in fact vote for Trump with all his moral baggage as he was typologically the Persian emperor Cyrus, the 'messiah'/anointed one (Isaiah 45:1), who would in turn fulfil God's plans by saving us from Babylon and its swampy whores, see, <https://religionnews.com/2018/10/04/the-trump-prophecy-includes-troubling-parallels-for-american-democracy/>.

¹⁷ In addition to the new US embassy in Jerusalem, Trump's administration has introduced sanctions against those deemed Palestinian terrorists, closed the PLO mission in Washington, D.C. and radically reduced American funding to the PA (Palestinian Authority), extended the recognition of the legitimacy of Jewish settlements in Judea and Samaria (West Bank) and the Golan Heights, and is sponsoring a peace plan that has been interpreted as being overly supportive of Israel. There is even a village in the Golan now renamed Trump Heights/Ramat Trump (טרמפ רמת).

¹⁸ Philip Roth, *The Plot Against America* (New York, Houghton Mifflin, 2004).

¹⁹ <https://www.timesofisrael.com/adl-to-trump-come-up-with-something-other-than-america-first/>.

²⁰ Stephen Miller along with Jeff Sessions and Stephen Bannon were the intellectual and informed populist grunt during the latter part of the campaign and the core of the 'policy team' in the West Wing.

²¹ Judith Butler, 'Why Is Bannon's Antisemitism Considered Alright?', *Jewish Social Studies*, 22/3 (2017), pp.182-185.

²² It is this stereotyping that permits Trump to see Zionists like Giuliani as more Jewish than Jewish Democrats. In December 2019 at the White House Hanukkah party, Trump informed the American Jews present that Israel was "your country," and at the Republican Jewish Coalition gathering in April 2019 he spoke of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as "your prime minister."

²³ The 2014 Anti-Defamation League survey on global antisemitism reported that "the most widely accepted anti-Semitic stereotype worldwide is: 'Jews are more loyal to Israel than to this country/the country they live in.'"

²⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/lior.felsenstein.3/videos/10218529224994795/>, Lev Parnas, one of Giuliani's sidekicks reported that Trump repeated and believed the conspiracy that Soros was behind Russiagate and his problems with Biden and Zelensky in Ukraine, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/lev-parnas-dishes-on-kushner-maduro-and-soros>. Fiona Hill, the Russian expert witness at the impeachment hearings reported that the Soros conspiracies were rife among Trumpians and she referred to them as "the new Protocols of the Elders of Zion", <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/IG/IG00/CPRT-116-IG00-D010>;

https://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2019/11/21/fiona_hill_anti-semitic_conspiracy_theories_about_george_soros_are_the_new_protocols_of_the_elders_of_zion.html; <https://www.salon.com/2019/11/22/fiona-hill-lays-waste-to-the-george-soros-conspiracy-theory-at-the-heart-of-trumps-ukraine-defense/>.

Parnas also released a videotaped meal with Trump in which he reported that the Chief Rabbi of Ukraine had rendered Donald Trump into Hebrew letter/numbers resulting in 424 which using gematria (Kabbalistic numerology) also 'spells/numbers 'Messiah, son of David', and that when the Jews of Ukraine are praying for the messiah they are praying for Donald Trump! Welcome to the Trump twilight zone.

Roger Stone play a role in the dissemination of the Soros myth during Trump's election campaign, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/31/us/politics/george-soros-bombs-trump.html> and <https://www.bbc.com/news/stories-49584157>.

²⁵ Armin Rosen, 'Trump's Jews', *The Tablet*, July 15, 2016

<https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/news/articles/trumps-jews>.

²⁶ <https://www.snopes.com/collections/debunker-11-30-2019/>;

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/26/business/media/trunews-white-house-press-credentials.html>

Wiles also claimed that he had previously been denied such credentials due to the influence of George Soros. See also, <http://bit.ly/37dMwlp>.

²⁷ <https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/.premium-trump-impeachment-holds-pitfalls-and-perils-for-american-jews-1.8131087>.

²⁸ Donald J Trump@realDonaldTrump 8 April 2020.

²⁹ Donald J Trump@realDonaldTrump 10 April 2020.

³⁰ David Rubin, *Trump and the Jews* (Shiloh, Shiloh Israel Press, 2018) 14, an uncritical hagiography of the best ever president for the Jews.

³¹ Something of the range of this support is indicated in Aomar Boum, 'A Moroccan Kabbalist in the White House: Understanding the Relationship between Jared Kushner and Moroccan Jewish Mysticism', *Jewish Social Studies*, 22/3 (2017), pp.146-157.

³² (New York, W.W. Norton & Company, 2020).

³³ The term was coined by Artur Sandauer in the 1980s and developed by Zygmunt Bauman, ('Allosemitism: Premodern, Modern, Postmodern', in Bryan Cheyette and Laura Marcus (eds), *Modernity, Culture, and "the Jew"* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1998.) Bauman argues that it is a "radically ambivalent" admixture of philosemitism and antisemitism, arising from undefinable categories rather than heterophobia.

³⁴ Replacement theory, in its recent guise, has its origin in Renaud Camus, *You Will Not Replace Us!* (Paris, Chez l'auteur, 2018), see also, the journalistic, bestselling, palatable version, Douglas Murray, *The Strange Death of Europe: Immigration, Identity, Islam* (London, Bloomsbury, 2018).

³⁵ Benjamin Segel, *A Lie and a Libel: The History of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (London, University of Nebraska Press, 1995).

³⁶ Is the Democratic Party still good for the Jews? Yes, albeit much more so for the Biden rather than the Sanders version.

³⁷ See the ADL (Anti-Defamation League) for their annual reports on antisemitism and their wonderful *Hate on Display™ Hate Symbols Database*, <https://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resource->

[knowledge-base](#). Also, see,

<https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Religion/Submissions/SimonWiesenthalCenter.pdf>.

» Jonathan Weisman, *(((Semitism))) Being Jewish in America in the Age of Trump* (New York, St Martin's Press, 2018) presents a spirited and worrying account of the alt-right and the social media and other campaigns by a growing number of anti-Semites.

» Bernard-Henri Lévy, 'Jews: Donald Trump Is A Huge Threat', January 22, 2019,

<https://forward.com/opinion/417936/wake-up-american-jews-donald-trump-is-a-huge-threat/>.