

The New Anti-Antisemitism: Interview with Professor Charles Selengut

Frank Kaufmann

May 11, 2020



Professor Charles Selengut continues his important scholarship, taking on challenging and controversial issues with courage and rigor.

In this episode of the PWPA Scholars interview series Professor Selengut discusses his recent article "[The New Anti-Semitism](#)" published in The Jewish Standard , in which he posits the dire prospect that Jewish life in America teeters on the brink of radical change, a kind perhaps too haunting to entertain.

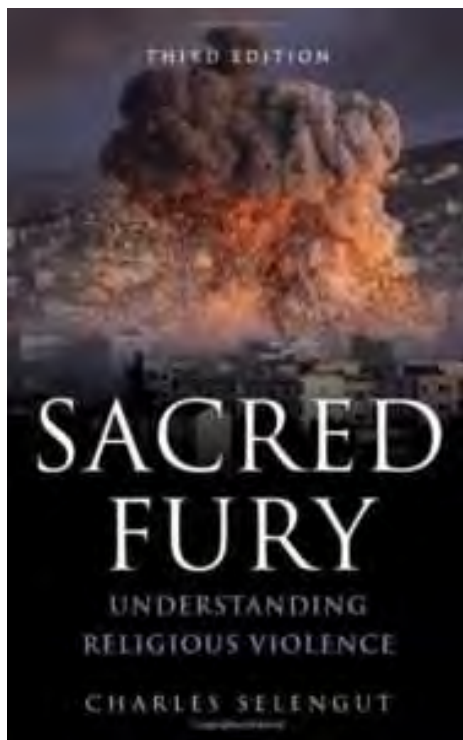
[The interview](#) examines evidence, implications, and causes. It is captivating:

Near the opening of the article, Selengut writes:

The current wave of anti-Semitic knifing and murderous attacks against Jews and Jewish institutions all over the United States, most prominently in the greater New York area but also in places like Texas and Pittsburg, rightly have frightened and terrorized many Jews about their safety in the United States. Rarely a day goes by without a report of harassment or violence in Jewish neighborhoods. These horrific attacks, however, are but an outward sign of the radically changed position of Jews and Judaism in America.

The article, "[The New Anti-Semitism](#)" is [here](#):

Find Professor Selengut's [Sacred Fury](#) here:



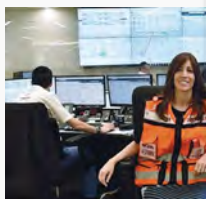
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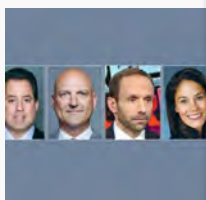
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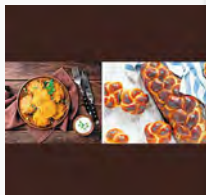
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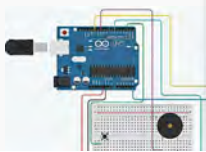


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The new anti-Semitism

By DR. CHARLES SELENGUT

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The current wave of anti-Semitic knifing and murderous attacks against Jews and Jewish institutions all over the United States, most prominently in the greater New York area but also in places like Texas and Pittsburg, rightly have frightened and terrorized many Jews about their safety in the United States. Rarely a day goes by without a report of harassment or violence in Jewish neighborhoods. These horrific attacks, however, are but an outward sign of the radically changed position of Jews and Judaism in America.

This is not at all to minimize this spate of violence, but to see the terror as emerging from frightening new manifestations of anti-Jewish political and cultural ideologies emanating from elite circles in government, academia, and the arts. These unprovoked violent attacks often are carried by racists and deranged individuals, but they are encouraged by the growth of now-acceptable anti-Semitic and anti-Israel rhetoric from leading political officials, including members of Congress and among some leading leftist progressive intellectuals. This new anti-Jewish violence is not simply criminal but has roots in the now respectable anti-Semitism that seeks to displace Jews from their position in the United States.

This view of the American Jewish situation may be unpopular, and sometimes unconventional and unpopular views are simply wrong, even foolish. At times, however, they are prophetic. Only the future can tell.

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Ze'ev Jabotinsky, the inspiration and leader of the Revisionist Zionist movement in pre-war Poland, took what was then, in the 1930s, widely unpopular positions, predicting that European Jewry was approaching a terrible fate. He talked about mass killings and organized persecutions against then-well-established European communities. In a speech he delivered in Warsaw in July 1938, Jabotinsky offered a doomsday prophecy. “I see a terrible picture ... the volcano that will soon spew out its flames of extermination,” he said. He was alarmist and his warnings were ignored, and the European Holocaust did come.

I do not think at all that America’s Jews find themselves in a similarly precarious situation. America’s history of tolerance, its freedom of religion, and its strong civil rights legislation all protect religious, racial, and sexual minorities. Still there are disturbing dangers facing the Jewish community in the United States. And it is best both for the Jewish community and for the Americans of all backgrounds to be aware of the movements and trends that threaten the condition of the American Jewish community.

Change is a constant in the long Jewish history, and Jews must remain fully aware of and vigilant about impending dangers.

For Jewish immigrants the United States was once the “goldene medine,” the golden land, a place where Jews could live as full citizens without the governmental discrimination that was a reality in the lands from which they had had migrated. In America, Jews found economic and educational opportunity as they had in no other country. Indeed, America was a wondrous land for Jews. Arriving in large numbers from Germany in the middle of the 19th century and in massive numbers from Eastern European lands in the early 20th century, the Jewish immigrants adopted quickly to American ways. By the later part of the 20th century, Jews reached the highest levels in American society; in business, in government, in university life, in the arts and sciences, and today they remain an affluent

and prominent element in American life.

It is a mythic tale. Senator Joseph Lieberman, an observant Jew, was a nominee for the vice presidency of the United States, and three Jewish Justices now are serving on the Supreme Court. Dozens of American Jews are members of Congress. World-renowned Jewish American university professors and researchers have been awarded the Nobel Prize, and Jewish authors are among the most distinguished members of the American literati. Notably, there are Saul Bellow, a Yiddish-speaking author whose writing style is considered among the best examples of midcentury literature, and Bernard Malamud, as well as the bestselling Philip Roth. In business and finance as well, American Jews have reached great affluence as creative entrepreneurs and innovators, contributing to America's economic successes.

Despite this wonderful history and the many glorious Jewish achievements, the situation of the American Jewish community now has been radically transformed. Increasingly among influential progressive movements and academic groups, Jews are no longer welcomed. Once lauded for their liberal and charitable activity on behalf of human rights, economic equality, and workers' rights, American Jews now are viewed as part of a white elite that has encouraged economic inequality and the subjugation of racial minorities. And most serious of all, there is widespread anger at what many progressives view as Jewish support of the xenophobic and racist state of Israel.

Many American Jews, the majority of whom were and are staunch supporters of liberal and progressive democratic political movements, understandably refuse to recognize the radically different — and in my view now precarious — situation of American Jewry. Liberalism, its progressive politics, and its support for unions, minority rights, and the working class was the natural home for the masses of Jewish immigrants, and this stance continued for generations. As one contemporary Jewish college student explained, given his family history and his Jewish roots, "it shouldn't be a surprise that so many young Jews, myself included, can't imagine being anything else other than political progressives."

This view is entirely understandable. The Democratic Party and its progressive programs were good for immigrant Jews as well as for other minorities, legislating for religious equality, workers' rights, and protection for the needy and the elderly. It all was consonant with Jewish values and culture. Liberalism and progressive social policies were good for Americans and good for Jews and accorded well with traditional Jewish culture.

The sad and painful reality is that large portions of the progressive left now have turned against the State of Israel, viewing it as a colonialist entity illegally occupying Arab lands. This view of Israel has not been confined to legitimate political disagreement, but has led to a rejection of American Jewish supporters of the Israeli state, who now are viewed with suspicion as supporters of a racist state.

I do not think it too extreme to say that for the many in the progressive left, Jews— even those with impeccable progressive histories and credentials — now are shunned as unworthy political partners.

This current perception of Jews as all deeply Zionist and opposed to peace and equality in the Middle East has resulted in a general stigmatization of all Jewish people — leftists, conservatives, religious or secular. It appears that to many progressives, the very fact of Jewishness itself is now a reason to refuse to cooperate and to refuse to include Jewish people in progressive political action.

This erroneous categorical treatment of all Jews as against Palestinian political rights, of seeing all Jews as advocates for Israeli extremist policies, has resulted in discrimination, harassment, and sometimes violence against Jews particularly in some, including some elite, universities. Not infrequently, progressive meetings or political rallies for better wages for working people, for immigrant rights, for health care turn into anti-Israeli and anti-Jewish demonstrations. This is particularly the case in university

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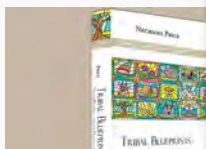
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settings. In a moving New York Times op-ed essay, Bruce Flaton, a sophomore at George Washington University and a self-proclaimed progressive and supporter of Palestinian rights, bemoaned that his leftist colleagues still viewed him as an enemy of the left. "I am a left-wing Jew. Yet I am called 'baby killer' and 'apartheid enabler,'" he wrote. He described how in his experience any variant of Zionism — including support for an independent Palestinian state — is considered racism.

Jewish and Israeli students often are harassed and physically threatened at some of America's most prestigious universities. Ofir Danon, a student at Columbia University and the daughter of the Israeli ambassador, Danny Danon, was regularly bullied and called baby killer and terrorist. Israeli speakers are frequently interrupted, to the point where their appearances are cancelled. Alan Dershowitz is a civil libertarian and strong supporter of free speech but is now regularly, harassed booed and threatened during his appearances on college campuses because of his support of Israel.

To those outside academia, this may appear difficult to imagine, but in many university settings to be seen as an identifying Jew is to invite scorn and derision. I experienced this at an academic conference on the Middle East conflict, where in the midst of my scholarly comments, one rather well-known political scientist shouted, "How many Palestinian babies did you people kill today?" Fortunately, the majority of the other participants shouted him down. But the discomfort and anger in me continued.

The comments I made were not political, but that did not matter. To be known as an identifying Jew and a supporter of Israel is grounds for rejection and harassment in most academic settings. Some Jewish academics have the courage to be vocal in support of Israel, but many others do not disclose their pro-Israel feelings.

It is not just in academic settings where Jews are stigmatized. In many political rallies and protests, in demonstrations protesting racism or poverty or in support of immigrant rights, Jews are unwelcome. Both their support for Israel and their economic success make them unworthy partners in progressive politics. Linda Sarsour, then one of the leaders of the Women's March on Washington, spoke for many when she told Jewish progressives that they were unwelcome to join progressive events because of their support of Israel. As she put it, "how can you be against white supremacy in America and the idea of being in a state based upon race and class, but then you support a state like Israel that is based on the idea that Jews are supreme to everyone else?"

Several progressive Jewish groups, like Jews for Racial and Economic Justice, a generally anti-Israel group, attempted to challenge this view. They explained that despite their supposed whiteness and economic success, prejudice, discrimination, and violence against Jews still exists. Progressives, however, refuse to recognize both the negative consequences of historical anti-Semitism and similarly will not acknowledge the increasingly serious rise of anti-Semitic violence, both in the attacks on Jewish institutions and the street violence against Jews in chasidic communities.

To many contemporary leftist movements, Jews, despite all protestations, are viewed as either part of the white elite, who take advantage of the poor and minorities, or they are seen as Zionists who support a dangerous and xenophobic Israeli state and therefore are unwelcome in progressive political action. The old stereotypes of the devious and money-grubbing Jew are unfortunately still alive in elements of the American left.

The now well-known Muslim congresswomen Ilhan Omar gave voice to this view when she tweeted that for Jews "It's all about the Benjamins," quoting from an entertainer's ode to the power of money. Sadly, there was no immediate or outright censure of her statement, either by progressive groups or her Democratic colleagues. Even after the horrific attack and murders at a kosher grocery in Jersey City, an official of the NAACP, speaking at a New Jersey education conference, told the group that Jews took unfair advantage of city budgets to support their religious institutions.

Who were those m

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The rejection and negative labeling of Jews has left many Jews feel isolated and politically homeless, uncomfortable in what they believed was their natural habitat in America. The Jewish liberal religious denominations particularly have identified both theologically and politically with the liberal left, and this has contributed to their growing sense of alienation and anxiety over the Jewish future. This growing anti-Jewish rhetoric unfortunately has not remained political and ideological, but has encouraged and legitimated the strong pockets of latent anti-Semitism that always existed but now could emerge and have respectable allies and justifications.

It is no accident that leftist anti-Jewish and anti-Israeli rhetoric have emboldened the virtually everyday violence against Jews all over the country. This does not mean that the Democratic left is violent, but the result of their talk and positions has brought out long-submerged anti-Jewish sentiments. Progressives and minorities, have, in their view, much to be disappointed with the social and economic inequalities in American society, and the Jews are now increasingly the scapegoat for their anger and disappointment.

The progressive left is but one element in the rise of anti-Jewish sentiment. Perhaps less well known and acknowledged is the continued rise and importance of virulently anti-Semitic groups associated with the Christian Identity movement. For these groups, there is a war going on in the United States between the forces of good, represented by Christian Identity believers, and the forces of evil represented by a satanic Jewish world conspiracy. Jews are viewed as the archenemy of white Christians. In their view, their Lord and Savior cannot return to usher in an end time era of world peace until this satanic element is destroyed.

Militant Christian Identity groups see the coming apocalypse as a race war between Aryans — who include all white northern Europeans — and the Jews and nonwhites who are in Satan's grip, working on the side of the Antichrist, acting to persecute white Christians and stop Christ's return to usher in messianic world transformation.

The Christian Identity groups are opposed to racial minorities as well, but view the Jewish people and Zionism as the greatest danger to white Christians and their program for world domination. In their view, Jews use deception, guile, and deviousness to manipulate the darker races — “mud people” in Christian Identity talk — to challenge and rebel against the superior white race. Jews and Judaism must be eliminated if Christians are to achieve their rightful world superiority.

In such a situation, confronted by such a formable Jewish enemy, it is necessary for believers to store weapons, train soldiers, and organize violent attacks on their enemies. Christian Identity, most ironically, sees the justification for attacks against Jewish institutions in a perverted reading of the Phineas narrative in the Hebrew Bible, in which the priest Phineas kills those who desecrated the Mishkan, the Jewish holy sanctuary. Christian identity followers see themselves as a Phineas brotherhood destroying Jewish religious enemies, as did the ancient Phineas.

This theology of violence, which sees the Jews as subhuman, has led in the past and now to an increasing number of attacks against Jews. The most recent attacks specifically targeted against Jews as enemies of white Christian American were the attacks on synagogues in Pittsburgh and Poway. In the 2018 attack on the Pittsburgh synagogue attack during Shabbat services, 11 Jews in shul were killed by Robert Bowers, a white supremacist who claimed to authorities that the “Jews were committed genocide against my people.” By “my people,” he meant to white Christians. He went on to explain that Jews were such a danger that “I want to kill Jews.”

John Earnest, a 20-year-old follower of anti-Semitic hate groups, attacked the Texas synagogue during Passover services in 2018. When confronted by the arresting police officers, he explained that his action was necessary because Jews “were trying to destroy white people.”

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Earlier attacks occurred at the Washington Holocaust Museum and many other Jewish institutions all around the country. These attacks by those most committed to Christian Identity and allied anti-Semitic groups, including neo-Nazis, has been followed by almost daily street attacks on clearly recognized individual Jews, particularly in Orthodox neighborhoods. It appears that the coverage given to these well-publicized shootings encouraged latent anti-Jewish animosities to emerge in violent street crime.

The ideological violence, although it is relatively rare, still has the effect of emboldening local anti-Semites to attack innocent Jews in the shops or on the way to synagogues. What was latent anti-Jewish attitudes is now acted upon and justified theologically.

Christian Identity is an extremist cult, and it is disavowed by all establishment Christian denominations. Still, such groups attract followers all over the country, and they are fairly prominent on the internet all over the Christian world, particularly in Norway and Germany.

Some racist right-wing American groups, including elements in the extremist right wing of the Republican party, while not members of Christian Identity groups, advocate and support identity programs. These groups believe that the elimination of Jewish influence and culture will lead to a flourishing of Christian values, and it will liberate America from the degeneracy and immorality of modern secular culture.

The popular media does not give much coverage to the religious and theological motivations of the growing violence against Jewish synagogues, community centers, and schools, and also against individual Jews. Coverage of these acts of violence frequently report them as acts of disturbed individuals, who have little backing. The truth, however, is that Christian Identity has a strong theological base, and some of the recent purveyors of violence had personal contact or internet connections with these hate groups. Only a minority of its followers engage in violence, but many who are affiliated contribute money and support the movement in other ways.

There is a tendency both in the popular media and in the Jewish establishment to see these recent violent outbursts as the action of disturbed individuals, or as merely criminal acts. There is truth to these views, and indeed some of these perpetrators may be mentally ill, but the fact remains that the surge of anti-Semitic violence is deeply ideological and it is organized and supported by committed religious believers. There actually are no real lone wolf terrorist attacks. An individual terrorist may execute the violence, but the motivation, support, and guidance is always given by a larger cell or an ongoing internet chat room.

There is no way to have an accurate idea of the number of followers these groups have. Estimates from various research groups report that there are between 50,000 and 150,000 members in these affiliated Identity groups. My own research suggests that the number of Americans sympathetic to these views far exceeds these estimates.

The growing violence and the constant threats have transformed Jewish life in the United States. Virtually all synagogues, Jewish community centers, and schools, and all Jewish-sponsored events, are policed by armed guards and security cameras. Most synagogues have a special lock with numbers known only to members. Many synagogues also have armed a number of members who carry weapons during services, including during Shabbat prayer times. Announcements are made periodically urging synagogue regulars to report and question any visitors who are not known to be a part of the community.

This might not sound strange to many Israelis, but to somebody like me, who grew up in midcentury American, it is astounding and frightening, and it was entirely unpredictable. Jewish public places were open and accessible. No one thought of them as possible places of danger or violence. Here we see the radically different place of Jews on the American landscape.

Nothing described here should encourage passivity. And no one political party is the progenitor of this new anti-Jewish mood. Rather, we are facing an uncertain future and a cultural and political transformation. Political action, lobbying, legal action, and public demonstrations, which fortunately already have begun, must continue and increase. Jews, however, cannot live in the past and revel in nostalgia but instead must acknowledge the new reality of their place in America.

Dr. Charles Selengut of Teaneck is a professor of sociology at the County College of Morris.

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Jewish Sports Hall of Fame is launching at Kaplen JCC

February 13, 2020, 9:35 am | 0

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The Kaplen JCC on the Palisades in Tenafly recently founded the New Jersey Jewish Sports Hall of Fame to honor Jews who have distinguished themselves as leaders in athletics in New Jersey and who have fostered their Jewish identity successfully through sports. The inaugural inductees, who will be honored at the JCC's third annual Sports Night of Champions on Thursday, March 5, include Jeff Kurtz, Leonard Rubin z"l, and Joseph Taub z"l. These community leaders were nominated and chosen based on the following criteria: they identified themselves publicly as Jewish; they demonstrated outstanding accomplishments as athletes, coaches, sports media, sports administrators, or sports figures who made a significant, positive impact on our community; they displayed excellence in leadership, sportsmanship and character; and they either were born in New Jersey, lived in New Jersey for at least four years, or played professionally for a New Jersey or tri-state area sports team.

The evening will include an elegant strolling dinner, a celebratory program with award presentations, a live auction, and the presentation of the Joseph Taub Scholar Athlete awards to one female and one male high school senior from Bergen County. Both scholars will be presented with a \$3,600 college scholarship in recognition of their excellence in sports, academics, and in their communities. Runner up and honorable mention awards also will be distributed. Since the establishment of this community-wide event two years ago, the JCC has raised more than \$400,000 in support of scholarships at the JCC.

“Every year, our Sports Night exceeds our expectations as a high-energy fundraiser that fills us with pride, knowing we can help countless children, families and seniors in need in our community,” the JCC's CEO, Jordan Shenker, said. “Launching our New Jersey Jewish Sports Hall of Fame

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Whole and holy food

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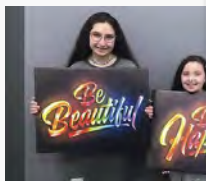
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'It seems to be savin
people's lives'

By LARRY YUDELSON

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substantially adds to our pride, as it allows us to honor both living and deceased leaders in our community who have demonstrated a lifelong commitment to sports, their Jewish identity, and the desire to inspire the next generation when it comes to both sports and sportsmanship.”

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Joseph Taub z”l, the former co-owner of the New Jersey Nets, was a founder of Automatic Data Processing. A longtime member of the JCC family, Taub was dedicated to Jewish life and the Jewish community. He was an avid philanthropist who promoted Jewish scholarship. He was well known for his kindness and generosity, as well as for his lifelong dedication to providing assistance to at-risk teens, and for inspiring young athletes to realize their goals.

Leonard Rubin z”l, a JCC founding member and president, was a driving force behind many JCC programs. Because he believed that Jewish education was the key to Jewish continuity, at the JCC, he established the first Judaic-scholar-in-residence program and a teen scholarship to Israel program. He and his wife, Syril z”l, established the JCC flagship nursery school, which bears their name. He also played a pivotal role in creating the JCC’s Adult Reach Center for seniors with Alzheimer’s and dementia and established the JCC annual Rubin Run as a community-wide athletic event to encourage and promote healthy living.

Jeff Kurtz, the president of the Kamson Corporation, serves on the board of the Hope & Heroes Children’s Cancer Fund and other charities. A graduate of the University of Miami, he played on the Miami tennis team, went on to play football, and was a member of the 1987, 1989, and 1991 National Championship Football Teams for the University of Miami. An avid golfer and tennis player, he coaches and runs the Tenafly Youth Football program for third through eighth graders, and also is an assistant basketball and lacrosse coach for his children. Kurtz also prides himself on coaching young quarterbacks to boost their skill sets, watching them grow into exceptional high school athletes.

JoJo Rubach and Jeff Levitt are the evening’s co-chairs; the committee includes Kenny Albert, Noah Garden, Jeff Kurtz, Danny Rubin, Craig Silver, Gordon A. Uehling III, Tracy Wolfson, and Barry Zeller. The scholarship awards have been made possible by the Joseph and Arlene Taub Foundation in memory of Joseph Taub z”l.

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