

### The Root of Antisemitism

TO THE EDITORS:

A.B. Yehoshua's erudite essay "An Attempt to Identify the Root Cause of Antisemitism" (AZURE 32, Spring 2008) contends to have found the common element that underlies Jew-hatred in all ages and places: Jew-haters are motivated by fear. Although I cannot disagree with Yehoshua about his fear hypothesis, I am less willing to relinquish a concern with particular historical contexts and political moments than is he. As a historian, both time and place are of considerable importance to me. It is precisely the existence of particular social, economic, or political conditions that animates antisemitism, resulting in ostracism or, worse yet, murder.

I must, however, contest two of Yehoshua's points. First, that antisemitism is *uniquely* the product of a fear grounded in the virtual reality of the victim in the mind of the oppressor. The history of racism in the Western world is a tale of fears grounded in imagination.

As the late professor of history and African-American studies Winthrop Jordan observed in his masterful book *White Over Black* (1968), the association of "blackness" with ignorance,

backwardness, the absence of illumination, and just plain evil in writings such as the Bible, Shakespeare's plays, and other Western classics conditioned European minds to reject the humanity of Africans and their potential for development. Thus, fear of the black person and the resulting persecution derived from the fear of a virtual "blackness." It was this racism that led to the defining of a people as subhuman and, as in the case of the Jew, the notion that this inferior people could nevertheless pose a danger to the biological existence of others and to civilization as a whole.

What was the origin of blackness? Some believed it was God's curse upon Ham and his descendants; others, such as Dr. Benjamin Rush, an eighteenth-century colonial physician, thought of blackness as the residual impact of leprosy upon the body. Similar to the behavior of antisemites, racists behaved in a myriad of ambiguous ways. For example, in the period before the American Civil War, Southern physicians experimented on the bodies of black slaves in order to acquire knowledge helpful in treating whites, while at the same time maintaining that black bodies were categorically different (read: inferior) to those of whites. Under the "one-drop rule," the blood of one

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great-grandparent was sufficient to “contaminate” an individual and define him as black regardless of his appearance. Blackness, like Jewishness, existed separate from time and place. Societies influenced by the power of racist fears could allay those fears only by means of separation, enslavement, or annihilation.

My second reservation concerns Yehoshua’s solution to the virtuality or indeterminateness of Jewish existence in the mind of the antisemite. Yehoshua posits that even Moses would be willing to have his secret burial place known and elaborately marked so that Jews would be inclined to remain close to that place, their identification with it made permanent for all to know and see. Jews committed to existing in a definite place with concrete defining characteristics—a land, a language, etc.—would be less frightening. And so, the solution for Israelis becomes to dissociate themselves from the diaspora experience, to cease blurring Israel’s borders—a process Yehoshua dates to the 1967 war—and to distance themselves from a “deeply symbiotic and ill-defined relationship with the Palestinian people and, through this, with the greater Arab and Muslim world.” To fail at these tasks might *promote* rather than dissipate a regression into the indeterminateness that fosters antisemitism, shudders Yehoshua.

It is appealing, albeit naïve, to think that Israel, nestled in its 1948 borders, can be the instrument of Jews’ final liberation from antisemitism and break the link in the chain of historical symbiotic hatred—and all this through nationalism! How regrettable that the author posits nationalism as a solution at the very historical moment when nations across the globe are losing their determinateness. Borders—both physical and cultural—are less significant than ever before: Countries share common currencies and are involved in each other’s economies via the Internet without the need for migration. Even though countries still have different languages and cultures, almost all share in corporate cultures that transcend boundaries.

While it is unlikely that Israel can dissipate antisemitism in the way that Yehoshua suggests, few can argue with the brilliance of the author’s insight that the hatred of the Jews is rooted in the virtual or indeterminate identity they possess in the non-Jewish mind. It echoes African-American novelist Ralph Ellison’s observation that to the mind of the racist, the black man is invisible. And as both Ellison and Yehoshua remind us, what we cannot see or clearly make out is often the most frightening.

**Alan M. Kraut**  
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TO THE EDITORS:

A.B. Yehoshua's essay on the root of antisemitism offers a provocative answer to the question of why so many different groups across so many different periods have hated Jews. However, I would like to raise three issues in response to Yehoshua's arguments. One relates to the question of Jewish uniqueness, one to the functions of group hatred, and last to the Jewish responsibility to respond to historical antisemitic realities.

While I am persuaded that Jew-hatred is based on the projection of one's own fears onto the unknown other, I am not sure that Jews serve as a target because of their indeterminacy. A look into racism directed toward African-Americans may shed some light on the issue. Although the black community is hardly indeterminate the way Jews are, scholars of African-American history have found much the same phenomenon that Yehoshua does: The projection of fears onto a group of unknown others. Those fears differ by region and time, but the traits or dangers most feared by whites were always projected onto black people—even when few black people were actually present. Therefore, racism is caused by whites projecting their fears onto non-whites, just as antisemitism is caused by non-Jews projecting all that they hate onto Jews. This is not to justify either kind

of bigotry, of course, but to observe that projection seems to be a human characteristic—not of all humans, but of all human communities. In general, unassimilated “others” are always the repository of communal fears, whether those others have chosen to remain separate or have been forced to do so. Jews and those of African descent, forcibly dispersed from their ancestral homeland, serve that purpose admirably, but it is not their own indeterminacy that causes it.

Racism does not operate just in the minds of individuals, or even just in the minds of communities. Racism serves a number of functional purposes: It justifies discrimination and exclusion, which allows the lion's share of social goods, services, and opportunities to go to the white majority. It also allows powerful white people to prevent vulnerable whites from joining forces with similarly exploited non-whites. Racism is not merely a psychological response to fear, but also a method of maintaining or extending power and control without visibly seeming to do so. Similarly, antisemitism has served to justify and maintain the power of non-Jewish elites, allowing them to rally otherwise discontented citizens or subjects in a variety of times and places. Neither of these observations—that antisemitism is not unique, and that group hatred is not only psychological

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but political—challenges Yehoshua's points, but rather seeks to embed them in a broader dialogue about the operation and function of bigotry across time and space.

On the question of how to respond to the challenge such bigotry poses, however, I must disagree altogether with what I take to be his proposal. Yehoshua's suggestion that if Jews somehow become less vague about their identity, if they give up the fantasy that there is some bond uniting Jews across time and space and, instead, root Jewish identity more firmly in nationhood and the land of Israel, they might be able to shake antisemitism loose from its foundations, is unacceptable to me—not as a historian or as a scholar, but as a Jew. If indeed group hatred is a human pattern, rooted in fear and projected onto others, then it is impossible to uproot it with rational argument. Yehoshua himself points out that if rationality worked, antisemitism would have died along with the first Jews to be slaughtered without repercussion. Furthermore, to the extent that antisemitism is often sustained by the desire to maintain the supremacy of the group in power, Jewish indeterminacy is irrelevant.

But more importantly to my mind, Jewish identity is what it is, and cannot and should not be shaped or reshaped in response to bigots or anyone else. The fact is, Jews *are* both a

nation and a religion. This occurred for historical reasons outlined in Yehoshua's essay, but whatever the reason, it is a motivating force behind Jewish identity. Whether Yemenite and Polish Jews actually have much in common is less important than the overall sense of what being Jewish means. Jews understand themselves, as Yehoshua notes, as part of a historical and global continuum—a community in the deepest sense of the word. It may make no historical or cultural sense. It may be a fantasy. But I believe it is part of the fundamental nature of being Jewish: to understand oneself as part of a community that seeks to understand the purpose of life and how to live it well, even if that understanding changes over time or place, or varies from Jew to Jew. To deny that sense of indeterminacy or to cut it out of our self-understanding would be to give up being Jewish in order to overcome antisemitism.

**Cheryl Greenberg**  
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TO THE EDITORS:

A.B. Yehoshua's thought-provoking essay is an important addition to the voluminous literature on the causes and manifestations of antisemitism. He presents a twofold analysis of the problem: First, the constancy

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of Jew-hatred throughout the ages; and second, its interaction with the Jews' awareness of their uniqueness as a people. His interpretation, however, requires some amendment when measured against the history of Jews in the United States.

To be sure, most American Jews, even within the Reform movement, did retain a sense of peoplehood. There were also those who judged antisemitism as part of an ongoing continuum, so that every generation had its own Haman. (As Yehoshua writes, such Jews doubtless drew a measure of comfort from that assumption.) But at the same time, Jews in the United States had to square the notion of eternal Judeophobia with their unshakeable belief in American exceptionalism. The idea of exceptionalism, which became the heart of the promise of America, went back to the founders of the country. It posited that this "new Zion" would be the exemplar of freedom and opportunity for the individual and a haven for the oppressed. Many Jews took this idea one step further: Jewish history, they believed, had turned a corner in the United States. For never before had Jews enjoyed the kind of well-being that America afforded. Indeed, some nineteenth-century Reform Jews even claimed that the future of Judaism lay in America. Breaking with their age-old heritage, they

did not share in what Yehoshua calls "the basic Jewish perception" that antisemitism "is a constant motivating factor of human behavior unrelated to the religious, national, social, or economic conditions prevailing in any given period." Rather, America was different, and the words and deeds of antisemites were but temporary aberrations from the American norm.

Accordingly, Jews who witnessed antisemitism in America before World War I came up with a variety of explanations for it, mostly of a socioeconomic or cultural nature. Exonerating the hate-mongers, many Jewish communal leaders even criticized the behavior of their fellow Jews, lecturing them on proper manners and social deportment. Some Jews added that manifestations of Jew-hatred in the United States were products of European bigotry. Blaming German antisemitism for discrimination in America at the end of the nineteenth century, Rabbi Marcus Jastrow of Philadelphia said: "A drop of poison has been instilled into the blood of Western nations, causing a distemper contagious to its nature, and... the contagion has reached our beloved country." Whatever the cause, American Jews pinned their hopes for remediation on rational counterarguments, particularly from respected Christian leaders.

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Reveling in the blessings of the United States, the overwhelming majority of American Jews never despaired of the diaspora or sought to remove themselves to a Jewish homeland. Nor did they produce a Leo Pinsker of their own. Emma Lazarus, an early proponent of secular Jewish nationalism who was influenced by Pinsker's *Autoemancipation*, wrote in her famous *Epistle to the Hebrews* that American Jews, different from the persecuted Jews of Eastern Europe, were not obliged to settle in a new country. Even racist antisemitism which underscored the image of the Jew as alien to the United States and Europe, failed to direct Jews to Palestine or, later, the State of Israel. Contemporary American Jews have studied the problems of antisemitism and analyzed their relationship to the Jewish state in an endless stream of surveys, conferences, and youth programs; but as a collective body, they have remained immured within an American cocoon.

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A.B. YEHOSHUA RESPONDS:

The attempt to trace the root of antisemitism in all ages and places is not an assertion that antisemitism

necessarily existed everywhere and throughout all of history. In fact, there were periods—and this includes modern times as well—in which antisemitism was less powerful or venomous than it was in others. The root of antisemitism, as I explained in my essay, stems firstly from the state of the antisemite's identity, not from what the Jew does or does not do. Antisemitism, as the popular saying goes, is a disease of the non-Jew from which the Jew dies. Naomi Cohen is therefore correct in stating that American society has been devoid of intense or dangerous expressions of antisemitism as a result of America's ingrained pluralism and its adherence to the ideals of freedom and democracy. One must hope that it will remain so forever. True, every now and then bizarre and venomous allegations are thrown around, such as the claim following the September 11 attacks that the Israeli Mossad knew about the attacks ahead of time and warned all the Jewish workers in the World Trade Center not to come to work that day. This absurd type of antisemitism is made possible only by the virtual, imaginary dimension unique to Jewish identity. For if there is antisemitic sentiment in the United States, it is not aimed directly toward American Jews, but focuses instead on Israel (as in the statement

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"America went to war with Iraq because of Israel"). At the same time, antisemitic sentiment outside of the United States often employs fantasies about American Jews ("Jews control the media, etc."). It is therefore only natural that the (relatively modest) *aliya* of American Jews to Israel was *not* a result of antisemitism, as they viewed themselves as relatively safe in the United States. Rather, this immigration is mainly due to that same drive by whose mere mention I recently caused a minor riot in the American Jewish community: the wish to live a complete and full Jewish life, which can only be had in the land of Israel; conducted in the Hebrew language; and, most importantly, within a binding Jewish reality that deals in a Jewish manner with all aspects of life.

Throughout their 2,500 years of diaspora history, Jews have for the most part managed to cope and learn to live with a certain degree of antisemitism in their countries of residence. It was only when antisemitism became so severe and so grave—namely, from the end of the nineteenth century to the appearance of Nazism—that some Jews began to contemplate a more radical change in their national condition, and hence the door to Zionism was opened. Therefore, even though I accept many of Greenberg's observations, I find it very difficult to

concede her "Jewish" argument that attempts to deal with antisemitism by diminishing the indeterminate component of Jewish identity are akin to a betrayal of this identity and are perhaps even morally flawed, since they appear to be succumbing to the threat of antisemitism. It is on this basis that Greenberg rejects the conclusions of my essay—not as a historian or a person of science, but as a Jew. To this I provide two answers: First, history teaches us that the identity of a nation is not metaphysical, but has the ability to undergo transformations and adaptations with respect to the ever-changing reality around it. (Only three centuries ago, for example, every French citizen was required to be Catholic, or at least Christian. Today, of course, no such requirement exists.) Second, the Israeli Jewish identity—whether secular or religious—which has considerably reduced the degree of Jewish indeterminacy by linking itself with a defined territory, national language, and clear and binding framework that deals with all aspects of life, is by no means "less Jewish" than the virtual, diasporic existence. If anything, it is, in my opinion, *more* Jewish in its substance and commitments. Not only is it the original Jewish identity as it existed throughout the First and Second Temple periods, but it is also, at least religiously, the aspired-to identity, achieved at last

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through national redemption. Thus, to argue that “Jewish identity is what it is” is simply irresponsible. An indeterminate identity is only one variation of Jewish existence, and a weak one at that. There are other options, such as the secular one or the solely national one, the latter of which has been gaining momentum in Israel of late. Such variations, which significantly reduce the virtuality of Jewish identity (but do not entirely dismiss it) are, in my opinion, much better able to cope with the projective dimension of antisemitism.

As to Alan Kraut’s interesting response, it must be stated that I did not claim that the root of antisemitism is *fear* of Jews. This fear, especially of the crazed sort expressed, for example, by Hitler in his final testament, is an illustrative example of the ability of the antisemite to seize upon the fluid and indeterminate nature of Jewish identity for the purpose of his own projection. Statements such as “the Jews control the banks,” or even positive assertions such as “all Jews are intelligent,” display the same projective element. Fear of Jews is only one example of the many absurdities directed toward them above and beyond ordinary expressions of xenophobia or nationalist racism. In this respect, there is a fundamental difference between racist hatred of

a black man and the hatred of Jews. Blacks, as opposed to Jews, are clearly recognizable; they are, in fact, so recognizable that their skin color becomes a central component of their identity in the mind of the racist, and it is that skin color toward which he channels all his hatred. That said, no one would argue that blacks control the media or the stock market, let alone posit a secret protocol of black elders who conspire to rule the world. Fear of the black man is a well known, primitive, childish fear, while fear of the Jew is a projected fear and may therefore crop up in even the most intelligent people, albeit ones with a disturbed sense of identity and broad imagination (of which, unfortunately, there are many). Thus, as I pointed out in my essay, the root of antisemitism is not fear, but rather antisemites’ ability to easily project their problems, frustrations, and internal demons onto the Jews.

The second point that Kraut raises astonishes me. Is nationalism really disintegrating? Is the Israeli national identity—with its homeland, language, and borders—an exception in today’s world? Yugoslavia was divided up into several nation states; Czechoslovakia broke into two states; the Soviet Union broke up into many separate countries; the Basques and

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Corsicans aspire to independence, or at least increased autonomy; even the Scots are forming their own parliament. Over 60 percent of Americans do not hold valid passports and have never been outside their country. Which borders, exactly, does Kraut believe are becoming “less significant”? Of course there are international organizations, but they do not cancel out nationalism. An attachment to one’s homeland, language, and national identity is a primal bond, one that exists even among Swedes and Norwegians. Thus, it is only natural that the State of Israel, which, in the early twentieth century, housed less than half a percent of the entire Jewish people, is today home to almost 50 percent of them. It is only natural to forgo the virtuality and mobility of one’s identity in exchange for something tangible and real. Nationalism is not crumbling, just as the family unit is not disintegrating. And, if Israel resolutely determines the extent of its territory (according to its 1967 borders, and not its 1948 borders, as Kraut erroneously writes), the Jewish nation—a nation that has lost over 90 percent of its people throughout the course of history, whether through assimilation or, in modern times, on account of the Holocaust—may be spared the disastrous repercussions of a virtual identity.

## Brain Drain

TO THE EDITORS:

Marla Braverman analyzes the Israeli brain drain in an insightful essay (“Losing Our Minds,” *AZURE* 32, Spring 2008) and concludes that “the absence of adequate incentives and competitive conditions is precisely what drives talented academics and scientists out of Israel and into countries whose market economies ensure them greater compensation.” She is absolutely right that salaries, as well as scholarly and scientific facilities in Israeli universities, are not competitive in the global market, and that this must be ameliorated if not entirely rectified. It is precisely because universities compete for scarce human, financial, and other resources, and because academics respond to financial and other incentives, that universities can be analyzed using market concepts. Thus, it is clear that economic considerations are essential in assessing the causes of and remedies for the Israeli brain drain. The difficult question is to what extent and in what manner should neoliberal market models—successfully employed by the Israeli Treasury in many areas—be used to guide the funding and management of Israeli universities? Calling for adequate incentives and

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competitive conditions is one thing, but requiring universities to function like businesses is quite another.

Global competition for academic talent is an indisputable fact, as is the need for world-class facilities—libraries, laboratories, support staff—for nurturing world-class scholarship. But neither of these facts necessarily implies that Israeli research universities can effectively operate on a business model which balances budgets by producing and selling a good. While some Israeli colleges are able to cover all or most of their costs from tuition, they provide only a small fraction of Israeli academic degrees in selected academic disciplines. The market model will not work for Israeli universities at large.

Universities produce two “commodities”: diplomas and ideas, which together support expertise, construed broadly as specialized and advanced knowledge and capability.

While diplomas are sold, the full market value of a university degree is realized over a lifetime, and cannot be sold at its discounted lifetime value the way one can sell a car or a tomato. The value of a university degree accrues to society as well as to the graduate over a long period of time. A degree is a public good as well as a private good: The individual engineer generates more wealth than he receives in salary by driving the growth of the

economy. The social worker or high school teacher contributes well-being and social values, which are immeasurable in currency. And what about the value of the scholar of Hebrew literature or Jewish philosophy in the reborn Jewish state? It is both unfair and economically unfeasible to ask a student to finance the full cost of producing a commodity—the university degree—which is both a public and private good.

Universities’ second commodity is the “idea.” Ideas are sometimes economically profitable, but mostly ideas influence how people think about themselves, their society, and the world. Such influence is usually gradual, even glacial, in its advance. Many ideas emerge, are studied and argued about, and consume academic resources, only to be rejected as unfruitful. Nevertheless, the costly process of sifting and weeding is unavoidable. Without substantial and patient effort sustained over years, ideas will fail to blossom.

Although universities are a great investment for society, they cannot be run on a profit-and-loss investment model. Universities cannot support themselves directly by market forces.

This analysis of universities’ peculiar market situation sheds light on the role of competition in nurturing academic excellence. It is a common truth that economic competition

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can, and often does, lead to improved quality of products at lower cost. The process occurs when consumers are able to select among commodities and choose low price and high quality. This certainly works, at least over the medium and long term, in the market for computers and related information technology, for instance. But it can't work for the commodities produced by universities: diplomas and new ideas. The consumer is too diffuse—society at large—and quality is too difficult to measure. Nonetheless, universities have developed a range of mechanisms to monitor and improve the quality of their products, such as internal and external review of academic programs and the long and exhausting process of tenure and advancement, in which the academic candidate is severely measured against his best peers from around the world. These mechanisms, though not flawless and subject to continual evaluation and revision, have created and maintained Israeli universities in the global forefront of academic research.

And what about global outsourcing? Universities have been highly globalized for a long time: Research collaborations are international, new ideas compete and are tested internationally, and evaluation of academic personnel is done in a global framework. The globalization of intellectual talent is here to stay, so why not harness

it to Israel's advantage by outsourcing our needs for university graduates? Israel could buy a substantial amount of engineering talent from India, hire scholars of Judaica from Brandeis and Yeshiva universities, even import social workers from Europe. But would we really want to? The viability of a country depends on its ability to educate and assimilate its young people constructively into society, providing them with challenging and rewarding opportunities to realize their personal potentials. Outsourcing for intellectual talent would significantly reduce the size of Israeli universities and leave talented and ambitious native Israelis with little choice but to leave the country. Even if large-scale outsourcing made sense financially, it would be the Zionist dream gone astray.

Another dimension of the problem of global competition for academic talent relates to the impact of benign global fluctuations on small countries such as Israel. The law of large numbers protects American or European academic communities from randomly losing a critical mass in one or another discipline. As Jewish studies or cryptology weakens in one institution, it grows elsewhere on the continent. But a tiny reservoir like Israel, when linked frictionlessly to a huge one—the world—can quickly lose critical elements of its intellectual community. Management paradigms

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which work stably for large systems do not necessarily work for small systems. Tiny systems are vulnerable to fluctuations and must be all the more robust against surprises.

In another vein, Braverman writes:

Unfortunately, today's Israeli society is more cynical and individualistic than ever before; ideals like devotion to and sacrifice for one's country have fallen out of fashion. Moreover, if the Zionist ethos, which sanctifies the individual's obligation to the collective national endeavor, can be said to be in critical condition, then in Israeli academia—entrusted with the cultivation of the country's best minds—it no longer has a pulse.

This assessment is harsh, and though it has an element of truth, it matches only part of my personal experience of Israeli academia over the past three decades. Israeli academics are extraordinarily cosmopolitan in their scholarly pursuits, but they tend to be far more faithful in institutional allegiance than their European or, especially, their American colleagues. A market-based model for university funding would certainly change this and exacerbate the malaise to which Braverman refers. If each professor must periodically face his or her chairman and individually bargain for salary, that individual's institutional allegiance will tend to diminish, regardless of the outcome. Friction among colleagues—not rare

in academia—will be exacerbated. Commitment to one's immediate community of scholars will erode as individual academics feel exploited by university management. If Israeli academics are forced to solicit counteroffers from foreign institutions in order to maintain their financial position in Israel, the erosion will be even greater. When you force people to hunt for foreign jobs, guess what? They will find them even more frequently than today, when collective bargaining insulates the individual academic from the bargaining process.

In conclusion, the Israeli economy has emerged as a "tiger" since 1985, when neoliberal and Washington-consensus policies took the upper hand. Without for a moment forgetting the challenges which remain—huge inequalities and global vulnerabilities, to name just two—liberal market-based policies have positioned Israel comfortably in the community of advanced industrial economies. But the Washington consensus of twenty years ago is nothing like a consensus today, even in such eligible fields as capital market liberalization. Not surprisingly, things are far more complex than simple slogans suggest. Many questions remain, such as the impact of differential salary according to discipline or achievement. But university education, like primary and secondary education and national

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defense, cannot thrive if left to market forces alone. Large-scale public support for universities is essential. We may be losing our minds, but we're not so far gone that we can't understand that.

**Yakov Ben-Haim**

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## Pipes' Legacy

TO THE EDITORS:

It is not often that an author has the satisfaction of reading such thoughtful and well-informed appraisals of his work (Marshall Poe, "The Dissident," *AZURE* 32, Spring 2008), and I am most obliged to the author for writing it and to *AZURE* for publishing it.

As Poe stresses, and I admit in *Vixi*, I have been a lifelong non-conformist. Many in the academic profession do not welcome non-conformism, and this is one aspect of university teaching that I particularly dislike. I have always hated "groupthink." I write and teach history as it appears to me. I do not mind if others do not accept my views, so long as they respect my right to hold them.

I welcome the fact that in his review, Poe went below the surface to explain the reasons for my positions.

He is right about the influence on me of my experiences as a Jewish youth in Poland, especially after its conquest by the Germans, and of the "philosophical history" of François Guizot. He understands the reasons for my emphasis on the autocratic tradition in Russia and approves of them (something rare in my experience). I appreciate his rejecting the charge of "Russophobia" occasionally leveled at me. And I am especially cheered by his closing sentence: "today we are all non-belongers." For me, his review was a richly rewarding experience.

**Richard Pipes**

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TO THE EDITORS:

In his praiseworthy review of Richard Pipes' memoir *Vixi* and his new study *Russian Conservatism and Its Critics*, Marshall Poe writes that "Pipes has never stopped trying to explain 'them' to 'us.'" One assumes that "them" are the Russians, but the "us" is less clear. Is it Americans in general? Or the "non-belongers," an unidentified group of rebels and detractors that makes an appearance at the conclusion of Poe's article? Such vagueness, coupled with an "us versus them" framework, does not bode well for serious intellectual discussion and analysis.

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Pipes himself, who is a noteworthy historian of the Russian revolution, needs no defenders. However, it is the task of a reviewer to raise questions about the subject at hand and to challenge the assumptions and conclusions of the author under review. Unfortunately, Poe accomplishes neither of these tasks. The reason for this appears to be Poe's acceptance of Pipes', or what he presents as Pipes', basic methodology. Poe writes, "Indeed, the question central to all of Pipes' future scholarship—what is the spirit of Russian civilization?—and the method by which he sought to answer it... were quintessentially philosophical." As a student of both Russian and Jewish intellectual history and literature, I would agree that a philosophical scrutiny of history is a necessary and productive task, but to ask such a romanticized question as "what is the spirit of Russian civilization?"—or, for that matter, of any civilization—is a completely different matter. It is not at all radical or new to say that civilizations have no "spirit." Recognizing this is not a matter of passing academic fashion or intellectual trends. While there are ideas put forth by certain intellectual groups at various points in history that purport to represent the spirit of a people or an era, it is precisely the job of the historian to recognize these ideas for what they are: ideological constructs,

often put into political practice. The claim that any one of these ideas embodies the "organic" spirit of a civilization smacks of the worst kind of essentialism. Who defines the Russian spirit? Pushkin or Dostoevsky? Who defines the Jewish spirit? Maimonides or Isaac Luria? Such questions are unproductive. They cannot explain the complex, polyphonic conversation that occurs within each civilization.

To argue, therefore, that Russia is somehow essentially different from Europe is an unsubstantiated proposition. The fact that certain autocratic forces have prevailed and, one may argue, continue to prevail in Russia is due to a variety of largely political reasons, not to some inborn predisposition to autocracy. It is equally problematic to group monarchic autocracy, Stalinist tyranny, and later Soviet rule under the same tent. Pipes' analysis of these various forms of Russian government is nuanced and complex, but Poe's presentation of it is simplistic and does no justice to his hero's own argument.

Furthermore, Poe fails to question Pipes' somewhat old-fashioned understanding of early Soviet history. Much has been written about Soviet nationalist policy since Pipes' *The Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism, 1917-1923* (1964), but Poe does not take this into account. The Bolsheviks,

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contrary to Pipes' conclusions, were not Russocentric. The Soviet Union did indeed become Russocentric, but only during World War II and, especially, its aftermath. On the one hand, nationalism of any kind was ideologically antithetical to the Bolshevik project; on the other hand, it was important to the Bolsheviks practically and pragmatically once they began to govern. A case in point is their treatment of the Jews in the 1920s. While Judaism as a religion was trampled underfoot, Yiddish culture was permitted and even celebrated. Indeed, Soviet Yiddish schools and collective farms were commonplace in the former Pale of Settlement. This is because the Soviet ideologues recognized that in the long run the Jews would assimilate, perhaps not into a specifically Russian culture, but certainly into a non-national Soviet culture. To accomplish this, however, the Jews would need to be indoctrinated in their own language, in this case Yiddish. Once again, this policy gradually changed in the 1930s and then radically shifted after the war.

At the end of his review, Poe returns to the philosophical plane. He claims that "Pipes is, ultimately, a firm believer in the power of culture.... Looking at Pipes' life's work, we can conclude, sadly, that autocracy will remain an important element of Russian culture, just as it has been

for centuries." This is a seemingly provocative statement, but it is at best highly questionable. To begin with, there is no discussion of Russian culture in Poe's presentation of Pipes. And what Russian culture is he talking about? Piotr Chaadaev's denunciation of Russia's lack of history in 1829? Or Dostoevsky's quest for the Russian Christ? Current post-modernist Russian fiction? Or Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*? The Russian case is not unique. All civilizations have trends, and some of them are invariably troubling. American racism, Western antisemitism, extreme Jewish messianism, and, yes, Russian autocratic conservatism are entrenched in the respective histories of these civilizations, but does this mean that these civilizations are inherently doomed by them? A critical, sober approach to history would suggest otherwise. One does not need to be a "non-belonger" to recognize that.

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MARSHALL POE RESPONDS:

Let me begin by thanking Richard Pipes for his kind words as well as for his years of service to the historical profession.

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In his spirited response, Marat Grinberg rebuts someone's arguments. Unfortunately, they aren't mine. The "us versus them" framework he attributes to my essay does not exist. This is made clear by my use of distancing quotation marks throughout the text. The idea that there is some sort of "essential" Russian spirit isn't mine: I do write that Pipes sought after the "spirit of Russian civilization," but I never say or imply that there is anything essential about it. The thesis that Russia is "*essentially* different from Europe" isn't mine, either: While I do think that Russia is different from Europe, and have argued as much in my book *The Russian Moment in World History* (Princeton, 2001), the idea that the difference is "essential" never appears in this review or in any of my published work. Finally, the plainly silly notion that Russians have an "inborn predisposition to autocracy" certainly

isn't mine. In fact, I cannot say I know anyone who believes such a thing. Somebody, somewhere, may think that Russia is "doomed," but I don't. My review says nothing of the sort. As a matter of fact, it suggests the opposite.

The purpose of reviews is to review books, not to give reviewers an opportunity to air their opinions. But since Grinberg seems both interested in and confused by my views, let me make them clear. I do think that cultures have "spirits" in the sense of sets of unexamined, taken-for-granted beliefs. I do think that the spirit of Russian culture was autocratic. I do think that Russia's spirit arose due to historical circumstances. I do think that cultures can change. And I do think that Russian culture is becoming less autocratic, even now. Though I would not presume to say what Grinberg believes about these matters, I imagine that he will find much to agree with in those few sentences.

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*AZURE welcomes letters from its readers. Letters should be sent to: AZURE, 13 Yehoshua Bin-Nun Street, Jerusalem, Israel. Fax: 972-2-560-5560. E-mail: [letters@azure.org.il](mailto:letters@azure.org.il). Letters may be edited for length and clarity.*

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