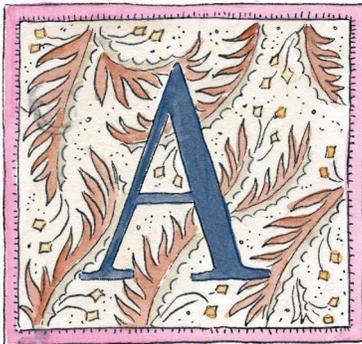


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Defeating Antizionism

The latest pseudoscience to overtake academia



STRANGE THING happened in the social sciences at the turn of the 20th century. In an effort to dignify Jewish origins in the minds of their academic peers, Jewish thinkers, including the anthropologist Maurice Fishberg, embraced the race science of the time.

The embrace went beyond simply approving of this pseudoscience to actually contributing to its scholarship. Based on a study of Jewish skulls, Fishberg co-authored scholarship supporting the view that the Jews constitute a distinct race: “When figures taken from such diverse elements of Judaism present such a homogeneity, it can safely be concluded that the cranial type of the modern Jews shows very little if any intermixture of foreign blood.”

Today, the language of race science is enough to make us wince.

At the time, however, it would have read as academically serious and even avant-garde. Race science was central to the social sciences of the period and widely regarded as a legitimate framework for understanding human difference. It was this same body of thought that would later furnish intellectual legitimacy to National Socialism in Germany.

In his 1946 book *Hitler's Professors*, linguist Max Weinreich documented how the German university—then the pride of Western scholarship—fell with terrifying speed into the service of Nazi ideology. Within months of Hitler's rise to power, professors across disciplines had issued declarations of loyalty. They did so not only to secure their posts but to align themselves with a social and political movement that promised prestige, resources, and renewed relevance. Entire research institutes were founded, fields reorganized, and new disciplines invented around the “Jewish Question.”

Weinreich revealed a moral and epistemic collapse that converted scholarship into ideology. Anti-Jewish libels do not circulate on their own. They require institutional prestige to stabilize them. The university has long been an effective instrument for transmuting defamation into knowledge, serving not as a barrier to harmful ideology but as its most efficient vehicle.

At the moment of writing, the university has been lost to a new pseudoscience: antizionism. And there are Jewish faculty, like Fishberg before them, who lent it credibility. Our urgent and ambitious task is to make them see the scholarly error, as Fishberg eventually did, and get them to reverse course.



What the Nazi university did with the “Jewish Question” the contemporary university now does with the “Zionist Question.” Entire

disciplines—anthropology, among them—have been reorganized around antizionist libel, based on a Manichean worldview in which “Zionist professors,” “Zionist ideologues,” and “Zionist administrators” are singled out as enemies of justice. In this imaginary, “Zionist” does not denote genuine persons or positions; it works as an all-encompassing metaphor of corruption that must be purged.

Antizionism is the ideology that treats Jewish peoplehood and sovereignty as an intrinsic injustice. It is today’s evolved form of anti-Jewish hate, less crude than classical antisemitism, but no less potent. Antizionism is more abstract, systematized, and rhetorically refined—ideally suited to academic environments that reward oppositional performance and repackage hostility as critical thought.

Antizionism didn’t emerge *ex nihilo*. It adapted old libels into new, contextually plausible forms. Its core accusations—colonizer, apartheid, and genocide—can all be understood as mutations of earlier anti-Jewish tropes. The colonizer libel reframes the classical image of the Jew as a foreign usurper or parasitic outsider. The apartheid libel secularizes the older anti-Judaic trope that Jews, as a self-declared “chosen people,” despise others, an image transmuted into the claim that “Zionists” are “racist.” The genocide libel follows the same logic: The Nazis claimed that Jews were plotting to exterminate the German people—Goebbels declaring in 1941 that the Jews had “plans for annihilation” against Germany—while the mufti of Jerusalem broadcast on Nazi radio that Zionists intended to annihilate the Arabs. Classical antisemitism was animated by fantasies of Jewish takeover and national extinction, fantasies that antizionism retools into a vocabulary for describing “Zionism.” The “Zionist,” then, is the new figure of “the Jew”: colonialist, racist, and genocidal.

Yet antizionism could not have achieved its current institutional dominance through ideological content alone. Like most successful anti-Jewish projects before it, from medieval anti-Talmudism

to the Soviet Yevseksiya—the Jewish section of the Communist Party tasked with suppressing Jewish life—it requires Jewish intermediaries to legitimize its claims. Antizionism depends on figures within the Jewish community who can naturalize its libels, giving the appearance of internal dissent while laundering an external ideology. It is at this junction, where an anti-Jewish ideology seeks Jewish validation, that the contemporary university’s crisis deepens.

Jewish anti-Zionists today engage in a consequential conflation that demands conceptual precision to disentangle. Anti-Zionism (with the hyphen) refers to historical Jewish debates about Zionism; antizionism (without the hyphen) names a modern ideology built on libels about Israel. This distinction, standard in contemporary antisemitism studies led by scholars such as David Hirsh and David Seymour, is ignored by some Jewish studies professors—Shaul Magid, Daniel Boyarin, David Biale, and others—whose elision gives ideological cover to antizionism. Their intellectual projects to produce accounts of diasporist Judaism are legitimate, even worthy. But their failure to recognize and acknowledge the difference between their projects and that of antizionism is what grants antizionism its alibi.

Jewish anti-Zionist intellectuals must realize just how much work they’re doing for the antizionist hate movement. The issue is not merely the difference between debating the creation of a state before it exists and questioning its legitimacy once it is a legal, historical, and civilizational fact. The real question is whether we can perceive antizionism at all as a concrete social movement and a coherent ideology, and whether we can name it with conceptual precision. It is exactly this linguistic and historical sleight of hand—collapsing pre-1948 Jewish debates about Zionism into today’s antizionist hate movement—that furnishes the intellectual alibi for what is otherwise the blunt mechanism of tokenism: the strategic elevation of “some Jews” to legitimize an ideology aimed at Jewish peoplehood.

Anti-Zionist Jews play a key institutional role in the antizionist takeover of the academy, acting as “experts on the Jews” in ways strikingly similar to the Jewish anti-Talmudists of medieval anti-Judaism—figures such as Nicholas Donin, Pablo Christiani, and Johann Pfefferkorn, whose Jewish origins were strategically deployed to legitimize attacks on Judaism itself. These token converts ultimately became proactive preachers of the gospel and aggressive antagonists of European Jews. Hatred directed at Israel is reframed as a higher form of Jewish piety, championed by Jews who present themselves as guardians of “true Judaism” precisely through their rejection of the Jewish state.

Let’s set the record straight.

There are three sources of pre-1948 Jewish anti-Zionism—liberal, ultra-Orthodox (Haredi), and Marxist—and all three are routinely invoked by antizionists today. The first two have no historical or genealogical connection to contemporary antizionism. Only the third does, and even then not because of anything specifically Jewish in it but because the Soviet Union forged the crystallized form of antizionism itself: the ideological complex that declares “Zionism is racism,” that “Zionists are Nazis,” and that Israel is a genocidal colonial state, as scholar Izabella Tabarovsky has shown. It is this Soviet lineage—not liberal or Haredi dissent—that has now entered the West with such force.

Liberal Jewish opposition to Zionism, exemplified by the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform, overlaps with antizionism only superficially. Reform leaders such as Kaufmann Kohler and Isaac Mayer Wise rejected Jewish nationhood in order to secure full civil equality in the Diaspora, emphasizing Judaism as a universal ethical religion rather than a people with territorial ties and claims. Whatever one

makes of this assimilationist wager, it sought the acquisition and consolidation of civic rights, rather than the denial or revocation of Jewish political rights that defines contemporary antizionism.

By contrast, antizionism's rejection of Jewish peoplehood aligns far more with Islamic dhimmitude frameworks, in which Jews were historically defined as a tolerated but subordinated religious minority. The PLO's 1964 and 1968 charters—which go to extraordinary lengths to deny the existence of the Jewish people altogether—draw on this older pattern. The ideological ancestry of those documents has nothing to do with Reform Judaism's attempt to secure equal citizenship in Europe or America.

Ultra-Orthodox traditions, which forbade a return to the Land of Israel until the arrival of the Messiah, contain nothing that even remotely resembles the antizionist colonizer libel. The classic Haredi position, articulated in sources such as the Talmud (Ketubot 111a), insisted on divine, not political, redemption. But none of these traditions ever suggested that Jews lacked indigeneity in the Land of Israel. Quite the opposite: The entire halakhic tradition presumes that Eretz Yisrael is the indisputable origin and eternal home of the Jewish People, and that its restoration is the telos of history. Even the fiercest anti-Zionist Hasidic authorities, such as the Satmar Rebbe, also never claimed that Jewish chosenness (*am segula*) implied “racial supremacy.” That idea—the core of the contemporary apartheid libel—originates not in Jewish theology but in its antizionist distortion.

So where does antizionism come from?

The foundational text is arguably Fayeze Sayegh's *Zionist Colonialism in Palestine* (1965), published while he directed the Soviet-sponsored Palestine Research Center in Beirut. Sayegh coined the term *settler colonialism* specifically to describe Israel, redefining colonialism not as a system of economic exploitation, as in classical Marxist theory, but as the mere existence of Jews as an immigrant enclave. Drawing

selectively on Marxism, Sayegh preserved the charge of anti-colonial struggle while stripping it of its content, redirecting it toward Jewish particularity itself. Jewish peoplehood was reframed as a colonial fabrication—a “racist ideology” rooted in “biblical chauvinism” and the idea of the “chosen people.” In this way, Sayegh succeeded in repurposing anti-Judaic polemic against Jewish “exclusivity” into a critique of “settler colonialism.”

Settler colonialism did not enter the academic mainstream until decades later. In 1999, Australian scholar Patrick Wolfe revived the framework in his book *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology*. In 2006, his now-canonical essay “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” published in the *Journal of Genocide Research*, explicitly applied this eliminatory logic to Israel—casting Zionism as a project structurally driven to remove the “native” population. This hostile reconstruction marked a critical nexus point: settler-colonial studies fused with the institutional machinery of genocide discourse. Under the editorial influence of Australian scholar Dirk Moses, now at CUNY, the journal became a platform for recasting “Zionism” through Wolfe’s framework.

The *Journal of Genocide Research* became the institutional hub of this ideological convergence, incubating a cohort of genocide-libel theorists—Martin Shaw, Omer Bartov, Raz Segal, Amos Goldberg, and others—who would rise to prominence after October 7, often citing or collaborating with UN official Francesca Albanese, whose work represents the full application of this logic within the UN’s institutionalized system of antizionism.

Jewish anti-Zionists today continue to ignore this history and genealogy, contending that the antizionist hate movement that stormed campuses and captured the international media, and that has long poisoned human rights organizations, is somehow the same as the rich Jewish political debate that preceded 1948. Simply telling this

story should be enough to disabuse anyone of the conflation between the anti-Zionism of the past and the anti-Jewish ideology that is antizionism today. The genealogies are simply distinct. Pre-1948 Jewish debates over Zionism are not the source material for contemporary antizionism, with its three core libels of colonizer, apartheid, and genocide.



German Jewish anthropologist Franz Boas devoted his career to disproving pseudoscientific theories of race. Practically inventing the discipline of modern anthropology through his prolific research, most famously of the Inuit of North America's Pacific Northwest, Boas led the charge against the scientific racism of his time, dismantling the racial typologies that had legitimized oppression. He demonstrated that many so-called racial traits were not fixed biological realities but shaped by environment and culture. His intervention overturned the categories that had once classified Jews as inherently degenerate or inferior—a foundational move in the struggle for both scientific integrity and minority dignity.

By 1911, Maurice Fishberg had recanted his support for Jewish race science, having moved in the direction opened by Boas, emphasizing the variability of Jewish physical characteristics and the formative role of culture and environment. As he put it, “The differences between Jews and Christians are not everywhere racial, due to anatomical or physiological peculiarities, but are solely the result of the social and political environment.” Yet the race science that conferred scholarly legitimacy on classical antisemitism had not yet been dismantled.

Today we face a different, but no less insidious, pseudoscience—one that masquerades as global justice while recoding Jews as racialized oppressors through the language of indigeneity, whiteness, and decolo-

nization. The Jew once again becomes the world-historical cause of suffering; only now it is “Zionism” that functions as the ontological stain.

Our charge is to reclaim the academy. The goal must be not simply to defend Jews but to repair a broken intellectual order. To expose how anti-Jewish hate has recoded the very disciplines meant to understand the human. To interrupt the ideological machinery that turns truth into sin. We need a Boasian intervention into antizionism today. That means showing today’s Jewish intellectuals what antizionism is and where it actually comes from.

In 1934 Boas, alongside Fishberg and other scholars, convened to explicitly condemn scientific racial essentialism and the authority it had been granted within academic life under Nazism. But by then, it was too late. The Nazis had already begun giving those cranial views some teeth. *

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