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# The Pornography of Fools

## *Tracing the History of Sexual Antisemitism*

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**Abstract:** *This article is an attempt to provide a genealogy of the sexual emotions and desires at work in contemporary far-right antisemitism. Embedded in primary research while also drawing heavily on the existing literature on antisemitism, the article seeks to make an intervention into the historiography of antisemitism and to argue for the existence of a sexual component at the heart of antisemitism, both historically and today. The article starts by briefly discussing a very short and specific story from Irish Jewish history in the 1900s, and then moves to a seemingly very unconnected story about the vocabulary of twenty-first-century American politics. And then what follows—a discussion of how these two stories are essentially intertwined and a broad overview of the history of antisemitism—argues for sexual antisemitism as a key concept for understanding anti-Jewish ideologies.*

**Keywords:** antisemitism, sexuality studies, pornography, alt-right, racism, white nationalism, anti-Judaism

This article is an attempt to provide a deep historical genealogy of the sexual emotions and desires at work in contemporary far-right antisemitism. Embedded in primary research while also drawing heavily on the existing literature on antisemitism, this article seeks to intervene in the historiography of antisemitism and to argue for the existence of a sexual component at the heart of antisemitism, both historically and today. My central, counterintuitive claim is that while serious scholars of antisemitism recognize its abhorrent nature, for antisemites it is instead something positive. The organizing principle is the need to identify the joy that exponents of various forms of racism gain from their actions and, as this article specifically argues, the various kinds of erotic excitement that antisemites might gain from anti-Jewish hatred.

Methodologically, the article is consciously speculative in its approach: it is highly difficult, if not impossible, to know the “true” motivations for anyone, least of all people on the fringes of mainstream politics. As Susannah Heschel has recently stated, “Motivations may not be verbal, and they often elude the most careful empiricist historian.” For Heschel, the solution is to focus on the emotional aspects of antisemitism,

even with the recognition that “emotions” are elusive things.<sup>1</sup> A key supposition of my approach is that if recurring patterns and themes are clearly visible across different pieces of antisemitic archival material, then those themes and patterns almost certainly point to recurring concerns—whether political, social, religious, or otherwise—of the antisemites who authored them. More specifically, the recurring use of sexually explicit material can be legitimately read as saying something about the sexual desires and sexual excitement that animate antisemites. The interpretations engaged in here are certainly not the only possible ones, but as will be argued, interpretations grounded in sexuality studies have the potential to make an important contribution to how we understand antisemitism.

Additionally, this work strives to remain fully cognizant of the simultaneous continuity and discontinuity that always characterizes antisemitism across its *longue durée*. Sexual themes, up to and including what appears to be an invitation to gain sexual titillation and enjoyment from the hatred of Jews, is a long-repeating pattern from medieval religious anti-Judaism to modern racial antisemitism (and in some ways going back to antiquity), even as the specific social, economic, and political contexts in which that hatred was activated changed constantly. Heschel has argued for an “erotohistoriography” of antisemitism, one that is alert to *both* the microhistory of antisemitism *as well as* the macrohistorical ways in which certain tropes or claims about Jews recur across vastly different times and places. This “erotohistoriography,” as the term suggests, is also able to see how antisemitism plays on the emotional, the intimate, the personal, and the sexual, all in ways that are comparable to other forms of racism.<sup>2</sup> Focusing on the “erotics of race,” she notes, will allow us to understand both the “pleasure” and “excitement” experienced during acts of racist denigration as well as the connections between the deeper gratifications being offered and the tenacity of racism over the centuries. The various goals and underlying assumptions of this article overlap neatly with the salient points Heschel makes.

The article starts by discussing a short and specific story from Irish Jewish history in the 1900s, and then moves to a seemingly unconnected story about the vocabulary of twenty-first-century American politics. The rest of what follows—a discussion of how these two stories are essentially intertwined and a broad overview of the history of antisemitism—argues for *sexual antisemitism* as a key concept for understanding anti-Jewish ideologies.

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1 Susannah Heschel, “Likrat Historiografiah Erotit: Chaker Ha-Memadim Ha-Choshim ve-Ha-Regashim shel ha-antishemiot” [Toward an erotic historiography: Exploring the sensory and emotional dimensions of antisemitism], *Tziyon* [Zion] 85, nos. 1–4 (2020): 73–95, at 77. My thanks to Professor Heschel for sharing this research with me.

2 Heschel; see also, Sharon Patricia Hollan, *The Erotic Life of Racism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), which informs Heschel’s work.

### Stealthy Visits in the Darkness

The first story: In January 1904, a Catholic priest named John Creagh began a campaign of intimidation against the small Jewish community in Limerick, a provincial city on the west coast of Ireland. Using his religious pulpit, Creagh was able to foment a program of economic boycotts against Jewish merchants in the city. Some acts of nonlethal violence against the Limerick Jewish community also took place, and by the summer of the following year the Jewish community in the city had decreased by half. Collectively, these events have become known as the Limerick Boycott, usually seen as the most extreme moment of antisemitism in modern Irish history—extreme by the relatively quiet standards of Irish Jewish history, less so from the broader perspective of twentieth-century Europe. Creagh had been initially encouraged in his actions by local native-born traders, who resented the economic competition of newly arrived Jewish grocers. And Creagh's sermons drew on the standard tropes and accusations of pre-Vatican II Catholic anti-Judaism, mixing long-standing accusations of deicide with more recent accusations connected to the Dreyfus Affair in France a decade earlier. Analyses of these events generally echo this, explaining the root causes of the Limerick Boycott either in terms of economic competition or religious bigotry.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, more broadly, these are two of the most common modes of historiographical analysis of antisemitism: antisemitism as a kind of misfired class consciousness—what the German Marxist August Bebel is apocryphally said to have called “the socialism of fools”—or antisemitism as the result of a recurring Christian anger about “Christ killers” who have refused to accept the (supposed) messianic truth of Jesus.

This article, however, investigates a different strand, one that I believe recurs regularly across the history of antisemitism and exists in combination with religious and political-economic factors. In the first of his violent sermons, John Creagh aimed his wrath at Jewish usurers (a conventional target of antisemites) but then added a charged and potentially very sexualized twist, claiming that rural housewives were the most common targets of Jews selling goods on credit in the agricultural hinterland of Limerick.

The Jew has got a sweet tongue when he wishes—he passes off his miserable goods upon her. She has to spare and stint to get the money to pay off the Jew without her husband knowing it, and then follow misery, sorrow and deceit. The wife is afraid lest her husband should find out that she has been dealing with the Jews. . . . The wife . . . will beg the Jew not to come to her

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3 On the history of Irish antisemitism, see Dermot Keogh, *Jews in Twentieth-Century Ireland: Refugees, Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1998). See also Natalie Wynn, “Irish Representations of Jews and Jewish Responses / Jewish Representations of Jews and Irish Responses”; Peter Hession, “‘New Jerusalem’: Constructing Jewish Space in Ireland, 1880–1914”; and R. M. Douglas, “‘Not So Different After All’: Irish and Continental Antisemitism in Comparative Perspective,” all in *Irish Questions and Jewish Questions: Crossovers in Culture*, ed. Aidan Beatty and Dan O’Brien (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2018).

house—she does not want him to be seen coming, and then stealthy visits must be paid at night, in the darkness, lest the dealings might be found out.<sup>4</sup>

Creagh went on to claim that if his parishioners visit the home of one particular Jewish trader they “will be surprised to see the number and class of people who are going in and out . . . to pay the Jew his usury.” In barely concealed terms, Creagh appeared to make a very specific accusation about the dangers of (implicitly male) Jews. The language used—“stealthy visits . . . in the darkness”—seems designed to simultaneously prick the masculine pride of his audience while also offering up a small hint of sexual titillation. Father Creagh’s charged accusation, then, seems to be that Irish men are being unknowingly cuckolded by Jews who have trapped their wives into giving them sexual favors.<sup>5</sup>

### Cuckolds and Cuckservatives

The second story is about this word “cuckold.” Deriving from Old French and etymologically related to the word “cuckoo,” cuckold is a generally pejorative term; just as a cuckoo unnaturally lays her eggs in another bird’s nest, so also a cuckold is an unnatural man who allows another man to enter his home and have sex with his wife. It entered the English language probably around the mid-thirteenth century, becoming a more obscure term by the twentieth. But what I am particularly interested in is the curious way it recently reentered American vernacular English. Sometime around 2015, the term “cuckservative” began to be used in online far-right circles to describe conservative politicians that are supposedly too moderate or too willing to compromise with liberals. It has since been shortened to the succinct and aggressive sounding “cuck,” and is regularly used as a noun, a verb, or an adjective.<sup>6</sup> It is a fluid word that can be deployed in divergent ways even if the central accusation it connotes is always of docile and unmanly submissiveness. For instance, Mitt Romney is a *cuck* because his alleged receptiveness to working with Democrats marks him as a weak, effeminate pseudoconservative, but also Mitt Romney has been *cucked* by Donald Trump, and

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4 *Munster News*, January 13, 1904, reprinted in Dermot Keogh and Andrew McCarthy, eds., *The Limerick Boycott: Antisemitism in Ireland* (Cork: Mercier Press, 2005), 35–36. For other contemporary reporting on Creagh and the boycott, see *Limerick Echo*, January 19, 1904; “Jews in Ireland,” *Dundalk Democrat*, January 30, 1904; “Jews in Limerick,” *Kerry Evening Post*, January 13, 1904; “On Jewish Methods,” *Evening Herald*, January 13, 1904; and “The Jews in Limerick,” *The Freeman’s Journal*, January 23, 1904. I am grateful to Trisha Kessler and Seán Gannon for sharing their own research in this area with me.

5 This was certainly not a new type of allegation: an accusation in 1321 in France held that “Jews had sex with the wives of their Christian debtors and committed other horrible crimes, all of which merited their expulsion.” David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 53.

6 David Weigel, “Cuckservative’: The Conservative Insult of the Month Explained,” *Washington Post*, July 29, 2015, [www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/07/29/cuckservative-the-conservative-insult-of-the-month-explained/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/07/29/cuckservative-the-conservative-insult-of-the-month-explained/).

anyone who does not support Trump's agenda is a *cuck* liberal.<sup>7</sup> It is a word bound up with both sexual desire and humiliation: Romney is a pathetic cuck, but Trump's appeal partly lies in his ability to cuck others. And while it is a word that has begun to circulate far beyond its original far-right base, it still betrays those origins; it is part of broader far-right obsessions surrounding sex, power, control, and Jews. For example, the Great Replacement conspiracy theory, increasingly popular in far-right circles, claims that Jews are orchestrating a flood of nonwhite immigrants who will outreproduce whites, mate with white women, or otherwise manipulate white birth rates; in one sense, it is a claim that Jews are cucking white men and taking their rightful sexual power away from them.

Cuckservative as a term is a borrowing from a specific genre of pornography. In her brilliantly provocative book *Not Gay: Sex between Straight White Men*, Jane Ward provides a useful summation of the standard plot of this cuckolding pornographic genre: "[A] straight (and typically white) man discovers that his wife or girlfriend is cheating on him with a stronger, sexually powerful (and typically Black) male rival. Feeling emasculated and undeserving of his female partner, the (white) man watches her have sex with his rival and is told he must submit to both of them in order to keep his wife."<sup>8</sup> As a genre, it combines sexual titillation and gratification (features of all genres of pornography) with humiliation and longstanding racist assumptions about hypervirulent Black male sexuality. The so-called alt-right—an uneasy mix of white nationalists, libertarians, and trolls—is predominantly a phenomenon of the internet and it shares that online existence with this kind of pornography (and in repurposing the word "cuckold," it reflects the popularity of this pornography). Like the alt-right, this genre of pornography displays a fascination with the cuckolding of white husbands by Black men, and it thus operates at the intersections of racism and sexual fantasy. As Andrea Long Chu writes, "The trope of the black man's penis as large, threatening, and tremendously potent is an old one, of course, the standby excuse for lynchings and white supremacist terror, and it's found all across the pornographic spectrum." This is not least the case in cuckolding porn, "in which white boyfriends and husbands are forced to watch, and occasionally participate," as Black men have sex with their eager wives and girlfriends. "The classic explanation for this fetish," Chu says, is Frantz Fanon's "theory of negrophobia as a kind of murderous envy: the white man, projecting onto the black man the 'infinite virility' he worries he lacks."

The paradox of white supremacy, of course, is that it's actually an inferiority complex: the white man, who could have just as easily fantasized that the

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7 These various uses of "cuck" can be found in the following tweets: Dash Cool (@ZenGod55), Twitter, August 18, 2017, 10:47 a.m., <https://x.com/Zengod55/status/898556844909543426>; Kyle Kulinski (@KyleKulinski), Twitter, February 25, 2018, 3:32 p.m., <https://x.com/KyleKulinski/status/967859901308522501>; and Tito (@Slick15Rk), Twitter, September 5, 2020, 5:12 p.m., <https://x.com/Slick15Rk/status/1302353964604813317>.

8 Jane Ward, *Not Gay: Sex between Straight White Men* (New York: NYU Press, 2015), 102.



black man's penis was smaller than his own—it would be fantasy either way, after all—nevertheless opts to imagine himself as a sexual failure, going limp in the presence of the black man's unlimited sexual potency.<sup>9</sup>

Seeing this genre of pornography in these terms fits closely with what Julian Carter has identified as the paradoxical ways whiteness is constructed with and through images of recurrent weakness.<sup>10</sup> Those online white nationalists and antisemites who deploy these accusations of being a “cuck” seem to be repulsed by interracial sex even as they reference it—presumably willingly—again and again. Like the husbands in these standard plots, it is as if they cannot look away from actions that both humiliate and arouse them.

Slavoj Žižek commented in *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema* that pornography is an inherently conservative genre because of the way it always seeks to flatter its audience's fantasies, never to confound them or supersede them or push them in new directions.<sup>11</sup> Highly racialized cuckolding pornography is more than just conservative, though; it is inherently reactionary, not only employing racist tropes but also helping to reproduce them online. That pornography would be so openly racist is hardly surprising since racism and bigotry are themselves often noticeably pornographic.

### **Toward a Theory of Sexual Antisemitism**

Sexual racism is probably as old as colonialism itself. In Ireland, “England's first colony,”<sup>12</sup> the Welsh Norman ideologue Giraldus Cambrensis (1146–1223) implied that “the Irish will have sex with any available partner, without any taboo, restriction or social rule whatsoever. This is behavior that truly marks them as bestial, beneath the standards of humanity: they copulate as freely as animals.”<sup>13</sup> While the claims about different races made across the material discussed below have certain exclusive attributes, all of these are, in one way or another, sexual fantasies operating through racism and racial fantasies operating through sexualized imagery.

Antiblack racism has a long history of relying on stereotypes about Black male sexual potency, lust, and rapaciousness. Concurrent with the short-lived enfranchisement of Black men during Reconstruction, the “titillating and violence-provoking theory of the super-potency of [the] black superpenis,” which had been “whispered about for

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9 Andrea Long Chu, *Females* (London: Verso, 2019), 82–83.

10 Julian B. Carter, *The Heart of Whiteness: Normal Sexuality and Race in America, 1880–1940* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 72.

11 *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema*, directed by Sophie Fiennes (Mischief Films / Amoeba Film, 2006), documentary, 150 minutes.

12 Friedrich Engels to Karl Marx, May 23, 1856, in *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels: Ireland and the Irish Question*, ed. I. L. Golman and V. E. Kunina (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1971), 83.

13 Joep Leerssen, *National Thought in Europe: A Cultural History* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 31.

several centuries,” became something of a social obsession in the South.<sup>14</sup> Stories about Black male lust for white women, often the pretexts for lynchings, played on these highly sexualized tales. Claims of Black male “super-sexual predators” also fueled antiblack violence in twentieth-century Britain.<sup>15</sup> In similar fashion, Black women were (and are) regularly depicted, in the white supremacist imagination, as either having freakishly weird and hyperfeminine bodies, or as objectified receptacles for white male sexual attention, as Dorothy Roberts discussed in *Killing the Black Body*.<sup>16</sup> In his recent monumental work on racial violence in the United States, Walter Johnson discusses “all the torture and violation by which white people have historically drawn pleasure from the suffering of Blacks.” Johnson then goes on to speak of white men’s “anxiety that white women might have unfulfilled sexual desires and that those desires might lead them into the arms of darker men.” But he also notes the ways such an archetypal white man can transform “his anxieties into optimism, his fears of sexual inadequacy into a sensation of erotic potency,” fueling “the sexual energy that these white men felt as they murdered a Black man whose projected animal appetites they openly condemned and secretly desired.” Johnson summarizes this as “the circular expression of inadequacy, entitlement, privilege, and violence we might call imperial whiteness.”<sup>17</sup> The parallels here between pornography and racism are readily apparent, showing the complicated ways pleasure and racial hatred exist simultaneously.

The history of what Anne McClintock has called “porno-tropics”<sup>18</sup>—sexualized fantasies of racial outsiders—is long and varied. Writing on the history of antisemitism has tended to be siloed within Jewish studies, rarely cross-pollinating with postcolonial theory or the historiography of American racism (and the latter two rarely engage with Jewish studies).<sup>19</sup> Yet, sexual antisemitism can be placed into these broader histories even as it diverges in key ways from racialized pornography that displays a prominent white male anxiety about white women and their alleged desires for Black men. The

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14 Jane Dailey, *White Fright: The Sexual Panic at the Heart of America's Racist History* (New York: Basic Books, 2020), 6. Dailey is here citing Eugene Genovese.

15 Gavin Schaffer, “Perverts and Purists: The Idea of Jewish Sexual Difference in Britain, 1900–1945,” in *Jews and Sex*, ed. Nathan Abrams (Nottingham: Five Leaves Publications, 2008), 102.

16 Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction and the Meaning of Liberty* (New York: Vintage, 1998).

17 Walter Johnson, *The Broken Heart of America: St. Louis and the Violent History of the United States* (New York: Basic Books, 2020), 8, 186, 188, 189. For a discussion of social boundaries, minorities’ perceived impotence, and the ways their resistance against that impotence become classified as pollution or sexual violation, see R. I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Authority and Deviance in Western Europe, 950–1250*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 95.

18 Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 22.

19 Heschel, “Likrat,” 78; Bryan Cheyette, “White Skins, Black Masks: Jews and Jewishness in the Writings of George Eliot and Frantz Fanon,” in *Cultural Readings of Imperialism: Edward Said and the Gravity of History*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, Benita Parry, and Judith Squires (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 74–99.



antisemitic material studied below often had a somewhat similar content, focusing on sexual contact between Jewish men and white/Gentile women, but with none of the same anxieties about white women's sexual agency. Additionally, even as Jewish men are often depicted as sexually dangerous, there is none of the clear inferiority complex that Walter Johnson or Julian Carter identified. White supremacists may desire a sexual potency they project onto Black men; they do not seem to desire Jewish sexualities.

When I talk about racism and pornography, I am also thinking of the ways Orientalist art in the nineteenth century depicted a vaguely defined East as a luxurious space of sexual license, whether a heterosexual license or a homosexual one.<sup>20</sup> Already in the twelfth century, Islam was being conflated with pederasty in Western political discourse.<sup>21</sup> Orientalism and antisemitism have a very close history, not least in the ways nineteenth-century Jewish women were simultaneously sexualized and Orientalized—the Jewess was supposedly “recognised by her stylised sensual beauty: her large dark eyes, abundant hair and languid expression”<sup>22</sup>—or the manner in which contemporary white slave narratives combined antisemitic claims about “foreign” Jewish men dealing in flesh with Orientalist fantasies of beautiful and submissive white female captives in Eastern harems. Such women were depicted as lacking all agency and thus existing as pure objects for male sexual subjects. In Victorian-era white slave narratives, the male enslavers were often coded as Jewish, or vaguely racially “Other,” with their depictions being legible in two diverging ways. First, and most obviously, these sexually dangerous men were figures of abhorrence who violated normative social rules. But were they not also, even if only implicitly, sexually exciting figures who enjoyed easy access to submissive white female flesh? As one scholar has said, “Visions of the harem, and ideas of white women forced therein to engage in sexual adventures with darker-skinned men, fascinated Europeans in the colonial period.”<sup>23</sup> Fascinated *and aroused*, I would add. What often characterizes sexual racism is an envious politics of resentment combining with a violent grievance; *we* could never get away with this, but *they* can. In making this claim, it often seems that sexual racists are perhaps laying bare a recurring conceit of

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20 Joseph Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007). What Orlando Figes observes of Russian Orientalist literature in the nineteenth century repeats itself in several different national contexts: the Orient was imagined as “a hedonistic kingdom of sensual luxury and indolence, seraglios and sultans, as everything in fact, that the austere north [or west] was not.” See his *Natasha's Dance: A Cultural History of Russia* (New York: Picador, 2002), 384. The “East” is the place where you can break all the sexual rules enforced in the “West.”

21 Moore, *Formation*, 88.

22 Nadia Valman, *The Jewess in Nineteenth-Century British Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 4. It is telling that there is no Jewish male equivalent here; the stereotypical Jewish male figure is not presented as a sexually attractive figure.

23 Mir Yarfitz, *Impure Migration: Jews and Sex Work in Golden Age Argentina* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2019), 22, 25. The 1935 antisemitic screed *America's Ju-Deal* claimed it would “expose” the central role of Jews in the “White Slave Traffic.” “America's Ju-Deal” (Community Press), Promotional Pamphlet (n.d.), AJA MS 307 Bertha V. Corets Papers, Box 3, Folder 2.

their own erotic desires: *we wish* we could get away with *that*.<sup>24</sup>

Many years ago, in his famous essay “The Paranoid Style in American Politics,” Richard Hofstadter made the astute observation that “anti-Catholicism has always been the pornography of the Puritan.”<sup>25</sup> Anti-Catholic screeds, such as the notorious 1836 hoax *The Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk*, played on the notion that Catholic priests were sexually depraved and that nuns were helpless victims with no agency. But also, by describing their sexual actions in extreme detail, these tales provided a forum for sexual titillation.<sup>26</sup> The central argument I aim to pursue here is that antisemitism (particularly antisemitic visual material) often operates according to a similar, if not always fully identical, rationale, welding horror and arousal at one and the same time. Or to put it differently, scholars of antisemitism often overlook a key but uncomfortable truth: for antisemites, antisemitic culture is a pleasant thing to experience. It is perhaps even designed to be titillating and erotically gratifying. The story that Creagh told his parishioners is open to multiple readings. Not least, for my purposes, is that his accusations also functioned on an erotic level. Alongside Catholic anti-Judaism and economic antisemitism, Creagh was engaging in sexual fantasies about Jewish men cuckolding Irish Catholic husbands.

Indeed, this kind of sexual imagery and titillation recurs again and again in the history of antisemitism, often with recourse to something akin to the rhetorical device of *occupatio*, in which a speaker claims to be ignoring the very thing they then focus on. What I aim to do for the rest of this article is argue for the existence of a specific strand of *sexual antisemitism*, one that has been noticed by many historians but not yet fully theorized or conceptualized. Pornography is inherently sexual by design. The material studied below in some cases also seems to be intentionally erotic in form and content; in other cases, it seems to be sexual because that is one of the ingrained patterns of antisemitic cultural production.

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24 Gargi Bhattacharyya et al. have made a similar point regarding a contemporary panic on the British right about so-called “Pakistani grooming gangs”: “[C]hild sexual exploitation has been blamed on ‘Pakistani grooming gangs,’ which have become the most visceral marker of anti-Muslim sentiment in British politics. . . . [T]his concern about ‘grooming gangs’ reveals a wider set of crises and contestations over gender, sexuality and culture. The ‘Pakistani grooming gang’ has been mobilised as a unique and existential threat to white girls, rehashing familiar fears of miscegenation, paedophilia and the civilizationist rhetoric of the ‘War on Terror.’ . . . These collective threats to the nation are imagined to play by their own, different, rules, and therefore to be acculturated within some other moral order and system of authority, embedded in an alternative and unknowable form of social organisation—both dangerous and seductive.” See *Empire’s Endgame: Racism and the British State* (London: Pluto Press, 2021), 48–49.

25 Richard Hofstadter, “The Paranoid Style in American Politics” (1964), in *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (New York: Vintage, 2012), 21.

26 Similarly hypersexualized claims circulated in the nineteenth century about Mormons, often featuring an “obsessive concern about plural marriage.” Michael Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 134; Mary Campbell, *Charles Ellis Johnson and the Erotic Mormon Image* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 31.

### Antisemitism and “Jewish” Sexual Danger

Ancient and medieval anti-Judaism were often disarmingly sexual in content, claiming that Jews were prone to extremes of lust. As early as the second century, the Roman historian Tacitus was mixing the standard accusation that Jews are particularist and self-serving with erotic claims: “The Jews are extremely loyal toward one another and always ready to show compassion, but toward every other people they feel only hate and enmity . . . and although as a race they are prone to lust, they abstain from intercourse with foreign women; yet among themselves nothing is unlawful.”<sup>27</sup> In other words, Jews were defined as much by their lustful and taboo-defying sexualities as by their alleged clannishness. Claims of excessive Jewish lust and overfocus on the material and the bodily in time came to reinforce Christians’ contrasting self-image of ascetic, supracorporeal spirituality and were common currency in the ancient Mediterranean.<sup>28</sup> “Synagoga,” the female personification of Jewry and the opposite of “Ecclesia,” herself underwent an important shift in the move from late antiquity into the medieval period. From being a “a pitiful remnant of Divine history,” Synagoga instead became a “common whore, led astray by her lustful nature.” She was conventionally depicted holding a decapitated ram’s head by its horns. As well as referencing the ram sacrificed by Abraham on Mount Moriah in Genesis 22, this symbolized Jews’ animalistic sexuality and carnality. “The oversexed ram of Judaism” was now contrasted by “the docile lamb of Christianity.”<sup>29</sup> Henry Abramson has assembled a list of shockingly sexualized images of Jews from the Middle Ages to the early modern era, such as a “sixteenth-century representation of a horrific demon, identified as Jewish with the coin-shaped *rouelle* on his [*sic*] clothing,” who is depicted with “both a menacingly erect penis as well as a heavily nipples pair of drooping breasts.” Next to him/her/it is a second demon, also depicted with both breasts and “a dagger-like penis”; this gender-bending Jewish demon is “incongruously playing the bagpipe atop a vomiting pig.”<sup>30</sup> Joshua Trachtenberg, in his famous 1943 work *The Devil and the Jews*, observed that the shockingly sexual *Judensau* (Jew-pig) images, popular in German lands in the Middle Ages, often featured the Devil supervising the action. Another popular Jewish caricature depicted Jews riding backwards on goats as a symbol of their general

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27 Tacitus, *The Histories*, trans. Clifford H. Moore (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931), 180–83.

28 David Biale, *Eros and the Jews: From Biblical Israel to Contemporary America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 11; Josh Lambert, *Unclean Lips: Obscenity, Jews, and American Culture* (New York: NYU Press, 2014), 3; Todd Berzon, *Classifying Christians: Ethnography, Heresiology, and the Limits of Knowledge in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016), 35–36; Alexandra Cuffel, *Gendering Disgust in Medieval Religious Polemic* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 200, 231–32.

29 Henry Abramson, “A Ready Hatred: Depictions of Jewish Women in Medieval Antisemitic Art and Caricature,” *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 62 (1996): 11–12.

30 Abramson, 4.

unnaturalness. As Trachtenberg points out, “The *Bock* or billy goat, as the Middle Ages knew full well, is the devil’s favorite animal, frequently represented as symbolic of satanic lechery.”<sup>31</sup> The Benedictine historian Guibert of Nogent (ca. 1055–1124) argued, in a soon-to-be-popular formulation, “that there was a special link between the Devil and the Jews, sexually bonded and characterized by the seduction of Christians into the Devil’s service by means of Jewish wiles.” Jewish pollution and perfidy, as well as their “exceptional sexual voracity and endowment,” were key ingredients of this propaganda.<sup>32</sup> Sex resides at or just below the surface here. And Trachtenberg has quite rightly spoken of how antisemitic tales and folk imagery functioned as both sources of entertainment and instruction. Jews in these representations were comic as well as vile characters.<sup>33</sup> Eli Bromberg has even gone so far as to suggest that medieval blood libels can also be read as thinly veiled accusations of Jewish pedophilia.<sup>34</sup> There does seem to be a resonance between how pedophiles and “groomers” are imagined today and the thirteenth-century Dominican preacher Giordano da Pisa’s description of alleged Jewish crimes: “He reported that Jews abducted poor Christian boys, promised them money, and circumcised them.”<sup>35</sup> And certain passages in the Talmud that can be misinterpreted as condoning pedophilia have been seized upon in recent years by the online far right, a connection that Bromberg also draws in tracing the prehistory of the QAnon and Pizzagate conspiracy theories—built on lurid claims about the sexual abuse of children—back to their medieval forebears.<sup>36</sup> It is certainly the case that Jews

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31 Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews: The Medieval Conception of the Jew and Its Relation to Modern Antisemitism* (1943; repr., Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1983), 26. Jewish sexual depravity was a central theme in *Judensau* images, which regularly depicted Jews examining the genitalia of pigs or licking their anuses.

32 Moore, *Formation*, 60. Claims of Jewish sexual endowment are almost nonexistent in the more recent history of antisemitism; this feature of medieval anti-Judaism did not survive into modernity.

33 Trachtenberg, *Devil and the Jews*, 13–14.

34 Eli Bromberg, *Unsettling: Jews, Whiteness, and Incest in American Popular Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2021), 4. Henry Abramson makes the same point: “Pedophilia, particularly involving young boys, is a recurrent charge in the antisemitic repertoire, consistent with the notion of oversexed Jewish men handicapped by weak, womanly physiques.” “Ready Hatred,” 4. See also the caricature in the May 1934 issue of *Der Stürmer* that depicts Jewish men directly sucking blood from the nude corpse of a (presumably Christian) child of indeterminate gender. The caricature, not least the long, quasi-phallic straws, has obvious sexual connotations. American Jewish Archives (AJA), Nearprint Special Topics—Antisemitism, Box 2, 1934 Folder. This was a special issue on the *Jüdischer Mordplan* (Jewish murder plan), reprinted as a souvenir edition by the US National State’s Rights Party sometime after 1958. See *Jewish Ritual Murder*, undated handbill (ca. 1960s/70s), Johns Hopkins University Special Collections (JHU), White Supremacist Ephemera 1937–2007 (Folder 1 of 3), which also claims a connection between a supposed Jewish desire to kill and “perverted sex practices.”

35 Paola Tartakoff, *Conversion, Circumcision, and Ritual Murder in Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020), 32.

36 Talia Lavin, *Culture Warlords: My Journey into the Dark Web of White Supremacy* (New York: Hachette, 2020), 41–42; Bromberg, *Unsettling*, 7. For earlier uses of Talmudic accusations by the American far right, see “The Talmud Unmasked,” Christian Patriots Crusade Handbill, n.d., AJA, MS 0290, Box 3,

were perceived as a source of sexual danger in medieval Christendom. This was probably a metaphorical danger, a way of condemning apostasy and warning of the dangers of conversion, since such conversions were exceedingly rare.

Explicit discussions of Jewish circumcision were certainly not uncommon in this kind of cultural production,<sup>37</sup> and Alexandra Cuffel has shown how popular conceptions of Jewish perfidy were regularly conveyed through images of filth, animality, and somatic disgust.<sup>38</sup> Building on Cuffel's work, my argument is that these kinds of claims were not just intended to disgust their audience but in some cases to titillate them with images of the sexually weird and the freakish. My presumption is that they were received as pleasing tales as well as being pieces of vernacular religious instruction.

Whether, how much, and in what ways modern antisemitism lies in a straight continuity with medieval anti-Judaism is a vexed question.<sup>39</sup> David Nirenberg's view, that anti-Judaism is a flexible system of thought in which recurring claims can be put to work in vastly different social and political contexts from antiquity to modernity, seems like the best workable answer since it allows us to grapple with both the continuities and discontinuities of anti-Jewish hatred's long history.<sup>40</sup> As Heschel has noted, "antisemitism" as a macrohistorical concept does important intellectual work, illuminating the "chains of tradition" that link different microhistorical moments of hatred.<sup>41</sup> And even if we should not draw a simple straight line from medieval religious anti-Judaism to modern racial or pseudoscientific antisemitism, it is still the case that

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Folder 5; "Facts are Facts," Christian Educational Association Pamphlet, 1954, AJA, MS 0290, Box 6, Folder 4; "Who Are the Real Hate-Mongers," *National Renaissance Bulletin* 10, no.1 (January 1959) AJA, MS 0290, Box 10, Folder 7.

37 Leonard B. Glick, *Marked in Your Flesh: Circumcision from Ancient Judea to Modern America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 101; Tartakoff, *Conversion*. This graphicness certainly did not end with the Middle Ages. One mid-eighteenth-century British pamphlet—*The Christian's New Warning Piece: Or, A Full and True Account of the Circumcision of Sir E. T. Bart* (London: W. Owen, 1753)—features a satirical, and gruesome, depiction of a pro-Jewish politician who had agreed to be circumcised in exchange for Jewish financial support, only to have his foreskin stolen and the offer of funds withdrawn. See also the two early twentieth-century postcards, from Algeria and Tunisia, which graphically depict a "humorous" circumcision scene, complete with oversized scissors and a terrified baby urinating into the mouth of a grinning mohel. Salo Aizenberg, *Hatemail: Anti-Semitism on Picture Postcards* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), 82.

38 Cuffel, *Gendering Disgust*, 7ff.

39 Maurice Samuels, "Literature and the Study of Anti-Semitism," *American Historical Review* 123, no.4 (2018): 1223–33; David Nirenberg, "Was There Race before Modernity? The Example of 'Jewish' Blood in Late Medieval Spain," in *Neighboring Faiths: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism in the Middle Ages and Today* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 169–90; Jacob Katz, *From Prejudice to Destruction: Anti-Semitism, 1700–1933* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980). For an overview of the difficulties of creating a workable definition and chronology of antisemitism, see Steven Beller, *Antisemitism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 1–10.

40 David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2013), 1–12.

41 Heschel, "Likrat," 75.



while there was a discontinuity in function, there was a specific kind of continuity in content here, one that cuts across the divide between the Middle Ages and modernity.<sup>42</sup> Most importantly for my purposes, medieval anti-Jewish culture provided a thick seed bed for modern antisemitism. Medieval anti-Jewish animus was already markedly sexual; I am agnostic as to whether it can be called pornography in any conventional sense, but it was clearly smuggling sexualized content, mixing theology with titillation.

Moving very rapidly (perhaps too rapidly) into modernity, we find that depictions of Jews in the Nazi *Der Stürmer* shared a graphicness with their medieval antecedents. And they certainly tend to fit the description of pornography better:

[I]t is readily apparent that in its narrative pacing, its luxuriantly detailed descriptions of sex crimes, and its many pictures of naked blondes defiled by big-nosed Jews, *Der Stürmer* served as pornography. While it is impossible to know with which characters in *Der Stürmer*'s scenarios readers identified (was it the sexually successful Jewish man, the violated or seduced non-Jewish woman, the outraged non-Jewish male or female voyeur?), the multiplicity of possibilities for libidinal identification may have been precisely the point and could help to explain the paper's immense appeal, especially for teenage boys.<sup>43</sup>

Many of the caricatures appearing in *Der Stürmer* already in the Weimar period sought to play directly on accusations (and perhaps also to arouse sexual jealousies) that Jewish men were gaining undue sexual access to Aryan German women. At times this seemed to encode a certain kind of economic grievance, claiming Jewish men had a wealth that gave them a life of free sexual access or sexual ease, all supposedly denied to German Gentile men. Against the metaphorical sexual contact of the Middle Ages, these cartoons were produced in a society where actual intermarriage was now a real possibility and where Nazi obsessions with racial purity were finding increasing popular purchase. But other caricatures in *Der Stürmer* presented Jews as rapacious threats to German Aryan womanhood (figure 1), though often with a graphic nudity and explicitness that to me suggest the purpose slipped into the pornographic. Claims that Jewish men posed a specific threat to the sexual purity of Aryan womanhood were rife among Nazis; the entry on *Mädchenhandel* (white slavery, literally "girl trafficking") in the Nazis' 1931 antisemitic encyclopedia ran to about fifty pages.<sup>44</sup> Anxieties about capitalism and the fear that, under capitalism, "all that is holy is profaned," can be

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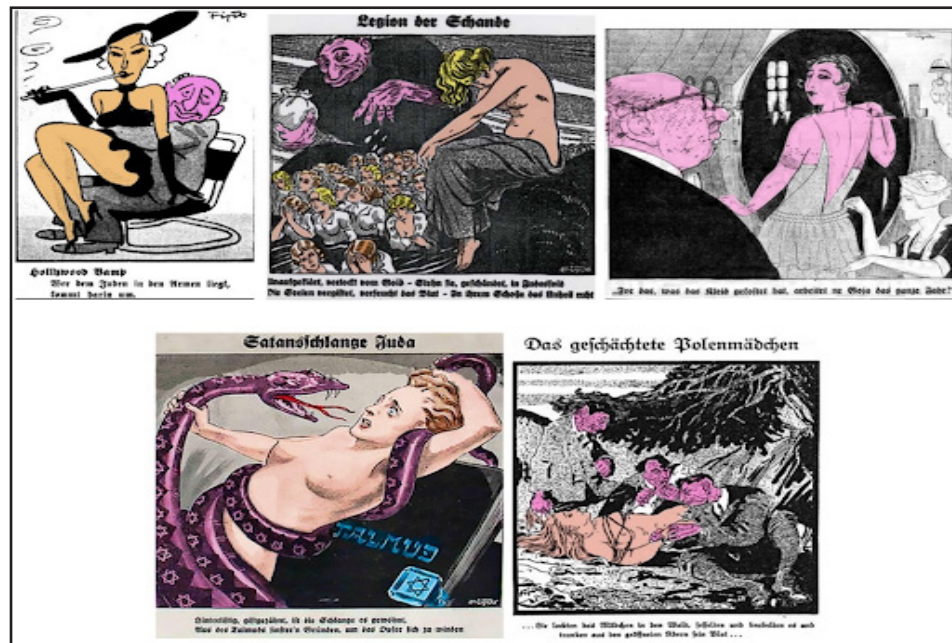
42 On the ways that modern antisemitism had roots in medieval anti-Judaism (and the manner in which the borders between the two are regularly quite fuzzy), see Heschel, "Likrat," 79.

43 Dagmar Herzog, *Sex after Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 37–40. See also Heschel, "Likrat," 90.

44 Edward Bristow, *Prostitution and Prejudice: The Jewish Fight against White Slavery, 1870–1939* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982), 304.



interpreted here too.<sup>45</sup> Anxieties about capitalist modernity were obviously absent in medieval anti-Judaism.



**Figure 1.** Selection of cartoons from *Der Stürmer*, 1930–1938.<sup>46</sup>

It also seems that in the rape fantasies of *Der Stürmer*, the problem is not so much that these women are being raped as that they are being raped by Jewish men (rather than their rightful Aryan male possessors).<sup>47</sup> Dagmar Herzog has aptly talked of “the

45 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, ed. A. J. P. Taylor (1848; repr., London: Penguin Books, 1967), 83.

46 The captions translate as follows: “Hollywood Vamp: He who lies in the arms of the Jew dies in there” (*Der Stürmer*, no. 28, July 1938); “Legion of disgrace and shame: Ignorant, lured by gold, they stand disgraced in Jewry’s fold. Souls poisoned, blood infected, disaster broods in their wombs” (*Der Stürmer*, no. 37, August 1935); “A goy works a whole year to pay for the price of that dress!” (*Der Stürmer*, no. 2, January 1930); “Snake of Satan Jüda: Treacherous, armed with poisoned teeth, the snake is used to rolling around the victim out of Talmud’s sinister reasons” (*Der Stürmer*, no. 23, June 1936); “The Polish girl slaughtered according to religious rites: They lured the girl into the forest, bound and gagged her, drinking the blood from her slashed wrists” (*Der Stürmer*, no. 39, September 1926). For a compendium of similar sexualized imagery on the American far right at the time, see the Anti-Defamation League Poster, “The Propaganda Which Abolished Human Rights Abroad,” n.d. (ca. 1938), AJA, Nearprint Special Topics: Nazism, Box 2.

47 On Nazi men’s assumptions “that they were entitled to almost unlimited access to women’s bodies,” see Regina Mühlhäuser, “Sex, Race, Violence, *Volksgemeinschaft*: German Soldiers’ Sexual Encounters with Local Women and Men during the War and the Occupation in the Soviet Union, 1941–1945,” in *Beyond the Racial State: Rethinking Nazi Germany*, ed. Devin Pendas, Mark Roseman, and Richard Wetzell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 455–81.

sexually inciting elements of Nazism” and noted that for those who fit the prescribed Nazi racial archetypes, new sexual liberties were promised.<sup>48</sup> And indeed a cartoon from August 1937, two years after the implementation of the Nuremberg Laws, depicted the new sexual ease enjoyed by Aryan men in a Germany no longer beset by allegedly lustful Jewish men (figure 2). All of these caricatures in *Der Stürmer* seem to be designed to invite and gratify the desires of their male readers, playing on a sense of sexual humiliation while also holding out a vision of sexual gratification through overcoming those Jews responsible for German Gentile male impotence. The national impotence that followed the imposition of the Treaty of Versailles, the national humiliation that followed defeat in 1918, and the well-known antisemitic claim that Jews had stabbed the nation in the back seem to collapse here into a more personal sense of sexual impotence, a correlate of what Annette Timm has called “the Nazi project of harnessing emotions to the goals of a racial utopia.”<sup>49</sup> As in much of the other material studied in this article, this material can be simultaneously read in terms of power, control, humiliation, and sexual desire.



**Figure 2.** “No entry for Jews: It is really wonderful that today in Germany, one can be among their own again.”<sup>50</sup>

48 Herzog, *Sex after Fascism*, 15, 28

49 Annette F. Timm, “Mothers, Whores, or Sentimental Dupes? Emotion and Race in Historiographical Debates about Women in the Third Reich,” in *Beyond the Racial State*, 335.

50 *Der Stürmer*, no. 32, August 1937.

The antisemitic sexual fantasies of *Der Stürmer* are echoed in the “Volk und Rasse” (People and Race) chapter in *Mein Kampf*. Here, Hitler cycles through boilerplate racial antisemitic attacks: Marxism as a Jewish conspiracy for global domination, Jews as an antinational and even antinatural force, insidious Jewish control of the state or domination of the culture. And then, late in the chapter, he identifies a suitably emotive manifestation of all this: “The black-haired Jewboy,” who, Hitler claims, “lurks for hours, Satanic joy on his face, for the unsuspecting girl, stealing her from the [German] people (*Volke*).”<sup>51</sup>

In his recent book on “the myth of Judeo-Bolshevism,” Paul Hanebrink has shown how Nazi anti-Soviet propaganda during World War II, particularly as the Soviets started to defeat the Nazis, often used these highly graphic kinds of rape fantasies and allegations as a way to further inflame German opinion against the USSR. Nazi anti-Soviet propaganda was markedly sexualized, often indulging in rape fantasies. In occupied Poland, for example, a widely circulated brochure depicted a Red Army soldier, whip in hand, clutching a helpless Polish woman while a lust-filled Jewish male figure looked on over his shoulder. The image was titled: “The fate of women under the Jewish-Bolshevik whip.”<sup>52</sup> And this kind of modern sexualized antisemitic propaganda—sometimes race-obsessed, but not necessarily so—has lingered on since then, surfacing in a number of national contexts and acting as a vehicle for a variety of divergent concerns.<sup>53</sup>

### Sexual Antisemitisms and Conservative Anxieties

To return to Ireland, sexual antisemitism echoes in the figure of Leopold Bloom, a sex-obsessed Jew, cuckolded by his wife, who masturbates in public, daydreams of BDSM, and has erotic fantasies about his own daughter (a “[p]ert little piece”).<sup>54</sup> Fitting with the Pauline division of flesh versus spirit, the carnal figure of Bloom stands in stark contrast to the Greek/Irish/Christian Stephen Dedalus, a man of the spirit rather than of the Jewish flesh. Joyce, for sure, inverted that Pauline conceptualization, presenting earthy Jewish sexuality as superior to dour Catholic self-denial, though he was still operating

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51 Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 1942), 357.

52 Paul Hanebrink, *A Specter Haunting Europe: The Myth of Judeo-Bolshevism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 155. See also *German Women in Soviet Hands: The Journal of a Young German Wife under Bolshevik Occupation from January 29 to May 31, 1945*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Boniface Press, 1962), AJA, Nearprint Special Topics—Antisemitism, Box 11.

53 David Biale began his panoramic survey of Jews and sex by remarking that “[m]odern culture has a fascination with the sexuality of the Jews, a fascination marked by wildly conflicting beliefs,” ranging from claims that Jews, lacking a Pauline partition of body and spirit, had a healthier and more earthy attitude to sexuality, to antisemitic claims that Jews are a uniquely sexual threat to the social order. We can find various examples of this sexual antisemitism across the twentieth century, often united by a certain grim fascination with Jewish sexuality. Biale, *Eros and the Jews*, 1.

54 James Joyce, *Ulysses* (1922; repr., New York: Random House, 1986), chaps. 4, 5, 13.

within a familiar framework of Jew-as-Lustful. And perhaps we can hear murmurs of Joyce in the strangest of comparisons: Hugh Hefner, “a lifelong non-Jewish philo-Semite,” asserted his admiration for American Jews in the 1960s for being “more liberal than either American Catholics or the main stream of American Protestantism,” even if they were “not nearly as sexually permissive as the Hebrews of the Old Testament.” Indeed, Hefner’s *Playboy* featured a pictorial on “The Girls of Israel” in 1970 that oscillated between an eroticized version of Zionism and familiar Orientalist tropes about men traveling to the East and there getting easy sexual access to the submissive bodies of exotic women.<sup>55</sup>

Joyce’s frank sexuality won him few favors in an Ireland embracing Catholic social teachings. Both in the 1930s, when a ban on contraception was introduced, and in the 1980s and 1990s, when contraception was made legal again, there were public claims that condoms were a Jewish plot against Catholic Ireland. Jews as a sexually dangerous people—Jewish men especially—is a persistent idea, here helping to express ideas about Irish national purity in the face of alleged foreign sexual dangers.<sup>56</sup> Post-1922 Irish conservative mores avoided any and all discussions of sex, thus there is none of the potentially titillating content present in other times and places.

In the Leo Frank trial in 1913, one of the most notorious antisemitic moments in modern American history, Tom Watson—populist, nativist, and journalist—described Leo Frank, an Atlanta businessman standing trial for murder, as being “the typical young libertine Jew . . . who has an utter contempt for the law, and a ravenous appetite for the forbidden fruit—a lustful eagerness enhanced by the racial novelty of the girls of the uncircumcised.”<sup>57</sup> Notice here that Gentile women seem to be presented as having no objective self-determination; they are the “girls” owned by Christian men, “the uncircumcised,” but momentarily stolen by Jewish interlopers. Voyeuristic accusations that Frank was a “habitual seducer” of innocent girls in his factory also appeared in reporting in the *Atlanta Constitution* newspaper and in *Life* magazine.<sup>58</sup> Claims that

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55 *Playboy* 17, no. 4 (April 1970); Lambert, *Unclean Lips*, 11. The Jewish celebrity sexologist Dr. Ruth Westheimer has more recently claimed that “Judaism is intensely sexual” and “sex, in and of itself, has never been a sin for Jews, or something not to discuss.” Lambert, 11.

56 In testimony to the Irish government’s “Committee on Evil Literature” in 1926, the Jesuit priest and social reformer Richard Devane offered anecdotal evidence of a “jew” [*sic*] found selling contraceptives in Ballina in the rural west; when the Gardaí (the Irish police) failed to stop him, the local parish priest held an ad hoc trial and attempted to extract a £100 fine from him. “The jew paid £10 and cleared out,” National Archives of Ireland, JUS 7/2/9, *Rev. R. S. Devane, S.J., examined*, June 24, 1926. Devane also used coded language to claim Jews were behind the contraceptive trade in Ireland. See his *Indecent Literature: Some Legal Remedies* (Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1925), which was originally published as an article in the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, an official organ of the Irish Catholic hierarchy. For a discussion of sexual antisemitism in 1980s Ireland, see Aidan Beatty, “Irish Modernity and the Politics of Contraception, 1979–1993,” *New Hibernia Review* 17, no. 3 (Autumn 2013): 108.

57 Sarah Imhoff, *Masculinity and the Making of American Judaism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), 199.

58 Imhoff, 230. For examples of how the American far right continued to exploit the Leo Frank case,



Jews “lived lives of unbridled license” were already swirling around the American conservative right by the start of the twentieth century.<sup>59</sup> It is not at all a coincidence that the pioneers in American censorship and social control, the Comstock Society, had a statistically notable tendency to target Jews far more than Gentiles, reinforcing this sexual antisemitism as well as a very white American racial desire to protect social purity.<sup>60</sup>

The English antisemite Joseph Banister, in his *England Under the Jews* (1901), not only echoed the notion that Jews controlled the sex trade but also that they delighted in the cruelties they bestowed: “No Jew is more of a hero among his fellow tribesmen than the one who can boast of having accomplished the ruin of some friendless, unprotected Christian girl.” Jewish men, Banister claimed, were “the most lecherous breed in existence,” and he expressed a particular unease about English servant girls working for Jews (an anxiety that the Nazis later exhibited—the 1935 Nuremberg Laws prohibited German women under forty-five years of age from working in Jewish homes because of an assumption that such women would be sexual targets).<sup>61</sup> Banister’s book title is probably a plagiarism of Édouard Drumont’s *La France Juive* (1886), which not only employed the same canard about Jews and prostitution but also, in turn, drew on Gougenot des Mousseaux’s 1869 work *Le Juif: Le Judaïsme et la Judaïsation des peuples chrétiens* (*The Jew: Judaism and the Judaization of the Christian Peoples*), where prostitution was labeled “La Morale du Talmud en action.” (Gougenot des Mousseaux, unlike his imitators, was equally excoriating in his views of Jewish women as of Jewish men).<sup>62</sup> Telemachus Timayenis’s *The Original Mr. Jacobs* (1888), a seminal work of American antisemitism, also cribbed heavily from *La France Juive* and made similar claims. Timayenis remained true to this form in his later works; his book *The American Jew: An Exposé of His Career* contained a chapter on “The Jew Lecher” as well as an extended chapter on “Customs and Habits of the Jews,” which displayed a

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see “Leo Frank Case and Today’s Jewish Rape of the South,” *The Thunderbolt: The White Man’s Viewpoint*, no. 26 (February 1961), AJA, MS 0290 Antisemitism Collection, Box 11, Folder 2. This was a “Special Georgia Edition” of the National States Rights Party’s newspaper, which claimed its account of the Frank case was here for the “first time told in full.” See also “Proof Leo Frank Murdered Mary Phagan,” *The Thunderbolt*, no. 275 (March 1982), AJA, Nearprint Special Topics—Antisemitism, Box 18, 1982 Folder.

59 Jenna Weissman Joselit, *Our Gang: Jewish Crime and the New York Jewish Community, 1900–1940* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 6.

60 Lambert, *Unclean Lips*, 6.

61 Joseph Banister, *England under the Jews* (London: Joseph Banister, 1901), 39; Schaffer, “Perverts and Purists,” 106–7. The Jewish country singer Kinky Friedman lampooned such sexualized antisemitic claims in his 1974 song “They Ain’t Makin’ Jews Like Jesus Anymore”: “Well, a redneck nerd in a bowling shirt was a-guzzlin’ Lone Star beer / Talking religion and-uh politics for all the world to hear / They oughta send you back to Russia, boy, or New York City-One / You just want to doodle a Christian girl and you killed God’s only son.”

62 Gougenot des Mousseaux, *Le Juif: Le Judaïsme et la Judaïsation des peuples chrétiens* (Paris: Henri Plon, 1869), 405; Bristow, *Prostitution and Prejudice*, 22.

clear fascination with “this strange and mysterious people,” their alleged lustful desires for Gentile women, and the supposed sexual license they enjoyed, all of which was minutely described.<sup>63</sup> In 1970, the neo-Nazi *Liberator* newspaper ran an article on the “Kings of Porno,” who were unsurprisingly labeled as Jews but with a tone bordering on titillation: “Everybody knows that some pretty raunchy stuff is being printed and filmed these days. But not many people have bothered to acquaint themselves with the vital statistics of the industry which churns the stuff out and peddles it.”<sup>64</sup>

Fin-de-siècle German antisemites such as Thomas Fritsch and Alexander Berg, author of the “semi-pornographic” *Juden-Bordelle*, also trafficked in allegations about Jews and the sex trade.<sup>65</sup> Stereotypes about Jews and the sex trade were so common in early twentieth-century Argentina that *polaca*, referring to immigrant women from eastern Europe, implicitly Jewish, became a common term for “prostitute.”<sup>66</sup> *Polaca* functioned as a similar code in Brazil. And in the years leading up to President Getúlio Vargas’s declaration of an “Estado Novo” in 1937, the “Cohen Plan” conspiracy theory fabricated a Jewish-communist plot to invade the houses of wealthy Brazilians and rape them. The Cohen Plan was widely disseminated across Brazil, and Vargas used the mood created to authorize a new military coup, promulgate a new constitution, and take control of a full-fledged dictatorship. As the writer Orides Mezzaroba said in 1992, “The objective of the Plan was to create an emotional environment, conducive to the rapid acceptance of the coup and the new Constitution by the population, as emergency national salvation measures.”<sup>67</sup> The journalist Vincent Bevins characterizes *Plano Cohen* as a “parable of unique communist evil” in which communism was associated “with pure evil or witchcraft, drawn with the use of demons or Satanic beasts, such as dragons, snakes, and goats. There was often the implication, or outright depiction, of sexual perversion and deviancy.”<sup>68</sup> “Jews,” I would add, were clearly being folded into the category of “communists” in these sexualized fantasies of the Brazilian right, in which violations of the male homestead and an anxiety about communist threats to property were expressed via sexual antisemitism.

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63 Telemachus Timayenis, *The Original Mr. Jacobs: A Startling Exposé* (New York: Minerva, 1888); Telemachus Timayenis, *The American Jew: An Exposé of His Career* (New York: Minerva, 1888). Both of these works were rediscovered and republished in the later twentieth century by white supremacists. For background, see Scott D. Seligman, “He Was the Father of Anti-Semitic Publishing in America,” *Forward*, February 5, 2020.

64 “Kings of Porno,” *The National Socialist Liberator*, no. 5 (March 1970), AJA, Nearprint Special Topics—Antisemitism, Box 15, 1970 Folder. This paper was published by the National Socialist Liberation Front, the Virginia-based youth-wing of George Lincoln Rockwell’s American Nazi Party.

65 Bristow, *Prostitution and Prejudice*, 250–51.

66 Yarfitz, *Impure Migration*, 2–3.

67 Orides Mezzaroba, “Plano Cohen: A Consolidação Do Anticomunismo No Brasil” [Cohen Plan: The consolidation of anticomunism in Brazil], *Revista Sequência* (September 1992): 94.

68 Vincent Bevins, *The Jakarta Method: Washington’s Anticomunist Crusade and the Mass Murder Program that Shaped Our World* (New York: Public Affairs, 2020), 103.



Even more bizarre was the fantasy that coalesced during a resurgent white-slave panic that swept Orléans, Grenoble, and other French cities in the late 1960s, when Jewish boutique owners were charged with drugging teenage girls in their fitting rooms and spiriting them along underground passages to waiting submarines.<sup>69</sup> And Henrietta Mondry has shown how anxieties about glasnost in 1980s and 1990s Russia often zeroed in on “the Uncensored Sexed Body of the Jew,” when a newly liberalized book market “was flooded with semi-pornographic and hard pornographic material depicting devious and criminal behavior. This new art was dubbed *pornukha* and *chernukha*—pornography and dark perversion (*chernyi* refers to the color black)—and included murder, sadistic sex, and every form of pathologic expression of basic instincts.” In the literature Mondry analyzes, Jewish men are depicted as having both a bisexual or ambiguous sexual identity as well as a dangerous desire to sexually possess Russian Gentile women.<sup>70</sup> Taken collectively, what all these examples show is that very specific anxieties, localized in time and place, are expressed through a shared vocabulary and set of images. There was clearly a horror of Jewish sexual danger here—and that is how they are conventionally interpreted—but the focus on libertinism and on sexual freedom existing outside the rules of normative society points to a different interpretation: that Jewish men enjoy sexual excitement denied to the rest of us.

Also worth recounting are the curious ways in which antisemitic views of sexually dangerous Jewish men coexist with similarly essentialized, if more sexually conventional, beliefs that Jewish women are exotic and sexually exciting while also still somehow dangerous.<sup>71</sup> In one historian’s overview, the Jewish woman was imagined as “an ambiguous, erotically threatening fantasy” before transmogrifying in the 1920s, with the rise of cinema, into “the veritable incarnation of the femme fatale.” And as Jean-Paul Sartre analyzed it, the trope of the “beautiful Jewess” carried a unique and “very special sexual signification,” bound up with images of rape during Russian pogroms.<sup>72</sup> Sartre calls the Jewess a literary “sexual symbol” who desires Christian men and desires

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69 Bristow, *Prostitution and Prejudice*, 45–46.

70 Henrietta Mondry, *Constructing the Jew in Russian Culture, 1880s to 2008* (Brookline, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2009), 168–87.

71 David Greven, “Hawthorne and the Gender of Jewishness: Anti-Semitism, Aesthetics, and Sexual Politics in *The Marble Faun*,” *Journal of American Culture* 35, no. 2 (2012): 135–52. Nadia Valman talks of “the irresistible erotic appeal of the ‘Jewess’” in Victorian literature. See Valman, *Jewess*, 2. In the plates accompanying the 1724 work *Jüdisches Ceremoniel*, written by the Jewish apostate Paul Christian Kirchner, various male Jewish rituals are depicted in a dry and quasi-ethnographic style (a tone at odds with the anti-Jewish register of the text itself); conversely, in a plate entitled “Reinigung der Weiber im Bad” (Cleaning the women in the bath), the female Jewish space of a mikveh is inaccurately depicted as a playfully erotic space of nude women cavorting in the water. Paul Christian Kirchner, *Jüdisches Ceremoniel, oder, Beschreibung dererjenigen Gebräuche* [Jewish Ceremonial, or, a description of their customs] (Frankfurt: Peter Conrad Monath, 1724), plate 24.

72 Stefanie Schüler-Springorum, “Gender and the Politics of Anti-Semitism,” *American Historical Review* 123, no. 4 (2018): 1215–16; Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, trans. George J. Becker (New York: Schocken Books, 1948), 48–49.

to be converted herself but is generally rejected if not “violated or beaten,” even if she is also initially an object of desire. Nevertheless, there are certainly examples of female figures in antisemitic visual material that were more vile than erotic: the series of anti-Dreyfusard political posters entitled *Musée des Horreurs* depicted Jewish women as being physically ugly and sexually monstrous, part of a general horror of Jews on the part of French conservatives in the 1890s.<sup>73</sup> Viewed from a very high vantage point, all of the material studied in this article shares anxieties about literal or ideational borders and about those with the agency to violate those borders, whether that is apostate monks flirting with heterodoxy or converted Jewish men with an alleged desire to violate both the nation and its women. As sexist fantasies, the idea that only men have agency predominates. Jewish women are thus either ignored, treated as submissive receptacles for male Gentile attentions, or seen as suitable candidates for conversion to Christianity.

### The Great Replacement Theory

In their recent book on Los Angeles in the 1960s, Mike Davis and Jon Wiener discuss a “toxic rumor” that circulated in southern California in the summer of 1964: “By the eve of the November election, it had spread virally across the entire country and infected political debate everywhere.” In a story variously set in different suburbs of the city, a group of adult Black men was said to have castrated a three-year-old white boy in a public bathroom. In versions of the story that circulated in white neighborhoods adjacent to Hispanic sections of LA, the assailants became Mexican. “Everyone” (everyone white, that is) was aware of this story and knew someone that knew someone who could allegedly verify the details, all of which had supposedly been covered up by a biased liberal media. But then Paul Coates, a columnist for the *Los Angeles Times*, discovered a telling etiology for the rumor when he received letters from three different readers who had lived in 1930s Germany: the “same story” had been used by Nazi leaders to enrage Hitler Youth before pogroms. “Only then, the ‘little white boy’ was a German boy, and the ‘colored hoodlums’ were Jews.”<sup>74</sup>

An American white supremacist racism informed by Nazi antisemitism was clearly at work in this 1960s urban legend. But so also was sex, as specifically shown by the sheer excess of sexual details in this lurid story. A specific variety of American pornographic antisemitism—which oscillates between humiliation and gratification—has been developing for several decades. American antiblack racism cross-pollinated with antisemitism throughout the twentieth century, with claims, for example, that “Jews” are the true masterminds of the Civil Rights Movement, since Black men were

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73 No. 48, *Charlotte Mayer* and No. 46, *Lénora*, JHU, MS-0422 Jean-Marie Goulemot Dreyfus Affair Collection, Box 3.

74 Paul Coates, “An Ugly Lie, Once Nailed Here, Spreads Eastward to Maryland,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 20, 1965; Mike Davis and Jon Wiener, *Set the Night On Fire: L.A. in the Sixties* (London: Verso, 2020), 113.

assumed to not have the proper political agency or basic human intelligence to steer such a mass movement.

The claim that Black and Jewish men are united in their desires to defile white womanhood (even if their sexualities are imagined as quite different—sex-obsessed but in weak Jewish bodies for which white women allegedly have no desire, sex-obsessed and in Black bodies to which white women are supposedly overly attracted) has been common on the post-1945 American far right (figure 3).<sup>75</sup> Sexually graphic images of Jews as rapists or as lustful devils are common currency here. In the late 1950s, for example, the Christian Patriots Crusade—connected to both the segregationist National States Rights Party and one iteration of the Ku Klux Klan—produced handbills depicting a naked woman bound to a giant Star of David and being whipped by a male Jewish figure.<sup>76</sup> In another piece from the same period, the central image depicted a seemingly unconscious white woman in the arms of a Black male lover and/or rapist, which was captioned “the result of race-mixing.” The sly-winking, stereotypically Jewish man on the same handbill was clearly the architect of this sexual contact, an accusation bluntly made clear by the title: “Save the White Race: The Hell-Inspired Jews Seek to Destroy the White Race.”<sup>77</sup> This kind of material draws on the same racial fears as Hitler’s accusation that sexually dangerous Jews were bringing Black men into the industrial heart of Germany for nefarious purposes. “[A]lways with the same ulterior motive and clear goals,” Hitler said, “to destroy the white race [*weiße Rasse*] that they detest through the bastardization that inevitably occurs, knocking them from their cultural and political heights and rising to be their masters themselves.”<sup>78</sup> For Hitler, as for late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century American white nationalists, sexual contamination and destruction are bound up with Jewish cultural contamination and the destruction of the nation; this antisemitism is inherently sexual in content.

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75 See, for example, “Niggers, You Too Can Be a Jew,” American Nazi Party handbill, n.d. (ca. 1960), AJA, MS 0290, Box 1, Folder 10; “How the Levellers Are Destroying America,” *Closer Up* pamphlet, n.d. (ca. 1957–1960), MS 0290, Box 3, Folder 8; “Jews Finance Race Mixing,” *Klan Bulletin* (March 1961), AJA, MS 0290, Box 7, Folder; “Boating Not Busing,” National Socialist White People’s Party handbill, n.d. (ca. early 1970s), AJA, Nearprint Special Topics: Nazism, Box 3.

76 “Freedom of Jewish Tyranny?,” Christian Patriots Crusade handbill, n.d. (ca. 1959), AJA, MS 0290, Box 3, Folder 5.

77 “Save the White Race,” Christian Patriots Crusade handbill, n.d. (ca. 1959), AJA, MS 0290, Box 3, Folder 5. See also the cartoon of a sexualized Jew/Satan in *Grass Roots* 8, no. 93 (May 1960), AJA, MS 0290, Box 9, Folder 6.

78 Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 357.



**Figure 3.** A National States Rights Party handbill warning of Jews' alleged desire to destroy racial difference.<sup>79</sup>

As white nationalism moves more and more into the mainstream as Trumpism, this sexual antisemitism has metastasized into the “Great Replacement Theory,” in which Jews are said to be masterminding a population decline of the white race. The fear of racial dilution at work here is also a fear of miscegenation and the “wrong” kinds of sexual contact, since these, along with immigration, are assumed to be the means by which the “replacement” is being carried out. This sexual conspiracy theory has deep roots in white nationalism while also tapping into contemporary fears of migration and rapid social change. It has also become one of the most popular contemporary antisemitic conspiracy theories of the so-called alt-right and increasingly accepted within the GOP.<sup>80</sup>

79 “Integration Is Jewish,” National States Rights Party handbill, n.d. (ca. 1958), AJA, MS 0290, Box 11, Folder 1.

80 Nazis claimed, in almost a foreshadowing of the Great Replacement conspiracy theory, that “abortion rights were defended by Jews in order to ‘secure their dominion over the Aryan peoples.’” Herzog, *Sex after Fascism*, 21. Hitler himself believed that a similar replacement was underway in France as a result of colonial racial mixing. Thomas Piketty, *Capital and Ideology*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), 477n90. Within the Republican Party and its broader ecosystem, J. D. Vance, Steve Bannon, Stephen Miller, and Tucker Carlson have all made statements that seem to accord with the conspiracy theory, but often with a (probably intentional) plausible deniability. See “A List of MAGA Republicans Who Took the ‘Great Replacement’ Theory Mainstream,” *Center for*

What is less noticed, perhaps, is the implied second half of this story: that white men—with possible echoes of *Dr. Strangelove*—are being offered a potential Jew-free future in which they get unfettered access to white women so as to repopulate a supposedly decimated white race.<sup>81</sup> Mark Collett, a former high-ranking member of the antisemitic and Islamophobic British National Party, has described the sexual freedoms of the twenty-first century as an attack on white men. According to Collett, white men have been deprived “of their females,” such that “the white man is not the dominant man, the white man is not on top, in fact, he is now a second class citizen,” and as such he is “a conquered man . . . a man who has lost control of his nation, his females and in a way his own destiny.”<sup>82</sup> The flip side of this story will be the pleasing return of white male authority and a monopoly on sexual access.<sup>83</sup> This is neatly encoded by the so-called *fourteen words*—“We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children”—coined by the white supremacist David Lane and now acting as a sort of mantra for the American far right. One way to understand Lane’s slogan is as an antisemitic invitation to engage in gratifying sexualized fantasies as well as the fantasy that second-wave feminism and the Civil Rights Movement (both assumed to be Jewish plots because women and African Americans are denied political agency while Jews are assumed, in another long-standing antisemitic trope, to be fiendishly crafty) will be undone and thus white male authority returned. The Great Replacement Theory promises to return sexual agency to white men, simultaneously denying it to women

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*American Progress*, May 18, 2022, [www.americanprogressaction.org/article/a-list-of-maga-republicans-who-took-the-great-replacement-theory-mainstream/](http://www.americanprogressaction.org/article/a-list-of-maga-republicans-who-took-the-great-replacement-theory-mainstream/); Judd Legum, “Republicans Have Invoked the ‘Great Replacement’ Theory Over and Over,” *Guardian*, May 17, 2022, [www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/may/17/republicans-have-invoked-the-great-replacement-theory-over-and-over-and-over](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/may/17/republicans-have-invoked-the-great-replacement-theory-over-and-over-and-over).

81 Lavin, *Culture Warlords*; Kristoff Kerl, “‘Oppression by Orgasm’: Pornography and Antisemitism in Far-Right Discourses in the United States since the 1970s,” *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 39, no.1 (2020): 117–38; Nikki McCann Ramírez, “A Racist Conspiracy Theory Called the ‘Great Replacement’ Has Made Its Way from Far-Right Media to the GOP,” *Business Insider*, September 7, 2020, [www.businessinsider.com/racist-great-replacement-conspiracy-far-alt-right-gop-mainstream-2020-9](http://www.businessinsider.com/racist-great-replacement-conspiracy-far-alt-right-gop-mainstream-2020-9). The conspiracy theory is often traced to the French writer Jean Raspail and his 1973 novel *Le Camp des Saints*. As I have been suggesting, though, it is a conspiracy theory drawing on broader international trends, not least German National Socialism and American nativism and white supremacy.

82 Kerl, “Oppression by Orgasm,” 128. See also Simon Purdue, “Useful Victims: Symbolic Rage and Racist Violence on the Global Extreme-Right,” *Journal for De-Radicalization* 27 (Summer 2021): 34–70.

83 The short-lived pseudo-intellectual far-right journal *Northern World* regularly featured idealized images of white femininity on its front covers, such as a “Typical Swedish Beauty from Stockholm” (July–August 1959) and “The Lovely Features of Uta” (Autumn 1960), and thus clearly invited its readers to imagine the sexual access they could gain to such women. AJA, MS 0290 Antisemitism Collection, Box 11, Folder 7. Similarly, in 1963, mixing desire, jealousy, and antisemitism, the American Nazi Party’s in-house magazine ran a salacious piece on the Profumo Scandal, including both a photo of a scantily clad Christine Keeler and a close-up description of the “wild and shameful, sex-studded, illicit life” she and Mandy Rice-Davis enjoyed. “The Jew Behind Christine’s Race-mixing Orgy,” *The Stormtrooper* 2, no. 4 (July–August 1963), AJA, Nearprint Special Topics—Antisemitism, Box 12.



and Black people and removing it from those Jews who are blamed for damaging white male agency in the first place. Antisemitism is potentially an aesthetic technology, one that catalyzes a diversity of anxieties into a sexual frisson.<sup>84</sup>

## Conclusion

The kinds of pornographic antisemitism studied across this article exist in vastly different historical contexts and have acted as vehicles for very different anxieties, whether a sense of national impotence in post-Versailles Germany, a fear of Black emancipation after Jim Crow, anxieties about the sexual boundaries of the nation in independent Ireland, or the perceived dangers of apostasy in medieval western Christendom. But differences aside, they engaged in a shared sexual vocabulary and a shared set of tropes about Jewish sexual difference and Jewish sexual danger. This sexualized vocabulary, benefitting from that perceived continuity over time, is malleable enough to be deployed in a variety of times and places while retaining a certain coherency. As Heschel has asserted, “antisemitism is never enclosed in the past; rather, antisemitism can be understood as a reservoir of possibility waiting to be activated by the present.”<sup>85</sup> The political forces behind antisemitism shift radically while the form that antisemitic visual and literary culture takes remains largely the same. And figures as diverse as the Irish Redemptorist priest John Creagh, the inventor of *Plano Cohen*, and online trolls who denounce their enemies as “cucks” have all been able to draw on this sexualized vocabulary and its attendant imagery.

Maurice Samuels has made the apposite point that overly repeated antisemitic stereotypes offer “the satisfaction of recognition” rather than an “authenticity of experience” that they cannot deliver.<sup>86</sup> Going even further than this, I would argue that antisemitism is also satisfying in personal, emotional, and sexual ways. And my own sense is that historians, in describing the grotesqueness of antisemitism, often unconsciously assume that everyone else finds this stuff equally grotesque and horrible. What we thus miss is that, for antisemites, antisemitism is an often deeply sensuous and sometimes even an erotic experience. In several cases it even seems to have been purposively designed to do all that (or at the least, it was received by its audience in that way). And as an open-ended conclusion, perhaps antisemitism continues to emerge in succeeding generations partly because so many people derive these erotic pleasures from it.

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84 I am borrowing this concept from Lambert, who talks about “obscene modernism” as an “aesthetic technology” that transformed “Jewishness, poverty, and sexual shame into cultural prestige.” See *Unclean Lips*, 79. Consider also Maurice Samuels’s view: “[T]he anti-Semite’s vision is ultimately an aesthetic one: the Jew represents the violation of an ideal of purity, a kind of interloper or contaminant that must be eliminated in order for the anti-Semite’s dream of organic wholeness to be realized.” See his “Literature and the Study of Anti-Semitism,” *American Historical Review* 123, no. 4 (2018): 1223–33, at 1232.

85 Heschel, “Likrat,” 76–77.

86 Samuels, “Literature,” 1225.



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