

Chapter Title: The Irrationality of the Rational: The Frankfurt School and Its Theory of Society in the 1940s

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Book Title: Antisemitism and the Constitution of Sociology

Book Editor(s): MARCEL STOETZLER

Published by: University of Nebraska Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1d9nnbd.14>

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The Irrationality of the Rational

The Frankfurt School and Its Theory of Society in the 1940s

EVA-MARIA ZIEGE

Recent years have seen a major reassessment of the forced migration of the 1930s and 1940s to the United States with regard to the history of the sciences and humanities. Mitchell G. Ash aptly phrased this reappraisal a scientific innovation through forced migration. This was not a new concept. The social scientist Paul Lazarsfeld, himself an émigré from Austria in the 1930s and a major figure in the innovation of the social sciences, stated as an autobiographical and, as it were, autosociological observation that innovation can often be traced back to individuals who belong to two worlds while belonging to neither unambiguously: “The best historical examples are Wilhelm von Humboldt who, as a hanger-on at Weimar, belonged to the lower Prussian aristocracy and created the University of Berlin in 1807. Another is Guillaume Budé, who was a hanger-on among the French humanists but who had access to the Court of Francis I and spent his life developing the Collège de France in opposition to the anti-humanistic Sorbonne (1515 to 1550).”¹ According to Lazarsfeld, individuals like these became “institution men,” special cases of a well-known sociological phenomenon: the marginal person (not to be confused with Parkes’s “marginal man”), who is part of two different cultures. In some cases precisely this marginality transforms itself into the propelling force to build up new institutions. These institutions offer their founders protection and at the same time a path to maintain their own identity.

This description may be used much more broadly in understanding scientific innovation. One can hardly envision the French sociologist

Pierre Bourdieu without his background in rural French Béarn and his experiences in Algeria that molded his perceptions of French high culture, perceiving it from the “outside” as he had perceived Algeria. We know how productive the Catholic Diaspora was in Protestant theology and vice versa. In the sciences innovation was repeatedly achieved by scientists who had to change from one discipline to another, a case in point being the physicists who left Nazi Germany and became biologists in their country of exile.²

The concept is useful also for understanding the Institute of Social Research (ISR) and its innovations in research on antisemitism. For the ISR, three aspects are of specific interest with regard to this approach. First, in the Weimar Republic the majority of associates of the ISR came from assimilated German Jewish families; an orthodox family background was the exception. Second, in the Weimar Republic all of them belonged to the Left, encompassing communists and in rare cases even anarchocommunists as well as Social Democrats. Third, irrespective of these differences, the inner circle shared as a paradigm Marx’s critique of political economy. Perhaps what linked them was a discreet orthodoxy.

All of them were more or less influenced by Freud, who introduced the notion of the unconscious into the analysis of the individual and society. A distinct school of Freudian Marxism emerged. Precisely the intense success of differing schools of Freudianism in the United States was a major prerequisite of the success of the Institute of Social Research in this country. Its Marxism, though, was rendered nearly invisible.

For the Frankfurt School in the 1930s and 1940s, an esoteric form of communication has to be distinguished from an exoteric one. This distinction between what one can formulate explicitly and what one can articulate only very selectively, hoping that those “in the know” will recognize and understand all the same, had been important to Enlightenment thinkers and featured prominently in the thought of Leo Strauss (1899–1973), who emigrated to the United States in 1932 and argued that contemporary thinkers too needed to maintain this distinction in an age of persecution and dictatorship. At the core of critical theory, philosophical assumptions were presupposed that were nevertheless negligible in everyday research; they remained esoteric. It is possible to conceive of this distinction between esoteric and exoteric, as well as of the process of transcending Marxist orthodoxy, not as a corruption or decline of, let

alone a contradiction to, Marxism or critical theory but as the normality of any evolving school. The Marxist core paradigm in fact remained paradigmatic for social thought with the key members of the Institute. Nevertheless other associates did not necessarily share these tenets to the same extent.

As Horkheimer defined it in the 1930s, the Institute's purpose was the development of a theory of society based on the Marxist assumption that the antagonism between labor and capital was the key driving force in the dynamics of society. In 1937 Horkheimer published a famous article entitled "Traditionelle und Kritische Theorie," juxtaposing traditional and critical theory. It established the term *critical theory* for the Institute's specific form of Marxist social theory. It aspired to a radical change of society but no longer accepted the Marxist prognosis that it was the working class who would bring about this change. This momentous theoretical shift was a response to the rise of Stalinism in the Soviet Union and national socialism in Germany and the fact that there had been no successful revolution in Germany after 1918.

Antisemitism among American Labor

With *Dialectic of Enlightenment* by Horkheimer and Adorno (1947) and *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950)—one of five volumes published in the series *Studies in Prejudice* in 1949 and 1950—the Institute of Social Research became world famous.³ Between these two classics of twentieth-century social thought, however, a third major study was written: *Antisemitism among American Labor* (the *Labor Study*, 1945). This was the last comprehensive study by the Institute of Social Research, and it remains unpublished to the present day.⁴

In *Antisemitism among American Labor* hundreds of loosely structured "screened interviews" conducted by American blue-collar workers with coworkers under the combined guidance of social researchers from Europe and the United States looked at antisemitism in the United States in the year 1944—attitudes toward Jews in the context of World War II, national socialism and the atrocities committed by Nazi Germany in Europe, and the genocide of the European Jews that by then was a well-known fact overseas. Based on qualitative analyses of these interviews, the hypothesis of the *Labor Study* was that the persecution and annihilation of the Jews of Europe did not *decrease* but on the contrary significantly *in-*

creased antisemitic attitudes. This was the background of the concept of the “guilty victim” later developed in *The Authoritarian Personality* and that of “ticket-thinking” in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. The *Labor Study* forms, as it were, the “missing link” between *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and *The Authoritarian Personality*.

These works by the Institute have to be seen in a broader context. In the 1940s research on antisemitism was professionalized, primarily in the United States, the major country of exile of European Jews. During this decade, and mainly resulting from international conferences, pioneering work on antisemitism was published. Koppel Pinson edited the volume *Essays on Antisemitism* (with a contribution by Hannah Arendt in its second edition), and Graeber and Britt edited *Jews in a Gentile World* (with a contribution by Talcott Parsons). The psychoanalyst Ernst Simmel edited a volume entitled *Anti-Semitism*, including contributions by most of the later authors of *The Authoritarian Personality*: Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, and R. Nevitt Sanford, with a preface by Gordon Allport and several mottos by the American president Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

Eugene Hartley (originally named Horowitz), who, like many of those publishing in the field, was an exiled intellectual from Europe, published *Problems in Prejudice* in 1946. The American Joshua Trachtenberg published *The Devil and the Jews* in 1943, and the American Carey McWilliams published *A Mask for Privilege: Anti-Semitism in America* in 1948.

Apart from Trachtenberg and, for example, Paul Massing’s volume *Rehearsal for Destruction* in the series *Studies in Prejudice* in 1949, historical studies were relatively rare compared to studies in psychoanalysis and social psychology, in social research and social theory. By its very nature research on antisemitism was interdisciplinary. Major works were published in philosophy and political theory, often by those who later became major figures of philosophical or political thought in the twentieth century: Arendt, Adorno, Sartre, and Jacques Maritain.

This sudden proliferation of work on antisemitism cannot be explained solely by the events in Europe and the genocide of the Jews. After Roosevelt was inaugurated president in 1933, antisemitism increased in the United States. After the United States became part of the Allied Powers in World War II, ethnic group antagonism as such was seriously exacerbated.⁵ Interned Japanese Americans on the West Coast were attacked, and African Americans became targets of violent assaults. In the infa-

mous case of "Sleepy Lagoon," Mexican Americans were falsely accused and convicted of murder. The Los Angeles Zoot Suit Riots were further proof of the hatred of white citizens against Mexicans.

Jews were targeted too. Jewish cemeteries were desecrated, synagogues damaged and defaced with swastikas, and antisemitic pamphlets distributed. Teenagers committed vicious assaults against Jewish children. Antisemitic incidents in the U.S. Army as well as Congress became known. The extreme violence of the Christian Front Hoodlums in October 1943 in Boston caused a police scandal. Roosevelt had been a target of antisemitism since 1933, so much so that his famous New Deal was nicknamed "Jew Deal" by those who inferred that Jews were unjustly privileged in his administration. This was the background for open antisemitism in the presidential campaign conducted by John Dewey, Roosevelt's rival candidate in 1944. The *Labor Study* commented, "The population is thoroughly saturated with antisemitism. One acquires it 'in the air.' Antisemitism, together with anti-antisemitism, is deeply ingrained in the whole American tradition."⁶ In April 1943 one of the Institute's associates wrote in a letter to Horkheimer:

I do not know how closely you follow the New York papers. Also whether the Jewish Project is of interest to you only because one can earn a couple of thousands of dollars with it. If your interest exceeds this you will want to know that during the last months here in New York State, in New York & other places millions of antisemitic leaflet[s] (à la Hitler) were distributed in all the factories involved in the war effort to workers, women, youths. The authorities do nothing; the FBI does not act, nobody was arrested, the Dies Committee remains silent. You can see from the press cuttings I enclose in this letter how far antisemitic propaganda has gone. Seeing this I am convinced that this is not the time for a theoretical study of antisemitism. It is the time for immediate political action by the Jews. We know enough about the motives of fascist antisemitic agitation. One must act and one can act. If the Jews are not to do that, no scholarly project is going to help (however great its merits may be).⁷

American antisemitism was part of the American experience of the exiles. The Institute of Social Research closely monitored an increasing

number of surveys and polls conducted since the late 1930s. In addition empirical research like *Middletown* (1929), *An American Dilemma* (1944), and *The People's Choice* (1944) became more and more sophisticated. Having been prepared by its own qualitative and quantitative studies in Europe, the Institute searched for new methods to perceive and analyze American society.

Especially *An American Dilemma*, a study of race relations and African Americans in society, became an influential model for the work of the Institute. In 1938–42 the young Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal had been commissioned and lavishly funded by the Carnegie Foundation to direct a comprehensive study on how African Americans were being discriminated against and the implications of their position in society for American democracy as such. Thus the “idea of a textbook à la Myrdal” emerged as a guiding idea of Horkheimer’s for the Institute, aspiring to a comprehensive study on the situation of the Jews in the modern world.⁸ The working hypothesis for the early 1940s became that, while antisemitism could be understood only through society, society at that particular time in history could henceforth be understood only through antisemitism.

Since the early 1940s the Institute had continually but unsuccessfully tried to acquire funding for various projects on antisemitism by the major U.S. funding bodies, the Rockefeller Foundation and the Carnegie Foundation. After years of failed efforts, however, two Jewish defense organizations, the American Jewish Committee and the Jewish Labor Committee, agreed to finance the Institute’s work on popular antisemitism.

The leadership of the Jewish Labor Committee, an umbrella organization of the Jewish labor unions founded to coordinate public responses of the political Left toward Nazi Germany in 1934, recruited from the Bund, a secular Jewish socialist party originating in Lithuania, Poland, and Russia. It maintained the idea of a distinct Jewishness against the ideal of the American “melting pot.” Specifically and programmatically it adhered to maintaining the use of the Yiddish language. Its most famous political leaders were Baruch Charney Vladeck and later David Dubinsky. The Jewish Labor Committee represented migrants from the Eastern European laboring classes and brought from Eastern Europe a moderate version of socialism that is best compared to Austromarxism in Europe. The American Jewish Committee, founded in 1906, was the

organization of the German Jews. Its members were part of the influential economic elite, governed by the paradigm of assimilation (or acculturation) and “Americanism” in accordance with the famous dictum by Woodrow Wilson: “America does not consist of groups.”⁹

Politically as well as sociologically, the American Jewish Committee and the Jewish Labor Committee represented two counterparts, two opposite poles, as it were, among the secular Jews of America. Equally opposed were their immediate strategies as to how to deal with the defense against antisemitism at home and abroad. The Jewish Labor Committee from the very beginning pursued a politics of boycott of the National Socialists, organizing mass rallies and, for example, a high-profile counter-Olympics as a form of protest against the 1936 Berlin Olympics, the World Labor Athletic Carnival. Later they actively supported armed resistance in Europe, active rescue operations, and media work.

The American Jewish Committee, by contrast, favored a policy of appeasement toward Germany well into the later 1930s and a strategy of silent diplomacy. While according to them, Jews in the United States should prove themselves by becoming Americans first and foremost, playing down antisemitism and resisting Jewish “particularism,” the Jewish Labor Committee opted for the opposite. The two organizations epitomized antagonistic positions, sharing, however, two main tenets: Jewish existence in Diaspora and the willingness to cooperate with the German Jews who had fled Germany.

The Institute of Social Research had to manage a difficult tightrope act between these two organizations, trying to maintain its academic autonomy against the heteronomy of these contradictory political influences. This contributed to a concerted effort of the academic and the political fields, of exiled Europeans and of American Jews, and this was a new phenomenon. It was also due to an emerging cognitive demand addressing some of the most urgent political and existential questions of the time. In this process the Institute in its mainly marginal position within the academic field became a connecting cog. The social scientist Nathan Glazer commented on this significant development already in 1946: “The ‘intellectual current’ is not the only force moving scientists to concern themselves with prejudice. The large Jewish domestic defence and community relations groups . . . are now sponsoring scientific research on prejudice.”¹⁰

The Jewish Labor Committee and the American Jewish Committee as organizations were quite different with regard to their social structure and political aims, yet they shared this conviction with the Horkheimer circle: "Our aim is not merely to describe prejudice but to explain it in order to help its eradication. . . . Eradication means re-education."¹¹

The Irrationality of Society's Rationality

In his book *Reflections on America*, Claus Offe showed that the descriptions of America by Tocqueville, Max Weber, and Adorno always contained European self-descriptions. This holds true also for *Antisemitism among American Labor*. Here was a task Horkheimer had declared in his 1939 article "The Jews and Europe" to be virtually impossible: "That the exiles show a mirror to a world that innately produces fascism precisely in those places where asylum is still granted to them, that is something nobody can ask of them."¹² Accordingly the Institute presented its own work on antisemitism with modesty, suggesting it should be considered a preparatory exploration of the subject, a first approach as to how antisemitism might be researched in the future. In these approaches Horkheimer and Adorno were influenced by the followers of Franz Boas in American cultural anthropology, particularly Ruth Benedict's famous concept of "cultural pattern."¹³ In the *Labor Study* the concept of "cultural pattern antisemitism," adopting Benedict's concept, was used to distinguish between the forms of antisemitism they encountered in the United States and the antisemitism of Europe in the 1940s, which they termed "exterminative antisemitism."

The irrationality of society's rationality, according to Horkheimer, should be considered key for a theory of current antisemitism both in Europe and the United States:

Fascism is the caricature of social revolution. . . . The monopolistic elimination of competition takes within the fascist states radically destructive forms only against the Jews, on the outside against colonial or national groups. Apart from that this trend is only a side effect of the new subordination of the masses into the machine of production. The unchecked brutality of the individual entrepreneur will be checked in the age of working contracts and social welfare and be replaced by more rational relations within society. To under-

stand the rationality of this, to understand the irrationality of this rationality, is our most important task. On the solution of this task depends also a theory of current antisemitism to a very large extent.¹⁴

This theory of current antisemitism was founded on a theory of so-called state capitalism. It included a theory of the role of the Jews in late capitalism. Horkheimer wrote the passage quoted above in November 1944, while the writing of *Antisemitism among American Labor* was in its early stages. The *Labor Study* was the first large-scale empirical study of antisemitism in the United States. It was written in the dire apprehension of an imminent outbreak of fascism in North America after the war and the instabilities arising from the postwar situation. Their European experience led the authors to believe that totalitarian antisemitism did not grow out of any constitutional peculiarities of any people or race. It was regarded not as a genuine product of a particular country but as a particular system of domination that had a political function as class-manipulated antisemitism for undermining democracy in unstable political situations such as the aftermath of a war. In the United States antisemitism as part of a “totalitarian” strategy might thus parallel the European model because during the war antisemitism in America had become, as Massing phrased it, a “staple commodity” and might be used after the war for political purposes.¹⁵ According to Leo Löwenthal, it was the antisemitic agitator who sold this commodity to the people.¹⁶

Thus the ISR reached a conclusion contrary to that of Talcott Parsons in his 1942 essay “Sociology of Modern anti-Semitism.” According to Parsons, antisemitism in North America would never reach an intensity comparable to the destructive force it had attained in Germany: “Two factors are particularly responsible for the spread of anti-Semitism in Germany. One is the extreme form of nationalism of the German people, and the other is the Nazi movement. . . . It seems exceedingly unlikely that nationalism can be brought to such a pitch of intensity in the United States.”¹⁷ Nevertheless it was Parsons, not the Institute of Social Research, who on this question and at this point in time held a minority position. The assessment of the European exiles was by no means European alarmism: it was shared by many social scientists and philosophers as well as large parts of the labor unions and public intellectuals like the writer Sinclair Lewis and, later, Thomas Mann.

Labor Antisemitism and Class Society

Antisemitism among American Labor was a qualitative, not a quantitative study. Unlike *The Authoritarian Personality* and the other works in the series *Studies in Prejudice*, it was based on neither psychoanalysis nor social psychology. Six major chapters were written by Massing, A. R. L. Gurland, Löwenthal, and Friedrich Pollock, and edited by Adorno: "Incidence of Antisemitism among Workers," "The American Worker Looks at the Jew," "War, Fascism, Propaganda," "Image of Prejudice," "Opinions and Reactions of Union Officers," and methodological consequences to be drawn from the study. The study was supervised in its empirical parts by Herta Herzog and Paul Lazarsfeld. Unlike other works in the *Studies in Prejudice* series that had an often extensive number of academic advisors, this study was accompanied by a single advisor from outside the Institute: Horace M. Kallen, the famed advocate of the concept of cultural pluralism in the United States.

In the course of the study approximately 4,500 questionnaires were distributed, and in the final instance approximately five hundred blue- and white-collar workers declared themselves willing to conduct "screened" undercover interviews according to the guidelines of these questionnaires and to write them up with the support of field workers. Eventually 270 interviewers wrote up 613 interviews that had been conducted in the industrial centers of the American West, Midwest, and East, in New York City, Philadelphia, Camden, Newark, and other parts of New Jersey, Pittsburgh, Los Angeles, Detroit, San Francisco, Massachusetts, Maryland, and Wisconsin. Not included were the South and the Farm Belt. This large-scale operation became possible only with the active help of the huge organizational capacities of the labor unions.

The *Labor Study* was based on the Marxist idea of society as an inherently antagonistic totality, according to Horkheimer's dictum "He who does not speak of capitalism should not speak of fascism, either."¹⁸

In the 1970s the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann declared the concept of class society obsolete, assessing it as part of a semantics of transition. Luhmann explained its overwhelming influence and reception with its very transitoriness. The idea of class society in his assessment meant not having to give up completely on the notion of society as a vertically organized hierarchy while at the same time giving it up insofar as crucial

aspects of modern society could be absorbed by it. Though obsolete, one characteristic of the concept of class proved to be still useful to sociology: its particular suitability as a theoretical framework for raising empirical data. Even though the paradigm of the factory, according to Luhmann, had become obsolete, the factory gave access to empirical data.¹⁹

Indeed the theoretical assumption of class, based on the politically generalized distinction between labor and capital, guided the theoretical framework of the *Labor Study*. In January 1944 Adorno wrote to his parents, "On Thursday, I will give my very first talk to a group of Jewish workers, with discussion to follow. It is going to be an interesting experience." Briefly afterward he reported, "My speech to the workers really went very well. I had to apologise that I did not speak Yiddish, the language of the meeting."²⁰

In the course of the actual fieldwork, communication sometimes proved to be much more difficult than that. In July Löwenthal wrote to Horkheimer, "[Massing] is so meek and depressed at the present because of the enormous difficulties which he encounters in forming study groups and getting interviews that he stays very clear from any new contacts which do not lead directly into the next factory."²¹ Even though class theory was a core aspect of the theory of the Frankfurt School, its Marxist paradigm remained esoteric in *Antisemitism among American Labor*. It was made virtually invisible even though it was written by a group of authors who (with Löwenthal, Massing, and Pollock)—like no other group of authors in the Institute of Social Research in the United States—embodied the "old" Marxist Institute as it had existed in Frankfurt in the 1920s. While the critique of capitalism was weakened in the *Labor Study*, the critique of totalitarianism became very pronounced. (As if Horkheimer and Adorno themselves were quite aware of this, in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* they went on ostentatiously to use the vocabulary of orthodox Marxism. This, however, was to be softened for the 1947 publication of their book.)

Precisely this made possible productive innovations of the *Labor Study*. This study established entirely new perspectives in the analysis of antisemitism. Differences in antisemitic attitudes between different national, cultural, and ethnic groups in the United States and, most notably, differences in attitudes of white non-Jews as compared to those of African Americans toward Jews, and attitudes of Mexicans, Irish, Japanese, and other immigrant groups were looked at as the stereotypes of individu-

als belonging to groups who themselves were stereotyped. The study showed in great empirical detail through the analysis of interviews conducted by workers with fellow workers that inequality, distinctions, and stereotypes evolved not necessarily along the lines of class antagonism. Although this may seem to contradict its underlying theoretical frame of class theory, the study did not negate the reality of class as such. Rather it differentiated within the concept of class with regard to age cohorts, gender, educational level, and migratory background.

Thus class remained crucial in the *Labor Study*. It gained special importance because the existence of a "proletariat" in the United States was not self-evident. In Europe the working class was a fixed entity; in the United States it was fluid. Perhaps it was precisely this openness that made it possible to broaden the concept of class. The *Labor Study* conceptualized manifold "fine distinctions": between men and women, blue- and white-collar workers, religious and nonreligious affiliations, and multiethnic and multicultural differences by virtue of country of origin, first, second, or third generation, education, sex, age cohort, and so on.

In the analyses of the interviews, however, there clearly emerged a specific type that seemed most susceptible to antisemitism: white male workers with neither vocational training nor education, the core membership of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). There also emerged just as clearly one group in the interviews as most resistant to antisemitism: the African American interviewees.

According to Horkheimer and Adorno in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, enlightenment, historically speaking, was specific to a certain class: the bourgeoisie. Therefore, Adorno assumed, prejudice could not be analyzed without the category of class. Workers formed the other of the bourgeois class, as it were. They could produce ideological elements that were products of the bourgeois consciousness only in an indirect manner. The production of the elements of antisemitism, as well as the specific changes they underwent when reflected in the minds of a non-bourgeois group, was one of the implicit guiding questions of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

From the interviews conducted for the *Labor Study* Adorno drew the conclusion that for the "true labourer," "the Jew" mainly represented the bourgeois. Gurland and Massing showed in their analyses of the in-

terview material that workers saw “the Jew” as the representative of the economic sphere, as the executor of capitalism. The Jew to them was he “who presented the bill,” as Adorno later phrased it in *The Authoritarian Personality*.²² In the *Labor Study* Gurland analyzed this in detail with regard to perceptions of “Jewish power,” “Jewish bosses,” “Jewish traders,” “Jewish workers,” and “the Jew as middleman” in line with *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

What was the impact of war and genocide on the antisemitism encountered in factories and shipyards? There were two questions in the *Labor Study* directly addressing this aspect: “How do you feel about what the Nazis did to the Jews in Germany?” and “Do people think the Jews are doing their share in the war effort? What do you think?” The following selected quotations illustrate the material the researchers were to interpret:

Interviewee: a son of immigrants from Sweden, married, no children, High School Graduate, union member, welder in San Francisco Shipyard: “He thinks the Nazis were ‘fairly reasonable’ in their treatment of Jews, ‘the thing had to be done.’ Maybe the Nazis ‘went too far.’”

Interviewee from American South, three children, union member, machinist in Los Angeles, Seventh Day Adventist: “The Bible says they should be persecuted.”

Interviewee from Poland, Catholic, no vocational training, works with Ford in Detroit, union member: “Steve knew ‘plenty’ of Jews in his hometown and elsewhere. ‘They are all the same. . . . Type of work not important but getting ahead is. The Aryan, so to speak, has a pride beneath which he won’t stoop. With Jews—nestegg, profit, etc.’” Interviewer asks whether Hitler “did the right thing, then. . . . No, says Steve, ‘He didn’t do enough. He should have exterminated all of them.’”

“‘Capital started this war,’ says a plumber in a shipyard on the East Coast. . . . ‘They owned too much. . . . If it hadn’t been for this war, the country would have cracked up. . . .’ He distinguishes between ‘two kinds of Jews—capital Jews and working Jews.’ But his ‘class

consciousness' leaves him right there and he continues in the best antisemitic fashion: 'The Jews own most everything and they won't share'—and '[Hitler] got rid of the capital Jews.'"

Control interview with housewife: "Woman, 58, 5 children, 8th grade, born in New Jersey, father German, mother Irish, Catholic (no regular churchgoer), married to metal engraver who is an old union member (O41)... 'They [Jews] deserved what they got [in Germany]. No one can trust them. Father Coughlin has their number. Roosevelt and the American and British Jew bankers got us into this war.'"

Looking at these quotes, Massing wrote in the *Labor Study*, "Immeasurable damage was done by the extermination of millions of Jews through the Nazis. The weakness of the Jewish group was thrown into bold relief when they were slaughtered as so much cattle. It is noteworthy that only once in our interviews reference was made to the Jews' death battle in the Warsaw ghetto."²³

Evaluating the interviews, two groups were distinguished in the report. Individuals in Group A say "they do not like mass murder but the Jews brought it on themselves":

"Linesman, telephone company, San Francisco, 37, Italian descent, Californian-born, member, IBEW-AFL: 'Don't approve of Nazism in any form but wonder if [the] Jews did not bring it on themselves by controlling the business and professions.'"

"Woman worker, machine plant, Los Angeles, (no further information available): 'Of course, the Nazis have been far too harsh in their methods of destroying a Jewish monopoly in Germany but I do not entirely blame Germans for hating Jews.'"²⁴

Those in Group B "reject mass killing but favor discriminatory measures against Jews":

"Shipfitter leadman, shipyard, Los Angeles, 24, 2-3 years college, Anglo-Saxon from Arizona, member, Boilermakers, American Federation of Labor: 'Extermination of the Jews is not the solution, but

economic and social control; had Hitler stopped there, would have caused no outcries from non-Jews in the rest of the world.”

“‘Don’t believe that Germans would do such a thing . . . ,’ says a German-born machinist in a tool- and die-making plant in New Jersey. ‘Won’t believe the newspaper accounts. Cannot believe that a white man could be as cruel and intolerant as Hitler,’ says a Tennessean machinist-helper in a rubber-plant in Detroit.”

“Woman, former worker, 32, married, ex-Catholic, born in Los Angeles, of Irish-German descent: ‘Ten years from now we shall know it is all a gross exaggeration and merely propaganda.’”

“‘Germany was right in driving out the Jews,’ says a machinist in an aircraft plant in the New York area. . . . He adds: ‘I don’t approve of killing them, but I don’t believe the reports are true. If you would have taken these reports day by day and added them up, every Jew in Germany would have been killed.’”²⁵

What was the political relevance of these results in the assessment of the European scholars? According to Massing, it was not antisemitic agitators like Charles Coughlin who exacerbated antisemitic attitudes in the United States but the events in Europe, or rather the reports on these events in media and war propaganda: “The coldblooded and unpunished annihilation of a part of world Jewry has exposed the rest to a new type of violence and contempt never experienced in modern times.”²⁶

This interpretation gave added complexity to the idea in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* that antisemitism was an instrument of manipulation of the working class.²⁷ It was crucial to Adorno’s hypothesis of the “guilty victim” in *The Authoritarian Personality*:

The mere fact that Jews were hunted down, slaughtered, burned alive and suffocated in gas chambers, and that all this was done on a scale never before witnessed nor held possible, has separated the Jews from the human race. . . . One cannot emphasize this point too strongly. The American worker, as he appears in this survey, shows little if any understanding of the purpose of totalitarian antisemi-

tism. He tries to make sense of what he hears about it in terms of his own experience. The result of his thinking processes often is that “you don’t just torture or kill a man, unless there is a reason.” The less comprehensible the Nazi actions are, the more the explanation of their motives is looked for and found with the Jews.²⁸

Press reports publicizing stories of Jewish persecution in Europe, according to the workers who volunteered as interviewers for the *Labor Study*, had been to the detriment of fighting prejudice, because “atrocious stories” were usually disbelieved. Were there significant differences between minorities with regard to their attitudes toward the genocide in Europe? Comparing interviewees of Scandinavian, British, Irish, Mexican, Hungarian, Polish, German, and Italian origin, only one group clearly emerged with very high degrees of support for the National Socialists: the Irish. Those who condemned the Nazi persecution of the Jews most consistently were Mexicans, even more than Scandinavians.

The most surprising reaction for the researchers was that of the black interviewees. What did black Americans think about the Jews? Among all interviewees 7.2 percent were black; this represented a proportion only a little lower than that in the general U.S. population. The result was unequivocal: “Negroes among our interviewees . . . reacted more favorably to working with Jews than other national or ethnic groups.” Compared to white people, only half as many black people declined to work with Jews. Also significant was the difference between whites and blacks in their answer to question 7: “Do people think the Jews are doing their share in the war effort?” Whereas only 53.1 percent of whites condemned the Nazi genocide, 65.9 percent of blacks did so; 17.9 percent of whites supported Nazi race policies, but only 9.7 percent of blacks. Almost two-thirds of the black interviewees were unconditionally against the Nazi genocide. Negative reactions were observed, however, when Jews as a persecuted group were strongly emphasized: “As a persecuted minority, Negroes are as sensitive to social discrimination as are Jews. . . . When working with Jews and hearing them talk emphatically about the persecution of Jews, Negroes easily resent the publicity given to persecution of Jews abroad while no attention is being paid to the persecution of Negroes at home.”²⁹ On the whole, however, blacks expressed themselves with less animosity and did not hold a “mythical concept of ‘the Jew.’”³⁰ A con-

nection between the prejudices that whites held against blacks *and* Jews seldom appeared plausible to black interviewees. To them, there did not seem to be a connection. Because of the shared history of persecution, however, black workers often suggested that Jews should show more solidarity with African Americans and fight for equal rights for all. The *Labor Study* concluded, "Negroes in America are subject to discriminatory treatment at all times and on any occasion. . . . Negroes do not need substitute targets."³¹

According to the ISR researchers, antisemitism did not fulfill the specific function that it did, psychologically speaking, for a significant percentage of whites. In part this was linked to religious orientations among African Americans derived from the Old Testament. The picture of the patriarchal Jew, the representative of the people chosen by God, was well known to them. Influential was the idea that the blacks should be the next chosen people of God.³² The next Messiah would not be Jewish, but black. That was the basis for their identification with the first chosen people of God.

Summary

As a marginal institution in exile, the ISR was perhaps able to develop and bring to a close precisely those projects that American research groups could not achieve. After Massing contacted an American union activist with regard to the antisemitism projects, he wrote to Horkheimer and Pollock in 1944, "When I told him about our project and our approach he got very excited and said: 'I have been telling that to my American friends for years and it takes you, a German, to do it!'"³³

Despite this, the problems of the ISR researchers in their fieldwork were highly complex. The following reflection by Ruth Benedict may serve as a point of departure: "Americans can poll Americans and understand the findings, but they can do this because of a prior step which is so obvious that no one mentions it: they know and take for granted the conduct of life in the United States. The results of polling tell more about what we already know. In trying to understand another country, systematic qualitative study of the habits and assumptions of its people is essential before a poll can serve to good advantage."³⁴ With Benedict's idea in mind, one can return to the hypothesis of Lazarsfeld on innovation by persons on the margin, cited earlier. In his *Reflections on America* Offe developed this theme with regard to Tocqueville, Weber, and Ador-

no, showing that their descriptions of America always included European self-descriptions. This can also be said for the studies conducted in exile by the ISR. In these studies the Marxist paradigm of critical theory remained esoteric. The *Labor Study* was not only the blue-collar but also the multicultural complement to *The Authoritarian Personality*. After the *Labor Study* the Institute's hypothesis of the relevance of antisemitism for the understanding of society irrevocably changed. The *Labor Study* forms the missing link between *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and *The Authoritarian Personality*. Without this missing link, the differences between these two works cannot be understood. According to the ISR, after World War II antisemitism could no longer be regarded as the key to a theory of society because its social function had changed. In the following quote, the Marxism that used to be esoteric becomes exoteric for once:

Our hypothesis of what causes anti-semitism is the following: It is due to the total structure of our society or, to put it more sweepingly, to every basically coercive society. This totality manifests itself in numerous aspects, all of which are comprised in it and appear as particular "causes" only to the kind of thinking which, naively following the pattern of natural sciences, forgets that all social facts bear the imprint of the system in which they appear and which can never be explained satisfactorily by atomistic enumeration of various causes.³⁵

Notes

1. Lazarsfeld, "An Episode in the History of Social Research," 302.
2. Fleming, "Émigré Physicists and the Biological Revolution."
3. Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung/ Dialectic of Enlightenment*; Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality*.
4. A full table of contents is transcribed in Ziege, *Antisemitismus und Gesellschaftstheorie*, 323–37. On *Antisemitism among American Labor*, see Ziege, *Antisemitismus und Gesellschaftstheorie*, 7–18, 180–228; Ziege, *Patterns within Prejudice*; Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, 224–66; Bonß, *Die Einübung des Tatsachenblicks*, 208–11; Wiggershaus, *Die Frankfurter Schule*, 409–12; Worrell, *Dialectic of Solidarity*; Walter-Busch, *Geschichte der Frankfurter Schule*, 126.
5. Dinnerstein, *Antisemitism in America*; Diner, *The Jews of the United States*.
6. Institute of Social Research, *Antisemitism among American Labor*, 1157.

7. Henryk Grossman, letter to Horkheimer, April 30, 1943, in Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 443. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.
8. Horkheimer, letter to Adorno, January 21, 1945, in Adorno and Horkheimer, *Briefwechsel*, 3:32.
9. Arad, *America, Its Jews and the Rise of Nazism*, 77.
10. Glazer, "The Social Scientists Dissect Prejudice," 79.
11. Horkheimer and Flowerman, "Foreword to Studies in Prejudice," vii.
12. Horkheimer, "Die Juden und Europa," 115.
13. Benedict, *Patterns of Culture*.
14. Horkheimer, letter to Adorno, November 13, 1944, in Adorno and Horkheimer, *Briefwechsel*, 2:351.
15. Massing in Institute of Social Research, *Antisemitism among American Labor*, 699.
16. Löwenthal and Guterman, *Prophets of Deceit*.
17. Parsons, "Sociology of Modern Anti-Semitism," 119.
18. Horkheimer, "Die Juden und Europa," 115.
19. Luhmann, *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft*, 1057.
20. Adorno, letter to his parents, January 1944, in Adorno, *Briefe an die Eltern*, 238, 242.
21. Horkheimer-Pollock-Archive of the City of Frankfurt, Germany, VI 17, LL 1/4-7/44.
22. Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality*, 638.
23. Institute of Social Research, *Antisemitism among American Labor*, 1259, 86, 75, 76, 77, 633, 832, 645.
24. Institute of Social Research, *Antisemitism among American Labor*, 712.
25. Institute of Social Research, *Antisemitism among American Labor*, 715, 716, 782, 805, 783.
26. Institute of Social Research, *Antisemitism among American Labor*, 780.
27. See Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, 200.
28. See Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality*, 631, 780.
29. Institute of Social Research, *Antisemitism among American Labor*, 519, 1259, 521, 539. "I didn't feel very sorry about them because I thought about what happens to Negroes in the South every day and the lynching and horrible things that have happened there—and nobody is interested" (540).
30. Institute of Social Research, *Antisemitism among American Labor*, 530, 1135. "A young drugstore attendant, URWDSEA [United Retail, Wholesale, and Department Store Employees of America], in Harlem indignantly states: 'I lived in Harlem all my life, and Harlem is run by Irish cops and Jewish pawn-brokers. Don't ask me how I like them because then I become very insulting. One Jew cost my father his job because he complained to his boss that Dad could not pay his rent. So he was fired'" (523).
31. Institute of Social Research, *Antisemitism among American Labor*, 542.
32. "This preacher believes that the second coming of Christ will occur as a physical rebirth and that the Messiah will be born to a Negro. . . . This belief is

widespread among the Negroes out at the Rouge [Ford Rouge Plant] and . . . it has affected their attitude toward the Jews. Those who believe in this doctrine are friendly to the Jews for the most part and show a marked tendency to identify themselves with Jews” (Institute of Social Research, *Antisemitism among American Labor*, 544).

33. Massing, “Memorandum to Horkheimer and Pollock.”
34. Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, 18.
35. Adorno, “Remarks on ‘The Authoritarian Personality,’” 81.

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