

Conflicting stereotypes in contemporary antisemitism

Different antisemitic stereotypes are applied by antisemites to Jews, Jews to antisemites, and Jews to themselves.



by Matthew Hausman

While walking to shul recently, I had one of those fleeting encounters that are significant beyond their moment. As I walked up the street, a man approached from the opposite direction on the same sidewalk and when he neared, I saw that his face, neck, and arms were covered with Nazi tattoos. As we passed each other, he caught my eye and said, “Good morning. Nice weather, huh?” Clearly, he didn’t know he was exchanging pleasantries with a Jew, and I suppose at a glance I didn’t fit his preconceived image of one – I didn’t have a beard, my kippah was under my hat, and I was walking along a busy thoroughfare near the business district. For all he knew, I could have been some professional on his way to the office to

put in a few extra hours.

What struck me was that for someone who wore his antisemitism so publicly on his sleeve, he was unable to identify the target of his hatred from a distance of two feet. Antisemites often pride themselves on being able to spot the Jew in a crowd, but I flew completely under his radar; the most threatening comment he could muster was a mundane observation about the weather.

And it got me thinking about the nature of stereotypes – and not only those foisted upon Jewish people by hateful bigots and aggressive missionaries. I also thought about the stereotypes that secular liberals ascribe to antisemites and to themselves as Jews.

Not all antisemites are tattooed thugs or white supremacists; indeed, many are evolved progressives, urbane policymakers, liberal entertainment moguls, professional athletes, minority activists, and woke academics who see in the Jews and Israel the same sinister caricatures found on the pages of “Mein Kampf” or the “Protocols of the Elders of Zion.” Those who cannot bring themselves to acknowledge increasing Jew-hatred on the left and among its anointed identity communities (consistent with law enforcement statistics) are blinded by their own partisan biases and misunderstanding of traditional Jewish values. They also tend to be awash in self-ignorance regarding the essence of Jewish identity...

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