

## **TRUMP & GIULIANI'S CRUDE, COERCIVE & CONDITIONAL 'LOVE' FOR JEWS**

By April Rosenblum\*  
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*Since at least the 1930s, American conservatives have tried to police Jewish identity, by attacking the Jewish credentials of anti-fascist, 'subversive' and 'disloyal' Jews – all the while declaring they 'love Jews'*

In the fall of 1933, on the front page of the New York Times Book Review, James W. Gerard went out on a limb for the Jews. Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf* had just been published in English, and Gerard, America's former ambassador to Germany, was taking a stand in print.

Surely, wrote Gerard, if Americans could condemn massacres in Armenia, or concentration camps in Cuba, "we have all of us a right to criticize, to boycott...to form a blockade of public opinion" against Germany's mounting attacks on Jews.

Gerard's gripe was not with Germany, nor even its leader. "Hitler is doing much for Germany," he wrote. "[H]is unification of the Germans, his destruction of communism...his curbing of parliamentary government, so unsuited to the German character; his protection of the right of private property are all good, and, after all, what the Germans do in their own territory is their own business, except for one thing – the persecution and practical expulsion of the Jews."

To Gerard, the Jews were "an intellectual and harmless race" – an ill-treated people who politely contributed to art and science; who had never been traitors, and had never complained.

Gerard's good deeds might have ended there, if it weren't for one day in New York's Union Square in 1934 – when whom should he spy at a Communist rally, but a crowd of Jews. While urban Jews in the 1930s would hardly have raised eyebrows at the sight of Jewish socialists or Communists clustered in a public square, Gerard was aghast – so much so that he felt compelled to warn America's Jews.

That October, Gerard entered an elegant Reform temple in Northern New Jersey to deliver a speech: "As a friend of the Jewish people," he said, "I want to state that if the American nation ever gets the idea that the Jewish race and communism are synonymous there is a possibility of a pogrom in the United States that will make those of the Czar's era in Russia look like a small parade." He urged "the responsible Jews of the country" to intervene against Jews who would embrace Communism.

Jewish leaders began frantic damage control. In editorials and speeches, they sought to correct Gerard's impressions. Most Jews were not Communists; most Communists, not Jews. The reality, of course, was that American Jews were far from being a unitary group to be disciplined through a memo to their leaders (even if Jews had agreed on any).

Real Jews, in real life, were not the "uncomplaining" type James Gerard thought they were – nor were they as homogeneous as America's worried Jewish leaders declared. In the middle of the Depression, with anti-Semitism rising in the U.S. and fascism on the march in Italy, Germany and, soon, Spain, Jews from a broad spectrum of religious and political backgrounds organized as if their lives depended on it. Intellectual? Perhaps. Harmless? Not if they could help it.

But as local fallout from the Gerard debacle made clear, American Jews were far from being of one mind. In Philadelphia, for instance, a Jewish police detective named Jacob Gomborow urged local Jews to heed Gerard's warning. Gomborow was adamant that Jewish Communists must not be permitted to be seen with the rest of the Jewish community, even if they were all working against the rise of Hitler. He had personally ejected Jewish Communists, and their Black non-Jewish Communist allies, from the city's large anti-Nazi rally in 1933.

Gomborow was alarmed by how many Jewish "subversives" were in the city; how comfortable they were celebrating Passover as a radical festival; how they were raising a new generation of their atheistic children in Jewish workers' schools, and how they were forever socializing and organizing with non-Jewish Black radicals.

It deeply bothered Gomborow that these radicals were so stuck on – in fact, gloried in – remaining Jewish. He wanted them out. He preferred to rename them "offspring of Jewish parents," and he wanted religious, "responsible" Jews to unite in expelling them from the community. Who knew? mused Gomborow during one speech. Perhaps it would go down in history that the movement to tell the world "a Jew cannot be a Communist and a Communist cannot be a Jew" had been born that night.

Alas, the detective's timing was premature. In the 1930s, when Jews like Jacob Gomborow judged more secular or Leftist Jews as illegitimate, it carried limited weight. With a vibrant, widespread and overtly Jewish Left, American Jews who felt judged in one circle could easily walk away and find kindred spirits in one of hundreds of other Jewish organizations.

That would change with the Cold War. In the midst of a new Red Scare, what had once been simply the disdain of one Jewish faction for another was now backed by the force of the state, which proceeded to demolish the social infrastructure of the Jewish Left, hound its leaders, and silence millions who looked on in fear. These political pressures came in tandem with pressures to embrace a different kind of Jewish identity.

Postwar policy pushed Jews (and others) of European descent into the suburbs, where religion was approved but open ethnicity was a source of shame. In the 1950s, even non-religious Jews often found that the easiest way to make friends and build community was to enter into synagogue life.

The changes that American Jews went through in the 1950s – both the political traumas and the privileges to which many gained access – made it possible for onlookers to believe that Jews were a religious, politically conservative and placid group. While this is at odds with most Jews' lived experience in recent U.S. history – to say nothing of their voting patterns – it is an image that certain Jewish leaders have protected carefully.

This untroubled image of Jews is gratifying to some non-Jews. Some feel so sure of themselves, and of who Jews are, that they have taken to offering their counsel publicly on who is a "real" Jew. The past year has featured many such "authentications" and expulsions, with high-profile non-Jews like Rudy Giuliani and Washington Examiner commentator Tiana Lowe casting doubt on the Jewish credentials of figures like George Soros and Bernie Sanders.

Suddenly, everyone is an authority on who's a Jew: from Lowe, who proudly celebrates her grandfather's service in the Nazi-allied Chetniks, to Trump wingman "more Jewish than Soros" Giuliani, peddling conspiracy theories about shadowy Jews behind the scenes, to the U.S. president himself, vigilantly policing "disloyal" Jews.

For these non-Jews, Judaism is fine; but "actual Jews are a problem," in the words of scholar Steven Weitzman in relation to his research on J. Edgar Hoover. The notorious FBI director, who spearheaded

decades of repression against Jewish radicals, “couldn’t really acknowledge that there might be an authentic, non-religious, secular Jewish culture - the left-leaning Jewish culture associated with Yiddish and New York. For him, those kinds of Jews weren’t really Jews. And it’s almost as if he had to defend Judaism against that kind of Jew.”

These leaders, who seem to be perturbed by anti-Semitism only when they can accuse others of it, feel more qualified than Jews themselves to defend, and define, Jewish identity. And why not? They – and we – are products of a world where centuries of Christian rulers have been invested in what the symbolism of Jews means for them – and much less interested in the fate or needs of real, flesh-and-blood Jews.

The same is true when politicians today use Jewish fears as a tool to attack political opponents or stymie policy reforms – even now, when we have barely recovered from the raw shock of attacks on Jews in New York and New Jersey.

We find ourselves in the odd position today in which many powerful conservative interests are proclaiming their love for Jews, and painting themselves as our defenders. For a people who quite recently found ourselves forsaken by most countries on Earth, and who are facing new outbreaks of violence in America, this is seductive.

It is also hollow. Real coalitions are hard. They are built with people who are interested in working with us but may start out mistrustful. They are forged through a thousand different errors, failures and disappointments, with people who are still there when the dust clears, perhaps also disappointed in us, but willing to try again to get it right.

When politicians or right-wing influencers declare their love for Jews while deliberately exploiting divisions that affect us – marking out Jews who don’t deserve protection, capitalizing on conflict between ourselves and other groups, and casually spinning out anti-Semitic tropes - we should ask ourselves whether what they really love is not Jews per se, but our usefulness to them as symbols. If it is the latter, there is very little difference between those who proclaim themselves our friends, and those who get mileage out of proclaiming themselves our enemies.

The Trumps and Giulianis and even the Gerards of this world are not new. In our history as well as in our origin myths, we have long had to engage with non-Jewish leaders who prefer Jews to be “loyal”: to conform and not complain. Some, like Gerard, who perhaps really wanted to save us from pogroms, are interested in our well-being. Others, like certain modern-day politicians, see us as pawns in the game, useful for their personal gain.

The same is true of Jewish leaders. Particularly when times feel dangerous, some hope to secure our safety by appeasing more powerful people, and some manipulate our fears to protect their own power.

It’s not just a Jewish joke to say that Jews are good at complaining. In an unequal world, that’s a precious skill to have, and to share. It may be that our safety ultimately lies in the very difficult task of finding the others who have as much to “complain” about as we do, building real friendships with them in spite of all the disappointments we will experience in the process, and rewriting the rules of the game together.

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