‘Anti-Semitism among American Labor’: a study by the refugee scholars of the Frankfurt School of Sociology at the end of World War II

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This article analyzes the unpublished 1400-page report ‘Anti-Semitism among American Labor’, produced in 1944–1945 by the German scholars of the Frankfurt School of Sociology during their exile in the United States. Overlooked so far by labor historians and by historians of Jewish and World War II history, this report is analyzed here with specific attention to its contents as well as to the historical circumstances of its production during World War II. The article explains the larger strategy of the Jewish Labor Committee which commissioned it. It also situates this study in the production of the German sociologists who realized it. Finally, the article argues that, in the context of the war production effort, the alleged anti-Semitism of the American working class was a fluctuant and paradigmatic sign of tension and frustration which eventually gave way to other forms of literal or imaginary conflicts.

In March 1945, the Institute for Social Research of Columbia University delivered a study on ‘Anti-Semitism among American Labor’, which it had conducted as a sociological inquiry between July and December 1944. As is well known, this institute was composed of the refugee scholars from the Frankfurt School of Sociology who had been forced into exile with the advent of the Nazi régime. The Marxist orientation of its members and the Jewish origin of nearly all of them made them outright opponents to the regime. The president of Columbia University in New York City allowed the independently funded Institute to transfer its operations there in 1934. Max Horkheimer, its director, was surrounded by a group of German scholars, among whom Theodor Adorno was his closest collaborator. Released in March 1945, the study on Anti-Semitism in the American working class was paradoxical in a number of ways. The unabashed expression of anti-Jewish sentiment by American workers which it exposed is surprising if one considers that, with the full patriotic support of its millions of soldiers and home-front workers, the United States was still at war for an ultimate victory over Nazi Germany and its systematic destruction of European Jewry. Surprising also when one thinks that the massive immigration of people of Jewish origin to the United States had long been ended by the quota system. Not only did Jewish immigrants by the mid-1940s seem fully integrated into the American working class, of which they were still a part, their offspring, the second generation, were now striving to move out of it.
The circumstances of production of this study and the interpretations that can be given of it are other points of interest. The study so far has been mentioned by philosophers examining the work of the Frankfurt School in the United States. Martin Jay and Rolf Wiggershaus in particular have clearly situated it in the sequence of its productions. Produced under Horkheimer and Adorno’s authority, the report on ‘Anti-Semitism among American Labor’ is imbedded in these scholars’ theoretical and more empirical work on the study of mass culture in modern societies. But it has come to the attention neither of labor historians looking at American workers during World War II and in the aftermath of the war, nor of historians of Jewish culture in the United States. It is thus necessary to situate this report more precisely in these contexts.

This report highlights a number of important issues concerning the relationship of the Jewish community to the American working class and the nation at large. It emphasizes the role of the Jewish labor leaders who commissioned it as one aspect of their fight against anti-Semitism in the United States and abroad, and therefore shows them as isolated, among American workers, in their fight. It also suggests that the findings of the report may be looked at as one more chapter in the long history of ethnic relations within the American working class, the non-publication of the report being itself a consequence of the rapid evolution of Jewish–Gentile relations in the late 1940s. Finally, the report allows the reader to ponder on the particular situation of these highly educated Jewish German scholars in exile investigating the problem of Anti-Semitism in the American working class at the time when the Holocaust, with its full-scale massacre, was being disclosed. Should this report be taken at face value? Or should it be viewed as a mirror reflecting shadows of the horrors of the time and country these scholars had come from? These questions bring us to see how it contributes to understanding what David Wyman has called ‘The Abandonment of the Jews’.

Circumstances of production

Historically, anti-Semitism has not been a structural paradigm shaping US working-class culture as it did in the old world, especially in the Russian Empire. Unlike the white/black opposition which, according to today’s scholars of ‘whiteness’, has had a stronger impact on social relations in the United States than the class structure itself, the Jew/Gentile difference did not produce long-lasting or meaningful sources of division within the American working class beyond recurring expressions of nativism. Samuel Gompers, the founder and long-time president of the American Federation of Labor (AFL), for instance, was of Jewish origin, and it was not his identity that caused oppositions, but rather, his autocratic manner and conservative political beliefs. By the 1930s and 1940s, the ‘Jewish Labor Movement’, mostly representing the needle trades, was at the vanguard of the US labor movement. The two most important unions in this movement, the International Ladies Garment Workers’ Union (ILGWU) and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America (ACWA), were among the founding organizations of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), the modern federation that, since 1936, has organized American industrial workers. And since 1940, the ILGWU, having re-affiliated itself to the AFL, the two pillars of the Jewish labor movement have been anchored.
in each of the two federations. Why, then, a study of anti-Semitism in the American working class?6

The study was commissioned by the New York–based Jewish Labor Committee (JLC). This organization was founded in 1934 to combat Nazism and fascism by providing a united front of labor and Jewish organizations fighting for the defense of workers and Jews in Europe and America. It brought together the membership of the major unions of the Jewish labor movement (the ILGWU and ACWA, as well as the smaller unions gathered in the United Hebrew Trades) and the branches of the socialist Jewish mutual help associations organized under the aegis of the Workmen’s Circle. The JLC offered relief and support to political victims of Nazi repression in Europe (whether they were Jewish or not) and actively combated the inroads of anti-Semitism in the United States. The JLC leaders – Baruch Charney Vladeck, Adolph Held, David Dubinsky, Joseph Schlossberg, Nathan Chanin7 – were themselves first-generation Jewish immigrants from the Russian Empire. Most of them had found refuge in the United States after the 1905 revolution and the political persecution exacted upon them for their political activism. In the Russian revolutionary movement, they had fought as Bundists8 in the Zone of Settlement for the defense of secular Jewish culture in its Yiddish expression and for the universal ideal of socialism. In the 1930s, in the diaspora or in Poland, the Bundists’ particular ethnic, cultural, and political origin made them doubly sensitive to the rise of Nazism. In the United States, JLC founder Baruch Charney Vladeck very clearly and presciently expressed that attacks against Jews and attacks against labor were twin facets of Nazi ideology. At the 1934 AFL convention, where he presented the JLC’s mission, he declared:

Jews have been a true barometer for the labor movement. Whenever and wherever a government begins to persecute the Jews, it inevitably follows with persecuting the workers […] The first blast against the Jews is only the fore-runner of a dark storm against labor.9

Vladeck’s words were conceived to alert American labor that Jews were not the only targets of Nazi persecution. Indeed, the complete destruction of the German labor movement had preceded the systematic measures of exclusion and persecution of Jewish people in the Third Reich. And the JLC’s foundation was also a reaction to the Dolfuss regime’s violent crushing of the workers’ upheaval in Vienna in February 1934. The dialectical relationship between the JLC’s labor and Jewish identities was inseparable from the organization’s class composition, and from its leaders’ revolutionary origin. In its defense of Jewish workers, as Jews and as workers, the JLC differed from the main Jewish organizations in the United States, which had a more middle-class orientation. On the other hand, it also differed from all European communist and social democratic parties and labor movements for whom the fight against anti-Semitism was secondary to the ultimate goal of a socialist revolution. In that sense, the Bundist analysis of Nazism, perceiving that the menace of anti-Semitism was as destructive as attacks against labor, was more clear-sighted, as history would tell, than that of other socialist doctrines.10

In the early years of World War II, the JLC’s most notorious achievement was the rescue of several hundred European socialist and labor leaders (not all of whom were Jewish) who were in immediate danger of arrest in Nazi-dominated countries. Some of these were anti-Nazi and anti-fascist refugees trapped in France from June
1940, and now actively requested by the Gestapo and the Vichy authorities. Among them were some of the most prominent leaders of European and international labor movements and social democratic parties. At the same time, the JLC also organized the rescue of many Polish Bundists who, in the fall of 1939, had found a temporary haven in Lithuania but were sought by the NKVD, Stalin’s political police, when the country was invaded by Soviet forces. In the following years of the war, the JLC was active in providing funds, clothes, medicines and all forms of relief that could somehow alleviate the plight of the persecuted Jewish populations in Europe or help their survival. In 1945, the JLC was the first organization in the United States to expose the atrocity of the Jewish genocide, by holding a photographic exhibition in New York in April 1945 on ‘Martyrs and Heroes of the Ghettoes’, which was dedicated to the Warsaw insurrection. According to Professor Albert Einstein, a most prominent German refugee, who inaugurated it, ‘The main purpose of this exhibition is enlightenment, education! We must be able to face the horrible reality in order to more effectively build a better future.’

A similar educational goal was the basis for the JLC’s commission of a study of anti-Semitism in the American working class. The desire to prevent any resurgence of such atrocities as happened during World War II motivated the JLC leaders to obtain a detailed picture of the situation in the United States. In the 1930s the JLC had made it one of its missions to fight anti-Jewish discrimination in employment and to sensitize labor organizations (the AFL and the CIO) against anti-Semitic propaganda in their ranks. Anti-Semitism in the United States certainly was never as virulent and widespread as in Europe. But expressions of it, which in the 1920s had mostly come from elite sections of US society (such as Henry Ford in the Dearborn Independent, or the universities’ quota systems to restrict the number of Jewish students), had flared in the late 1930s with the ranting of radio-priest Father Coughlin, who broadcast his sermons to millions of Catholic working-class listeners. His preaching mainstreamed the worst anti-Semitic clichés directly borrowed from the forged document Protocols of the Elders of Zion, or from Nazi leader Josef Goebbels’ diatribes. In addition, although not having large memberships, a few organizations, such as the Silver Shirts and the German American Bund, openly advocated Nazi ideology in the United States. More consistently, anti-Semitism was also apparent in the absolute refusal of the US Congress to relax the tight immigration rules that prevented the admission of a massive flow of refugees to the United States. But if all this is well known, the German sociologists’ report enables us to measure how these ideas resonated in the American working class, or partly emanated from it.

The United States’ participation in the war itself had not necessarily softened existing anti-Semitic beliefs or pro-Nazi propensities for those who harbored them. The belated knowledge about the horror of the final solution – only officially known in the United States by the end of 1942, and only slowly penetrating national consciousness – had not eradicated the remnants of anti-Semitic sentiment. One of the results of the study entitled ‘Anti-Semitism among American Labor’ was precisely to underline the fact that some people believed that the war was waged by non-Jews for the sake of Jews. Incredulity concerning the number of victims of Nazi concentration camps led to the belief that the figure was falsely inflated. In this context of false rumors, the JLC’s decision to commission a scientific study to
evaluate the degree of anti-Semitism in the American working class was motivated by the fear that unemployment – likely to happen, as many believed, when war contracts would end, and as a result of the return of the 12 million soldiers – would create additional tensions in labor ranks. The introduction to the study stated that anti-Semitism had spread widely in the United States on the eve of the war and in wartime. Leo Lowenthal, one of the scholars participating in the study, reasserted this ominous fear when he presented its conclusions to the JLC leaders on 10 March 1945. He made it clear that anti-Semitism could be fueled within the ranks of American labor by exterior manipulators, and claimed that it was therefore necessary to probe the degree of resistance to such attacks:

You will agree with me when I say that severe onslaughts on our democratic way of life may be expected when the war is over, and that we may anticipate the first strategically planned attacks even at an earlier date. We do not know whether the use of anti-Semitism will be the weapon of this offensive. But we know, and you know that the main purpose of this anti-democratic offensive will be the attack on labor.

Although anti-Semitism had not been the Frankfurt School sociologists’ predominant object of study in the early 1930s, by the end of the decade it had become a central theme in their work. In the United States, these scholars had continued to develop their theoretical work, writing essays that under Horkheimer’s intellectual leadership became known as ‘Critical Theory’. Much has been written on this notion which rejected any closed philosophical system and aimed at integrating philosophy and the social sciences, even in their empirical forms of exploration: sociology, psychoanalysis, economics, history of ideas and culture. Grounded in Marxism, this multiple perspective aimed at understanding the nature of man and society in the modern capitalist world, but it was more interested in culture and knowledge as a product of this world than in orthodox Marxist economic relations and modes of production. In its practical applications, this vision ascertained the moral and political role of the social sciences in the quest for a better social order governed by the rule of reason rather than by emotions or interests. Until 1940, these scholars continued working from New York City, publishing in German in the Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung that was printed in Paris. ‘Critical Theory’ was initially a form of intellectual resistance to Nazism, formulated from abroad in the form of federating research carried out by widely scattered scholars, some of whom were in the United States, while others were in Geneva, Paris or London. The works produced in this context thus remained aloof from the American academic and social world. When the possibility of publishing in France was foreclosed by the German invasion, the exiled scholars started publishing their work in English, transforming the title of their journal into Studies in Philosophy and Social Science, and also to some extent their own relationship to research and politics in the United States.

By the end of 1938, after the Anschluss and the onslaught against German and Austrian Jews launched by the ‘Crystal night’ pogroms, the scholars became chiefly involved in explaining the essence of National Socialism. In 1942, Franz Neuman, with his book Behemoth, produced the first major interpretation of Nazi power. At the same time, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, from their further retreat in Los Angeles, wrote the series of essays published as Dialektik der Aufklärung [Dialectics of Enlightenment], which was to be the most theoretical work of the Frankfurt school’s publications. Its purpose, the authors claimed, was ‘nothing less
than to explain why humanity, instead of entering into a truly human condition, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism'. Among the densely written essays analyzing this proposition, there was one that was devoted to anti-Semitism, entitled ‘Elements of Anti-Semitism, Limits of Enlightenment’. Indeed, in his correspondence with Horkheimer, Adorno had said, ‘It often seems to me that everything that we used to see from the point of view of the proletariat has been concentrated today with frightful force upon the Jews […] The Jews are now at the opposite pole to the concentration of power.’ In this light, Jewish people therefore were to be considered in Marxist analysis as the proletariat of the world, and their exclusion and oppression as the ‘real focal point of injustice’. The analysis of anti-Semitism became central in the sociologists’ involvement in the study of the role of prejudice in the emergence of totalitarian societies as well as in the formation of the phenomenon of mass culture as it prevailed in the United States. In addition to their philosophical exploration, Horkheimer and Adorno had launched a ‘Research Project on Anti-Semitism’, whose program was published in the spring 1941 issue of Studies in Philosophy and Social Science, and they were seeking ways to finance the necessary empirical work to sustain it. In response to this program, they first obtained in 1943 a contract lasting for several years from the American Jewish Committee. This major Jewish institution was willing to support the Institute’s large project on Anti-Semitism. With its sponsorship, the Institute’s collective work eventually led to the five-volume publication of Studies in Prejudice, which appeared in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

The second contract they obtained was that granted by the Jewish Labor Committee in March 1944 for the study of ‘Anti-Semitism among American Labor’. The latter project, the object of this article, is therefore imbedded in a strongly formulated theoretical context as well as in other empirical studies on the same or related subjects. Both projects, although unequal in scope, bear the psychosociological approach that the Critical Theorists were now adopting in the application of their general hypotheses on the role of prejudice in the formation of totalitarian societies. With these projects they linked reflections on the sources of Nazi totalitarianism with considerations on mass-culture societies such as the United States. Horkheimer and Adorno continued to assume the leadership in these research projects, but they left the empirical work to their associates in the Institute. Adorno, one of the main authors of The Authoritarian Personality, was also, however, actively involved in empirical research.

In Germany the sociologists had already abandoned the classic interpretation of Marxism which ascribes to the proletariat the role of political and cultural transformation of society. They questioned the emancipating role attributed to the working class as a universal class and did not entirely adhere to the centrality of labor as the source of man’s desire and ability for social change. Their interest in psychoanalysis distanced them from a vision of society preordained by economic factors. Already in 1930, Horkheimer had presciently concluded that the German working class was an ambivalent mass that could easily be swayed and that it would offer less resistance to a conservative ideology and power structure, if it were to develop, than its political discourse affirmed. But the question of anti-Semitism was not then central to this analysis. Martin Jay explains this point with the fact that in Germany, the scholars had benefited from the objective situation created by the
Weimar Republic, where most existing barriers to professions and services had been removed, and, never having personally experienced anti-Semitism, they did not perceive its impact, or they downplayed it, although it soon blaringly came to the forefront of German politics.\(^{25}\)

In one of their introductory remarks to the volumes of the American study in 1945, the sociologists indeed noted that European labor, prior to Hitler’s conquest in Germany, ‘obviously was more immune to anti-Semitic prejudice than American labor today. And yet totalitarianism succeeded in obviating or reducing the resistance of European workers.’ They asked, ‘Will American workers, so much more easily swayed by racial prejudice, prove a stronger bulwark against totalitarianism?’\(^{26}\)

This focal question led to the detailed investigation carried through the second half of 1944. The study was conducted by four of the Institute’s scholars. Friedrich Pollock directed it, and he worked collectively with Leo Lowenthal, Paul Massing and A.R.L. Gurland, with the help of several research assistants at the Institute.\(^{27}\) Massing supervised the investigation on the East Coast and Detroit area, while Pollock, assisted by Theodor Adorno, took charge of that on the West Coast. Each part of the report was written by one of the four collaborators.\(^{28}\) The AFL and the CIO, as well as numerous labor unions either affiliated to them or independent, contributed largely to the ‘success of the study’, as reported by the authors. The latter also thanked the JLC president, Adolph Held, the head of the Committee to Combat Anti-Semitism, Charles Zimmerman, and other JLC officers who helped them get the project under way and financed it.\(^{29}\) They also acknowledged the support of many community leaders, educators, writers, and men and women in government service, industry and social work.\(^{30}\) The investigation was initially planned as a sample study to be followed by more extensive research. The project concerning American labor, however, did not go further as such, and was never published in spite of several attempts to do so up until 1953.

**Method and results of the study**

Spelled out in the introduction to the study, its major conclusions emphasized the idea that ‘totalitarian stereotypes mold the thinking of large sections of Americans’, and its authors claimed: ‘Anti-Jewish prejudice pervades the overwhelming majority of the persons interviewed.’ ‘To a large extent American workers do accept anti-Semitism,’ they maintained. ‘What counts is not exactly open and active hostility to Jews, these [agitators] can be spotted and neutralized; the threat, rather, is the prejudice itself.’ The ‘texture’ of prejudice is what the investigators explored, tracing its various expressions, degrees of intensity and possible explanations. They exposed a palpable sense of danger, arising in part from the fact that prejudice could easily be manipulated from within and outside the working class to serve fascistic political purposes. Although the sociologists carefully maintained that this was not a statistical survey, which would have required more extensive investigations, they revealed from it qualitative trends and tendencies based on quantified data.\(^{31}\)

The study was conducted by analyzing the results of 566 interviews, carried out between July and October 1944, of workers sampled to represent the American working class as a whole, allowing regional, industrial, trade and skill differences.
The sampling of age, gender, race, religious and ethnic backgrounds, however, was more random than systematically calculated, as interviewers were given certain leeway to obtain responses from the ‘average worker’ rather than from the more obviously extreme ones. The study focused on the industrial working class, especially in the major sectors of the defense industry, to which many ‘new workers’ had recently migrated. It focused on five specific industrial regions: the East Coast, encompassing the New York, New Jersey and Philadelphia areas; Pittsburgh, with its steel industry; Detroit, where the automobile industry had been turned to defense production; and the West Coast, in Los Angeles and San Francisco. The sample contained unionized workers (23.8% of them AFL and 38.5% CIO) and non-union ones (29.5%). A few white-collar employees, small tradesmen and professionals were part of the sample, but it included no independent craftsmen and no agricultural workers or farmers. 

The technique of investigation was elaborated in agreement with trade union leaders (AFL and CIO). The idea was one of ‘participant observation’. Instead of handing out questionnaires to selected respondents, or organizing opinion polls, less formal interviews were obtained by fellow workers who had been trained to guide the conversation on a given pattern so as to ‘elucidate the nature, the intensity and extent of anti-Semitic feeling’ among their respondents. A total of 270 such voluntary investigators had thus been trained, from the ranks of the workers themselves, to produce these ‘screened interviews’. Non-Jewish interviewers were specifically selected so that their identities would not be an obstacle to or an incentive for the expression of sentiments on the subject on which they were instructed to launch open questions. The ‘screened interview’ was a compromise, taking into account both the desire to extract maximum knowledge, and the technical difficulty of doing so. According to the sociologists, ‘the purpose is a conversation in which the interviewee is not to know that he is being interviewed, in which he does not fear that what he says may be used against him’. But the conversation had to be ‘guided’. It was ‘steered along definite previously established lines’. ‘Co-workers, friends in the same social position, living under similar conditions’ were chosen as interviewers, capable of conducting these ‘participant’ observations. The guided conversation contained the following seven basic questions aimed at obtaining information about the interviewee, but also at learning if any propaganda had been voiced in the workplace or in his/her community:

1. Do Jewish people act and feel differently from others? What do people say about them?
2. Can you tell a Jew from a non-Jew?
3. Do you mind working with Jews on the job? Why? Have you ever worked with any? How about working with Negroes? (of course this question cannot be asked a negro worker).
4. Did you know any Jews before you started in your first job? At school? Or in your hometown? What were they like?
5. What do you feel about what the Nazis did to the Jews in Germany?
6. Are there people in this country who would like to see feelings against the Jews grow? What groups? Why do they want it?
7. Do people think the Jews are doing their share in the war effort? What do you think?
These questions were intended to expose the nature of prejudice in this particular American sociological context, as well as the direct influences (political or psychological) that may have supported it. They were designed to reveal such notions, facts or trends as general and traditional prejudice and fixed opinion (questions 1 and 2); prejudice in its more modern varieties, especially the totalitarian type (questions 5, 6); developmental features of prejudice within the personality frame of the interviewee (question 4); specific experience with Jews as workers (question 3); and influence of war, incidence of wartime on prejudice (question 7).

Beyond answers to these questions, the interviewers were required to collect biographical data about the persons interviewed relating to age, gender, marriage and family status, educational level, place of birth, nationality of parents, religion, occupation, place of work, union membership. Elements about the persons’ psychological character were indicated by filling in psychological descriptions of the respondent by types, such as ‘Easy-going; Worries a lot; If yes: what about? Present job; Job after the war; Married life; Other things?’. From this material, the evaluation of the degree of anti-Semitism was classified in eight categories ranging from (a) extreme hostility to (h) non-discriminatory, friendly attitude excluding any critique. Obviously the response to question 5 was pivotal to understanding the intensity of prejudice. The analysis of responses produced the degrees of anti-Semitism shown in Table 1.

Combined in major groups, these percentages add up to the clusters of attitudes shown in Table 2.

Lumped differently, these results also meant that 30.7% of the sampled population were strongly prejudiced, and at the other extreme, 30.9% were friendly to Jews. The hesitations of the medium third who harbored no positive feelings for Jews but were undecided as to what position to take led the investigators to believe that half the population could be swayed towards anti-Semitic action. Little regional variation was found in these categories. In all five regions, more or less the same proportion of respondents appeared as anti-Semitic, prejudiced, undecided and non-hostile.

**Table 1. Degrees of anti-Semitism.**

| (a) Extreme hostility, aiming at physical extermination of Jews | 10.6 |
| (b) Extreme hostility aiming at elimination of articulate Jewish life (mass deportation, etc.) | 10.2 |
| (c) Active hostility to Jews violently expressed but indicative of inconsistent attitude | 3.7 |
| (d) Strong hostility to Jews aiming at segregation, restrictions and consistent discrimination | 6.2 |
| (e) Emotional resentment of Jews, with moderate to medium hostility, but undecided as to action to be taken | 19.1 |
| (f) Rejection of discrimination combined with emotional dislike for Jews | 19.3 |
| (g) Friendly attitude with rational critique of ‘Jewish’ traits | 10.8 |
| (h) Non-discriminatory, friendly attitude excluding any critique | 20.1 |
| Total | 100 |
One clear-cut difference was noted between men and women, the former showing a higher percentage of prejudiced respondents, and the latter being more frequently friendly to Jews. Concerning the relationship between unionization and tolerance, the interviewers remarked that members of the CIO ranked both above AFL members in the less anti-Semitic categories and above the unorganized. The sociologists commented that ‘AFL ideology and practice had had no effect upon the samples’ AFL members that would distinguish them from the unorganized’. CIO unions, on the other hand, had ‘taken a definite stand on non-discrimination and [did] enforce union policies in this respect’. In the AFL, the study noted ‘only a few belong to unions known for their consistent anti-discrimination policies, such as the ILGWU and the United Hatters’. It must be remembered, however, that none of the garment trade unions, which comprised the JLC, mainly the ILGWU (an AFL affiliate) and the ACWA (a CIO union), were part of the sample. If no longer overwhelmingly Jewish, these unions’ membership was ethnically varied; and their leaders, in the forefront of the struggle against Nazism and anti-Semitism, as JLC executives, were those who had commissioned the study.

‘The functions of the mask’

A very high degree of extremely aggressive verbal violence and feeling was recorded in the interviews. Attacks ranged from age-old clichés about Jews – gregariousness, money-grabbing, monopolizing commerce, ‘they are all in business’, ‘do not work with their hands’, ‘they own all the money, all the business and are trying to destroy the country’ – to forms of totalitarian execration: ‘They will Jew each other’; ‘Jews got exactly what was coming to them’; ‘Hitler did the right thing, he did not do
enough, he should have exterminated them all, they are a menace to society’; ‘Damn good job, we should have let them finish it, and the Poles too’. Even the more moderate types did not mince their words: ‘What happened in Germany was terrible, but about Hollywood, there’s a few dozen I would like to see liquidated.’ Another respondent disapproved of such ‘wholesale persecution’ – ‘But they DO need restraint,’ he maintained. Obviously, the sociologists’ initial concern was justified by their findings: the American working class harbored conscious, stereotypical and destructive prejudice against Jews. And persecution in Europe had not weakened anti-Semitism – it was more likely to have aggravated it.39

While recording and reporting verbatim the answers given to the (hidden) questions, in their analysis the sociologists were aware of the fluidity of attitudes within the categories made out from these remarks and often noted the ambivalence of their respondents. The value attributed to these answers therefore had to be interpreted if one were to understand what expressions of anti-Semitism meant for these workers. As they explained in the introduction, ‘anti-Semitism, in recent as well as in olden times, emerged when people who suffer failed to discover the real cause of their suffering. It emerged when organized groups succeeded in manipulating vague protest against prevailing conditions and in diverting it towards an imaginary culprit made responsible for any and every evil.’40 Interpretation was all the more necessary as, from a surface view of American society in wartime, they said, ‘no obvious reasons for the evident increase of anti-Semitism among the masses of workers can be detected. The nation’s economy is geared to full employment, organized labor is heard in the decision on economic policy, war restrictions and sacrifices cannot be said to have led to a general deterioration of the workers’ living standards.’41

Certainly after years of depression, wartime production provided a full-employment situation which gave workers a more affluent standard of living than they had ever known; major industries were now unionized; and management and labor were brought to terms, guaranteeing union security. Although wartime production, as we shall see below, created much tension on the shop floor, in comparison with earlier times in the United States and with European war-torn countries, American workers ‘had never had it so good’. The anti-Semitism they expressed was therefore a diversion from other causes of discontent.42

A catalogue of possible explanations was thus elaborated. None of them of course exposed any rationality, since the Jew imagined by anti-Semites is a mythical person. The sociologists explored all avenues of interpretation. Well versed in the enumeration of the Judeo-phobic paradigm,43 they nevertheless tried to circumscribe its specific nature as expressed then and there by the American working class. One element of this American specificity was the relatively lesser degree of anti-Semitism among white-collar workers compared with blue-collar ones. The more educated a person was, the less anti-Semitic they were, the German sociologists pointed out. They recognized there a difference with Germany, where ‘white collar workers, a good barometer for political weather […], were among the first to support fascist movements’. The more liberal attitude of the American middle class, the sociologists remarked, was a ‘promising sign for democracy’.44 Another observation related to the absence of real anti-capitalist discourse in these workers’ anti-Semitic remarks. This did not prevent acrimonious expressions of prejudice against the imagined ‘International conspiracy of the Elders of Zion’, against ‘Jewish power behind the
control of business’, or against ‘Jewish bosses’ generally. But the investigators noted the vague and ritual character of these accusations that lacked precise reference to actual Jewish employers, and did not even have a clearly anti-capitalist discourse. The respondents blamed the exploitative and clannish nature of small employers, the ‘sweatshop boss’ who ‘could get the best of you’, and the conspicuous presence of Jews in small businesses: ‘Every store is Jew-owned’, it was affirmed.45

Another American specificity was the racial divide between whites and blacks, which reverberated upon the workers’ attitudes towards Jews. The proportion of respondents affirming that they would not work alongside Jews (29.3%) was comparable to that of persons saying they would not work alongside blacks (30.3%). But in some cases, the balance fell in favor of black workers, because, as one interviewee suggested, ‘after all, it is not the Negro’s fault that he is black, while the Jew is a white man, he don’t have to be that way!’46 Plausible explanations of anti-black racism were obvious in the discrimination pattern of race relations. Urban congestion in industrial districts, added to the black segregation into restricted zones, multiplied the overall housing shortage created by the influx of new workers to industrial centers. Although this was expressly mentioned neither by the interviewees nor by the commentators, violent race riots did take place during the war, in Detroit especially, where many new black and white workers had migrated from the South. ‘Detroit is Dynamite, it can either blow up Hitler or Blow up the U.S.’, announced a banner headline in Life Magazine in 1942. Indeed, one of the worst race riots of the twentieth century flared up there in June 1943. It engulfed whites, blacks, and the police, in a three-day rampage of violence and destruction during which blacks looted white-owned stores and whites swept through the black areas.47 Similar tension appeared in Harlem, Mobile, Brownsville (Texas), Los Angeles and Chicago. These riots were generally triggered by the housing shortage, which affected whites as well as blacks. In Detroit alone, for instance, the workforce had more than doubled during the war, increasing from 400,000 to 867,000 workers.48 But conflicts were also motivated on the shop floor by the application of Roosevelt’s 1941 executive order banning segregation in the defense industries. In Detroit and other cities, white workers protesting about the integration of blacks into previously segregated departments sometimes led to strikes.49 According to the German sociologists interpreting the ‘Jewish menace’ invoked in these interviews, anti-Jewish hatred was a way of dealing with the more fundamental and concrete race-relations problem. ‘Anti-Semitism takes a load off the workers’ shoulders,’ they explained.50 Hostile reactions against blacks were contained by workplace and union discipline for wartime production, and the deflection of racial hostility towards Jews was one translation of the economic and psychological tensions. It fed on the old stereotypes of the money-grabbing Jewish landlord or store-owner, the rapacious businessman, and the parasitical non-worker. The report noted that ‘while the Negro worker is a concrete competitor, the Jew in business is an abstract threat religiously believed in’. ‘Anti-Jewishness, really a diversion, becomes an outlet for [the white workers’] rebellion against actual wrong. Charges against Jews are of greater importance to the individual than specific remediable grievances against Negroes or other minority groups.’51

A much higher degree of racial justice and tolerance was expressed by black workers than by whites. For instance, 65.9% of the interviewed black workers
definitely condemned Nazi terror, while only 53.1% of the whites did so. And blacks less frequently objected to working with Jews (12%) than whites did (29.3%). When they did express grievances against Jews, black workers emphasized examples specific to the ghettos. They complained that the vast majority of apartments and grocery stores, in Harlem or other city ghettos, were owned or run by Jewish landlords. The explosive aspect of the situation, the investigators pointed out, was that fascist activists might exploit the black residents’ social frustration and susceptibility to insurgency, exacerbating anti-Semitic feelings against Jews as agents of white domination. ‘Anti-Semitic propaganda among negroes cannot be fought unless the negro worker is integrated into the family of organized labor,’ they recommended; ‘he must have the feeling that he does not have to face discrimination alone, isolated, unprotected.’

Another potent source of hostile feeling was linked to the assumption that Jews were not living up to the patriotic duties of the war: 40% of respondents held such views. More than a quarter (27%) charged Jews of dodging the draft by seeking ‘soft jobs’ in war industries, the army, or government agencies: ‘The Jew in the army does not appear as a GI nor as a commissioned officer.’ By a ‘process of natural selection’ he is more often assigned to jobs more related to his training, thus becoming an interpreter, a quartermaster, or an accountant. So the old stereotype of the Jew as a non-worker reappeared in the form of the Jew as a non-fighter. Beyond such resentment, which also included indicting the Jews for their intellectual capability, came new additions to the arsenal of insulting stereotypes. Paul Massing stated that in wartime, anti-Semitism had become a ‘staple commodity’. ‘Today, the Jew is now much more than a repulsive individual, he is a war-monger’, and the war is a ‘Jewish war’. ‘Millions of American boys have to fight in this Jewish war,’ one interviewee maintained, ‘and while they fight and die, the Jew is dodging the draft, sitting on soft jobs, running the black market, his eyes already on the huge profits that can be made from the sale of war surplus goods, blood money.’ The Jew presents an ‘unheroic image’. This criticism was made more pointed when some argued that a number of Jewish boys took up jobs in the steel mills of the defense industry, in order to obtain a deferment allowing them to avoid the draft, and would ‘return to selling cars, or to their law firms, after the war’. Obviously their unusual presence in the steel mills created tensions with other workers more traditionally employed in that industry (Poles, Italians, Croatians). The sociologist added that some of the interviewed workers went on furiously, threatening that ‘we just wait until our boys come home, they will take care of the Jews’.

When the study correlated the degree of anti-Semitism and religious denomination, the results were inconclusive or contradictory. For instance, 20.2% of Catholics supported fascist ideas, against 15.1% of Protestants. But more Catholic workers disapproved of Nazi terror (21.6%) than did Protestant ones (16.8%). The results on ethnic origin were not very consistent either, bringing the scholars to collapse ethnic origins into the group of Allied nations (British, Mexicans, Polish, Czechs, Scandinavians, French) on the one hand, and into that of the Axis on the other (Italians, Germans, Austrians, Hungarians) on the other, in order to delineate the profiles of the more pro- and anti-fascist clusters of opinions. The degree of Americanization and education was the strongest factor regarding opposition to Nazism. The older the immigrant group, the less anti-Semitic. The American-born
third- and second-generation descendants of immigrants evinced an inferior rate of agreement with fascist ideas (13% and 19% respectively) compared with those of the first generation, the foreign born (23.5%). This suggested that the more recent they were to the working class, the more likely it was that a person would express his/her insecurity in terms of anti-Jewish feeling.\footnote{59}

**Union leaders**

A special part of the investigation was devoted to open discussion with union leaders.\footnote{60} Their responses in general brought out articulate and more nuanced attitudes than those of rank-and-file workers. Some suggested that the relational problems affecting Jews may have had more to do with exogenous factors than with ones pertaining to the working class itself. In other words, they would be linked to class antagonism (the Jew as middleman, as banker and businessman). Others pointedly remarked that the interviewers’ ‘guided’ conversations on Jews and anti-Semitism reified a more uncertain feeling and somehow provoked the expression of prejudice. ‘Don’t exaggerate [the meaning of these verbal outbursts],’ remarked a CIO leader. ‘You might hear me say that the only good Catholic is a dead Catholic if I want to deal with these Polish peasants who have been told by their blockhead Catholic priests that the Jews are the Devil’s breed.’\footnote{61} The editor of a Yiddish working-class paper also stressed the fact that minor conflicts take on fantastic dimensions because they are not real. Others found the investigation dangerous in itself: ‘We don’t want to stir up any trouble.’ This was especially the case with communist-led unions. The interviewers found a nearly explosive situation in their ranks: ‘The members of these unions are less communist than fascist-minded, and indeed violent outbreaks of anti-Semitism could have been caused by raising the question.’ Authoritatively silencing the workers’ expression, they felt, did not solve the problem; ‘the air is saturated with anti-Semitism,’ the investigators affirmed.\footnote{62}

**Beyond words and stereotypes**

With the privilege of hindsight, one is inclined to agree with the union leaders that the questionnaire on anti-Semitism tended to reify into verbal attacks a sentiment that was more volatile and transient than really anti-Semitic. By pointing out ‘the Jew’, one may wonder whether the questions were not likely to isolate that ethnic group among others and give rise to anti-Jewish responses. Or didn’t the German sociologists, and their JLC sponsors, project into these questions fears and anxieties that were more specifically related to the European events than to the American context? Their worst fears were not confirmed. No ‘severe onslaught’ occurred against the Jewish community in the United States after the war. Historian Ronald Bayor indicates that acts of vandalism against synagogues or Jewish-owned stores were perpetrated in neighborhoods where Charles Coughlin’s Christian Front operated, but nothing happened on a wide, local, regional, let alone national scale.\footnote{63} Such attacks, in addition, paled in comparison with the government-ordered internment of every person of Japanese origin through the duration of the war (1942–5).\footnote{64}
Had the German scholars been more aware of precedents in race and ethnic relations in the United States, they might have ascribed less objectivity to the responses to their questionnaire about Jews. Before the Japanese, the Chinese had been the object of intense racial prejudice, especially among the American working class, which led to the exclusion laws that prevented any further Chinese immigration from 1882 to 1943. Through the course of mass immigration, each new group of immigrants had somehow been subjected to the expression of hostile feelings, starting with the Irish in the nineteenth century. In the light of such continuity, therefore, the exposure of anti-Semitic feelings during World War II revealed just one more expression of the classic and ritual rejection of the ‘other’.

However, the German sociologists were not alone in exposing a high degree of anti-Semitism in the American nation. Several opinion polls carried out during the war through a larger sample of the American population revealed approximately the same proportion of anti-Semitic sentiments across the nation and across class as the study among American workers had shown. Between 5 and 10% of the population in 1944 expressed ‘rabidly anti-Semitic feelings’. More than a third and sometimes half of the respondents replied ‘Yes’ to the question ‘Do you think Jews have too much power in the United States?’ The Judeo-phobic sentiment had increased, rather than declined, during the war: from 43% in April 1940, it reached 56% of the sample in May 1944 and 58% in June 1945, to subside only slightly in 1946 (55%). Epidemics of anti-Semitic action erupted in several parts of the country, especially the urban North East. Even before ordering the report from the Institute of Social Research, the JLC had made it its special task to combat anti-Semitism in the American working class. It published educational material in several foreign-language labor organs and organized regional and city-wide conferences and seminars in conjunction with AFL and CIO officials, thus developing community and labor programs against racial intolerance in a number of key industrial cities. In 1945 and 1946, the JLC appointed several social workers to work in partnership with labor union representatives to combat intolerance. Believing that ‘insecurity brings hatred’, its leaders worked for programs to ensure full employment and to educate the rank and file.

The surge of anti-Semitism is all the more paradoxical as it was expressed by workers producing arms to win the war against the Third Reich’s goal of complete destruction of European Jewry. Yet, as David Wyman has made clear, in 1944, saving Jewish lives was not a priority for the US War Department. Thus, for home-front workers, that cause was blurred by local contingencies. As a form of explanation, one can suggest that the tension of wartime production in the defense industries (the most widely investigated by the study), creating high levels of frustration and anger, was irrationally transposed into anti-Semitism when workers were asked questions about their relations to Jews generally. The demands of the War Labor Board certainly created much pent-up feeling in the workplace: it imposed a wage freeze through the duration of the war and a No Strike pledge which the labor unions had agreed to in their patriotic commitment. Yet in spite of the pledge, 4956 strikes were recorded in 1944, involving 7% of the entire workforce. These wild-cat strikes erupted as signs of anger against day-to-day indignities, the speeding up of time and production standards, bad treatment by foremen, arbitrary wage classifications, job assignments, disciplinary action, and poor standards of
health, safety and comfort. And, out of the workplace, fueled by segregation, the shortage of housing increased the discontent. Verbal violence, therefore, was a form of relief against the frustration of displacement, hard work, inequality, and danger, in a labor force challenged by the demands of war production.

The social explosion which the Frankfurt sociologists had foretold did take place in the immediate aftermath of the war. But not in the way they had imagined. The huge strike wave that swept through all key industries in the 1945-46 winter released the pent-up expectations of the war years. By January 1946, 750,000 steelworkers were on strike, along with 200,000 electrical workers, 150,000 packing-house workers, and the 200,000 automobile workers at General Motors who stopped work for 113 days. All of them were striking to catch up on wages, after the wartime freeze and the end of the overtime which had compensated for the freeze. Contained during the war, the desire to assert the power of these recent CIO unions was suddenly released. Capitalizing on the war situation, the workers and their unions demanded full employment and pay increases as well as a more democratic control of the workplace. The huge confrontation that took place was a class-based, labor-management struggle, both offensive and defensive. It corresponded to the prediction of the sociologists, who had seen dynamite in the workers' minds, only in as much as it revealed the latter's anger, frustration and determination to fight for a more equitable post-war world. But workers were far from being manipulated in this conflict. And anti-Semitism had no place in it – and neither would it have any direct place in the succeeding years of the economic boom triggered by the GI Bill and the Marshall Plan.

What value did the German sociologists themselves finally ascribe to their study of ‘Anti-Semitism among American Labor’? On the one hand, the report pointed out the reality of anti-Semitic feeling in the American working class during the war, especially in the context of the defense industries. The full gamut of Judeo-phobic prejudice was registered in its classic and contemporary forms of expression, and the formulation of that feeling exposed tangible intolerance of Jews in a way that went beyond the usual pattern of American nativism. The specific irrationality of anti-Jewish sentiment was what characterized it. It revealed the absence of ideological restraint on the part of many workers who vented their feelings against Jewish co-workers, as well as Jewish landlords, grocers, and what they thought was the Jewish business world. It significantly showed that the war against Nazi Germany did not invalidate anti-Semitism in America.

On the other hand, because of the very irrationality of the anti-Jewish prejudice, the sociologists sought to explain what it stood for. 'It is a perverted revolutionary concept,' Leo Lowenthal proposed, in Marxist phraseology, 'an unconscious form of social critique.' He preceded Jean-Paul Sartre, who in 1954 also described anti-Semitism as a ‘bourgeois representation of the class struggle’. With these words, Lowenthal reflected the Critical Theorists’ continuing disillusion about the redemptive quality of the working class. The horror of Nazi crimes against the Jewish people did not lead a great part of the American working class to stand aloof of base prejudices – at least, not verbally.

A fundamental shift in the German sociologists’ ‘Critical Theory’ had occurred by the end of the war. Their hesitation as to the publication of the report also reveals the reorientation of their analysis. As time went on, delays in publication made its
meaning less and less relevant. But also, while before they had investigated the problem of anti-Semitism in the framework of class analysis (‘a perverted revolutionary concept’), the sociologists now had turned to a more general, cultural, psychological and anthropological approach in their object of study and in the results that they obtained. In the course of the ‘Research Project on Anti-Semitism’ (of which the study on American labor was one step), and with the aggravating factor of the full revelation of Nazi death camps, Horkheimer and Adorno, as expressed by Rolf Wiggershaus, ‘turned away from the theory of the absent revolution to the theory of absent civilization’. Abandoning the focus on labor (American or other), whose lack of class consciousness they deplored, they interpreted anti-Semitism as a ritual behavioral component of totalitarian societies. The sociologists’ field of investigation was now enlarged to cover the role of prejudice in the formation of mass psychology. By the end of the 1940s, the multi-volume series *Studies in Prejudice* confirmed and prolonged what had been initiated in the 1944 report on American labor. With different methods of classification, it aimed at revealing the psychological structure of the ‘authoritarian personality’ that was susceptible to anti-Semitism and fascism. When these volumes appeared in 1949, however, fascism and Nazism had been vanquished, and the Jew was no longer the pariah of the world, or of American labor. As John Higham has remarked, anti-Semitism was no longer the matrix of group prejudice.

With the advent of the cold war, rather, it was now the ‘Communist’, alleged or real, who had become the execrated figure in American politics and consensus culture. The authors of the report on ‘Anti-Semitism among American Labor’ thus had recognized the dimension of prejudice in American mentalities, whatever its object, to which the anti-communist context now gave a new validity.

Today, historians may see this episode as one more chapter in the paradigmatic story of ethnic, racial and finally political prejudice – one which did not divide members of the working class, but which prevented the formation of clear political thinking among them. In that sense, it indicated that part of the working class consciously or unconsciously neglected, or rejected the problems caused by, Nazi terror against Jews. It indicated that the nation’s acceptance of the US Congress’ Malthusian immigration policies through the 1930s and of the War Department’s belated response to the horror of Jewish extermination was deeply rooted in the American working class, at the heart of the defense production sector. In other words, this study is one more element adding to the thesis of fundamental US ambivalence concerning the problem of European Jewry during World War II. Specifically, it measures one of the ‘formidable barriers to the development of an American initiative to save European Jews’ that David Wyman and other historians have described.

**Notes on contributor**

Professor Catherine Collomp (Université Paris-Diderot, France) specializes in US labor and immigration history. She is currently working on US labor’s response to Nazism and fascism, and is preparing a history of the Jewish Labor Committee, 1934–1945 on which she has published several articles in American and European journals. Her previous books include *Entre Classe et Nation: Mouvement ouvrier et immigration aux Etats-Unis* (Belin, Paris, 1998); *Exilés et réfugiés politiques aux Etats-Unis*, co-edited with M. Menendez (CNRS Editions, 2002).

Notes

1. ‘Anti-Semitism among American Labor’, report on a research project conducted by the Institute of Social Research of Columbia University, 4 volumes, 1400 typed pages, 1944-45. These pages have remained in the archives of the Jewish Labor Committee, Holocaust Era Records of the Jewish Labor Committee (hereafter JLC Records), microfilm reels 161-164, Robert Wagner Labor Archive Center, New York University, Bobst Library, New York. The Horkheimer Archives in Frankfurt am Main also hold a copy of the report. All references to ‘Anti-Semitism among American Labor’ in this paper come from the JLC Records and shall hereafter be cited as ASAL, followed by volume, reel and page numbers.

2. Theodor Adorno only reached the United States in 1938. Other close collaborators were Herbert Marcuse, Eric Fromm (until 1939), Felix Weil, Franz Neumann, Friedrich Pollock, Leo Lowenthal, A.R. Gurland, and Paul Massing (the latter was the only non-Jew of the Institute’s close circle).


4. I take this expression as the most mediatized to represent the several historians who have strongly indicted the US Congress, the Roosevelt administration and American civil society for failing to rescue more endangered European Jewish people. Among other historians: Morse, Why Six Million Died; Feingold, Politics of Rescue; Friedman, No Haven for the Oppressed; Wyman, Paper Walls; Wyman, Abandonment of the Jews; Breitman and Kraut, American Refugee Policy.

5. On this question, see, for instance, Roediger, Wages of Whiteness; Eric Arnesen, ‘Whiteness and the Historian’s Imagination’.

6. Epstein, Jewish Labor; on the ACWA, see Fraser, Labor Will Rule; on the ILGWU, see Parmet, Master of Seventh Avenue. The ILGWU and ACWA membership together represented some 500,000 members. By the 1940s, Jewish workers were no longer a majority in this sector.

7. B.C. Vladeck was founder and first president of the JLC. After his untimely death in 1938, Vladeck was succeeded by Adolph Held as president; David Dubinsky, president of the ILGWU and JLC treasurer; Joseph Schlossberg, ACWA secretary-treasurer; and Nathan Chanin, education director of the Workmen’s Circle and founding member of the Jewish Socialist Verband.

8. The Bund (General Jewish Workers’ Union of Russia and Poland) was both a general workers’ union and a socialist party.


10. Traverso, Marxistes et la question juive.

11. Among those who escaped from France with the JLC’s help were Friedrich Adler, Secretary General of the Labor and Socialist International; Julius Deutsch, head of the Schutzbund rebellion in Vienna; Georg Stolz, assistant secretary of the International Federation of Trade Unions; Friedrich Stampfer, former editor of the Berlin Vorwärts; Alberto Cianca, editor of Giustizia e Libertà in Paris; and Rafael Abramovitch, head of the Russian Social Democratic Party in exile. From Lithuania, Noah Portnoy, president of the Central Committee of the Polish Bund, and many other Bundists were rescued. By 1942, the JLC claimed having rescued some 800 European socialist and labor refugees. Collomp, ‘Jewish Labor Committee’.

12. Message from Professor Albert Einstein at the opening of the Exhibition dedicated to the ‘Martyrs and Heroes of the Ghettos’, 19 April 1945, Lebowitz and Malmgreen, Papers of the Jewish Labor Committee, 323.


15. The study was done in the summer and fall of 1944 – that is, before the US army actually reached the death camps in January 1945. Knowledge about the number of victims was still highly conjectural.


25. In the words of Friedrich Pollock, the Institute’s associate director for many years, born from a class of integrated Jewish professionals or businessmen, these scholars had not experienced anti-Semitism. ‘All of us,’ he maintained, ‘up to the last years before Hitler, had no feeling of insecurity originating from our ethnic descent’ (Jay, *Permanent Exiles*, 81).


27. Leo Lowenthal (1901–93), specialist of the sociology of literature; Paul Massing (1902–79), historian of socialism; Friedrich Pollock (1894–1970), an economist, and Horkheimer’s assistant at the head of the Institute; A.R.L. Gurland (1904–?), political scientist.


29. The Institute and the JLC evenly shared the overall cost of $22,463. Frederick Pollock to Adolph Held, 8 January 1946; Held to Pollock, 7 May 1946. JLC Records, reel 20, box 9, folder 13.


32. Out of 566 interviewees, 68% were manual blue-collar workers, 6% foremen, 9% white-collar employees, 6.7% sales and tradesmen, and 8% professionals. The industries surveyed included iron and steel, machine building, motor vehicles and aircraft, oil, chemical and rubber, shipbuilding, electrical machinery, public utilities, building, lumber and woodwork, textiles, clothing, business services. The majority of the interviewees worked in defense industries; they were more affected than others by wartime


42. Zieger, The CIO, 141; Lichtenstein, Labor’s War at Home, 110.

43. Leo Lowenthal in particular – who, among the Institute’s collaborators, was the closest to Judaism - explored the persistence of traditional images of prejudice in the economic, mental, emotional and bodily appearance of Jews which depicted them as ‘parasites’, ‘not a worker’, ‘living by fraud’, ‘not to be trusted’, practicing ‘idolatry for education’, ‘dirty’, etc. ASAL, vol. III, reel 163, pp. 909–1051. Lowenthal’s section has finally been published in his False Prophets, 193–253.

44. A total of 28% of white-collar employees, as opposed to 62% of blue-collar workers, stated that ‘Jews were not doing their share of the war effort’. ASAL, vol. III, reel 163, pp. 772–6.


46. Ibid., p. 516.

47. In total, 34 people were killed in the riot, 25 of them black; 675 were injured and 1893 arrested before federal troops intervened. Sugrue, Origins of the Urban Crisis, 29.

48. Zieger, CIO, 149.

49. On black/white tension among industrial workers during and after the war, see: Myrdal, American Dilemma; Sitkoff, ‘Racial Militance’; Sugrue, Origins of Urban Crisis; Lichtenstein, Labor’s War at Home, 125. Roosevelt’s Fair Employment Practice Committee banning segregation in the defense industries had been introduced in response to black labor leader A. Philip Randolph’s threat of a massive march of black workers on Washington if they were not integrated in the defense industries. Inasmuch as blacks also promoted their own interest in the war against the Nazi ideology of supremacy of the Aryan ‘race’, their lot was connected to that of Jews in the fight for racial justice. The interviewed white workers, however, did not perceive this link.


51. Ibid., p. 501.

52. Ibid., p. 551. Anti-Semitic, anti-democratic propaganda entered the black community via black nationalists, white Nazi sympathizers and Klan members. Capeci, ‘Black-Jewish Relations’.


54. This vision is correlated with the widespread anti-Semitic image of the Jew as an outsider to the ‘normal type of masculinity’; see Mosse, The Image of Man, 56–77. On stereotypes of Jews as ‘quintessential draft-dodgers’, see Moore, GI Jews, 32.

55. ASAL, vol. III, reel 163, pp. 675–89. The Jew as warmonger was one of the themes developed by the isolationist America First Committee which opposed US entry into the war. Making Jews responsible for the war was one of Joseph Goebbels’ leitmotivs; see Friedländer, Nazi Germany and the Jews, 16–24.


57. Commenting on such rejoinders, Paul Massing said that ‘they forget that the soldier is undergoing an experience which has nothing in common with theirs and which might lead to very different reactions’. ASAL, vol. III, reel 163, pp. 656–7.

58. Thus, 54.2% of workers originating from nations that were members of the Allied forces ‘objected to Nazi terror’, while 49.1% of those from Axis nations did so. ASAL, vol. III, reel 163, p. 767.
Some 230 of them were interviewed, but the conversations were not screened – on the contrary, the questions were openly asked to enlist the leaders’ participation for suggesting methods of counteraction.

In February 1942, President Roosevelt’s Executive Order 9066 ordered all persons of Japanese birth or descent (some 120,000 persons) to be removed from the Pacific coast and interned in makeshift barracks under the military custody of the War Relocation Authority.

For instance, in 1942, the JLC spent $63,405 on civic protective work against racial hatred and anti-Semitism in the United States. ‘Jewish Labor Committee in Action’, 1942, JLC Records, reel 2, box 1, folder 17; and 1945, box 1, folder 19.

It was also highly contentious: the American working class, after all, had fully responded to the war effort. By 1952, however, the JLC was approached again by the sociologists, who offered to publish a shortened version by Paul Lazarsfeld. But Paul Massing refused this short version, which distorted its findings. E. Muravchik, 3 December 1952, memo to Adolph Held, Charles Zimmerman and Jacob Pat, JLC Records, reel 182, folder 26; Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*, 225–6.

73. Wiggershaus, 310, 338.

74. In 1975, Higham had perceived that ‘the whole theory [of the authors of *The Authoritarian Personality*] was rooted in special events of a particular era, and the era was closing even before the book appeared. [...] The exceptional importance post-war social scientists attached to anti-Semitism fitted European circumstances better than American.’ Higham, ‘Anti-Semitism in American Culture’, 154–5.


A shorter version of this article has been published in Italian as part of the Proceedings of a conference on exile and emigration: ‘La Scuola di Francoforte in esilio: storia di un’inchiesta sull’antisemitismo nella classe operaia americana’. *Memoria e Ricerca* 31 (May–August 2009): 121–41.

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