

PROPHETS OF DECEIT

*A Study of the Techniques
of the American Agitator*

by

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HARPER & BROTHERS · NEW YORK

FOREWORD TO STUDIES IN PREJUDICE

At this moment in world history anti-Semitism is not manifesting itself with the full and violent destructiveness of which we know it to be capable. Even a social disease has its periods of quiescence during which the social scientist, like the biologist or the physician, can study it in the search for more effective ways to prevent or reduce the virulence of the next outbreak.

Today the world scarcely remembers the mechanized persecution and extermination of millions of human beings only a short span of years away in what was once regarded as the citadel of Western civilization. Yet the conscience of many men was aroused. How could it be, they asked each other, that in a culture of law, order and reason, there should have survived the irrational remnants of ancient racial and religious hatreds? How could they explain the willingness of great masses of people to tolerate the mass extermination of their fellow citizens? What tissues in the life of our modern society remain cancerous, and despite our assumed enlightenment show the incongruous atavism of ancient peoples? And what within the individual organism responds to certain stimuli in our culture with attitudes and acts of destructive aggression?

But an aroused conscience is not enough if it does not stimulate a systematic search for an answer. Mankind has paid too dearly for its naive faith in the automatic effect of the mere passage of time: incantations have really never dispelled storms, disaster, pestilence, disease or other evils; nor does he who torments another cease his torture out of sheer boredom with his victim.

Prejudice is one of the problems of our times for which everyone has a theory but no one an answer. Every man, in a sense, believes that he is his own social scientist, for social science is the stuff of everyday living. The progress of science can perhaps be charted by the advances that scientists have made over commonsense notions of phenomena. In an effort to advance beyond mere commonsense approaches to problems of intergroup conflict, the American Jewish Committee in May, 1944, invited a group of American scholars of various backgrounds and disciplines to a two-day conference on religious and racial prejudice. At this meeting, a research program was outlined which would enlist

scientific method in the cause of seeking solutions to this crucial problem. Two levels of research were recommended. One was more limited in scope and geared to the recurring problems faced by educational agencies; e.g., the study of public reaction to selected current events, and the evaluation of various techniques and methods such as those involved in mass media of communication as they impinge upon inter-group relationships. The other level suggested was one of basic research, basic in that it should eventually result in additions to organized knowledge in this field. The first level frequently consists of a large number of small studies, limited in scope and focused sharply on a given issue. In practice, we have found that the "goodness" of our smaller studies was proportional to our ingenuity in so devising them that they, too, could contribute basically to knowledge. The chief difference between the two levels of research—sometimes loosely called "short-range" and "long-range" research—seems largely to be due to the immediacy of implementation of findings as program-related or unrelated, rather than to differences in methodology, skills and techniques. On both levels, it is necessary to pursue an interdisciplinary approach to research problems.

To further research on both levels, the American Jewish Committee established a Department of Scientific Research, headed in turn by each of us. The department saw its responsibility not only in itself initiating fundamental studies in the phenomenon of prejudice, but also in helping to stimulate new studies.

The present series of volumes represents the first fruits of this effort. In a sense, the initial five volumes constitute one unit, an integrated whole, each part of which illuminates one or another facet of the phenomenon we call prejudice. Three of the books deal with those elements in the personality of modern man that predispose him to reactions of hostility to racial and religious groups. They attempt answers to the questions: What is there in the psychology of the individual that renders him "prejudiced" or "unprejudiced," that makes him more or less likely to respond favorably to the agitation of a Goebbels or a Gerald K. Smith? The volume on *The Authoritarian Personality* by Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson and Sanford, based upon a combination of research techniques, suggests one answer. It demonstrates that there is a close correlation between a number of deep-rooted personality traits, and overt prejudice. The study has also succeeded in producing an instrument for measuring these traits among various strata of the population.

Within a more limited range of inquiry, the same question was asked with respect to two specific groups. The study on *Dynamics of Prejudice*,

by Bettelheim and Janowitz, considers the connection between personality traits and prejudice among war veterans. Here the investigators were able to examine the impact of the war experience, with its complex anxieties and tensions, as an added factor of major significance affecting tens of millions of people. *Anti-Semitism and Emotional Disorder*, by Ackerman and Jahoda, is based upon case histories of a number of individuals, from different walks of life, who have received intensive psychotherapy. The special significance of this study lies precisely in the analytical source of the material, in the availability of a body of evidence dealing with phenomena beneath the realm of the conscious and the rational, and illuminating the correlation established in more general terms in the basic investigation of the authoritarian personality.

The other important factor in prejudice is of course the social situation itself, i.e., the external stimuli to which the predispositions within the individual have reacted and continue to react. Nazi Germany is the vivid example of the effect of the social situation, and it is to the understanding of the roots of Nazi anti-Semitism and thence to the present task of democratic reorientation in Germany that *Rehearsal for Destruction* by Massing is directed.

In *Prophets of Deceit*, by Lowenthal and Guterman, the role of the agitator is studied. The agitator's technique of persuasion, the mechanism of mediation that translates inchoate feeling into specific belief and action make up the theme of that volume. As mediator between the world and the individual psyche, the agitator molds already existing prejudices and tendencies into overt doctrines and ultimately into overt action.

It may strike the reader that we have placed undue stress upon the personal and the psychological rather than upon the social aspect of prejudice. This is not due to a personal preference for psychological analysis nor to a failure to see that the cause of irrational hostility is in the last instance to be found in social frustration and injustice. Our aim is not merely to describe prejudice but to explain it in order to help in its eradication. That is the challenge we would meet. Eradication means re-education, scientifically planned on the basis of understanding scientifically arrived at. And education in a strict sense is by its nature personal and psychological. Once we understand, for example, how the war experience may in some cases have strengthened personality traits predisposed to group hatred, the educational remedies may follow logically. Similarly, to expose the psychological tricks in the arsenal of the agitator may help to immunize his prospective victims against them.

Since the completion of these studies the Department of Scientific

Research of the American Jewish Committee has moved ahead into areas of research in which the unit of study is the group, the institution, the community rather than the individual. Fortified by a better knowledge of *individual* dynamics, we are now concerned with achieving a better understanding of *group* dynamics. For we recognize that the individual *in vacuo* is but an artifact; even in the present series of studies, although essentially psychological in nature, it has been necessary to explain individual behavior in terms of social antecedents and concomitants. The second stage of our research is thus focused upon problems of group pressures and the sociological determinants of roles in given social situations. We seek answers to such questions as: Why does an individual behave in a "tolerant" manner in one situation and in a "bigoted" manner in another situation? To what extent may certain forms of intergroup conflict, which appear on the surface to be based upon ethnic difference, be based upon other factors, using ethnic difference as content?

The authors of the volumes and the many colleagues upon whose experience and assistance they have been able to draw have widely differing professional interests. This is immediately reflected in the various techniques they have used, even in the way they write. Some of the books are more technical, others more "readable." We have not sought uniformity. A search for the truth conducted with the best techniques of contemporary social sciences was our sole aim. Yet through all this diversity of method a significant measure of agreement has been achieved.

The problem requires a much more extensive and much more sustained effort than any single institution or any small group such as ours, could hope to put forth. It was our hope that whatever projects we could undertake would not only be contributions in themselves, but would also serve to stimulate active interest in continued study by other scholars. With deep satisfaction we have watched the steady increase in scientific publications in this field in the past few years. We believe that any study that bears upon this central theme, if carried out in a truly scientific spirit, cannot help but bring us closer to the theoretical, and ultimately to the practical, solution for reducing intergroup prejudice and hatred.

This foreword to *Studies in Prejudice* would not be complete without a tribute to the vision and leadership of Dr. John Slawson, Executive Vice-President of the American Jewish Committee, who was responsible for calling the conference of scholars and for establishing the Department of Scientific Research. Both editors owe Dr. Slawson a debt of gratitude for the inspiration, guidance, and stimulation which he gave them.

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INTRODUCTION

IDEOLOGIES and ideological manifestations may be measured, or they may be understood as qualities, as meaningful structural units. Both techniques of content analysis lead the scientist to insights into the roots of social problems, in this case, of group prejudice and discrimination. This book by Leo Lowenthal and Norbert Guterman is confined to qualitative analysis. Not the frequency of the ideas, formulas and devices to be found in agitational material, but the meaning of demagoguery, of its techniques and appeals, its arguments and its personalities, is the theme.

While the study employs many psycho-analytical concepts, in fact it is devoted not so much to the private physiognomy of the agitator as to the psychological content and significance of his behavior. It seeks to cast light on the inner, and often unconscious, mechanisms at which agitation is directed. But all this must be understood sociologically. Though the demagogue plays upon psychological predispositions with psychological weapons, the predispositions themselves and the aims at which he is striving are socially created.

It is only the highly developed social situation which sets our demagogue apart from his numerous predecessors back through the centuries and millennia. Demagoguery makes its appearance whenever a democratic society is threatened with internal destruction. In a general sense, its function has always been the same, to lead the masses toward goals that run counter to their basic interests. And this function accounts for the irrationality of demagoguery; the psychological techniques it employs have a definite social basis.

Today, under the conditions of a highly industrialized society, consumption is largely determined by production even in the field of ideologies. Attitudes and reactive behavior are often "manufactured." The people do not "choose" them freely but accept them under the pressure of power, real or imaginary. Study of the people themselves therefore does not suffice. The nature of the stimuli must be studied along with the reactions if we are to grasp the true significance of the phenom-

ena of mass behavior. Otherwise, one might erroneously attribute to an underlying frame of public mind what may in fact be the product of calculated techniques of communication.

None of the specific techniques of agitation can be judged outside their political and social contexts. Their specific significance as a means of anti-democratic mass manipulation lies solely within the structural unity of the pattern this book seeks to formulate.

It is notable, for example, that the contemporary agitator, the expert propagandist who has assumed the role of leader, dwells incessantly on his own person. He portrays himself as both leader and common man. By suggesting that he too is a victim of sinister social forces, by displaying his own weakness as it were, he helps conceal from his followers the very possibility of independent thinking and autonomous decision. He sets the pattern for that most contemporary phenomenon, the de-individualized, incoherent, and fully malleable personality structure into which anti-democratic forces seek to transform man.

The content of present-day demagoguery is obviously empty, accidental and entirely subordinate to manipulative considerations. Our homegrown agitators, in the absence of an American tradition of nationalistic aggressiveness, created an artificial fusion with Italian and German fascist notions. They have also borrowed from certain forms of religious revivalism, without regard to any specific content, forms which exploit such rigid stereotypes as the distinction between the "damned" and the "saved." The modern American agitator has put these old-fashioned techniques to very good use.

"Good use?" the reader may well ask with some incredulity. American hatemongers are at present at a low point in influence and prestige. Even at the peak of their strength before the war, they failed to build a unified organization or to win substantial financial backing.

This is true, of course. But because the emphasis of the book is on the *meaning* of the phenomena under analysis, the agitator should be studied in the light of his *potential* effectiveness within the context of present-day society and its dynamics, rather than in terms of his immediate effectiveness. Although overt anti-Semitic agitation is at an ebb, it is important to study its content and techniques as examples of modern mass manipulation in its most sinister form.

This volume does not exaggerate the immediate importance of American demagoguery, nor does it pretend to offer a photographic picture of the

political realities of the day. Instead, it places under the microscope certain phenomena that may seem negligible at first sight, and by thus enlarging the most extreme and apparently unrealistic manifestations of anti-democratic behavior, it gains diagnostic insight into the latent threat against democracy.

MAX HORKHEIMER

PREFACE

BEFORE and during the past war Americans were amazed to find that there existed in their midst a number of individuals who strikingly resembled the local Nazi *führers* of the 1920's in Germany. Most of these openly expressed admiration for Hitler and Mussolini, were rabidly anti-Semitic, and indulged in intensive vituperation of our national leaders. In addition, most of them headed small "movements" and published periodicals. They all made frequent political speeches, and some gave comfort and aid to our enemies.

It is this type of self-appointed popular spokesman that is designated by the term "agitator" in the present study. No attempt has been made here to cover the history of political agitation in all its aspects or to analyze other forms of contemporary propagandistic manipulation of popular psychology, indigenous or imported.

The conventional image of the American agitator is that of an American copy of a foreign model. He is usually thought of as a crackpot whose appeals and goals derive neither from domestic conditions nor from native attitudes. Seen thus as a kind of foreign agent, the agitator has usually been fought by the method of exposure. His nefarious purposes and affiliations as well as the obvious internal inconsistencies in his statements have often been pointed out. Underlying this view of the agitator—and its attendant strategy of exposure—is the assumption that he can succeed in enlisting public support only through deception, his utterances serving merely to camouflage his true aims. Expose his tricks, it is held, and you reduce him to helplessness.*

In this study of American agitation we have tried to demonstrate that the conventional image of the agitator is not a faithful portrait, that it

* A pioneering exception is the study, *The Fine Art of Propaganda* (edited by Alfred McClung Lee and Elizabeth Briant Lee, New York, 1939, and published under the auspices of the Institute for Propaganda Analysis). The authors sensed the need for a content analysis of agitational output and succeeded in isolating a number of central rhetorical devices used by the agitator.

Another interesting study along these lines is "The Technique of Propaganda for Reaction: Gerald L. K. Smith's Radio Speeches" by Morris Janowitz, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 1944, pp. 84-93.

differs from the picture which emerges from a careful study of his texts. These texts serve as the sole basis of the present study; but since we believe that the agitator often relies upon unconscious mechanisms to build instruments for manipulating his audience, we have tried to probe beneath the manifest content of his speeches and writings to disinter their latent content.

We have sought to extract what is common in the various agitational texts; on the whole, we have ignored the differences. From a mass of writings and speeches by America's notorious agitators we have drawn the most significant characteristics of the different types of those who are sophisticated and intellectual in their approach as well as of those who are naive and primitive; of those who come from industrial areas and of those who come from rural America. In the overwhelming majority of instances, the quotations used in this book can easily be found as recurrent themes in the agitational material.

The idea of studying agitation as a surface manifestation of deeper social and psychological currents was conceived by Max Horkheimer, Director of the Institute of Social Research. The Institute has conducted research along these lines since 1940 through pilot studies by Theodor W. Adorno, Leo Lowenthal, and Paul W. Massing. The present study, based partly upon these previous investigations, was undertaken in cooperation with the Department of Scientific Research of the American Jewish Committee, to whom the authors are indebted for continued encouragement and interest. Although they have drawn freely upon the earlier studies of the Institute on the subject, especially that of Adorno, the authors take full responsibility for their interpretations and conclusions. Obviously, only a certain degree of probability can be claimed for conclusions about latent content. A merely textual analysis cannot determine with precision which of several possible meanings an audience might ascribe to a given theme. We recognize that our interpretations cannot claim to represent actual audience reactions. Rather, our purpose here has been to establish hypotheses on possible reactions. We believe that this approach may pave the way for an empirical exploration of the psychology of the agitator and for field work on his actual effects upon audiences. Methodologically, this study is frankly experimental; it touches a field that has been hardly explored.*

* Cf. Max Horkheimer, "Egoismus and Freiheitsbewegung," in *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, V:161-234 (1936). This study on the psychological background of various liberation movements in modern history has set the historical frame of reference for our book.

We wish to express our appreciation and thanks to associates and friends who were unsparing of their time and effort in helping us with this book. To Dr. Adorno, Professor Edward N. Barnhart of the University of California, Dr. Horkheimer, Dr. Paul Massing, Professors Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Robert K. Merton and C. Wright Mills of Columbia University, and Professor Hans Speier of the Rand Corporation who were kind enough to read the entire draft, we are deeply grateful for their comments and constructive criticism. Dr. Ernst Kris of the New School of Social Research, Dr. S. Kracauer, as well as Miss Thelma Herman, Dr. Herta Herzog and Joseph Klapper gave us valuable suggestions on methodological and sociological problems.

In the selection of the representative agitators and the quoted texts, various organizations prominent in the task of combatting anti-democratic propaganda have given us generous assistance. For making source material available we wish to express special thanks to Leon Lewis of Los Angeles and to Miss Ellen Posner of the Library of Jewish Information in New York. Mrs. Edith Kriss of the Institute showed exceptional devotion in the complicated and thankless task of organizing voluminous files of material. To Irving Howe we owe much for his help in preparing the final manuscript.

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December, 1948