

Episode 5: “The Protocols, Henry Ford, and The International Jew”

Transcription

An actor reads from *The International Jew: The World's Foremost Problem*:

The international Jew, Volume One, Chapter One. The Jew is again being singled out for critical attention throughout the world. His emergence in the financial, political and social spheres has been so complete and spectacular since the war that his place, power and purpose in the world are being given a new scrutiny, much of it unfriendly.

Persecution is not a new experience to the Jew, but intensive scrutiny of his nature and super-nationality is. He had suffered for more than 2000 years from what may be called “instinctive antisemitism” of the other races. But this antagonism has never been intelligent, nor has it been able to make itself intelligible. Nowadays however, the Jew is being placed, as it were, under the microscope of economic observation, that the reasons for his power, the reasons for his separateness, the reasons for his suffering, may be defined and understood.



Co-host Jeremy Shere: Welcome to this special episode, “The Protocols, Henry Ford, and The International Jew,” produced in collaboration between The Association For Jewish Studies’ podcast, *Adventures in Jewish Studies*, and theatre dybbuk’s podcast, *The Dybbukast*. I’m Jeremy Shere, host of *Adventures in Jewish Studies* -

Co-host Aaron Henne: - and I’m Aaron Henne, artistic director of theatre dybbuk. In this episode, we’ll be exploring Henry Ford’s publication of *The international Jew: The World's Foremost Problem*, a four-volume series of books containing articles which his Michigan-based newspaper, *The Dearborn independent*, originally published from 1920 to 1922. These writings were largely based on, and included elements of, the notorious fraudulent text *The Protocols of The Elders of Zion*, which purported to be evidence of a global Jewish conspiracy to dominate the world. You’ve already heard a reading from the beginning of *The international Jew*. Throughout the episode, actor Joe Jordan will continue to read selections from the text. And now, “The Protocols, Henry Ford, and The International Jew”.



Actor 1: *Volume One, Chapter 10. The documents most frequently mentioned by those who are interested in the theory of Jewish world power, rather than the actual operation of that power in the world today, are those 24 documents known as The Protocols of The Learned Elders of Zion.*

Jeremy: There’s a good chance you’ve heard of *The Protocols of The Elders of Zion*, but exactly what the documents supposedly revealed and how and why such a document came to be published in the first place are less well-known.

Aaron: Since *The Protocols* are at the center of the story of Henry Ford and *The International Jew*, we need to spend a little time exploring what this document is, why it matters and where it came from.

Dr. Lisa Leff: In Europe, a lot of anti-Jewish prejudice is really based in a Christian idea that comes from the fact that Christianity emerges out of Judaism and purports to replace it, to supersede it.

Jeremy: This is Lisa Leff, a professor of European and Jewish History at American University. She says the fact that Jews and Judaism persisted was a source of tension, and by the fourth century CE, when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, that tension erupted into full blown religious intolerance and political oppression against Jews. By the medieval period, many of the classic Christian antisemitic tropes and smears had taken shape.

Lisa: You start to have various forms of anti-Jewish prejudice that really paint Jews as devils or, not just wrong, but somehow preying upon Christian society, and those prejudices are around and they erupt sometimes into violence and sometimes into expulsion.

Aaron: The narrative that Jews were devils or deceitful figures that sucked the lifeblood from Christian societies persisted for centuries. The German reformation leader Martin Luther was one of the most vehement expositors of the anti-Jewish sentiments of his time.

Actor 2: *"I would not have believed that a Christian could be duped by the Jews into taking their exile and wretchedness upon himself. However, the devil is the God of the world and wherever God's word is absent, he has an easy task, not only with the weak, but also with the strong. May God help us. Amen."* - Martin Luther, *"On the Jews and Their Lies,"* 1543.

Jeremy: One of the most famous and damaging antisemitic myths was the blood libel, a conspiracy theory that gained prominence in 12th century England, when the Jews of Norwich were accused of having murdered a Christian boy, and the story developed claiming that this killing was part of a ritual. Other similar accusations came about in the years and centuries that followed.

Lisa: It's a lie that you see show up in many different geographical locations. I mean, it's not made up out of nowhere. It's rooted in a myth linked back to Christianity. Jews killed Jesus in ancient times. So too did Jews throughout the ages want to prey on innocent Christians. And that's why it keeps on emerging.

Jeremy: Other antisemitic myths linking Jews to economic domination and to crime spread throughout Europe, persisting well into the 20th century.

Lisa: There's the idea that Jews are connected to what was called in the late 19th century, the white slave trade, or, that is to say, prostitution rings that often brought women across borders. That myth remains pervasive. And then there's the idea that Jews control things having to do with modernity — the media, or even, when we get to something like *The Protocols*, that Jews are in a conspiracy to bring about political forms that look like they're going to benefit everyone but in fact benefit only the Jews.

Aaron: *The Protocols of The Elders of Zion* arose within this milieu of antisemitic conspiracy theories. First published in Russia in 1903 in installments in a newspaper called, in English translation, *The Banner*, *The Protocols* continue to evolve after that time. It is a document which, as we alluded to earlier, presents itself as the record of the secret meetings of a group of powerful Jews, outlining their plans for controlling society and bending it to their will.

Lisa: Whenever I have students read it, they're very surprised that this is read as so nefarious because, if you have no context for reading it, you might think it's somewhat banal. They're

just talking about how they're going to institute the basic things having to do with modernity, like liberalism.

Jeremy: But during the early 20th century, liberalism was a new idea, and those who read *The Protocols* saw the document as evidence that Jews were conspiring to use modern ideas like liberalism and socialism as a Trojan horse to infiltrate societies and undermine their traditions and welfare.

Aaron: To make that case even more emphatically, Leff said that *The Protocols* was claimed by some to have originally been composed in the French language, even though the first known publication was Russian.

Lisa: It's really important that it's in French because it says this is a group, the Elders of Zion, whose headquarters are in Paris, right? So the idea is like this foreign group coming from the West, and here's the liberalism that they're bringing. France, a hundred years before it, had a revolution that became a war on the European continent that went all the way to Russia. Russia was going to be conquered by revolutionary or liberal ideas from the West. So it kind of feeds into their anti-imperial ideas.

Jeremy: France was also home to the Alliance Israélite Universelle, an organization founded in the mid-19th century to advance Jewish interests around the world.

Lisa: So, basically, what *The Protocols* looked like is they're identifying that the Alliance, when it looks like it's just doing good for everyone, is, in fact, a Jewish conspiracy that's going to undermine all the traditional values that Russians have.

Aaron: The idea that Jews were conspiring to manipulate societies for their own selfish and greedy interests may not have been new, but the form in which these ideas are presented in *The Protocols* was what made it unique.

Lisa: You know, it used to be like, in the medieval times or in the early modern period, people who sought to persecute the Jews would drag out the Talmud and show what Jews believed. Now it's like a piece of evidence that you would show in a courtroom or that a detective would have come up with. And it really is appealing to a much wider literate audience in showing them this kind of primary source that no one before this time of growing democracy and growing literacy would have ever cared about. You would never have had a document like that.

Jeremy: *The Protocols* circulated among a relatively small audience in Russia for the next decade and a half until after World War I, when Russians fleeing from the violence and tyranny of the Bolshevik Revolution fled to Western Europe and the document's reach grew.

Lisa: Which, you know, if you think about it in the context of the Russian Revolution, is saying, socialism is the work of the Jews. It might seem like a good thing. And the Jews, even — you know, in *The Protocols of The Elders of Zion*, it says in there we're going to use this as a kind of Trojan horse. So it says socialism may sound good to you, but in fact, look, it's trying to destroy our good Christian societies. And that becomes a powerful myth even beyond what is then the Soviet Union, even more powerfully in the West than it had ever been in the Russian Empire.



Aaron: The West included of course also the United States where, as in Western Europe, the first world war and the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia had shaken society to the core.

Jeremy: The Bolshevik Revolution took communism from an intellectual theory to an actual working governing philosophy in the newly formed Soviet state, and, says Pamela Nadell, a professor of Jewish History and Director of the Jewish Studies program at American University, Jews who had come to the United States from Russia were often seen as Bolshevik sympathizers.

Dr. Pamela Nadell: They get flagged as communists, and then there's a Red Scare after the war in the United States, and many of the people who are targets of the Red Scare happened to be Jews.

Actor 1: *Volume One, Chapter 15. The Soviet is not a Russian, but a Jewish institution. Nor is it the invention of Russian Jews of the present time — a new political device, which has been set up as a vehicle of the ideas of Lenin and Trotsky. It is of ancient Jewish origin; a device which the Jews themselves invented to maintain their distinctive racial and national life after the conquest of Palestine by the Romans.*

Aaron: As you can hear, Henry Ford was especially attuned to the supposed Jewish threat.

Pamela: I would say the Ford's anti-Semitism gets radicalized. I think that's the chief point that we need to make. Growing up, he has these kind of standard Christian influences, but he begins to get radicalized in the wake of World War I.

Aaron: Nadell says that Ford's antisemitism was a product of the same antisemitic conspiracy theories that had been prevalent in Europe for centuries and that existed in the New World from the moment Jews first appeared there in 1654, when Jews from Brazil, fleeing the Inquisition, arrived in New Amsterdam, which later became New York.

Pamela: And the governor of New Amsterdam wants to eject this despicable people that he calls -

Actor 2: *A deceitful race; such hateful enemies and blasphemers of the name of Christ.*

Pamela: He actually tries to throw them out of the colony. He's not successful. If he had been successful, maybe we wouldn't be having this conversation.

Jeremy: Jews in America may not have been brutalized to the extent that they were in parts of Europe, but antisemitic ideas were still common in the US, and Jews were persecuted. For example, in 1862, during the early years of the Civil War, General Ulysses S. Grant, who accused Jews of being involved in cotton smuggling, signed an order expelling Jews from the Department of the Tennessee, an administrative division under Grant's command that included parts of Kentucky, Mississippi, and Tennessee.

Actor 3: *"The Jews, as a class violating every regulation of trade established by the Treasury Department and also department orders, are hereby expelled from the department within 24 hours from the receipt of this order." - General Orders, Number 11, Ulysses S. Grant, December 17th, 1862.*

Pamela: The order is countermanded by President Lincoln, but we see that example on American soil. Then, after the Civil War, we have what one historian calls the emergence of a full-fledged antisemitic society. It's not surprising. Moments of crisis, both political and

economic and social — they produce tensions that often see antisemitism flare. And then it takes new shapes and new forms when we get to the latter decades of the 19th century and the first couple of decades of the 20th, because now the East European Jews have come in, and there's an enormous debate in American society about whether or not these particular foreigners can be absorbed into America. They're marked out as racially distinctive.

Actor 1: *Volume One, Chapter Three. The American Jew does not assimilate. It is better that he should make it clear to Gentiles once and for all where true Jews stand in the matter, as when a young Jew said — “There is all the difference in the world between an American Jew and a Jewish American. A Jewish American is a mere amateur Gentile, doomed to be a parasite forever.”*

Jeremy: This growth in antisemitism was spurred not only by the great changes taking place in the influx of Jews from Eastern Europe, but also by the horrifying destruction and loss of life during the war. For many, the war called into question the assumption that modernity meant that Western civilization was on a path toward wealth and prosperity.

Aaron: And like in Europe, American Jews were blamed for advancing modernity to the benefit of themselves and to the detriment of the nations they allegedly exploited.

Actor 1: *Volume One, Chapter 13. Certain mistaken ideas of liberalism, certain flabby ideas of tolerance, all of them originating at European sources, which the Protocolists had completely polluted, were transported to America.*

Aaron: American Jews felt the effects of this antisemitism, especially in terms of social standing and opportunities for advancement. For example, some universities made restrictive policy decisions, possibly in partial reaction to the fact that by the late nineteenth-teens, Columbia University in New York City had gotten a reputation as a Jewish university due to the large numbers of Jewish students enrolled there.

Pamela: Jews are going there because New York has half of the Jews in America. And it's the most prestigious Ivy League schools like Harvard and Yale and Princeton are looking at what happened at Columbia; seeing that the men that they want are not going to Columbia, and they decide that they need to institute quotas on the number of Jewish students because too many Jewish students are coming in.

Actor 3: *“The antisemitic feeling among the students is increasing, and it grows in proportion to the increase in the number of Jews. If their number should become 40% of the student body, the race feeling would become intense. If every college in the country would take a limited proportion of Jews, I suspect we should go a long way toward eliminating race feeling among students.” Harvard President A. Lawrence Lowell, 1922.*

Jeremy: Around the same time, in 1921 and again in 1924, the United States Congress passed legislation limiting the number of Jews who could enter the country.

Actor 4: *An act to limit the immigration of aliens into the United States and for other purposes. Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, that this act may be cited as the Immigration Act of 1924. Numerical limitations, Section 11a: the annual quota of any nationality shall be 2 percentum of the number of foreign-born individuals of such nationality resident in continental United States, as determined by the United States census of 1890.*

Pamela: They are clearly motivated by racial ideology. They give strong preference to immigrants who come from the more acceptable countries — the Anglo-Saxon countries, essentially; Great Britain, Ireland, Germany — and the numbers that are allowed in from both Southern Europe and Eastern Europe, where the Jews came from, are much much more limited.



Aaron: It's against this background of growing unease around immigration and the previously mentioned anxiety around modernity washing away traditional ways of life, that Henry Ford took center stage as one of America's most outspoken antisemites. In many ways, Ford was a product of his time. As a child growing up during the last decades of the 19th century, like many American kids, he read McGuffey's Readers, books that included selections from a variety of sources and authors that were used to teach elementary grade students to read.

Pamela: He idolized the text of McGuffey's Reader. But you have to understand that this reader that Jewish children were also reading in their schools, talked about perfidious Jews. It promoted the classic anti-Jewish stereotypes.

Jeremy: Connected to his experiences in World War I, Ford's antisemitism morphed from the garden variety practiced by many Americans into something significantly more radical.

Pamela: He at some point begins to take up some of the lies that are told about World War I in Europe, in Germany. He latches onto them in part because it's suggested to him that he needs to find something sensational that will make his newspaper, *The Dearborn Independent*, a successful newspaper.

Aaron: Ford's hometown newspaper, *The Dearborn independent*, was hemorrhaging money when he purchased it in 1918. Ford hatched a plan. He would use *The Independent* to publish articles about the so-called "Jewish question". Beginning in May, 1920, and for the next 91 issues, *The independent* featured lengthy articles about a global Jewish conspiracy to sow political and economic chaos, which included quotations from, references to, and some in-depth analysis of *The Protocols*, which by that time had already been republished in various forms throughout Europe.

Pamela: I think it's very important to understand that by the time he begins publishing in the United States, we already have it published in London in 1920 as "The Jewish Peril". It's serialized in a Paris newspaper — an antisemitic newspaper in Paris — by then. There was a Polish edition in Warsaw. So it's begun to make its way around the world.

Jeremy: While it may have included elements of Zionism and communism, for the most part, *The Independent's* commentary on *The Protocols* relied on familiar tropes, accusing Jews of comprising a secret cabal to strengthen themselves by weakening the political, economic and moral fabric of the Christian world.

Actor 1: *Volume One, Chapter 10. All plans and purposes and expectations are merged in the future of Israel; which future, it would seem, can only be secured by the subtle breaking-down of certain world ideas held by the Gentiles.*

Aaron: To bolster this analysis, *The Independent's* commentary put heavy emphasis on the threat of Jews as revolutionaries.

Actor 1: *Volume One, Chapter 20. In Russia, the excuse was the Czar; in Germany, the Kaiser. In England, it is the Irish question. In the numerous South American revolutions, where the Jews always had a ruling hand, no particular reason was thought necessary to be given.*

Aaron: Now, again, these ideas were not new. Ford was not particularly creative or innovative regarding the content of his antisemitic views, but he used his power to take the dissemination of these views to a new level.

Pamela: *The Dearborn independent* in 1919 had a circulation of 72,000. From 1922 to 1924, 1925, it had jumped to 700,000. Ford had the ability to require his car dealers to buy copies of the paper and to give them out when they would meet with customers. And so he had an enormous platform for disseminating the paper, and eventually, while he's publishing *The International Jew*, the paper becomes the second-largest circulation paper after, I think, it's the *New York Daily News*. It's a local paper, yes, but it has national distribution.

Jeremy: Starting as early as 1920, Ford republished the paper's antisemitic articles in what came to be called *The International Jew: The World's Foremost Problem*, a multi-volume series of books that were translated into dozens of languages and published around the world.

Aaron: The reaction in the United States to the articles that comprise *The International Jew*, and to *The Protocols* itself, was mixed.

Pamela: There are people who buy them, read them and are convinced that they are a true and accurate depiction of the Jewish conspiracy to take over the world. There are also people who denounce them, but not necessarily ever by mentioning Henry Ford's connection to the publication of *The Protocols*. So we get a very prominent letter signed by former presidents, and they denounce this as a forgery and a fabrication.

Actor 4: *"It should not be left to men and women of the Jewish faith to fight this evil but, in a very special sense, it is the duty of citizens who are not Jews by ancestry or faith to strike at this un-American and unchristian agitation"* From a statement, *"The Perils of Racial Prejudice,"* signed by Woodrow Wilson, William Howard Taft and Warren G. Harding, among many others.

Jeremy: It's important to note that as early as 1921, *The Protocols* were debunked as a fraud in *The Times* of London. Nevertheless, throughout Europe and in the United States, *The Protocols* gained a lot of traction among many people.

Pamela: They believed that this was true. They would argue, no, those who expose it as a forgery, they're in the pay of the Jews. The Jews are helping them to expose the forgery. It's the same thing with the Dreyfus affair. There's so many analogies, but the really critical issue is that people believed it. It didn't matter that it had been exposed as a falsehood. So we have classic arguments within American Jewish leadership about what do we do. I mean, how do you go after Ford? How do you go after such a prominent figure? Is it dangerous to counter it and go after it because all you do is you bring more attention to the falsehoods?

Jeremy: American Jews struggled to figure out how to respond to Ford's aggressive dissemination of antisemitic propaganda.

Aaron: It's worth recalling that the 1920s and '30s were a delicate era for American Jews; a time, as we've noted, when antisemitism was on the rise, when the Ku Klux Klan had resurfaced as a major political force in American life, and when Jews were routinely barred

from particular neighborhoods, professions, social clubs and universities. And so, while American Jews didn't, for the most part, always fear for life and limb, their social standing in the United States was on shaky ground.

Pamela: Ford's antisemitism by and large does not touch the life of the woman who picks up her kids from school at lunchtime and feeds them a hotdog and then takes them back to school after lunch. What does touch her life will be when her son comes home from school and says that somebody called him a Christ killer on the playground, or when that son grows up and he says, I want to be an engineer, and now we're into the 1930s and the 1940s, and she knows that engineering companies do not hire Jews.

Aaron: A Jewish lawyer named Aaron Sapiro sued Ford for libel. In 1927, the court case ended in a mistrial and a new trial was set for later in the year. Ford issued a statement claiming ignorance of his newspaper's antisemitic content.

Actor 1: *I confess that I am deeply mortified that this journal, which is intended to be constructive and not destructive, has been made the medium for resurrecting exploded fictions; for giving currency to the so-called protocols of the wise men of Zion, which have been demonstrated, as I learn, to be gross forgeries; and for contending that the Jews have been engaged in a conspiracy to control the capital and the industries of the world, besides laying at their door many offenses against decency, public order and good morals. Had I appreciated even the general nature, to say nothing of the details of these utterances, I would have forbidden their circulation without a moment's hesitation.*

Aaron: Within two weeks of this apology, Ford and Sapiro reached a settlement.

Jeremy: It should be noted that *The Dearborn Independent's* last issue was published in December of that same year. And while the paper no longer circulated after 1927, the standalone volumes of *The International Jew* were still widely read around the world. In fact, Adolf Hitler greatly admired Ford and was deeply influenced by *The International Jew*. As early as 1923, a Chicago newspaper quoted Hitler expressing admiration for Ford.

Actor 5: *Chicago Tribune Foreign News Service, Munich. "Heinrich Ford of Detroit will have 100% moral support of Adolf Hitler's Deutsche Arbeiterpartei if he runs for president. 'I wish that I could send some of my shock troops to Chicago and other big American cities to help in the election,' the young leader of the Bavarian Fascisti party said grimly."*

Aaron: In 1938, Hitler honored Ford with the Grand Cross of The German Eagle, the highest honor the Nazi regime could bestow on any foreigner.

Pamela: What I hope you will also include is the afterlife of the publication of *The Protocols* that he initiated. Father Charles Coughlin, who gets 80,000 letters a week — about almost three quarters of them from Protestants, not just from Catholics — publishes excerpts of *The Protocols*. He's using Ford's edition. And it's published around the world, and, if anything, thanks to Henry Ford, *The Protocols* are far better known on the eve of World War II than they were ever known when he was publishing them.

Jeremy: Of course, *The Protocols'* lingering appeal goes beyond Henry Ford. As Leff notes, like most conspiracy theories, the document endures because it purports to provide a clear and simple answer to the vexing problems brought on by modernity.

Lisa: I always think like, why does this thing appeal and why does it endure? It's because it plays off of this contradiction that we live in an era, really since the 19th century, where our

basic guiding ideology is that capitalism is here to make everyone prosperous, and liberal democracy is here to make us all free and able to participate in self-governance. And yet, the reality is none of that has led to global prosperity and happiness. And it's very difficult to understand why, right? These conspiracy theories really thrive at times where that contradiction is the strongest and in places where that contradiction is most deeply felt.

Actor 1: *Volume Four, Chapter 80. Surely it must be understood by this time that the Jews rule, not by reason of their brilliance or their money, but by ideas which are not even properly Jewish, but Babylonian. They have captured the castle from within. They have been able to do so only because of our ignorance of the lineage and dignity of the stock of ideas upon which our civilization has been founded. Our people needs to engraft itself again on the parent tree and draw again the sustenance which made it great and fruitful.*



Aaron: Thank you for listening to this special episode of *Adventures in Jewish Studies* and *The Dybbukast*. Selections from *The International Jew* and the statement by Henry Ford were read by Joe Jordan. Additional readings were performed by Joshua Wolf Coleman, Julie Lockhart, Clay Steakley, and Diana Tanaka. Editing of the performed selections was by Mark McClain Wilson.

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Aaron: *The Dybbukast* is produced by theatre dybbuk, and its launch and presentation of related resources was made possible in part thanks to the support of The Covenant Foundation. *The Dybbukast* theme music was composed by Michael Skloff and produced by Sam K.S..

Jeremy: The Association for Jewish Studies is the world's largest Jewish studies membership organization, featuring an annual conference, publications, fellowships, and much more for our members, as well as public programming. Visit associationforjewishstudies.org to learn about joining if you're a Jewish studies scholar, or to find out how to bring a Jewish studies scholar to your community. If you'd like to support the AJS and learn more about what we do, we invite you to join our new "Friends Of The AJS" group, which will keep you informed about the latest research, books and developments in the field of Jewish studies. For more information, go to associationforjewishstudies.org/friends.

Aaron: theatre dybbuk creates provocative performances and innovative educational encounters inspired by Jewish thought to illuminate universal human experience. Please visit theaterdybbuk.org/podcast, where you will find links to a wide variety of materials which expand upon the episode's explorations. And if you want to know more about theatre dybbuk's work in general, please sign up for our mailing list on that same website on the contact page. New episodes of *The Dybbukast* are available every second Friday of the month. This episode was co-produced by The Association for Jewish Studies and theatre dybbuk.



Actor 4: *Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 20th, 1921. You can and should have a Ford this Christmas. The cost is so low, the upkeep so small and the returns in pleasure, convenience

and utility so great, that it is from every viewpoint the most economical and satisfactory gift of all. Your order should be placed at once for Christmas delivery. Terms if desired.