

Anti-Semitism

IN THE

U. S.?

By

RUSSELL W. DAVENPORT

Managing Editor of

Fortune Magazine

Address delivered at

HUNTER COLLEGE,

August 4, 1938

YOUR chairman has asked me to tell you in a few words something about Jews in America, as reported by FORTUNE Magazine under that title, in February, 1936, and subsequently published in book form by Random House. I cannot of course go into this matter very thoroughly in the time at our disposal. But I very much appreciate the opportunity of discussing it briefly, because it is a question to which I and my associates on FORTUNE have devoted considerable thought. It is a question, we believe, which goes directly to the root of many of the world's most serious economic and political troubles; which, indeed, cannot be discussed without reference to those troubles and without taking sides concerning the solution of them. In other words, it is our feeling that what has been called anti-Semitism—a phrase which I shall presently define—is not an isolated problem, but is rather symptomatic of even profounder problems which must be solved if our civilization is any longer to survive. By this I do not mean that the survival of civilization hinges upon the solution to anti-Semitism. That would be a gross exaggeration. I mean, rather, that anti-Semitism arises from, and is caused by, the very forces which are unsettling the *economics* of the modern world. Anti-Semitism is an inevitable by-product of the action of those forces; just as prohibitive tariffs are an inevitable by-product, and trade quotas, and extended armies, and threats of war.

To make my meaning clear it will be necessary to begin where FORTUNE's article on Jews in America began: that is, with a definition of anti-Semitism. Here it is necessary to proceed very carefully. In one sense anti-Semitism has always existed, because latent prejudice against the Jews—as Rabbi Joel Blau has put it—“dates back to the beginnings of the Jewish people.” Here in America this prejudice has made it difficult or impossible for Jews to enter certain clubs and certain social circles. Prejudice like that is deplorable; but in America, at any rate, it has been almost entirely *social* (in the narrow sense of the word *society*) and I am sure that that is not what is in your mind when you speak of anti-Semitism today. I am sure that you have in mind something at once more specific *and* more general.

What we mean when we talk about anti-Semitism today is—to quote FORTUNE—“a deliberately incited, affirmative, racial phobia.” It is the emotion or state of mind of being *against* the Jews, and of actively expressing one's antagonism in personal speech and propaganda, or by outright persecution. Anti-Semitism in this sense is the crystallized thought or action of a majority group against a minority group. It is therefore

marily of any other group, but of those ideals already mentioned. He should make himself an exponent of those ideals and he should make himself a student of ways and means for enacting them. We have in the city of New York, as I need scarcely tell you, several political leaders who are Jews, but whose conduct, as measured by democratic standards, has made me, who am not a Jew, proud to be an American. That is the type of life—not necessarily public, not necessarily famed—which I urge the Jews of America to adopt. I urge upon them a citizenship which will make all other Americans proud of *their* citizenship. And I submit that if the four and a half million Jews in America were to affect other American citizens in this way, an anti-Semitic movement could never actually arise.