

The perennial hostility and conspiracy theories about Jews seemed, at least in the US, a non-issue. Jews serve in government, in academe, in the press, in movies, and in outsized numbers in Nobel Prizes and other international awards.

Of course, even in the US, one finds remnants of Jew Hatred, but in mainstream society, it has been more covert; insulting Jews is an embarrassed knee-jerk utterance. I recall being in a car driven by a dear elderly classmate who, when cut off by a Cadillac driven by a man smoking a cigar, she snarled: "God damn kike!" I turned to her and asked why she thought that he was Jewish. Her embarrassed response was this was a knee-jerk response she learned in her childhood. She meant no harm, but this timeless insult just came out.

This country has a unique history of religious tolerance that goes back to our founding. When in 1654, the first Jews arrived in New Amsterdam (later New York), the Dutch governor wanted to refuse their entry. They had been fleeing the Inquisition in Brazil, and had been guaranteed welcome by Holland and any of its colonies because of a favor Jewish pirates had done, capturing the entire Spanish fleet carrying Inca gold and towing it to Amsterdam, which had just suffered a financial crisis.

The gold saved Holland, and in return, the Jews asked for religious freedom, which the Dutch gladly guaranteed. This was the first time that anybody in Europe had done so. Although the nasty governor of New Amsterdam hated Jews, the colony was under homeland orders to admit the Jews.

Jews played an important role in the American Revolution, giving all their money to George Washington to buy arms and feed his army. Washington, as our first president, sent a letter to the oldest Jewish house of worship, built in 1763 in Newport, Rhode Island. His 1790 letter thanked the community for their great help and loyalty, and wrote: "to bigotry no sanction; to persecution no assistance." That became the hallmark promise to American Jews, and all other religious minorities, unheard of anywhere else in the world (except for Holland.)

Jews continued to contribute and thrive from that time forward, generally accepted socially and culturally by the country's educated elites. Only one ugly flashback to the past occurred in Georgia in 1913, when a Jewish factory manager, Leo Frank, falsely accused of murdering a 13-year-old girl worker, was tried, jailed, and then lynched by a mob. The Georgia State Board of Pardons finally issued an official pardon in 1986, in a reluctant admission of a miscarriage of justice.

Hatred of Jews, no longer part of mainstream American society, still festers among the country's lower fringes. A rich history of conspiracy theories about Jews dates back to the first Crusade (1098), when a populist preacher traveled up and down the Rhine River in Germany fomented extermination of the Jews as "enemies of Christ." Myths of Jews murdering Christian babies to get their blood to make the Passover flatbreads popped up everywhere in Europe.

Strangely enough, the Enlightenment (belief in reason rather than faith by intellectuals and aristocrats) gave rise to the French Revolution, letting loose mobs seeking revenge for all past insults. The ideologues responsible for the revolution quickly looked for someone the mobs could blame: Jews. The post-revolutionary conspiracy theories traveled from France to Russia, to fester as the Russian Revolution took control

The Russian Tsar's secret service invented a conspiracy about Jews secretly plotting to rule the world: the notorious "Protocols of the Elders of Zion." This document was outed as a fraud in the 1920s, yet it continued to be published: by Henry Ford, and Adolf Hitler, and today, the Muslim world.

True believers in this nonsense continue: the neo-Nazi marchers in Charlottesville ("Jews Shall Not Replace Us") and the mass murderer of Jews at worship in Pittsburgh.

President Trump's "base" is fed poison about "Intellectuals," the "elites," and "globalists," all dog-whistles meaning Jews. Words do matter, and the use of such words in rallies and Tweets has proven deadly. Is winning more important than decency?

Laina Farhat-Holzman is a historian, lecturer, and author of God's Law or Man's Law. You may contact her at Lfarhat102@aol.com or www.globalthink.net.