In November 1879, the Berlin historian Heinrich von Treitschke unleashed a torrent of controversy with his article, "Our Prospects." In it he warned that year after year a never-ending wave of "striving pants-selling" Jews streamed across Germany’s borders. These men arrived in poverty, but he predicted that their "children will rule Germany’s stock markets and newspapers." Of course Jews had lived in Germany for generations, and many men were German in the best sense. At the same time, he argued, "[a] dangerous spirit of presumption has arisen within Jewish circles." Jews shared a large responsibility for the "lies and deception" and the "impudent greed" of the founding period as well as for the "despicable materialism of today." In thousands of villages across Germany the Jew used profiteering methods to buy out his neighbors. The threat, according to Treitschke, was that "after one thousand years of German civilization a new period of German-Jewish mixed culture will follow" (pp. 11-12).

In his new collection, Karsten Krieger has assembled the most important newspaper articles and letters related to the controversy and provided introductory and background material to place the conflict within the larger context of intellectual life in the late 1870s and early 1880s. The sourcebook also includes biographical sketches of the figures mentioned in the articles, information about the newspapers in which the articles appeared, and a timeline of the most important events. Krieger includes introductions to each of the 121 sources that appear in the collection, thus assisting the researcher interested in a specific part of the controversy. Krieger’s collection represents an improvement on and expansion of Walter Böhlich’s primary source book, Der Berliner Antisemitismusstreit, published in 1965.[1]

As Krieger’s collection clearly shows, it was up to Jewish intellectuals to take up the gauntlet in the first few months of the controversy and respond to Treitschke’s attacks. In these articles, which are of general interest to historians of Imperial Germany, we see debate and discussion over the meaning of membership and inclusion in the nation. Language, customs, culture, origin, and a subjective sense of belonging all played a role, but which factors should be given the most weight? (pp. 42-48). In this part of the conflict, journalists dissected different parts of Treitschke’s claims: What is this mixed-culture that he fears? German culture was already a product of a blend of different traditions and customs. Origin should not determine membership in the nation: Kant’s forefathers were Scottish; who would claim that he was not German (pp. 53-54)? Harry Bresslau, a historian of Jewish origin whom Treitschke called “one of the most loyal, unselfish, and lovely of people,” noted the unfairness of
making all Jews responsible for the failures of the few (pp. 213, 279). Ludwig Bamberger, a leader of the National Liberal Party and politician of German-Jewish origins, wrote sardonically that for Treitschke and the antisemites, “the more hate the more virtue!” (p. 217).

The first part of the conflict played out primarily between Treitschke and representatives of various members of the Jewish community. Few non-Jewish voices were raised to defend the rights of Jewish citizens. The liberal newspapers for the most part stood on the sidelines (pp. 594, 661). Here it certainly would be interesting to find out more about this silence. In one of the most important recent analyses of the *Antisemitismusstreit*, Uffa Jensen emphasizes the division of the conflict into two parts. Because Jews defended themselves alone, they were susceptible to the charge that they represented an “illegitimate particular interest rather than the good of the whole,” and they were thus placed into a “rhetorical ghetto.” As a result, the first round “ended with a victory on points for the historian.”[2]

The climate changed with the publication on November 12, 1880 of the “Manifesto of the Berlin Notables against Antisemitism,” signed by a range of prominent Berliners in academia, the civil service, politics, and industry. They wrote that “in an unexpected and deeply shameful way ... the race-hate and fanaticism of the Middle Ages has again been called into life ... Like an epidemic, the reemergence of this old delusion threaten[ed] to poison the relations between Christian and Jews.” It was time to “turn away from this national shame.” The fact was that all Germans were equal in their rights and responsibilities, and this equality must not only exist under the law, but also “in the conscience of every citizen” (pp. 551-554).

Theodor Mommsen, a historian of ancient Rome, led the gathering of signatures for the Notables Manifesto. He was in part motivated by an antisemitic petition that had begun to circulate among students in the fall of 1880, which called to restrict immigration and limit the number of Jewish professionals and civil servants (p. 581). More than 255,000 people in Germany signed this petition, among them 4,000 students—19 percent of all students. At the University of Berlin, where 17 percent of students were Jewish, 700 students (41 percent of the student body) signed the petition.[3] The university itself was polarized and Treitschke’s classroom was the scene of demonstrations (pp. 618-620). Krieger’s sources include those that shed light on the more general antisemitic movement in Berlin and on attitudes of the Catholic Center Party towards antisemitism (pp. 681-682, 738-743). We also learn more about the complicated relationship between the crisis of the National Liberal party of the late 1870s and the use of antisemitism to undermine it (pp. 152, 223, 595, 661-667, 678).

If Treitschke “won” the first round, it seems clear that victory in the second round went to Mommsen and the Notables (pp. xxvii, 695, 731). Some of the letters in the collection also suggest that Treitschke stood isolated within Berlin academic life. Karl Wilhelm Nitzsch wrote to Wilhelm Schrader that “in the entire university only 12 professors support Treitschke” and that it was suggested that Treitschke’s wife not attend a gathering where she might offend the Jewish Berliners who were to attend (p. 295). Krieger’s sources make clear that Treitschke took the Notables’ Manifesto very personally (p. 598). He wrote to Heinrich Hirzel, “My heart aches with Mommsen’s attacks. I love and honor him so sincerely with all his peculiarities; so many times he has hugged and kissed me. I never thought such behavior [by Mommsen] were possible ... I wish for nothing more ardently than a reconciliation” (p. 752). His isolation was even more evident in April 1881, when Treitschke wrote to his friend Wilhelm Noss that since these events “the world views me very differently, and I will never overcome these blows” (p. 848). The liberal press finally took note of the conflict and called the antisemitic petition laughable (pp. 634, 661). The liberal *Nationale Zeitung* noted that even those who had looked on with indifference or even with “Schadenfreude” had to recognize the “deeply harmful effect of the movement on our entire civil life” and concluded “the Jewish rabble-rousing is a shame for our century and for our people” (p. 673). In November 1880, Treitschke instructed his students that they should continue socializing with Jewish students and “refrain from any form of demonstration” (p. 612). Treitschke was also forced to back away from his claim that masses of Jews were coming to Germany (p. 762). It also seems that Treitschke was forced to publicly proclaim a mistruth regarding his dealings with Paul Dulon, a leader in the student antisemitic petition effort. Dulon claimed that Treitschke supported the collection of signatures for the petition with the remark, “I wish you the best of luck.” Treitschke in contrast wrote in an article in the *Preußisches Jahrbuch* that he was “not in agreement with the petition,” and had “refused to sign it” (pp. 744-749, 764-769). A series of articles and letters then followed in the wake of this public disagreement. Krieger suggests that Dulon’s version was more plausible and that Treitschke’s published account did not correspond to the truth. If Treitschke were
forced to lie to save his face—and to prevent himself from being associated with the antisemitic petition—he would have risked severe censure, for nothing was more central to the academic code of honor than truth-telling.

If Mommsen "won" the final round, why do historians continue to see this conflict as central in the growth of an antisemitic movement in Germany? In part because Mommsen and other liberals objected less to the substance of Treitschke's concerns than to the way that he presented them in public, or as Treitschke put it, "Mommsen found my manner in regards to the Jewish question to be inappropriate" (p. 746). In his own historical works, Mommsen claimed that Jews represented a force for "decomposition" both in the ancient and modern worlds (p. 702). Mommsen stated that the "Jewish profiteer is no fable" in contemporary Germany (p. 706). Because of the importance of Christianity within the nation, to remain outside of the Christian community but inside of the nation "is possible, but dangerous and difficult." The entrance into a great nation has its price, and Mommsen suggested that "except for those whose conscience forbid it," that price is conversion. Both Treitschke and Mommsen suggested that their views on the Jewish question were not so far apart (pp. 716, 746, 753).

In the midst of this heated debate, both Treitschke and Mommsen failed to be completely consistent in their arguments. It does seem difficult to reconcile Mommsen's de facto call for the conversion of Jews with his comment in the same article to Treitschke: "what is he suggesting when he demands that our Jewish fellow citizens become German? They are already, the same as he or I." He added, "just as the descendents of the French Colony of Berlin are not Frenchmen, our Jewish fellow citizens are none other than German" (pp. 699-700). It seems that even though Mommsen believed most Jews were certainly German, it would be better for all if they converted to Christianity. Both Mommsen and Treitschke certainly shared the same distasteful prejudices of the nineteenth century toward Jews, and in his analysis Krieger links their views closely together. It is of no little importance, however, that Mommsen and the Notables refused to consider any limitation on the rights of their Jewish fellow citizens. Krieger underestimates the importance of their different attitudes towards the antisemitic movement and towards the idea of the equality of all citizens under the law (p. xvi).

Some of Krieger's most revealing sources are the letters related to the conflict, sources not included in Böhlisch's 1965 collection. We see the prejudices of such historiographical luminaries as Jacob Burckhardt revealed here, for example when he wrote to Friedrich von Preen that "in particular the Semites must pay for their fully unjustified meddling in all affairs and the newspapers must rid themselves of Semitic editors and correspondents" (p. 251). Less exalted folk also wrote to Treitschke, and Krieger has included some of their letters as well. An anonymous school principal in Baden thanked Treitschke for his work in light of Jewish teachers' responsibility for increasing materialism and secularism (p. 303). Considering the light that these types of sources shed on the main figures' underlying motives, Krieger might have included more letters and diaries and fewer articles in his collection. For example, letters written to and from Treitschke before the beginning of the controversy would be important examples of Treitschke's aims. Although it is Krieger's goal to provide a full accounting of the public debate, the inclusion of so many articles from the Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums with its small circulation numbers (1600 per issue) was probably not necessary, especially as many of these articles repeat the same points. Furthermore, unlike most German newspapers, this publication is now available online and thus easily accessible for those interested in finding more articles from this source.

Krieger concludes that Treitschke helped pave the way for the acceptance of a "gutbürgerliche Judenfeindschaft" that was considered "moderate" and hence gained widespread influence. Krieger argues further that "plausibly, like no other person Treitschke shaped the common identity [Identitätsbewusstsein] of elites as well as the middle classes in the German Empire." Particularly important was his role in "domesticating" antisemitism. For these groups Treitschke "may well have decisively contributed to making antisemitism an integral component of their worldview, a worldview with a destructive potential that was first unleashed later in the social crises of the First World War" (p. xxi).

Did antisemitism become salonfähig as a result of this conflict, as historians have often suggested? A conclusive answer to this question would require different sources than are presented here. The material in this book does not shed light on broader changes in attitudes towards antisemitism across the German middle class. One very clear link between the Antisemitismusstreit and later events, however, is the founding of a new organization to spread antisemitism within the student body. The Verein deutscher Studenten brought students together around the ideals of antisemitism, national renewal, and German unity. The excitement and energy this group...
generated reflected the continuing resonance of the controversy within student life. Antisemitism was at the center of the worldview promulgated in this organization. Its greatest success in spreading antisemitism came in the pressure it exerted on other student groups to exclude Jews officially and openly. The sad state of affairs at German universities meant that those groups that tried to resist the pressure to exclude Jewish students could be denigrated as “Jewish,” which resulted in their loss of status within student life. By the 1890s the largest and most prestigious of German student organizations had decided that they would accept no Jewish students.

Certainly the Berliner *Antisemitismusstreit* and the rise of the Union of German Students played an important role in this form of antisemitism. Krieger’s collection also reveals the barriers within middle-class society for a widespread acceptance of Treitschke’s form of antisemitism. Treitschke’s comments prompted one journalist to note that he did not realize that the moral conditions in Germany were so dire that a minority of 1.25 percent of the population could undermine German culture (p. 147, see also p. 97). For middle-class liberals, antisemitism was part of the dark past, a past that Germany had now overcome; Theodor Mommsen rhetorically asked, “is the Reich of Emperor Wilhelm really still the land of Friedrich the Great, the land of Enlightenment in which character and intellect rather than confession or nationality count” (pp. 446, 636)? Such prejudice was shameful: “it is bad enough that such things be said, much less printed and openly defended” (p. 157). Jew-baiting “has made our noble land a laughing stock with the cultured nations of Europe” (p. 28, see also p. 726). Or “what an honor for Germany to be placed together with Romania and Serbia” (p. 635, see also pp. 88, 448). A correspondent of the London *Times* noted: “there is lying at my elbow a heap of anti-Jewish literature … a more scurrilous, unjust, and unmannersly pile of polemics it would be difficult to come across” (pp. 603, 727). The association with Stöcker and Marr also hindered the acceptance of antisemitism. In one article a journalist reported that Stöcker and Marr had found in Treitschke a new “consort” and were working together “arm in arm” (pp. 90, 254). The middle-class man who embraced antisemitism risked being labeled a “fanatic” like Marr and Stöcker (pp. 98, 761), the opposite of middle-class respectability.

As a primary source collection, Krieger’s work has by no means answered all the questions related to the *Antisemitismusstreit*, yet it will be the future standard on this conflict. The well-written, clear, and comprehensive editorial material will be of great use for scholars working on this topic. This collection will be of particular interest to historians specializing in antisemitism, the history of Berlin and its politics, the Jewish community in Germany, the liberal parties and their relations with others, and academic life in the nation’s capital.

Notes


[4]. Uffa Jensen analyzes some of these letters in his article “Getrennt streiten–getrennt leben? ” The collection of Treitschke’s surviving papers includes handwritten notes on his drafts, which would merit inclusion in a future edition.


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