

FOREWORD

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The book that follows grew out of a series of lectures presented by Laura Engelstein, the Henry S. McNeil Professor Emerita of Russian History at Yale University, as the 2016 Jerusalem Lectures in History in Memory of Menahem Stern. The Historical Society of Israel, which sponsors this distinguished series of lectures, has made it its practice to seek out innovative scholars who are at the cutting edge of historical research. Often, lecturers and their chosen topics have been related to issues that were at the heart of Professor Stern's own scholarship. In this case, Professor Engelstein's thought-provoking foray into non-Jewish opinion on Jews and Judaism in the early to mid-twentieth century fits well within the broad conceptual range of Menahem Stern's own explorations of Jewish-non-Jewish relations and their representations in large cultural systems, as exemplified in his classic collection of *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*. The Historical Society of Israel is honored to present here the expanded version of Laura Engelstein's lectures, which deals with distinctive cases of non-Jews' relations to Jews in the Eastern European milieu. The book focuses on individuals who may be said to straddle and to complicate the issue, and they adumbrate what may be called "anti-antisemitism."

Laura Engelstein's seminal, bold, and provocative contributions to Russian political and cultural history are well known to anyone familiar with the field. She has delved deeply and innovatively into the history of late Imperial Russia, cultural politics, and the theoretical understanding of sexuality in history, religion, and the history of European liberal and illiberal thought from the late nineteenth through the twentieth centuries.

Engelstein, a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and a corresponding fellow of the British Academy, has taught at Cornell University and at Princeton and has held distinguished fellowships at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation's Center at Bellagio, and the New York Public Library's Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers, before joining

the Yale faculty in 2002. Her landmark works include *Moscow, 1905: Working-Class Organization and Political Conflict*; *The Keys to Happiness: Sex and the Search for Modernity in Fin-de-Siècle Russia*; a further exploration of sexuality, in relation to Russian popular religion, *Castration and the Heavenly Kingdom: A Russian Folktale*; as well as numerous essays and other works that span both the imperial and the post-revolutionary periods in Russian history. Some of her memorable studies in Russian intellectual and political history have appeared in her collection entitled: *Slavophile Empire: Imperial Russia's Illiberal Path*.

In particular, her most recently published book, *Russia in Flames: War, Revolution, and Civil War, 1914–1921* (Oxford University Press, 2018), is a definitive contribution to our understanding of that crucial era, now a century behind us, but still reverberating in so many ways. Indeed, it is in that book that Engelstein develops the argument that violent antisemitism—culminating in mass-scale murder and rape during the Civil War—was not simply a coincidental by-product of the chaos and struggles of wartime and revolutionary Russia. She argues, rather, that it permeated the era and was a key to understanding the general violence that doomed the imperial regime and indelibly marked the contours of the Revolution.

The present study of historical images and episodes follows naturally upon those other insightful works. In reexamining the question of “the Jews” as a political problem in twentieth-century Eastern Europe, she poses the counter-intuitive problem: How not to be an antisemite, in a social and political milieu infused with Jew-hatred? What, she asks, are we to make of public figures who, if they are to be taken at their word, sought to disavow or at least distance themselves from the worst that modern antisemitism represented and foreshadowed? How much historical credence should be given to such disavowals? How did organized Jewish mobilization against political antisemitism foment a wider discrediting of anti-Jewish ideology that, in one way or another, dialectically influenced the web of antisemitic discourse? When did the political fallout of antisemitic populism motivate Jews and non-Jews to modulate their strategies, and when, on the other hand, did liberal and pro-Jewish points of view retain the upper hand and even impose a defensive posture on those who took antagonistic positions?

The question of the shifting rhetoric and motives of her chosen public figures and intellectuals, and the way they maneuvered in a fraught political landscape, requires subtle parsing. The range of state-

ments and actions under examination spans the principled and the expedient, alike. These are people who, in retrospect, seemed to “have it both ways” (to borrow a phrase from one of Engelstein’s own works), and their ambiguity or their ability to compartmentalize their own sentiments was not entirely disingenuous.¹ The cases at hand, she argues, exemplify how antisemitism pervaded the socio-political and mental space of twentieth-century Eastern Europe. It was nonetheless also seen by many as a morally reprehensible posture, or at least a political liability from which one needed to disengage. Above all, its taint was inescapable—so much so, that even liberals and even some Jews amongst them proved unable to avoid its pitfalls.

This book exemplifies new conceptual approaches to the study of modern antisemitism. That is, beyond contemplating antisemitism and its fruits as examples par excellence of the modern era’s most virulent forms of ethno-racial persecution, historians and social scientists alike are likely to benefit from taking antisemitism seriously as a complex problem in the history of human relations, and not just as an inglorious epitaph to the scourge of destruction and murder.

Moreover, while antisemitism in Russia and its successor states is familiar to all students of that history mostly from research stemming from Jewish sources and stressing the victims’ perspective, it is less conventional and entirely more thought provoking to consider the entire subject as a Russian question and, indeed, also a Polish and a Ukrainian question: a question that not only perturbed the Jews and their various opponents, but also a fair number of writers and public figures whose perspectives spanned a gamut of positions—all of them imperfect, and few of them very familiar to non-specialist readers.

By parsing the limits of Russian philosemitism and its opposite, she returns to a method that has figured so prominently in much of her research, which is intriguingly calculated to upset the proverbial apple-cart of conventional ideas. We have grown to expect her to bring us up short, which is her way of warning us to take care the next time we are tempted to expostulate in over-generalizations. In probing the most sensitive historical issues with a delicate instrument, pointing a beam of light at the under-explored, the rare, and the unexpected, Engelstein pits specific case histories against a broad canvas of ideas and events.

Note

1. Laura Engelstein, “Having it Both Ways: Rozanov, Modernity, and the Skopcy,” *Slavica Lundensia* 21 (2001): 1–15.