

Headline: Henry Ford and 'The International Jew': His Century-old Anti-Semitism Thrives in the 21st Century

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What: This is four pages of an 16-page article I wrote for the current issue of the Dearborn Historical Museum's quarterly magazine, which I edit.

Context: One hundred years ago this month, Henry Ford – Dearborn's favorite son -- bought a weekly paper in Dearborn, used it to attack Jews. He turned the content into widely circulated books, which continue to sow hatred online today.

There is no online aspect to The Historian. It's like it's 1990.

Four pages

By BILL McGRAW

Henry Ford was peaking as a global celebrity at the conclusion of World War I, having introduced the \$5 workday, assembly line and Model T -- revolutionary changes that transformed the way people lived. Reporters staked out the gates of his Fair Lane mansion. Ford loved the limelight and he constantly made news, even running for the U.S. Senate in Michigan as a Democrat in 1918. He narrowly lost.

In the midst of his fame, Ford became a media mogul of sorts, forming the Dearborn Publishing Company and purchasing the sleepy Dearborn Independent weekly newspaper, which was dying of red ink. He published the paper under his name for the first time 100 years ago, in January 1919.

Under Ford, the Independent became notorious for its unprecedented attacks on Jews. But Ford's anti-Semitism traveled far beyond the Dearborn borders. Showing the marketing expertise that had catapulted Ford Motor into one of the world's most famous brands, Henry Ford's lieutenants vastly widened the reach of his attacks by packaging the

paper's anti-Semitic content into four books. Experts say "The International Jew," distributed across Europe and North America during the rise of fascism in the 1920s and '30s, influenced some of the future rulers of Nazi Germany.

In 1931, two years before he became the German chancellor, Adolf Hitler gave an interview to a Detroit News reporter in his Munich office, which featured a large portrait of Ford over the desk of the future fuhrer. The reporter asked about the photo.

"I regard Henry Ford as my inspiration," Hitler told the News.

Ford's anti-Jewish campaign provoked protests and a boycott of Ford Motor automobiles in the 1920s. Ford offered an apology -- received by the public with great skepticism -- and closed the paper in 1927. It was too late, though, as copies of "The International Jew" spread widely before and after World War II, influencing generations of anti-Semites. The glowing imprimatur of Henry Ford lent credibility to the preposterous charges against Jews the books contained.

But what might have been lost to history as an ugly curiosity has proven to be a Pandora's box, as the Internet age has given Ford's anti-Semitic literature a powerful new life. Today, a century after Ford purchased the Dearborn Independent and 71 years after his death, his legacy of hate is stronger than ever -- it flourishes on the websites and forums of white nationalists, racists and others who hate Jews.

Today, "The International Jew" by Henry Ford plays a significant role in fomenting resentment as the United States grapples with rising numbers of hate crimes and anti-Semitic incidents, ascendant white nationalism and a gunman armed with an AR-15-style assault rifle who massacred 11 people at a

Pittsburgh synagogue in October. When he surrendered, the gunman told police he “wanted all Jews to die.”

An essay posted by the Anti-Defamation League says that by posting decades-old texts such as “The International Jew,” today's anti-Semites demonstrate the longevity of their beliefs, legitimizing them to both dedicated followers and potential recruits.

Because of Ford’s fame, “The International Jew” has been a “particularly powerful tool for haters trying to validate their hostile beliefs,” the essay adds.

One example of Ford’s influence online today: On Stormfront, a white nationalist online forum, a contributor has taken the screen name Dr. Ford and uses a photo of Henry Ford as a profile image. On the same forum, a participant whose screen name is AllisonRM wrote last year:

“I'm currently reading The International Jew: Essays from the Dearborn Independent (Ford)... Read these great books!... We, the white race, need to encourage ourselves and our children.”

Heidi Beirich, an expert on extremism in the United States at the Alabama-based Southern Poverty Law Center, said extremist websites contain thousands of references to Ford and “The International Jew.”

“In the world of the racist right, Henry Ford is almost a living, breathing human being, “ Beirich said in an interview. She added that extremist leaders use Ford “as an inspiration” and “validator” to impress people while enlisting them to join the movement.

It's not just extremist websites that are peddling Ford's books. Shoppers can buy "The International Jew" by Henry Ford on the websites of Amazon, Barnes & Noble and Walmart.

"This is a wonderful book that should be required reading for all Americans," wrote Tara, in a five-star Amazon review.

"Sadly, many people like to label Henry Ford as an anti-Semite, when nothing could be further from the truth."

And then there are the ads. After I explored the availability of Ford's anti-Semitic books on Amazon in connection with this story, ads for "The International Jew" by Henry Ford began popping up on my Facebook page. They appeared next to ads for what I was actually shopping for -- a winter coat.