Andrew Berry, who works at Harvard’s Museum of Comparative Zoology, is the editor of Infinite Topics, an anthology of the writings of Alfred Russell Wallace, to be published by Verso.

Siddhartha Deb’s first novel, The Point of Return, is due from Picador this year.

Jerry Fodor teaches philosophy and psychology at Rutgers. He is finishing a book that is about, he says, about Hume’s theory of mind.

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Rose McKibbin’s Cluster and Culture: England 1830-51 is out in paperback. He is a fellow of St John’s College, Oxford.

Stephen Sedley is a judge of the Court of Appeal and has sat as the UK judge in the European Court of Human Rights. The full text of his article in this issue was given as last year’s MacDermott Lecture in Belfast.

Charles Simic’s most recent book of poems is Jadedness.

Tom Vanderbilt’s Survival City: Adventure among the Ruins of Atomic America is published in the US this month. He lives in Brooklyn.

Michael Wood, who teaches at Princeton, is the author of books about Stendhal, Nabokov and Proust.

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Hollywood and Anti-Semitism: A Cultural History Up to World War Two
by Steven Alan Carr
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Moguls
J. Hoberman

Fear of Jewish influence on the movies merged with anxieties over the medium's potential to foster indecency and moralistic violence. Motion pictures were under widespread attack for the presentation of crime, the treatment of sex and the corruption of American youth. Massive press coverage of the Fatty Arbuckle case (the popular screen comedian was tried three times for raping and causing the death of a scantily clad girl at a boozedrenched orgy) fanned public outrage and pushed the fearful movie industry towards self-regulation. By March 1932, the studio heads established the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association, presiding over the Postmaster General, Will Hays — a prominent Indiana Republican and Presbyterian church elder — as its president.

Although the creation of the Hays Office did little to placate Reverend Crails and his allies, Hays ultimately outflanked his Protestant critics by forming an alliance with the Catholic Church. In allowing Catholic clerics as well as prominent laymen, to draw up and sign, the suspicions of Joseph Breen, administer the 1930 Motion Picture Production Code, Hays helped create what the historian Francis Couvreur described as "an industry largely financed by the Papacy", operated by Jewish studio executives and policed by Catholic bureaucrats, all the while claiming to represent "good roots American".

For Carr, this sense of the movies as an all-American enterprise has largely been ignored. No matter how Hollywood was thought of, it was imagined to be an essentially Jewish enterprise — sometimes of international dimensions. Thus, with the Nazi notion of "Judeo-Bolshevism", the moguls might simultaneously be associated with cynical capitalism and with Soviet subversion. Although some critics, such as the Communist Harry Alan Potamkin, pointed out that, even if Jewish control over Hollywood existed, it did not benefit Jews — at least in terms of favourable screen representation — the moguls were nonetheless perceived to be Jews acting as Jews.

These Jews seem to think of nothing but money-making and sexual indulgence. They are, probably, the scum of the earth," Breen wrote to a friend in the early 1930s. Breen and his ecclesiastical supporters' Hitler's rise was a useful tool in the campaign to reform the industry. The moguls were newly vulnerable. Jewish control of the industry was altering many of our habits at the very time when Jews are afraid of things that may possibly happen in this country to them," the Los Angeles Archbishop John Cantwell observed in a letter to the Archbishop of Cincinnati in July 1933.

The Hollywood Question was now a political matter. Anti-semitic stereotypes were employed by both supporters and opponents of Upton Sinclair's campaign for Governor of California, and by the mid-1930s, Breen felt that Hollywood Communities — whom he identified as mainly Jewish — were involved in a campaign to smuggle Red content into the movies. It was also deeply suspicious of the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League which, launched during the summer of 1936, had by the autumn enrolled some four thousand members — including such celebrities as Eddie Cantor, Ernst Lubitsch, Boris Karloff and Dorothy Parker. In newsletters and radio broadcasts, at meetings, demonstrations and banquets, it called for a boycott of German products and vociferously supported the Spanish Republic and thus, for Breen, who sympathised with the Falangist rebellion, was a conspiracy "conducted and financed almost entirely by Jews."

Although the League was thrown into confusion by the 1939 Hitler-Stalin Pact and the subsequent outbreak of war, the movie industry released several anti-Fascist pictures — among them, Congratulations of a Nazi Spy. In a closed meeting held late that year, the US Ambassador to Britain (and former FKO executive) Joseph Kennedy bluntly warned Hollywood executives to stop...
making such movies, citing the possibility that any subsequent American entry into the war might be blamed on Jews. This, he suggested, was even now happening in Britain. The line soon went public. Addressing an America First rally in Des Moines, Iowa, Charles Lindbergh maintained that the 'greatest danger to this country' lay in Jewish 'ownershiof and influence on our motion pictures, our press, our radio and our government.'

The Republican Senator from North Dakota, Gerald Nye, echoed Lindbergh's charges, informing a national radio audience in the summer of 1942 that Hollywood, a haven for all manner of foreigners, was agitating for war. Consequently, he said, the movies 'have ceased to be an instrument of entertainment,' seeking instead 'to drag the reason of the American people' and 'rouse the war fever.' A month later, a Senate Subcommittee on Interstate Commerce opened hearings on 'Moving Picture Screen and Radio Propaganda' with Nye as the first witness. He repeated his charge that the movies had been captured by foreigners. Harry Warner (the most actively anti-Nazi studio boss) and Twentieth Century Fox's Darryl Zanuck testified on their own behalf, the latter stressing his Christian background and Nebraska roots. The studios also enlisted as their spokesman Wendell Willkie, Republican Presidential nominee in 1940. Willkie accused Nye and other isolationist senators of attempting to suppress 'factual pictures on Nazism,' while deliberately dividing 'the American people in discordant racial and religious groups in order to disrupt them over foreign policy.' The hearings paled out in October, but on 7 December, the Japanese Air Force bombed Pearl Harbor.

Carr rightly considers the largely forgotten propaganda hearings a turning point in the history of the Hollywood Question, 'a showdown between a traditional, isolationist America and a modern, New Deal, internationalist America.' Although a Gallup Poll in 1938 discovered that more than two out of five Americans considered 'war propaganda' a greater threat to the Republic than Fascism or Communism, and other polls showed a rising sense of Jewish influence, isolationism failed. Still, the Propaganda Hearings foreshadowed those vastly more infamous hearings held two years after the war by the House Un-American Activities Committee. The idea of international Jewish Hollywood was displaced by that of an international Communist conspiracy and, this time, Hollywood would not escape unscathed.

Although the moguls are often exonerated for their apparent unwillingness to engage the Nazi threat directly, Carr's research shows how closely movie industry leaders monitored events in Europe. Citing a meeting of studio heads held in March 1934 to discuss anti-semitism at home, he notes their decision not to act as moviemakers, but as part of the larger Jewish community. The movie industry had to avoid even the appearance of special pleading. To complicate matters, the moguls were criticized from the Left as well as the Right. Carr cites a late 1938 editorial in the Hollywood Spectator addressed 'To the Jews Who Control the Films' which called on studio heads to put aside profits and directly attack Nazism. Even as the moguls looked for a way to oppose Nazi Germany within the context of American patriotism, their own business successes had presented writers with a new narrative metaphor. Carr points to three Hollywood novels, Day of the Locust, The Last Tycoon and What Makes Sammy Run?, published in 1943, which shared themes of a declining culture and the price of venality and insecurity. The result of this disapproval, was particularly concerned to universalise his protagonist. The ruthlessly ambitious Sammy Glick is explained in terms of his miserable childhood in the slums of the Lower East Side; his capacity for amoral manipulation is more than once equated with that of Fascist demagogues.

Carr usefully places Leo Rosten's sociological Hollywood: The Movie Colony in the making of the novels. Working on a Carnegie grant, Rosten sought to debunk Hollywood as a home of excess and exoticism, seeing it instead as emblematic of the national culture. The movie industry did not produce 'anti-semitic' movies or impose values, but was 'compelled to feed' the public's pre-existing tastes—its commercial viability was a factor of how well it succeeded in doing so. Hollywood's Jewish problem was a misapprehension. It was not the movie moguls who were un-American, but the xenophobic bigots who hated them. Indeed, the moguls were judged by a double standard: their humble origins, unlike those of other successful American entrepreneurs, were a subject for ridicule, rather than proof of industry and achievement of the American Dream. Carr notes that 'this powerful response' was further articulated in a new cycle of 'anti anti-semitic' movies, such as Utopia and Gentlemen's Agreement (both released in 1947), which emphasised that prejudice and intolerance—rather than Jewishness—were 'outside the core American experience'.

The aftermath of World War Two and the revelation of the Holocaust may have mitigated direct attacks on the Jewishness of Hollywood moguls, or placed such attacks beyond the pale, just as it muted overt anti-Semitic rhetoric in general. The issue was to be invoked once more, however, when the film industry emerged as a domestic battleground in the early years of the Cold War. Gerald Horne's Clev Struggle in Hollywood provides a detailed account of the labour strife that consumed the movie industry during the mid-1940s. He also writes about Hollywood's Jewish Question: 'A spasm of anti-semitism erupted in Los Angeles as the postwar era began, reinforcing the conservative assault on labour.' The gangland assassination of the Jewish mobster Bugsy Siegel who, among his other interests, controlled the movie extras' union, was, Horne asserts, tangential to the moguls who had been accused repeatedly of failing to corral the Jewish radicals who presumably controlled the Communist Party and, it was thought, the liberal, but not Communist, Conference of Studio Unions. When the moguls 'did the right thing' and smashed CIO, they showed that they could set aside presumed ethnic-religious interests and so were qualified to advance further within the ruling elite.

Preceding Carr himself has come under fire in Congress for painting too broadly in the movies' exorbitant themes of war and crusaders, even as anti-Communism attracted those who, having argued for the existence of a Jewish conspiracy, now maintained that they opposed both Nazism and Communism. The anti-Hollywood tirades of the Mississippi Congressman John Rankin equated Jews with Communists (like the anti-semetic anti-Bolsheviks of the 1920s), Rankin considered the unmasking of Jewish performers who had Americanised their names as tantamount to uncovering a political conspiracy. Shortly after VE Day, Rankin warned Congress that "alien-minded" Hollywood producers were 'trying to take over the motion-pictures industry'. This ideology, which he associated specifically with Trotsky, was 'based upon hatred for Christianity' and, in fact, presented Christianity 'as having persecuted and persecuted our Saviour during his earthly ministry, inspired his crucifixion, ridiculed him in his dying agony, and then gambled for his garments at the foot of the cross.'

The larger Cold War discourse recede to the margins of American discourse, though the Hollywood Question intermittently surfaced in its original form. During the 1988 controversy surrounding Martin Scorsese's The Last Temptation of Christ, Christian fundamentalists picketed the home and synagogue of Lew Wasserman, then chairman of MCA (and chief executive of Universal Studios). Usually, however, the language is more oblique. Such conservatives as Pat Buchanan accuse Hollywood of undermining traditional family values; the movie industry is simultaneously associated with amoral profiteering and ideological experimentation, in propagating the credo of 'secular humanism'.

To what degree are these terms coded? Throughout his Presidency, Bill Clinton was regularly identified with a 'cultural elite' conveniently visualised in the form of his Hollywood supporters Steven Spielberg and Barbra Streisand. Similarly, when conservative Republicans campaign against Hollywood's moral degeneracy, they have invariably levelled their charges against Warner Bros and Disney, both studios with prominent Jewish executives, rather than Rupert Murdoch's Twentieth Century Fox or Sony's Columbia.

In its dynamic expansionism and near-universal appeal, American popular culture is often theorised, and experienced by the rest of the world, as a destructive, hegemonic force, even as an unstoppable viral infection which bids to wipe out indigenous cultures. Carr's account of Cold War and Anti-Semitism demonstrates the degree to which the experience was equally true at home. Do the Jews 'control' Hollywood? How convenient to project this quintessentially American force as the province of alien interlopers.