

# ***F\*\*\* Your Racist History***

## **E101: *Henry Ford and His Pal Hitler***

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**Intro and outro music courtesy of Flatfoot 56**

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### **Show Notes**

In 1919, Henry Ford took over a weekly journal called the *Dearborn Independent*, and within a year and a half, turned it into one of the most notorious anti-Semitic fake news rags in the United States. Ford's anti-Jewish campaign ran for 91 consecutive issues and became a 4-volume book titled *The International Jew*. Ford's texts and ideas inspired Adolf Hitler and his murderous Nazis in the years leading up to WW2 and they continue to be widely circulated among violent white supremacists today. Americans are still struggling to come to terms with this deeply troubling aspect of Henry Ford's life because he's considered an American hero, and there are even officials trying to bury this story.

## **EPISODE SCRIPT**

This is episode 1 of *F\*\*\* Your Racist History: Henry Ford and His Pal Hitler*.

### **Introduction**

*Fall 2018, Dearborn, Michigan, U.S.A.*

The Dearborn Historical Museum's quarterly publication, *The Dearborn Historian*, is about to drop its fall issue. The cover story, written by editor Bill McGraw, is an exposé on one of Dearborn's most famous figures, Henry Ford. In it, McGraw illuminates a dark piece of the automobile titan's history; the time when Ford bought a local news journal called *The Dearborn Independent*, and through a series of editorials called "The International Jew," exposed himself as one of America's most infamous and outspoken anti-Semites.

McGraw titles the story "Special Report: Henry Ford and the International Jew," but before he can ship the magazine to subscribers, Dearborn, Michigan Mayor John B. O'Reilly steps in and halts distribution, confiscates all printed copies, and presumably has them destroyed. Then, he fires Bill McGraw as editor of *The Dearborn Historian* in January 2019.

Let me say that again: in America, in 2019, an editor of a historical publication was fired for writing a factual article about American industrialist Henry Ford.

What was so wrong with this story that the Mayor of Dearborn fired McGraw and had the edition permanently pulled? It was a desperate move, which called more attention to the small publication than it probably would have received otherwise, even had the article come out. What did Mayor O'Reilly really want to keep hidden?

To understand, we have to go back to the 19-teens, back when nearly everyone in the United States considered Henry Ford its greatest national hero.

### **Early Life**

A typical short bio of Henry Ford might sound something like this:

By the time the first world war was underway, Henry Ford was in his 50's and the king of the

automakers. An industrialist who began with relatively nothing and rose to become a business magnate. A man we've built statues to honor and museums to educate. Without a doubt, a traditional American success story.

Dare we say the American dream?

Born during the Civil War, Henry Ford was the first child in his family to survive infancy. His parents were rural farmers with a homestead in Dearborn, Michigan. After his parents gave him a watch for his thirteenth birthday, Ford took it apart to see how it worked and was able to reassemble it with relative ease. This was a defining moment for him; he discovered his love for mechanics.

Ford didn't learn his trade from books; he learned it through hard work and tinkering. He got his hands into the industry at an early age—at 17, he trudged 13 miles (on foot presumably) from Dearborn into Detroit to work an apprenticeship as a machinist on the dry docks.

In 1888, at 25, he married a Christian farm girl named Clara Bryant; they had one son, Edsel.

Throughout the 1890s, Ford worked as an engineer for Thomas Edison (who turned into a lifelong friend), for George Westinghouse as a steam engine mechanic, and he studied bookkeeping. He was truly a self-made man, an American Icon of the times, and all-around a midwestern success story. A "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" kind of guy. In essence, the lifeblood of a quickly-expanding Americana, and a living, breathing example of the results of hard work and ingenuity.

Ford followed his natural talent for mechanics and built a gasoline-powered engine in the 1890s. By the turn of the 20th century, he'd made several innovative automobile prototypes that sold modestly through a business he formed called the Henry Ford Company. When he realized his true ambition was to build an affordable vehicle for the common man rather than the luxury vehicles he was making exclusively for the wealthy, he left his namesake company (which eventually became Cadillac) and formed Ford Motor Company.

In 1908, Ford came out with the Model T, a more powerful and less expensive automobile than

the higher-end vehicles on the market, and effectively revolutionized the industry.

Before long, Ford Motor Company was at capacity for orders, and Ford had to figure out a faster, cheaper way to manufacture his Model T's. His solution was the assembly line, which again revolutionized American industry. By the mid-19-teens, the Model T was the most popular car in the country: a decade later, Ford Motor Company would build over 15 million of them.

By 1915, however, Ford also began to set his sights on other endeavors. In August of that year, he publicly declared himself a pacifist activist. *The Daily Notes* quoted him on August 23<sup>rd</sup>:

“I will do everything in my power to prevent murderous, wasteful war in America, and in the whole world.”

Then in December, Ford chartered a Peace Ship to Norway called the Oscar II in an effort to help end World War I. Was he naive? Absolutely. This perception of his oblivious idealism deepened when the *Chicago Tribune* lashed out at him for his pacifist stance on American intervention in Mexico in 1916. He eventually abandoned the venture after constant bickering aboard the Peace Ship killed his morale. When it docked in Norway, Ford returned home, and the war continued.

### **Rumble with the *Chicago Tribune***

By the Summer of 1916, tensions between Mexico and the United States had reached a boiling point, leading to the Mexican Border War. Mexico was in the throes of its revolution. Bands of fighters led by Pancho Villa were venturing across the Mexican/American border, attacking American towns and pillaging for supplies, so President Wilson deployed troops to launch an offensive attack. The American Press largely supported the war with Mexico, a prospect that deeply offended pacifist Henry Ford.

A *Chicago Tribune* reporter at the time interviewed a Ford employee who said that if anyone who worked for Ford Motor Company joined the National Guard and went to the Mexican border to fight, Ford would not hold their positions for them, nor pay their salaries while they were away. In other words, Ford wouldn't support American servicemen in action, a stance which the *Tribune* denounced in a front-page editorial with the headline “Henry Ford is an Anarchist.” They

dubbed Ford an ignorant idealist, an out-of-touch millionaire who had no appreciation for the people fighting for his right to make vast wealth.

Ford had a fragile ego and couldn't abide being labeled an anarchist—so, he sued the *Chicago Tribune* for 1 million dollars in damages for libel. The case went to court three years later, in March of 1919. The trial was a circus. When Ford took the stand, his testimony embarrassed him deeply. The *Tribune's* lawyers quizzed him on American history, the result of which can be summed up with the following example re-published in the law publication *Litigation* in the Fall of 2005:

*Tribune's lawyer:* Have there ever been any revolutions in this country?

*Henry Ford:* There was, I understand.

*Tribune's lawyer:* When?

*Henry Ford:* In 1812.

After repeated verbal traps, where Ford misplaced the American Revolution in 1812 and misidentified Benedict Arnold as a famous writer, *Tribune* lawyers also asked Ford to read something on the stand, which he repeatedly refused, leading to the suspicion that Ford was nearly illiterate.

The trial ended with a verdict in favor of Ford, essentially clearing his name in the libel suit, but the jury's award of just 6 cents infuriated him.

Feeling like the press repeatedly misrepresented his opinions and unfairly attacked him, Ford bought a small local journal called the *Dearborn Independent* in a revenge move.

And *this* is where the typical biography of Henry Ford begins to splinter into a racist nightmare.

### ***The Dearborn Independent* / Dearborn Publishing Company**

When Ford bought the *Dearborn Independent*, it was a floundering publication; it needed reviving. So, he assembled his very own crack team of editors and writers.

As the publication's manager, Ford assigned Ernest Liebold, a trusted aide of his since 1911.

Historians maintain that Liebold was a notorious anti-Semite.

Together, they hired several employees from the nearby *Detroit News*.

As editor, they hired Edwin Pipp, a liberal Catholic man, apparently known for muckraking, a term for the use of defamatory information to intentionally injure a person's reputation. This technique was (and still is) a favorite among politicians.

As head writer, Ford and Liebold hired William Cameron, a Canadian writer and columnist they believed had a credible reputation.

Ford's new paper's motto? "Chronicler of the Neglected Truth."

The team published the first issue of the *Dearborn Independent* bearing Ford's name in January 1919, and initial reception was disappointing. It apparently lacked the sensationalism of other publications of its day.

*The Detroit Times* called it "the best periodical ever turned out by a tractor plant."

For the first 16 months, the *Dearborn Independent* maintained itself as a progressive and pacifist publication, but that all changed in May of 1920.

During a staff meeting, *Dearborn Independent* writer Joseph O'Neill recommended they "find an evil to attack... Go after it and stay after it... Name names and tell actual facts. Let's have some sensationalism."

It turns out, Ford and Liebold both agreed on just the "evil" to attack: Jews.

Ford had blamed Jews for the start of WW1. He resented big banks, which he believed were Jewish tools of oppression over hard-working Americans, a common though unfounded anti-Semitic conspiracy theory. Liebold, his trusted advisor, was overjoyed at Ford's new anti-Jewish angle, and the paper quickly went to work on drafting a campaign to bring to light what they viewed as a global threat. William Cameron wielded the pen.

The first issue, titled “The International Jew: The World’s Problem,” went to press on May 22nd, 1920. It was the first of 91 issues published in this vein. Ford even allegedly hired “agents” (aka goons) to lurk around Jewish neighborhoods and gather incriminating evidence supporting his made-up conspiracies.

Not everyone at the *Independent* was on board, however.

Editor Edwin Pipp quit before the issues went to press, refusing to be associated with an anti-Semitic rag. He established his own periodical called *Pipp’s Weekly* and often published editorials criticizing Ford and the *Dearborn Independent*. This did nothing to halt Ford’s anti-Semitic campaign.

Per Ford’s *Independent* in June of 1920: “There is no other racial or national type which puts forth this kind of person. It is not merely that there are a few Jews among the international financial controllers—it is that these world controllers are exclusively Jews.”

Ford’s newspaper falsely blamed Jews for everything from spawning the Russian Revolution in 1917, working with the treacherous Benedict Arnold during the American Revolution, to fixing the 1919 World Series. According to Ford, even Jazz music was the result of negative Jewish influence over the white western world. Not on the list back then? Space lasers. You can see how far this garbage travels.

This international anti-Jewish conspiracy theory was not birthed, however, by Ford or his lackeys. It stemmed primarily from a notorious Russian anti-Semitic forgery from 1903 called *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* that Ford’s *Dearborn Independent* published on their pages as “factual” information. It was, in fact, fake news.

The racist text which Ford published expounded a false conspiracy that a small group of powerful Jewish men was responsible for every disaster (financial, natural, or otherwise) in the world. Jews were supposedly the puppet masters of the universe, controlling news and holding ultimate power. Historians believe it’s likely that if Ford hadn’t published an English translation of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in his newspaper, this horrid trope might have died long ago.

Instead, he happily published the lie as news and breathed new life into it, helping spread it far and wide.

Ford funneled millions of dollars into his newspaper's distribution, putting it in front of as many eyeballs as he could. Because he was so famous and respected, Ford's anti-Semitic views began to spread and take hold with average Americans. He also forced Ford Motor dealerships to buy his newspapers and sell subscriptions. If you bought a Model T between 1920 to 1922, chances were that you would drive your new Ford automobile off the lot and find a hate-filled issue of the *Dearborn Independent* on the dashboard or in the glovebox. Ford also had the paper mailed to schools and libraries all over the United States.

The Ku Klux Klan enjoyed reprinting Ford's articles as well.

At its most popular, *The Dearborn Independent* reached weekly circulation numbers close to 900,000.

Ford and his associate Ernest Liebold then established the Dearborn Publishing Company and put the original articles together into a four-part book series titled *The International Jew*, released between 1920 and 1922. The volumes are sub-titled:

- "The World's Foremost Problem" (1920)
- "Jewish Activities in the United States" (1921)
- "Jewish Influence on American Life" (1921)
- "Aspects of Jewish Power in the United States" (1922)

They also deliberately avoided copywriting the books so other anti-Semites could be free to reproduce the work without infringement or permission in the future.

Despite its growing popularity, there was also a significant backlash against Ford's paper:

Per *Dearborn Historian* journalist Bill McGraw (who had his expose of Ford pulled), "As the *Independent* launched its anti-Semitic campaign and sent the paper, unsolicited, to libraries and schools across the nation, protests broke out. Some cities attempted to ban the paper, but such

moves raised First Amendment issues. Jews organized Ford Motor boycotts. Former President William Howard Taft, a future U.S. Supreme Court chief justice (and the only person to ever hold both positions), slammed Ford in a speech. Later, he joined outgoing President Woodrow Wilson in signing a petition that denounced the *Independent*.” Wilson was another notorious bigot who called Blacks “an ignorant and inferior race,” but that’s for another episode.

Nevertheless, Ford carried on with his racist attack on Jews.

What *is* mildly surprising about Ford’s actions, however, is that he had Jewish friends (I’m putting air quotes up around “friends”). One example is Rabbi Leo Franklin, a former neighbor of Ford’s. Ford sent Rabbi Franklin a new Model T every year. In 1920, the rabbi stopped accepting the gift, and Ford was allegedly baffled by this rebuff. After all, the *Dearborn Independent* had consistently maintained that “good Jews” had nothing to worry about. *Hmm*.

The *Independent*’s anti-Jewish attacks also spawned numerous lawsuits. The first was in 1921 by a playwright named Morris Gest, who sued for 5 million dollars after Ford’s paper had implied that Gest (who is Jewish) wrote “lewd” plays.

The second was Herman Bernstein, a journalist (who also happens to be Jewish) who had traveled with Ford aboard the Oscar II Peace Ship back in 1915. Ford alleged that Bernstein had confirmed to him details behind the global Jewish conspiracy. Bernstein wasn’t having it.

Nevertheless, neither of those lawsuits came to fruition. But, suddenly in 1922, the *Independent* paused its anti-Jewish hate campaign.

No one knows for sure why this happened, but high-profile figures at the time were likely gearing up to take on Ford and the *Independent*. Fearing bad publicity, Ford toned down his anti-Semitism, but this interlude was only temporary.

## **Ford and His Pal Hitler**

By 1924, Henry Ford’s four-volume book series *The International Jew* had sold over 200,000 copies, been translated into 13 languages, and was being distributed on three continents. The book even got the attention of the most infamous anti-Semite in history: Adolf Hitler.

At that point, Hitler was 35 years old and only just embarking on his political career. He was still nine years away from becoming chancellor of Germany and leader of the murderous Third Reich.

The young, aspiring politician Hitler even gave his enthusiastic support of Ford in 1923 upon learning that Ford might run for president of the United States when he said, “I wish I could send some of my shock troops to Chicago and other big American cities to help in the elections...We look to Heinrich Ford as the leader of the growing Fascist movement in America...We have just had his anti-Jewish articles translated and published. The book is being circulated in [the] millions throughout Germany.”

Hitler was rumored to keep copies of Ford’s book on a table in the office of the National Socialist German Workers Party building in Munich. He even kept a photo of the automaker behind his desk.

To Adolf Hitler, a famous American industrialist like Henry Ford holding the same anti-Semitic views confirmed this international Jewish conspiracy. Hitler deeply respected Ford—he used Ford’s assembly line idea in Germany to produce the Volkswagen; Germany’s version of the Model T. Henry Ford is also the only American mentioned in Hitler’s 1925 memoir *Mein Kampf*.

### **Return to *The International Jew***

Before the end of that same year, Ford and the *Dearborn Independent* were back at it again, this time attacking a Jewish Chicago lawyer named Aaron Sapiro, who was organizing farm cooperatives across the United States. Maintaining nostalgic views of independent farming of the late 19th century, Ford disapproved of cooperatives, seeing them as another ploy by Jewish socialists to increase the cost of farm products.

Per Ford’s *Independent*, “A band of Jew-bankers, lawyers, money lenders, and agencies, fruit-packers, professional office managers and book-keeping experts is on the back of the American farmer.” The paper attacked Sapiro for being a cheat and a liar. So, Sapiro sued for libel, seeking \$1 million in damages. But, unlike the libel suits brought against Ford before, this one would go to trial.

Sapiro made a point of suing Ford himself rather than the *Independent*, thereby placing responsibility for the newspaper's anti-Semitic claims squarely on Ford and his personal views. In response, Ford's lawyers had William Cameron, head writer for the *Dearborn Independent* and author/ghostwriter of *The International Jew*, testify that he was solely responsible for the content of the newspaper, claiming Ford did not know of the articles before publication, nor did he ever read the paper. Sapiro's lawyers countered by calling James M. Miller, an employee of the Dearborn Publishing Company, to testify that he and Ford had a conversation during which Ford said he wanted to expose Sapiro as a cheat.

Despite Ford's best efforts to avoid another embarrassing cross-examination like the one back in 1918 during the *Chicago Tribune* libel suit, he was subpoenaed to testify. But, the night before his scheduled appearance, Ford reported he was in a serious (get this) car accident.

He was taken to (get this, again) Henry Ford Hospital and kept out of public view—doctor's orders.

Things get even more suspicious after that. Sapiro's lawyers asked the judge to send an impartial doctor to examine Ford. Ford's lawyers responded with an onslaught of affidavits alleging juror misconduct and juror tampering by Sapiro's team. They claimed a juror named Cora Hoffman had accepted a bribe in the form of a "mysterious package." Hoffman responded by denying these claims to a reporter, which resulted in the judge declaring a mistrial. Ford's lawyers swiftly brokered a settlement with Sapiro, which included the cost of legal fees, the establishment of a scholarship fund for an unnamed underprivileged child, a full printed retraction of *The International Jew* in the *Dearborn Independent*, the issuance of a public apology, and the halting of all distribution of Ford's anti-Semitic book series.

Ford then worked with Louis Marshall, President of the American Jewish Committee, to prepare a public apology that would be published in the *Dearborn Independent* and beyond.

## **Henry Ford's Apology**

The following is the apology published as Henry Ford's own words that bore his signature:

*For some time past I have given consideration to the series of articles concerning Jews which since 1920 have appeared in The Dearborn Independent. Some of them have been reprinted in pamphlet form under the title "The International Jew." Although both publications are my property, it goes without saying that in the multitude of my activities it has been impossible for me to devote personal attention to their management or to keep informed as to their contents. It has therefore inevitably followed that the conduct and policies of these publications had to be delegated to men whom I placed in charge of them and upon whom I relied implicitly.*

*To my great regret I have learned that Jews generally, and particularly those of this country, not only resent these publications as promoting anti-Semitism, but regard me as their enemy. Trusted friends with whom I have conferred recently have assured me in all sincerity that in their opinion the character of the charges and insinuations made against the Jews, both individually and collectively, contained in many of the articles which have been circulated periodically in The Dearborn Independent and have been reprinted in the pamphlets mentioned, justifies the righteous indignation entertained by Jews everywhere toward me because of the mental anguish occasioned by the unprovoked reflections made upon them.*

*This has led me to direct my personal attention to this subject, in order to ascertain the exact nature of these articles. As a result of this survey I confess that I am deeply mortified that this journal, which is intended to be constructive and non-destructive, has been the medium for resurrecting exploded fictions, for giving currency to the so-called Protocols of the Wise Men of Zion, which have been demonstrated, as I learn, to be gross forgeries, and for contending that the Jews have been engaged in a conspiracy to control the capital and the industries of the world, besides laying at their door many offenses against decency, public order and good morals.*

*Had I appreciated even the general nature, to say nothing of the details of these utterances, I would have forbidden their circulation without a moment's hesitation, because I am fully aware of the virtues of the Jewish people as a whole, of what they and their ancestors have done for civilization and for mankind and toward the development of commerce and industry, of their sobriety and diligence, their*

*benevolence and their unselfish interest in the public welfare.*

*Of course, there are black sheep in every flock as there are among men of all races, creeds and nationalities who are at times evildoers. It is wrong, however, to judge a people by a few individuals, and I therefore join in condemning unreservedly all wholesale denunciations and attacks.*

*It is needless to add that the pamphlets which have been distributed throughout the country and in foreign lands will be withdrawn from circulation, that in every way possible I will make it known that they have my unqualified disapproval, and that henceforth The Dearborn Independent will be conducted under such auspices that articles reflecting upon the Jews will never again appear in its columns.*

*Henry Ford*

*Dearborn, Michigan*

*June 30, 1927*

In other words, Henry Ford claimed he had no idea what was being published in his newspaper...for seven years. If you believe that, I have an Edsel to sell you.

For obvious reasons, people at the time also doubted the sincerity and truthfulness of Ford's apology. As we already know, he was almost illiterate, so he certainly didn't write it himself. People, rightfully so, were also angry with Louis Marshall for letting Ford off the hook so easily, and no one actually believed Ford didn't know what his underlings were doing.

## **Later Years**

Ford's later actions would all but prove his apology was just an attempt to save face and get out of a messy legal battle.

In 1938, just before the start of WW2, for his 75th birthday, Henry Ford (the great American "pacifist" who did nothing to scream from the rooftops about the atrocities to come) accepted the Grand Cross of the Supreme Order of the German Eagle as a gift from Adolf Hitler himself. In response to outrage over his receipt of this award, Ford later said:

“Acceptance of a medal from the German people does not, as some people seem to think, involve any sympathy on my part with Nazism. Those who have known me for many years realize that anything that breeds hate is repulsive to me.”

Ford *did* shut down the *Dearborn Independent* for good by the end of 1927, but he did very little to halt the distribution of *The International Jew* in Europe.

It was widely circulated throughout Germany in the 1930s and had a significant impact on young Nazis in the Hitler Youth. Nazi War criminal Baldur von Schirach also testified during the Nuremberg Trials after WW2 that *The International Jew* inspired him to hate and kill Jews.

Historian Leo Rubuffo wrote in his 1980 piece on *The International Jew*, Ford informed the *Manchester Guardian* in 1940 that “international Jewish bankers” had caused WW2. At roughly the same time, Ford told American nativist Gerald L.K. Smith that he had allowed an associate to forge his signature on his public apology, that he hoped someday to reissue *The International Jew*, and Ford urged Smith to do so if he could not live long enough to do it himself.

These are not the actions of an apologetic or remorseful man.

According to historian Carol Gelderman, when Ford saw footage of the liberation of the Majdanek concentration camp in 1945, he was horrified; perhaps then he finally realized his anti-Semitic tropes might have been connected to or helped cause those atrocities. Too little, too late. Henry Ford died two years later.

In the decades after his death, Ford Motor Company tried to repair the damage their founder had caused. Ford’s grandson, Henry Ford II, took over the company in the early 1940s and began supporting Jewish charities and businesses after WW2 ended. The Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith awarded Ford Motor Company their American Heritage Award in 1980, signaling to the world the relationship between Ford’s company and the Jewish people had improved. In 1997, Ford Motor Company funded a nationally televised commercial-free broadcast of Steven Spielberg’s “Schindler’s List.”

And, finally, in 2019, Ford opened a research center in Tel Aviv, Israel to develop self-driving cars, a move that would ensure collaboration between Ford and the Jewish people for many years to come.

Happy ending, right?

Let's go back to 2018, when Dearborn Mayor John B. O'Reilly pulled the Fall issue of the *Dearborn Historian* because of journalist Bill McGraw's exposé cover story on Henry Ford's anti-Semitism. Mayor O'Reilly was quoted as saying the article was "a distraction that lacked a compelling reason directly linked to events in Dearborn today."

But, that's not true. Henry Ford's legacy and his writings in *The International Jew* continue to live on today in white supremacist circles and among neo-Nazis.

McGraw provided two pertinent examples of Ford's influence online in his 2018 article:

"On Stormfront, a toxic 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 in 2020:

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

Former President Donald Trump even praised Ford for his "good bloodlines" during a visit to a Ford motor plant in Ypsilanti, Michigan in 2020.

Because of Henry Ford's decision not to copyright *The International Jew*, anyone can now reprint and distribute it. Sadly, you can currently buy digital copies on Amazon and several variations are available for purchase in print at Walmart.com. The reviews, as of today, have been wiped clean. But, again, Bill McGraw plucked a choice review from Amazon back in 2018:

"[*The International Jew*] 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."

What is true is that even when people or companies take steps to make amends for past wrongs, lasting damage often remains and festers for generations. While it's imperative to continue to hold those who've harmed society accountable, and to atone for our own past mistakes, it's also critical that we work to prevent racist policies and practices from taking hold in the first place.

## Source Notes

- <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/henryford-antisemitism/> - American Experience interview with Hasia Dina
  - Notes from the Intro
    - 1918 - Henry Ford purchased his hometown newspaper, The Dearborn Independent.
    - Once firmly established in his new role as a newspaper owner, Ford published a series of articles beginning in mid-1919 that expounded on a Jewish conspiracy infecting America.
    - He published these anti-Semitic articles in 91 issues, eventually publishing the series in a 4-part book series called *The International Jew*.
  - Notes from the Interview
    - The social climate in the US for Jews by the 1870s: Jews were seen as a social group with substandard moral and cognitive abilities. People believed they were Anti-Christian, Anti-Jesus, and scoundrels in general.
      - “The Jews have a certain phenotype: the Jew has a hook nose, the Jew is loud, the Jew talks with his hands.”
    - Antisemitism was everywhere, even in small towns like the one Henry Ford grew up in. Jews were synonymous with big banks- an enemy to the small farmer and average American just trying to get by.
      - Dina surmises that Ford would have come in contact with anti-Semitic views and comments in everyday life as a young farm boy in rural Michigan.
    - In his pieces for the *Dearborn Independent*, Ford placed blame for everything from strikes to financial scandals.
      - “So ‘the Jew’ in a way became the symbol of a world that was being manipulated and controlled.”
    - Ford published the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in his newspaper as a piece of “news.”
      - This was a Russian forgery that claimed a small group of Jews planned out everything that happened in the world, from war to famine to bankruptcy.
    - Ford distributed his newspapers at his dealerships, placing the pages in his cars so people would drive off the lot with his latest issue of The Dearborn Independent.
    - Ford’s name held weight and credibility, so his opinions were viewed as valid and newsworthy. His articles were picked up by other newspapers and spread throughout the country.
      - There was talk of Ford running for president in 1920.

- Jewish communities were frightened by Ford's comments because of his reach and influence.
  - Jewish publications were writing about his comments and informing their readership of the danger.
  - The implications of the opinions in *The Dearborn Independent* are great: Dina describes psychic damage to the Jewish community, who begin to question their standing and acceptance as Americans.
- 1938 - The Nazi regime awards the Grand Cross of the German Eagle to Ford.
  - This award signifies Hitler's reverence for Ford in a number of ways:
    - His invention of the assembly line, which Germany used to manufacture the Volkswagen.
    - His anti-Semitic views, which endear Hitler to believe that America could be infiltrated by Nazism
- It's not possible to quantify how much damage Ford did to the Jewish community in America, but his influence is undeniable, and he validated anti-Semitic rhetoric on a national scale.



[https://www.jstor.org/stable/29760538?read-now=1&refreqid=excelsior%3Ab8e5ce50aa37535deb2b2c3c41d651d1&seq=1#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/29760538?read-now=1&refreqid=excelsior%3Ab8e5ce50aa37535deb2b2c3c41d651d1&seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents) - "Pride and Prejudice: The Dark Side of Henry Ford," by Robert Aitken and Marilyn Aitken (*Litigation*, Fall 2005)

- Henry Ford was anti-war. He sent a "Peace Ship" to Europe to try to end WW1 in 1915. When President Wilson called up the National Guard to control border tensions with Mexico in 1916, the *Chicago Tribune* interviewed a "Ford aide" about what the anti-war mogul thought. The aide reported that if the employees "reported for duty they would lose their jobs and not receive Ford's help." The reporter published the story called *Flivver Patriotism* with the headline "Ford is an Anarchist."
  - Ford sued, but their case was overly broad and cited the whole article as libelous, which it was not. He technically won, but the judge only ordered the *Tribune* to pay 6 cents. Ford was exposed as an "Ignorant idealist," which deeply wounded his pride.
  - Attorneys for the *Tribune* cross-examined Henry Ford and attempted to prove he was an ignorant idealist by giving him a history quiz on the stand, which he failed miserably. The lawyers also exposed Ford's seeming illiteracy when Ford refused to read something when asked for the court, saying first he forgot his glasses, then that he had had hay fever as a child and would only bungle the text.
- After this public humiliation, Henry Ford bought a newspaper of his own in 1919: the *Dearborn Independent*.

- After a year of lackluster reviews of the paper's content and poor circulation, "in a conference, staff member Joseph O'Neill suggested that the newspaper "find an evil to attack, go after it and stay after it... name names and tell actual facts," concluding, "Let's have some sensationalism."
- "Ford found it easy to believe that "an international Jewish banking power" had started WW1 and kept it going. He felt "good" Jews would be happy about the exposé of the "International" types." Ford's source? He stated a journalist named Herman Bernstein filled him in after riding aboard Ford's "Peace Ship," but Bernstein denied this and sued Ford for defamation at a later time.
  - Side note: Ford made a bid for the US senate in 1918 and lost.
- "The *Independent's* Circulation leaped from 70,000 in 1920 to 900,000 in 1926." People were hungry for this sort of anti-Semitic rhetoric. He printed 91 articles in this vein.
- The Ku Klux Klan (KKK) used reprints. Ford assigned subscription quotas to his dealerships, so dealers would send papers to their mailing lists and put papers inside the new Model T.
- The Dearborn Publishing Company printed the collection of articles in a four-volume compendium titled *The International Jew*. The volume names: "The World's Foremost Problem" (1920), "Jewish Activities in the United States" (1921), "Jewish Influence on American Life" (1921), and "Aspects of Jewish Power in the United States" (1922).
- The anti-Semitic articles in the *Independent* stopped inexplicably in 1922.
- Quote: "In 1924, an enthusiastic young German politician named Adolf Hitler was jubilant, telling a *Chicago Tribune* reporter: "I wish I could send some of my shock troops to Chicago and other big American cities to help in the elections... We look to Heinrich Ford as the leader of the growing Fascist movement in America... We have just had his anti-Jewish articles translated and published. The book is being circulated in millions throughout Germany." This was apparently cited from Baldwin, supra; Brinkley, supra; F.R. Bryan, *Beyond the Model T: The Other Ventures of Henry Ford* (1997)
- 1924 - The *Independent* was back at it again, this time attacking a Chicago lawyer named Aaron Sapiro who was organizing farm cooperatives all over the United States. Ford disapproved, seeing this as only a ploy to increase the cost of farm products. The *Independent* attacked Sapiro for being a cheat and a liar. Sapiro sued. Per the *Independent*, "A band of Jew-bankers, lawyers, money lenders, and agencies, fruit-packers, professional office managers and book-keeping experts is on the back of the American farmer."

- Sapiro sued for libel. Ford's editor W. J. Cameron testified on his behalf and said that he (Cameron) was solely responsible for the content of the newspaper, that Ford had no prior knowledge of the articles in question, nor read the paper as far as he knew.
- Dearborn Publishing Co. employee James M. Miller testified that Ford himself had said to him that he wanted to expose Sapiro.
- Ford was subpoenaed but had a mysterious car accident the night before he was scheduled to testify. He kept himself locked safely away at Henry Ford Hospital and avoided having to testify.
- What happened next looks mighty suspicious. Sapiro's lawyer asked the judge to send an impartial doctor to examine Ford, and Ford's legal team responded with an onslaught of affidavits leveling juror misconduct and jury tampering at Sapiro. They alleged that one juror named Cora Hoffman had accepted a "suspicious package" (implied bribe). The judge declared a mistrial, and Ford negotiated a settlement with Sapiro. This included \$140,000, the establishment of a scholarship fund, and an official retraction and apology from Ford to be issued publicly. In July 1927, Ford's retraction and apology was published in the Independent and by newspaper mogul Arthur Brisbane.
- Ford received the Grand Cross of the German Eagle from Hitler on July 30, 1938.
- During WW2, Ford opened a factory at Willow Run and employed 60,000 workers to "produce B-24's, plane engines, jeeps, trucks, tank engines, and tank destroyers."
- According to historical Carol Gelderman, when Ford saw footage of the liberation of the Majdanek concentration camp in 1945, he was horrified; he realized his articles might have been connected to or caused those atrocities. He died 2 years later.
- Edsel Ford, Henry's only son, disagreed with his father. "He vehemently opposed the articles and gave generously to Jewish causes." Edsel's son Henry II took great care to right the wrongs of and eventually succeeded in repairing the Ford Motor Company's relationship with the Jewish community. "The Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith gave Ford its American Heritage Award in 1980."



[https://www.jstor.org/stable/23601090?read-now=1&refreqid=excelsior%3Aa6834dbbcf3f18218dc9a28af129e00a&seq=1#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/23601090?read-now=1&refreqid=excelsior%3Aa6834dbbcf3f18218dc9a28af129e00a&seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents) "Statement by Henry Ford" (*The American Jewish Year Book*, September 27, 1927-September 14, 1928)

- This source contains the full apology/public statement issued by Henry Ford as a part of his settlement deal with Aaron Sapiro.
- "An Explanatory Statement by Mr. Louis Marshall, President of the American Jewish Committee, and His Reply to Mr. Ford."

■ Jewish lawyer/mediator/community leader Louis Marshall wrote about (and published) his receiving a sworn apology from Henry Ford for the statements published in the *Dearborn Independent* and the books *The International Jew*.

- Ford claimed he didn't pay enough attention to his dealings at the Dearborn Independent, and that it was underlings who took it upon themselves to publish these hateful words...
- He went on to say he had amended the policies of the paper, and that no more articles of that nature would be published. He also attested that any and all copies of *The International Jew* would be pulled from circulation.
- Marshall published his reply: he expressed the Jewish community's dismay at having once thought Ford a kindly man only to see such heinous attacks appear on the pages of his newspaper. Marshall accepted Ford's apology and offered forgiveness.



<https://www.cnn.com/2019/02/04/mayors-bid-to-censor-article-on-henry-fords-anti-semitism-goes-viral.html> - "Mayor's attempt to censor local article about Henry Ford's anti-Semitism draws national attention," by Paul A. Eisenstein

- After the publication of a story on Henry Ford's anti-Semitism, Dearborn Mayor John B. O'Reilly ordered all copies of the Autumn 2018 issue of the *Dearborn Historian* confiscated and fired the editor and writer of the piece, Bill McGraw.
  - O'Reilly stated he didn't think the piece was productive or that it was what their city needed.
- Ford Motor Company's response to the controversy: "Ford Motor Company has a long and rich history as a company that supports equality and fairness to all people, and condemns any form of discrimination. Ford Motor Company's position on any form of discrimination is well documented and the company remains committed to the advancement of understanding and goodwill among all races, religions, and cultures."



<https://www.bridgemi.com/michigan-government/henry-ford-and-jews-story-dearborn-didnt-want-told> - Henry Ford and the Jews, The Story Dearborn Didn't Want Told, by Bill McGraw

- Quote from the article: "Two examples 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.'

- Recruiters for extremist groups use Henry Ford as a hook to impress and inspire new recruits.
- Ford bought *Dearborn Independent* for the equivalent of \$18,000 in today's money in 1919.
  - Ford hired his longtime personal aide Ernest Liebold as *Dearborn Independent's* General Manager.
  - Liebold was a steadfast anti-Semite who actually hired investigators to snoop around Jewish community buildings and gatherings to pilfer information for the Independent's anti-Jewish campaigns. They were known as Ford's "agents."
- Ford spent millions distributing the *Dearborn Independent*, but sales/circulation were unimpressive the first year. Needing a hook, Ford and Liebold decided to pit the paper against what they saw as a great evil: The Jew.
  - The paper's motto: "Chronicler of the Neglected Truth."
- May 22, 1920- Ford released his first anti-Jew article in the *Dearborn Independent*: "The International Jew: The World's Problem"
  - "There is apparently in the world today a central financial force which is playing a vast and closely organized game with the world for its table and universal control for its stakes," the article said.
  - "There is no other racial or national type which puts forth this kind of person," the Independent said in June 1920. "It is not merely that there are a few Jews among international financial controllers – it is that these world controllers are exclusively Jews."
  - The paper published *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* as a piece of "news."
- This new angle and subsequent 91 issues did wonders for the paper's popularity. At its most popular, the Dearborn Independent achieved a circulation of over 900,000.
- The subsequent book series *The International Jew*. The books were translated into 12 languages and distributed on 3 continents, selling 200,000 copies in its first few years.
- Ford's editor Edwin Pipp quit over this new angle. He was a liberal Catholic man who thought this anti-Semitic position was evil
  - Pip started his own paper, *Pipp's Weekly*, that was often critical of Ford.
- Despite its popularity, there was a major backlash against the paper:
  - Quote from the article: "As the Independent launched its anti-Semitic campaign and sent the paper, unsolicited, to libraries and schools across the nation, protests broke out. Some cities attempted to ban the paper, but such moves raised First Amendment issues. Jews

organized Ford Motor boycotts. Former President William Howard Taft, a future U.S. Supreme Court chief justice, slammed Ford in a speech. Later, he joined outgoing President Woodrow Wilson and dozens of other VIPs in signing a petition that denounced the *Independent*.”

- Louis Marshall sent Ford a notice that the *Independent*’s position “constituted libel upon an entire people.” The paper responded by comparing Jews with Bolsheviks.

- One of Ford’s friends was actually a Rabbi: Leo Franklin. A former neighbor of Ford’s, the Rabbi received a new Model T every year, a gift from the automaker. He stopped accepting the gift in 1920 after Ford’s paper adopted its anti-Semitic stance.

- The series of hateful articles stopped in December 1922 but then resumed in 1924 with an attack on a man named Aaron Sapiro who was a Jewish activist from California. Sapiro sued Ford for libel, leveling a \$1 million lawsuit against Ford.

- The suit went to trial in 1927, but Ford settled with Sapiro out of court and issued a public apology stating he didn’t know about the articles in advance...doubtful.

- Publicly, Ford fired Liebold and his editor but kept them on his payroll for many years.

- The *Dearborn Independent* folded in December 1927.

- By the early 1930s copies of *The International Jew* were circulating in Nazi Germany. It became a favorite of Adolf Hitler and a major influence on the Hitler Youth

- Quote from the article: “Books wound up on a table in the office of Hitler’s National Socialist German Workers Party in Munich.”

- “Hitler’s ravings and public speeches against Jews frequently were based on Ford’s anti-Semitic literature.” Per David Lewis, a Ford expert.

- Baldur von Schirach testified at the Nuremberg trials that *The International Jew* inspired him to become an anti-Semite.

- Henry Ford is the only American in Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*. “After asserting Jews were increasingly exerting control over American labor, Hitler wrote, “one great man, Ford, to their exasperation, still holds out independently.”

- Ford confirmed to Hitler that there was a financial world takeover being executed by Jews to the detriment of the rest of the human race.

- For his 75th birthday, Henry Ford accepted the Grand Cross of the Supreme Order of the German Eagle gifted to him by Hitler. This was given to him at his Dearborn offices by the German vice-consul. Ford said of his decision to accept the award:

- “Acceptance of a medal from the German people does not, as some people seem to think, involve any sympathy on my part

with Nazism,” Ford said. “Those who have known me for many years realize that anything that breeds hate is repulsive to me.”

- The Ford Motor Company took steps to repent for the actions of its founder. Ford’s son took over the company and began supporting Jewish charities and businesses. Later, when Israel was established, Ford was one of the few companies who didn’t subscribe to the embargo, and in turn, supported the formation. In 1997, Ford funded a commercial-free nationally televised showing of Steven Spielberg’s “Schindler’s List.”

➤ <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1997-06-08-9706300080-story.html>

“The Libel Case with A 6-Cent Verdict,”

- Details Ford’s libel suit against *Chicago Tribune*.

➤ <https://papershake.blogspot.com/2011/07/henry-ford-libel-lawsuit-against.html> -

Transcripts of the newspaper reports on the trial. These include the reasoning behind the 6-cent verdict; the judge said, “money damages were not sought by Mr. Ford.” It looks like Ford brought the case against the Tribune to clear his name. He sued for 1 million dollars to attract press attention.

➤

[https://www.jstor.org/stable/23881872?read-now=1&seq=1#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/23881872?read-now=1&seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents) –

“Henry Ford and ‘The International Jew,’” by Leo P. Ribuffo (*American Jewish History*, June 1980)

- Study of anti-Semitism through a focus on *The International Jew*.

- “More than any other literary source, these articles spread the notion that Jews menaced the United States.”

- Ford established the “Five-Dollar Day,” an exceptionally high salary for the day. This made him a favorite among workers. He developed a reputation as an “Industrialist Statesman,”

- Oscar II - Ford’s Peace Ship he sent to Europe with neutral delegates to engage in peace talks to end WW1.

- 1918 - “Drafted by President Wilson, [Ford] accepted the Democratic nomination for senator from Michigan.”

- None of the above ventures succeeded- Inflation eroded the five-dollar day leading to resentment from employees whose finances became increasingly strained. Ford abandoned the Oscar II venture shortly after the ship landed in Norway. He lost the senate race.

- In response to Ford’s openly anti-Mexican intervention stance, the *Chicago Tribune* named him “an ignorant idealist” in print. After a rough couple of years, Ford’s pride couldn’t take it and he sued.

- Ernest G Liebold - Ford’s personal secretary since 1911. He held power of attorney for Ford after 1918.

- *The Dearborn International* didn’t print a single anti-Semitic article in its first 16 months with Ford at the helm.

- In June 1920, they started.

- Russian emigres brought *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* to Dearborn (either that, or Ford's "agents" bought it off a Russian judge in France for 7000 francs)
- July 24, 1920- *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* became a core undercurrent for all of the *Independent's* anti-Semitic articles- the international conspiracy was a constant theme from then on.
- *The Protocols* blamed Jews for everything from spawning the French Revolution, to working with the treacherous Benedict Arnold during the American Revolution, to the 1913 Federal Reserve Act that boosted the "Banking Aristocracy," to fixing the 1919 World Series. Per the Protocols, Jews controlled everything - everything was their fault. They were the puppet masters of the universe.
- Quote "The Federal Council of Churches condemned the articles in December 1920. A month later, without specifically mentioning Ford, 119 prominent Christians, including William Howard Taft, Woodrow Wilson, and William Cardinal O'Connell, signed "The Perils of Racial Prejudice," a statement asking gentiles to halt the "vicious propaganda" against Jews. Officials in several cities considered censoring the *Independent* or removed it from public libraries."
- January 1921, Morris Gest sued Ford for \$5 million in damages "because the *Independent* accused him of producing lewd plays.
- The Dearborn *Independent* maintained that "the good Jew" had nothing to fear.
- Ford ordered his editor, Cameron, to discontinue publication of *The International Jew* in January 1922. There could be several reasons for this: 1. Ford realized that it was hurting his automobile sales. 2. It could be the reason he lost his bid for the presidential nomination. 3. Big names in the film and newspaper industry were gearing up for a counterattack against him. 4. President Harding sent someone to Dearborn in 1921 to convince Ford to shut it down. No one knows for sure why Ford discontinued the *Independent*
- 1923 - Herman Bernstein, journalist aboard the *Oscar II*, filed a complaint against Ford for saying he had confirmed the "international Jewish conspiracy."
- 1924 - The *Independent* goes after Aaron Sapiro, creator of the National Council of Farmers Cooperative Marketing Association- they represented 700,000 farmers nationwide.
- Quote p465: "In January 1925, therefore, Sapiro sent a thirty-one-page letter to Ford and his associates, demanding a retraction of "Jewish Exploitation." When the *Independent* refused to comply, he sued Ford and the Dearborn Publishing Company for \$1 million in order to vindicate 'myself and my race.'"
- After a mistrial, Ford offered to apologize, issue a retraction, and halt distribution of *The International Jew*. However, his actions later show a less than repentant Ford:
  - Quote p469 "Ford informed the *Manchester Guardian* in 1940 that "international Jewish bankers" caused WW2. At roughly the same time,

he told nativist Gerald L.K. Smith that he had allowed Bennett to forge his signature on the retraction, hoped someday to reissue "*The International Jew*" and urged Smith to do so if he could not."

### Context Sources:

- [44:38 Henry Ford: Creator of First American Car | Full Documentary ...YouTube : Biography - Sep 27, 2020](#) - Biography Documentary
- <https://www.newspapers.com/image/53814404/?terms=Henry%20Ford%20peace&match=1> - Quote on Ford's pacifism.
- [http://www.dalnet.lib.mi.us/henryford/docs/DearbornIndependentAaronSapiroVHenryFordLawsuitCollection\\_Accession48.pdf](http://www.dalnet.lib.mi.us/henryford/docs/DearbornIndependentAaronSapiroVHenryFordLawsuitCollection_Accession48.pdf) - Overview of the *Sapiro v. Ford* libel case filed in 1924. The case went to trial in 1927 and ultimately led to Ford shutting down the *Dearborn Independent* and issuing a retraction of *The International Jew* as well as a public apology.