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A Note on Antisemitism in Admissions at Dartmouth

by Tamar Buchsbaum

The following report, which compares students' attitudes toward Jews in the early 1900s at Dartmouth (where 4 per cent of students were Jewish)¹ and Harvard (where 20 per cent of students were Jewish)² illustrates the racial prejudice and social discrimination seemingly founded in upper-class values and elitist notions.

. . . Jews here . . . have always mixed freely with the other students, never flocking together as they used to do at Harvard. They used to be elected to the various fraternities, in the good old days when a majority of our students were country boys, and didn't know a Jew when they saw him. . . . It is different now that most of our boys come from the city. They bring with them a race prejudice, and with it a tendency to exclude from the fraternities all the Jews whom they can recognize as such, but they still are unable to recognize a good many. Some fraternities have an "Aryan" clause, to keep out the Jews. . . . One such fraternity has this year elected a Jew. So you see, the prejudice exists here in theory, but our students haven't been on Fifth Avenue enough to know when to apply it. Outside of the fraternities, Jews and Christians mix freely, as they have always done. . . . They blend into the mass. The general impression is that there are only half a dozen Jews in (the) college. . . . The ability to recognize a Jew is getting to be a mark of social superiority. It shows at least that you have been outside of Hanover.³

Justification of quotas was based on more than elitist grounds and antisemitism. The colleges did not want to become Jewish institutions, as they would become if admission were based purely on individual achievement. This use of the quota system excluded qualified Jewish applicants and limited Jewish enrollment.

As more Jews rose in economic and social status and found their way into mainstream America, Jewish enrollment significantly increased. This resulted in many colleges developing their informal but determined systems of bias into explicit statements of policy. A dean at New York University, explaining a sudden drop in the number of Jewish students in 1922, remarked that "whenever the student body is found to contain elements from any source in such proportions as to threaten our capacity for assimilating them, we . . . restore the balance."⁴ Columbia University, finding that its Jewish enrollment in 1920 had risen to 40 per cent, took steps to cut it to 22 per cent within two years.⁵ On 1 June 1922, Harvard issued an announcement stating that because of "the great increase in the number of students at Harvard College . . . it is natural . . . there should be talk about the proportion of Jews at the college."⁶ A Jewish student at Harvard in the 1920s wrote:

. . . we learned that it was *numbers* that mattered; bad or good, *too many* Jews were not liked. . . . It was the natural thing for these kindly mannered men (the admissions committee), who bore not a trace of malice, to admit that a few good Jews were quite delightful at the club, or the hotel — but they must "not for their own sake" accumulate, even though

the accumulation be induced by the worthy feeling that Harvard was the best place in the world.⁷

Admissions quotas at Dartmouth became a public issue when the Selective Process was initiated by President Hopkins in 1921. Previously the surplus of applications for admission over the number of college vacancies had not warranted a systemized scheme for admissions. In 1921, however, the surplus was considerable, and the Selective Process was adopted.⁸ The Selective Process was based on the principle of “proportionate selection” in admissions: selecting the most broadly representative student body based on geographic, economic and racial background. Explicitly stated by President Hopkins, “. . . the interchange of ideas among youthful minds is most successful when the College most nearly represents the population of the nation in general in its own population.”⁹

The quota system was continued at Dartmouth, as well as at most colleges and universities throughout America. One Jewish lawyer from New York recalls his

. . . unhappy memories of the ordeal of seeking admission to colleges and graduate schools in America in the 20's and 30's. The “quotas” and “geographical distribution” techniques for discrimination were rampant – and it hurt deeply for Jewish . . . youngsters to know they were rejected while applicants with lower grades and poorer scores were accepted.¹⁰

Evidence for the fact that Dartmouth based its admissions process on religious background rather than solely on individual achievement and scholastic accomplishment can be found in President Hopkins' 1934 letter to an alumnus who had recommended two Jewish applicants.

We haven't any barriers against the admission of Jews, and as a matter of fact, I should not like to see the time come when we were not including Jews in our undergraduate body in reasonable proportion. It is true, however, that in recent years the applications have increased so overwhelmingly from boys of Jewish blood that we acknowledgedly take a smaller proportion of the Jewish applicants than of the Gentiles. . . . It is a problem full of difficulties, as far as being certain of our fairness is concerned, but after all it would be quixotic to allow ourselves to be overrun racially as it would be unfair to have a definite exclusion. Compromises are never wholly satisfactory, but we are doing the best we can.¹¹

It was not until 1945, however, that the issue of antisemitism in Dartmouth admissions came to a head. On 10 February 1945, President Hopkins was urged by the Independent Citizens Committee of Arts, Sciences and Professions to protest against a report submitted by the American Dental Association that requested quotas on admissions of Jewish students. President Hopkins sent the following telegram in reply:

Understand complexity of problem and am sympathetic with purposes you have in mind. Cannot join with you, however, . . . for I believe nothing would so increase intolerance and focus racial and religious prejudice as to allow any racial group to gain virtual monopoly of educational advantages offered by any institution of higher education.¹²

President Hopkins further clarified his reasoning behind Dartmouth's quota system to limit Jewish enrollment in a letter to Herman Shumlin, an affiliate of the Independent Citizens Committee of Arts, Sciences and Professions. Mr. Shumlin turned the correspondence over to the *New York Post*, which featured the story in its 7 August issue. In his letter to Mr. Shumlin, President Hopkins wrote: “I should not be willing to see the proportion of the Jews in the College so greatly increased as to arouse widespread resentment and develop widespread prejudice in our own family.”¹³

President Hopkins went on to explain how the quota on Jewish students at Dart-

mouth had been established as the result of his own observations in Germany after World War I and as the result of a book by Stephen Roberts, entitled *The House that Hitler Built*. Hopkins wrote:

I was in Europe almost immediately after the last war, and practically all with whom I talked were discussing the danger of the racial antagonisms which had been so accentuated in Germany by the soldiers on their finding all of their institutions and all of their professions dominated by a race which numbered only one percent of the population.

. . . Professor Roberts leaves nothing to be desired in his own hatred and fear of race prejudice, but nevertheless, he feels that the ill-advised concentration of Jews in the cities of Germany and their utilization of the war to take over all of the important posts in the cities created the discontent which gave Hitler a nucleus around which to build his structure of hatred and of evil. There are some very striking analogies to that situation in the situation of the Jews in the United States at the present time. Roberts says: ". . . While the Jews claimed that this predominance was due to their natural ability, the Aryans attributed it mostly to illicit Jewish combinations and influence."¹⁴

Then President Hopkins quoted Roberts to prove that 50.2 per cent of the lawyers and 48 per cent of the physicians in Berlin were Jews.¹⁵ German institutions, however, were not dominated by Jews in either 1919 or 1933. Roberts got these figures from an article by Alfred Rosenberg in the *Voelkischer Beobachter* for 20 August 1933. President Hopkins quoted the figures from Nazi sources to advance Nazi ideas. Hopkins said—as both Hitler and Roberts did—that antisemitism is the fault of the Jews, because they get all the best jobs.¹⁶

This letter set off heavily emotional invective against President Hopkins and Dartmouth in newspapers and magazines throughout the country. Herman Shumlin's reply was published in *Time*: ". . . I am filled with anger against you and shame. . . . It is fantastic to me that a man in your position can, at this date, make use of the very allegations which were used by Hitler and his accomplices."¹⁷

A Jewish Dartmouth alumnus was quoted in the *New York Post*:

Hopkins' statement . . . is simply a piously phrased endorsement of the Nazi racist doctrine that Jews are unlike other human beings and must therefore be treated differently. He recommends an intellectual ghetto for American Jews.¹⁸

Also New York Supreme Court Justice Meier Steinbrink, chairman of the board of the Eastern regional office of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith stated that President Hopkins was doing, ". . . a basic disservice not only to the Jews but to the concept of Democracy in the American tradition."¹⁹

President Hopkins, in his letter to Mr. Shumlin, explained that the Dartmouth quota system had been set up to prevent antisemitism. He quoted the *Ballad of Reading Gaol*, in which Oscar Wilde wrote "all men kill the things they love," to justify Dartmouth's policy. With this theme in mind, Hopkins wrote:

. . . I would not for anything forego the representation of Jewish boys that enroll year by year at Dartmouth. Some of our outstanding alumni are Jews, as are some of the foremost benefactors of the College. They are exceedingly welcome in the Dartmouth family, whether as undergraduates or as alumni, and I personally number some of my most intimate friends among them. However, I know definitely that this would all be changed overnight in Dartmouth, or in any other college, if Dartmouth were to disregard the fact that it would become an urban college, which it does not want to become, and would lose its racial tolerance, which it is desperately anxious not to lose, were we to accept unexamined the great blocks of Jewish applications which come in, for instance, from the New York high schools and other great metropolitan centers.²⁰

Dartmouth College's Board of Trustees solidly backed President Hopkins' theory that enrollment of Jewish students should be carefully controlled. The trustees, as well as other supporters of Dartmouth's quota, praised Hopkins for his "unflinching honesty"²¹ and thought it a pity that "... once again (Hopkins') candor and his unwillingness to express anything but an honest opinion landed him in trouble."²² Characteristic of this opinion was that of Dr. Giles, a trustee who stated in an interview with the *New York Post*, "I think only a representative proportion (of Jewish students) should be eligible."²³

In a telephone interview with a reporter from the *New York Post* President Hopkins admitted without equivocation that

... we cut the quotas more on our Jewish applicants than we do the basis of applications from Anglo-Saxons. ... I think if you were to let Dartmouth become predominantly Jewish, it would lose its attraction for the Jews.²⁴

When asked if the same quota system were in effect in other colleges and universities would it not constitute discrimination, President Hopkins replied, "It's discrimination, unquestionably."²⁵ When asked, too, why isn't it discrimination at Dartmouth, Hopkins answered, "Dartmouth is a Christian college, founded for the Christianization of its students."²⁶

President Hopkins claimed that the quota system at Dartmouth was not an antisemitic policy. Rather, it minimized antisemitism, first for the sake of the American people in that it prevented Jews from dominating institutions and professions, thus preventing a situation analogous to the rise of Hitler. Second, he claimed, it minimized antisemitism for the sake of the Jewish students themselves in that it kept down the Jewish enrollment at Dartmouth, thus minimizing prejudice and discrimination on campus. President Hopkins might well have claimed that he was doing a service to Americans in general as well as to Jews at Dartmouth, but his letter to Mr. Shumlin affirms that the quota system at Dartmouth was founded in classical antisemitism and racism: the beliefs that rights guaranteed to the general population constitute a special privilege when granted to Jews, and that Jews dominate institutions and professions because of their illicit associations. Who but an antisemite would state that the right to be considered as an applicant for college enrollment on the basis of merit and ability rather than race or religion becomes a "special privilege" when conferred on a Jew?²⁷

The public controversy of Dartmouth's quota died down in about a month, obscured by President Hopkins' resignation and the ending of World War II. The quota system at Dartmouth was eliminated during President Dickey's administration in the 1950s. Yet, the College still retains the principle of "proportionate selection" to some degree in striving for a broadly representative student body.²⁸

Jews at Dartmouth make up 11 per cent of total student enrollment. This is a relatively high figure considering Jews make up less than 3 per cent of the total American population. Eleven per cent, however, is a relatively low figure compared to the percentages of Jews at comparable institutions of higher learning. Dartmouth has the lowest percentage of Jewish enrollment among the Ivy League colleges. Columbia is 50 per cent Jewish, the University of Pennsylvania is 35 per cent Jewish, and the other five institutions range from 19 per cent to 25 per cent Jewish. Dartmouth is also at the bottom of a list of other highly selective rural institutions throughout the country.²⁹

Jews make up a very small percentage of the total American population. They do, however, make up quite a substantial percentage of those Americans who place a high value on intellectual accomplishment and strive to attend college. In this respect, Jews are not overrepresented at institutions of higher learning.

Dartmouth's application form asks no discriminating questions to ascertain religion. Even so, some indication of religious affiliation does come through. Rabbi Michael Paley, associate chaplain at Dartmouth, states that this is more strongly so with the Jewish applicant. A trip to Israel, Hebrew school, involvement in Jewish youth groups, knowledge of Hebrew, and Jewish surnames are all common "giveaways." In addition, the admissions officers know which high schools are predominantly Jewish.³⁰

It is interesting to note that a much smaller percentage of the Jews admitted to Dartmouth actually matriculate, as compared with the overall student body. This indicates that to the highly qualified Jewish applicant, Dartmouth does not seem to be the most attractive choice. Rabbi Paley suggests that this is because of the non-urban and rather non-intellectual (more sports and outdoors oriented) environment, lack of Judaic programs (especially Hebrew), and the lack of critical mass of Jewish students. Jewish students, as well as students of other ethnic minorities, tend to be attracted to a campus where there already is a substantial number of students of the same background.

In addition, concern for antisemitism on campus, especially on the part of the parents, discourages Jews admitted to Dartmouth from matriculating, and discourages Jews from applying in the first place. Rabbi Paley receives an average of fifty telephone calls a year from parents of prospective students who are worried about antisemitism on campus.³¹ While there is no blatant antisemitism at the college, Dartmouth has not portrayed a very favorable image to the general Jewish population: President Hopkins' quota of the 1940s; the popular perception of Dartmouth as a homogeneous and intolerant "WASP" institution; the destruction of the Hillel Sukkah several years ago (which was written up in every Jewish newspaper worldwide³²); and the negative press Dartmouth has recently received, regarding prejudice and discrimination against minority groups, all contribute to the negative perception of the college among American Jews.

The Dartmouth and the *Dartmouth Review* have recently published articles to the effect that Dartmouth's administration is making a concerted effort to portray a more favorable image of the college to Jews in order to increase the number of Jewish applicants and matriculants. Still, other than the designation of an admissions officer to serve as a liaison with the Dartmouth Jewish community and the addition of the eminent Jewish scholar, Professor Arthur Hertzberg, to the faculty, Dartmouth has done little to attract Jewish students. Rabbi Paley claims that the only efforts to recruit more Jews to come to Dartmouth have been by himself, Jewish students and the recently formed Alumni Committee on Jewish Life. Jewish alumni are working to change Dartmouth's negative image by personally contacting perspective Jewish students and encouraging accepted students to matriculate, despite the Committee of Admissions' refusal to provide a list of the Jewish applicants. The college has reluctantly agreed to the establishment of Hebrew courses, only after persistent campaigning by Jewish alumni. The Alumni Committee on Jewish Life is also campaigning for the establishment of a Jewish studies program and a foreign study program in Israel. These academic offerings would serve not only to attract Jewish students to Dartmouth, but would also provide an opportunity for Jews and non-Jews alike to deepen their knowledge of Judaism.

Jewish students have characteristically been higher achievers, and in discouraging them from attending, Dartmouth can only suffer the loss of their potential contribution to the college. In the words of Thomas Spencer, a former chair of the Committee on Admissions and Financial Aid, "Having a larger Jewish population at Dartmouth would produce an intellectually more stimulating environment."³³ Colleges should not seek to restrict the number of qualified Jewish applicants, but rather encourage them to attend. Otherwise, not only will the Jewish students suffer, but the colleges as well.

NOTES

1. Norman Hapgood, "Schools, Colleges, and Jews," *Harper's Weekly* (22 January 1916), 79.
2. Nathan C. Belth, *A Promise to Keep* (New York, 1979), p. 99.
3. Hapgood, "Schools," p. 79.
4. Belth, *Promise*, p. 96.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 106.
8. Martin Hopkins Potter, *The Question of Anti-Semitism in Admissions at Dartmouth* (Hanover, NH, 1964), p. 2.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
10. George M. Shapiro, "To the Editor of Commentary," *Commentary* (August 1983), 10.
11. Charles E. Widmayer, *Hopkins of Dartmouth* (Hanover, NH, 1977), p. 292.
12. "College Accused of Anti-Semitism," *Dartmouth Log* (10 August 1945), 1.
13. Potter, *Question of Anti-Semitism*, appendix II.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*
16. Tom O'Conner, "The Dartmouth Recipe for Suicide," *PM*. (8 August 1945), p. 20.
17. "Sense or Nonsense," *Time* (20 August 1945), 2.
18. "Leo M. Swaim, Jr., "Trustees Back Prexy Hopkins on Limiting Jews at Dartmouth," *New York Post*, 9 August 1945, p. 10.
19. "Disservice to Democracy," *New York Post*, 8 August 1945, p. 7.
20. Potter, *Question of Anti-Semitism*, appendix II.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
22. Widmayer, *Hopkins*, p. 288.
23. Swaim, "Trustees Back Prexy," p. 10.
24. Robert G. Spivak and Leo M. Swaim, Jr., "Dartmouth Limits Jews to Stop Anti-Semitism, Says its Prexy," *New York Post*, 7 August 1945, p. 5.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
26. *Ibid.*
27. O'Conner, "Dartmouth Recipe," p. 20.
28. Personal interview with Rabbi Michael Paley, associate chaplain at Dartmouth, 22 May 1986 (hereafter called Interview).
29. Ellen Glaser, "College Examines Jewish Recruitment," *The Dartmouth*, 24 October 1985, p. 1.
30. Interview.
31. Interview.
32. Interview.
33. Glaser, "College," p. 10.