

## Editorial

### French Revolution 200 Years Ago Was Mixed Blessing for Jews

By Marc H. Tanenbaum

The bicentennial of the French Revolution, climaxed by the observance of Bastille Day on July 14, was widely commemorated in France and in other parts of the world.

As we know from the torrent of stories in the popular media, there is extensive controversy among historians: Was it a blessing that resulted in the Declaration of the Rights of Man, or was it the inauguration of the use of terror to establish authoritarian governments in later centuries?

Clearly for Jews, the French Revolution was a mixed blessing. On the affirmative side of the ledger, the French Revolution brought to an end the "ancient regime" whose feudal monarchism had denied Jews elementary rights as citizen. When Napoleon summoned the French "Sanhedrin" of rabbis, he assured Jews as individuals equal rights with all other liberated Frenchmen, but denied them corporate rights as a group.

For most Jews in France and in other European countries, the revolution was the magnet of messianic liberation after so many centuries of oppression.

Theodor Herzl was seized by those flaming hopes for a liberated future for Jews. In his earlier years in Vienna, he dreamt of the total assimilation of Jews in the new societies as the means of finally solving the Jewish question.

Then Herzl went to Paris as correspondent for the Vienna Neue Freie Presse. His encounter with the bitter anti-Semitism in the Dreyfus trial of 1894 and other manifestations of anti-Jewish hatred in the French Republic — 100 years after the Revolution — were traumatic for him.

That encounter with the failing side of the French Revolution, together with other moving influences, started Herzl on his journey to create a Jewish state where Jews would be genuinely free as citizens and as equals.

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## On Reflection ... By Ira Gissen, Virginia/North Carolina Director ADL

### Skinheads Reported in VA and NC

Reports of Skinhead activity are increasing. From Richmond, Henrico, Norfolk, Charlottesville and Waynesboro in Virginia, to Greensboro and Charlotte in North Carolina, the list continues to grow. The number of racist Skinheads is growing nationwide and two new trends are adding to the dangers they pose — activity and recruitment in high schools and the acquisition of deadlier weapons, including semi-automatic guns.

The Skinhead movement has a membership of 3,000 in 31 states — up from 2,000 in 21 states last October. The largest increase of members is in the southeastern states. A high rate of assaults on members of minority groups as well as vandalism of religious institutions, particularly synagogues, has continued.

The movement of Skinheads from the streets into the schools is a serious development. They assault mi-

nority students, scrawl racist graffiti on school lockers, walls and doors, shout racial epithets and distribute racist flyers that poison the school atmosphere.

The neo-Nazi Skinheads are a relatively new phenomenon which although not a mass movement, has cropped up in enough areas of the country and in enough numbers to indicate that they are a product of contemporary American life.

All Skinheads are not racists. The ADL monitors only the activities of those shaven-headed youths who wear Nazi insignia, preach hatred and commit violent crimes against blacks, Jews, Hispanics, Asians and homosexuals.

Certain characteristic patterns are emerging about the kind of young people who become racist Skinheads. The following data had been gathered from ADL's own investigative resources and

from law enforcement officials who have had contact with Skinheads:

- Despite their often expressed claim that they are sons and daughters of the "working class," Skinheads come from widely varying social and economic backgrounds.

- A large percentage of Skinheads are unskilled school dropouts who live from hand to mouth, picking up unskilled odd jobs.

- An important attraction for some young people is the Skinheads' hard-driving music and their aura of toughness. In addition, like all street gangs and cults, Skinhead gangs provide members with a substitute family composed of their peers.

- Skinhead racism is in part a reflection of their anti-establishment posture at a time when the conventional doctrine of respectable society is anti-racist.

What follows are typical incidents at schools tied to Skinheads from around the nation:

- Groves High School, suburban Detroit, was spray-painted with swastikas and the words "White Power" and "Skins." Earlier, the word "nigger" was scrawled across the lockers of several black students and other lockers were defaced with swastikas. Racist flyers were posted outside the school. A school brawl was instigated by three non-student Skinheads.

- At Rosemont Junior High School, Glendale, CA,

See SKINHEADS next page

## Beware of the Saturday-Sabbath

By Rabbi Marc Wilson

If you read *The Charlotte Observer* Op Ed page, did you get the same kick I recently did watching our Christian neighbors slug it out about whose Sabbath is the "real" Sabbath? It is one of those delicious moments that I only wish Harry Golden had lived to see.

We of the Israelitish persuasion can only sit on the sidelines bemused, watching the rancorous exchange. At times like this I can't help but think of the red-blooded American Jewish youngster sitting glued to his radio, who exuberantly announces to his aged European grandfather, "Zeideh, the Yankees are ahead 4-2, with two outs in the top of the ninth!"

Zeideh looks up quizzically from his Yiddish newspaper. "Oh?" he says. "Tell me, is it good or bad for the Jews?"

Whether Christians bickering about the proper day for the Sabbath is "good or bad for the Jews" is moot. In the grander scheme of things, however, it warms this rabbi's heart to know that the great pendulum of historical irony is now finally poised to swing in the opposite direction. For, you

see, it was not so long ago that Jews who wished to better harmonize with their Christian neighbors proposed that our Sabbath be moved to a more socially-acceptable Sunday. Believe it or not, there are yet a few fossils of that great paean to assimilation still skulking around.

But now, the circle comes to be complete. Who would have dreamt that neighbors of the Christian persuasion would be tempted to join their Jewish brethren in the celebration of a Saturday-Sabbath? To them, this rabbi offers not a warning, but a pointed caveat from one who is in the know:

Sure, a Saturday-Sabbath looks like the fine life. But, just make sure you know what you're getting yourself into. Let me, as an insider, share with you a little of the "downside":

Get home from work on Friday afternoon, battle-weary from a week of dog-eat-dog hassle. Time to rest? Hah! Feed the kids supper. Scrub them. Dress their rambunctious bodies. Brush their unruly hair. March them off, underwhelmed, to services. Whine and fidget, fidget and whine, through

the rabbi's interminable sermon. Go home. Reverse the process. And so to bed.

Enough? Nope. Seventy-three wake-up call. Off to services again. Three hours of services. Hebrew services. Another interminable sermon. Heck, I've heard little Episcopalian guests at a Bar Mitzvah cry "Uncle!" and swear to their parents that they'll never gripe again about the hour that they're obliged to spend in church on Sunday morning.

And so, it's noon and you leave services. An afternoon out on the lake or at the mall? Wrong again. If you're going to take this Saturday-Sabbath thing seriously, you've gotta get into the spirit: no phone to yak on, no TV to watch "Wide World of Sports," no car to gallivant off to SouthPark, no money for trinkets at Carowinds, no video games to occupy the kids. Are we having fun yet?

And don't forget the Sabbath delicacies you'll be inheriting. Sure, all you can think about is honey cake and gefilte fish. But, are you martyr enough to survive the cholesterol in chopped liver? Can your big toe withstand the gout? What about the brisket that tastes like chicken, or is it the chicken that tastes like brisket? And then there is that quintessence of Sabbath fare: cholent — a noxious quagmire of beans and fatty shortribs that civil people would wish only on their mortal enemies. Not for polite company.

You get the picture? Sure, I could paint you all kinds of romantic images of what a Saturday-Sabbath can be. But, let's get down to the unvarnished truth. It is, as my dad would say, a "cultivated taste." Like sushi. Like Beowulf. Like Rolfing.

Go ahead, fight it out. Toss your biblical passages back and forth. Try a Saturday-Sabbath on for size. No delusions. Just don't say I didn't warn you. And, if you still like it, remind me to tell you what we do with a chicken in another little gem we call "shluggen kappores"...

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