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A Groundbreaking Book by JPS

Hatemail: Anti-Semitism on Picture Postcards
By Salo Aizenberg with a foreword by Michael Berenbaum

Hatemail is an extraordinary work that chronicles a shocking aspect of anti-Semitism. One of the most visible forms of anti-Semitism in the early 20th century was spread by the general population through postcards. Salo Aizenberg, one of the world's foremost postcard collectors, is the first to compile, translate, and describe them in a historical context.

Hatemail surveys the content and usage of these postcards throughout the world, with a focus on the pre-Holocaust era. The more than 250 examples depicted here are only a small sample of the many thousands that were printed and circulated. They take the reader through the many permutations of hatred for Jews and help us to better understand a phenomenon that still exists today.

The years 1890-1920 were the golden age of postcards. Mail was delivered twice a day and penny postcards were the primary vehicle used to communicate with friends and family. Somewhat like today's social media, these postcards circulated powerful visual messages to large groups of people quickly and cheaply.

Aizenberg's premise is that the best way to understand anti-Semitism in a particular place and time is by looking at what average people were saying to each other. Postcards present a unique way of examining the daily thoughts of a society. As his book makes so clear, thousands of postcard publishers created horrendous images of Jews, and people deliberately bought them from postcard racks at their corner store and mailed them regularly, most without a second thought.

As described in the foreword by eminent Holocaust historian Michael Berenbaum, for a postcard to sell it had to be brief and pack a bunch: a picture is worth a thousand words. Berenbaum reminds us "the Nazis did not invent the image of the Jew that had been portrayed in German postcards, they merely followed the implications of those images to their most extreme – their most 'final' – conclusion."

Rabbi Barry Schwartz, director of The Jewish Publication Society was floored when he saw the images in this book. "This book communicates the toxicity of anti-Semitism with visceral images that are searing and haunting. One does not forget this book."

On this postcard, a Jewish man is being burned at the stake by an American Indian. The image of an Indian burning a Jew signifies that, according to this artist, the Jew was hated even more than the Indian. The caption is a play on the word "stake," implying that the burning of the Jew is of little consequence.

