

Declaration of Seventy-Five Notables against Antisemitism (November 12, 1880)

Abstract

Theodor Mommsen (1817–1903) was a historian, classical scholar, and politician. He was even more famous and respected than his fellow historian Heinrich von Treitschke (1834–1896), whose polemical attack on the Jews in November 1879 unleashed the “Berlin Antisemitism Conflict” [*Berliner Antisemitismusstreit*]. Mommsen drew up a declaration that was signed by seventy-five well-known scholars and other public figures. Among the signatories were the historian Johann Gustav Droysen (1838–1908), the constitutional scholar Rudolf von Gneist (1816–1895), and the pathologist and liberal politician Rudolf Virchow (1821–1902). The declaration was published in Berlin’s *Nationalzeitung* and marked a turning point in the conflict. Up to that time, Treitschke’s supporters had dominated public discussion of the “Jewish Question,” which reached its peak in the weeks following this declaration. Thereafter, more members of Germany’s liberal middle classes voiced their opposition to the “epidemic” of antisemitism identified here.

Source

Declaration

Fierce battles have united our fatherland into an empire of powerful aspirations. This unity has been achieved through an appreciation of the necessity of our common bond—a feeling embedded within the national consciousness of the Germans, and one that has triumphed over the tribal and confessional differences that have fragmented our nation like no other. To make individual members atone for such differences is unjust and ignoble and hurts above all those who are trying honestly and earnestly to shake off their peculiar ways and merge loyally with the nation. They see it as a breach of faith on the part of the very people with whom they share the same goals, and the result is the prevention of that which is and will remain the common objective: The ironing out of all differences that continue to operate within the German nation.

In an unexpected and deeply shameful manner, the racial hatred and fanaticism of the Middle Ages is being rekindled in various places, especially in the largest cities of the Reich, and directed against our fellow Jewish citizens. What is being forgotten here is that many of them have bestowed benefit and honor upon the fatherland through their industry and talent in commerce and trade, in the arts and sciences. The rule of law and the rule of honor that all Germans are equal in their rights and obligations is being violated. Enforcing this equality is not merely the province of the tribunals but of every citizen’s conscience.

Like a contagious disease, the revival of an old delusion threatens to poison the conditions that have brought Christians and Jews together on the basis of tolerance in both state and municipality and in society and family. If the leaders of this movement now preach envy and resentment only in abstract terms, the mass of the people will not hesitate to draw practical conclusions from this speechifying. Men are calling the legacy of Lessing into question, the very same men who ought to be proclaiming from the pulpit and the lectern that our culture has overcome the isolation of the very tribe that once gave to the world the worship of the one God. Already one can hear the call for exceptional laws and the exclusion of Jews from this or that profession or occupation, honor, or position of trust. How long will it be before the crowd clamors for this, too?

There is still time to take action against the confusion and to avert national shame; there is still time for the resistance of sensible men to break the artificially inflamed passions of the multitude. Our call goes out to Christians of all parties for whom religion is the Gospel of peace; our call goes out to all Germans who cherish the ideal legacy of their great princes, thinkers, and poets. Defend by public declaration and calm explanation the fundament of our common life. Respect for each confession, equal rights, equal prospects in competition, equal recognition of competent efforts for Christians and Jews alike.

Berlin, November 12, 1880

Professor Dr. med. Albrecht;
Professor Dr. Arndt;
C.F. Arndt, Elder of the Berlin Merchants;
Professor A. Auwers[1];
Principal of the *Realschule*, Dr. Bach;
Beisert, Deputy and Legal Advisor of the Berlin Merchants;
City School Inspector Professor Dr. Bertram;
Professor Bruns[2], Doctor of Law;
Dr. Cauer, City School Inspector;
Ed. Conrad, President of the Elders of the Berlin Merchants;
Contentius, Lawyer;
A. Delbrück, Elder of the Berlin Merchants;
G. Dietrich, Vice President of the Elders of the Berlin Merchants;
Professor Dr. Droysen[3];
Government Privy Councilor and Mayor Duncker;
Commercial Council Eger;
Dr. Engel, Senior Government Privy Councilor;
Ad. Enslin, Publishing Bookseller;
Lord Mayor Dr. von Forckenbeck;
Professor Dr. Förster[4], Director of the Observatory;
A. Frenzel, Elder of the Berlin Merchants;
Dr. Gallenkamp, Principal of the Vocational School;
Commercial Privy Councilor Fr. Gelpcke;
City Elder Gesenius;
Professor Dr. Gneist;
Commercial Councilor E. Hergersberg;
Hermes, City Councilor;
Professor Dr. Hofmann, currently President of the University;
Professor Dr. Hofmann, Grammar School Principal;
Dr. Friedrich Kapp;
Karsten, Lawyer;
Jul. Kauffmann, Elder of the Berlin Merchants;
G. Keibel, Elder of the Berlin Merchants;
Professor Kirchhoff, Member of the Academy of the Sciences;
Dr. Koerte, Public Health Privy Councilor;
H. Kochhann, Elder of the Berlin Merchants;
Senior Government Privy Councilor, retired. D. Kieschke, Deputy;
Koffka, Lawyer;
Director of the District Court, Kowalzig;
Krebs, Lawyer;
Dr. Kürten, City Councilor;
Laué, Lawyer;

Lesse, Lawyer;
Director of the District Court, Lessing;
Dr. Lisco[5], Preacher;
Professor Dr. Th. Mommsen;
Noeldechen, City Councilor;
P. Parey, Publishing Bookseller;
Hans Reimer, Bookseller;
Senior Medical Privy Councilor Reichert, Member of the Academy of the Sciences[6];
Rikkert, Deputy;
Runge, City Councilor;
Sarre, City Councilor;
Professor Dr. W. Scherer[7];
Dr. Schroeder, Professor of Medicine;
Schmeidler, Preacher;
Schrader, Railway Director;
Schroeder, Justice of the Court of Appeal;
Professor Dr. Schwalbe, Principal of the *Realschule*;
Dr. Werner Siemens, Member of the Academy of the Sciences[8];
Dr. Georg Siemens, Director of Deutsche Bank;
E. Stephan, Commercial Privy Councilor;
Stephan, Governments and State Economy Councilor, retired;
Struve, Deputy;
Stubenrauch, Lawyer;
Dr. Thomas, Preacher;
Professor Dr. Virchow;
Professor Dr. Wattenbach;
Professor Dr. Weber, Member of the Academy of the Sciences[9];
Dr. Max Weber, City Councilor and Deputy[10];
Dr. Wegscheider, Public Health Privy Councilor;
von Wilmowski, Lawyer;
Zelle, City Legal Advisor.

NOTES

[1] Professor of Astronomy, permanent Secretary of the physical-mathematical section of the Berlin Academy of the Sciences. [All footnotes are taken from: Karstein Krieger, ed., *Der "Berliner Antisemitismusstreit" 1879–1881. Eine Kontroverse um die Zugehörigkeit der deutschen Juden zur Nation. Kommentierte Quellenedition*, 2 parts. Munich: K. G. Saur, 2003–2004, Part 2, pp. 551–54.]

[2] Professor of Roman Law.

[3] Johann Gustav Droysen.

[4] Father of the social education theorist, politician, and pacifist Friedrich Wilhelm Förster.

[5] As a theologically liberal preacher at the Neue Kirche [New Church], in 1872 he got caught in a conflict with his church authority concerning the apostolic creed.

[6] Professor of General Anatomy and specialist for Evolutionary History.

[7] Founder of the positivist method in literary studies.

[8] Engineer, inventor, and entrepreneur in the field of electrical engineering.

[9] Professor of Indian Literature and Language.

[10] Father of the famous sociologists of the same name.

Source: This declaration was published in various Berlin newspapers, including the *Berliner Börsen-Courier*, on November 14, 1880; reprinted in Karstein Krieger, ed., *Der "Berliner Antisemitismusstreit" 1879–1881. Eine Kontroverse um die Zugehörigkeit der deutschen Juden zur Nation. Kommentierte Quellenedition*, 2 parts. Munich: K. G. Saur, 2003–2004, Part 2, pp. 551–54. Republished with permission.

Translation: Erwin Fink

Recommended Citation: Declaration of Seventy-Five Notables against Antisemitism (November 12, 1880), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/forging-an-empire-bismarckian-germany-1866-1890/ghdi:document-1803>> [April 11, 2026].