

# Exiles from Nowhere

## The Jews and the Canadian Elite

Alan Mendelson

**E**xiles from Nowhere is a compelling investigation into the attitudes of influential 19th- and 20th-century Canadians that will shock even the most informed.

Alan Mendelson examines the thoughts and actions of some of Canada's intellectual elite – a circle that radiates from the revered philosopher of Canadian nationalism, George Grant, who died in 1988. What emerges in Mendelson's dispassionate portrayal of their world is an insidious antisemitism and intolerance. Because their belief system affected the actions of those in high places during what was the moral crisis of the twentieth century – the Holocaust – their “genteel” antisemitism had deadly consequences.

Mendelson begins with the controversial Goldwin Smith, for several years Professor of History at Cornell University, whose Toronto home (the Grange) was a centre of 19th-century social and intellectual life. Smith churned out antisemitic pieces for periodicals across the English-speaking world, and his influence endured for generations.

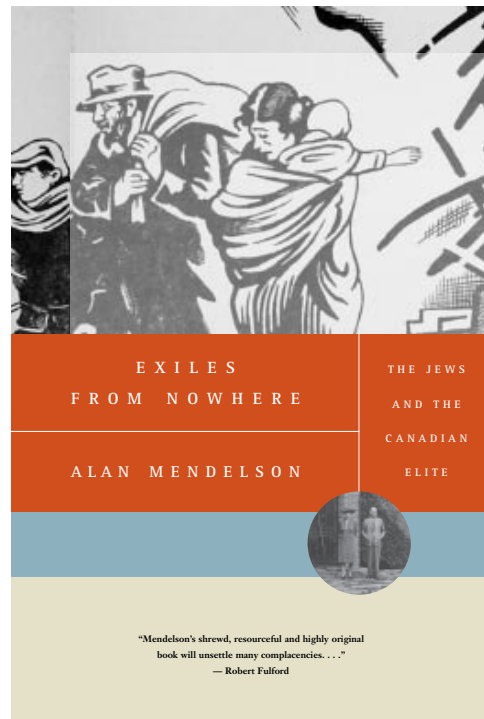
George Grant's grandfather, the Reverend George Monro Grant, Principal of Queen's University, wrote that there was no need to treat Judaism as a real religion, because Judaism had been superseded by Christianity. George Grant's other grandfather, Sir George Parkin, spread the racist and imperialist vision of Cecil Rhodes in his role as administrator of the Rhodes Scholarship program. These men used the doctrine of Christian triumphalism to support a narrow religious nationalism. If the Jews were condemned to wander the world as outsiders, they believed, how could they serve as loyal members of the political nation?

During the Second World War, the young George Grant took his lead from his uncle Vincent Massey, Canada's High Commissioner in London and an intimate of the Cliveden set that favoured the appeasement of Nazi Germany. Massey was part of Mackenzie King's inner circle who conspired to exclude Jewish immigrants from Canada.

When *Lament for a Nation* was published in 1965, George Grant was assured a premier place as a Canadian philosopher and public intellectual. Yet it is a puzzling fact that many of his intellectual and spiritual heroes were tainted with antisemitism, including historian Arnold Toynbee, who characterized the Jews as a parasitic “fossil” race; philosopher Martin Heidegger, who refused to repudiate his Nazi associations; writer Louis-Ferdinand Céline, whose virulent antisemitism led countrymen to call him a national disgrace; and theologian Si-

**“Mendelson's shrewd, resourceful and highly original book will unsettle many complacencies and make all of us take another hard look at the leadership class of Canada in the 20th century. What he tells us about George Grant is breathtaking.” – Robert Fulford**

**“This book was a revelation for me. As a Quebecker, I always thought that the anti-Semitism that used to flourish in my native province was the most poisonous to be found anywhere in Canada. Imagine my surprise, then, when I learned from this excellent book that historically the 'genteel' anti-Jewish bigotry of Ontario's Anglo elite was more vicious than Quebec's more raucous brand – and had deadly consequences. This is an important book that deserves to be widely read and discussed.” – William Weintraub**



mone Weil, a Jewish-born mystic whose denunciations of Judaism offer a strange contrast to her work for the French Resistance.

The title “Exiles from Nowhere” is taken from Canadian-Jewish novelist Matt Cohen, who was befriended by George Grant – a relationship that flourished for a time, then foundered on issues related to the Jewish-Christian divide. The phrase expresses Cohen's feelings of homelessness and exclusion, his belief that the Canadian establishment had erected psychological walls that could never be breached by outsiders.

**Alan Mendelson** is Professor Emeritus (Religious Studies), McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. In 1965 he received an M.A. in the History of Ideas from Brandeis University, where he studied with philosopher Herbert Marcuse. His Ph.D. is from the Committee for the History of Culture at the University of Chicago (1971). He and George Grant briefly overlapped at McMaster from 1976 to 1980. Mendelson describes their relationship as distant but cordial. Mendelson has taught and published for more than three decades. Although he works mainly in the fields of ancient philosophy and religion, he believes that antiquity can inform modernity.



Photo by Ian Crysler

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