

Religion & Antisemitism Show Notes and Main Questions

Question 1: The state of the field. In terms of the history of American antisemitism, how have historians and other scholars addressed the history of antisemitism in the U.S and are there trends in that scholarship that we might be able to observe?

Britt: There are, I think, two roads that scholars walk down.

- One is within the field of American Jewish history, that has been the primary field that has addressed this subject, and, in that field, we see the notion of American Jewish exceptionalism, putting it apart from American Jewish history is different from Europe, that antisemitism hasn't been a genuine phenomenon in American history, and that's what makes America exceptional.
- Outside of American Jewish history, there are other scholars and historians, because they are not wed to the notion of American Jewish exceptionalism, they tend to take antisemitism more seriously. There isn't a lot of scholarship on it, but there is a shift happening.

Sarah: Thinking about antisemitism more contextually. The best scholars are quite attentive to the other dynamics that are going on.

- When we think about antisemitism, we do our best research when thinking contextually.
- [Leo Frank Case](#)
- I am worried about the narrative of antisemitism being "the longest hatred", as if it has been the same thing throughout time and place.

John: There seems to be more conversation around antisemitism and more concern to address the subject. What is behind that fresh interest that predates the prior year?

Lincoln: Historians tell histories for a purpose, not just looking at the past but what we are trying to say in the present. I think the main concern for many years has been looking for explanations for a Jewish place in America, making America place that is open to American Jews. There has been a renewed interest in looking at the hard parts of American history.

- [The 1619 Project](#), one example of this that has been popular with a lot of Americans.
- There has been an opportunity to look at this problem and to focus on the darker parts, which is important for understanding our country and its roots.
- [Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville](#), the [shootings at the tree of life synagogue](#).

Sarah: Link it to wider cultural questions, the visibility of Black Lives Matter, Standing Rock, people in communities looking to places like structure and power dynamics to explain people's situations. This has been a conversation that has sprung up in the U.S and Jewish communities.

- One of the major questions for Jewish communities, it is a live question, is "where do we see ourselves in respect to these things?"
- The Jewish question, what does it mean to be a people who has experienced privilege and hatred, racism, and more. How we tell our story, how we fit into the current events and context becomes an important conversation.

Question 2: What's the relationship between the study of antisemitism and political rights, citizenship, and emancipation, how do we look at those histories?

Britt: "This is my answer, I am sure if you ask another historian, they might have a different answer."

- The subject of Jewish Emancipation, which is Jews gaining and losing rights globally, starting around 500 years ago.
- Antisemitism is best understood as a political program used against Jews, denial of rights. We can see this in many ways, violence, the denial of right to serve on a jury and more.

Help us think about that term emancipation: The term is apt and useful because it describes a process, that when nation states were forming, they were asking who should have rights here, what rights and what is the distinction.

Question 3: How is the study of antisemitism connected to the study of race?

Sarah: We want to be particular in what we are talking about. Antisemitism is always changing in different moments. Colonial times it was more religious, looking at cultural moments happening shows us how antisemitism is happening. Sometimes it is more about race, in the 21st century, that moment shows race, a different kind of antisemitism. Understanding the historical moments shows us how antisemitism is happening, who it is impacting and why.

Question 4: Evangelicals on Antisemitism.

John: Evangelicals have been a confusing shifting opinion on Jews, both negative and positive. Until recently, evangelicals have been a major party in trying to convert Jews. The events of the 1940's and 1967 were thrilling to many evangelicals.

- [Ep 8 of Antisemitism, USA](#) in which we explore Billy Graham's conversation on Richard Nixon and Jews.

Question 5: Antisemitism has many roots, from scientific racism to political exclusion, to conspiracy theories, what are the ongoing influences of religion, specifically, on antisemitism?

Lincoln: Christian antisemitism was one of the earliest forms in North America. One thing I think is important and obvious, is that a lot of Christians think they know a lot about Jews without ever having met a Jew.

- [The Mythical Jew Next Door](#)

Britt: Some of these ideas and stereotypes can manifest into American law. For example, Sunday closing laws passing in 60s, explicitly Christian laws, sometimes specific to deter Jews from an area.

Sarah: the tools of religious scholars and the questions they can bring are incredibly helpful, thinking about conspiracy theories and analyzing them.

Question 6: Since October 7th, 2023, discussion has focused on the line between anti-Israel activism and antisemitism, which thus involves defining the term antisemitism. How can we use this popular concern to advance an informed definition of what antisemitism is?

- **Similar Q&A question from audience: Discuss the relationship between anti-Zionism and antisemitism.**

John: This connection between antizionism and antisemitism isn't new, the success of antizionist and anti-Israel has made a space for antisemitism. Causation rather than correlation.

- Naomi Cohen book – [Americanization of Zionism](#)
- [Episode 9 of Antisemitism, U.S.A](#)
 - o Issues on college campuses (see Resources)

Sarah: There is and always has been anti-Jewish-Zionism when there is anti-Zionism. The collapsing of these two ideas puts pressure on Jewish communities. Reform movements, call to paying attention to the full context. Not sure where the line is between antizionism and antisemitism. We need more information and context; we need to be asked more questions.

Lincoln: The question of pro-Palestinian or anti-Israeli activism is one that is deeply connected to history, people are unaware of the history of the activism.

Question from Audience: Speak to the intersection of antisemitism and other bigotry towards Jews of color, specifically Latinx.

Sarah: In the U.S there are a bunch of complicated factors.

- One being some people who identify themselves as Jewish and of Latin decent are refugees, who have often maybe voted more republican which is often different from most Jewish communities.
- They hit an interesting moment of, “you're not doing Jewishness right”, “real Jews are white”.
- [Kugel and Frijoles: Latino Jews in the United States Laura Limonic](#)

Why has the term ‘antisemitism’ continued to be used instead of ‘anti-Jewishness’ or any other term? What is the value of continuing with such terminology?

Britt: the term itself appears in the late 1870s during conversations about who deserves rights in the new country of Germany.

- Wilhelm Marr, journalist who was incredibly determined that Jews should not gain rights in this new country. He started a “club” called “the antisemites”. This was based around a racialized understanding of speakers of certain languages and a category he referred to as “sematic”, this included Hebrew and Arabic speakers. The label spread.
- It became specifically attached to Jews and became known as a specifically Jewish hatred.