



INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF CONTEMPORARY ANTISEMITISM

INDIANA UNIVERSITY

Robert A. and Sandra S. Borns Jewish Studies Program
Bloomington

Indiana University's Institute for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism

Announces

ANTISEMITISM IN TODAY'S AMERICA: MANIFESTATIONS, CAUSES, AND CONSEQUENCES

Indiana University at Bloomington

July 2021 (exact date TBA)

Call for Papers

Outside of Israel, more Jews live in the United States than in any other country. While America has never been altogether free of antisemitism, most American Jews have not had to contend with ongoing hostility of a seriously threatening kind. Social prejudice of an antisemitic nature has been a fact of American life, and there have been instances of episodic violence directed against Jews and Jewish institutions.

Compared to the experiences of Jews in Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa, though, most American Jews have not lived with concerns about chronic persecution and lethal attacks. Especially in the decades following the end of World War II, they have felt largely accepted, safe, and at home in America.

This sense of security and relative normality can no longer be taken for granted. Antisemitism has been on the upsurge globally over the last two decades, and America is not immune. Hostility to Jews, in both word and deed, is now a growing presence within the public sphere and appears to be moving from the fringes, where it has long existed, closer to the mainstream. Pittsburgh, Poway, Jersey City, and Monsey name the sites of recent and particularly brutal attacks, but in less dramatic, and often underreported, ways, assaults against Jews in sections of Brooklyn and elsewhere have become commonplace. According to recent surveys, in fact, the

numbers of attacks against American Jews and Jewish institutions appear to be increasing year by year, to the point where the United States is now on a par with several European countries in this respect. To date, however, there has been too little serious attention focused on this troubling phenomenon and what is driving it.

In an effort to better understand the revival of anti-Jewish hostility in the United States, Indiana University's *Institute for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism* (<https://isca.indiana.edu>) proposes to hold a major conference, "***Antisemitism in Today's America: Manifestations, Causes, and Consequences***," in July 2021 (precise dates still to be determined). This will be an important gathering and will bring together dozens of scholars and practitioners for three days of intensive deliberations on the most urgent issues before us.

As of now, we hope to hold the conference on the Bloomington campus of Indiana University. Given the current uncertainty related to the COVID-19 pandemic, however, it might be necessary to convene online. We will get word to you at a later date regarding the conference site and format.

While the focus of our conference will be predominantly on contemporary threats to Jews and Jewish communal life in this country, the subject will also be examined historically and comparatively. Throughout our sessions, significant attention will be devoted to reviewing what measures have been taken in the past to contend effectively with antisemitism and what needs to be done in our own day to understand and restrain the revival of anti-Jewish hostility.

Topics to be covered might include the following:

1. The History of Antisemitism in America

What forms has it taken? When and where has it been most virulent? Who have been its chief proponents, and what has motivated them to turn against Jews? How have such people and their destructive acts been effectively opposed in the past? If so, how and by whom? In what ways does today's American antisemitism resemble or differ from yesterday's antisemitism?

2. The Social, Cultural, and Religious Contexts of Contemporary Antisemitism

Who are the major perpetrators of Jew-hatred in today's America? What drives them? Does their animosity to Jews resemble animosity to others within a general climate of intolerance and openly expressed hatred or is it best understood as a thing unto itself? What social, cultural, religious, and ideological movements seem to readily accommodate and encourage hostility to Jews? In what ways does such hostility guide the thinking and behavior of Americans on the extreme political right, including white

nationalists, white supremacists, and neo-Nazis; the extreme political left, including self-proclaimed anti-colonialists, anti-imperialists, anti-Zionists, and social justice warriors; militant activists within political Islam; and individuals within segments of African-American communities, where race-and- class-oriented thinking about relative victimhood, oppression, income inequality, gentrification, and “white privilege” sometimes seem to fuel anti-Jewish passions and activity.

Traditional European antisemitism cannot be understood apart from negative Christian teachings about Judaism and the Jews. Jews living within Muslim-majority countries fared somewhat better, but some of the teachings of Islam denigrate the status of Jews and have been invoked to incite and justify violence against them.

What role do Christian and Muslim religious beliefs about Judaism and the Jews play in today’s America? In what ways do particular religious spokespeople and institutions help to foment antisemitism? In what ways do they seek to discourage it and actively promote positive ties to Judaism and the Jews? And how do attitudes toward the Jewish state influence American Christian and Muslim attitudes to Jews in this country?

3. The Political Contexts of Contemporary Antisemitism

Mainstream American political life has traditionally not been hospitable to accommodating antisemitism, although populist and nativist sentiments at times have been linked to anti-Jewish attitudes that have found political expression. Within today’s overwrought America, however, some extreme political views are being voiced accusing American Jews of “dual loyalty” and others setting forth conspiracy notions about “undue Jewish influence” and Jewish “control” of Congress, the economy, and the media. Some particularly extreme notions about Jews conspiring to bring on and/or profit from the coronavirus pandemic are also notable, as are attempts to implicate Jews in some of the more impassioned debates about American racial strife.

Antisemitism, in short, has entered contemporary American political discourse, and while it has been sharply criticized by some, it seems to have won adherents among others. What explains the presence of antisemitism within today’s American politics? Why is it that serious attention to antisemitism has been rendered almost invisible within human rights organizations other than the Jewish agencies that attend to it? In what ways is hostility to Jews tied to the upsurge of American populism, nationalism, and a radical left-wing illiberalism? In what ways is such hostility linked to American support for Israel?

In the name of progressive politics, some American Jews and Jewish anti-Zionist organizations have turned sharply against Israel, sometimes even calling for the

country's dissolution. What explains their fervent anti-Israel attitudes, and in what ways may they be contributing to the upsurge of today's antisemitism?

4. International Influences and Comparisons

Contemporary hostility to Jews is a global phenomenon. Thanks to the ease of internet connections, antisemites can be readily in touch with one another and be nurtured by common ideological sources and ideas—among them, Holocaust denial and relativization; conspiracy theories about Jewish power; the alleged Jewish role in “great replacement” designs; the delegitimization of Zionism and demonization of Israel; and, for some, the writings of extreme Islamist authors. How these and related notions help to incite animosity to Jews may differ from place to place, but commonalities are observable.

Given this global context, how does antisemitism in today's America resemble its counterparts in France, Germany, Poland, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere? How does it differ from them? How does the response to antisemitism within America compare to responses in other countries? Is American “exceptionalism” still a viable idea?

5. Antisemitism on American College Campuses

America has over 3,000 colleges and universities. Most are not beset by chronic antisemitism. However, numbers of college campuses have become venues for antagonistic attitudes toward Jews and, especially, the Jewish state. What sometimes passes as “criticism of Israel” is often accompanied by negative attitudes toward Jews as such and the marginalization and ostracization of Jewish students and faculty members. The BDS movement, Israel Apartheid Week, and other forms of anti-Israel activism have turned many campuses into hubs of “anti-Zionist” indoctrination and outlets for antisemitic passions.

Who are the major actors behind these developments? What are their goals? To what degree are they succeeding in advancing them? How are they organized and funded? How do university administrators and others respond to activities of this kind taking place on their campuses? What will be the likely effects of President Trump's executive order seeking to protect Jewish students from harassment under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964?

6. Antisemitism and the Media

American journalism, television, and the Internet are powerful media for disseminating both positive and negative views of Jews and the Jewish state. What role do they play in educating people about antisemitism? In fomenting it? In helping to contain it? The Internet, in particular, is broadly recognized as the single largest

disseminator of hate speech today, including hatred directed against Jews. Numbers of people who have committed attacks against Jews in this country were evidently “radicalized” on the Internet. How precisely does that transformation take place? What are the most persuasive arguments for and against regulating the Internet in an effort to curb hate speech?

7. What Lies Ahead?

Antisemitism dates back over many centuries. Always a destructive force, it inevitably causes great human suffering if left unchecked, first to the Jews it targets but also to the cultures and societies that harbor it. To date, America has never promoted state-sponsored antisemitism; nor has it witnessed widespread, ongoing anti-Jewish violence on the European and Middle Eastern models. It is clear, however, that within segments of American social, political, cultural, and religious life hostility to Jews appears to be increasing. If it is not effectively restrained and reaches the point where it becomes normalized, the country’s future and the place of Jews in it will look much different than its past.

To prevent such a future from becoming a reality, the concluding session of this conference will focus on identifying practical and effective measures that need to be taken to contain anti-Jewish animosity.

The following are only some of the questions that are worth asking:

- In addition to understanding antisemitism, it is imperative to resist it. What are the most promising strategies to carry out such resistance today?
- What role can scholars of antisemitism play in helping to formulate responsive and effective policy-making? Based on your research and analysis, what specific policy recommendations would benefit people in leadership positions—at the local, state, and federal levels—to more successfully combat antisemitism?
- What lessons from opposing antisemitism in the past can contribute to our efforts today?
- How should law enforcement better understand and report antisemitic hate crimes?
- What concrete actions should tech companies take to stop the spread of antisemitism and the cross-pollination between hate groups on their platforms?
- In what tools and technologies should we be investing to lower the levels of antisemitism in 21st-century America?
- Who are the natural allies of American Jews in the fight against antisemitism? Are such alliances being created, and how can they be sustained?

- What more needs to be done to assure the safety and security of American Jews and to keep the country itself from the harm that unchecked Jew-hatred brings with it?

Papers are invited from younger scholars as well as more senior scholars. For oral presentation at the conference, papers will be restricted to 25-30 minutes. For possible inclusion in a projected volume of edited conference proceedings, papers should be 20-25 pages, double-spaced.

Instructions for Submitting Paper Proposals

Please send detailed proposals to Alvin H. Rosenfeld (rosenfel@Indiana.edu) together with your curriculum vitae, by October 15, 2020. Proposals should be no longer than 2 typed pages, double-spaced. Papers will be read and assessed by an academic advisory committee, and decisions about acceptance will be sent to applicants by January 15, 2021.

Best wishes,

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