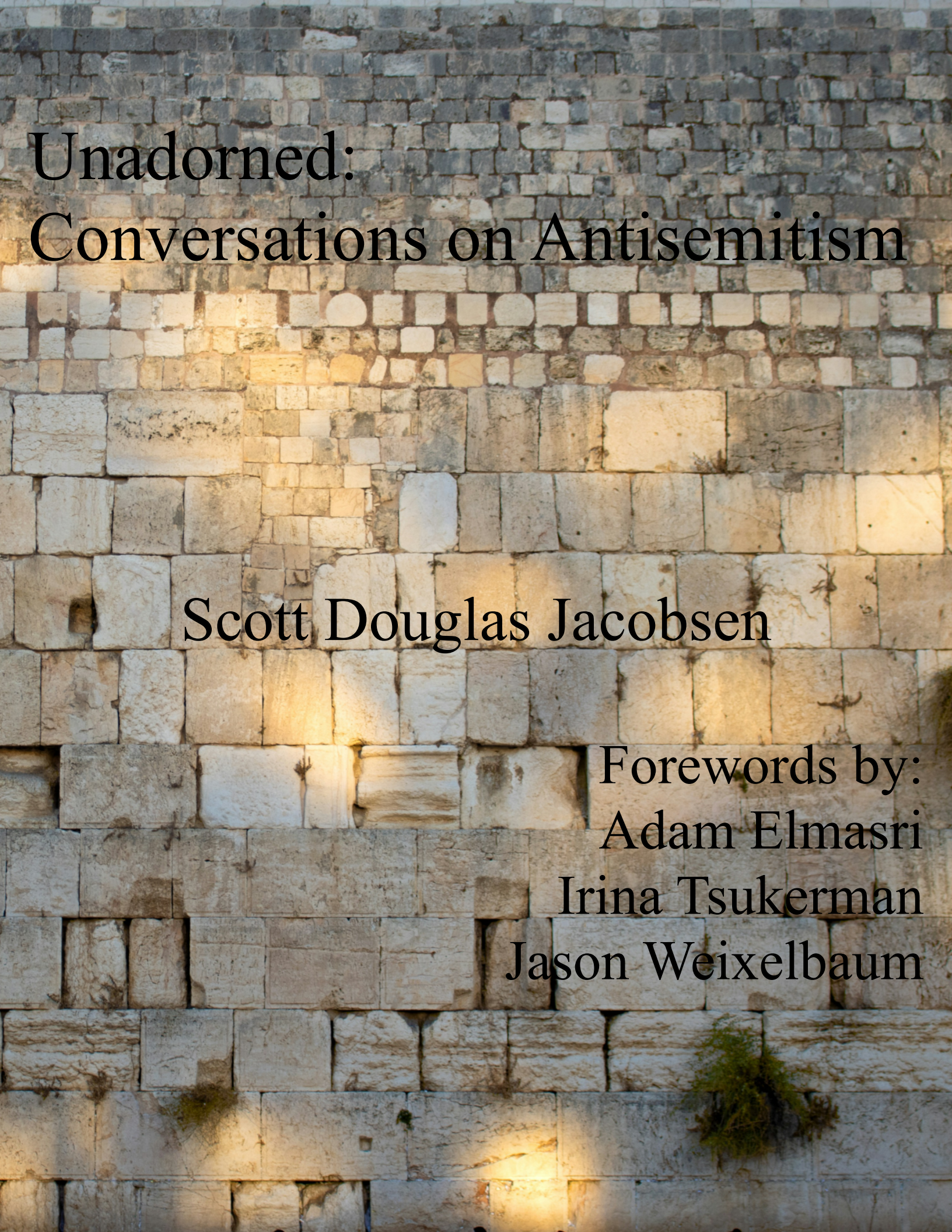


Unadorned: Conversations on Antisemitism

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Forewords by:
Adam Elmasri
Irina Tsukerman
Jason Weixelbaum

In-Sight Publishing

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Scott Douglas Jacobsen

October 24, 2025

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Preface by Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Antisemitism has proved perennial, whether 722 BCE (Assyrian conquest of Israel) or October 7, 2023 (Hamas's attacks on Israel). It feels more visible today, measured both in incidents and amplification. Therefore, a conversational anthology is timely. *Unadorned: Conversations on Antisemitism* was born. Three definitions of "Antisemitism" are widely cited. The Nexus Document (Nexus) states "Antisemitism consists of anti-Jewish beliefs, attitudes, actions or systemic conditions…" The Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism (JDA) states "Antisemitism is discrimination, prejudice, hostility or violence against Jews as Jews (or Jewish institutions as Jewish)." Famously, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition is widely adopted in policy contexts and states "Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews." In terms of utility, the IHRA document is the most widely adopted, while the JDA and Nexus definitions are frequently used in academic and debate settings. No single definition enjoys universal acceptance.

This raises a basic choice: adopt a fixed text definition for policy clarity, or treat antisemitism as a process examined through conversation. In this thematically organized work, both approaches appear in these pages. Although, both have utility dependent on context. The text contains a patchwork of conversations and a few articles without a single thesis. This scatterplot of diverse voices presents shared concerns, inquiries, and reflections. The project maps how some antisemitism operates in pluralism rather than doctrinal purity. Antisemitism has no metaphysical 'essence.' Antisemitism is individual and/or collective thoughts and actions. Therefore, antisemitism can be subject to naturalistic identification, taxonomic classification, and academic analysis.

Certain platforms amplify antisemitic narratives. Some propagandistic efforts, fronts, and influence operations fertilize division through antisemitism. Some are homegrown; some are cultivated. Many antisemitic tropes exist in the essentialization of Jewish peoples. Speech is free while scapegoating exacts a cost. Norm erosion and identity-frame politics can link to antisemitism's rise. Cosmopolitan pluralism and universal ethics and the norms of liberal democracy need defense. Human rights can be a fortress in some ways, while interbelief efforts can be another. Antisemitism can be seen as a human-rights violation and a moral sin against seeing everyone as God's children. Multiple lines of defense exist—use them. Civics is not cured by vibes.

A personal and familial note colours the silences between the words in this anthology, too. I am part Dutch. Nazis afflicted the Jews and the Dutch in different ways. Yad Vashem honoured two family members with a Certificate of Honour. The certificate bears the line: "WHOEVER SAVES ONE LIFE IS AS THOUGH HE HAD SAVED THE ENTIRE WORLD." The accompanying medal reads, in French, "Le peuple juif reconnaissant" ("The Jewish people are grateful"). By decision of the Commission for the Designation of the Righteous Among the Nations, made under the Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Law, Yad Vashem accorded them the title "Righteous Among the Nations" for risking their lives during the Holocaust to save Jews from the Nazis. Their names are inscribed on the Honour Wall in the Garden of the Righteous at

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Yad Vashem, Jerusalem. I did not visit the site during my birthday-week trip this year. That will be for another, more appropriate and intimate time.

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Foreword by Adam Elmasri

Conversations about antisemitism are never easy. Nor should they be.

When Scott Jacobsen invited me to write this foreword, I hesitated. Not because I had nothing to say, but because I have far too much respect for the complexity of the topic to reduce it to slogans, partisanship, or borrowed outrage. Antisemitism is a centuries-old toxin; one that adapts, mutates, and often disguises itself in the language of ideology, theology, or politics. What makes it so dangerous is not just the hate it breeds, but the confusion it thrives on.

That is why this book matters.

This collection doesn't offer a single voice or a singular truth. It offers tension. It offers contradiction. It offers nuance. And that is exactly what makes it worth reading.

Having been born and raised in Egypt in the 1970s, not long after wars with Israel, I was steeped from an early age in narratives of hostility toward Jews and Israel alike. Like many around me, I absorbed this prejudice without question, bred and fed to see Jewish identity through a lens of suspicion and hatred. Four decades later, I stand on the opposite side: no longer accepting inherited hostility, but committed to unlearning it with honesty, reason, and moral consistency. My own journey is proof of how deeply antisemitism embeds itself, and how necessary deliberate reflection becomes to dismantle it.

One of the most urgent distinctions we must protect, especially in times of conflict, is the difference between opposing a government's policy and targeting a group of people. These are not the same. To conflate criticism of war tactics or state conduct with hatred of an entire ethnic or religious group is not just intellectually lazy. It's morally hazardous. It is this conflation that fuels modern forms of antisemitism just as much as it silences necessary critique in global affairs. Both outcomes serve ignorance. Neither serves justice.

In every ideological debate, we must resist the temptation to selectively apply morality. War, occupation, resistance, human rights - these are not concepts that shift based on who is involved. If oppression is wrong, it is wrong regardless of whether the oppressor is Christian, Jewish, Muslim, atheist, or otherwise. Our moral compass cannot afford to be ethnically or politically conditional. The minute we start adjusting ethical standards based on who commits the act, we lose the very essence of what it means to be ethical at all.

What you'll find in this book is not a doctrine, but a dialogue; a pluralistic attempt to dissect how antisemitism manifests across ideological lines, historical narratives, and cultural contexts. Some voices you may agree with. Others may deeply challenge you. But agreement is not the goal here. Understanding is.

As someone who critiques religious dogma and totalitarian thought across traditions, I know how easily certain critiques can slip into prejudice. And I know how easily legitimate grievances can be silenced under the accusation of bigotry. We must learn to hold both truths in tension simultaneously: to condemn antisemitism unequivocally, while still protecting the space to question state power, religious authority, and inherited ideologies - whoever they belong to.

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Antisemitism, like all hatred, doesn't thrive in the presence of critical thought. It thrives in echo chambers, in historical amnesia, and in the absence of honest dialogue. That's why the conversations in this book - diverse, sometimes uncomfortable, often unresolved - are so essential.

If there's one invitation I offer the reader, it is this: **Engage with humility. Question with discipline. And refuse to trade your moral integrity for ideological convenience.**
The world does not need more noise. It needs courage. The kind that listens before it reacts.

Love for all, hate to none,

Adam Elmasri

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Foreword by Irina Tsukerman

The Oldest Lie in the New World

Antisemitism is not an opinion. It is not misunderstanding, nor is it reducible to ignorance. It is an ideological organism that mutates, adapts, and survives because it serves functions no society in crisis is willing to relinquish. It provides explanation where institutions have failed to educate, meaning where leaders have failed to inspire, and unity where policy has failed to deliver. It is both ancient pathology and modern instrument. Its resilience lies not in its content but in its architecture. It is a framework that can be filled with any material be it religious, economic, racial, or geopolitical, so long as the conclusion remains the same: that Jews are the source of disorder and the obstacle to redemption.

The history of antisemitism is the history of its disguises. In the medieval age, the hatred was overtly theological. Jews were blamed for cosmic crimes, from killing Christ to poisoning wells during plague years. These accusations justified pogroms, expulsions, and the establishment of ghettos. The Jew was cast as an eternal outsider, his existence tolerated only as witness to Christian supremacy. The Enlightenment, which claimed to free Europe from superstition, merely exchanged dogma for doctrine. The Jew was recast as a fossil of tribalism, incapable of reason, unfit for citizenship. Philosophers who exalted liberty denied Jews the right to belong. The birth of modernity did not liberate Jews but introduced new forms of bondage: pseudo-scientific racism, racial hygiene, and biological determinism. The industrial era's cult of progress turned Jews into scapegoats for dislocation and mechanization. Capitalists blamed them for socialism, socialists blamed them for capitalism, and both treated them as parasites rather than partners. The fascist age fused all these strands into a total ideology, portraying the Jew as both moral corrupter and racial contaminant. The Holocaust was not an aberration but the logical end of a worldview that saw in the Jew the negation of purity, order, and meaning.

The Cold War era promised to bury racialized hatred in the rubble of fascism, yet the Soviet Union ensured its resurrection. Moscow denounced Zionism as racism, accused Jews of bourgeois nationalism, and smeared Jewish intellectuals as foreign agents. The anti-Zionist campaigns of the 1950s through the 1980s spread across the developing world, embedding antisemitic imagery in the rhetoric of liberation. The old caricature of the hook-nosed moneylender reappeared, dressed now in the fatigues of anti-imperialism. By the time the Soviet empire collapsed, the lexicon of hate had been absorbed by Islamist clerics, leftist academics, and nationalist populists alike. Antisemitism became the one ideology fluent across cultures that otherwise shared nothing but resentment.

The twenty-first century has refined this inheritance. The internet has done for antisemitism what the printing press did for the Reformation: democratized it, globalized it, and sanctified it in the eyes of believers. Hatred once confined to pamphlets and pulpits now circulates through viral clips, memes, and algorithmic feeds. Platforms reward the provocative over the accurate, the emotional over the factual. In this economy of attention, antisemitism thrives not as belief but as content. A conspiracy video does not need to persuade. It only needs to provoke. Each click confirms the illusion that outrage is insight. The user becomes both consumer and disciple. The screen becomes catechism.

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The structure of modern antisemitism rests upon familiar motifs. The myth of omnipotence persists: Jews are said to control finance, media, or politics, even as Jewish communities remain vulnerable minorities in every country where they live. The myth of duality endures: Jews are portrayed as both rootless cosmopolitans and tribal conspirators, accused of undermining nations while clinging to their own. The myth of contamination reemerges in cultural terms: Jews are blamed for promoting degeneracy, for eroding tradition, for imposing liberalism or secularism on unwilling populations. And the myth of theatricality remains intact: every upheaval, from economic collapse to epidemic, is explained as the choreography of a hidden Jewish hand. Each trope contains its own logic. If Jews are powerful, they are to be resisted. If they are powerless, their victimhood is evidence of cunning. If they assimilate, they are infiltrators. If they stand apart, they are traitors. Contradiction does not disprove the theory. It proves its versatility.

The psychological utility of antisemitism lies in its simplicity. It converts systemic failure into moral fable. It transforms shame into righteousness. It gives the powerless a story that makes them feel chosen by fate rather than defeated by circumstance. It also flatters the unscrupulous with permission. To hate Jews is to participate in a moral crusade. It is a hatred that excuses itself by claiming virtue. That is why it can coexist with humanitarian rhetoric, antiracist slogans, and progressive branding. It is the only prejudice that markets itself as empathy.

In the modern geopolitical landscape, antisemitism has become a central tool of authoritarian information warfare. The Kremlin, inheritor of the Tsarist blood libel and the Soviet propaganda apparatus, uses antisemitic tropes to frame democracy itself as a Jewish conspiracy. Russian outlets insinuate that Western liberalism, LGBTQ+ rights, and civil society activism are forms of Jewish subversion. The purpose is not theological but strategic. By associating democracy with foreign manipulation, Moscow absolves itself of failure and justifies repression. The Jew becomes shorthand for everything the regime fears: independence, pluralism, conscience.

Tehran’s antisemitism fuses apocalyptic theology with statecraft. The Iranian regime does not merely oppose Israel as a rival. It denies its right to exist. The destruction of the Jewish state is preached as divine mandate. Iranian media circulate grotesque imagery of Israelis as blood-drinkers and child-killers, echoing medieval libels with modern cinematography. Each conflict in Gaza is seized upon to portray Israel as the world’s preeminent criminal. The strategy is to invert victim and aggressor, to brand Jewish sovereignty as original sin. By doing so, Tehran positions itself as champion of the oppressed, laundering genocidal intent through humanitarian language.

Beijing’s antisemitism operates through implication rather than decree. On state-linked platforms such as TikTok, antisemitic content flourishes in algorithmic ecosystems designed to amplify Western discord. Chinese-controlled networks promote conspiracies linking Jews to global finance, media influence, and colonial crimes. These narratives spike during Middle East conflicts, serving a dual purpose: eroding Western unity and shifting scrutiny away from China’s domestic repression. Antisemitism here functions as cognitive warfare, a means of soft-power sabotage. By framing Jews as avatars of hypocrisy, Beijing undermines Western claims to moral authority.

Qatar completes the quartet with cultural sophistication. Its media empire, led by Al Jazeera, has perfected the art of emotional propaganda. Its anchors narrate conflict in the cadence of

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confession. Its analysts translate Islamist ideology into the vocabulary of social justice. Hamas militants are rebranded as resistance fighters. Israeli civilians become symbols of occupation. Carefully edited footage, stripped of chronology and context, transforms war into theater. This is antisemitism cloaked in compassion, violence repackaged as virtue.

The same logic has metastasized within Western democracies. On the far right, antisemitism has reemerged through the rhetoric of "replacement." Jews are accused of orchestrating immigration to dilute national identity. They are blamed for globalism, for feminism, for cosmopolitanism, in short, for everything perceived as weakening the tribal order. Marchers chant "You will not replace us," believing they are confronting Jewish architects of their decline. On the far left, the script is reversed but the plot identical. Jews are cast as agents of empire, embodiments of privilege, symbols of whiteness. The same logic of contamination applies. The Jew is too powerful to be oppressed, too different to be trusted, too visible to be ignored.

Islamist movements merge both narratives. They denounce Jews as enemies of God and puppeteers of the West. They portray Israel as the spearhead of a crusade against Islam, reviving medieval imagery of perfidious tribes and demonic conspiracies. This synthesis of right-wing purity, left-wing grievance, and religious zeal has produced a new total ideology: antisemitism as global populism.

The results are visible on the streets of Europe. Riots in Paris, Berlin, and Brussels feature chants of "Death to Jews" shouted in the language of liberation. Synagogues are attacked while police stand by, unsure whether to intervene. Jewish schools close for fear of reprisal. Mobs vandalize Jewish shops while waving signs about human rights. Politicians equivocate, insisting on "balance" between victim and executioner. In London, convoys of cars drive through Jewish neighborhoods shouting threats. In Malmö, Jewish families quietly emigrate. In Berlin, protestors burn Israeli flags outside synagogues on Kristallnacht anniversaries. Europe, which swore never again, now tolerates calls for genocide in its plazas.

Central to contemporary antisemitism is the narrative of Israel as war criminal. This narrative fuses Islamist, Marxist, and nationalist motifs into a single accusation: that Jewish self-defense is aggression, and Jewish sovereignty is illegitimate. Every airstrike is decontextualized, every atrocity against Jews ignored, every ceasefire violation inverted. Iranian propagandists choreograph the imagery, Russian outlets provide amplification, Chinese platforms ensure virality, and Qatari presenters deliver the moral framing. The purpose is not to inform but to indict. The goal is to make Jewish survival itself appear criminal.

This narrative has conquered Western discourse. In universities, professors teach students that Zionism equals racism. In NGOs, policy papers treat Israel as the world's chief violator of human rights. In newsrooms, editors equate terror tunnels with apartment buildings. In popular culture, actors who express sympathy for Israel are blacklisted, while artists who call for intifada are celebrated as dissidents. The oldest hatred has donned the language of justice, and the result is moral collapse.

In the United States, the problem is compounded by personality cults and platform algorithms. Figures such as Tucker Carlson translate the structure of the "globalist" conspiracy into

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mainstream vernacular. Without ever naming Jews, they invoke archetypes recognizable to any student of hate: the shadowy financier, the cultural subverter, the elite orchestrator. Each monologue is an initiation into suspicion, teaching millions to decode modernity as malevolence. Candace Owens performs the same ritual for younger audiences, framing contempt for Jews as rebellion against orthodoxy. Her rhetoric converts cruelty into courage. Zohran Mamdani delivers the left's version from the podium, sanctifying antisemitic demands with procedural decorum. He turns exterminationist slogans into policy statements, framing erasure as equity.

Donald Trump's refusal to confront antisemitism within his ranks represents a broader failure of moral leadership. His administration advanced historic agreements in the Middle East, yet his silence on domestic hate has legitimized extremists who view Jewish loyalty as suspect. His equivocation has taught followers that antisemitism, when politically convenient, can be tolerated or excused. This abdication has opened space for younger conservatives to flirt with alliances that would once have been unthinkable. Some now praise Hamas as anti-establishment heroes, confusing barbarity with authenticity. They retweet propaganda from Tehran and Gaza, imagining they are standing against the global elite. They wear keffiyehs as symbols of defiance, ignorant that they are performing allegiance to a death cult.

The manifestations are everywhere. In Pittsburgh, Jews murdered at prayer. In Poway, a rabbi shot mid-sermon. In Monsey, a machete-wielding attacker at a Hanukkah celebration. In Jersey City, a kosher market riddled with bullets. In Los Angeles, a Jewish man killed after a rally. In New York, assaults on Hasidic pedestrians, day after day. In Paris, apartment walls defaced with Stars of David by Russian assets. In London, threats shouted from convoys. In Berlin, men beaten for wearing kippot. Across continents, the pattern is the same: hatred masked as activism, violence justified as resistance.

Statistics bear out what Jews already know. In the United States, Jews represent less than three percent of the population yet account for more than half of all religion-based hate crimes. After each conflict involving Israel, antisemitic incidents surge by hundreds of percent. The baseline never returns to normal. In Europe, similar trends prevail. Jewish schools install bulletproof glass. Synagogues employ armed guards. Communities operate as fortresses. Ordinary acts, such as attending services, wearing a Star of David, speaking Hebrew, become calculations of risk.

The slogans on Western streets leave no room for ambiguity. "From the river to the sea" is a call for ethnic cleansing and genocide. "Globalize the intifada" means export murder. "No peace on stolen land" means permanent war. These chants are not misunderstood metaphors. They are manifestos. They define the end state: a world without Jews in their ancestral home.

In the cultural sphere, antisemitism operates through erasure. Film studios remove Jewish identity from Jewish stories to avoid offense. Literary festivals uninvite Israeli authors while celebrating Palestinian poets who glorify violence. Museums host exhibits on the Holocaust yet partner with regimes that deny it. The language of inclusion excludes Jewish particularity. The promise of diversity dissolves into hierarchy.

In the workplace, Jews are told their safety is privilege, their concerns parochial, their visibility provocative. Diversity statements omit antisemitism. Equity programs fold Jewish identity into

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whiteness, stripping it of vulnerability. When Jews ask for acknowledgment, they are accused of weaponizing trauma. The most targeted minority in the Western world is treated as a footnote.

In universities, Jewish students are cast as oppressors regardless of background or belief. Hostage posters are torn down and replaced with slogans of annihilation. Professors excuse chants of extermination as political speech. Administrators condemn antisemitism only when it is convenient, couching their statements in language that blames the victims. Academic freedom becomes the shield of the fanatic, not the refuge of the thinker.

In politics, cowardice reigns. Leaders hesitate to condemn antisemitism within their coalitions. They fear losing votes, losing donors, losing hashtags. Each equivocation strengthens the lie. Each euphemism licenses another outrage. Democracy cannot survive this moral inversion. A society that cannot protect its Jews cannot protect truth.

Antisemitism endures because it meets psychological demand. It offers identity to the rootless, meaning to the nihilist, certainty to the confused, and purpose to the resentful. It requires no study, only faith. It invites believers to wage war against abstraction, to purify the world by persecuting its smallest nation. It promises moral grandeur through cruelty. It is the oldest ideology of decline.

To fight antisemitism is not to plead for tolerance but to defend civilization. It is to affirm the distinction between fact and fiction, between justice and vengeance, between empathy and envy. It is to insist that truth is not negotiable. Where antisemitism flourishes, reason rots. Where Jews are vilified, law decays. Where Jewish blood is cheap, liberty is for sale.

This collection stands as both chronicle and challenge. It exposes the architecture of falsehood and names the authors of deception. It reveals how state propaganda, social media algorithms, and ideological cowardice have conspired to resurrect a hatred once thought buried. It documents the courage of those who refuse erasure, who walk to synagogue under guard but unbowed, who speak even when silence would be safer.

To read these essays is to confront a mirror. The question is not whether Jews will endure. They have endured Pharaohs and Popes, Czars and Commissars, Crusades and Caliphates. The question is whether the West will endure its own betrayal of truth. Where the Jew is defamed, language soon follows. Where language collapses, tyranny enters unopposed. To defend the Jew is to defend reality itself. The line between history and myth is drawn, as ever, through the body of the Jew. To hold that line is the duty of every free mind.

To confront antisemitism is not an act of courtesy but of sovereignty. It begins with the courage to define reality, to strip away the vocabulary of false equivalence, and to refuse the moral blackmail that demands apology for Jewish survival. It involves exposing the infrastructure that enables hatred, including the money, the institutions, the media ecosystems, and the academic grants that convert bigotry into curriculum.

On university campuses, confronting antisemitism means dismantling the networks that fund it. Qatar channels billions into Western higher education through centers, endowed chairs, joint institutes, and exchange pipelines. The influence operates through memoranda of understanding, restricted gifts with programmatic strings, faculty hiring arranged around preferred narratives,

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and fellowships that reward research aligned with state messaging. These arrangements are presented as global engagement. The effect is curricular capture. Courses are designed to erase Jewish indigeneity, rename terrorism as resistance, and treat the abolition of Israel as enlightened. Administrators learn to avoid decisions that might offend donors. Student groups learn that intimidation faces no penalty when it follows the right script. Confronting this system means full disclosure of foreign gifts and contracts, conflict-of-interest rules for faculty who hold paid external posts, independent audits of centers and institutes with foreign ties, and divestment from partnerships that launder propaganda into scholarship. Academic freedom protects inquiry. It does not protect foreign state influence masquerading as study.

Campus policy needs teeth. Codes of conduct should state in plain language that calls for genocide, ethnic cleansing, or the erasure of a people are threats, not opinions. Time, place, and manner rules should be enforced so that encampments cannot blockade classrooms and libraries. Security assessments should be based on risk, not on the fear of bad headlines. Funding for student organizations should be contingent on compliance with institutional rules that apply to everyone. Faculty governance should distinguish between the discussion of controversial ideas and the indoctrination of students into totalizing dogma. Tenure is not a shield for harassment.

In media and technology, pushback begins with transparency and liability. Platforms that monetize outrage should disclose how recommendation engines rank content that contains explicit or coded calls for violence. Auditable records should show what gets boosted, what gets throttled, and why. Ad suppliers and brands should be given tools to see when their dollars appear beside incitement. Editorial desks should adopt standards that refuse euphemism. A chant that calls for Jewish eradication is not a cultural slogan. It is a threat. Interviews that launder the rhetoric of terror into the language of civil rights should be identified as propaganda. Independence is not neutrality between truth and blood libel.

In civic life, clarity replaces performance. City councils that pass resolutions about distant conflicts while ignoring mobs outside synagogues should be held to account at the next election. Police departments should treat organized harassment of Jewish neighborhoods as a public-order problem, not a content dispute. Prosecutors should pursue cases that involve intimidation, menacing, and conspiracy with the same vigor they bring to other protected classes. Grant programs for security at schools, synagogues, and community centers should be funded on multi-year cycles so that protection is routine rather than reactive.

In national politics, consequences matter. Parties that tolerate candidates who platform eliminationist rhetoric invite rot into their core. Vetting should include a clear standard that equates calls to remove Jews from their homeland with calls to remove minorities from any homeland. Officeholders who traffic in conspiratorial code should lose committee posts and fundraising support. Diplomatic engagement with foreign capitals that export antisemitic propaganda should be linked to measurable changes in their media and education ecosystems. Influence peddling through think tanks, cultural festivals, and sports sponsorships should be audited like lobbying.

Education is the long game. Primary and secondary curricula can teach pattern recognition. Students can learn how medieval libels mutated into racial science, then into revolutionary

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dogma, then into digital memes. They can learn to spot the four motifs of the hatred: omnipotence, duality, contamination, theatricality. They can analyze how disinformation campaigns work, how images are edited, how numbers are manipulated, and how slogans erase context. Universities can require a core course in pluralism and free inquiry that treats antisemitism as the prototype of conspiracy thinking. Teacher training can include units on how to interrupt coercive activism in classrooms while protecting speech that argues in good faith.

Culture recovers authority when it refuses cowardice. Studios can restore Jewish identity to Jewish stories and stop outsourcing sensitivity to those who cheer for erasure. Festivals and museums can set participation rules that exclude any artist or institution that endorses eliminationist slogans, just as they exclude overt racists. Arts funding can reward work that treats Jewish life as living civilization rather than as decorative trauma. Critics can refuse the lazy binary that sorts Jews into acceptable and unacceptable depending on their distance from Israel.

Religious institutions shape the moral weather. Churches, synagogues, and mosques that care about the health of the public square can teach that criticism of Israel is not a license to target Jews, and that the dignity of difference includes the right of a people to their homeland. Interfaith partnerships can be rebuilt around commitments that are explicit rather than sentimental. Agreements can state that no participant will host, platform, or endorse speakers or texts that call for Jewish erasure. Sermons can explain how antisemitism corrodes faith by replacing humility with spectacle.

Community life needs rituals of courage. Youth groups can normalize wearing visible Jewish symbols again. Schools can host open-house security briefings that treat safety as communal solidarity, not stigma. Employers can create clear channels for reporting harassment related to Jewish identity, with the same seriousness they bring to other forms of bias. Alumni can condition donations on policies that protect all students, including Jews, from intimidation. Celebrities and influencers who enjoy Jewish audiences or Jewish collaborators can be expected to speak clearly when mobs target those audiences and collaborators.

Personal conduct is where movements either rot or recover. Refuse to share propaganda, even when it flatters your side. Refuse to repeat slogans you have not examined. Refuse the thrill of belonging to a righteous mob. Read the source. Ask who paid for it. Ask who benefits if you believe it. Demand standards from the people who claim to represent you. Reward the leaders who speak plainly when it costs them and retire the ones who wait for the wind.

Finally, the foreign funding pipeline into campuses and cultural institutions requires a blueprint, not a lament. Full public ledgers of foreign gifts above a modest threshold. Independent review boards with authority to inspect side letters, employment arrangements, and curriculum conditions. Sunset clauses for all foreign-funded centers, renewed only after transparent evaluation by panels that include scholars outside the beneficiary departments. Ethics rules that bar faculty from holding paid foreign posts tied to regimes that criminalize dissent or export incitement. Student awareness campaigns that label events and fellowships with their financial origins so that debate can proceed with eyes open. If a government bankrolls the ideas, students deserve to know whose ideas they are learning.

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The lessons of October 7 cut deeper than any seminar or policy memo. They stripped away illusion. They proved that the hatred of Jews is not about borders, checkpoints, or treaties. It is about existence. Hamas did not storm villages to negotiate. It filmed children burning, parents bound, and bodies desecrated. It broadcast the slaughter not as evidence of desperation, but as proof of triumph. The world watched, and much of it applauded. Students at elite universities called the massacre a victory. Activists in Western capitals waved flags and chanted slogans that justified the murder of infants. Professors issued statements that treated beheadings as resistance. Commentators scolded Jews for mourning too loudly.

October 7 revealed how thoroughly antisemitic narratives have colonized the moral vocabulary of the West. The reaction was not ignorance. It was ideology. Those who believed Jews invented their own oppression now believed Jews invented their own massacre. Those who spent years teaching that Israel is colonial and evil could not recognize evil when it slaughtered Israelis in their beds. The boundary between analysis and blood libel vanished. The frameworks of critical theory collapsed under the weight of real corpses.

The massacre taught three truths. First, that no amount of integration, philanthropy, or progressivism will shield Jews from hatred when hatred becomes fashionable again. Second, that moral relativism is not sophistication but surrender. And third, that those who cannot name evil when it strikes Jews will never stand against evil when it turns elsewhere.

October 7 also unmasked the complicity of institutions. Universities that could produce statements within hours of any global tragedy hesitated for days. Politicians who wept for every cause spoke in riddles. Cultural leaders, terrified of offending audiences raised on grievance, equivocated until the moment for moral clarity had passed. The same universities that teach genocide studies could not recognize one unfolding on their screens. The same NGOs that measure microaggressions refused to count the dead. The same journalists who demand accountability from every government treated mass murder as a cultural misunderstanding.

To confront antisemitism after October 7 means rejecting the fantasy that it can be educated away by workshops or softened by empathy training. It means understanding that hatred of Jews is not ignorance of the past, but rebellion against reality. It means recognizing that neutrality between the murderer and the murdered is complicity. It means enforcing red lines where once there were polite suggestions. It means understanding that every poster ripped from a wall, every classroom hijacked, every policy distorted is not debate but preparation.

The lesson is not despair. It is instruction. Evil declared itself in plain sight, confident that the world would rationalize it. Much of the world did. The task now is not to explain antisemitism to the antisemite, but to fortify those still willing to see. To confront antisemitism is to rebuild the cultural immune system of the free world. It is to tell the truth even when it isolates you. It is to restore the word “never” to “never again,” not as slogan, but as sentence.

Confronting antisemitism is the defense of reality. It is the restoration of proportion in law, courage in leadership, and honesty in culture. It begins when people stop apologizing for Jewish survival. It accelerates when institutions disclose who pays them to look away. It succeeds when a child can walk to school wearing a star without checking the shadows, when a student can pin a

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mezuzah on a dorm door without a second thought, and when a synagogue can unlock its doors because the neighborhood itself has become the guard.

Irina Tsukerman,

October 5, 2025

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Foreword by Jay Weixelbaum

What a time. I'm writing to you, dear reader, on October 9, 2025. We're just two days after the second anniversary of the horrific Hamas attack on Israel. Looking back, I don't know if I can express any more than what has already been said. It's been a devastating time for the Jewish community, with a seemingly endless brutal war, and probably the worst period of antisemitism for world Jewry since the emergence of Nazi Germany.

But that's not the only thing happening on October 9, 2025. This morning, people everywhere are waking up to headlines that Israel and Hamas have just signed a ceasefire deal. The remaining hostages (living or dead) are set to be released. The Israeli military will begin withdrawing from Gaza. On this day, we don't yet know what the future may bring. Maybe the deal will collapse into more violence. Or maybe it will lead to a sorely needed and long-awaited two-state solution. These moments are a challenge for historians like me. Our minds are full of patterns that can offer wisdom of the past—but even the best of us have no idea what the future may bring. To paraphrase a great historian I know: "History can only offer us an echo of the past to guess what might come in the future. It's the next best thing to flying totally blind."

The backdrop for this high historic drama is a collection of interviews conducted by Canadian journalist Scott Jacobsen. Although I think the term "righteous gentile" can be a bit cringey and even a little bit goofy, Jacobsen squarely fits the bill. His grandparents were Dutch and his wider family hid Jews during the Holocaust, then fled the Nazis to Canada. Jacobsen didn't have to interview a bunch of Jewish people in this intense moment. But he remembered where he came from and decided to do something in a critical moment, just like his predecessors. He listened. And that matters. We can all learn from that impulse.

And at the risk of praising myself, Jacobsen has pulled together a broad variety of voices to talk about antisemitism across the ideological spectrum—myself included. You know, some Jewish folks have saying: Two Jews, three opinions. So, get ready for an interesting ride; some of us don't even agree with ourselves! But what is consistent across these interviews is a depth of thinking, nuance, and authentic human emotion. And if I'm not mistaken, not everyone Jacobsen interviews is even Jewish. But we are all concerned about antisemitism. You're getting all of these interactions. Raw and unedited.

Like some of the other writers on this project, I honestly didn't really want to write this. These last two years have been hard. Frankly, I'm exhausted. "What a treat! I get to write about antisemitism again," said no one, ever. And yet here we are, and with a lot of great company.

We have Alon Milwicki, who reminds us that antisemitism is always shifting and needs to be interrogated in present context. Later, he talks about campus protests in another interview. Sacha Roytman tells us we live in a moment of conflict and historically, just like now, antisemitism tends to rear its head when this happens. I happen to love Irina Tsukerman's observation that humor is an important weapon against antisemitism and bigotry, in general, because it's irrational and ridiculous. She also warns us against the dangers of populism, which is a topic I think can't be understated. In another interview she demonstrates her encyclopedic knowledge of antisemitic tropes, which I think are important for all of us to be aware of.

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Star Kashman is here to tell us that social media amplifies antisemitic content because amoral corporations profit from the high engagement with inflammatory content. Adam Elmasri examines antisemitism in religious texts, which provides important context for hate movements. I also hope you will appreciate Malka Shaw's discussions of how Jewish mental health professionals are building resilience during the global surge of antisemitism. And she joins Jessica Zmood and Shelly Steinwurtzel to interrogate the underlying psychological causes of antisemitism, among other topics.

Rabbi Ariel Markovitch talks about building resilience for Jewish community in Ukraine by including Holocaust education and emphasizing shared humanity. One quote in this interview really struck me, which could characterize this whole book. He says, "If you zoom out, it may look like endless chaos. But when you zoom in, you see individual stories—moments of grace and connection, moments when someone felt they were not alone." Yeah. That's poignant. Joe Joe McManus talks about how to integrate opposition to all forms of oppression, including antisemitism, into their daily lives. Super important stuff. And Riane Eisler is real-life historical source. She fled Nazi-occupied Vienna and studies group dynamics, scapegoating, and historical trauma to understand antisemitism as well as the mentality of Israel's leaders. A crown jewel in this collection of voices.

And still, there's a few more to mention. Amos N. Guiora reminds us that antisemitism is complicated. For someone with such nuanced opinions, his matter-of-fact explanations of the death threats he's received are eye opening. Hugo Daniel Estrella Tampieri has been tracking antisemitism across Latin America. Frankly, it is alarming to see so much Holocaust-inversion. He emphasizes fact-checking, exposure to different peoples, and confronting purveyors of misinformation as helpful directions to pursue—and at a time when we need solutions, I appreciate the actionable wisdom.

Kristen Renwick Monroe teaches us that our identities go far in guiding our actions—and our prejudices. These days, as in the past, people who identify themselves by groups they are against rather than recognizing the common humanity of everyone are fueling hate around the world, including antisemitism. Herb Silverman talks about his upbringing and the tension between Jewish culture and religion, and how he lives life as a secular Jew. Moreover, he underlines how secularism is important for democracy—in both the US and Israel. Valeriia Kholodova tells us about the reaction of Jewish communities in Ukraine to the Russian invasions in 2014 and full-scale war in 2022. Her harrowing story about evacuating Jewish people to Israel is a must read. Severyn Ashkenazy is a Holocaust survivor with a powerful message about how Jewish people have been targeted by Western religious organizations, which has morphed itself into widespread antisemitic attitudes and tropes. We should listen.

Tal-Or Cohen Montemayor monitors escalating antisemitism on social media, which leads to real world attacks on Jewish communities worldwide. What an unenviable job. We're all indebted to him for doing this difficult work. Mathew Giagnorio studies the evolution of antisemitism, warning us that its penetration into academia harms intellectual discourse itself. As a fellow academic, I can only say amen to that.

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Jacobsen also adds a bit more detail to the discussion of antisemitism creeping into therapeutic spaces under the guise of "decolonization," which I think is important to confront; because if it's happening there, it's happening in other spaces, too. Additionally, there's an essay from Lloyd Hawkeye Robertson on antisemitism emerging in leftwing circles in 1967. This historical lesson is punctuated with questions I wish my allegedly leftwing friends had the courage to confront. I hope they will one day. And of course, last but not least, I show up in a couple of interviews to talk about my own work producing a television show about Nazis, spies, big business, and a lone Jewish agent trying to save democracy from the threat of fascism. Just a little bit of light entertainment, as they say.

That's a lot. And I hope I didn't forget anyone.

I would be remiss without closing with a statement that I think these are important conversations. Let me rephrase. These are essential conversations. I'm Jewish, so I have to care about antisemitism. But, dear reader, if you're a person who thinks that nobody is truly free while any group is oppressed, then you need to care about antisemitism, too. There's a lot to be gained from the collected wisdom here.

And on October 9, 2025, let's hope that this collection of interviews is a harbinger for a better era, characterized by greater wisdom, less strife, and more care for each other.

Cheers,

Jason (Jay) Weixelbaum

October 9, 2025

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INTERNATIONAL POLICY DIGEST

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Filmmaker Jason Weixelbaum on American Corporations, Nazi Germany, and the Fight for Memory

Jason Weixelbaum is a historian and filmmaker whose work explores the moral entanglements of American corporations with authoritarian regimes, especially Nazi Germany.

After witnessing ethical lapses in the mortgage industry during the 2000s, he pursued a Ph.D. examining U.S. companies like Ford, IBM, and GM under Nazism. He founded Elusive Films in 2020 and created *A Nazi on Wall Street*, a dramatized series about a Jewish FBI agent targeting Nazi influence in 1940s New York.

Weixelbaum emphasizes how historical patterns of authoritarianism echo today through populist politics, corporate complicity, and the erosion of ethical accountability under capitalism in crisis.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Thank you for joining me today and contributing to this broader project—a forthcoming book compiling conversations with diverse experts on antisemitism.

Jason Weixelbaum: I appreciate it. I'm glad someone is listening. Sometimes, I feel like I've been shouting into the void for years.

Jacobsen: Over the years, I've learned that one of our family members was recognized for sheltering a Jewish couple during the Second World War. I have some Dutch heritage, which explains my blond hair and Northern European features.

What initially drew you to the intersection of American corporate history and Nazi Germany?

Weixelbaum: That's a good story. Once upon a time, I dropped out of art school. To support my painting and rock music lifestyle, I played in bands in my early twenties, and I took a job where they were hiring: the mortgage business.

In the early 2000s, refinancing was booming, and I ended up in mortgage-backed securities. I had no idea at the time that I was part of a rapidly growing economic bubble that would eventually collapse in 2008.

Eventually, I worked in a bank's mortgage securities department. I was not a trader and certainly was not making large sums of money. I earned ten dollars an hour to help process large securities transactions—the kind that later became infamous in films like *The Big Short*.

On my first day at this particular financial institution—located in a large, mostly empty mall converted into office cubicles—I was instructed to process a $200 million "pool" of mortgages. In industry terms, a "pool" is a bundle of home loans sold as a mortgage-backed security. My job was to stamp mortgage notes sold to another institution—which no longer exists because it collapsed during the 2008 financial crisis—and to enter borrower data into a system.

I meticulously checked them all, then hit "send," and a big red error box popped up on the screen. It was my first day, and I was trying not to freak out. I went back and double-checked every single Social Security number, dollar amount, income, loan amount—everything. Then I hit "send" again.

There is a big red error screen.

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Now, my boss sees the distressed look on my face. She approaches my cubicle, sits at my terminal, and asks, “What’s wrong?”

“I—I don’t know. It won’t send.”

So, she’s looking through the different pieces of data. I notice she’s starting to change numbers—changing incomes here and there. Then she says, “Try it now.”

She gets up. I sit back down at my terminal and hit “Send.”

A big green bar comes up: Sent successfully.

And then—nonchalantly—she says, “Next time, do that with all of them,” and walks away.

I spent three more years in that department, trading approximately $2.5 billion of mortgage securities. Of course, I was part of a larger department, but I had that level of responsibility.

I was in my early twenties. This was my intellectual awakening. I thought, “If I’m going to be in this place, I might as well learn about finance, banking, and mortgages.” What’s going on here?

And that’s when it started to dawn on me that this was going to be a huge problem for the world. This was going to cause an economic catastrophe. My morale sank more and more the longer I stayed.

One day—this was still two or three years before the crash—I was sitting at a bus stop after work, feeling particularly low about what I had done all day. They weren’t even paying me enough to afford a car. It was poetic, in a way—while I was helping to crash the world economy.

Right next to the bus stop, there was a bookstore. In the window, I saw a book about a company operating in Nazi Germany. Side note: Around the early 2000s, several books were published on the topic, partly because several large-scale Holocaust restitution lawsuits had recently concluded—some of which involved major companies. That brought renewed attention to corporate complicity in the Holocaust.

So I walked in, saw that book, and felt an immediate connection. These businesses might have had good reputations on the surface but were doing things with tremendously grave outcomes.

It took a little while, but I can pinpoint that moment when I decided to quit that job, return to school, and begin again—starting my undergraduate degree as a historian, studying this topic. I was pretty single-minded. I wanted to know more—what this was all about. I fell down the rabbit hole. An undergraduate degree turned into a master’s and a doctorate.

Jacobsen: Looking back at your time in the mortgage securities industry during the early 2000s and the decision to investigate corporate ethics during the 1930s—is there some truth to that Mark Twain quote “history doesn't repeat, but it often rhymes”?

Weixelbaum: Oh, I’m glad you brought that up. As the founder and executive producer of Elusive Films, we have a tagline: “Every time history repeats, the price goes up.”

Yeah, that’s pretty accurate.

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It *does* rhyme. I am seeing some very similar behaviour today in the American business community and their reaction to—what I call—the regime. It is enough to say that. The range of different approaches these businessmen take is fascinating.

When I started studying this, my surface-level understanding was very populist—torches and pitchforks. "Let's get the bad corporate guys—they're all evil," that sort of thing. But if you're doing history right, you begin to develop a respect for subtleties and nuance. Different business people have different motivations and approaches.

Some were true believers in the fascist cause—Henry Ford, for example. Others were far more amoral—Alfred Sloan of General Motors comes to mind. They just wanted to win the corporate race. Then, others knew they were doing something wrong but tried to cover it publicly as if they were doing the right thing.

I am thinking about Thomas Watson of IBM. He very publicly returned his Nazi medal and wrote an op-ed in The New York Times denouncing Nazism. But at the same time—simultaneously—he was fighting tooth and nail to retain control over IBM's German subsidiaries. So there's a range of approaches.

While we do not need to get into the weeds here, the field of corporate social responsibility also outlines different models for how business leaders respond. Some want to actively erase or forget their ties to authoritarian regimes, while others are content with apathy. It depends on the context.

Jacobsen: Elusive Films is relatively new. It was founded in 2020, marking your transition from academia to filmmaking. With *A Nazi on Wall Street*, which is based on the true story of a Nazi spy operating in 1940s New York and the Jewish FBI agent determined to stop him—how did you uncover this narrative? This sounds like Mark Wahlberg going after Brad Pitt.

Weixelbaum: [Laughing] Oh gosh—yes, get this script to them!

We've spent the last several years developing an incredible pitch. It's a project that's being taken seriously by people in the entertainment industry. But as with everything, it is all about *who* you know. We're told we have a great pitch—but we need to get it in front of some big movers and shakers. That's one of the main reasons I'm talking to you—trying to get the word out.

This company—and this project—was born out of grief, Scott.

I was trying to find my way with a Ph.D. in history and business ethics. As you might imagine, that is not the most profitable path. I was doing some compliance work. Then, in December 2019, my father—who had spent his entire life in the entertainment industry, a TV actor in soap operas and films, a wonderful, wonderful man, the center of my world—got a mysterious respiratory virus.

Nobody knew what COVID-19 was yet. Maybe if you were paying close attention to the news here in the States, you would have an idea. But it took him *very* quickly. I was standing in the doorway of my row house in Baltimore after leaving work early on New Year's Eve when I got the call from the ICU. As the eldest child, I had to decide to let him go—to turn off the respirator.

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And, to put it mildly, I was destroyed. Destroyed. Then, only a month later, I was laid off. And a month after that, the entire world shut down. So there I was—devastated, unemployed, sitting on my couch with a completed Ph.D.—thinking, "What the hell am I going to do?"

And I wanted to find some way to honour my father's legacy in television. He had been an actor for fifty years.

He also produced and directed for the stage and on screen. So I brought together a group of my creative friends—producers, writers, composers, designers—and asked them, "What if we tried to do this? What if we tried to make a TV show?" This is to answer your question, though I know it is a roundabout way of getting there.

I came across this incredible story of a Jewish FBI agent chasing a Nazi spy around New York City. It was not quite dissertation material, so I could not use much of it in my doctoral work. But it captured my imagination for a long time. Even the Nazi spy himself—who was connected to many of the companies I studied—kept popping up. I did not get to write much about him individually because I was focused on corporate case studies.

Still, this story had been kicking around in my head for quite some time. And as a vehicle to bring people into a first-person view of history, I *don't* want to do a documentary. Everyone assumes, "Oh, I can't wait to see your documentary." But

I'm not doing a documentary.

I want to do a dramatization—on purpose—because it can reach the broadest possible audience and allow them to connect to the story through a human lens.

This FBI agent—whose story I can get into more deeply—was essentially trying, almost single-handedly, to stop the infiltration of Nazism into American business.

Jacobsen: What is the mindset of someone who is fully indoctrinated—functioning as a political vanguard for an ideology like Nazism? Someone virulent enough that even in another country, in a cosmopolitan city, they still carry and act on this ideological construct of mind.

Weixelbaum: This is where history meets the present.

Many others, people much more accomplished than I am, have written on this topic. But I do have a specific take: populism—grievance politics.

Now, I know there's an ongoing debate about what populism is, but this is my definition. And because I have a doctorate, I get to make up my definitions of political terms—so you'll have to bear with me. Populism—the *pop politics* of grievance—is always present. It's like background radiation. It's anthrax in the soil.

Populism is always present, especially in liberal societies where surface-level stability exists. It flourishes in those environments precisely because it does not live in a world of facts. It lives in a world of emotion—of outrage.

It jumps from one target to another. Rhetoric is irrelevant and can be shifted at will. The cause is irrelevant—it can be swapped out. Many people have trouble distinguishing left-wing and right-wing populism from actual liberalism or progressivism. The populist rhetoric is always the same:

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the people versus the elite. And the "elite" is changeable. It could be bankers. It could be academics. It could be the wealthy. It could be media figures. You name it.

Unfortunately, over a long enough timeline, in societies where populism thrives, Jewish people are often cast as *the* elite—those who must be stopped or destroyed. Populists always need new enemies. That is the actual mechanism. Any cause becomes a vehicle for continuing that pattern of scapegoating and persecution.

In my view, across the arc of history, populism has become very attractive when people feel particularly anxious or afraid, especially in times of great social or economic transformation.

Populism was prevalent in the 1920s and 1930s, and it is still prevalent today. It gives people a simple explanation for their fear: "I feel anxious, so I'll go find the bad guys."

The big bad guy is *over there*. I can dominate them, feel a little better about myself, and distract myself from my own fear and anxiety. The problem is that this kind of movement—this populist impulse—is extremely powerful for demagogues. And it is not limited to the disenfranchised. It is attractive to people who already hold wealth and power. They, too, are afraid. The more you have, the more afraid you may be of losing it.

Sorry—again, it's a bit of a roundabout way to answer your question. However, populist movements were happening all over the place in the 1930s. Henry Ford is a great example. See if this sounds familiar: We have a wealthy person who did well in an industry but did not appear well-educated. He lacks critical thinking instincts and is surrounded by conspiracy theorists. They get their hands on *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*—an antisemitic hoax text originating in Russia.

And it changes his worldview. He becomes convinced there is a global Jewish conspiracy aiming to control the world.

And unfortunately, because Ford had so much money and influence, he could put these conspiracy theories into action. He began publishing the *Protocols* in his newspaper, The Dearborn Independent. He learned of Adolf Hitler and began sending money to the Nazi Party—although that topic is still under scrutiny by historians. He had The International Jew, his antisemitic publication, translated and distributed widely. So, no—wealth does not insulate you from ignorance. Critical thinking does not come with a big bank account.

That is where we see the toxic mix: populist sentiment, conspiracy theory, and immense wealth and influence. This was very much alive among segments of the American business community in the interwar period. And we could talk about other figures—businessmen who believed the world should be carved into spheres of influence. It sounds familiar again. These are not good dynamics.

Of course, eventually, the pattern emerges clearly: populists always destroy what they claim to protect. It is only a matter of time. Populism ultimately consumes itself. It does not build. It only tears down.

Jacobsen: Your father was an actor in film and television for fifty years. Did he—or his legacy—help influence your career path?

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Weixelbaum: Yes—this is a passion project. It started because I needed something to do with my grief. I wanted to honour his legacy in some way. I do not think his work in soap operas and beach movies directly inspired the content I am working on now. But as a person—absolutely—he influenced me profoundly.

It was a great honour to have a father who would call me and say, especially after he retired, "I've been reading the news. Tell me, historian son, what the hell is going on?" He would call me regularly. He was engaged. He was curious. And that intellectual curiosity, that desire to understand the world—was a big part of who he was and what I carry forward.

We used to have these great, detailed conversations about why Reconstruction failed and how that failure continues to shape American politics today. I'd also talk to him about populist movements or similar topics. For me, continuing this work is a way of still having those conversations with him.

Jacobsen: Right-wing, far-right ideologies and political violence in the United States have been on the rise. The most active domestic terrorist groups in recent years have been white nationalists—often associated with Christian religious identity and tied to ethnic supremacist views. Statistically speaking, one could argue that the largest ethnic group and the dominant religion—white and Christian—are the most likely sources of this kind of terrorism. So, if you were to throw a dart randomly at a Venn diagram of potential culprits for right-wing terrorism, you'd likely land in that intersection. But of course, there are more nuanced takes to consider. What are some of those more nuanced perspectives?

Weixelbaum: I typically seek out the work of other experts in this field. There are many outstanding scholars—both living and deceased—whose research has deeply influenced my thinking. I would not claim to be more of an expert than they are, but I can speak to the patterns I see.

As I said earlier, this links directly to the anxiety people feel about their place in society—and how that fuels populist movements. We're talking about right-wing populism here, and its most extreme version is fascism. Unsurprisingly, people join these movements when they feel their social status is threatened. Many white Christian nationalists in the U.S. have long believed themselves to be the default holders of power. But in a multiethnic democracy—especially one moving toward a "majority-minority" population—they see that dominance slipping. That anxiety becomes fuel.

There's a direct connection between that fear and the rise of extremist movements. And I'm just one of many scholars who have made that observation. These conversations float through a lot of morally gray territory and deserve careful, continuous engagement.

Jacobsen: In your contribution to public discourse, how do you view the intersection of corporate ethics, historical accountability, and the prevention of authoritarianism? To what extent are ethical demands on corporations reasonable—and when might they become unfeasible?

Weixelbaum: Great question. It touches the core of my professional work throughout this project. I also work in ethics in a professional capacity. What's hard to watch today is that we're seeing the same patterns repeat.

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You have businessmen who tell themselves comforting stories: "It will be fine. He's our dictator. He's a businessman. He'll help us." But it is all nonsense. As things progress, it rarely ends well when businesspeople engage with authoritarian movements. Populism is not rational. It's not predictable. That is not a good environment for a long-term business strategy.

So yes, corporate ethics are vital. One of the biggest myths in my field is that American companies made massive profits in Nazi Germany. People often ask me, "How much money did they make?" The answer? Most of them lost money. Think about it: you're an American executive and return to your factory in Germany in 1945. The factory is rubble. Your bank account is full of valueless Reichsmark from a defeated regime. And if the public finds out what you did, your company's reputation is in shambles. There's no profit in that.

Sure, you can argue that some companies gained market share after the war by eliminating competition, and some were well-positioned for the postwar boom. That is true in some cases. But we are seeing echoes of the same delusions today. Corporate leaders say things like, "The tariffs will be fine, or this will pass," and it is clearly not fine.

At the time of this interview, the market reaction has been terrible—this is not a moment of validation for those who supported authoritarian figures and their enablers. So yes, corporate ethics matters. And some companies are trying—they value transparency, emphasize people over profits, or at least try to go beyond lip service.

However, where the scholarship in corporate ethics intersects with history is in practice. Today, companies can choose to be certified as ethical or transparent. Some have learned from history. But many—frankly, most—have not—not even close.

Jacobsen: Would you say that what we're witnessing today is a resurgence of fascism in the truest sense? Or is it more appropriate to view fascism as a phenomenon bound to a specific historical moment, making today's developments better characterized as a broader rise in authoritarianism rather than fascism itself?

Wexelbaum: [Laughing] If it doesn't come out of Germany, it's merely sparkling authoritarianism, right? I mean—sorry to keep pointing to this vague body of scholarship—but there is so much debate over what exactly constitutes fascism.

I'm looking at a section of my library next to my desk—bookshelves full of works, each offering a slightly different definition: "My exact definition is fascism." It gets academic fast. That said, I generally think that, yes—right-wing authoritarianism took to its logical conclusion. We can call that fascism. We can use the F word and not feel too weird about it.

One of the really important projects in political discourse today is to be intentional about the words we use. I think—maybe this is partly the influence of social media—but people throw around terms like liberalism, leftism, populism, fascism, and progressivism constantly and rarely stop to reflect on what they mean. I do not see much discussion that's useful or grounded.

And it's okay to debate those terms. Scholars do it all the time. We should not take them for granted. So, yes, my broad understanding is that right-wing populism, taken to its extreme, leads

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to fascism. That means a demagogue becomes a dictator, and the movement itself runs on emotional cycles—finding new enemies to destroy repeatedly.

Where it gets more contentious—and especially relevant to our conversation—is in the relationship between capitalism and fascism, between business and fascist regimes.

As you might imagine, many people want to use the kind of historical work I do to support their political positions. I am not always thrilled about that. Some want to use the story of American companies operating in Nazi Germany as evidence that America has always been morally bankrupt. Well—maybe. But that's not the whole story.

There were plenty of Americans, like the main character in *A Nazi on Wall Street*, who were actively trying to stop those alliances who were fighting fascism.

On the other hand, some want to argue that the Nazis were just puppets of industrialists—that capitalists were secretly pulling the strings behind Hitler. That is also not quite right. Hitler and the Nazi movement were already robust and ideologically driven before they came to power.

And once they *did* take over the German state, business leaders—especially German ones—had limited choices. It was not a matter of cozy alignment. It was compliance under threat. Once the Nazis consolidated power, business people were expected to cooperate—or face the consequences. If you disobeyed, someone would come to your house.

So, even in those contexts, there is still a range of behaviors. Some people were true believers, and it was profitable for them. Others did what they had to do because, frankly, they did not have a choice.

What's so interesting about Americans who did business with the Nazis is that they were never under threat from the Gestapo. If they had chosen to walk away, no one would have shown up at their home in the U.S. There was a lot more room for negotiation, for exerting agency. And that power dynamic—between American business leaders and the Nazi regime—is something I find endlessly fascinating.

Readers might find this particularly interesting if you do not mind indulging me for a quick example. General Motors, at a certain point, wanted to make it appear as though they were not profoundly entangled with the Nazis. At the same time, the Nazi state was uneasy about relying so heavily on an American company—one that was, by far, the largest automaker in Germany at the time. People often talk about boycotting Volkswagen, but if you wanted to disrupt Nazi military production, you would have targeted General Motors. The scholarship on this is deep, and I could go on for hours.

Anyway, the Nazi regime and GM both knew the situation was delicate. So General Motors said, "We'll stay, but we want our guy—our hand-picked Nazi—to run our German subsidiary." After some negotiation and trial and error, they found a man who fit the bill. There was a revolving door of executives until they landed on someone who could maintain that balance. It was all very calculated.

That is just one example of how nuanced the relationship between capital and fascism could be. It was not just blind support or total victimization—it was messy, strategic, and often self-

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serving. And, of course, as the war progressed and things deteriorated, the American companies lost money. Their factories were bombed. Their assets were frozen. Their reputations suffered.

And gosh—does that sound familiar? It's the same pattern: People think they will benefit in the short term from backing authoritarian actors, but in the long term, it almost always goes badly.

Jacobsen: How much are current American events paralleling the 1930s and 1940s historical occurrences? In other words, how much are people reading the situation correctly, and how much are they buying into left, centrist, or right-wing hyperbole?

Wexelbaum: Yes, what's endlessly fascinating—and also maddening—about the history of Nazi Germany is that it has become a kind of Rorschach test. People project their anxieties and politics onto it. And if you invoke it too often or carelessly, it can be stripped of all real meaning.

The America of 2025 is *not* Nazi Germany for many reasons. First, it's simply a much bigger country. Creating a totalitarian state in Germany in the 1930s was a very different enterprise from trying to do so in a nation of 350 million people.

That structural difference is, I hope, a saving grace for Americans who are worried about the direction of their country.

Also, today's authoritarian-leaning movements in the U.S. are far less organized than the Nazis were. The Nazis had paramilitary wings, a centralized ideology, and a deeply developed propaganda system well before taking power. What we see now in the U.S. is much more chaotic—more fragmented.

That said, the rhetoric, the targeting of vulnerable groups, and the populist grievances rhyme with history, and we must pay attention.

This is an important story, and we can close with this.

For a few months during a long stretch of dissertation research, I became obsessed with reading the documents from the American Embassy in Nazi Germany, particularly in 1938. Specifically, I focused on the records from the Commercial Attaché's Office. This office, housed within the U.S. Embassy in Berlin, studied economic trends and monitored the attitudes of American businesses operating in Germany and German businesspeople.

I highlight 1938 because it was a moment of intense global fear. Those who study this period know that the world had just experienced the Great Depression—a traumatic economic collapse that affected every industrialized nation. Both the United States and Germany had begun to recover in different ways. They found strategies to stimulate their economies; by the mid-to-late 1930s, some growth had returned.

But in 1938, another recession loomed—the first major signal of economic trouble since the recovery began. And that scared the Nazis to death. In those embassy records, I was surprised by just how much anxiety I saw—especially from people running a totalitarian state. These were not democratic leaders who feared losing an election. The Nazis had outlawed all other political parties by that point. But still, in 1937 and 1938, they were *worried*.

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Why? Because even in a one-party dictatorship, you have to manage public perception. Even among supporters of the regime and the politically disengaged, public morale matters. Populist and authoritarian regimes require a foundation of stability to function. When the economy falters, the emotional rhetoric of grievance becomes hollow. You cannot feed people with propaganda. If they are well-fed, you can sell them all the grievance you want—but when hunger sets in, outrage loses its power.

Stability is the oxygen for authoritarian and populist regimes. But here's the paradox: those regimes almost always destroy the very platform they stand on.

And the Nazis did exactly that. They eventually obliterated their foundation by launching a global war. So, bringing this back to the United States is a real and pressing concern. Authoritarianism cannot thrive without economic and social stability. I think the Nazi regime, for all its evil, understood that far better than the current American regime does.

You cannot build a durable authoritarian state on chaos. Even the Nazis—who were far more disciplined and ideologically cohesive—envisioned a "Thousand-Year Reich" and only made it twelve years. Not exactly a strong track record.
What will be the track record of this current regime in America? Well... time will tell.

Jacobsen: Jay, thank you for your time today.

Wexelbaum: Sounds great. It's good to meet you, Scott.

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Antisemitism Isn't Just a Bug in the System. It's Being Amplified by It. (Tal-Or Cohen Montemayor)

As Australia headed into its 2025 federal election, a darker undercurrent pulsed through its digital platforms. CyberWell, a nonprofit group specializing in online antisemitism, uncovered a disturbing trend: antisemitic narratives were not just circulating—they were being algorithmically amplified to more than 257,000 users. Using proprietary monitoring tools guided by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism, CyberWell flagged 548 posts between November 2024 and April 2025. Of those, 80 were confirmed antisemitic.

The responses from social media platforms varied starkly. X (formerly Twitter) removed just 5% of flagged content, citing permissive "civic integrity" policies, while Facebook removed nearly 90%. Classic antisemitic conspiracies—like the Kalergi Plan—reemerged in digital camouflage, retooled into memes and coded language to evade detection.

CyberWell argues that such normalization of Jewish hatred poses a direct threat to democratic norms, public safety, and civil discourse. They advocate for mandatory IHRA-based moderator training and stronger enforcement. Platforms like YouTube and Facebook, which maintain clearer policies and trusted partnerships, demonstrated more robust moderation. But as the data suggests, uneven enforcement leaves critical gaps—ones that extremists are all too eager to exploit.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: How did CyberWell identify and verify the posts?

Tal-Or Cohen Montemayor: CyberWell utilizes a combination of social media listening tools and a proprietary monitoring system to identify posts that are highly likely to be antisemitic, according to the IHRA working definition. Between Nov 11, 2024 – April 22, 2025, CyberWell's monitoring technology flagged 548 posts in English on Facebook, X (Twitter), TikTok, and YouTube that included keywords related to the Australian federal election and had a high likelihood of being antisemitic.

Of the 548 posts, CyberWell selected a sample for manual review. In total, 80 posts were confirmed as antisemitic according to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism by CyberWell's research team. The high level of engagement around a select sample of just 80 posts indicates that the exposure of deeply anti-Jewish narratives ahead of the election period in Australia is far worse than what CyberWell's research indicates.

Jacobsen: Elon Musk's X platform removed only ~5% of flagged antisemitic election content compared to 54.2% in 2024. What explains the dramatic drop in moderation?

Montemayor: The significance of removal between X and other platforms is largely due to their policy approach to election-related content. Much of the hate speech that intersects with election issues is mistakenly perceived by X and their moderators as political expression and, therefore, allowed on their platform. X is the platform with the most permissive "Civic Integrity" policy, and it appears that much of the antisemitic election-related content is categorized under this

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policy as far as they are concerned. This extraordinarily low rate of actioning open Jewish hatred is not something we have encountered before.

Additionally, the gap between X's rate of removal of antisemitic election content and their average rate of removal in 2024 highlights a key issue when relying on user reporting and escalation to major social media platforms, particularly to X: response time. The average rate of removal of reported antisemitic content by X in 2024, as collected by CyberWell, is a snapshot at the end of the calendar year, giving the platform many months to respond to our reporting. X's average rate of removal of the antisemitic Australia election dataset collected by CyberWell is approximately 5% reflects the rate of removal three to five days after reporting it to X. While platforms take days to respond to user reports, the engagement algorithms continue to push and suggest content, especially ahead of events of wide public interest like a national election.

Jacobsen: Your report mentions the use of classic antisemitic conspiracy theories, such as the Kalergi Plan and alleged Jewish control over political parties. How have these narratives evolved?

Montemayor: The dominant antisemitic theme that election antisemitism centers around is conspiracy theories about Jewish global control and influence. These narratives characterize Jews as manipulative puppeteers who secretly control governments, political leaders, and the electoral process itself. Antisemitic conspiracy theories—such as the Kalergi Plan and claims of Jewish control over specific political parties—have evolved online by merging with contemporary political narratives and global events.

On social media, this very old anti-Jewish idea is often repackaged using coded language, emojis, and memes. The conspiracy theories suggesting secret Jewish control frequently surface in discussions about major political events, such as federal elections, where antisemitic tropes are embedded within broader ideological discourse. This blending allows hate actors to evade platform policies and challenges enforcement in practice while spreading this harmful narrative to mass audiences during times of increased social sensitivity and tension. This is extremely dangerous for the Jewish community in Australia, which is already experiencing a marked rise in violent and targeted attacks.

Jacobsen: How have these gained traction in digital political discourse during election cycles?

Montemayor: CyberWell will be releasing a comparative analysis of antisemitic narratives during election cycles, examining how these anti-Jewish trends have gained popularity and audience during the UK, U.S., Canadian, and Australian elections towards the end of the summer.

However, we can share that in each of the four election cycles, classic antisemitism criticizing disproportionate Jewish power and conspiracies of covert control are the most prevalent types of Jewish hatred in election antisemitism across the board. This indicates that the dominant antisemitic theme in this dataset centers on conspiracy theories about Jewish global control and influence.

Notably, this form of classic antisemitism, consistent with the second example of the IHRA working definition, closely aligns with the core principles of major social media platforms' hate

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speech and hateful conduct policies. This content includes offensive generalizations, harmful stereotypes, and conspiracy theories targeting a "protected group," including those defined by religious affiliation or belief.

Since these carve-outs and protections are already recognized by most large social media platforms in their policies, it is reasonable to expect that platforms would enforce their policies against this type of content effectively. In practice, however, enforcement of election-related antisemitic hate speech appears to be significantly lower than typical enforcement rates against online Jewish hatred.

Political rhetoric focused on candidates and party platforms, including those that are irate and critical, are an important part of freedom of expression and political speech. However, the targeted violence against the Australian Jewish community and other Jewish communities across the globe has proven that online conspiracy theories and hatred has real-world consequences.

Jacobsen: How does CyberWell's application of the IHRA working definition of antisemitism help distinguish rhetoric?

Montemayor: The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism is a globally recognized consensus definition, rooted in multi-disciplinary expertise, that CyberWell uses as a discourse analysis tool. The eleven examples featured in the IHRA working definition provide a framework for a lexicon focused on identifying particular beliefs, conspiracy theories, and narratives that are the cornerstones of Jewish hatred. We apply the definition as a tool for narrative analysis context. It not only helps us monitor specific narratives online but also organizes and allows us to track spikes in particular tropes, accusations, slurs, and narratives.

Jacobsen: What are the strengths and weaknesses of the IHRA definition of antisemitism? How can social media companies improve enforcement during elections?

Montemayor: A major strength of the IHRA working definition is that it provides a comprehensive consensus definition of antisemitism that addresses the multifaceted nature of Jewish hatred as it has evolved over time and up to the modern day.

The IHRA working definition through the eleven categories laid out in the definition covers the evolution of Jewish hatred from its historical roots in religious antisemitism, race-based Jewish hatred during the Holocaust to its most modern iteration, political antisemitism via vilification of Jews as agents of the Israeli state, demonization of the concept of Jewish self-determination and using the state of Israel or the Israeli identity as a touchstone for promoting classic and openly anti-Jewish tropes, biases and hatred. However, as one of the most complex forms of hatred, even this working definition needs updates.

For example, CyberWell's research of online antisemitism, particularly the October 7 denial campaign, has revealed that purposeful denial of atrocities or attacks committed against the Jewish community is a form of current antisemitism. The denial or 'false flag' narrative, either blaming the victims for the attack or erroneously claiming that they set up the attack, has also been used to delegitimize and dismiss the attacks against the Jewish community in Australia from Sydney to Melbourne. The recognition of Holocaust denial and distortion as a form of

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antisemitism, featured in the IHRA working definition, should be applied to the purposeful denial or distortion of atrocities committed against Jews for being Jews.

Some social media platforms have gone on the record stating that they use the IHRA working definition as a reference point when updating their policies, but the truth is the practitioners and enforcers of the policies, the content moderators, often outsourced by major platforms to third party providers around the world, are unfamiliar with the IHRA working definition and there is no indication that it is part of their regular training material.

A more comprehensive application of the IHRA working definition within the existing policies of the social media platforms, making sure the definition is part of content moderator training and implementation of recommendations from off-platform experts like CyberWell, including reliance on specialized datasets and keywords around events like the elections, would significantly impact better enforcement of digital policy on social media.

Jacobsen: There is a growing normalization of antisemitism online and offline in Australian society. What are the urgent consequences of this normalization?

Montemayor: The normalization of antisemitism—both online and offline—erodes social tolerance and creates an environment where hate speech, hostility, and violence against Jewish citizens is more likely to be accepted or ignored. It emboldens extremist actors to act criminally and violently, legitimizes dangerous conspiracy theories that erode trust, and fosters a climate of fear within Jewish communities. When antisemitic rhetoric goes unchecked, it weakens democratic norms and desensitizes the public to open bigotry and hatred. This is why many Jewish communities are experiencing increased incidents of harassment, threats to community safety, and the risk of real-world attacks—the increased violence is fueled by online radicalization and algorithmically charged hate speech. The platforms must be responsible for systematic and effective enforcement of their own digital policies in order to stem the tide of increasing violence.

Jacobsen: Facebook and YouTube demonstrated stronger enforcement. Why are they more proactive? Are they more successful?

Montemayor: Unlike the other platforms, YouTube takes a more defined stance by including specific policies on hate speech related to elections and civic integrity. The platform explicitly prohibits hate speech and harassment in the context of elections. Reflecting this policy, YouTube had the fewest antisemitic posts in the dataset. While the removal rate stood at 0%, this is attributable to the fact that only one video was identified during the monitoring period.

Overall, CyberWell's research across platforms suggests that the more explicit a policy is, the more effectively it is enforced. This is true in terms of technological resources, such as pre-emptive AI removal through classifiers and human content moderation, which reviews users' reports of violating content. While Facebook does not currently include explicit clauses in their policies targeting election-related hate speech, Facebook demonstrated the highest rate of content removal, taking down 89.47% of the reported posts. It is also worth noting that CyberWell is a trusted partner of TikTok and Meta, but not an official partner of YouTube. This may support stronger response mechanisms by Meta for reported antisemitic content.

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Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Tal-Or.

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A FURTHER INQUIRY

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Intersecting Tensions: Right-Wing Antisemitism, Identity Politics, and the Israel-Palestine Conflict (Scott Douglas Jacobsen with Dr. Alon Milwicki)

Dr. Alon Milwicki is a senior research analyst in the Intelligence Project at the Southern Poverty Law Center.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: I interviewed a colleague because she was writing about religious-based identity politics. This is the basis for the idea of this interview. The term "identity politics" can be overused, making it difficult to provide a proper critique. Antisemitism is an inversion of that, where you're not adopting an identity for political gain but instead asserting it about someone else to create unfavourable political currency for them and then relatively positive political currency for yourself. What's your take on that? If you can tie someone to being antisemitic, especially post-October 7th, it can have severe implications.

Dr. Alon Milwicki: Antisemitism is currently a prevalent form of racism. Many populists talk about antisemitism. Labelling someone as antisemitic is a potent form of demonization, considering the context of Hamas's actions. Accusing someone of antisemitism implies they support Hamas and terrorism. In post-9/11 America, being labelled pro-terrorist is highly damaging.

Your statement is accurate, but it can be somewhat flipped. In the effort to be the most pro-Israel, it often has nothing to do with actual Israeli politics. Most people need to familiarize themselves with Israeli politics. A recent poll showed that almost three-quarters of Israelis oppose Netanyahu, yet the entire Republican party in the US supports him. If they genuinely favour democratic societies and the will of the people, they should listen to the Israeli people rather than project their beliefs onto them.

In an attempt to prove they are so pro-Semitic, they feel the need to be extremely pro-Israel. Projecting this image of pro-Israel deflects the negative identity of antisemitism. Thus, there is identity politics surrounding antisemitism, with the pro-Israel trope being prominently displayed. You'll likely see many Republican candidates up for reelection declaring themselves pro-America, America first, and pro-Israel.

Labelling themselves as pro-Israel has nothing to do with genuine allyship. The US and Israel are so interdependent that there is no scenario where America will not support Israel from a foreign policy perspective. Based on my limited knowledge and experiences from previous workplaces, it is highly unlikely. If these individuals in government are unaware, it indicates either a lack of diligence or dishonesty. If they are dishonest, one must question their motives. If they are simply uninformed, they ought to be better informed.

Jacobsen: Indeed. What about the lesser risk posed by state-based issues?

Milwicki: If Marjorie Taylor Greene claims to be pro-Israel but previously discussed Jewish space lasers, she should reassess her knowledge.

Jacobsen: How do you perceive American campus protests, where individuals oppose Israeli policies but support Palestinians while condemning terrorism? There is also a mix of individuals

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who join these protests without fully understanding the issues, potentially feeding into antisemitism. This can result in an inadvertent moral misstep towards antisemitism on the left wing.

Milwicki: The reporting on these protests often differs from the actual events. Some protests have been significantly disrupted, with certain groups attending specifically to promote their narratives. Antisemitic groups have been known to participate in these protests. For instance, the JDL, listed by the FBI as a terrorist organization, was reportedly seen at a campus protest. While this might not have been confirmed, I recall reading about it. College students' involvement is significant. Many believe they can rekindle the civil rights movement. This is unlikely in the 21st century. Protesting is an American right and should be exercised.

Whether through sit-ins or campus protests, these activities are permissible. However, when swastikas are displayed, one must question whether this stems from ignorance or extremism. The depiction of the Israeli flag with a swastika is antisemitic. Although the swastika is shocking, its presence is generally limited. Most college protests are simply that—protests. There is nothing inherently wrong with them. However, the narrative that criticizing Israel equates to antisemitism is a right-wing construct. By this logic, 75% of Israelis would be considered antisemitic.

Following this reasoning, one must question the assumption that antisemitism began on college campuses only a few months ago. Antisemitism, racism, and misogyny have always been present on college campuses. These institutions are microcosms of society. Most college individuals are between 16 and 25 years old, forming their identities. This environment can be a breeding ground for both positive and negative behaviours. College campuses indeed reflect broader societal issues. There are valid reasons to critique the Israeli government, but this must also involve understanding Hamas. We must acknowledge the context provided by the widely circulated videos.

We have all seen the atrocities, not just those committed by Hamas, but also the bombings carried out by Israel. We need to understand that Hamas frequently uses civilian targets. They are experts in propaganda and have succeeded in the propaganda war. The only source of information many people rely on regarding the death toll in Gaza is Hamas. This does not account for those whom Hamas has endangered or killed. Netanyahu correctly pointed out that if relief aid reaches Gaza, Hamas does not distribute it to the people; they allocate it to their supporters and themselves. This is typical behaviour for a terrorist organization, and it must be understood that the first victims of Hamas are the Palestinians.

Palestinians have been victims of Hamas for nearly 20 years, living under a terrorist regime that controls all aspects of their lives. This needs to be recognized. However, eliminating Hamas does not mean the destruction of Palestine or the erasure of Palestinian identity. It also does not grant Israel the freedom to act without restraint. I am not a specialist in Middle Eastern affairs, but as a historian who has studied antisemitism for many years, I have a basic understanding of Hamas and Israel, which is necessary to grasp how these issues are appropriated or misused.

I do not oppose campus protests and do not believe they should be banned. Organizations like SJP and BLM should have the right to protest. While some activists have made inappropriate

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statements, this does not justify banning their protests. Regardless of one's perspective, certain activists say problematic things. For example, right-wing activists often make offensive remarks. One could argue that the right's current focus on antisemitism, particularly **after October 7th**, is an attempt to shift the narrative back to the post-9/11 era, emphasizing Islamic terrorism as the primary threat despite FBI statistics showing that white supremacy and far-right groups are the largest domestic terrorist threats in America.

This narrative shift involves using Israel to further their agenda. This is a novel point, and I appreciate you mentioning it, Scott. I used to tell my students that my role was to impart wisdom, and their role was to record it. It may sound trivial, but hopefully, it addresses your question. College campuses are easy targets for such narratives, but this does not mean that problematic behaviour does not occur there. Antisemitic incidents do happen within these protests. However, condemning all colleges or universities is unjustified. The United States has many prestigious institutions that attract students and professors worldwide, although recent trends may affect this. Those who claim to be First Amendment purists should question why they are so keen on limiting freedom of expression and education.

Jacobsen: That is an important point to consider. I cannot think of a better way to conclude this discussion.

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Examining Decolonization, Zionism, and the Ethics of Clinical Neutrality (Scott Douglas Jacobsen)

Therapy and Politics

If therapy can be a vehicle for ideology, then clinicians risk repeating past abuses.

The article "The Danger of Decolonization Therapy" by Miri Bar-Halpern and Dean McKay, published on April 8, 2025, in *Jewish Syndicate News*, addressed concerns within the mental health field. The focus was on the partial politicization of some facets of therapeutic spaces.

Spotlight on Decolonization Therapy

Decolonization therapy is a psychological approach working on lasting impacts of colonialism by centring Indigenous knowledge, challenging Eurocentric models, and integrating social justice. This does not necessarily mean cultural psychology or Indigenous psychology: To acknowledge some systemic issues is different than imposed ideological stances ignoring principles of impartiality. The emphasis for Bar-Halpern and McKay is a particular strain and risk in this framework of therapy, implicitly. They argued decolonization therapy lacks sufficient rigorous scientific validation unlike Dialectical Behavioural Therapy or Cognitive Behavioural Therapy.

It can erase the core identity of some Jewish clients vis-a-vis Jewish identity and Zionism, and may retraumatize some Jewish clients. They make a call-to-action for the rejection of ideological coercion in therapy, protecting Jewish clinicians from discrimination, demanding high empirical standards of practices, addressing some nuanced antisemitism in mental-health training, and advocating for Jewish clients in this space. Naturally, colonialism is a factor in histories and people groups more recently affected remain extant. That's not the question of concern here, but remains a question of concern in other conversations.

I would agree with the thrust of the arguments, while pumping the brakes modestly.

A Cautionary Tale: Sluggish Schizophrenia

I thought about this over a coffee one morning, whether to pursue analysis or not. I had another coffee and jotted some brain droppings down. I had some time today to synthesize some reflections. The piece made me think, rethink, question myself, *et cetera*. A reflection from a doctoral counselling psychologist colleague with Metis heritage, if that counts in context on prior politicization of an intended apolitical therapeutic space after reading the same article by Bar-Halpern and McKay:

> *In the mid-twentieth century, Soviet psychologists invented a category called "sluggish schizophrenia," which they used to classify political dissenters as mentally ill. Psychology continues to be misused to push political agendas. Ethical psychologists do not push their views on their clients. Psychotherapy is designed to assist the client in expanding their worldviews and making their lives more satisfying by using self-experimentation and reason. Even if a client decides she wishes to forgo her volitional abilities and become a robot waiting for the command, we explore the likely*

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> *consequences with the client. However, as long as the client is aware of the consequences of their actions, we support them. Here is an ethical dilemma we discussed in my early training: Do we help Al Capone become more self-actualized in his actions?*

Decolonization therapy may well do this, not from Eastern Europe but from North America if pushing ideologies, whether anti-Capitalist or anti-Zionist. Anti-Zionism is not antisemitism in most cases, while pro-Zionist or anti-Zionist political pushes in an intended apolitical space is *wrong*. That is the root: "Psychology continues to be misused to push political agendas." No specification of alignment or a re-stipulation of the foundational ethics of therapy: impartiality, or minimize bias and maximize neutrality.

From Theory to the Couch: Ethical Dilemmas

As the article surmises, the majority of Jewish people identify as Zionists and/or support Israel. On a personal note, I share the last name of the Founder of Reform Judaism, Israel Jacobson. However, I do not know if there is any family history or patrilineal or matrilineal relation. My family received an award for harbouring at least one Jewish couple for several years for safety and protection on the Dutch side during World War II. Do I get a cookie? *No*.

My biases: Let us say, for the sake of argument, the likely background of no family relation, I "identify" per contemporary, in vogue, verbiage, or "am" a “Zionist” in a manner of being a ‘Palestinist’--not an abnormal position in international documentation. I wrote a book project, out of In-Sight Publishing, of in-depth professional, expert-level interviews from 2019-2021 on precisely the subject matter of Israel-Palestine, entitled *On Israel-Palestine: 2019-2021* (2024).

Identity, Data, and the Risk of Erasure

Those State terms came from agreements following the Balfour Declaration. The vote for Palestine's non-member observer State status on November 29, 2012, at the United Nations cemented this further within international voting records. UN Resolution A/RES/67/19 stipulated, "The General Assembly... Decide to accord Palestine non-member observer state status in the United Nations..."

It passed with 138 votes in favour, nine against, and 41 abstentions. Therefore, we have Palestine as a non-member observer State status of the UN, under observer state Status, on equal footing with the Holy See, as Israel is a Member State with voting privileges. At least, in either case, it could change, in theory.

However, it is so overwhelmingly supported by the international community for a State of Palestine under the Question of Palestine and for a State of Israel, simply unreasonable to put in the fore a question about the member state status of either. I denounce anti-Arab and anti-Muslim prejudice, and antisemitic bigotry. Many others do, too.

The fact that these become controversial stances, as generically positioned and further utilized to politicize a professionally intended vulnerable population and apolitical interpersonal professional space, raises serious questions under codes of ethics. Therapeutic spaces are

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intended as apolitical spaces for terms set by clients with therapists. To politicize them violates the premise, they are not complex considerations.

The symmetry fits structurally with Conversion Therapy in their positionality, but is disjunct in harm type and degree. Based on the article numbers, Zionism *is* something 85% of Jewish people support. However, based on other sources from the United States and in the United Kingdom, these may be inflated numbers, but not too much. Others range the numbers from 63% to 82% regarding caring about Zionism, with lesser strength in support, while still adhering.

As of 2020, UK data from the Institute for Jewish Policy Research state 73% of U.S. Jews feel emotionally attached to Israel, while 63% identify as Zionists, down from 72% a decade earlier. While Pew's 2021 data show 82% of American Jews feel at least some attachment to Israel, while 48% under 30 feel "very" or "somewhat" attached to Israel, 51% of Jews 50 and older caring about Israel is essential to Jewish identity. Overall 2/3rds express some degree of connection to Israel. Attachment does not equate to support. Connection and care can mean Zionism to many. Therefore, most adhere to styles of Zionism or connection, care, and/or support for Israel.

Parallels and Hypotheticals

Similarly on issues of gender and sexual minorities, LGBTI+, using terminology via the UN with the LGBTI Core Group rather than narrowing within common American parlance, is an inherent identity of development. Gender and sexual orientation seem to flow outwards, akin to the development of a snowflake and a sociological category. It is not a position of necessary advocacy to proclaim: "I am a bisexual man." It is *fabulous* and factual, but not a necessary point of advocacy in the manner of Zionism or argument around historicity or a claim to some biblically (mostly) unjustified narrative. On the other hand, antisemitism has been around for centuries. This can count as an early sprouting of it in a professional space.

Within a few decades, people's lives targeted can be impacted. Conversion Therapy was established and systematized for decades prior to the 1990s controversies. Conversion Therapy, or reparative therapy, is a practice aimed at changing sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. Peter Gajdics, the author of *The Inheritance of Shame*, was a victim. So, that case is different, not in spirit but in development. Eventually, I could see a symmetry if others were not critically inquiring into it and pushing back against it. It is critically confronted, not yet 2055 or 2065, either, so not enough room for decades of entrenchment.

So, we can at least step forward with a strong foot. This potato is too hot. Journalists do not want to cover this. To critique Israeli policy, "Hooray, stop the genocide!" and "You are an antisemite" To critique Hamas murders on October 7 and hostage-taking, and leftwing unwitting antisemitism, "Stop the clock on the Woke, you go, Mr.!" and "Deport the lunatic leftwing radicals and terrorists on our campuses!"

If they are on the Right sociopolitically, then they might be afraid of leftist harassment and cancellation tactics. If they are on the Left, then they do not want to become another Norman Finkelstein case, and fear some wings of the Israeli lobby and the American State. To the more significant point, though, while no mainstream therapy formally pathologizes Zionism, a framing

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as inherently oppressive without acknowledging its ethnic and religious dimensions risks veering into symbolic antisemitism. This could destabilize a client's sense of safety and/or identity.

If they are like Mr. Huckabee and want a single super-state for apocalyptic Christian Zionism for the Second Coming of Christ, then that is a different story on hermeneutical antisemitism if that is their wheelhouse. One obvious thought experiment to me. Can we reverse this claim? Just forgetting any UN record, rights abuses by the Israeli state or the Palestinians against Israelis, etc., theoretically, one could assert the American far-right ethnic supremacist talking point about white genocide.

As a case in illustrative hyperbole, based on extreme viewpoints held in parts by many, "Looking at the mass immigration, look at the Kalergi-Coudenhove plan in action for the 'Eurasian-Negroid race of the future,' the Rothschilds own the moon, etc.; we are being colonized--watch out for the space lasers (TM) targeting the last of the pure Aryan Race." These form a White ethnic American State idea.

They pose this: anyone criticizing or arguing against it is considered colonizing. We need to decolonize the therapy of anti-White Statism. It is a *professional duty* for those in our care to decolonize from anti-White State ideas. People would take offence at this. Why not the reverse? They could even have APA poster presentations pointing to the prefrontal cortex, vaguely identifying anti-White Statism as a mental illness needing a decolonization therapy style of approach as was done with Zionism.

Restoring Neutrality: Evidence and Safeguards

We risk undermining the neutrality and integrity of psychological practice, and are moving towards this more pervasively based on this. Jewish identity is multifaceted, is not a mental illness when linked to Zionism, and involves self-determination. Decolonization Therapy mostly lacks sufficient rigorous empirical support. However, it is grounded in cultural psychology and values ideology over evidence, while inverting its duty not to harm by retraumatizing some Jewish patients, alienating them further.

It does not have the same systematic and comprehensive empirical support as standardized therapeutic techniques, including Dialectical Behavioural Therapy. Therapists, thus, can buy into antisemitic tropes around genocide and fascist stereotypes, labelling Jewish clients as oppressors, politicize therapy with anti-Zionist ideologies, and make therapeutic spaces a place to intimidate others. I submit that if a social justice framework in therapy retraumatizes and alienates clientele, then there will be less social justice and more *anti*-social *in*justice frameworks for therapy.

Therapy as Sanctuary, Not Battleground

Dr. Jennifer Mullan, the Founder of Decolonizing Therapy, most succinctly stated, "There's no such thing as neutral education. Education either functions as an instrument to bring about conformity or freedom," or "To begin to consider and implement practices that support politicizing and shifting our organizational and interpersonal perspectives."

To contrast, the Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists (Fourth Edition), under Ethical Standards of Principle of Integrity in Relationships, stipulated the importance of the need "to be

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as objective and unbiased as possible in their… service." The British Psychological Society in *Code of Ethics and Conduct* linked reason or rationality to impartiality. The International Union for Psychological Science in its *Universal Declaration of Ethical Principles for Psychologists* emphasized the fundamental Principle of Integrity specifying "maximizing impartiality and minimizing biases." Finally, the American Psychological Association (APA) *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct* emphasizes in its Principle C: Integrity the avoidance of deception and misrepresentation, which could extend to refraining from the use of therapy as a vehicle for partisan persuasion.

Therapy is meant as a sanctuary for clients' own narratives. Ironically, this trend can come to risk repeating the colonization abuses of the past under the imposition of a 'decolonization' pretense. We need a reintegration of client autonomy and therapeutic neutrality; therapy is the client's domain for autonomy premised on non-maleficence, not an ideological battleground. It may be helpful to further embed thorough mandatory neutrality training in licensure standards, so it doesn't become an issue at scale.

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Defining Antisemitism in Canada: Mathew Giagnorio on Law, Education, and the Propaganda War

Mathew Giagnorio is the founder and editor-in-chief of A Further Inquiry, where he publishes commentary on liberal democracy and contemporary antisemitism. His work, including "What is Liberalism? The Rise of Left-Wing Antisemitism, and The Weaponization of White Privilege," examines ideological extremism, conspiratorial rhetoric, and policy responses. A contributor to The Freethinker, Giagnorio foregrounds the resurgence of antisemitism across politics, academia, and culture. He employs legal, historical, and educational frameworks to enhance civic resilience and safeguard Jewish communities. In June 2025, he participated in "Confronting Antisemitism in Canada," a co-hosted event by the Clarity Coalition, Niagara Military Museum, and the Canadian Antisemitism Education Foundation.

In this interview with **Scott Douglas Jacobsen**, Giagnorio supports a practical working definition paired with awareness that antisemitism morphs across eras, from religious and racial frames to anti-Zionist rhetoric. He warns that propaganda, campus intimidation, and increasingly misapplied concepts like "anti-Palestinian racism" can shield violent extremism from criticism. Education's overreliance on Holocaust instruction, he argues, obscures the prejudice's deeper history. Reflecting on a June 2025 conference, he highlights legal and policy strategies, student testimonies, and cross-partisan conspiracism. Canada's leadership is inconsistent; today, civil society organizations are driving effective responses.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Alright, today we are here with Mathew Giagnorio, founder and editor-in-chief of *A Further Inquiry*. We will discuss antisemitism. On June 12, 2025, you organized and the Clarity Coalition, the Niagara Military Museum, and the Canadian Antisemitism Education Foundation (CAEF) co-hosted the conference "Confronting Antisemitism in Canada" at the Niagara Military Museum. You frequently publish commentary and analysis on contemporary antisemitism, including the piece *"What is Liberalism? The Rise of Left-Wing Antisemitism, and The Weaponization of White Privilege."*Additionally, your contributor bio at *The Freethinker* highlights the resurgence of antisemitism as a central focus of your work.

Two main ideas have emerged in these conversations. One approach is to adopt a static definition—helpful as a placeholder that enables metrics (e.g., via census or incident data) and provides an indicator of what to watch for. The other sees a static definition as too limited, because antisemitism evolves and is perennial. This view advocates for a living, context-responsive definition informed by current needs. Which approach seems—perhaps not more "correct," but more appropriate—in a Canadian publishing context to you?

Mathew Giagnorio: Scott, first, it is great to be with you again today, and thank you for highlighting some of my work. I think you do need a definition—a working definition of antisemitism—but you also need to be fully aware that antisemitism evolves. It varies from decade to decade.

If we were talking at the turn of the 20th century—the 1920s or 1930s—the focus would lean toward nationalism and racial orientation. If we were talking in the 1500s, the emphasis might be

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on Jews as a people without a country—a wandering people—and it would also have been tied to religion. Antisemitism does change; it is morphological, to put it that way. There are constants in how it operates: it is a prejudice. However, it is not just another type of racism. In a sense, it is the original form of conspiracy theories.

There is almost nothing that does not end up being blamed on or attributed to Jews in the most outlandish, disgusting, and conspiratorial ways from an antisemitic mindset. So, yes, you need a working definition for everyday use.

Moreover, for the legal system, we need a means to circumvent, stop, and prevent this from occurring. As we are seeing through a contemporary lens, antisemitism has never truly gone away. However, today it is being given a more emboldened voice by politicians and by people who should otherwise dismiss this nonsense. We are witnessing it on the streets of Toronto, in Sydney, Australia, and in the United Kingdom. It is absolute nonsense.

We are also seeing the line: *"I am not antisemitic, I am just anti-Zionist."* As I last checked, that is absolutely absurd. There are blatant calls for the destruction of Israel, people describing Hamas as "resistance," and even casting Hezbollah as "resistance fighters." This is grotesque. It is a propaganda strategy aimed at winning the war of perception. Moreover, although the IDF is doing a strong job militarily on the ground, in the West—in what should be democratic, liberal, secular countries—the propaganda war is still at a crossroads. Increasingly, the online space is being occupied by antisemitic voices.

Moreover, what frightens me most is seeing young people, especially those under 30, who believe they are engaging in a just, righteous, or historically correct cause. However, they know little about the history, and they are being drawn deeply into this. Why? Because academic discourse and DEI programming often disproportionately frame Jews as "privileged," classifying them as "white Europeans." This narrative has been heard at rallies under slogans like *"From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free,"* or other refrains, which cast anyone Jewish as European, white, and therefore, by that definition, privileged.

It is a complete distortion of reality. Therefore, we need a clear working definition for a legal approach. However, we also must remain aware, both historically and in the present, that antisemitism undergoes morphological change. Today, one form is disgust that Israel exists at all, or resentment that the Jewish people are thriving. To be antisemitic today is not only to harbour old prejudices—which persist—but also to oppose the existence of the State of Israel directly. Hence, the anti-Zionist framing has become a prominent feature of modern discourse. You can see this in both academia and activist culture.

At our conference, one of the Canadian aspects discussed was the troubling introduction of these narratives not only at the high school level but even in primary schools. I shared with you and some of my colleagues my research on how this is being framed legally, particularly through the concept of "anti-Palestinian racism." On its face, that sounds good—of course, nobody wants to be prejudiced against Palestinians.

Giagnorio: The problem with some of these modern definitions is that they are being used not based on race or anything of that sort, but rather to dismiss any criticism of volatility, terrorism,

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or extreme ideologies. These are ideologies that do not function as equals or compatriots, but explicitly as opponents of the Jewish people and, more specifically, as opponents of the State of Israel's existence.

That becomes a serious problem when definitions are manipulated in ways that make it impossible to criticize groups such as Hamas. When you cannot call out violent, extreme, illiberal, undemocratic, theocratic, and outright barbaric actions—and when those actions are instead classified as "culture"—that is grotesque.

Now, that being said, I do not want to see any person—man, woman, or child, Palestinian or otherwise—die. I do not think any free-thinking, healthy-minded individual wants that. However, we must recognize that Palestinian civilians are put in harm's way daily by groups such as Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and other factions. In many ways, they are captives of those entities themselves.

Do we have to acknowledge that every day, people are involved in this process? Indeed, some of these groups are even voted into power. However, we also must hold on to nuance and reality. Modern antisemitism is not diluted; it still uses the same tropes, the same conspiratorial frameworks that it always has.

We also need to understand that for people in their 30s, 40s, or older, antisemitism is often equated almost exclusively with the far-right framing—Nazi Germany, World War II, and of course, the Holocaust. That is what most people picture. However, it is difficult, especially for those on the political left or in liberal circles, to accept or even observe that antisemitism is not partisan. It predates the political spectrum as we know it. It exists on both the left and the right.

Today, we are seeing more of it from the political left, and that has historical precedent. For example, the Soviet model of antisemitism favoured leaders like Yasser Arafat and his approaches. This is not new. Stalin was virulently antisemitic, as was the Soviet system more broadly, as well as Imperial Russia before it. Out of this context emerged the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion"—a fabricated text that became the precursor for much of the conspiratorial antisemitic framework that followed.

The fact that these ideas continue to circulate online is alarming. However, as free-thinking individuals in Western liberal democratic countries, we cannot sit idly by and allow this to continue. We must be vigilant and active. This is not a partisan issue—it is not simply for those on the left or the right. It is a societal issue.

Societies that allow the normalization of antisemitic rhetoric and discourse are societies that are, historically speaking, on the path to disintegration and decay. Moreover, we are seeing the beginnings of that today.

The Palestinian movement for statehood recognition has gained international attention. Canada, France, and the UK have each signalled support at the upcoming United Nations General Assembly, which is concerning. I know Prime Minister Mark Carney has suggested that recognition would only be contingent on disarmament—Hamas excluded from elections, Fatah committing to certain conditions. However, that is naïve. Who enforces these promises? Who ensures compliance?

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We need to realize that antisemitism is not just a threat to the Jewish people. It has always been —and will always be—a threat to intellectual discourse. It is brain rot. It is also a direct threat to the functioning of liberal democracy.

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Canada's Struggle with Antisemitism: Civil Society, Politics, and the Fight for Liberal Democracy (Scott Douglas Jacobsen with Mathew Giagnorio)

Mathew Giagnorio is the founder and editor-in-chief of A Further Inquiry, where he publishes commentary on liberal democracy and contemporary antisemitism. His work, including "What is Liberalism? The Rise of Left-Wing Antisemitism, and The Weaponization of White Privilege," examines ideological extremism, conspiratorial rhetoric, and policy responses. A contributor to The Freethinker, Giagnorio foregrounds the resurgence of antisemitism across politics, academia, and culture. He employs legal, historical, and educational frameworks to enhance civic resilience and safeguard Jewish communities. In June 2025, he participated in "Confronting Antisemitism in Canada," a co-hosted event by the Clarity Coalition, Niagara Military Museum, and the Canadian Antisemitism Education Foundation.

In this interview with **Scott Douglas Jacobsen**, Giagnorio supports a practical working definition paired with awareness that antisemitism morphs across eras, from religious and racial frames to anti-Zionist rhetoric. He warns that propaganda, campus intimidation, and increasingly misapplied concepts like "anti-Palestinian racism" can shield violent extremism from criticism. Education's overreliance on Holocaust instruction, he argues, obscures the prejudice's deeper history. Reflecting on a June 2025 conference, he highlights legal and policy strategies, student testimonies, and cross-partisan conspiracism. Canada's leadership is inconsistent; today, civil society organizations are driving effective responses.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: That is the political and geographic context, where matters are concrete. However, in other conversations, we touched on different strands of antisemitism, some of which are far more bizarre. In a glossary of styles of antisemitism, we encountered the supernaturalist conspiracy theories—things like, "the Rothschilds own the moon and operate a moon base controlling global domination." These examples are extreme, but they illustrate how antisemitism mutates into absurd forms. What we discussed at the conference, however, remained more concrete and pressing: the kind of antisemitism that is shaping publishing, organizing, and political events today.

From your perspective as an editor and organizer, what was your takeaway from that event? Moreover, how do you incorporate these insights into your editorial guidelines and decision-making?

Giagnorio: That is an excellent question. My main takeaway was that we have much work to do, but we also have a lot of people already doing the work. There are numerous outstanding Jewish organizations, some newly established after October 7, while others are long-standing.

I was particularly impressed by the contributions of Casey Babb at the Macdonald-Laurier Institute—his policy work is phenomenal. I also had conversations with Mark Sandler and his team at an organization whose name escapes me at the moment. However, their focus is crucial: they approach antisemitism through a legal lens. They are asking: *What do we need to do legally? How do we combat this through the courts and policy frameworks?*

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For me, it was also a valuable chance to deepen my understanding of how the historical dimensions of antisemitism shape contemporary realities. Moreover, what I took away most of all is that we are not in an exclusively doom-and-gloom moment. Yes, things may be burning—literally and figuratively. Yes, things may be chaotic. However, there are people, organizations, and legal advocates working diligently behind the scenes.

I consider myself part of that network. It is encouraging to know there are compatriots—Jewish and non-Jewish—who are committed to liberal democracy and who stand firmly against antisemitism in all its vile, brain-rotting forms. The conference also provided an opportunity to build connections, strengthen our ranks, and highlight important moments in Canadian history that can inform the fight we face today.

One of the most chilling things I took away from the conference was hearing the testimonies of Jewish students on Canadian campuses, especially in Quebec. Their stories were frightening—they gave me chills then, and they give me chills now. Many of these students felt they had nowhere to turn. They could not go to their deans or professors. When they did speak up, they were dismissed outright. Their concerns were brushed off as "just an opinion" or a "feeling."

To me, that was not very nice. The very act of attending university and seeking an education is no longer safe for Jewish students—emotionally or physically—in Canada at this moment. That is heartbreaking, especially for me, as someone who loves this country, was born here, and values our history—the good, the bad, and the complex. While Canada talks about welcoming others with "elbows up," we are at the same time turning an elbow against our Jewish brothers and sisters. That hurts deeply.

Jacobsen: Do you notice any commonalities between left and right blind spots on this issue?

Giagnorio: Yes. The conspiratorial mindset is the commonality. The further you go into extremism—whether left or right—the more interchangeable the narratives become. Both sides fall into the same patterns: the Rothschild conspiracies, the denial of the moon landing, and, in the most grotesque examples, the blaming of 9/11 on Israel and the Jews. That is not new, but it is grotesque.

Another blind spot is internal. Both the left and the right struggle—or outright refuse—to acknowledge antisemitism in their own ranks. Each side insists that antisemitism only exists on the other side. That refusal is itself part of the problem. John Cleese, in a satirical sketch on self-righteousness, captured this perfectly decades ago: it is always easier to attribute all the bad to others and all the good to oneself. That mindset happens not only at the individual level but also within groups. Unless we remain vigilant and mindful, we all fall prey to it.

Jacobsen: So that is a perennial lesson.

Giagnorio: Each generation has to relearn this lesson. Moreover, in terms of antisemitism, I would add another commonality: the educational approach. In Canada—at least in Ontario, and I cannot speak for other provinces—what is labelled "antisemitism education" usually boils down to Holocaust education. That is important, but it is only one part of the history.

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Antisemitism has European roots, a Middle Eastern history, and has evolved over centuries. Reducing education to only the Holocaust flattens the picture. It leaves out the longer arc of antisemitism—its religious, political, and conspiratorial forms. To address antisemitism effectively, we need to teach it as a long-standing, global prejudice—not simply a chapter of mid-20th-century European history.

The current educational approach's structure exacerbates the situation. If you are in primary or secondary school and move into post-secondary education, you may come away with the impression that the Holocaust was just another genocide. Horrible, yes—but no different, nothing distinct in and of itself. That is inaccurate. It reflects a blanket approach in education.

So, I am not surprised, Scott, when you see younger people in their twenties today becoming vehemently antisemitic. Young people are out there chanting *"Globalize the Intifada"* or *"From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free,"*wrapped in keffiyehs. That is a natural response from an education system that has failed to teach them the long history of antisemitism. Instead, they are given a crib-note version of Anne Frank and maybe a chapter—or even just a few pages—on the Holocaust within the context of World War II. However, the buildup, the severity, and why the Holocaust happened are not emphasized. It did not appear out of nowhere.

Jacobsen: Canada is a close ally of the United States and has its own long history of navigating this issue. Canada can be hypocritical at times in policy versus action—though in a more subtle, almost "smiley-face" way. With respect to antisemitism, what is Canada doing well, and what is Canada not doing well?

Giagnorio: Excellent question. Right off the bat, I believe that Prime Minister Carney is worse than Prime Minister Trudeau on this file. For all the sham, drudgery, and disgusting yes-and-no approaches with Trudeau, at least he openly stated—passionately, in fact—that he was a Zionist. Take that with a grain of salt, critique me if you like, but he did say it.

Carney, by contrast, has yet to make such a statement. He takes an overly technocratic approach to governance, where even if Trudeau often made the wrong policy calls, at least he understood the issues from a political and policy perspective. Carney seems not to grasp them at all. To him, it is just a numbers game: if you organize things in a certain way, you can either "fix" or dismiss the problem. That is a fundamental misunderstanding.

Now, Canada has done some things right. One of them is listening—though inconsistently—to Jewish voices and community leaders. It has been an ebb and flow, not a straight line of progress. Even Carney, despite his flaws, has at least shown some willingness to listen, although he tends to treat Canada as if it were a corporation. It is a very technocratic, almost corporate mindset, and in that sense, ironically, it reminds me of a Trump-like approach to governance—though with Canadian politeness layered on top.

Prime Minister Carney did at least attend the October 7 Nova Music Festival memorial exhibit. He reached out to the Jewish community in a way that Justin Trudeau often did not. Moreover, I must agree with my colleague, Warren Kinsella, who wrote an article making the same point: when a politician is listening, you take it. Please do not spit in his face every ten seconds. He is a

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politician—he will be frustrating at times, even infuriating—but when he listens, take what you can get.

That said, what we are seeing now feels very much like an appeasement of terror. I recently wrote an article opposing Canada's move toward acknowledging a Palestinian state at this time. To me, that is appeasement. It sends a message: commit enough atrocities, cause enough slaughter, and you will be rewarded. You do not even need to disarm—just attack, terrorize, and eventually, you will get what you demand. That is a dangerous—and complex—issue to address.

It is not easy, and it has been an ebb and flow, both under Trudeau and now under Carney. Take October 7 itself: Montreal was practically ablaze—riots, vigilantes, people shouting *"Globalize the Intifada"* in the streets. Moreover, where was Trudeau? At a Taylor Swift concert. He issued no official statement. That is a problem. Antisemitism is not a local issue—it is a national and civilizational issue.

This tendency defined Trudeau's time: he often told different audiences different things. Moreover, we see it continuing under Carney. Yes, Carney made gestures, but then you also see him speaking at MAC (the Muslim Association of Canada), equating "Muslim values" with Canadian values. For context, he was trying to say that all cultural traditions are compatible with Canadian liberal, secular, democratic values. However, that is not entirely accurate—especially when addressing an organization widely criticized for its illiberal tendencies. The problem is not that MAC is "conservative." The problem is that it is an entity with deeply illiberal tendencies.

That kind of rhetoric emboldens the voices of extremism. For Carney to speak at such an event and make those remarks at a time of heightened tensions was, frankly, foolish. It does not demonstrate economic brilliance—it demonstrates social ineptitude. Therefore, I cannot provide a concise and thorough answer, except to say that there are too many ebbs and flows in Canada's leadership.

The people who are truly doing great work are not necessarily those in government. They are the Jewish organizations, many of which were formed in the aftermath of October 7, as well as those that predate it by a long time. These include legal organizations, advocacy groups, and policy institutes. They are the ones doing the real work.

For example, Vivian Bercovici, Canada's former ambassador to Israel, has also made significant contributions as a journalist. She has written courageously and clearly about issues that others in Canada either avoid or fail to articulate with the same precision. Organizations such as the Canadian Antisemitism Education Foundation (CAEF) are also doing outstanding work. Moreover, entities like the Jewish Affairs and Free Speech Alliance (JAFFA) are also making meaningful contributions.

There are many organizations across Canada working to influence government positively, press for real change, and respond pragmatically and proactively to antisemitism. Their work highlights an essential point: this is not a free speech issue. When speech crosses the line into calls for the destruction of a democratic state or the physical elimination of a people, that is not free expression—it is a threat. Moreover, in those cases, the threat outweighs any claim to

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freedom of speech, because what is being expressed is not an idea but the denial of a people's right to exist.

Jacobsen: Matthew, thank you.

Giagnorio: You are welcome.

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Comedy Writer Rick Rosner on Hollywood, Jewish Peoples, and Antisemitism

Rick Rosner is an accomplished television writer with credits on shows like Jimmy Kimmel Live!, Crank Yankers, and The Man Show. Over his career, he has earned multiple Writers Guild Award nominations—winning one—and an Emmy nomination. Rosner holds a broad academic background, graduating with the equivalent of eight majors. Based in Los Angeles, he continues to write and develop ideas while spending time with his wife, daughter, and two dogs.

In this interview with **Scott Douglas Jacobsen**, Rosner dismantles the persistent myth of a "Jewish cabal" controlling Hollywood, tracing the industry's roots instead to entrepreneurial immigrants escaping Edison's patent wars. He reflects on shifts from creative passion to corporate greed, recounts Soviet propaganda attempts in the 1930s, and critiques rising antisemitism in modern digital spaces. Rosner also contextualizes contemporary confusion about Israel, media polarization, and the resurgence of extremist ideologies.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: This is to be included in the book. Something that has arisen in many of these conversations is the idea that Jewish people—particularly a small, elite cohort—own and run Hollywood, and that they have always done so. The claim usually implies some form of organized, nefarious intent.

You have worked in Hollywood, either consecutively for twelve years on a single program—which is uncommon—or across a range of productions such as *The Man Show* and *Crank Yankers*. You therefore possess far more experience than most of the other interviewees. You also have a strong Ashkenazi background. My own background, for context, is genetically Ashkenazi—approximately ninety-eight or ninety-nine percent.

I grew up in New Mexico and Colorado, so my own practice of Judaism is reform, lapsed, and quite dilute. You probably now hold the title of my longest-standing writing partner—approximately eleven or perhaps twelve years.

To me, you are a trusted friend, colleague, and voice of reason. I expect, as always, that you will provide straightforward and honest answers. About that stereotype and your professional experience, what is the reality? How does it differ from the racist myth?

Rick Rosner: In reality, as far as I know, Jews are not uniquely dominant in entertainment, though there are undoubtedly many Jewish individuals working within the industry.

Historically, the film business in Los Angeles was built by entrepreneurial immigrants who had engaged in various trades before discovering the motion picture business. In the early 1900s, the Motion Picture Patents Company—connected to Thomas Edison—enforced patents, making film production on the East Coast difficult. That pressure drove many filmmakers west to California, where the distance from Edison's legal reach and the region's reliable weather created ideal working conditions. They settled in Los Angeles because it offered abundant sunshine, diverse landscapes, and year-round shooting opportunities.

The natural light was ideal. Early film studios often lacked roofs or used glass stages to take advantage of sunlight, as early film stock required immense illumination. Los Angeles proved per-

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fect for that reason. Many of those early pioneers were Jewish immigrants—business-minded individuals who founded the great Hollywood studios.

They went on to become the studio moguls, and many of them genuinely loved storytelling. The films of the 1930s and 1940s—from Warner Bros. and other studios—were created by people who, once they found this business, took joy in its creative potential, its power, and its glamour. In contrast, eight or nine decades later, the major studios are primarily controlled by large corporate conglomerates and executives whose priorities are financial rather than artistic.

For example, Warner Bros. Discovery cancelled *Batgirl* in 2022 as part of a cost-saving and tax strategy, and initially shelved *Coyote vs. Acme*—a *Looney Tunes* feature—in 2023 for similar reasons. Although both films were completed and were of high quality, the corporation determined that shelving them would yield greater tax benefits. *Another distributor later acquired Coyote vs. Acme* and is now slated for release in 2026.

Jewish people have a long tradition of humour. If you are funny, you can find work in entertainment. But there is no conspiracy in the entertainment industry—no coordinated effort by Jews to plant ideas in people's minds. Everyone in Hollywood wants to make money and get their creative work produced.

There have been times when genuinely insidious influences were at play. In the 1930s, Soviet communists attempted to infiltrate the American film industry for propaganda purposes. My understanding, though I cannot verify every detail, is that they sometimes employed what were called "honeypots"—attractive women who would seduce writers at Hollywood gatherings. The stereotype then was that writers had a harder time attracting attention than others in the business. As the old saying went, "Writers are schmucks with Underwoods," referring to the popular typewriter brand of the early twentieth century.

The story goes that these "honeypots" would charm the writers and then try to persuade them of the greatness of the Soviet Union during the 1930s—a period when few Americans were actually visiting Russia and many had to take such claims at face value. As a result, a small amount of pro-Soviet sentiment appeared in certain films of that era. But that was not "the Jews being up to no good." That was the Soviet Union attempting to influence Hollywood. There has never been a Jewish conspiracy in that regard.

As for American television, by the 1960s and 1970s, I was often frustrated with it. Much of it was uninspired and formulaic, though it was beginning to diversify its voices. Norman Lear, for instance, started producing programs featuring Black and Latino families, which was groundbreaking at the time. But many of those shows—like *All in the Family*—centred on people arguing constantly, which did not appeal to me as a teenager.

I was also a typical adolescent boy; I wanted television that was entertaining and, frankly, titillating. There were plenty of jokes in Lear's shows, but they were not what I would call sexy. Even *Three's Company*, which was a very white show, was hardly fulfilling in that sense. Still, television was slowly evolving.

We now have a far greater diversity of voices and subjects. The television I truly disliked was the kind exemplified by *The Brady Bunch*—safe, sanitized programming that avoided any real is-

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sues. Back then, everything was so clean that even *The Wonderful World of Disney* on Sunday nights—wholesome to the extreme—was something to look forward to simply because it broke the monotony.

In my own experience, I have never encountered a "Jewish monopoly" on entertainment work, nor have I experienced significant antisemitism—either personally or professionally. I did not enter entertainment because I was Jewish.

I found my way into it by accident. I kept returning to high school using a fake ID, and MTV was looking for teenagers to appear as contestants on a new game show that turned out to be *Remote Control*. They wanted ordinary teens, and my fake ID said I still was one. I showed up, played the game, enjoyed the people, and asked if I could work for them. They said yes, though they would not pay me, and I agreed. It turned out that MTV—and, in truth, much of Viacom—was mainly run on unpaid interns at the time. My Jewishness had absolutely nothing to do with that series of events.

Later, my boss for fourteen or fifteen years was Jimmy Kimmel. People sometimes assume he is Jewish, but he is not—he is of German and Italian descent. He has no Jewish background whatsoever. That, in a sense, encapsulates my experience: no conspiracy, no special access, just the usual mix of luck, persistence, and timing that shapes every career in entertainment.

The only place where I have encountered a substantial amount of antisemitism is X—formerly Twitter—after Elon Musk purchased it and transformed it into a haven for right-wing extremism and hate. He effectively ruined Twitter.

It used to be a space where I followed hundreds of comedians and comedy writers. I could read hundreds—sometimes more than five hundred—jokes a day. I would add my own jokes into the mix, and it felt like a lively, creative, and often joyful place. Then Musk took over and turned it into a platform filled with hostility. All the reasonable people left, and many of those who had been banned for spreading hate and misinformation were allowed back.

Now, there are numerous openly antisemitic accounts. Many of them have learned how to evade moderation rules. For example, users who would be banned for typing racial slurs often avoid penalties by deliberately misspelling the words—replacing letters with numbers or symbols. The same thing happens with antisemitic speech: people write "J-O-O" instead of "Jew," and everyone knows what they mean. These coded forms of hate speech have become common, and it is profoundly disheartening.

We are speaking at the end of October 2025, and recently, there have been multiple cases of individuals in Republican political circles—some even in leadership positions—being exposed for sharing pro-Hitler messages or making statements glorifying Nazi ideology. One congressional aide, for example, reportedly displayed an American flag with a swastika embedded in it, thumbtacked to the wall behind his desk.

In comedy, there is a long-standing idea of "too soon." You cannot make jokes about a tragedy immediately after it happens. For instance, you can now make jokes about the Kennedy assassination—it has been sixty years—because time creates distance. Just about any joke on that subject, if genuinely funny, would not get you into trouble today.

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We are also more accustomed now to people saying appalling things publicly. We are roughly eighty years past the death of Hitler, so it is certainly not "too soon" to make jokes about him. Yet, based on what I see online, particularly in right-wing spaces, it appears that enough time has passed for some of those individuals to begin embracing him again—quietly, but unmistakably.

That kind of quiet admiration is dangerous because silence rarely stays silent. There is a growing erosion of moral clarity, and more people are now openly discussing supposed "good points" about Hitler—of which, of course, there were none. He directly ordered the systematic murder of approximately eleven million people: six million Jews and around five million others whom the Nazi regime deemed enemies of the state. His role in World War II also contributed to the deaths of an estimated twenty-five million additional people through combat, famine, and displacement. Nothing was redeeming about Hitler, yet public disapproval of those who sympathize with him seems to be weakening.

There is also widespread confusion at the moment about Judaism and Israel—some of it understandable, much of it deliberately exploited by antisemites. We are now more than two years past the Hamas attacks **on October 7, 2023**, when militants killed roughly 1,200 Israelis and took about 250 hostages. In response, the Israel Defence Forces, under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's leadership, invaded Gaza. The resulting war has killed tens of thousands of Gazans—estimates suggest over 68,000, amounting to more than three percent of the population—with roughly half of those casualties being women and children, and fewer than half identified as Hamas fighters.

Israel's campaign has been brutal, and part of the reason, in my view, lies in Netanyahu's political motivations. He remains in power largely to avoid the consequences of his long-running corruption trial. Once out of the office, he could face conviction and a likely prison sentence. At seventy-five, he appears to be trying to prolong his tenure to delay justice. Even if removed from power, he could continue to stall proceedings for years until his defence might argue that he is too old to serve time.

He has also maintained power by forming a coalition government with Israel's most extreme right-wing factions. Because Israel's parliamentary system requires coalitions to achieve a governing majority, he has aligned himself with some of the hardest-line and ultranationalist elements in Israeli politics—those least inclined toward restraint or compromise.

The people who support the most extraordinary brutality toward Palestinians tend to be the ones Netanyahu has aligned himself with. According to recent surveys, roughly 68 percent of American Jews do not support Netanyahu. Yet confusion persists. Many Jews say, "I support Israel, but I do not support its current leadership."

When I was a child attending Sunday school, we were not taught—at least I do not recall being taught—that the establishment of Israel came at the expense of the Palestinians. That part of the story was absent. For a long time, many American Jews did not know how to feel about it. During the first months after the Hamas attacks, most supported Israel's campaign against Hamas. But as the war dragged on and civilian casualties mounted, the sentiment shifted. Now, most

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American Jews I know would say something like, “To hell with Hamas, and to hell with Netanyahu too.”

Antisemites in America exploit this confusion. They spread the idea that Jews worldwide are collectively responsible for the deaths of Palestinians. It has been a devastating time for Palestinians, unquestionably, and that suffering extends back decades. Their leadership has often been corrupt or incompetent almost since the founding of Israel in 1948, and Israel has treated them harshly for generations. So, Palestinians have suffered under both their own governance and Israeli policy.

It is also a disorienting period for Jews. We are not being killed in large numbers, but antisemitic incidents in the United States had already tripled over five years before the 2023 war, according to FBI statistics. Antisemitism is on the rise again, and there are entire industries built on amplifying hate. Elon Musk has turned Twitter—now X—into a kind of hate factory. Television news, meanwhile, profits from political division, manufacturing outrage for ratings.

We are also witnessing a disturbing increase in what’s known as stochastic terrorism. The United States has more than 330 million people, including about 250 million adults. If even one in a thousand of those adults is severely unwell or unstable, that’s roughly a quarter of a million people in the 99.9th percentile of volatility. When you bombard those individuals with hate-filled content on social media or partisan cable news, a small but dangerous fraction will act on it. That is stochastic terrorism—spreading hate broadly and waiting for random extremists to commit violence.

It is, in short, a difficult time for everyone.

Jacobsen: Thank you, Rick.

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THE GOOD MEN PROJECT

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Dr. Alon Milwicki: Extensive Plumb of Antisemitism

Dr. Alon Milwicki is a senior research analyst in the Intelligence Project at the Southern Poverty Law Center.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Today, we are here with Dr. Alon Milwicki. So, I am from Canada. I live in the rural areas outside of Vancouver while you are in Texas. I say "Vancouver" because that is the common city international people will know, but I live in a smaller semi-tourist/semi-retirement community now, temporarily. So, anyway, I will open with a Canadian apology for the Proud Boys. It seems polite in an extensive series. Gavin McInnes, as far as I know, is Canadian. Then, he moved to the United States to spread the hateful ideology.

Dr. Alon Milwicki: Apology accepted.

Jacobsen: That's point one. Point two, my hometown has Trinity Western University. Its closest comparison to an American ear would be Liberty University. It's the largest private university in Canada, and it's evangelical-based. They have a covenant for the community that everyone must abide by until they graduate or fail. It was controversial, super controversial. I did some interviews with people and wrote some articles about it, too. Much silly stuff is happening in the town and the township, and much ignorance stems from pseudoscience and religiosity–true enough.

They tried to get a law school, but the Supreme Court said no. The decision was seven to two, so it was an overwhelming loss based on some LGBTQ issues they had in that covenant. They have goofy creationists debating creationists on campus over scientific truth. I interviewed more reasonable pastors from there, who had those who contrasted their views. So, it vividly portrays the American mind of where I grew up when it was five minutes up the road. So, I'm now out of there. It makes sense--me growing up there--because I look like I was in an alternate universe leading a Christian youth group or a member of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir.

While looking at some of my town's history, I found out that only a few years ago, there was a group called the Northern Order. They presented themselves as either a white nationalist or a white supremacist group at Fort Langley National Historic Site. They took pictures, about a dozen 'brave' young men decided to take the photo and then blur their faces(Facebook).

They had a Facebook page and defined themselves as wanting to preserve something akin to Anglo-Saxon European stock, heritage, etc. So, that's a common theme in North American history right up to the present. Naturally, it's a statistical phenomenon: some rise, some fall, some are long-term, and some are short-term. So, antisemitism has been a focus of many groups. Let's start with definitions; what is the most appropriate way to define antisemitism? What is the source for that? How do these groups stand?

Milwicki: I will give you the way we talk about it. The biggest problem is within the question. Defining antisemitism as something static is problematic. It's the same way that defining racism is problematic because it changes. It changes depending on the period we're talking about, who's talking about it, and how it's being discussed.

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It also depends on the society. Sure, there are commonalities. It boils down to dehumanizing and attacking Jewish people. But when you look to give it a finite definition, you will run into problems. What antisemitism means today is not what antisemitism meant before October 7; you can be damn sure of that. You go back 100 years, bring it into a European or Australian context, then it becomes something different. But I would direct you to this:

Antisemitic hate groups seek to racialize Jewish people and vilify them as the manipulative puppet masters behind an economic, political and social scheme to undermine white people. Antisemitism also undergirds much of the far right, unifying adherents across various extremist ideologies around efforts to subvert and misconstrue the collective suffering of Jewish people in the Holocaust and cast them as conniving opportunists.

That's the way that I would say antisemitism is not defined but should be talked about. It is a starting point for a discussion about not so much what it is but how it operates and why it matters, if that makes sense. What this does and differentiates from other organizations is that we have in bold right there: the way to combat and understand antisemitism is not by defining it but by discussing it, understanding how it affects people, and looking at how it is presenting itself right now. This document is going to be updated. We give examples of the most prominent narratives.

The likelihood of the demonization of queer people and male supremacy will still be there. However, other things about antisemitism are presenting themselves in American society more openly right now, like the utilitarianism of the Jews and how Jews are utilized as tools, whether it's by Christian nationalists or right-wing politicians. They're a means to an end. Supporting Jews gets you X, a lot of that has to do with believing in the tropes of Jewish power and Jewish influence.

What do we make up? We make up one to two percent of this country and 0.2 percent of the world's population; yet somehow, it's believed that we control 80 to 90 to even 100 percent of the world's wealth and influence. One of the most important things to recognize is that seeking a finite definition is flawed, if that makes sense.

It's easy to say, "Look, antisemitism is hatred against Jews." Great, but how does that help us? How does saying that help us? It doesn't. Some of the best examples I'll give are, in the wake of the Gaza war and Israel's retaliation, if somebody graffitis "Free Gaza" on a wall in the middle of a freeway or something, great. Criticism of Israel, support for Palestinians, whatever; however, when they decide to do it in a synagogue or a Jewish institution, it's not the message that makes it antisemitic. It's the decision on the location that does. This person decided that Jews are synonymous with Israel and that a Jewish religious institution or a Jewish institution is responsible or at least connected to what Israel is or isn't doing. That's antisemitic. That decision is antisemitic. That nuance needs to be pointed out because, in these finite definitions, the more finite they get, the less nuance is included. That becomes a problem. That was a very long-winded non-answer to your question. But does that make sense?

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Jacobsen: Yes, I know a counselling psychologist, a Métis doctoral counselling psychologist, who specializes in the self. He views cultures and the self as non-static. They're dynamic entities, so, similarly, with this definition.

Milwicki: That's the thing. I've always been a grassroots historian, a social historian. As long as people are the driving engines of these actions and beliefs, they'll never be static. You can say things like racism is hatred of someone of a different race, or you could say things like anti-Islam is hatred of Muslims. You can say all those things. They're obvious. That's obvious. You don't need an academic to tell you that antisemitism has to do with hating Jews. You don't need me for that. Where others and I are valuable in pointing out that these things are not static; it is important to continue to study them so that we can keep up with them and understand how they're presenting themselves. The fact that antisemitism is so baked into American society is so baked in that most people utilize antisemitic tropes without realizing it. The amount of people in this country who are talking about a deep state have no idea that at its core, it has roots in antisemitism, in recent antisemitism. That's Henry Ford's stuff. You can probably trace that back before the protocols.

And the person using that deep state term might not be an overtly antisemitic person, might not even be hateful. They might be someone who thinks there's a shadow government. There's a lot of Americans that do. But the very concept of that shadow government, of that puppet master, of people controlling things behind the scenes, has its core in antisemitism. We see this often, for example, with George Soros, right? It doesn't matter. I've written about the George Soros trope twice for SPLC alone. The George Soros trope, it doesn't matter who the man is or what he does. It doesn't matter. The "Soros," George Soros's name, is no longer about the person.

Soros has become a convenient stand-in for Jews. In one of the articles, I'd have to find out if it was two years ago or last year that I wrote that we did a study. We took a month and looked at if you look at the Soros tropes - "Soros is behind," "Soros backed power," and "Soros greed" - they even got Soros involved with causing the Holocaust. A couple of years ago, I believe it was a GOP convention in either Minnesota or Michigan or even more recently, they have these pictures of George Soros as the puppet master. Those are the exact images the Nazis used of Jews. Whatever your thoughts about George Soros as a businessman, I don't understand business.

But it's not a criticism of George Soros or his business. Put it this way: nobody is saying Elon Musk backed prosecutors or Elon Musk backed D.A.s. No one cares about that. And you have to ask yourself why. There's this one significant difference: Soros is Jewish. Everything they're accusing Soros of fits into these antisemitic tropes.

Jacobsen: I found another one where I've been seeing this one thrown around, too, this bigger picture is the greatreplacement theory. That Jews are behind all this. What's the antisemitic grounding for a clear conspiracy hypothesis or whatever you want to call it?

Milwicki: I wrote the recent Soros article. Looking at this one, you'll see the graph I told you about from 2022. This is the far-right using that. This is the George Soros trope one. We used two graphs in this on. It was for a month that we did this little study. But if you also scroll down a little bit more and you look at the tropes there, or the idea that Soros controlled every single

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one of them, then these are all things that are said by people still to this day and have been said for arguably 20-plus years. If you replace the word "Jew" in place of "Soros" or "George Soros" with any of those, those are all standard antisemitic tropes, every single one. But this is palatable. Because it says "George Soros." It's so palatable that the country has become so inflamed by this that talking about George Soros like this isn't considered antisemitic in mainstream or at least in right-wing politics. I would love to say left-wing politics also, but it's everywhere. That's how baked it is.

Jacobsen: Are these done consciously to shuttle these extremist, antisemitic ideas into the mainstream–Left and Right?

Milwicki: You could make it. The question is, which is worse? On the one hand, combating hatred is something you can do. Hateful people can disassociate from you or vice versa. That can happen. You can help that. However, ignorance is a lot more tricky because, at least in our lifetimes, ignorance has become considerably more willful. People are not like, "Well, I didn't know, I'd like to learn." People say, "I don't want to know, and what you're saying is wrong because it counters my beliefs or things that I already know." There needs to be more openness or intellectual inquiry among people nowadays. People know. The people who think George Soros is a villain, there's almost nothing I could ever do. I've been told, "Don't you think that because you have a PhD, it means you're tainted by academia?"

Jacobsen: So with all these George Soros connections to this, as an image apart from the man, how does the "Great Replacement Theory" work in this too? My first introduction to this form of hate was in the conspiracy theory around the Richard von Coudenhove-Kalergi plan posited by a member of the high-IQ communities who has minor to moderate fame on-and-off for mostly notorious things and less about extraordinary IQ at this point.

Milwicki: If you scratch the surface of any conspiracy theory, you'll find antisemitism. That's a cold-hearted fact. I can give you an example. I don't even know the headline. This might not have to do directly with the great replacement, but this theme is here. George Soros is behind the move to make abortions legal because California is like a godless country. The great replacement is the idea of minorities replacing white people.

In racist dogmas and racist theologies, there's a belief that the other, the non-white, are not capable. This is traceable a long way back. The long-standing history of anti-Black racism in this country is obvious. At least, it should be to most people anyway. I'm sure, as an outsider looking in, you might know more about America's racist history than the average high school student because that's a whole other thing. So there has to be someone behind it who has the money, knowledge, and ability to pull the strings and use these things.

I say "things" on purpose because that's the way they believe these other races are. Who's behind it all? Jewish people, always, always pulling the strings. So again, please read through our website to see why the Great Replacement Theory is still popular, Tucker Carlson loves to talk about it all the time. Unfortunately, he still has a following. It's not with Black people. The migrant caravans, who do you think is behind all that? Soros. Now, the people saying Soros is behind it might not realize that they're buying into antisemitic tropes. A lot of those people would

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fall into the category of the "I'm-not-racist-but" people. Like, "I'm not racist; I got a lot of Jewish friends. I'm not racist, but you have to believe Jews have lots of money. I'm not racist, but you gotta believe there's more black and brown people in jail." I've always said that when I used to teach, I used to say, if anyone ever says to you, "I'm not racist, but" tell them to stop. Because whatever comes after that "but" is going to be racist. It's as close to a universal truth as you will get. If someone says, "I'm not racist, but" be like, "Bro, I'm out. Come on, stop."

So, one of the hallmarks of antisemitism is conspiracy. So, any conspiracy you find, I guarantee you, you can find an antisemitic rationale behind it or some antisemitic explanation of it. Remember Jews, and if you read *Mein Kampf*, even got through the first four chapters of it, you'll realize that Jews are the only people who can be both communist and capitalist, greedy and poor, dirty rich. If there's one thing the Nazis did well, it's that they consolidated all of their enemies into one.

It's hard to hate so many different things. Who are we hating now? Whose fault is this? It doesn't have to be all of those; it's the Jew. Because Jews represent such a small part of the population, that makes them even more dangerous; that makes the hidden hand much more viable because you can't see them. Look at me; I look like a white guy, right?

My long hair is the only thing that gives me away. I might be a little weird to these people. The amount of times in myclasses when I got told, "You don't seem Jewish." What does a Jew seem like? They weren't coming from a place of hatred. The one kid who flipped over his thing and gave me a Confederate flag was, but I called him out and said, "Yes, yes, like that. That's bigotry, that's racism. What you're showing right there."

Jacobsen: What about the tragedy of some who have come from a history of experiencing a variety of racism, then use antisemitic tropes and conspiracies to bolster their community? A common claim against Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam.

Milwicki: Antisemitism is the great unifier. If there's one thing that can connect the Hebrew Israelites to the Proud Boys, to the Ku Klux Klan, to Patriot Front, to Neo-Volkish, you name it. The one thing that can tie them all together is antisemitism. If you find any form of racism, you can find antisemitism. It's not as irregular as it sounds. A lot of the stuff that the radical Hebrew Israelites would like to say is Christian identity repackaged.

Jacobsen: I've mentioned something in other interviews, but I'll say it again. My background is that I did my 23andMe and came out 100% Northwestern European. So, by that definition of 'white,' if we have to use 'race' pseudoscience, that would be categorized into that. My nationality is Canadian; my heritage is Dutch, Norwegian, and so on. So, I have a bunch of people who are Jewish friends. I learned that around 1810, Israel Jacobson founded Reform Judaism. If there's any relation at all, I have no idea. I have yet to do a formal research project into it. One of my longest-term writing friends is Rick Rosner. He wrote for Jimmy Kimmel for 12 years. He's part of the Mega Society. He does well on these high-range tests. So, he's a wacky character. He is a former child prodigy in physics. He did non-genius things like roller skating, waiting, stripper, bouncer, nude art modelling, and comedy writing for his career. He's in his 60s. Another gentleman did identically on some of these more famous tests with large sample sizes and recent

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statistical analysis, measuring pretty high. But not as high as originally stated. A guy who was featured in *Outliers* by Malcolm Gladwell, by Cynthia McFadden in 20/20 (also), Rick Montgomery in *The Kansas City Star*, John R. Quain in *Popular Science*, Ray Preston in *KMOV*, Louis Finley in *KTVO*, with Spike Jonze, with Aaron Henry, in *Esquire* by Mike Sager, *NBC*, Errol Morris in *First Person*, *SuperScholar*, Christopher Michael Langan. They claimed an IQ of 195. He has claimed 190 to 210. Based on more recent sober analysis, these are not true but are believed. [Ed. Probably closer to 163 to 170+ S.D. 16, as with Rosner.]

Milwicki: Geniuses can be racist, too.

Jacobsen: Correct. So you have very high scores on these reasonably researched high-range test set sample - Mega Test and Titan Test. As a case study, he's interesting as a independent, freelance journalist, leaning more into investigative journalism in this instance, a complex figure. He has expressed views around conspiracy theories and the 9-11 truth movement, opposition to interracial relationships, and getting a following by people's freedom to, generally speaking, say something about them, as well as using what has been termed dog whistles around antisemitism (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7, among other things), particularly in some articles by Justin Ward in *The Baffler*, Talbert Gregson of *Cracked*, and Ari Feldman in *The Forward*. So, opinions differ in the extreme on him. People might disagree with the applications of people's articles or orientations. Still, it allows a little bit of individual reflection, but, anyway, what that's got methinking about is how people who are antisemitic, at least in this stream, have their opposition to interracial relationships. Not the interracial relationship itself but the fact that somehow the Jews are behind them. That, to me, is hilarious. What'sthe thinking there?

Milwicki: It goes back to what I said before, which is that these demographics are incapable of doing things independently. Or that Jews have this desire to remake the world. Many anti-Semites will call it the "Jew world order," for example. They're very clever. So, when things are going in a bad direction, there's this belief that there has to be someone behind it. There are demographers. In the United States, there's this belief, or there's this study that was done that says by 2050, this country's going to be predominantly Latino. That's been something that's been around for a while. For me, I don't give a crap. But that scares the crap out of many people. There's this belief, think about it. Every year in this country, there's a war on Christmas.

Every year: I am sorry, but I am not inundated by menorahs and Hanukkah music every December. I don't see Ramadan parties or Eid parties. I don't get a federal holiday for Yom Kippur. But this all plays into it—this victimization of the white Christian male, cis-gendered male, specifically, the white Christian man. So that's a tale as old as time, dude, with the risk of being the Beast myself. Anyway, it's not rational. Racism of any kind, any discrimination, is not rational. That'sa key point. People will point to evidence and instances, but an instance of something happening.

That's not evidence. The personal does not reflect the whole, right? The fact that you got robbed by a Latino man does not mean that all Latino men are criminals. Do you get what I'm saying? But that's the belief. However, when it's a white man who is raping a girl, not all white men are rapists. That's wrong. That only applies to minorities. So you have the combination of the

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demonization of minorities coupled with the puppet mastery of the Jew. The fact that society is changing: Who benefits from that? Who's the financial backer? Who's the one behind this?

Listen, if I was half of what anti-Semites believed I was... I used to tell my students this in classes: all of their tuition would be going into my right pocket. I'd be sharing it equally with my left pocket because I'm both communist and capitalist. The only demographic of people who are capable of this level of betrayal, this level of duplicity, this level of banality and evil, while simultaneously being godless and whatever, are Jews. I'm the worst kind. I look like everyone else.

Jacobsen: What would be the centrist examples and leftist examples of antisemitism?

Milwicki: Buying into tropes and buying into tropes because they are so difficult. That would be my best answer. Look, here's the thing. The way I used to explain it is that it's the right that hates Jews. It's the left that doesn't like Israel.

It's in this world we're living in now where we're seeing that mix. While it is true that there have been some right-wing racist organizations that have come out supporting Palestinians and Holocaust revisionists, right? Other researchers might have seen more, but I've seen this. The people who are–let's say–vandalizing synagogues or Holocaust museums with "Free Gaza" aren't necessarily right-wing. I would argue they're probably progressives. The trope that they're falling into there is the conflation of Jews with Israel. So that would be my best example. That's a recent one. I can't tell you how many progressives have done that because nobody sticks around.

That's the thing about these. I track antisemitic incidents for SPLC. I can tell you that since Gaza, vandalism, bomb threats, and graffiti of Jewish institutions have gone up like this.

Jacobsen: It's on the rise in Canada, too.

Milwicki: So, I see much stuff happening in Canada, too. It does not look like antisemitism. Like I said, I said antisemitism is baked into America. That's true. But the reason is because it's baked into Western civilization. I'm not the first historian to tell you that it's the world's oldest racism. As long as there have been Jews, there have been people who have been against Jews. One of the facts of Western history is that you can barely go a half-century without a pogrom against Jews. You can't. If there's one true thing, it's that in periods of heightened tension, whether economic, racial, political, social, or even spiritual. You will find antisemitism accompanying it.

What Herzl said in the 1890s about the Jewish question, right? He said something along the lines of, 'The Jewish question persists wherever Jews live in appreciable numbers, and it's brought in because they are allowed to live there.' The question becomes the same question that Goebbels ripped off, except he was like, "What do we do with the Jews?" Herzl intended: "What happens to us when they turn?" One of the best examples of this is if I were to ask you point blank, between 1870 and roughly 1917, what do you think the safest place in the world for Jews was?

Jacobsen: Germany.

Milwicki: German Jews were allowed to join the army. German Jews fought for the Central Powers. They were granted citizenship. They flocked *en masse* to fight for the Central Powers. Hitler's commander was Jewish, and he was awarded a medal. There was even talk among them

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once Herzl died in "Zionist headquarters." Instead of finding it in historic Jewish history in the Middle East in what was then the British protectorate of Palestine, there was talk about...

Jacobsen: Germany?

Milwicki: Germany. There were a lot of moderate Zionist Jews. Remember, I'm using the word "Zionism" in the context of the 19th century and early 20th century. It's another social construct that's gone out of control, especially how people use it. That's a side issue or another issue we can talk about. But then, things went bad. Things got bad. You have Jews living in appreciable numbers in Germany. So you get things like the stab-in-the-back myth. We start seeing political cartoons of Jews stabbing German soldiers in the trenches from the back. There's a whole legend about Ludendorff and a British admiral that's probably not true. Where the British admiral says at tea time, "Well, it sounds like you were stabbed in the back," and Ludendorff is like, "Son of a bitch." And then you get *Mein Kampf* in 1923. That's all she wrote.

Or look at Spain or France; France was the most dangerous place in the world to be Jewish, or Russia had pogroms against Jews; the Soviet Union, you name it, it's everywhere. So it's that insider-outsider thing. I'm not going to go full Herzlian here. He's right on one thing. Jews move to places where they're allowed to live freely. That is a fact of history.

Jacobsen: Could you make a social and group psychology statement? If you look at the demographics of how many Jewish people living in a country and rank them by country with the most antisemitic country to the country with the least, you could make a social psychological statement. Generally speaking, this is the portion of people where they feel safest to live, where more Jewish people are; then there's a safer feeling. And wherever any Jew lives, the reason they live there is because either they or someone before them felt safer.

Milwicki: I can't. I'm not a sociologist; I'm not a psychologist. I know psychology or sociology through two dear colleagues, one of whom was my mentor. Let me tell you, that woman was a psych M.D. in Saudi Arabia for 20 years. That woman has seen some shit. So, I know psychology through a very limited lens. My sociology colleague and friend deals with the sociology of power. He's convinced me that that's the most important construct: power and the absence of power. I used to think it was identity in my naive youth four years ago. Power or the perception of it. But here's the thing. The two universal truths I have are: that the Nazis never had any good ideas, and the Civil War was about slavery, cut and print. I won't accept any argument over that. But there are two things that I've heard that I have not been able to disprove in any way, shape, or form. I can't take credit for saying this. I was in grad school for 395,000 years and heard it somewhere.

Subjugation always requires "Justification," not for the people being subjugated but for the backers. Perception always, always, always matters more than reality, always. Nobody cares what's happening. It's the same reason most people base their understanding of today's world on headlines. No one, no one, no one goes deeper. That's why academics are being attacked or schools are being shut down, not physically, maybe physically, why books are being attacked. People don'twant reality. People don't want to learn what these people think. People don't want to

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listen to people like me. "Please give me the top line. Could you give me the headline?" That's all people want.

I have never found an instance where that isn't true. I'm open to being told I'm wrong, except for the Nazis and the Civil War thing. Now that's true. At the beginning of every semester, I would tell students I would like them to argue anything with me. I will allow any argument. If you attempt this argument, I will destroy you. You will be too embarrassed to return to class. So yes, I hope that even addressed your question.

Jacobsen: So, in the Canadian Armed Forces, it has been reported that there are white nationalist groups; members of the Canadian Armed Forces either have ties or had ties to some of the following groups such as the Proud Boys, the Base, Soldiers of Odin, Atomwaffen Division, Hammerskins Nation, and the 3%. Now, there are some things to be stated. There are some things to be stated about that. One is that it is noted as an issue, according to research by the Canadian Armed Forces. Our numbers are high, but it is independent of your point of view. However, Canada has one of the smallestarmies of the G-20. 19th out of 20th of the members.

So there are 53 members of the Canadian forces who have been identified as members of these styles of hate groups, antisemitic groups. It's in a not-very-large army. So that is reasonable and a claim for alarm because these people are looking to the army for resources and training, especially with weapons.

Milwicki: You also have to keep in mind that those are the people who are card-carrying members. That's a difference. That's a matter of rhetoric.

Jacobsen: It travels. As it happens, these guys tend to talk. As I did in the follow-up article on the sexual assault scandals in the Canadian Armed Forces, there was this one officer called Officer X. He had cases going back more than ten years. So, this Officer X reportage found that everyone in senior officership had his case brought to them at some point, including the current highest-ranking general. Nothing has been done. So, what this got me thinking about was after writing that article on the white nationalists in the Canadian Armed Forces and then following up on the sexual assault scandal in the Canadian Armed Forces, one, they're happening. They're real. The prevalence is going to be underreported, as we know, at least in the sexual assault case. We know in the white nationalist white supremacist case because, as they say, those 53 are according to their internal documents. Then they will say, "We didn't have enough resources. We didn'thave enough staff."

What needs to be stated is that they need a formal procedure for identification; you can easily see in those three gaps that there are many more in an army of only 80,000, potentially fewer if you're considering active and full-time alone. So these people want training, especially weapons. It's different from other contexts. If you're a baker, mail carrier, or clerk, it's a different context because you are trained in lethality. So then the question is, does this change the threat level of antisemitism when these types of groups are going for that training?

Milwicki: So then they can then be of use, so to speak, for their movement. It could, but keep in mind that the difference between Canada and America is that we have more guns than people. So

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far, there have been more shootings than there have been days of 2024. One thing that Americans do have is that they have more guns than people.

Jacobsen: You have as many registered guns as Canadians have registered guns.

Milwicki: So I could probably drive 10 minutes and see a gun show any day of the week. Look, the dude who shot at Donald Trump had his dad's AK-47. What the hell does a civilian need with a military-grade weapon? No idea. They'll say the Second Amendment. If you base it on the Second Amendment, you best get a musket based on that time. You best be going out hunting with that musket. You can put a scope on it if you want. It's going to go differently than you want it. On another topic, there was an award for a non-Nazi citizen or a non-German Nazi. If you look, this is a lecture I gave. Henry Ford was awarded the Grand Cross of Germany.

Jacobsen: And let's see. [Read Milwicki's slides] "Jews have always controlled the business... The motion picture influence of the United States and Canada... is exclusively under the control, moral and financial, of the Jewish manipulators of the public mind."

"There is nothing that the international Jew fears so much as the truth or any hint of the truth about himself or his plans."

Milwicki: So, not for nothing, that dude didn't work out. You don't need my slides to find Henry Ford's quotes. You can also find countless copies of *The International Jew* online. One of those other things is not to wait to read it in public. I'vemade that mistake several times. 90% of my dissertation was written in a coffee shop, but look how far it goes back. This is Martin Luther's On the Jews and Their Lies. His is from the 16th century. So, we're staying strong here. We're not breaking new ground here. Why do you need to? The answer is you don't. If it isn't broken, right? That's the brilliance of racism. You don't need evidence. All you need is someone else to say it to you, before and after.

Jacobsen: What about Louis Farrakhan?:

> *"Why isn't the white man a native anywhere? You're not a native Palestinian, no you're not. You didn't originate there. But if you did, then you're the real Semitic people. But the Ashkenazi European, he has no connection at all to the Holy Land. None! So in a showdown prove to us that you are Semitic. Let's go on with it, it's our time now!" — Speech at Mosque Maryam, Chicago, Illinois, 11/18/18*
>
> *"Do you know that many of us who go to Hollywood seeking a chance, we have to submit to anal sex and all kids of debauchery, and they give you a little part? The couch where you have to sit, it's called the 'casting couch.' That's Jewish power." — Speech at Mosque Maryam, Chicago, Illinois, 5/27/18*
>
> *"You and I are going to have to learn to distinguish between the righteous Jew and the Satanic Jews who have infected the whole world with poison and deceit." — Speech at Mosque Maryam, Chicago, Illinois, 5/27/18*
>
> *"But when you've got revelation that came to you from God through all these prophets, then that's your test because if you use God's truth that makes you wiser than others and use it to promote evil when you should be promoting good, then you're no longer a Jew.*

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And that's why the scripture says, "I will make those who say they are Jews," this is Revelation 2 and 9, 'Who say they are Jews, but they are not, I will make them of the Synagogue of Satan.' — Interview on WCGI 107.5 Chicago, 5/11/18

"When you want something in this world, the Jew holds the door." — Saviours' Day speech, 2/25/18

"Satan is going down. Farrakhan has pulled the cover of the eyes of the Satanic Jew and I'm here to say your time is up, your world is through. You good Jews better separate because the satanic ones will take you to hell with them because that's where they are headed." — Saviours' Day speech, 2/25/18

"The Jews were responsible for all of this filth and degenerate behavior that Hollywood is putting out: turning men into women, and women into men." — Saviours' Day speech, 2/25/18

"I don't care what they put on me. The government is my enemy, the powerful Jews are my enemy." — Saviours' Day speech, 2/25/18

"Members of the Jewish community, who owned a lot of plantations, please don't get angry and upset because this is real history, you put us back on the plantation as share croppers and began riding down on us, and if any of us escaped the plantation many of the Irish that were coming over, they call them the paddy wagon, they would come after us and bring us back to the plantation; those were hard days, hard days." — Speech at the Watergate Hotel in Washington, DC, 11/11/17

"But there are righteous Jews, good Jews, Jews that want to practice the teachings of the prophets, but then there are others who don't wish to practice, and it is they that hated Reverend [Jesse] Jackson's desire to be President." — Speech at the Watergate Hotel in Washington, DC, 11/11/17

"Those who call themselves 'Jews," who are not really Jews, but are in fact Satan: You should learn to call them by their real name, 'Satan;' you are coming face-to-face with Satan, the Arch Deceiver, the enemy of God and the enemy of the Righteous." — Saviours' Day speech (part 2), 2/26/17

"To my Jewish friends, I shouldn't use the word 'friends' so lightly, you have been a great and master deceiver, but God is going to pull the covers all off of you." — Saviours' Day speech (part 2), 2/26/17

"I want to disabuse the Jews today of the false claim that you are 'The Chosen of God,' and that Israel, or Palestine, belongs to you; I want to disabuse you of that…And I'm going to tell you about your future: You that think you have power to frighten and dominate the peoples of the world. I am here to announce the end of your time." — Saviours' Day speech (part 1), 2/19/17

"This past December we organized a boycott of Christmas and our theme was 'Up with Jesus! Down with Santa!' Here is the white man, many of whom that have these businesses, they don't believe in Jesus. I'm going to say it again: Many of the biggest

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business people are called Jews, and they don't believe in Jesus. But you love Jesus so magnificently, that now they can make money—a lot of money—off of your love. So, they set up Christmas." — Speech delivered at Mosque Maryam at the second annual "Boys to Men Empowerment Conference, Chicago, Illinois, 4/20/2016

"We are feeling the effect of the planning of a small group of Zionists and some so-called Christians as well. The Synagogue of Satan and its companions are working day and night to destroy any unity among Muslims." — Speech delivered in Iran, 2/10/16

"Do you know that the enemies of Jesus were the Jews of his day and the Roman authorities? That wasn't 2000 years ago alone. That's today!" — Saviours' Day speech (part 2), Mosque Maryam, Chicago, Illinois 3/2/14

"David — even though he may have made a mistake — he submitted and repented before God. This you false Jews have not done. No. You are not a Jew! I say you're a so-called Jew. You are Satan masquerading as a covenanted people of God. You must be exposed, regardless of the consequences…" — The Time and What Must Be Done: Part 57, 2/8/14

"Did you know that Jesus had a real problem with the Jewish community? They had power, the rabbis of that day, over the Roman authorities just as they have power today over our government." — Remarks at Indianapolis Convention Center, Indianapolis, Indiana, 12/1/13

"In all of these cities on a Jewish holiday, business stops because they are the masters not only in America's cities but in cities throughout Europe and the Western world." — The Time and What Must Be Done, Part 20: Making Satan Known, 5/25/13

"The Jewish media has normalized sexual degeneracy, profanity, and all kinds of sin." — The Time and What Must Be Done, Part 20: Making Satan Known, 5/25/13

"Socialism or communism is a doctrine they have to fight cause it ends their wealth and their power, wherever socialism rises, capitalism begins to die…So the International Jew is affected by the rise of socialism, it is in their DNA to fight anything that will raise the common man. This is why they fight any voice that the little man will listen to." — The Time and What Must Be Done, Part 17, 5/4/13

"You that think that those who refer to themselves as Jews are the real Children of Israel? No. You have made a real theological mistake and some of you have made a theological error because you know the truth, but yet you consider your wickedness in promoting a deceptive lie." — The Time and What Must Be Done, Part 5, 2/9/13

"Now you know I'm going to be lambasted and called anti-Semitic… They'll say Farrakhan was up to his old canards; he said Jews control Hollywood. Well, they said it themselves! Jews control the media. They said it themselves! Jews and some gentiles control the banking industry, international banks. They do! In Washington right next to the Holocaust Museum is the Federal Reserve where they print the money. Is that an accident?" — Holy Day of Atonement Keynote Address (part 2) Mosque Maryam, Chicago, Illinois, 10/21/12

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Farrakhan: How many of you are lawyers? Only have one in the house? No wonder we go to jail so much, brother! But at the top of the law profession, who are the top in law?

Audience: Jews.

Farrakhan: Sorry I didn't hear you. Audience: Jews! Farrakhan: Any doctors in the house? Ain't got no doctors? Oh there's one way in the back. At the top of the medical profession, the top in that are members of the Jewish community. Anybody in media? Who's the top in that field?

Audience: Jews.

Farrakhan: Anybody a rapper in the house? There's rappers. You can rap, ain't nothing wrong with that, but at the top of that are those that control the industry. Any of you have Hollywood ambitions, Broadway ambitions? Who's the top of that? Audience: Jews. Farrakhan: Same people! They're masters in business. Well I'm not a businessman I'm a banker. Well who's the master of the bankers?

Audience: Jews.

Farrakhan: TALK TO ME!

Audience: Jews!

Farrakhan: You don't discredit them because they're masters, you discredit them by the way they use their mastery.

Audience: [applause]

Farrakhan: Now, I close.

Milwicki: Oh, it's all kinds. "Satanic Jew" is a straight Christian identity, radical Hebrew Israelites. Where I used to teach in downtown Dallas, every so often, there used to be radical Hebrew Israelites protesting there. I would be amazed at how identical this was to Christian identity. I don't track them here. One of my other colleagues does. But I know about them because they are essentially Christians who replace white male Christendom with black male Christians. Antisemitism, like I said, is the great unifier. It doesn't matter. It brings the strangest bedfellows.

Jacobsen: It's unsurprising and believable. What emotions arise for many Jewish people when talking to all types of Jewish communities? What are the words of commonalities?

Milwicki: I can only speak to what I've witnessed. There is much fear and also much resignation. There's also a lot of like, "Oh, who gives a shit?" It's enough. The exhaustion: if we're going to put it like this, things will be terrifying. Of course, "It's this way" and "isn't it enough already?" Those are the best ways I would explain it. But again, I can only speak to my own experience here regarding what I've seen. You'd have to put anger in there, too. A lot of the anger is directed not necessarily at, I don't want to say, accurate, but useful targets. It's easy to get angry at the world. That's one of the greatest ways to be for birthing extremists. Like I said before, why is having one enemy so beneficial?

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Like how the Nazis made it so beneficial to have all your problems in one thing, antisemitism comes from so many different ways. Antisemitism comes from so many different places and different modalities that it can make you angry and tired. Now, look, I lived this life. I chose to study this stuff.

And usually, I'm able to disconnect. But there are times when this has happened more since I've had kids. There are some times when it's like, "Are you kidding me right now?" It's like the fact that it didn't take more than a couple of hours for people to blame Jews for what happened to Trump or people to blame Jews. It's almost instantaneous. I don't want to say it's not like that in other countries, but at the same time, it's not as loud in other countries. Or at least, it could be more instantaneously vociferous. If that makes sense, other countries have laws about this stuff. We don't have a First Amendment right to be an asshole.

Jacobsen: So Michelle Shortt, Stuart De Haan of the Arizona chapter of The Satanic Temple. Whether they're still running it or not, I want to make sure they get their credit because they were the ones who laid to rest any doubts I had about it when I asked them point blank. We said:

> ***Jacobsen: You see this in those that don't put the self first, too. For instance, the current Catholic Pope—I believe Discordianism likes to joke that that's the guy who thinks he's the only Pope—basically, he is liberalizing much of, not necessarily church doctrine but, perception in the public eye of the Catholic Church. He's even meeting with the leader of the second largest sect of Christianity.***
>
> ***250-300 million, which is the Eastern Orthodox Church, they met with the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, in Cairo of all places! There are times of meetup. But when you were talking about alternative places for people who don't really find themselves buying majoritarian mythologies very much, two things came to mind.***
>
> ***One was a United Church of Canada Minister. For context, the United Church of Canada is probably considered the most liberalised Christian church in Canada. I use it as a benchmark. Whatever is controversial to them, it is what Christianity will allow in this country. Not sure about America, things are different in America. The minister's name is Gretta Vosper.***
>
> ***She lost her faith while in the church. She went from the progression of theist to deist to atheist. Her congregation were fine with the minister. Recently, late 2016, she was under review for her suitability for being in the church. She was giving – for that particular group – moral lessons. Another case I was thinking about was the secular church in, what some would consider the equivalent of the Bible Belt in America, Calgary, Alberta.***
>
> ***So I think there are ways this stuff is cropping up more, and more. And it is heartening to hear this. Media representation is interesting. The United States has very powerful public relations, previously termed propaganda, industry. When I watch interviews with Lucien Greaves, for instance, there's talking over him. There's stereotypes. There's not taking him seriously.***

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Any bad journalistic practice. He undergoes. Is there a bettering trend in the representation of the media of Satanism?

de Haan: *No.*

Shortt: *No. A Fox News thing posted an article for our veterans' memorial in Minnesota. First line: "Devil Worshippers Erecting Monument in Bell Plains."*

de Haan: *It's like they won't even give the courtesy of a Google search, sometimes.*

Jacobsen: [Laughing].

de Haan: *If you want to see how we're treated personally, you can Google it. A councilman in Phoenix, Arizona compared us to ISIS. Michelle and I have personally been called terrorists by public officials. We've been called bullies, as they tell us to go to hell.*

Jacobsen: These would be the same person, same personality type, that would bully you in work and then wouldplay the victim.

de Haan: *What we see in Christianity a lot is if they don't get 100% of their way 100% of the time, they play the victim.*

Jacobsen: [Laughing] of course.

de Haan: *That they're being persecuted. Part of what we do is expose this. I think a lot of stuff people don't realize is going on until you have someone who comes up, and who is an easy standard to call the 'wrong religion'.*

Shortt: *We definitely do not see them being any fairer in their representation of us at all, to answer the question. In fact,almost anything like pizzagate. Or the satanic panic being underway with religious freedom now being the thing. It's going to happen.*

de Haan: *Moral panics are on the rise. It is a bit concerning. As they are calling it in the Trump Era, the Post-Fact Era, the facts simply do not matter anymore. What makes you maddest? That's the truth. You see the things like pizzagate. Where a pizza parlour, they say they're going to have children sacrifices in the basement. In 2017, this is a throwback to the McMartin babysitter case, which happened in the 80s.*

You're seeing stuff like this happening. Luckily, you have debunking of this pretty quickly. People know about Snopes, and so on. Michelle and I have been the subject of conspiracy theories in Phoenix, in our own cities. There are websites slandering us personally. It is what we deal with, especially if you're in a leadership position.

Regarding your expertise, it's not necessarily the wrong religion. It's the wrong type of person.

Milwicki: It's also the wrong belief system. It's not about religion. That's about politics and society and everything. I could be judged immoral because I support gay marriage. I support marriage equality.

Jacobsen: Don Lemon said, "Am I in a state of sin, or am I sinning because I..." And Candace Owens says, "Yes, you are." Without a flinch.

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Milwicki: Without a flinch. And she also thinks that the Holocaust didn't happen the way we thought it did because she's an expert in everything.

Jacobsen: I listen to a lot of these American preachers of this type, a lot of them. Mark Driscoll comes to mind. And these things from the FRC, they're terrible. These individuals are now told by their leaders to their congregants to be bold. That they will come across X, Y, and Z resistance. You don't have to have fear and be bold in your affirmations. Candace Owens, I'm seeing this pop up more where many aren't having feedback; they need to hold to the regular social contract where you've cut off the feedback at that point. That's what I noticed in Candace Owens and Don Lemon's interaction.

Milwicki: No, you can't have any; they're all cowards. The second you give them any form of criticism, they fall back on bullshit tropes or whataboutism. They're all cowards. *They're all cowards*. They don't have evidence to back them up. They abuse faith by saying, "I'll quote this scripture." Look, Wesley Swift, one of the most mind-blowing things when I was working on my dissertation. One of the major, probably the most important, voices is the focus of my entire dissertation, the major voice of Christian identity. Every time he quoted scripture, he was on point—every time. I would be like, there's no way this isn't... There were a couple of words missing, like a "thou" or a "thee" or a "shall," whatever, but everything he quoted was on point. Now, that doesn't mean that scripture is inherently racist. It means it's not hard to make scripture racist and exclusionary. It is not hard.

I used to say, and take this with a grain of salt, but I used to say that history is a very subjective study that relies on objectivity. We know that Germany invaded Poland in September of 1939, and that was the beginning of World War II. We can say that. That is as close to an objective historical fact as we can say. There are, however, that Germany did invade Poland. Some historians would argue that that's not the beginning of World War II, and they'll provide evidence to say, “No, it began when Japan invaded Manchuria.” But there is an element of some form of objectivity. Where theology becomes dangerous is that it's equally subjective; that's why if you take Protestantism: How many different kinds of Protestants are there?

So there's a difference. But the backbone is faith, and you cannot prove or disprove faith. So, if you build a racial or racist ideology or theology around faith, it cannot be disproved. Because the only thing the person using it has to say is “what I believe... That's not my faith, which is real.” That's a danger in every religion. Facts are useless if you believe them, and belief is the core of your evidence. And that was a very sad thing to mention.

It was a great pleasure talking to you, man.

Jacobsen: Great to meet you, bro.

Milwicki: Nice to meet you, too. Bye.

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The Work of the Combat Antisemitism Movement (Sacha Roytman)

Sacha Roytman, a 38-year-old married father of three, holds a bachelor's degree in Interactive Communications from the Interdisciplinary Center (IDC) Herzliya and a master's degree in Political Marketing from the IDC School of Government, Diplomacy, and Strategy. Over the course of his career as a social entrepreneur, Sacha has dedicated himself to securing and nurturing Jewish life worldwide, collaborating with a wide range of government officials, religious and community leaders, cultural influencers, sports executives, educators, artists, and business figures. Sacha, born, raised, and educated in Belgium, was deeply influenced by his Holocaust survivor grandparents, whose stories of resilience and heroism against all odds deeply inspired him. Sacha also personally experienced antisemitism growing up in Brussels, which shaped his worldview and led him to the realization that the "Never Again" vow requires personal responsibility and active social involvement. Roytman highlights the importance of coalitions to counter interconnected hate ideologies, the role of the U.S. in setting global precedents, and the value of stories of de-radicalization as tools for societal change and combating prejudice.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Sacha Roytman is the Chief Executive Officer of the Combat Antisemitism Movement (CAM), based out of Tel Aviv, Israel. With over a decade of global experience, he excels in advocacy, strategic planning, and building international partnerships. He has previously served in other roles as Director of Digital Advocacy for the World Jewish Congress and played a pivotal role in establishing the IDF's Digital Media Department. Additionally, he co-founded the Israel Wine Collection, which contributes to initiatives promoting Jewish impact and heritage.

The Combat Antisemitism Movement is a global coalition dedicated to eradicating antisemitism by uniting over 950 partner organizations and over 5 million individuals individuals from diverse backgrounds. It employs three main approaches: advocacy and policy development, educational initiatives, and community engagement. So, regarding the main question about organizational work and your role, what do you see as a central pillar in the themes that continually arise globally around antisemitism, and what is a key way to combat how it manifests?

Sacha Roytman: You ask a very broad question, which I can answer at length, but I would say that we are living in an era when we truly see a conflict of civilizations these days, and Jews are at the front line. Civilizations are more complicated than the classic ones of the Western world, mostly based on the theory of clashing civilizations. We also see a clash of ideologies, a clash of civilizations, and a clash of religions.

Somehow, and historically, it has always been the case that Jews are the first to pay a price. That is the general context. We see that in the Middle East, with Israel being presented as the problem of the entire Middle East by certain people. Then, antisemitism was present in the Ukrainian-Russian conflict and was used to start the conflict. On the one hand, Putin accused Zelensky of being a Nazi, and on the other, everyone is accused—the concept of Nazism plays a big part in accusations in all conflicts. Even a few days ago, the Nazi salute of Elon Musk was presented as a penalty.

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This reflects the end of the war against Nazism, antisemitism narratives, and anti-Israel narratives, which are omnipresent. Somehow, it is very easy to use these narratives because Jews are a very tiny nation of 15 million people—0.2% of the world population. Since we are a religion that exists everywhere, in 104 countries, there is always a Jew somewhere doing something that is presented as bad.

This is why we first see this global movement that consistently blames Jews. Historically, we keep our religion; we are among the oldest people in the world with a global presence. We have preserved our identity, heritage, and religion, and today, we have Israel helping us to preserve these things. Jews seem stronger than ever, despite antisemitism and Israel being under attack, because we now have our own country and army.

There are all the reasons right now to attack Jews—not directly, but through Israel. This is the second narrative of anti-Zionism being the new antisemitism. We see it everywhere. It is easier to manipulate anti-Zionism and claim to be against the only Jewish state, but this raises questions about what that opposition truly means.

The third narrative is the convergence of ideologies. From the right wing to radical Islamism to the extreme left, we see everything coming together on common ground when it relates to Jews.

We can see in the demonstrations the same slogans, very similar slogans, between pro-Palestinian radical left groups, radical Islamist groups, and right-wing groups. Though the imagery might differ slightly, they use the same terminology, but the core messaging is the same. We see the swastika being used, both by neo-Nazis and by radical Islamists, as a symbol. The convergence of ideologies is not new—we've been aware of it—but since October 7, it has probably become the most significant narrative we've seen.

The last part is the fact that the Western world is defending itself, and Israel is a part of this Western world. We see this reflected in the elections in the United States and Europe and in changes in Latin America, such as Argentina. After World War II, a utopian dream of a peaceful world was achieved by creating the United Nations and striving to make all nations equal. While it's a very noble vision—and one we support—it cannot work when extreme ideologies are embedded in the system.

We are now living in a post-utopian, post-naive period where people are realizing that extreme countries and ideologies—such as those from Russia, Iran, or other Muslim states—make globalization challenging. This is where we see a clash of civilizations, essentially divided into two groups: the Western group and the anti-Western group, which includes Russia, China, Iran, and other major Muslim nations. In the middle, however, we see promising initiatives like the Abraham Accords. These are opportunities created by different administrations, showing that not everything is bleak.

The spread of ideologies is global, and social media makes it very easy for these ideologies to travel. For instance, a conflict originating in Russia can quickly influence other regions, as social media is accessible to everyone. There's no single starting point anymore. Activism and hate messaging can be placed everywhere, and with the right strategy, anti-Western values, anti-

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Western messaging, and hatred—whether directed at Jews, America, or Europe—can be easily spread.

Today, we don't see one central focus point. Nations like Russia, for example, spread hatred against Jews for political purposes. This doesn't necessarily mean they are antisemitic; rather, they use antisemitism as a means to achieve broader goals, such as destabilizing the Western world. This is often done in partnership with nations like Iran. At the same time, such efforts have seen mixed results, as in the United States, the change in administration there has led to policies that actively defend against hatred and support Western values.

Ideologies infiltrate the Western world on three levels: first, through media and social media; second, through immigration and grassroots-level efforts, building new social structures in various countries and spreading these ideologies; and third, through finance. For instance, large financial investments from Qatar fund universities, companies, and other entities to influence narratives, curriculums, and ideologies. These three factors combined form a powerful mechanism for spreading hatred.

Now, what can counter this? First, the public vote. Public voting is one of the best tools to combat foreign funding and interference in public narratives. We've seen examples in the Netherlands, the United States, Germany, Austria, and France, where voters are pushing back against the three major elements I mentioned: immigration, media, and funding. People are expressing a desire to preserve their national identities and heritage.

Second, law enforcement plays a crucial role. Law enforcement needs to detect new ideologies that aim to destabilize societies.

Law enforcement is equipped with the tools to detect both online and offline activity, to be aware of changes in ideologies, and to understand what constitutes modern forms of antisemitism. For example, we try to address this through research and by identifying new forms of antisemitism. A good example is the use of the red triangle in demonstrations. Hamas uses this symbol to target the Israeli army, but when the same red triangle appears in a demonstration in the UK or the United States or is placed on the home of a Jewish person, it becomes a clear signal of targeting. We work to show law enforcement these changes and emphasize the need to protect communities.

Third, we aim to equip local leaders. It is very difficult to create change at the federal government or nationwide strategy level—it takes much time, and we do not have that time. We have found that mayors and municipal leaders are often very eager to make an impact. They want their cities to be free of hate crimes and to protect all citizens. Sometimes, they do not know how to address these issues. If we can educate them about antisemitism, its history, interfaith relations, and related topics, they are often ready to stand up and take action because protecting their citizens is why they were elected.

On the national level, governance often becomes a political game, making it much harder to implement real change quickly. This is why we decided that local government is one of the best venues for us to make a difference.

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The second venue for our work involves interfaith cooperation. We collaborate extensively with formal organizations such as the Vatican, the Muslim World League, and other major groups. However, we realized that many of these organizations do not know how to engage with grassroots communities effectively. As a result, we shifted our model to focus on working with interfaith groups at local and regional levels.

You can work with any church, mosque, or group open to collaboration. Sometimes, it is just a matter of reaching out to them. Of course, we are too small to reach everyone, but this is the only way to create meaningful change—by building a shield against hatred through relationships and celebrating each other. For instance, next week, we are hosting an interfaith event at a Muslim center in New York City, where a large Muslim community will learn about the Holocaust. This is where our efforts are focused. While working with large formal organizations globally is almost impossible, local events and celebrations allow us to connect with hundreds of people, and this strategy works very well.

However, the problems grow larger every day. The world is increasingly becoming polarized into a black-and-white mindset, which is not healthy. We see two clear sides forming, and the center —what I would call the moderate or balanced middle—is disappearing. This is evident in elections, where voters increasingly support extreme parties rather than centrist ones. Without a strong center, conversations diminish.

What concerns me most is the idea of a world without dialogue, where there are only two opposing sides unable to listen to each other. Each side may hold some truth and some falsehood, but without cooperation, we cannot fix anything. This worries me. On the other hand, it is crucial to ensure that the choices we make are deliberate and thoughtful.

Your side cannot afford not to fight back. Yes, you need to be able to speak, but when you're under threat, you cannot just respond nicely. We need to be very strong and have a strong response. We're excited to see what may happen in the United States with the new administration —not as a political question, but because the previous administration didn't succeed in certain areas. We hope the new administration will be able to address these gaps, make significant changes, and implement what the prior administration was unable to deploy.

America is very important; the world follows America. When the U.S. determines its policies, it often sets the tone for how the world approaches key issues. We're already seeing signs of change within just a few days of the new administration, and the types of policies being developed are interesting to analyze and understand about our issues. This is where we are right now.

Jacobsen: Do you find the more toxic elements of antisemitism are emerging more in the online space now or more traditionally in physical spaces? It's happening on multiple fronts, but in the 2020s, with the rise of social media, is that the area where you're seeing the biggest uptick?

Roytman: I think it's becoming harder to separate the online and offline spaces. Let's leave aside bots and fake accounts and talk about real people. Real people are online because they're not well-educated offline. This is why I always emphasize education first. The global level of education is declining, particularly among the middle class, lower class, and those unwilling to invest in it. The tragic irony is that education has never been more accessible.

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On the one hand, education is available to everyone; on the other hand, fewer people are becoming educated. This creates a dangerous situation where uneducated individuals now have platforms to express themselves. The second part of this problem is that small, marginal groups —who in the past could only speak antisemitic rhetoric in private or small gatherings of 100 or 200 people—are now able to spread their ideology online and reach uneducated individuals. When these two groups meet, they create a fire of hatred.

Online spaces have become breeding grounds for this hatred due to two factors: declining education and platform accessibility. It's not social media itself that's the problem, but how it enables the spread of this discourse. The question then arises: What responsibility do platforms bear? This is a complex issue, especially in America, where freedom of speech plays a major role.

What's critical is being able to define antisemitism. For example, Holocaust denial is a serious issue. Even if you cannot block it outright, you need to define it clearly as antisemitism. Unfortunately, this is a major gap today. The American government has yet to adopt the IHRA definition of antisemitism, and internet platforms have not either. It's not about creating legislation to block everything; it's about being able to identify and define antisemitic discourse clearly. Once we do that, we can address it on an educational level rather than through punitive measures.

This is what we're striving for. Yes, the online space is terrible, but it'sthat’s because the offline world isn't doing well either—it's not the other way around.

When things grow online as a fire, they eventually move back offline. The cycle perpetuates itself, with online hatred fueling offline behaviour. We're seeing this now with more people participating in demonstrations. Why? Because they are less educated and have access to marginal ideologies that are becoming more mainstream. In the past, these ideas were confined to private spaces and inaccessible to the average person. Today, anyone can access these ideologies daily, leading to the societal downgrade we're witnessing.

What's most frustrating is that we have more access to knowledge than ever in history, yet society is regressing in critical thinking and education. This is what deeply concerns me.

Jacobsen: Access is not necessarily the main condition; it is a necessary but not sufficient condition. Some fringe ideologies you alluded to often involve historical secret organizations or conspiratorial thoughts. As I've seen, a recurring theme revolves around banks or similar ideas. When I spoke with Dr. Alon Milwicki of the Southern Poverty Law Center, he noted that conspiracy theories almost always draw back to blaming the Jewish people. That is typically the common thread—they all seem to pull back to that narrative.

So, with these marginal ideologies, which are not necessarily in the mainstream but are given mainstream platforms periodically, how do you see this playing out in daily life for people? For instance, individuals not deeply invested in education might be given equal time online on relevant subjects with educated people on these topics. They then buy into conspiratorial, historical, or contemporary ideas, go home, and continue their regular lives. How do you see this

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impacting their daily interactions, working relationships, or even their participation in workshops or organizational meetings like the Combat Antisemitism Movement?

Roytman: It impacts everything—their behaviour, antisemitism itself, and the number of hateful acts. These individuals are often educated online, and this influences offline actions. There is a clear relationship. In most of the hate crimes we've seen in the past decades, individuals were indoctrinated online. They sought information and education online, making the online world a key part of organized hate crime, hate speech, antisemitism, and anti-Western ideologies. This is no longer up for debate—online platforms are central to this.

What we need is responsible leadership. While I don't believe we can entirely change the way antisemitism exists—that's not our role—we can influence how educators address these issues, how law enforcement detects antisemitism, and how they are trained to recognize hate crimes. We can help open the eyes of the media so they report antisemitism more accurately and ensure legislators understand what constitutes an antisemitic crime and what doesn't. It's about ensuring that society, as a whole, is aware of the growing dangers of hatred and knows how to address them.

We cannot fight this alone as a community. We are too small, and history has shown us what happens when we try to stand alone. The goal is to educate society about the dangers of rising hatred and empower those who need education to act. Antisemitism will always exist. The goal is not to eradicate it—that's unrealistic. Instead, it's about controlling it and ensuring it doesn't escalate to an uncontrollable level.

There will always be antisemitic groups and messages, just as there will always be people who harbour racist beliefs. We can't entirely remove these sentiments from the world, but we must control them. Right now, the situation is out of control—there are too many attacks on Jews every day all over the world. This unchecked violence is dangerous. If it continues to grow, it could lead to even greater violence, which society may eventually normalize and accept.

The key to change lies in educated and responsible leadership. When leadership at all levels takes these issues seriously and acts responsibly, we can see meaningful change in our society.

One more comment: It sounds very negative, but we see so many allies in this fight, so many people who want to see a society that respects everyone. They want a world free of hatred. They truly see the Western world under attack, which is how we feel. They genuinely believe that Jews are on the front line right now, and they want to protect the Jewish community because they understand that eradicating antisemitic ideology can lead to eradicating other deep forms of hatred.

Usually, a Nazi is also a racist or Islamophobic. Similarly, an extreme radical Islamist is often anti-women's rights and anti-LGBT rights. There is a correlation. Just as we see a convergence of antisemitic ideologies, we also see a convergence of these groups of hatred—they are not isolated.

This is an opportunity to create coalitions with other groups who recognize that they are also threatened. Together, we can fight back. There are many opportunities, and we see many great

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people engaging with us, willing to fight, express their opinions, and reject the status quo as a solution.

Jacobsen: Have you seen any cases of individuals who were strong antisemites but later had a change of conscience? What's that like when you witness such cases?

Roytman: We've encountered many cases of extremism. We've worked with former Nazis, neo-Nazis, and even former jihadists who realized that something was not right. We love these stories because they are the stories we need.

If we want to change a generation of white supremacists into being less hateful, they need to see someone who has gone through that transformation. That's very exciting work—de-radicalization. It's incredible to see people change their minds, recognize that they were in a place of hatred that perpetuates itself, and move to a place of peace, which also perpetuates itself.

This is a significant thing now, and we're seeing real differences. It's exciting for us to see and to work around that.

Jacobsen: Excellent, Sacha, thank you. I appreciate it. I'm glad we were finally able to make this happen.

Roytman: Thank you very much.

Jacobsen: Okay, we'll be in touch.

Roytman: Yes, bye-bye.

Jacobsen: Bye.

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A Comprehensive on Antisemitism With Irina Tsukerman

Irina Tsukerman is a New York-based human rights and national security attorney specializing in international law, media strategy, and information warfare. She is the editor-in-chief of *The Washington Outsider*, providing insights on global affairs and advocating for human rights. Her expertise spans the Middle East, Africa, Eastern Europe, and Latin America. Tsukerman emphasizes humour's power to expose absurdities and the role of critical education in countering disinformation. They analyze the influence of media, algorithms, and foreign actors in amplifying hate. Addressing challenges like organized boycotts, hacking campaigns, and financial targeting, they highlight the manipulation of narratives for political or economic motives. The conversation explores systemic antisemitism in countries like Russia, China, and Iran, contrasting legal frameworks and societal impacts across regions. They stress fostering critical thinking and transparency to combat prejudice effectively.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: We will discuss another important subject: antisemitism. It's a critical topic. What do you think the role of humour is in combating antisemitism? Take, for instance, the works of Mel Brooks, *Seinfeld*, Larry David, and others.

Irina Tsukerman: Humour can respond to authoritarianism, conspiracy theories, and illogical or distorted beliefs. Arguing with someone deeply entrenched in such a mindset often doesn't work; it can reinforce their position. Humour, however, can pause the conversation, ridicule the absurdity of the belief, and point out how nonsensical it is.

Not every type of humour works for everyone, of course. Sometimes, humour resonates more with outside observers than with the bigot in question. Those who harbour hateful beliefs often have a narrow sense of humour that only reinforces their worldview. Yet humour can still highlight the ridiculousness of a viewpoint, effectively saying, "This doesn't make sense. Look at how absurd it is." There are two key dimensions to understanding antisemitism: legal and human rights-based.

Jacobsen: On one hand, there are forms of antisemitism that are more social and don't necessarily fall under criminal law. On the other hand, some actions cross the line into criminality, such as hate speech or spreading historical falsehoods like Holocaust denial.

In North America, these dividing lines differ. Canada has stricter hate speech laws than the United States, but it also seems to have fewer overt, conspiratorial antisemites. While free speech protections are broader in the U.S., they often allow harmful rhetoric to flourish unchecked.

Tsukerman: The obsession with conspiracy theories is a relatively recent phenomenon in its modern form, largely fueled by social media. Historically, antisemitism in the U.S. has waxed and waned. For example, it was particularly widespread in the 1920s, during a period of rising nativism and xenophobia. However, it declined in the mid-to-late 20th century as multiculturalism gained traction. Antisemitism didn't disappear—it remained present in pockets—but it became less socially acceptable.

In earlier periods, antisemitism often existed in ignorance or isolation. For instance, stereotypes or baseless beliefs about Jews were prevalent in some areas. However, public figures with large

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platforms rarely spread antisemitic conspiracy theories. One reason for this was the lack of social media and algorithmic amplification.

Culturally, the mid-20th century emphasized shared national values and multicultural curiosity, discouraging divisive identity politics. However, as identity politics became more prevalent in recent decades, expressions of antisemitism also resurfaced in some spaces. A decline in education about history and critical thinking contributed to this resurgence, as fewer people understood the roots of antisemitism or its devastating consequences.

Jacobsen: How has social media impacted this trend?

Tsukerman: Social media has also played a significant role. Algorithmic amplification often promotes extreme views, and foreign actors or organized groups have used these platforms to spread disinformation. Celebrities who repeat conspiratorial rhetoric add fuel to the fire. Unfortunately, many people place undue trust in celebrity opinions, allowing harmful ideas to spread more widely.

However, the influence of major media outlets and prominent commentators is more concerning than isolated celebrities. When trusted media personalities repeat antisemitic tropes, it legitimizes these ideas and creates a dangerous ripple effect. People are more likely to believe narratives from figures they respect. Once those figures embrace extreme or harmful views, their followers also adopt those views. This escalation can have dire consequences for public discourse and social cohesion.

Jacobsen: What do you find are the common conspiracy theories? And does this come up in your legal work or geopolitical analysis? For instance, does it become so problematic that it infiltrates mainstream geopolitical discourse?

Tsukerman: Some old conspiracy theories have faded, such as the notion that Jews and Freemasons are trying to take over the world. That used to be prevalent but has largely disappeared from U.S. discourse. You might still find it in parts of the Middle East or Europe, but in the U.S., it's not as common. Most people here don't know Freemasonry and the movement has become far less prominent. Its visibility has significantly diminished.

That said, religious antisemitism hasn't entirely disappeared. It still exists in various forms across certain religious organizations, whether churches, mosques, or even in ostensibly secular institutions. In secular spaces, antisemitism often takes on a more cultural or ideological bent, but it remains entrenched in peculiar ways. For example, there's the old trope of "Jews killed Jesus" or some Islamist rhetoric, which tends to amplify hostility.

These ideas have become more pervasive with the rise of internet platforms and mass gatherings, as they provide new avenues for amplification. Whether shared in person, in social settings, or online, the issue isn't just about free speech—it's about how that speech is promoted and by whom.

Governments often exacerbate the problem when they try to micromanage or accommodate every perspective. Instead of defining or regulating religions themselves, they should focus on measurable factors: the violence, the results, and the ideologies fueling harmful behaviour.

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Separating religion from ideology and examining the real-world impacts would be more effective.

For instance, governments can look at objective factors like who funds certain institutions, who participates in them, and their levels of education. Where were these individuals educated? Where does their funding come from? What translations of texts are being used? Governments can address these tangible areas without overstepping their bounds or trying to regulate religion itself.

Society is better equipped to self-regulate than government officials regarding the broader societal discourse. However, social media companies and media institutions play a critical role. If hosting objectionable rhetoric becomes a reputational or financial risk, it's less likely to be tolerated. Conversely, it becomes more widely accepted when platforms and institutions find they can profit from such rhetoric.

The media's role is pivotal. By giving platforms to objectionable figures, they inadvertently normalize harmful ideas. The way these platforms amplify rhetoric has changed drastically, and with it, so has the societal impact of conspiracy theories and antisemitism.

If you want to have a real debate between people, that's fine. This is when better arguments can emerge, and people can see for themselves what works and what doesn't. But conspiracy theorists, for obvious reasons, are not good debaters. Suppose you keep giving bigots soapboxes to rant, spread nonsense, manipulate people, and exploit social crises. In that case, that won't end well.

We saw this during COVID-19, when many conspiracy theories became more prominent during a time of social and economic crisis. These crises often serve as breeding grounds for bigoted language.

When there's a political or social crisis elsewhere, like a war in Gaza, people often import the discourse to the U.S. For example, it's perfectly acceptable to say, "The Israeli government is taking steps I don't agree with." Criticism of any government or institution is valid.

However, it crosses into bigotry when people say, "All Israelis want to kill Palestinians." That's an assumption about an entire people, and it's dangerous. Unfortunately, this type of rhetoric fuels the undercurrents of prejudice and is sometimes amplified by the media.

Some provocateurs deliberately stoke these tensions because outrage, polarization, and echo chambers sell. We see this phenomenon beyond antisemitism as well. Social media companies encourage polarization because it drives engagement and increases viewership. Conspiracy theories, bigotry, and outrage are particularly effective because they provide simple explanations for complex problems, scapegoats to blame and appeal to the worst aspects of human nature.

Jacobsen: So, many actors deliberately amplify this rhetoric for profit or political motives?

Tsukerman: Yes. Some actors are motivated by money, while others—often foreign state actors—deliberately foment social polarization in the U.S. Countries like Russia, China, and Iran are known to exploit social divisions through propaganda and disinformation campaigns.

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Jacobsen: Do these countries face similar issues within their borders? Are they also grappling with internal dissent or unrest?

Tsukerman: To an extent, yes. Russia, for example, has a history of internal issues related to antisemitism. The worst period was during the peak of the Soviet Union when there were official state policies of discrimination, including quotas against Jews.

In contemporary Russia, antisemitism is less overt but still present. Media often portrays Jews using stereotypical tropes, and state officials occasionally make antisemitic remarks. For instance, they've made comments equating Jews with particular policies or questioning Jewish identities about figures like Zelensky or Israel.

China and Iran also have internal challenges, though the dynamics differ. While these countries project strength outward, there's often a significant gap between public perception and the realities on the ground. In many cases, dissent is quietly suppressed, creating a facade of stability.

So that's also antisemitic. It doesn't necessarily mean that Jews within these countries are being targeted for violent acts. Still, when a country deliberately cultivates neo-Nazis within its borders and abroad while making official antisemitic statements, it sets a dangerous precedent. When TV and other media propagate subconscious messaging—implying, for example, that villains in the financial sector or other areas are Jewish—it's bound to have a long-term impact. Sooner or later, this leads to increased social antisemitism and demands for antisemitic policies from the government.

In China, for instance, the Jewish community is practically nonexistent. However, the Communist Party of China (CPC) has embedded antisemitism into its media, education system, and even social apps. This creates a uniquely Chinese variant of antisemitism, particularly among active party members. Historically, antisemitism wasn't a focus in China because their issues were primarily internal, dealing with various nationalities within the country. But now, the CPC is deliberately cultivating antisemitism, even though it doesn't reflect the country's history or reality.

In Iran, antisemitism is starkly evident. There have been executions of Jews solely for being Jewish. While the Jewish community is allowed to practice its religious rituals, there is an underlying fear. If they stray from the party line, they risk being accused of treason. Discriminatory practices are widespread.

For example, there was a recent incident where a young Jewish man killed a Muslim who attacked him during a fight. The Jewish man's family offered "blood money" as compensation, but the Muslim family refused. Consequently, the Jewish man was executed. Normally, in self-defence cases, people are not executed for such actions, but in this instance, bigotry plays a role. The government could have intervened, declared a resolution, or sought reconciliation, but instead, they allowed the execution to proceed. This is a clear example of antisemitic policies translating into individual injustices and shaping public attitudes.

Jacobsen: How do these state-level policies and attitudes in countries like Russia, China, and Iran compare to the dynamics in the United States or Canada? The situation is distinct but still

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concerning in the United States. Analysis shows that the primary domestic terrorism threat now comes from white nationalist or Christian white nationalist groups. These groups often perpetuate nationalist, ethnic rhetoric, and antisemitic talking points. They amplify propaganda and conspiracy theories, which we've already discussed.

When these attitudes are perpetuated internally within a country or amplified by foreign state actors—like Russia, China, and Iran—they can lead to organized hate movements. These movements often result in real-world harm to individuals who are Jewish or perceived to be Jewish.

Tsukerman: The biggest challenge isn't necessarily any single antisemitic group. The real danger lies in the "horseshoe theory" of politics. This occurs when radicals from different parts of the political spectrum—far-right extremists, radical leftists, Islamists, and fringe groups—join forces. By aligning, they amplify each other's influence and create a false perception of unity.

These groups have limited audiences individually, even at the height of their influence. But when they join forces, they lend each other credibility and reach. This allows their antisemitic rhetoric to spread far more effectively than if they operated in isolation. The convergence of such ideologies can result in significant harm, both in terms of physical violence and broader societal divisions. It starts with normalizing and mainstreaming hate.

Jacobsen: They become unified by hate. But beyond that, they are also unified by more effective political messaging and organization—something they would typically lack on their own.

When these groups come together, they break down political and ideological barriers. Party lines no longer constrain them, and their messaging becomes mainstream. They reach individuals who would otherwise never engage with them or their rhetoric. This process corrupts everything around them as they dismantle the ideological boundaries that normally keep them isolated.

To counter this, several steps are necessary. First, we must examine and stop any foreign funding supporting these movements. Second, we need effective counter-information warfare initiatives involving the public and private sectors. There are very few such efforts at the moment, and those that do exist are in their infancy. They cannot counter highly organized and well-funded movements.

Public education and critical thinking skills are also essential. People must be equipped to identify bad arguments, distinguish between fact and opinion, and recognize bigotry versus rational analysis. Unfortunately, these skills are currently at an all-time low, leaving people vulnerable to disinformation and manipulation. Many don't even realize they are acting with bias or that their statements are socially unacceptable or rooted in harmful generalizations.

For instance, I've had people ask me, "What do Jews think about this or that?" My response is, "Which Jews are you referring to?" Like any other group, Jewish communities are diverse and hold various opinions. You can track voting patterns or trends based on historical reasons, but you cannot say everyone votes or thinks the same way about every issue. That's not true.

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Jacobsen: One obvious red flag to watch for is when someone starts a statement with "the," as in "The Muslims," "The Jews," "The Christians," or "The atheists." These groups are incredibly diverse internally, with differing social, community, and political dynamics. Making blanket statements about them is not only ridiculous but also biased. People often don't recognize that they're stereotyping because they view their question or statement as perfectly normal or rooted in common political discourse.

Do you find that state or non-state actors are more effective in combating antisemitic narratives?

Tsukerman: Governments are not generally particularly efficient at most things, and countering disinformation is certainly not one of their strengths. However, there are exceptions. Some European countries have implemented successful initiatives. Finland, for example, has a robust program for combating disinformation. Sweden also has relatively effective state and private efforts.

In the U.S., the situation is far less developed. Any official state efforts to counter disinformation are rudimentary or have been dismantled entirely. Despite its limitations and criticisms from both sides of the political spectrum, the Global Engagement Center was one of the few agencies attempting to address information operations and engage with the outside world. However, it has since been defunded, leaving a significant gap in the fight against disinformation.

A coordinated effort is needed to address these challenges, but the U.S. currently lags behind in this critical area.

During the Cold War, information bureaus were tasked with countering propaganda, at least internationally, if not domestically. They were far more effective at that time. But after the fall of the Soviet Union, those efforts were dismantled. So, on a government level, such initiatives are nonexistent now.

The government has attempted public-private partnerships with social media companies. Still, those efforts have been extremely controversial due to constitutional concerns about government interference in private speech. What about private efforts? Have social media companies been effective?

Social media companies have attempted self-regulation, but the results have been mixed. Often, their frameworks backfire because they're either implemented poorly or provoke dissatisfaction from all sides. In some cases, their efforts have actually exacerbated the problem.

Jacobsen: You mentioned "deliberate boosting" of antisemitic and hateful accounts. What do you mean by that?

Tsukerman: Let me give you an example. There's a figure named Jackson Hinkel. He's a troll who promotes propaganda for Russia, Hamas, and other groups. Two years ago, he had only about 1,000 followers—a relatively obscure social media personality with no significant accomplishments or media presence.

Today, he's verified on social media, has an American flag next to his name, and has over 2.8 million followers. This is someone who went from complete obscurity to a massive following,

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not because of genuine merit or noteworthy achievements, but because he aligned himself with Russian and Hamas propaganda networks.

Hinkle has a checkered past, moving from one radical activity to another before finding his niche amplifying antisemitic and extremist rhetoric. He's now heavily promoted, even receiving significant exposure in a major *New York Times profile*. This raises questions about how such obscure figures gain sudden prominence.

Jacobsen: What's behind this "boosting"?

Tsukerman: It's often driven by entities seeking to promote "alternative perspectives." This gives these individuals an aura of legitimacy, even martyrdom, feeding into conspiracy theories that they were previously suppressed or silenced. People like Hinkle have no substantial qualifications or meaningful contributions to public discourse. Yet, they gain wide exposure by being amplified—both by Moscow-aligned networks and social media algorithms.

This creates a dangerous feedback loop. Antisemites flock to figures like Hinkle, while others, who may not be inherently antisemitic but are ignorant or easily manipulated, start finding his content compelling. They begin questioning what they perceive as "state narratives," which is precisely the intended effect of these propagandists.

Tucker Carlson is a good example of someone who doesn't need boosting because he already has a massive platform and significant influence in certain circles. However, when someone like Carlson uses that platform irresponsibly, introducing or normalizing extreme ideas into mainstream discourse, it legitimizes those narratives.

Jacobsen: What did you make of Tucker Carlson's interview with Putin?

Tsukerman: That interview was an unsettling example of how influential figures can serve as conduits for authoritarian propaganda. Carlson gave Putin a platform to spread narratives that appeal to the West's fringe elements, further polarizing and undermining democratic discourse. It's a stark reminder of how media responsibility matters, especially when dealing with figures like Putin, who are adept at weaponizing information for strategic gains.

Local regimes, such as the Ba'athist regimes in Syria and Iraq or Nasser's government in Egypt, followed these narratives for political purposes. Once those ideologies became entrenched in the popular mindset, they became almost indistinguishable from the broader culture. It's been decades, and there have only been brief, inconsistent attempts at reform, often disrupted by internal political squabbles.

Jacobsen: What would it take to undo this deeply rooted antisemitism?

Tsukerman: Undoing this would require a serious, long-term, and consistent effort. Some countries have attempted to revise their textbooks to remove antisemitic conspiracy theories, but the state media remains a bigger challenge. Many officials who benefit from these narratives are deeply entrenched in their positions. Reforming this system is difficult when governments juggle security issues, economic crises, and other pressing concerns.

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For deprogramming to be successful, it would need to be supported by major powers like the U.S. and the European Union. Unfortunately, I haven't seen a consistent commitment to such a project from any U.S. president in the last 20 years. Some administration members made brief reform efforts during Trump's first term. Still, these were insufficient and often countered by conflicting initiatives from the same administration.

Jacobsen: Regarding the Soviet influence you mentioned earlier, some texts—such as *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Besides *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, we have Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, Henry Ford's *The International Jew*, and *The Talmud Unmasked* by Justinas Pranaitis, though I must admit that one is less familiar to me. There's also the broader range of Holocaust denial literature, exemplified by figures like David Irving.

This "rich and unillustrious" history of antisemitic works continues to shape hate movements. Even though these texts have been debunked extensively, they persist. The failure to eradicate them raises questions about the nature of this style of hatred and its resistance to rational analysis, evidentiary discourse, and debunking efforts.

Why do these ideas resurface, even after being thoroughly discredited? It's like a game of whack-a-mole. You can debunk these ideas repeatedly, but they'll keep popping up.

Tsukerman: You can't fully convince 100% of people all the time. Still, you can build a societal baseline of rational thinking that minimizes their impact.

Think of it like a vaccination. Not everyone will benefit from a vaccine—some might be medically unable to take it, and others might refuse it. However, society becomes better protected overall when most of the population is inoculated against a particular strain or illness. Similarly, we need to "vaccinate" society against the appeal of antisemitic ideas through education and critical thinking.

Jacobsen: How would such an educational "inoculation" work?

Tsukerman: It starts by building a foundation of critical thinking and deep historical understanding from a young age. Students must learn to grapple with complex narratives rather than absorb oversimplified propaganda. Doing so makes them more likely to question ideas, engage with diverse perspectives, and resist emotional manipulation and simplistic explanations.

This "base" of education must also be reinforced over time—much like booster shots in medicine. Critical thinking and historical study shouldn't stop in childhood; they must be part of lifelong learning. Regular exposure to thoughtful discourse and factual information can counter the emotional appeal of propaganda and inoculate society against hate.

Jacobsen: Besides inoculating the population with basic critical thinking training and developing an anti-conspiratorial mindset, how do you boost public awareness? For example, periodic exercises or updates about new developments in information warfare. How can people be taught to recognize when they're being taken for a ride, much like scams targeting vulnerable populations, such as senior citizens?

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Tsukerman: That's a great analogy. Scams show how easily people can fall for false narratives without realizing their origins. Many believe they understand what they're hearing or reading but often don't grasp the manipulation behind it.

The best thing governments, companies, and institutions can do is to be transparent and truthful. Admit mistakes, remain flexible, and be receptive to citizens' concerns. Trust is easier to build when experts are humble, clear in their communications, and open about the evolving nature of their knowledge. Experts should emphasize that science and understanding are not static but continually advancing. Humility—admitting what you don't know and acknowledging mistakes—goes a long way in cultivating trust and societal buy-in.

Conspiracy theories thrive in environments where the social contract feels broken. When people feel betrayed by their government, authorities, doctors, or the media, bad actors exploit these vulnerabilities. They offer narratives that align with existing feelings of resentment or doubt, preying on cognitive biases. People gravitate toward ideas that validate their emotional and intellectual frameworks rather than challenge those ideas skeptically.

Jacobsen: You mentioned Jackson Hinkel earlier as an example of a promoted individual. At another level, there are individuals and organizations whose antisemitism doesn't depend on being boosted—they're entrenched in conspiratorial thinking, bad logic, and pseudo-evidence. From your analysis, which personalities or organizations would you say exemplify the most virulent or entrenched forms of antisemitism?

Tsukerman: That's a good question. There are certainly personalities and organizations that have professionalized their hatred, so to speak. One example is **CAIR** (Council on American-Islamic Relations). CAIR markets itself as the leading civil rights organization for Muslim Americans. However, its actual membership is relatively small, and it has actively suppressed efforts by other organizations attempting to serve similar roles.

CAIR has faced accusations of receiving funding from foreign entities linked to extremist ideologies. These financial ties often align with fundamentalist interpretations of Islam, which many Muslim Americans do not support. Despite these internal and external issues, CAIR has managed to create an image of legitimacy by building a network of associations, sister organizations, and affiliated groups. This makes it appear influential and representative of the broader Muslim community.

The problem is that there is no monolithic "Muslim community." Muslims are incredibly diverse in terms of ethnicity, culture, and religious practices. Many feel unrepresented by CAIR but believe they have no alternative because of its prominence.

I can give you a clear example. I attended a conference. At this conference, a CAIR representative participated in discussions about religious inclusion and human rights. They portrayed themselves as the sole voice for Muslim Americans, leveraging their established reputation to dominate the narrative. However, some attendees, including Muslim participants, quietly expressed their discomfort with CAIR's approach, feeling it did not reflect their views or experiences.

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This situation highlights the broader issue: organizations like CAIR use their networks and media presence to amplify their influence, even when they don't represent most of the communities they claim to speak for. It's a calculated strategy that capitalizes on the lack of alternative voices while presenting a unified but misleading front.

Jacobsen: I really enjoy talking to experts and being educated by them. As I often tell them, I can't replace their expertise as a freelance journalist simply surveying the landscape. That's the whole point of conversations, book projects, etc.

Sometimes, I'll go to a pub or nightclub and end up in interesting discussions. For example, I once went to a Latin nightclub, and a Saudi guy was there. We hit it off, had a couple of drinks together, and got into a conversation.

He started talking about the LA fires, which had just begun. He insinuated that the fires were caused by divine intervention—he nudged his head upwards, implying they were started by God Almighty as a punishment.

Here's this Saudi, liquor-drinking Muslim in Vancouver, at a Latin nightclub with his brother, drinking heavily and yet holding this mindset of divine retribution against, I don't know, Hollywood or something.

Compare that to someone like Imam Soharwardy, a Canadian Sufi Muslim. He's a gentle person who founded the Islamic Supreme Council of Canada and led a 6,500-kilometer walk against violence to promote peace and nonviolence within his community. These two individuals represent vastly different expressions of Islam.

One is a Pakistani Sufi Muslim who doesn't drink, as far as I know and leads a life of activism and peacebuilding. The other is a Saudi Muslim who goes out drinking with his brother and, instead of expressing sympathy for people affected by the fires in LA, immediately frames the disaster as divine punishment then has sympathy mixed into it.

Tsukerman: Right, and that speaks to the diversity within Muslim communities. To the extent that someone operates within a religious framework, they might view events as having divine significance. But even if an event is seen as divinely inspired, the human mandate—across all major religious texts—is to help those in need, not to stand by or wait for people to suffer.

I don't know of any divine text that calls for passivity in the face of a natural disaster. The human response should always be to assist others, regardless of theological interpretations.

Jacobsen: Regarding organizations, you mentioned earlier that CAIR was linked to controversies.

Tsukerman: CAIR (Council on American-Islamic Relations) was an unindicted co-conspirator in the Holy Land Foundation trials. They were accused of illicitly sponsoring commerce through various networks. Although they were never prosecuted, a file sitting with the Department of Justice could be reopened at any time.

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One of CAIR's co-founders, Nihad Awad, made headlines recently by praising the October 7 terrorist attacks on Israel. This prompted the Biden administration to remove CAIR from its antisemitism task force.

Frankly, I don't understand why CAIR was ever part of an antisemitism task force in the first place. They might have expertise in Muslim issues, but they're certainly not experts on antisemitism or anything related to Jewish communities. That's not their field.

Jacobsen: It does tie into your earlier point about governments often being ineffective

Tsukerman: This is another example of why governments aren't always the most efficient or logical actors in addressing these issues. CAIR's inclusion in an antisemitism task force raises questions about the decision-making process and the criteria for selecting participants. It reflects broader inefficiencies and missteps that are too common in government initiatives.

So, the issue is that they've monopolized the space. They've threatened other organizations and used cartel-like, monopolistic methods to ensure no competition emerges. This leaves communities, such as new immigrants from Bangladesh who don't know anyone, with little choice but to turn to these organizations for help.

These groups create an illusion of legitimacy, but it's more akin to a mafia structure—creating a racket, controlling a community, and claiming they are the only ones capable of defending it.

That's precisely the problem. Their methods aren't legitimate; they're criminal and monopolistic in nature. You see this pattern with many similar organizations. They are highly organized, structured, and connected to international networks. They understand local societies well enough to establish effective networks of associates and supporters. However, their influence often extends into spreading conspiracy theories, which is not what they claim to be doing.

Their stated mission might be legal defence or assistance to communities, but their agenda often involves social subversion. They misuse funding for propaganda and accusations rather than genuinely helping those in need. That's just one example.

Jacobsen: Can you elaborate on how other nations, like Russia, have used similar tactics?

Tsukerman: Russia has created parallel structures—essentially shell organizations or fronts—in various contexts. They target diverse audiences in different ways. For example:

- They appeal to old Russian diasporas with nostalgic messaging.
- They fund neo-Nazi groups to destabilize societies.
- They support radical leftist groups, pushing extremist ideologies.

All of these efforts inevitably lead to antisemitism in some form. These organized campaigns are deliberate, sophisticated, and global.

We've also seen targeted efforts against specific industries and sectors, particularly influential figures with large platforms. Former athletes, comedians, or podcast hosts—people with big audiences but limited expertise on complex topics—are prime targets. Their followers aren't expecting nuanced discussions on the history of antisemitism.

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Instead, these influencers either platform individuals with antisemitic leanings without challenging them or amplify contrarian viewpoints that seem appealing for the sake of being "anti-establishment." Contrarianism, for its own sake, can become a gateway for normalizing antisemitic ideas.

Jacobsen: That's a concerning trend. Moving on, you mentioned human rights violations earlier. How should antisemitism be investigated as violating international human rights under frameworks like UN principles or the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)?

Tsukerman: That's an excellent question. Historically, the international community has been reluctant to treat antisemitic incidents as human rights violations. They've often been framed as issues of hate speech, bigotry, or intellectual discourse but not as violations of fundamental human rights.

Under existing frameworks, antisemitism should be considered a human rights issue. Suppose a state or actor deliberately targets an entire community based on ideological hatred. In that case, that constitutes a violation of their human rights.

For example, hate crimes motivated by antisemitism often involve deliberate campaigns against a group, including incitement to violence, atrocities, or even genocide. This falls squarely under international human rights principles. Such acts can and should be treated as violations of the UDHR, particularly when they escalate to incitement or organized efforts to harm or ostracize an entire community.

Jacobsen: So, in essence, antisemitism can amount to more than just hate speech—it can escalate into incitement toward genocide or mass violence?

Tsukerman: When antisemitism involves systemic, deliberate campaigns—especially state-sponsored ones—it goes beyond mere bigotry or speech issues. It becomes an international human rights issue that demands accountability under frameworks like the UDHR or international law.

The problem with the international community is that it's only as good as its members. Let's face it—when you have a large international organization, it becomes harder to enforce basic standards of lawfulness, democratic norms, and the rule of law.

We're seeing a lot of corruption at the UN. Lobbies sometimes sway smaller or developing countries into voting for hateful or illogical resolutions. There's also significant dissent and disagreement over basic definitions. How do we address that?

It starts with something small: defining the terms. For instance, what is antisemitism? You'll never get anywhere without an agreed-upon, clear definition—especially in large forums with diverse members. Agreeing on what exactly you're fighting is the first step.

Once you've done that, the next challenge is ensuring that member states are incentivized to adhere to the framework. Without accountability or enforcement mechanisms, all you're left with are empty words.

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Jacobsen: Within such frameworks, do you see risks in how certain historical atrocities are used for comparison? For example, attempts to compare the Holocaust with other atrocities can lead to conflation, diminishing the significance of both.

Tsukerman: That's a great point. Comparing the Holocaust—a targeted, systematic campaign of genocide against millions of Jewish people—with other atrocities is often inappropriate and problematic. While it's possible to make comparisons as an intellectual exercise, doing so in public discourse can diminish not only the Jewish suffering but also the suffering of other groups involved in those comparisons.

Jacobsen: Can you provide examples of such inappropriate comparisons?

Tsukerman: Absolutely. Two recent examples come to mind, and while controversial, they're worth discussing.

First, there's been a trend to bring up the Holocaust too easily in discourse, reducing its significance. For example, it's often invoked to make ugly or hyperbolic comparisons, which can diminish the unique horror of that crime and devalue discussions of other genocides, such as those in Rwanda or Darfur.

Second, a more specific example involves Queen Camilla in the UK. At a Holocaust memorial service, she mentioned antisemitism and Islamophobia in the same sentence. This was highly inappropriate and in poor taste—not because Islamophobia isn't an issue worth addressing, but because it has nothing to do with the Holocaust.

The Nazis collaborated with Islamist extremist groups during World War II, aiming to eliminate Jews, so bringing up Islamophobia in this context not only risks conflating unrelated issues but also opens the door to historical controversies that are irrelevant to the Holocaust itself. It was an unnecessary inclusion that detracted from the focus of the event.

Jacobsen: What do you think motivates these kinds of comparisons?

Tsukerman: Often, they stem from either a lack of understanding or a deliberate attempt to subvert the narrative. In some cases, they're meant to devalue the Holocaust as a singular atrocity, portraying it as just one of many and erasing its specific significance. At times, this reflects antisemitic motivations—seeking to minimize Jewish suffering or deny the uniqueness of their persecution.

When these comparisons are made inappropriately, they shift the discourse away from meaningful discussions of historical atrocities and their lessons. Instead, they risk trivializing both the Holocaust and the other tragedies they're compared to.

Armenian lobbies in the U.S. are quite distinct from the Pashinyan government in Armenia. These groups represent local Armenian-American communities in the U.S. for over a century. They're not new migrants, and many of them didn't even come directly from Armenia—they're from other parts of the world but happen to be Armenian.

These lobbies often attempt to draw comparisons between the Holocaust and the events of 1915, the Armenian genocide. While historical tragedies deserve acknowledgment and remembrance,

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how these lobbies sometimes frame their arguments is problematic. They have, at times, employed antisemitic rhetoric when others don't align with their political strategies or narratives.

There have also been controversies surrounding some of these lobbies, including allegations of embezzlement of humanitarian funds meant for Armenia. Some of these groups have been linked to organized crime or Russian-backed efforts, which complicates their activities further. Despite these issues, they have become highly influential in American politics.

Jacobsen: How does this tie into Holocaust comparisons specifically?

Tsukerman: The Armenian lobbies often use the Holocaust as a rhetorical tool to draw attention to their cause. This co-opting of Holocaust history for a different political agenda is deeply problematic. It's not just offensive—it's historically damaging.

It undermines the unique significance of both historical events, distorting the understanding of history and failing to treat each atrocity in its own right. Moreover, there is often a deliberate intent to appropriate the Holocaust's cultural and historical weight to gain attention for their political aims.

Jacobsen: Shifting gears, what are your thoughts on the economic and cybersecurity implications of antisemitic rhetoric and conspiracy theories?

Tsukerman: Unfortunately, antisemitism sells. Popular media personalities like Candace Owens and Tucker Carlson wouldn't normalize obscure conspiracy theories and extremist arguments if they weren't profitable. Without money or an audience for these ideas, they wouldn't pursue them.

Someone is paying for it, and someone benefits from pushing these narratives. In many cases, the funding likely comes from state actors, though not always. But make no mistake—if there weren't a financial incentive, much of this antisemitic rhetoric wouldn't persist. Books and other materials wouldn't sell if there weren't demand for them.

Jacobsen: So, how do we address the economic aspect of antisemitism?

Tsukerman: It's a matter of understanding demand and supply dynamics. The demand side is critical. If people stop consuming this content, the supply will diminish naturally. Trying to shut down supply without addressing demand often backfires.

Look at the Soviet Union as an example. Anything taboo or forbidden became more desirable, fueling curiosity and conspiracies about why it was banned in the first place. By reducing demand—through education, awareness, and counter-narratives—you can reduce the market for these ideas.

Another key aspect is cutting off foreign funding for these narratives. Many people don't realize that external actors push some of this rhetoric maliciously and don't have the public's best interests at heart. Identifying and exposing these foreign influences is crucial to curbing the spread of antisemitism and conspiracy theories.

Jacobsen: That's the economic argument. What about cybersecurity? How do we see antisemitic narratives being boosted in cyberspace?

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Tsukerman: Boosting happens in cyberspace, and it's not just by Elon Musk or Russian trolls—it involves state actors from various countries. Qatar, for instance, plays a significant role. They use Western influencers and cybersecurity experts to craft complex narratives that ultimately boost antisemitic sentiments.

The most sophisticated tactic involves selecting "good Jews"—often hardcore anti-Zionist or self-hating types—and propping them up to justify antisemitism. The narrative becomes, "We're not antisemitic; we're just against Israel or religious extremism. Look at these Jewish people who agree with us!"

This is one of the worst forms of antisemitism, and it has historical parallels. Throughout history, so-called "court Jews"in monarchies were often employed to suppress their communities in exchange for favour from governments. What we're seeing now is the same idea, where antisemites deploy individuals with internalized self-hatred to legitimize their rhetoric.

Jacobsen: You mentioned bots earlier. How do they factor into this?

Tsukerman: Bots are heavily involved in amplifying these ridiculous arguments. They've become more sophisticated over time. It's not just Russia with its troll farms anymore—it's a variety of countries investing in AI technologies.

Interestingly, some of these efforts are based in Europe. European groups, leveraging advanced AI, are running these campaigns. Because they're European-based, they attract less scrutiny and are harder to trace. These campaigns are more complex and insidious.

Jacobsen: What about targeted campaigns to boycott anything Jewish—whether explicitly antisemitic or framed as part of a hypothetical noble cause?

Tsukerman: If people choose not to buy a product for personal reasons, that's their prerogative. The problem arises when organized campaigns attempt to create economic pressure on institutions, including government entities, to engage in illegal discrimination against citizens or allied states.

These campaigns often invoke the apartheid South Africa comparison, but it's an entirely inappropriate analogy. Apartheid South Africa was a unique phenomenon where a minority population oppressed a majority through explicit, codified policies.

Israel doesn't fit that framework. It's a country with Arab Muslim parties in the government. Yes, there are issues of discrimination that need addressing, and some politicians have said deplorable things. Policies can be criticized, and governments can always improve, but to compare Israel to apartheid South Africa is historically and factually inaccurate.

Jacobsen: So these campaigns distort definitions to justify hate campaigns?

Tsukerman: The goal is to weaponize flawed definitions to legitimize hate campaigns and push for illegal discrimination. State and non-state foreign actors often fund these organized movements. They're not grassroots efforts but deliberate, well-funded initiatives to spread hate under the guise of legitimate political discourse.

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The good news is that 27 U.S. states have enacted laws opposing these discriminatory movements. A federal framework has also been pushed, though it hasn't materialized yet.

Jacobsen: What's the next step?

Tsukerman: The next step is to unravel the funding sources behind these campaigns, expose the foreign actors involved, and ensure legal frameworks are in place to protect against discrimination. Public education on why these narratives are flawed is also critical. Without understanding the tactics and motivations behind these movements, it's easy for people to fall prey to their rhetoric.

Jacobsen: Let's discuss the characterizations and slurs used in antisemitic rhetoric. Beyond the overtly hateful terms, you have the less obvious ones—"globalists" or "international banksters," for example. Then there's the idea of a hypothetical Zionist or dual control of the world. The notion that 0.2% of the global population somehow pulls the levers on everything, or separation in ‘Good Jews’ and ‘Bad Jews.’ What's your take on this kind of narrative?

Tsukerman: Yes, I know exactly what you're referring to. I always joke, "Where are my bags of gold in this conspiracy? How did I get left out?" By the way, if these supposed conspirators are so effective, why are things going so badly? The logic doesn't hold up.

Jacobsen: What about antisemitic hacking campaigns? Are these targeting Jewish institutions or individuals?

Tsukerman: There have been hacking campaigns targeting Jewish organizations and institutions. However, we need to unpack this topic fully when we have more time.

Jacobsen: One angle I've found interesting is individuals who grew up surrounded by antisemitism or even converted to antisemitic ideologies in adulthood but later deconverted and became outspoken critics. These individuals, having lived it, know the language and the mindset. Do you see this group as effective in combating antisemitism?

Tsukerman: In theory, it sounds promising. You're referring to people akin to ex-communists who became liberal critics of oppressive systems or former Maoists who switched ideological sides. But there are significant caveats.

First, many of these individuals lack a classical liberal mindset or a genuine, deeply rooted repulsion to oppressive systems. Some of them move from one extreme to another. After leaving antisemitic ideologies, they may embrace another form of extremism rather than adopting a truly balanced perspective.

Second, not everyone claiming to have "converted" away from antisemitism is genuine. Some are opportunists seeking attention. Others infiltrate Jewish communities under pretenses, gathering information to pass back to their original networks or governments.

Jacobsen: That's concerning. Are there other limitations with this group?

Tsukerman: Yes. Many of these so-called converts are ineffective because they primarily preach to the converted—they appeal only to Jewish or Christian audiences already sympathetic to their

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message. Rarely do they engage with their communities or challenge antisemitic mindsets in their native languages or cultural contexts.

The critical question is: What value are they providing? Often, they reiterate what the audience already knows. "X, Y, Z regime is antisemitic and needs to go." Great—we're aware of that. What's missing is actionable insight: how to effectively combat that regime or convince others in their communities to stop listening to propaganda.

Jacobsen: In most cases, they're not developing strategies to challenge antisemitism in their home contexts.

Tsukerman: In my experience, very few of these individuals have been truly valuable in this regard. Worse, some sponsored by organizations do more harm than good. In some cases, they deliberately infiltrate Jewish communities, pretending to be allies while gathering intelligence to pass on to their original networks or governments.

We need to be cautious when evaluating the authenticity and effectiveness of these individuals. While few may provide genuine insight and support, many do not challenge their communities or provide strategies for meaningful change.

Jacobsen: Something I'm not too familiar with are antisemitic hacking campaigns. I assume these are black hat hackers, not white hat hackers, meaning they aim to cause harm rather than help. What do these campaigns look like?

Tsukerman: Yes, exactly. These are black hat hackers with malicious intent. There have been extensive campaigns, particularly involving Iranian, Russian, and Chinese hackers targeting Israel's institutions. Interestingly, there have been counter-responses from Indian hackers who've hacked back at some of these groups.

Jacobsen: Leave it to the Indian hackers, they're great.

Tsukerman: You have Russians, Chinese, and Iranians on one side and Indians countering them.

Jacobsen: Then, Nigerians enter the mix, trying to scam you as the "son of a prince, and a banker." What about the U.S.? Do you see much hacking activity targeting Jewish organizations or activists?

Tsukerman: In the U.S., you hear less about outright hacking aimed at Jewish organizations compared to what's happening globally. However, there have been incidents targeting Jewish institutions, Jewish activists, and pro-Israel advocates.

One particularly insidious tactic, especially prominent with Qatari actors, involves preemptive hacking. This means identifying activists or critics before they reach their peak influence, gathering compromising or embarrassing information about them, and then leaking it later when they've gained prominence. It's preemptive talent spotting, and I've seen it in action.

Jacobsen: Is this widely known?

Tsukerman: Not really. It's so targeted and specific that it often flies under the radar. The more well-known incidents tend to be simpler, like defacing websites with hateful messages. But these

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more sophisticated, intelligence-level patterns of hacking—particularly aimed at Jewish or pro-Israel individuals and organizations—aren't getting the attention they deserve.

Jacobsen: What needs to be done to address this?

Tsukerman: We need data. First, detailed data must be collected to understand the scale and patterns of these attacks. From that data, we can build a framework to analyze the tactics used. Once we have actionable insights, or "NSATs" (next steps and tactics), we can effectively develop strategies to counter these attacks—whether through governmental action, NGO work, or individual advocacy.

Jacobsen: Beyond hacking, how do you see financial targeting of Jewish organizations? How do you differentiate between those targeted for political reasons—such as criticism of Israel—and those targeted explicitly for being Jewish?

Tsukerman: At this point, it's often a distinction without a difference. Suppose someone is attacking all of Israel, not just specific government policies. In that case, they're effectively targeting Jews and anyone associated with the state. Israel is recognized as a Jewish state, so such attacks disproportionately impact Jewish individuals and organizations.

Criticism of specific policies or leaders, like Netanyahu, is, of course, legitimate. But the real question is: What about the rest of Israel? Are these critics okay with Israel and its people's existence? In my experience, I've yet to see an organization exclusively dedicated to criticizing specific Israeli political decisions without also smearing the broader society.

Jacobsen: So, in theory, such a distinction could exist, but it's rare in practice? It's one of those academic exercises—nice in theory but almost nonexistent in reality.

Tsukerman: Most organized criticism ends up targeting Israel as a whole, which inevitably crosses into antisemitism.

Jacobsen: Let's discuss international conspiracies involving Freemasonry, banks, and various institutions—specifically, the conflation of these ideas with antisemitic narratives. While media portrayals often perpetuate the same old tropes, I'm curious about the weaponization of financial stereotypes. These conspiracies often center around the idea of "global financial control" and are weaponized to harm Jewish individuals and communities. They're pervasive and can target anyone, from wealthy public figures like Larry David and Jerry Seinfeld to regular Jewish families—whether they're Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, or otherwise.

Tsukerman: One of the clearest examples of this was the case of Ilan Halimi in France. He was a 23-year-old Jewish man, a cell phone salesman, abducted and tortured by a violent gang called the "Gang of Barbarians."

The gang specifically targeted him because they believed he was wealthy, purely because he was Jewish. They demanded a ransom of €450,000, more than most people earn in a lifetime. In the end, they killed him.

Jacobsen: That's horrifying.

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Tsukerman: It is, and it's a stark example of antisemitism in its purest and most brutal form. This was not someone wealthy or prominent. He was just a regular person. Even the gang admitted they believed all Jews were wealthy, and that motivated the crime. Nicolas Sarkozy, the French Interior Minister at the time, acknowledged this explicitly.

Jacobsen: It's striking that they even called themselves the "Gang of Barbarians."

Tsukerman: Yes, you can't make this up. They openly identified as villains, which is rare, but at least they were honest about their motivations. It's a tragic case that illustrates how pervasive and dangerous these stereotypes can be.

Jacobsen: Beyond this case, how do these stereotypes manifest in other parts of the world?

Tsukerman: You see variations of this narrative in the Middle East and many developing countries. In some places, people don't even know what being Jewish means, yet they parrot stereotypes like "Jews are rich" or "Jews control everything." These ideas have become so entrenched that they're often accepted without question, even in regions with no significant Jewish population.

There's also magical thinking at play. People fail to connect the dots between the cultural emphasis on education and hard work in many Jewish communities and the resulting financial success for some individuals. Instead, they attribute success to conspiracies or luck, ignoring the historical context of discrimination and the resilience it necessitated.

At the same time, not every Jewish person is wealthy or successful. There's a broad spectrum, just like in any other community. But these stereotypes persist because they're easy, reductive explanations for complex realities.

It oversimplifies and dehumanizes. When people fail to recognize the diversity within Jewish communities and the effort behind individual achievements, they perpetuate harmful myths that fuel prejudice and, in extreme cases, violence.

Many people gravitate toward professions that provide financial stability and allow them to take care of their families.

Jacobsen: Are there any major topics we missed? We've covered radicalization, extremism, geopolitics, propaganda, state and non-state actors, Israel, disinformation campaigns, human rights violations, antisemitism, protections, cybersecurity, economics, boycotts, hacking, financial targeting, and destabilization. Did we miss anything?

Tsukerman: We've covered a lot.

Jacobsen: Earlier, we touched on the AfD and the far right in Britain, but they don't have much of a chance under Trump.

Tsukerman: One additional point I wanted to mention is that a recent trend is seeing individuals who aren't genuinely pro-Jewish or pro-Israel use fake appeals to advance their own agendas.

For example, Viktor Orbán in Hungary invited Netanyahu for a visit and boasted about how safe Hungary allegedly is for its Jewish community compared to other European countries. However, Orbán is deeply invested in Iran, does business with China, and sides with Russia. He also has no

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issue with the horrific crimes occurring in Ukraine. How can someone like that possibly be pro-Jewish?

I'm deeply skeptical of Orbán's intentions. It looks like pure opportunism—a scheme to attract Jews to Hungary because many are politically influential in the U.S., and he likely sees them as useful for building political connections. It's political cynicism at its finest.

Jacobsen: This ties into the broader category of "useful idiots." Cynical actors like Orbán play both sides, creating the illusion of being allies while serving their interests.

Everyone seems to have this archetype of a Bond villain in mind. It reminds me of a German comedian's joke on Conan O'Brien's show. Conan asked if it bothered him–the interviewee–that Germans in American media are often portrayed as villains. The comedian immediately replied, "No."

He said, "Have you Wiki'd Germany history before?" It was quick and to the point. That's sharp humour—concise and accurate.

Jacobsen: We could dig into these tropes more. One area I'd like to explore in the future is how people who hold antisemitic beliefs define "Jewish." What's their conception of a Jewish person? That's a fascinating and broad topic. It warrants its discussion.

Jacobsen: Thank you so much. It was great to connect with you.

Tsukerman: Excellent. Thank you so much for your time.

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Star Kashman on Antisemitism and Bad Information

Star Kashman is a legal expert specializing in cybersecurity, privacy, and social media law. She authored the first scholarly article on the legality of Search Engine Hacking (Google Dorking) in the *Washington Journal of Law, Technology & Arts* and expanded on this research in *Law360*. She has led discussions on cybersecurity law, including an event at Brooklyn Law School's Incubator & Policy Clinic (BLIP) with top legal and security experts. Recognized by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) for her research, she now founded her own technology-focused law firm Cyber Law Firm, tackling cyberstalking, social media harm, doxing, deep fakes, online fraud, tech-based personal injury litigation and more. Star Kashman also focuses on advocating for stronger legislation within the digital age at Gotham Government Relations where she serves as the Technology and Cyber Law Chair. Social media platforms amplify antisemitism by prioritizing high-engagement content, often driven by outrage and emotional responses. Algorithms inadvertently promote harmful narratives, as seen with Osama bin Laden's letter circulating on TikTok. Additionally, paid promotion allows the spread of antisemitic content. Legal challenges exist both domestically and internationally, with the U.S. prioritizing free speech, and broadly protecting platforms under Section 230. Misinformation distorts history and current events, fueling conspiracy theories that reframe antisemitic rhetoric in "woke" narratives. AI tools can help detect antisemitism but require human oversight. Global jurisdictions complicate accountability, and while networks can combat online hate, platforms often prioritize profits over regulation.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: How do social media amplify antisemitic content?

Star Kashman: Social media amplifies antisemitic content by blindly rewarding posts that receive high engagement. This can often prioritize content that brings a strong emotional response from a user, like outrage, shock, or disbelief. Often, platform algorithms push out high engagement content because it has a greater number of comments, debates, shares, and longer watch times from users, telling the platform that the content is "good" as it draws attention and can addict users. For example, when Osama bin Laden's letter circulated on TikTok, it gained traction not just among those who agreed with it, but also due to those who were outraged, which inadvertently boosted its engagement and ultimately visibility. This amplification is algorithm-driven and often leads to harmful narratives spreading faster and further. Also, social media platforms tend to blindly accept funding from nearly anyone, allowing users to pay to push out their content and accounts or pay for advertisements from content creators. For example, Meta admitted that Russia had allegedly paid around 150,000 to push out misinformation around the time of the US 2016 election. It will likely come out in a few years that anti-israel and anti-jewish organizations and terrorist groups funded content, content creators, and accounts. Additionally, funding can be put behind creating artificial engagement and bot accounts to push out antisemitic content, and this is something that the public has already recognized. There are bots on numerous social media applications that will automatically either leave boiler-plate hate comments or arguments on Jewish creators content, or template supportive comments on hateful antisemitic posts to push them out. These bots may automatically create mass-scale posts

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spewing hateful antisemitic rhetoric, pushing conspiracy theories, and normalizing misinformation to benefit from the echo-chamber and group think impacts of social media.

Jacobsen: Does this pose legal challenges domestically more or internationally more?

Kashman: Legal challenges exist in both domestic and international contexts, but they are likely more complex internationally due to vastly different regulations, views, and goals. In the U.S., Section 230 protects platforms from liability for third-party content. This has expanded over the year to cover far beyond that, immunizing platforms from it's own harmful conduct and contributions as well. We have various laws in place to protect tech companies because US courts have in the past prioritized innovation and profit even sometimes over safety. Meanwhile, other areas like China or Iran have stricter regulations on platform accountability, yet those areas have vastly different views on free speech issues. Globally, balancing free speech with combating harmful content is challenging, especially when each country has different standards for what constitutes hate speech or propaganda.

Jacobsen: How do mis- and dis-information play roles in the spread of both antisemitism and conspiracy theories?

Kashman: Mis- and disinformation play a big role in spreading antisemitism by rewriting history and distorting current events to dehumanize jews, and brainwash the public into thinking they are justified or even noble for having antisemitic or hateful thoughts against jews and israel. For instance, after the October 7 attacks in Israel, fabricated stories and AI-generated images were used to discredit verified accounts of violence against Israelis. For example, content was generated of a dog on a bed replacing visual evidence of burned Israeli babies and children, which was disseminated to say that Israel lies and pushes out fake information. This narrative stated that there were no images of dead or burned babies, alleging that Israel that used AI to turn an image of a rescued dog into a burnt baby. This was to stop a narrative that would cause people to empathize with israelis or jewish people, understand what they went through on October 7th to begin the war, and to create distrust against jews and israelis so when something unfavorable was seen in the media it would not be trusted. So much misinformation and disinformation was pushed out regarding evidence of crimes to the point where people can almost only believe what they want to and not distinguish the truth from fiction. Because of the discrediting campaigns, individuals refuse to even look at evidence of Jewish pain, hardship, and loss, citing it as "Zionist propaganda," rejecting even to view or process it before making any opinion. Similarly, misinformation about the Jewish community's origins, and historical presence in the Middle East is frequently shared to justify harmful actions and make it appear as if they are unrelated settlers randomly choosing Israel to invade and "steal" from Palestinians, in order to justify the horrific actions taken on October 7 and flip the narrative. In addition to re-writing the term Zionism, holocaust terminology was strategically weaponized against Jews, brainwashing the public to believe one of the most oppressed minority groups was actually oppressors, and desensitizing the population to abuse, discredit, and rewrite Jewish pain and history. Such disinformation dehumanizes Jewish individuals and feeds into broader conspiracy theories that further spread hate.

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Jacobsen: How do conspiracy theories, e.g., ‘globalists,’ ‘international banksters,’ etc., merge with antisemitic language for virulent narratives online?

Kashman: Conspiracy theories have evolved into a more ironically “woke" narrative to blend into current cultural discussions while maintaining their antisemitic roots. Instead of using overtly racist language the public is familiar with through holocaust teachings, modern narratives frame Jews as oppressors, calling them "globalists" or falsely accusing them of controlling media and finance. Terms like "Zio-Nazi" and references to "apartheid" and "genocide" are new iterations of old hate, cloaked in political activism to make them more palatable and less obvious to casual or naïve observers, more importantly using such triggering holocaust-specific language to jewish people against them. Jews are now often compared directly to their oppressor who actually tried to commit genocide against them, in order to dehumanize jews and make them appear as an oppressor, and also dehumanize the Jews harmed on October 7th, implying that never occurred and could never justify Israel seeking to obtain their hostages back.

Jacobsen: How can AI tools detect and mitigate antisemitism?

Kashman: AI tools can play a significant role in mitigating antisemitism by flagging patterns of harmful language and content for human review. Certain keywords and phrases—such as references to "genocide," "apartheid," or "Zio-Nazi", should trigger content moderation systems. There is also shocking amounts of holocaust denial rhetoric and commentary online, and it is surprising that repeated language regarding the rejection of the holocaust is not often flagged, or even removed after various reports. However, human oversight is crucial to avoid false positives. For example, while a Palestinian flag itself isn’t in itself harmful, but spamming it on unrelated Jewish creators' content completely unrelated to the conflict as a form of intimidation could be detected by AI systems and flagged for review as potential hate or harassment, which would need human oversight so as to not suppress comments in a place where it would not be deemed as hateful or antisemitic.

Jacobsen: What barriers do global jurisdictions present online platform accountability?

Kashman: Global jurisdictions present major challenges due to differing legal standards for speech and platform regulation. The U.S. prioritizes free speech and innovation, often under-regulating platforms, while countries like China and Iran impose heavy restrictions. This

disparity makes it difficult to enforce consistent accountability, as platforms must comply with local laws that may conflict with each other. It is also a challenge for the US, with less regulation around technology given our economy likely thrives off of it, and the government likely does not want to deter that. However, the US itself is the area that owns, controls, and homes most of these major and hugely impactful technology companies. This prevents those with better restrictions and protections from having them as easily, and creates an environment where technology platforms are protected by a US bubble that refuses to regulate it as much as it should, to make it safer for all.

Jacobsen: Are there networks of legal experts, tech companies, and policymakers, to combat antisemitism? If so, who? (If not, why not?)

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Kashman: While networks to combat antisemitism exist in traditional advocacy spaces, similar networks for the digital space are still underdeveloped. Tech companies often avoid forming such coalitions or hosting such discussions to minimize liability and costs, preferring to focus on maximizing engagement and profitability. Some organizations have taken steps to engage with tech companies, but a broader, more organized coalition is needed to address online antisemitism. Especially because reducing hateful content on platforms often directly contrasts with platforms intent to profit from high engagement and rage-bait, there needs to be a more serious matter to encourage platforms to go against profitability for good moral reason.

Jacobsen: What legal precedents have been set to address antisemitic harm?

Kashman: Legal precedent in the U.S. for addressing online antisemitism is limited due to Section 230 protections and free speech law which have in the past been broadly over-applied even in irrelevant cases. The other issue in the new wave of and definitions of antisemitism look very different than the already pre-established old, more often recognized form of antisemitism that are likely backed by case law and statutory language. For example, now it is antisemitic to call a jew a "zio-nazi", compare them to hitler, say that israel is committing genocide by ignoring the harms that occurred on October 7 and weaponizing the holocaust, etc. These are very different than what had been said in the past, which was already deemed antisemitic in courts of law and statutes. Further, the term “Jew” seems to have been replaced by the term “Zionist” attempting to spew hate on jewish individuals while trying to make it appear to be a non religious discrimination problem. This means that these new cases are going to struggle because we have broad free speech rights, and we would have to prove new speech as hate speech without past precedent or statutory language to rely on. As for the legal protections for tech companies as well, things may be looking more positive in recent years. Recent cases have begun to chip away at these broad protections like section 230 and free speech. The TikTok ban bill and emerging product liability cases involving social media suggest a shift toward holding platforms more accountable. Courts have also started recognizing that algorithmic promotion of harmful content may constitute the platform’s speech, potentially opening the door for new legal carveouts. However, at the moment, platforms are not necessarily required to abide by or even comply with their own anti-hate speech policies, and with the new unfamiliar wave of antisemitism, it is easier for platforms to ignore rising hate.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Star.

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Adam Elmasri on Antisemitism and Uncomfortable Hermeneutics

Adam Elmasri is an Australian Egyptian free thinker, human rights activist, author, and content creator. He is widely recognized as a strong religious critic whose viewpoints are based on academic studies and as a supporter of the LGBTQ+ and women's rights in the Middle East. As an author, Adam Elmasri has published two books and numberous articles on various topics, including religion, politics, and human rights. His work has been praised for its insightful and thought-provoking analysis, and he is considered one of the leading voices in his field. In addition to his YouTube channels and writing, Adam Elmasri is also a popular speaker and commentator. He has appeared on numerous media outlets to share his expertise and insights, and he is often invited to speak at conferences, universities and community based events around Australia. He examines antisemitic narratives woven into Christian and Islamic texts, which continue to shape hostile attitudes toward Jews today. They note how scriptures like Matthew 27:25 and Surah 5:82 historically demonize Jews and incite hatred. Elmasri emphasizes that apocalyptic, end-times beliefs in the Middle East further reinforce these biases, conflating Jewish identity with political actions of Israel. He calls for a clear separation between legitimate critique of state policies and antisemitism, urging religious leaders to reinterpret sacred texts as historical artifacts rather than immutable moral guides, to dismantle ingrained prejudice and promote human dignity worldwide.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Do you see a pattern of antisemitic narratives woven into their sacred texts or commentaries, and how do these influence contemporary cultural attitudes toward Jewish people?

Adam Elmasri: Absolutely—antisemitic narratives are deeply embedded in both Christian and Islamic sacred texts, with Islamic texts being particularly severe in their portrayal of Jewish people.

In Christian scripture, the Gospels depict Jews as responsible for inciting the crucifixion of Jesus, with verses like *Matthew 27:25*—"His blood is on us and our children"—framing Jewish people as collectively culpable. This passage, among others, has historically fuelled antisemitic sentiments and persecution.

Islamic texts go even further. Both the Quran and Hadith contain explicit hostility toward Jews. For instance, *Surah 5:82*states:
"You will surely find that the most hostile people toward the believers are the Jews and those who associate partners with Allah."

While these texts may not always command direct action against Jewish people in a contemporary sense, they undeniably shape negative perceptions. They portray Jews as enemies of God, the betrayers of Christ, and inherently corrupt, often implying that they are somehow "deserving" of misfortune.

It is important to clarify that I am not claiming all Christians or Muslims hate Jewish people. Many believers interpret their faith differently and do not harbor these views. However, the issue is that these texts explicitly paint a deeply negative and hostile image of Jews, and because they are regarded as sacred and divine, they serve as a foundational perspective on Jewish people

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within these religious traditions. Whether consciously or unconsciously, these portrayals continue to influence attitudes and perceptions, making it difficult to separate theological beliefs from ingrained prejudice.

Jacobsen: What sub-cultures of Middle Eastern culture and history might perpetuate antisemitic sentiments?

Elmasri: One particularly interesting sub-culture that perpetuates antisemitic sentiments in the Middle East is the apocalyptic, end-of-days worldview. Across nearly all Abrahamic faiths — including many Jewish, Christian, and Islamic sects — there is a deep-rooted belief that the end of days is inevitable and that Jewish people, Jerusalem, the Jewish temple, and Al-Aqsa Mosque will be central to the catastrophic events leading up to it.

In Islamic eschatology, for example, one of the most notorious hadiths states:

"The Final Hour will not come until the Muslims fight the Jews, and the Muslims will kill them until the Jew hides behind a rock or a tree, and the rock or tree will speak up: 'O Muslim, O servant of Allah, there is a Jew behind me, so come and kill him.'"

The implications of such narrative are deeply troubling. The logic that follows is this: whenever major global crises or disturbing events occur, many people in the region interpret them as signs that the end times are near. This belief, in turn, subconsciously reinforces antisemitic attitudes. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy — one that fuels hostility toward Jewish people, whether through direct action or passive endorsement.

Some individuals, believing they are fulfilling divine prophecy, may feel justified in harming Jewish people, while others, convinced that Jewish suffering is predestined, may choose to stand by and do nothing. In either case, whether through violence or silent complicity, this apocalyptic narrative perpetuates antisemitism both in thought and in action. It's a profoundly disturbing worldview that continues to shape cultural attitudes in the region and globally.

Jacobsen: As a religious critic, what interpretations or teachings in Islamic commentaries have been used as justification for antisemitism?

Elmasri: On the surface, contemporary Islamic commentary and apologetic responses often condemn violence against Jewish people, citing hadiths such as:

"Whoever kills a person with whom he has a covenant will never enter Paradise."

This is frequently used to promote a more tolerant stance, suggesting that as long as Jewish people are not seen as aggressors — meaning they exist under a state of peace or a covenant (a ceasefire or non-hostile agreement) — they should be spared and "should not be killed."

However, the problem with this apologetic framing is that it collapses entirely with the establishment of the State of Israel. From an Islamic perspective, particularly within traditional jurisprudence and commentary, Israel's creation was not just a political event — it was an *act of aggression* against what is considered sacred Islamic and Palestinian land. By this interpretation, Jewish people are no longer seen as being under a covenant but rather as violators of Islamic territorial sanctity.

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As a result, the apocalyptic narrative resurfaces, fuelling deep-seated hostility. Since many Islamic eschatological texts already frame Jews as enemies of God and the believers, Israel's existence becomes the ultimate trigger for viewing Jewish people around the world as "out of covenant" — no longer protected under Islamic law but rather positioned as adversaries. This creates a ticking time bomb of tension and hostility, where antisemitic justifications are not only tolerated but, in some circles, actively reinforced as part of a divinely sanctioned struggle.

Jacobsen: What is important to distinguish between critiques of political actions of the Israeli state versus challenging antisemitic narratives around Jewish identity? Sometimes, these can be conflated conceptual spaces.

Elmasri: The fundamental issue is that many belief systems do not make this distinction—they fail to separate Jewish identity from the political actions of the Israeli state.

Historically, Jewish people have been referred to as *"Banu Isra'il"* (the Children of Israel), a term that links Jewish identity with the concept of Israel itself. This linguistic and historical association leads many — especially in the Middle East—to view *all* Jewish people, regardless of nationality or personal beliefs, as inherently tied to the Israeli state. The result is a widespread inability to distinguish between an individual of Jewish descent (as an ethnic or cultural identity) and Israel as a political entity.

This confusion is precisely why, whenever the Israeli government engages in military actions, Jewish individuals around the world often become targets of hostility. In the eyes of many, being Jewish and being Israeli are seen as one and the same, which fuels global antisemitic attacks in response to conflicts in the Middle East.

So, to answer the question precisely: the most critical distinction we must make is that political actions of a government should never be equated with the identity of an entire people. We need more advocates, thinkers, and voices across the world to actively challenge this conflation. A person can rightfully critique or condemn the actions of the Israeli government while still recognizing that their Jewish neighbour in Canada, the U.S., or Europe is simply an individual with Jewish heritage—not a representative of Israel's policies.

I find it baffling that this is so difficult for some to grasp. If conflict or war erupts between African nations, does that justify hostility toward Black people worldwide? Do we not recognize that Black Americans, for example, have nothing to do with what happens in Africa beyond shared ancestry? This is exactly the distinction that must be made — politics are politics, with all their complexities, but people are people, individuals who come from diverse races and cultures and should never be held accountable for the actions of governments the represent them or not.

Jacobsen: Are there ex-believer communities who carry over antisemitic views rooted in their former religious lives?

Elmasri: Yes, absolutely—ex-believers can and often do carry over antisemitic views from their former religious lives, even after they leave their faith.

The reason for this is that religion is not just a set of doctrines that a person can simply abandon —it is a deeply ingrained cultural framework that shapes identity, worldview, and subconscious

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biases. Even when someone intellectually rejects their former religious beliefs, many of the implicit attitudes and prejudices they were raised with can persist, sometimes unnoticed.

A good example of this is gender inequality. Despite radical shifts in global beliefs about gender equality, we are still fighting deeply embedded prejudices against women today. That's because centuries of religious and cultural conditioning do not disappear overnight—they linger in our social structures, legal systems, and personal biases. The same applies to antisemitic views among ex-religious individuals.

Many former believers may have left their faith but still retain anti-Israel sentiments due to their upbringing. In many environments, anti-Zionism and antisemitism are conflated (which is a complex topic on its own), making it difficult for people to recognize that their stance may still be rooted in biases carried over from religious teachings.

For instance, a former believer might reject religious justifications for antisemitism but still hold onto the political, social, or conspiratorial narratives they grew up with. They may continue to see Israel not as a political entity, but as an enemy of "their own people" or "their race." A false but deeply ingrained notion like *"I'm no longer Muslim, but the Jewish people are still killing my brothers and sisters"* may still influence their thinking.

Ultimately, deconstructing faith does not automatically mean deconstructing everything faith taught them. Cultural prejudices, especially those reinforced over generations, can persist long after belief is gone. Unlearning them requires conscious effort, self-awareness, and a willingness to question not just religious teachings but the broader narratives inherited from them.

Jacobsen: What is the role of broader religious educations in dismantling harmful cultural misconceptions about Jewish people? How can religious leaders address antisemitic references in teachings and texts?

Elmasri: Allow me to combine these two questions. I fully acknowledge my own biases as an ex-religious person—I don't have much faith left in religious leadership (pun intended). This is not to say that I lack faith in religious individuals themselves or in those who genuinely try to create change from within. My skepticism, however, comes from the limitations imposed by the religious texts themselves.

Take, for example, the struggle for LGBTQ+ rights. It has taken centuries to even begin shifting perspectives on homosexuality, and despite the efforts of progressive religious leaders, we are still far from full acceptance. Why?Because religious texts, when viewed through a sacred lens, do not change. The same applies to antisemitism. No matter how well-intentioned a religious leader may be, they are bound by the authority of texts that contain harmful narratives.

In my view, dismantling antisemitic misconceptions requires a shift away from strict religious frameworks and toward a more spiritual and secular approach. At this point in history, kindness, acceptance, and equality cannot be contingent upon what is "permissible" in sacred texts. These values must instead be rooted in spiritual and psychological awareness—an understanding of human dignity that transcends ancient dogmas.

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One way forward is to recontextualize religious texts as historical artifacts rather than moral absolutes. We can acknowledge that these scriptures served a role in shaping civilizations, but that role must end where it ceases to serve humanity today. Antisemitic passages can be rendered historical, referring to conflicts of the past rather than dictating attitudes in the present. The apocalyptic narratives that continue to fuel hostility can be reframed—not as an impending future, but as a metaphor for an era we have already left behind.

These are just ideas, and I remain uncertain how effective they can be within a religious mindset that still holds these texts as sacred. But what I do know is this: the more we cling to religious texts and depend on religious leadership for moral progress, the more we risk being trapped in historical narratives that no longer serve humanity today.

Jacobsen: Where are the opportunities to challenge antisemitism in volatile geopolitical contexts shaped by long-standing historical conflicts, e.g., the Israel–occupied Palestinian territories?

Elmasri: One of the biggest challenges in addressing antisemitism in the Middle East is that it is not perceived as “hatred” in the traditional sense — rather, it is embedded in theology, education, and political discourse as an accepted "fact" about the world. It is a worldview rather than hatred, if that makes sense! This makes it even harder to confront because those who hold antisemitic beliefs do not necessarily see themselves as bigoted. Instead, their hostility toward Jewish people is often framed as justified by one or more of these factors, religious texts, historical conflicts, and/or ongoing geopolitical struggles.

The opportunities to challenge antisemitism, as I have outlined throughout my responses above, lie in several key areas. Religious texts that demonize Jewish people must be openly discussed and reinterpreted, shifting from being seen as eternal truths to historical contexts that no longer apply today. The idea that Jewish people are divinely cursed or that conflict with them is inevitable must be dismantled at the theological level, because as long as these beliefs remain untouched, they will continue to shape perceptions and fuel hostility. Furthermore, one of the most critical steps in addressing antisemitism is to consistently separate criticism of Israel’s political actions from hostility toward Jewish people. In many parts of the Middle East, the equation of *Jewish = Israel = enemy* is so deeply ingrained that people fail to distinguish between Jewish individuals and the actions of the Israeli government. This conflation must be broken if we are to make any meaningful progress.

I have also encountered many individuals who, even after leaving religion, continue to carry remnants of antisemitic thinking without realizing it. This is why deeper deconstruction is necessary. Not just of religious beliefs, but also of the political and psychological biases that have been inherited from them. Acknowledging these deeply rooted attitudes is crucial, even beyond ex-religious perspectives, because many of these biases exist at a subconscious level. One issue I find especially important to recognize is the mistaken idea that acknowledging the suffering of one group somehow diminishes the suffering of another. But challenging antisemitism does not mean ignoring the suffering of Palestinians or downplaying the realities of occupation and displacement. The key is to promote a worldview in which the humanity of one group does not (and should not) come at the expense of another.

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Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Adam.

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Malka Shaw, LCSW, Jewish Resilience & Combating Antisemitism

Malka Shaw, LCSW, founded Kesher Shalom Projects, which promotes Jewish unity, resilience, and cultural competency. The project emerged after the October 7, 2023, Hamas attacks and the global surge in anti-Semitism. Shaw highlights the psychological impact of anti-Semitism, propaganda, and identity destabilization. She discusses The Guard System, a trauma-informed framework integrating CBT, DBT, and narrative therapy to help individuals develop coping skills. Shaw stresses the urgency of addressing anti-Semitism, media misinformation, and social division, emphasizing that anti-Semitism threatens democratic values and requires a unified response across Jewish and non-Jewish communities.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Today, we're here with Malka Shaw, LCSW, the founder of Kesher Shalom Projects. Can you introduce this project before we get into the discussion?

Malka Shaw: *Kesher* means connection, and *Shalom* means peace. That symbolism represents what we stand for—we aim to foster connections, promote peace and unity, and combat hate.

Kesher Shalom grew organically after October 7, 2023, following the Hamas-led attacks on Israel, which resulted in the largest loss of Jewish life in a single day since the Holocaust. The attacks also triggered a global surge in anti-Semitism. As I mentioned before, we started recording anti-Semitic incidents worldwide, which have increased dramatically, with a reported 360% rise in some regions. In the United States alone, anti-Semitic hate crimes account for nearly 55% of all religiously motivated hate crimes, despite Jews making up only about 2.4% of the population.

What was not being adequately addressed was how to help the Jewish community cope with this trauma and build resilience. This project is unique because we are trauma therapists focused on fostering resilience. We prioritize education and have now trained over 3,500 mental health professionals through continuing education courses on Jewish cultural competency, the psychological impact of anti-Semitism, working with Jewish clients, and navigating Jewish identity in the wake of October 7.

We have also been researching the psychological mechanisms of propaganda, how anti-Semitic ideologies spread, and their broader societal impact. While we initially focused on mental health professionals, our programs and workshops are designed for a broad audience. I have spoken at the New Jersey Bar Association, Rutgers University, and other institutions. We can adapt our material to meet the needs of any audience. Providing accurate, evidence-based education and sharing factual information as widely as possible is crucial.

A key part of this is Jewish cultural competence. This is not just about understanding Jewish history in the context of persecution but also about recognizing Jewish contributions to society, values, and traditions. A significant portion of our work involves correcting misconceptions—terms like "chosen people" and "Zionism" are often misinterpreted, weaponized, and used to justify discrimination against Jews.

We work to clarify these concepts, explain their true meanings, and discuss their impact on Jewish clients. The mental health field has also experienced a sharp rise in anti-Semitism. Many

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Jewish individuals are now hesitant to seek professional help outside Jewish practitioners. In contrast, Jewish practitioners themselves face threats, professional ostracization, and doxxing.

The Free Press broke a major story highlighting how Jewish mental health professionals have been targeted online.

Jacobsen: I read the story. Unfortunately, this situation has become common, though it's not right.

Shaw: Yes, people are being doxxed. I have personally received numerous threats and cyber harassment. On the other hand, my practice has seen a significant increase in Jewish clients seeking culturally competent care. I always prided myself on maintaining a diverse practice and enjoyed working with people from all backgrounds. I define culture broadly—not just in ethnic or religious terms but also in professional subcultures, such as those in emergency medicine, law enforcement, or first responders—each has its own identity.

For me, culture has many layers beyond ethnicity or religion. I appreciate you bringing this topic to my attention, and I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

Jacobsen: When it comes to resilience—an important topic—it appears in psychological and therapeutic discussions almost as frequently as narcissism, particularly in the United States today. So, when considering cultural competence on the one hand and resilience on the other, how do you convey Jewish people's culture, values, and ideologies in the United States to those who may have limited knowledge? And how do you teach resilience to individuals who are more likely to be targeted by these types of hate crimes?

Shaw: Let's take one question at a time. Let's start with cultural competence. We have a formula. I'm a licensed clinical social worker, and there is an established formula for teaching cultural competence in social work. I follow that formula. Many licensing boards require cultural competence training to maintain certification as part of continuing education requirements. However, before October 7, 2023, it was rare to find Jewish identity and experience included among the cultural competence topics.

So, we have to start by defining Jewish identity, which is complex. Judaism is not just a religion, culture, or ethnicity—it is all these and more. Different individuals connect with different aspects of Jewish identity. Judaism predates these modern categorizations; concepts like religion, culture, and ethnicity emerged only in the last few hundred years, whereas Judaism has existed for more than 4,000 years.

To build cultural competence, we discuss Jewish ideology and key historical milestones that shape Jewish identity today. I am not there to provide an in-depth history lesson—there are many history professors. Instead, we cover the essentials in two or three slides and a seven-minute video. My goal is to establish the historical and cultural context necessary to understand intergenerational trauma, which is closely tied to Jewish resilience.

I am there to answer questions and clarify common misconceptions. One major issue today is misinformation about Zionism. Zionism has been demonized to the point where discussing it

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triggers a gaslighting effect. But Zionism, at its core, is simply the Jewish people's right to self-determination and their desire to live in their ancestral homeland.

Zionism does not mean discrimination against others in that homeland. It also does not mean one must agree with every modern State of Israel policy. I often adjust how I present this information depending on when and where I give the class.

I always ask, "Did you agree with everything Trump did? "Did you agree with everything Biden did? "Nobody is going to say they agreed with both. We are allowed to criticize a democracy.

So, we're not talking about politics here. We're talking about the right to defend ourselves when attacked and the right to yearn for our homeland. But when people start to associate Zionism with something evil or inaccurate, that is anti-Semitism.

Point blank—it's anti-Semitism. And it also violates the ethical codes of mental health professionals, as well as those in healthcare and legal professions. In psychology, we emphasize self-experience and lived experience. Our role is not to redefine an identity or belief not part of our culture. Doing so is considered unethical in the field.

Cultural competence is crucial in our social and mental health work. It fosters true empathy. We're not just telling people, *"Don't engage in anti-Semitism because it's bad."*

We want people to understand who we are. Empathy comes from truly knowing someone. Once you genuinely understandsomeone, they are no longer an outsider.

At their core, human beings are human beings. Everyone shares fundamental needs—the desire to connect, love, and uphold personal values. We aim to break down the walls of judgment.

Now, moving on to your excellent question about resilience. It's a separate issue. As a trauma therapist, I've seen the evolution of how we discuss trauma. We used to call it trauma recovery. Now, we talk about building resilience.

It's a more forward-thinking, positive approach. The word resilience comes from engineering—it originally referred to materials "bouncing back." But that's not how trauma works.

Once you go through something difficult, you are never the same. But you have a choice. You can turn toward despair, depression, or bitterness, or you can find meaning and purpose. Some people emerge with a renewed sense of purpose and become stronger.

We strive for that. This is why people often say, "With age comes wisdom." It's because they've lived through experiences. You don't get through life without facing pain or disappointment. I wish you could. But if that were the case, I'd be out of business.

I wish we all could, but that's not how life works. Resilience building starts with small steps. It begins with mindset because our mindset affects our feelings, and our feelings influence our actions. That's basic cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) in a nutshell. And while it sounds simple, there's much truth to it.

So, we start with a mindset. We help people name their experiences, express their emotions, and remove any sense of shame about what they have gone through or are currently facing. That is

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the most important piece. Resilience is not about feeling strong—it's about navigating through difficulty. Clients often say to me, "I don't feel strong." And that's exactly it.

Resilience happens at that moment—when you don't feel strong, but you take another step forward anyway. And you keep going. Over time, people discover that they are far more capable than they ever realized.

That is my job in individual therapy, but it's also my job as an educator and public speaker—to help people recognize their inner strength. Do you want to continue? Do you have any other questions?

Jacobsen: I do. I've noticed generational differences in how people define abuse.

Older generations—particularly in films and media—often only recognize physical or sexual abuse. In more recent times, there has been greater awareness and nuance, acknowledging psychological and emotional abuse as well.

And in the last 20 years, with cell phones, computers, and constant connectivity, people—especially in the United States and other developed nations—are immersed in online spaces. Anti-Semitism has also evolved and spread in these digital environments.

What are your recommendations for people who want to reduce their exposure or self-soothe when encountering something triggering?

Shaw: I always say, "Unplug to replug." Social media has its positives. You and I wouldn't have connected if it weren't for digital media. Without it, we likely wouldn't have crossed paths. Hopefully, it allows you to write an amazing article. That's one benefit.

However, as mental health professionals, we strongly recommend setting boundaries. We often advise spending at least one hour, five times a week, completely off devices. In Judaism, we have Shabbat—from Friday night to Saturday night—when we disconnect from technology.

But tuning out is tuning in—to family, loved ones, and moments of reflection. Now, regarding abuse—you're right. The boomer generation often says, "Toughen up." But younger generations have a different perspective.

I work with teenagers who sometimes label everything as trauma. For example, they'll say, "My teacher gave me a B+ instead of an A—that's so traumatic." But that's not how trauma works, either.

But there is a reality—words do hurt. They truly penetrate. What we're seeing with anti-Semitism today is a gaslighting effect. Specifically, what we're witnessing online is what I call macro gaslighting. Traditional gaslighting occurs when an individual manipulates, controls, or distorts reality to make someone else question their sanity. Sometimes, it involves the perpetrator playing the victim or making the target feel unimportant, dismissed, or even crazy.

With macro gaslighting, the message extends beyond an individual. Instead of "I don't matter," it becomes "Malka doesn't matter." "She's not worthy." "She deserved it." "She must be stopped." Now, that damaging narrative spreads across social networks and communities, distorting perceptions on a mass scale. Macro gaslighting is dangerous—like a spiderweb or a puppet

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master's strings. We don't always know where it started but find ourselves entangled. For the person on the receiving end, the psychological impact is severe. It can trigger our brain's trauma response—fight, flight, freeze, or fawn. This occurs when we feel unsafe or powerless.

Since October 7, 2023, the Jewish community has been in what I call "active trauma"—the trauma is ongoing, with no clear end in sight. At this point, I would even describe it as a combination of trauma and communal grief. Yesterday, for example, we witnessed the heart-wrenching funeral of the Bebas family. But it's not just them. This is communal grief. We mourn them as a people, and this shapes our collective identity. So, what does this mean for self-esteem? How do people see themselves?

I want to reach out to those on the other side of this conversation. Social media creates a false sense of anonymity. It becomes easy to type hateful comments without considering the real-world consequences. But words truly hurt. They can trigger trauma responses. That is why I call it "anti-Semitism of identity destabilization." This is the psychological impact of deliberate defamation. I can always email you more details if I'm speaking too fast. The psychological effects of anti-Semitism on Jewish individuals and communities are profound.

Trauma doesn't always stem from one massive event like 9/11 or a violent assault. The accumulation of toxic, prolonged stress can also cause it. One of my slides illustrates this with a glass jar filled with rocks. At first, the jar holds strong. But over time, rock after rock is added, creating tiny fractures. Eventually, one last small pebble causes the entire jar to shatter. As a therapist, I've seen this play out countless times. People often come to therapy with a "small" problem—for example, they read one offensive comment online. On the surface, it seems like no big deal. They might tell themselves, "Oh, he's just an idiot. I should ignore it." But that one comment is just the final pebble. It's the breaking point—the culmination of all the stress, discrimination, and trauma that came before it.

There is a reality that people are using bots in these spaces. I wasn't even personally aware of bots when I first started advertising, even within mental health circles. When I shared information about continuing education classes, I was spammed with horrific cyber hate. At first, I used to take screenshots of everything, but now I know how to block certainwords—at least on Instagram and Facebook. I didn't know that before.

At the time, I was overwhelmed by the flood of spam, and it was difficult not to take it personally until someone pointed out that many of these accounts were bots. The problem is that, even though they aren't real people, they still create a powerful psychological effect. When an outsider sees 100 negative comments on a post, they might assume something must be wrong, or maybe those comments are valid—even though no one is researching the truth.

Anti-Semitism thrives on disinformation, distortion, and historical erasure. These bot networks fuel that misinformation and it's easy for Jewish individuals to get drawn into responding. I don't necessarily recommend engaging with them. Instead, I suggest reporting them. Unfortunately, Meta hasn't effectively addressed these issues on Facebook or Instagram. The best approach is to block, ignore, and report them as much as possible.

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In the mental health field, there are now organizations documenting and reporting anti-Semitic behaviour. If the person behind the posts is a licensed therapist, they are reported to their licensing boards. This is also happening in the medical field. However, I am not as involved in advocacy—my focus is on education and equipping the Jewish community with coping skills.

Jacobsen: Self-soothing is an important skill. It's a part of resilience, though not the entire concept of resilience. That's important to cover. In my opinion, this is one of the most practical and substantive ways to address these challenges on a community and individual level.

We often come across absurd, conspiracy-laden narratives. In another conversation, I encountered the claim that the Rothschilds own the moon. Supposedly, they have a secret base and plan various forms of world domination.

Shaw: I love it when people say, "The Jews control the weather." I don't know where you are, but I'm in New York. And if I controlled the weather, it would be 70°F and sunny all the time. So, that's proof that I don't control the weather.

There's also proof that we don't control the media. If we did, we wouldn't receive such overwhelmingly negative media coverage. The fact that anti-Semitic narratives are being amplified so widely contradicts that entire idea.

Before we leave, I created a framework called The Guard System, which is designed to help with these challenges. Each letter represents a different clinical orientation and provides specific, concrete skills. Whether I'm teaching it to therapists to help their clients or presenting it in a synagogue for people to apply to their own lives, the system is designed to be practical and accessible.

It starts with G—gratitude. We incorporate skills from 12-step recovery programs. U—understanding integrates concepts from psychodynamic therapy and narrative therapy. A—attitude to action applies to cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT). R—regulation, Reset, and Reconnect focus on emotional regulation and grounding techniques.

Some of the simplest grounding exercises can make a huge difference. That's why I teach therapists how to use them with their clients, work with campus rabbis to help college students, and bring these tools into synagogues to strengthen community resilience. The challenge is that people often forget to use these techniques at the moment.

That's why we chose the word "GUARD"—to create a system that allows for easy recall. Think about how often you've attended a lecture and thought, "That was useful." Still, later, you can't remember the details. We developed two systems: the Guard System and the Bridge.

The Bridge System is designed for people who have been exposed to indoctrination—it helps bridge the gap when engaging with someone who has begun believing anti-Semitic tropes. But focusing on regulation and self-soothing, we need people to develop tools to cope independently.

The goal of therapy is for clients to rely on their therapist forever. My goal isn't to keep people in endless treatment. The goal is to equip them with the skills to face their challenges independently.

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Jacobsen: Any final takeaway points you want to make?

Shaw: The takeaway is that anti-Semitism is not just a symptom of broader societal unrest—when people feel disillusioned, they look for someone to blame.

Historically, Jews have been the canary in the coal mine. But anti-Semitism isn't just people's democratic values, critical thinking, and individual independence. When these fundamental principles are under attack, it signals that society as a whole is in trouble.

If you know what's happening at some of these rallies or on college campuses, you'll notice that people are not allowed to speak for themselves. There is an effort to silence critical thinking and discourage individuals from questioning narratives or conducting research.

What happens to a society when critical thinking is suppressed? What happens when people are encouraged to be passive, unquestioning, and unthinkingly follow a movement? It leads to radicalization. And that is not a world that 99.9% of Americans want to live in.

Now is not the time to remain silent. If you've ever wondered where you would have stood in Nazi Germany, now is the time to find out. If you haven't spoken up, or if you haven't offered a positive or reaffirming comment to someone in the Jewish community, then we know you would have been silent in the 1930s and 1940s.

It's not just about your perceptions of the Middle East. I encourage you to question what you believe to be true. I won't get political, but this happens in Canada and America.

Even if you had strong objections to Israel, how does that justify assaulting a college student on campus? How does it justify vandalizing a restaurant? Who gave you the right to do that?

How did I do?

Jacobsen: Pretty good. Thank you so much for your time today—I appreciate it.

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Psychologists Confront Rising Antisemitism, Campuses (Malka Shaw, Dr. Jessica Zmood, and Dr. Shelly Steinwurtzel)

Malka Shaw, LCSW, is the founder of Kesher Shalom Projects, a trauma-informed initiative supporting Jewish identity and mental health after the October 7 Hamas attacks and rising antisemitism. She developed The Guard System, integrating CBT, DBT, and narrative therapy, and has trained over 3,500 professionals in Jewish cultural competence. Shaw also serves as the training and education coordinator for Gesher Campus Care, founded by **Dr. Jessica Zmood and Dr. Shelly Steinwurtzel**. Gesher bridges Jewish students on campus with vetted, culturally competent therapists. In a wide-ranging conversation with Scott Douglas Jacobsen, the team discussed the psychological impacts of antisemitism, identity destabilization, indoctrination on college campuses, and the professional concerns arising from politicized therapy practices. They highlighted the misuse of "decolonization" rhetoric in clinical spaces and warned of therapy becoming ideologically coercive. The discussion emphasized the need for ethical, bias-free mental health care for Jewish communities facing increasing hostility.

With a rise in antisemitism U.S. college campuses after October 7, 2023, psychologists Jessica and Shelly founded **Gesher Campus Care**. It is a referral service connecting Jewish students and faculty to culturally competent therapists. The aim is to ensure safe, supportive mental health care where Jewish identity is respected and understood. Kesher Shalom projects was founded after October 7th. It was founded to equip professionals who address antisemitism and trauma. It started out with a grassroots call on Zoom. Now, **Kesher Shalom** offers education, support groups, training, intended to foster dialogue and resilience across diverse audiences to understand and respond to the clinical and emotional impact of antisemitism.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Today, we are here with Malka Shaw, LCSW. She is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and founded Kesher Shalom Projects, an initiative focused on Jewish identity, resilience, and cultural competency. This initiative was developed in response to the October 7, 2023, Hamas attacks and the rise in global antisemitism. Shaw created educational and therapeutic programming to support Jewish communities and developed The Guard System, a trauma-informed framework integrating CBT, DBT, EMDR, and narrative therapy. Shaw has trained over 3,500 mental health professionals in Jewish cultural competence and the psychological impact of antisemitism. She also plays a key role in Gesher Campus Care, providing culturally competent mental health resources for Jewish students in higher education. She is a member of the American Jewish Medical Association (AJMA), American Jewish Psychologists (AJP), and Psychologist Against Antisemitism (PAA).

Steinwurtzel: As you may already know from Malka, *Kesher* means "connection," and *Gesher* means "bridge." They share a similar Hebraic root but are distinct words. Jessica and I founded and directed Gesher Campus Care. Malka is our training and education coordinator. She has been leading our orientation training for therapists. We love Malka and work closely with her, but they are separate organizations. Gesher Campus Care is a nonprofit focused on bridging the gap between students on campus seeking mental health support in a safe, vetted, trauma-informed setting and connecting them with therapists who meet those criteria.

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Jacobsen: We're also here with Jessica Zmood, Psy.D., a New York State Licensed Clinical Psychologist in private practice in Manhattan since 2010. She earned a B.A. in English Literature and Spanish from Washington University in St. Louis. She completed a post-baccalaureate in psychology at Baruch College. Dr. Zmood received her M.A. and Psy.D. in Clinical Psychology from the Ferkauf Graduate School of Psychology. Her clinical background includes work in substance abuse treatment, psychiatric evaluations, and therapy with Spanish-speaking clients. She specializes in stress, anxiety, depression, and relationships. She is a Level II certified Gottman therapist and an AJMA, AJP, and PAA member.

We're also joined by Shelly Steinwurtzel, Psy.D., a New York State Licensed Clinical Psychologist specializing in treating children, adolescents, and adults. She holds a B.A. from Brandeis University, an M.S.Ed. in School Psychology (2008), and a Psy.D. in School and Clinical Psychology (2011). Her experience includes psychiatric hospital work and serving as Columbia University Medical Center's NICU staff psychologist. Dr. Steinwurtzel was formerly the Assistant Director at Pace University's McShane Center. Her additional certifications include EMDR, CBT, and perinatal mental health. She's a member of APA, AJP, PAA, Postpartum Support International, and the National Network of NICU Psychologists.

Thank you all three for joining me—I appreciate it.

Shaw: Thank you.

Zmood: Thanks for having us.

Jacobsen: Social work and clinical psychology are here today to explore antisemitism. This is going to be interesting. I have a background in psychology. I was in some psychology labs, but then I went into journalism—so this feels like home.

Zmood: What? I did the opposite. I used to be a journalist, and I left journalism for psychology. So there you go.

Jacobsen: In New York?

Zmood: Yes.

Jacobsen: The New York journalist went into psychology. How could you?

Zmood: It was too tough for me in the big city. I was writing too many articles about makeup and weddings, and I thought—"Oh, this is not what I want to do."

Jacobsen: What part of New York were the makeup and wedding stories about?

Zmood: It was in Manhattan. I was trying to get jobs in magazines. Ironically—or maybe not ironically—all the places that hired me are now defunct. As most magazines are, I'm glad I jumped ship and went into psychology.

Jacobsen: Thank you. It's hard out here. It's hard in the hood. So, when we think of antisemitism vis-a-vis emotions and individual differences in psychology, what is happening with someone who harbours this style of prejudice and hatred? What are the impacts on individuals who have had this expressed toward them—on and off campus? It's a general question for an overview.

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Dr. Shelly Steinwurtzel: That's an interesting question—your first question, about what generates antisemitism from a psychological perspective—is what you're asking, right? What brings that about?

That's a big question. I don't know that there's a single generalizable psychological characteristic that one can point to for antisemitism or any form of discrimination. There are so many factors that go into it. But certainly, at least on college campuses, what we've been seeing—and what experts are talking about—is that there's much indoctrination.

Malka talks a lot about the role of indoctrination in this particular population. So this question of psychology and politics intersects with the work you do, Scott, in investigative journalism. Many people have been studying and bringing these issues to the forefront—experts across all these arenas.

You've got the BDS movement, which has been active in academia for a long time. You have SJP—Students for Justice in Palestine—which, I don't know if you've seen some of the more recent documentation about its connections or alleged connections to other organizations.

Again, this leans more toward history and investigative research. Still, it speaks directly to psychology, especially because the psychology of adolescence is relevant to how propaganda has been strategically implemented in academia over the years.

I recommend looking into Lorenzo Vidino, who's in the George Washington University program on extremism. They've published reports that date back to before the United States government designated Hamas a terrorist organization (in 1997). The FBI was reportedly able to link certain groups' plans that would be enacted once Hamas was listed as a terrorist organization.

The Program on Extremism at GW outlines those early plans—strategies involving fundraising, philanthropy, advocacy, propaganda, and education. SJP, or Students for Justice in Palestine, eventually emerged from those broader plans.

All of this is currently being explored further in legal and academic investigations—there's more to come. But I bring this up because these activities date back to the late 1980s and early 1990s. There has been a long-standing and intentional use of propaganda on college campuses. So, to your question—people engaging in antisemitic behaviour may not even identify as antisemitic themselves. Rather, they may be victims of propaganda.

From a psychological standpoint, we know that late adolescence and emerging adulthood—typically ages 17 to mid-20s—is a critical developmental period. During this time, the prefrontal cortex is still maturing. Research in neuropsychology shows that it is not fully developed until the mid- to late 20s.

We don't fully understand how decades of screen exposure and constant social media might affect this development. But based on my observations—and supported by some emerging research—I hypothesize that executive functioning may already be declining due to fast dopamine hits from social media and excessive screen time.

But fundamentally, that stage of life is meant to be when individuals form their identity—when they leave the security of home and begin to develop a sense of self out in the world. Part of it is

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trying on many different styles, behaviours, and versions of self-learning from other people. Campus communities are meant to be a space for diverse perspectives and exposure to people from different backgrounds, which is beautiful when considering a university's purpose.

But when you have intentional propaganda being espoused—with a very different intended outcome—and in this case, antisemitism, there's much ideology that's hyper-focused on a small region of the world and just 0.2% of the global population.

In terms of psychology, much of it comes down to being brilliant at identifying opportunities within a population and understanding the strengths and vulnerabilities of individuals during this period of psychological development.

Dr. Jessica Zmood: Yes, and I can give an example from a student at Columbia—a Jewish freshman who didn't have any particularly strong feelings about Israel or Zionism. They were just a Jewish kid at Columbia who wanted to make friends, get involved, and join some clubs.

There's a group at Columbia called C-U-A-D, which stands for Columbia University Apartheid Divest. It's a coalition of about 20 to 30 student organizations. So, do you want to join the gardening, arts, or dance clubs? They might all be part of CUAD.

Now, imagine—you're this Jewish student. You go to a club meeting and say, "Hey, can I garden with you?" And they respond, "We're CUAD members. As part of this group, you need to renounce your Zionism. We know you're Jewish. We don't accept Jews or anyone who supports genocide, colonialism, or apartheid in our gardening club."

So you could be in the group—but only if you denounce part of your identity, ancestral connection, and homeland. You're asked to make a political statement about Israel. Now imagine being a 19-year-old kid who just left home and community, trying to make friends, settle into college life, worry about homework, social life, dating—and then being told that this is what you're facing.

You're backed into a corner. You're meant to feel immediate shame about who you are—about your identity, your relationship to Israel, and your Jewishness. Then you're presented with propaganda disguised as truth—told, "This is what's happening. You either support it and conform, or you don't."

The information is false even at that starting point, so this student is incredibly precarious.

Asking students to walk into those situations, stand firm in their identity, and know who they are and where they come from—all while just trying to make friends and be college students—is asking them to do something incredibly difficult. But that's what many are facing.

"I want to garden with you all, but I want to do it as someone who doesn't believe what you're saying—someone who feels that's false. I'm a proud Jew. I'm a proud Zionist." And for most Jewish people, those two identities go hand in hand. But in this scenario, they're turned away. The door is shut on them.

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To be socially included in the broader Columbia community, you must—quote—divest from your identity. This is incredibly damaging. And if you internalize this as a Jewish student on a college campus, it becomes painful and complex.

Steinwurtzel: Columbia's been in the news a lot, but I want to clarify—and emphasize—that, unfortunately, this isn't just Columbia. It would be one thing if this were limited to one campus, but we know it's not. It's pervasive.

We've spoken with faculty from other universities. One conversation stayed with me. A professor shared that, for the past year and a half, Jewish students on his campus had been essentially in hiding—afraid to speak up, afraid to be visible.

He described a turning point when, after a particular incident, some students finally came out of the closet—because they couldn't bear it anymore. That language—"came out of the closet"—was so impactful. It speaks directly to Jess's words about the shame and fear of being cancelled by peers when they want to have a normal university experience and become more of themselves. But instead, they're made to feel they can't share an important part of who they are.

That struck me deeply because we've worked hard in psychology and society to create inclusive, safe, and welcoming spaces. And yet, Jewish students, faculty, and staff are being made to feel that they must hide. That phrase—"in the closet"—is powerful because we've fought many social justice battles in the name of openness and acceptance. And now, this group is being pushed into silence.

Zmood: Cancel culture—the binary nature of all of this. The complete lack of nuance. It's not "we disagree with certain actions of a government on the other side of the world." It's you—this individual student standing in front of me—you represent everything I hate.

Jacobsen: And therefore, you can't garden with us.

Zmood: Yes. That was the story I shared earlier. Students ask, "Let me find clubs that aren't part of this coalition so I can show up as myself and be accepted." As Shelly said, while Ivy League schools like Columbia get the headlines, we've heard some horrific stories from small colleges in New England that haven't gotten much press.

Generally, most students tried to keep their heads down and focus on getting through school, hoping no one would notice them. But things are reaching a fever pitch now. As Shelly said, students are forced to leave hiding to advocate for their right to exist and participate in student life without shame.

I want to get through school without incident. To think that becoming invisible—just getting through without being abused—is now the goal of your college experience? That's so, so sad. And let's be honest: it would not be tolerated by any other ethnic, racial, or cultural group. Another anecdote: One student's father told me, "Do you want to see the film on October 8?" It's about people's experiences in America—specifically on campuses—since October 7.

His son, a sophomore in college, said, "Why would I want to see that film with you? That's my life. I live it every day. I get through it—but I don't want to watch it. I don't want to relive it." The father visited the campus to understand it firsthand, and he came back traumatized. He told

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me he had no idea how his son had functioned in that environment. His son has since moved 40 blocks away from campus and now commutes daily to avoid being confronted by this. It's such a difficult time for these kids.

Steinwurtzel: Malka, I believe you had something you wanted to add.

Malka Shaw: Yes, thank you. I have many thoughts about what Jessica just said, but I'd also like to return to the original question—Scott, could you repeat it? I think we veered off a bit.

Jacobsen: Sure—this session is exploratory, so I didn't expect a strict structure. But to recap, Shelly's response brought in developmental psychology and executive function—people like Adele Diamond come to mind—and Jessica followed with a case study and observations specific to New England campuses that aren't getting media coverage.

This all stemmed from the original question: Psychologically, what is going on with an individual who harbours antisemitic prejudice? And conversely, what are the psychological effects on individuals targeted by it?

So far, the responses point to two themes: 1) the psychological systems of the aggressors are often overwhelmed or manipulated, and 2) the targets experience varying forms of stress and trauma—depending on individual differences.

Let's turn to your social work lens now.

Shaw: Absolutely. From a social work perspective, there's much to say about the social dynamics. But I want to return to the psychology of indoctrination for a moment—because it's really important to name what's happening.

Here's the dynamic: the first student who says to another, "You can't be in my gardening club," genuinely believes he's right. He thinks he's standing up for justice. And why? Because Zionism has been misdefined and vilified so severely that it's no longer recognized for what it truly is.

So, let's define it clearly: Zionism is simply the belief that Jews have the right to exist, the right to defend themselves, and the right to live in their ancestral homeland. It doesn't mean you have to agree with every action or policy of the modern State of Israel or reject peaceful coexistence with others in that homeland. But that's not how it's being framed today.

What's happened is that a legitimate part of Jewish identity has been reframed as evil—and that's what these students are absorbing. That's what makes this so dangerous. It's not just misinformation—it's identity vilification.

Passover is coming up. It's a major Jewish holiday that arrives in about two weeks. At the end of every Passover ceremony, called the Seder, we say, "Next year in Yerushalayim." Yerushalayim —Jerusalem—is referred to as Zion in ancient Jewish texts. Zion is the root of Zionism. Zionism, therefore, predates both Christianity and Islam. It's an ancient concept—thousands of years old.

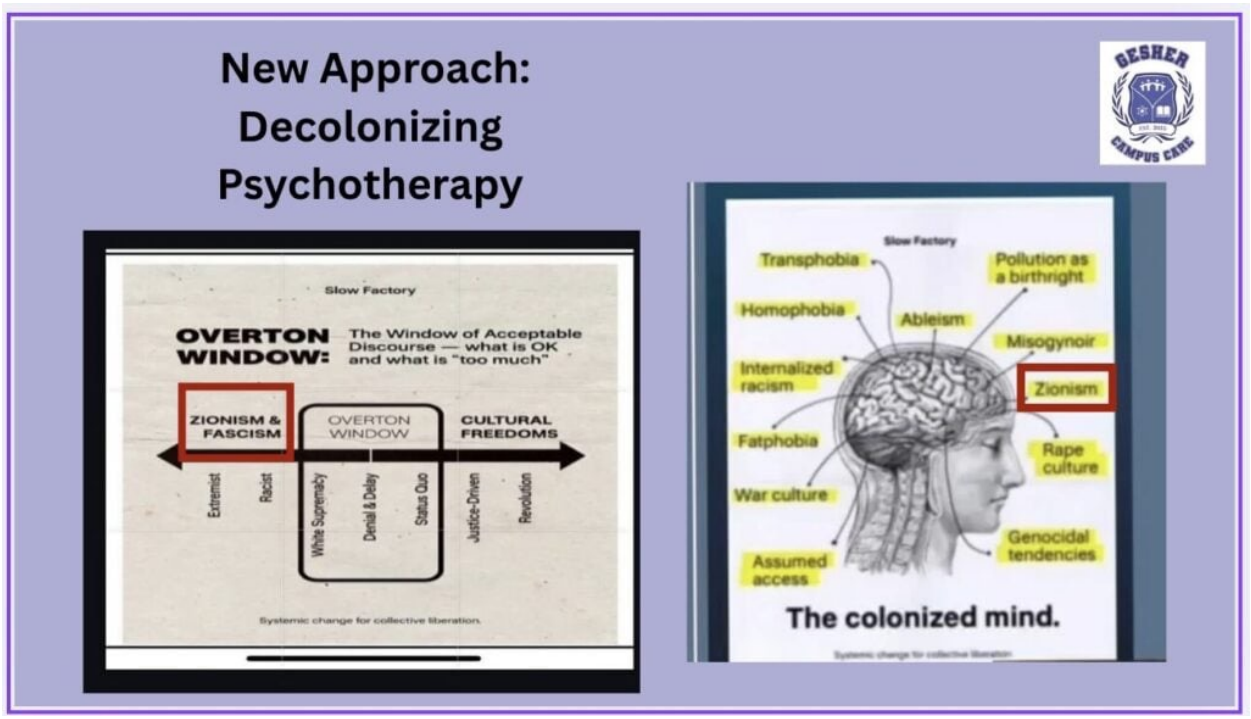
So let's return to that person—the student who believes they're doing the right thing by excluding someone from a club. Part of the reason they feel morally justified is that moral superiority and cancel culture activate the dopamine system. It feels good. It gives them a hit of perceived virtue.

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They genuinely believe they're doing something right. In their mind, it's like saying, "Well, I don't want someone from the KKK in my gardening club." That's the false equivalence they're drawing. But the reality is—that they've been indoctrinated. Once indoctrinated, someone begins to lose the ability to think critically.

I'll give you a quick overview of neurology.

Zmood: I can share slides if that helps everyone.



Shaw: I often show a set of slides that include statistics on what's happening to students on campus and also how mental health indoctrination is occurring within the field through educators.

Yes, show him the DBT slides. From a neurological standpoint, when someone has been indoctrinated, their brain begins to resolve discomfort by rejecting evidence and reinforcing existing beliefs.

Here's what happens: Indoctrination leads to heightened amygdala activation, the part of the brain responsible for processing fear and emotion. As a result, the prefrontal cortex—which handles critical thinking, decision-making, and impulse control—becomes dampened.

Let's say someone has come to believe that Zionism is evil. That belief becomes central to their new identity and their perceived moral standing. Now, any new evidence that contradicts that belief isn't processed neutrally—it triggers a threat response. That's when you get rigid neural pathways. The more these ideas are repeated, the more the brain hardwires them. Clinically, we refer to this as entrenchment. Colloquially, it's doubling down.

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You see this person dig deeper into their belief—not because they're reasoning through it, but because it's psychologically painful to unlearn it. They must admit that everything they've internalized and possibly acted upon is wrong.

That kind of rewiring is neurologically and emotionally difficult. We've studied this extensively in cult recovery; the same mechanisms apply here. When neuroplasticity—the brain's ability to adapt—is reduced, it limits cognitive flexibility and growth capacity.

Critical thinking reduces empathy in these cases because decision-making becomes fear-based. Once these neurological changes occur—heightened amygdala activation and diminished prefrontal engagement—the brain's ability to produce empathy decreases. This can lead to an increased tolerance for violence and attitudes that would otherwise be morally unacceptable.

Now, you have a student who feels justified in believing that Jessica's child cannot join the gardening club because they are certain they're right. They'll double down if you challenge them and don't do it exactly the "correct" way. They've lost empathy because you've been redefined in their mind as "one of the bad guys."

We need to consider empathy from all sides because, historically, we've seen where this can lead. Look at the youth movements under Nazi rule—many of those kids were indoctrinated. What we're seeing now is not so different, and history is beginning to repeat itself.

Even more disturbing is that we now see this same dynamic creep into medicine and psychology.

Shaw: Jessica, can you show him the DBT slides?

Zmood: Yep, I've got them up.

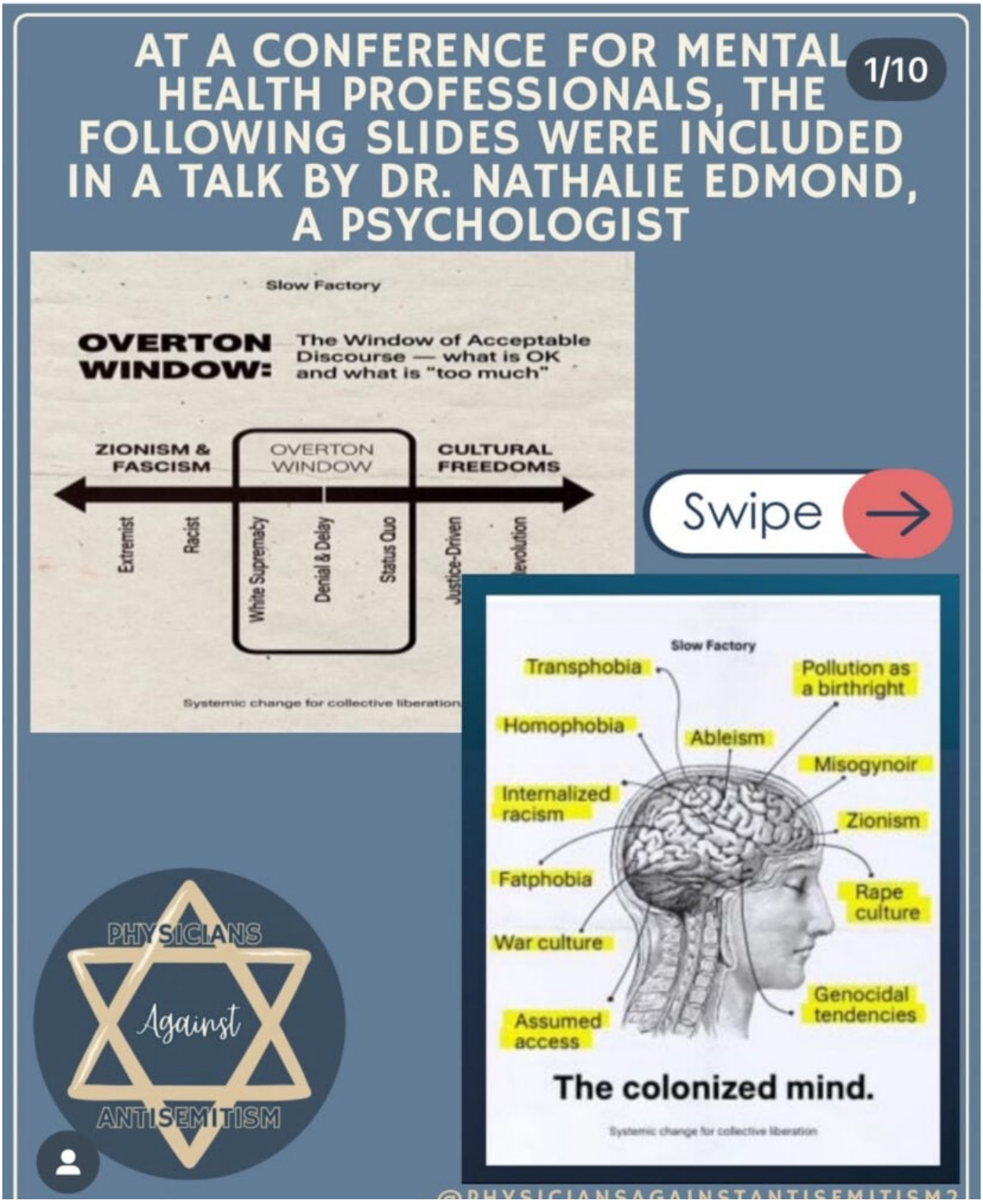
Shaw: Great. I want Scott to see them.

Jacobsen: For anyone reading this—DBT stands for Dialectical Behavior Therapy. Go ahead and share.

Shaw: Start with the one that shows the brain graphic—the one that labels Zionism and racism as diseases.

Jacobsen: Where is it sourced from?

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Steinwurtzel: That's the interesting part. If you look closely at the slide, it says "The Slow Factory." This was presented as scientific data at a DBT workshop at the APA—the American Psychological Association.

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However, The Slow Factory is not a research institution. It's a consortium of artists and climate activists. They created this slide content based not on empirical science but on ideological messaging. And yet, it was shown to thousands of students and licensed clinicians at an APA conference.

Shaw: The slide suggests that there's a part of your frontal lobe—your executive functioning center—that becomes infected by "Zionism," which they claim must be decolonized and cured for someone to be psychologically healthy.

Jacobsen: The frame I'm getting here—as someone staunchly nonreligious—is that this sounds more like something you'd hear in the Middle Ages. It's almost like saying someone is possessed and needs an exorcism. Suppose this isn'tbacked by data or empirical evidence. In that case, it's closer to incantation—like casting out demons—than mental health science.

Zmood: Yes. So—this group's mission is to "redesign socially and environmentally harmful systems" to align with what is good for the earth and good for people. But who are they? They're designers—web designers, creative designers. This is a purely creative endeavour—these slides are fabricated visual content presented as if they were grounded in scientific research. They are also internalized by licensed clinicians, who bring these distorted frameworks into their therapeutic practices.

Now, therapy itself—a space that is supposed to be as apolitical and bias-free as possible—has been politicized. This contradicts everything we were taught in graduate school.

Shaw: We were trained to be mindful of our projections, practice ethically, and maintain objectivity in the room. What's happening now directly conflicts with the ethical codes of almost every professional licensing board—whether for LCSWs, MFTs, or psychologists under the APA. I have a slide listing all the different codes of ethics.

Zmood: I'll show that next so you can see for yourself.

Steinwurtzel: But to take it even further: this same group includes people who describe themselves as queer abolitionist therapists, and when you research some of their platforms, you find that they are also advocating for eliminating mandated reporting laws. Essentially, they are arguing for anarchic frameworks in clinical practice. Scott, I know the laws are slightly different in Canada. Still, I can't imagine they're so different that a therapist wouldn't be a mandated reporter. If any of us—therapists or teachers—suspect abuse, we are legally required to report it. That's the law here. I assume it's similar to where you are, but we can double-check.

Now, look at Lara Sheehi. She was the head of Division 39 of the American Psychological Association, the Psychoanalysis Division. That's a significant position of influence. There's a substantial body of material out there on her. These are typical things she posts publicly—every day—on Twitter. She's not some fringe figure; she's leading a division representing over 135,000 psychologists within the APA. That's a serious ethical concern.

Jacobsen: So, when we do exploratory group discussions like this, the strategy we use is to identify points of traction so we can pursue them more deeply. When I see cases like what you're describing, I draw a clear line between what's happening here and something like the

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demonology and exorcism of the Middle Ages—because those were fantasy-based categories. Suppose someone came into your practice and said demons possessed them as a clinician. In that case, you'd have a professional response. But that belongs to a more obvious realm of irrationality. These categories being presented—Zionism, fascism, the Overton Window—are real concepts in political science and sociology. The Overton Window is the window of acceptable discourse. When people push increasingly extreme views into public dialogue, they shift that window—what was once radical becomes normalized.

So yes—Zionism, fascism, and the Overton Window are legitimate subjects of study. But what's happening here is that, without any evidentiary foundation, these terms are being thrown together like a patchwork, as if they're interchangeable psychological constructs. And that's dangerous. It's much more sophisticated to untangle that rhetorical collage than refuting something mythical, like demon possession. This is not pseudoscience in the traditional sense—it's non-science cloaked in academic aesthetics.

Shaw: Well, this is what happened in Nazi Germany. They're taking playbooks from that era—using fake science to justify harmful ideologies. This isn't new. Throughout history, there have been many instances where science was warped to serve power. Entire communities were targeted. For example, there was a time when an entire Indigenous tribe was labelled "less worthy" and subjected to forced sterilization.

Science has been manipulated many times in history. And this is exactly why Gesher Campus Care needed to be created. Because we can't just send Jewish college students—who are experiencing real antisemitism and psychological harm—to just any therapist, the therapists must be vetted and properly trained. Even Jewish-identifying therapists need specific training to understand this climate and the unique cultural, historical, and psychological needs of these students.

We touched on this in our last conversation. Still, I want to go deeper today into something I call "antisemitism of identity destabilization." Identity destabilization can happen at any age, but it's especially dangerous during late adolescence when young people figure out who they are in society. That's why it becomes so critical on college campuses—students are forming identities, and now that identity is being challenged or vilified in profoundly harmful ways.

I have some of these examples on my phone, though not all are in my slide deck. Jessica, could you share that specific slide with me, too?

Jacobsen: Let's pause here. I think I was the one who interrupted Jessica earlier—so if you have any other slides or points you want to finish, we can come back to that first.

Zmood: What we're looking at here is a third set of examples—what I'd call a disturbing sample of what mental health clinicians are publicly posting on social media. These are licensed professionals, and their posts include statements like:

"I'm feeling urgency, anger, disgust, and avoidance when working with Zionist patients."

"Jewish people are sexual predators."

"Keep your crimes out of this country."

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"A large portion of my clients are Zionists. I never understood how that might impact their well-being. Any wisdom on this? None of them are seeing me with the intention of deconstructing."

That word—"deconstructing"—is key. It ties directly into the previous slide we showed, where the therapist talks about "deconstructing the colonized mind." The idea here is that the Zionist part of the brain—a part of someone's identity—is considered an illness that must be "treated" or "removed."

Another example reads:

"Zionism is a racist white supremacy ideology."

This kind of statement completely erases Jewish identity. It's not even factually accurate.

Shaw: Because the truth is, Jews aren't "white" in the monolithic, simplistic way these ideologues are framing it.

One of the most important points I emphasize is that Judaism is one of the world's most ethnically and culturally diverse identities. Judaism predates modern categories like ethnicity, culture, and religion, which have only existed for the past few hundred years. Judaism has been around for over 4,000 years.

So what happens when you're Jewish and something else? What if you're queer and Jewish? What if you're Black and Jewish? What if you're Latino and Jewish?

And the irony here is staggering. Hitler targeted Jews because we weren't "white enough." Now, 70 years later, people are calling us white supremacists. It's a complete reversal of history—a distortion that erases the trauma, displacement, and persecution that define such a lot of Jewish history.

We all originally came from the Middle East and were repeatedly expelled from our homeland. That created a diaspora that resulted in an incredibly diverse global community. Jews today come from every continent—we have Ethiopian Jews, Iranian Jews, Indian Jews, Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews, and so many others.

To reduce us to a single label—and then use that label to justify exclusion, dehumanization, or discrimination—it's not only offensive, it's historically false. And no other group would tolerate this kind of treatment. Why should we?

If we said these things about any other group—if we substituted the word Zionist with any other minority population—people would be rightfully disgusted. But somehow, Jews don't count as minorities, even though the numbers clearly show we are. We are 0.2% of the global population. Yet, we're treated as though our concerns are invalid because we're perceived as a "successful minority" or somehow not "marginalized enough."

That's part of the paradox of antisemitism. It's duplicitous and self-contradictory. On one hand, we're portrayed as oppressors, and on the other hand, as "dirty Jews." On one hand, we're "not a real minority," but on the other hand, we're still subject to slurs, threats, and exclusion. These contradictions—this back-and-forth logic—are central to how antisemitism functions. It thrives on double standards and what I call macro gaslighting.

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You'll hear things like, "Well, that's not antisemitism. I'm just anti-Zionist." Or, "You're being too sensitive," or, "You're calling it antisemitism just to silence my free speech." These are gaslighting tactics.

And, Scott, have you heard of DARVO?

Jacobsen: Yes—deny, attack, reverse victim and offender. I first learned about it from people working in the space of clergy-related abuse. It's become a recognized pattern in manipulative or abusive behaviour.

Shaw: That's what we're seeing here on a cultural scale. As clinicians, we all feel a strong responsibility to protect the next generation's mental health. We already know the long-term consequences of the generation after the Holocaust survivors. This moment now requires the same level of care.

This is not just a community issue—it's a mental health crisis, particularly for adolescents and late adolescents. Shelly and Jessica are truly heroes in this space. They saw a service gap and created a nonprofit that works daily to ensure students receive the culturally competent mental health support they need.

The goal isn't to achieve a perfect identity development process—because that's not realistic in this climate—but to at least make it as normative as possible in an environment that is anything but normal.

Steinwurtzel: Scott, there are so many layers here. I'll share a couple of thoughts now.

First, it's not just the students. Yes, they are at particular risk because they're in the middle of developing their sense of self—figuring out how they want to show up in the world. That stage is critical.

But we're also hearing from faculty and staff, which brings another risk layer. For example, untenured faculty members are afraid to speak openly. Many of them have anti-Zionist advisers or tenure board members, and some of these boards are holding class sessions in encampments. So, expressing their Jewish or Zionist identity can jeopardize their careers.

Then there are graduate students, many of whom are silently struggling. At Gesher, we aim to support anyone on campus who needs us—not just undergrads but faculty, staff, and grad students. Everyone is experiencing this differently, and campus communities are their microcultures. Each campus has its vibe and pressures, and people are tied to that culture in a way unlike any other environment.

That's such an important point. The gaslighting that Malka described earlier? It's not just happening on the individual level but at a mass scale. What we're witnessing is an inversion of reality, where the victims are made to feel like the perpetrators and speech that defends identity is twisted into accusations of bigotry.

It's not only harmful to Jewish students—it's dangerous to democracy. We're losing our ability to hold nuanced conversations. And that's what college is supposed to be about—learning to wrestle with ideas, not silencing people or pushing them into hiding.

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So we're talking about both individual psychology and a broader cultural psyche—a kind of collective, ambient anxiety and reversal that's deeply damaging. And yes, this is bigger than just the Jewish community. It's a question of whether we still value intellectual honesty, diversity of thought, and the ability to disagree without dehumanizing.

How do we have real conversations without throwing the baby out with the bathwater? Can we agree with certain aspects of a person's thought process or belief system without agreeing with every part? From a psychological perspective, we can't diagnose an entire society, but we can observe a trend toward black-and-white thinking or all-or-nothing reasoning, characteristic of psychological immaturity.

In healthy adult development, we should be able to hold on to complexity. We should be able to say, "This part I agree with, but that part I don't." Psychologically speaking, that's called the ability to think in shades of gray. When we do this, we can hold multiple truths simultaneously—we can mourn and still feel joy or grieve and live fully. That's a marker of emotional maturity.

But right now, what we're seeing on many college campuses is something different—more aligned with what we would clinically call rigid thinking or even what resembles traits of borderline personality disorder. I'm sure you've encountered BPD in your psychology background, Scott. There's a desperate need for many of these students to feel like they're part of something meaningful. And to achieve that sense of belonging, they're willing to sacrifice critical thinking, or as the saying goes, throw the baby out with the bathwater. And that's a dangerous way to shape our future generations.

Shaw: Many students are willing to take social, academic, and psychological risks. And they may even know what they're risking it for. They've been told this is the "right side of history," so they follow it unquestioningly. Those were a couple of the thoughts that came to me as everyone shared.

And, if I may share something a little more personal—when all of this began unfolding, yes, it was shocking as a Jewish person. But it was profoundly horrifying to experience this as a Jewish mental health professional. Our professional identities are deeply tied to our values. We've pursued this field because it means something to us. So, to suddenly face antisemitism disguised as anti-Zionism, not only from society but from within our field, has been devastating.

Zmood: I have to go. Shelly can continue in good faith without me—and Malka, too. Thank you, Scott.

Jacobsen: Thank you, Jess. Thanks for being part of this conversation.

Shaw: So, Scott, do you have any quick or specific questions you want to ask before we wrap up?

Jacobsen: Yes, I do. The one I had relates to your reflections—specifically on Jess's presentation about some of these individuals and our observed trends.

I want to be clear—I'm not looking to "cancel" anyone's business. However, many of these people have professional channels, and the concern is about the public messaging influencing clients and clinicians.

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They share their qualifications—"Come see me; I'm open at these times," "Here are my rates," "Contact me for more information or special offers," etc. This is standard professional practice. People are allowed to make a living as clinical social workers or psychologists.

But what stands out in these cases is that the commentary shared on their platforms is often political or personal and posted on their professional pages—as part of their brand. That's an entirely different dynamic. If these views were expressed purely in personal spaces, that would be one thing. People are allowed to have opinions. But the issue is when those opinions—particularly antisemitic or ideologically aggressive views—are being shared in spaces used for clinical advertising and patient engagement.

In your analysis, are these statements posted in professional spaces like LinkedIn, Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook pages representing their practices?

Shaw: Yes, it's important to separate two things here. First, we've seen that the world of professionalism is becoming less professional overall. I might be the oldest on this Zoom. Still, when I graduated college, the expectation was that you interviewed in a blazer, wore closed-toe shoes, had no visible piercings or tattoos, and kept strict professional boundaries. That was the norm.

There's been a cultural shift in attire and how people define "professionalism." Personal branding has merged with professional identity. So yes, they're posting political commentary—often deeply biased and, in many cases, explicitly antisemitic—on platforms where they are simultaneously offering services to clients. That is deeply troubling. There's another piece we may not have time to unpack today fully, but it's worth flagging: What role did the pandemic play in this?

Students currently in college were in middle school or high school during COVID-19. That means their critical identity formation years happened in isolation during a global trauma. That's bound to have psychosocial impacts, including how they perceive relationships, authority, and ideology. The professional world also changed during that time. Work from home, telehealth, and TikTok therapy blurred boundaries even further. What we're seeing now is a direct outcome of that shift.

But the fact remains: using professional platforms to promote antisemitic or biased materials is both appalling and heartbreaking. For Jewish mental health professionals like us, it's a triple heartbreak.

First, there's the ongoing trauma of what's happening in Israel and with the hostages. Second, antisemitism is resurgent—especially in academic and mental health spaces. Third, there's the sense of betrayal from our profession—a field to which we devoted our lives.

All three of us here are members of AJMA, the American Jewish Medical Association. AJMA was founded after October 7 to respond to the growing hostility within the medical and mental health fields. What's happening in hospitals and therapy rooms is outrageous; we've been speaking out.

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So yes, we're all in this together because it's not just personal—it's professional, communal, and existential.

Steinwurtzel: To answer your question directly, yes, these attitudes are normalized in professional spaces. They are tolerated and, in some cases, encouraged or celebrated. That's why we're speaking up.

The American Psychological Association (APA) strongly advocates "decolonizing therapy." On its face, this concept is not necessarily problematic. There's room for discussion about how therapy can better serve diverse populations. However, politicizing this idea within the therapeutic frame is unacceptable.

I dropped in a reference to Thema Bryant, who was President of the APA. I have nothing personal against her—I don't know her—but 'decolonizing therapy' was one of the main initiatives she advocated for during her presidency.

That's part of how this has become so normalized. People are now putting this language—framed as clinical best practice—on their professional websites and social media. It's become part of the expected rhetoric for anyone promoting therapy services. So, prospective clients encounter it and interpret it as evidence-based.

I have no issue with dialogue on these themes. We should always be evolving and engaging in complex conversations. But the problem arises when a specific group—in this case, Jews and Zionists—is singled out and mischaracterized as part of a global colonial enterprise.

The irony—and frankly, the absurdity—of this is striking. Israel is a tiny piece of land. The Jewish people make up 0.2% of the world's population. To claim that Jews are somehow orchestrating global colonialism is historically, demographically, and logically flawed.

There are over two million Arab citizens living in Israel today. Zionism is not—and has never been—the desire to eliminate other people from Israel. As Mark already said earlier, that's a complete misrepresentation of what Zionism means.

I also dropped in the *Free Press* article by Sally Satel. I don't know if you've seen it, Scott, but it's incredibly relevant.

Jacobsen: I interviewed her several years ago. She is thoughtful and grounded.

Steinwurtzel: I shared the article not just because Gesher is mentioned in it but also because the letter it includes—written by the leadership of Psychologists Against Antisemitism, including Julie Ansis—is exceptionally well-crafted.

The letter outlines many growing concerns within the APA and, more broadly, across social work and mental health. It shows how ideologically driven frameworks—like unexamined uses of "decolonization"—are being normalized in professional spaces and how this creates an unsafe environment for Jewish professionals and clients alike. It's part of why we're so deeply concerned.

You asked earlier about the psychological makeup of someone who espouses antisemitic beliefs or engages in these behaviours on campuses. That's a complex question, and honestly, it's been

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quite a journey for us to witness our colleagues and peers—people who are intelligent, educated, and clinically trained—embracing these ideologies.

There isn't a single psychological profile. As we've said before, it can happen to anyone. These ideas have become so entrenched, particularly under decolonization and equity.

But then, you look at the Jewish experience, and we become a conundrum within these frameworks. We are 0.2% of the population, but we've been relatively successful in certain fields. And that disrupts the equity narrative.

Jacobsen: Right—Jews make up a quarter of Nobel Prize winners.

Shaw: It disrupts the narrative, and instead of embracing complexity, some people double down on simplified ideological thinking. And that's when it gets dangerous. That's also part of Jewish culture. The emphasis on education and literacy has been central to Jewish identity for millennia—even in the Middle Ages.

Jacobsen: But here's the thing: you don't see people haranguing Hindu or Sikh women for success.

Shaw: There's this persistent oxymoron—a contradictory double standard—that operates when it comes to Jews. Take one example from history: money lending. That role became stigmatized and portrayed as morally corrupt. But why did Jews become associated with money lending in the first place?

The truth is that, historically, Jews were excluded from owning land—so they couldn't be farmers. They were barred from guilds so that they couldn't become craftsmen. The only profession left open to them—due to restrictions imposed by Christian institutions—was money lending. Then, when the Catholic Church forbade Christians from lending money with interest, Jews became the only ones allowed to perform that necessary function. And suddenly, they were vilified for it. We were forced into that role, and then we were demonized for surviving.

Shaw: I often say Jews have had no choice but to excel—because the alternative was extermination. That's the brutal historical reality. We had to become resilient, resourceful, and driven—not because we wanted to outshine others, but because our survival depended on it.

Steinwurtzel: I just returned from Israel. I want to share something because it speaks to both the psychology of survival and the emotional complexity that Israelis have developed—and that we in America are struggling to integrate.

This goes back to the black-and-white thinking we've been discussing—the rise of cancel culture, the borderline dynamics, and the erosion of nuance in how we relate to others and ideas.

Israel's experience is completely different. This is a country in deep mourning. People are devastated by loss, angry, and actively surviving.

At the same time, there is joy, exuberance for life, sharper focus, and more vibrant energy. The emotional bandwidth is wide—they feel the full range of human experience, not collapsing into black-and-white modes.

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One of the recently released hostages shared that Hersh Goldberg-Polin—while still in captivity—said something deeply profound to him, a paraphrase of Viktor Frankl: "When you have a why, the how becomes possible."

That's it. That's the center of it. When you know your why, the how becomes more manageable. There's clarity, purpose, and prioritization. You stop wasting energy on distraction or division.

That clarity drives our work. It's what drove Malka to develop Kesher and our work with Gesher. These initiatives were born out of trauma, but they offer pathways to growth and resilience.

In psychology, we talk about this as post-traumatic growth. Trauma doesn't always have to lead to long-term injury. Traumatic experiences don't have to become traumatizing if we healthily process them and find meaning in the pain.

Malka covers this so beautifully in her training. I've seen it firsthand in my clinical work, especially in the NICU (Neonatal Intensive Care Unit). I wasn't even working in the field of antisemitism before October 7. But that day changed everything.

In my practice, my personal political beliefs don't come up because, as Jess and Malka said, we were trained to follow the patient. Our role is to guide them clinically, using neuropsychological, psychological, behavioural, and psychosocial frameworks. Our political opinions have no place in the therapy room.

That's part of what we're also training our Gesher therapists to remember. Even though the mental health field has become politically active, our therapeutic environments must remain safe spaces for patients—places where they can explore their "why," not our "why."

That's where Gesher and Kesher became necessary.

Jacobsen: We saw quotes from therapists openly stating that they need to 'decolonize the space of their patients'" That is not patient-centred care. That's motivated therapy—it reflects the therapist's agenda, not the client's needs.

Steinwurtzel: And honestly, it's strikingly similar to the rationale behind conversion therapy. The psychological field fought hard to remove conversion therapy from legitimate clinical practice because we came to understand the scientific and psychosocial basis of sexual diversity. We now recognize that trying to "convert" someone's orientation is unethical and harmful.

But this idea of "decolonizing the Zionist mind"—that's conversion therapy for Jews. It's a nonreligious form, but the structure is the same: it assumes something fundamentally broken or wrong about a person's identity. It seeks to change it against their will.

Shaw: It's worth noting, too—this isn't just a fringe issue. These perspectives are now mainstreaming in professional spaces, and they're being positioned as therapeutic norms.

Here's something random but relevant: I looked into the Jewish history there when we were in Spain. There are very few Jews left in Spain today, either due to conversion, exile, or mass murder dating back centuries. But historically, there was a large Sephardic Jewish population there.

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Steinwurtzel: Recently, a genetic study found that about 30% of Spanish men—men who today identify as non-Jewish—carry Sephardic Jewish ancestry. That's a huge percentage, and it tells us something about how deeply rooted Jewish identity is in many parts of the world.

Shaw: That ties into the larger conversation about Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews. In North America, Ashkenazi Jews are more visible and numerous. But in the global Jewish population, Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews make up the majority. That's an important correction to some of the misinformation being circulated.

This whole narrative that Jews are "white colonizers" in Israel? It's absurd.

Go to Israel, you'll find it's an extremely diverse State. Israel is majority Mizrahi—which is closer to North African. Sephardic Jews have more Mediterranean features. It's not a white state in the way it's often portrayed.

Steinwurtzel: And don't forget Ethiopian Jews. My cousin is married to an Ethiopian Jew—she's Black. Her heritage is fully Jewish. There are Black Jews, Arab Jews, Indian Jews, Chinese Jews. The Jewish people are ethnically and racially diverse.

So this narrative that 'Zionism is white colonialism'—it's not just offensive, it's categorically false. It erases centuries of history, migration, and survival. And it ignores the fact that Jewish diversity is central to who we are.

Her family came from Ethiopia in the 1990s. When you speak to Ethiopian Jews who made *aliyah*, their stories are often incredibly powerful. I remember being in Israel another time, eating in an Ethiopian restaurant, and this woman sharing her story. One of the things she said struck me deeply—and it speaks to what Zionism truly is.

She told us that her grandparents and earlier generations in Ethiopia had no idea other Jews existed. They thought they were the only remaining tribe of Jewish people—that they alone carried the tradition of Zion. They had no technology, no external communication, and no way to connect with Jews outside their isolated villages.

When they eventually learned about the State of Israel and that there were Jews all over the world, they were in shock. It was life-changing. It reoriented their entire understanding of their identity. This woman asked her grandmother, "What surprised you the most about coming to Israel?" And her grandmother responded: "I can't believe there are white Jews."

And for many of us, our reaction might be the reverse—"I can't believe there are Black Jews." But that's the beauty of it. Judaism is so ethnically diverse. They didn't have religious texts or educational resources—just oral traditions and prayers toward Jerusalem. And that's the key: Jerusalem is our indigenous home. Our souls, as Jews, are deeply tied to that land. It's not a slogan. It's who we are.

That's my little moment on the bully pulpit—I know I've been talking for a while. I need to go soon.

Shaw: Scott, do you have any final questions or thoughts before I go? Thank you for being so patient with us today and for reading all of this so thoroughly.

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Jacobsen: Thank you—all of you—for your time. There's still a lot more to explore. And I know Malka needs to go now—so we can start wrapping up.

Shaw: Yes, Scott, thank you again. It's always a pleasure working with you. You're amazing, and I'm glad you're shining a light on these important issues.

Steinwurtzel: Absolutely.

Jacobsen: Not a problem at all. Thank you for your time, Malka.

Shaw: Bye, everyone!

All: Bye!

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Irina Tsukerman, End of Conversational Antisemitism Glossary

Irina Tsukerman, a New York-based human rights and national security attorney, examines obscure and evolving forms of antisemitism, including conspiracy theories like the New World Order, QAnon, and Zionist Occupied Government (ZOG). She explores how these narratives falsely depict Jews as global manipulators and blame them for political shifts, social unrest, and economic crises. She highlights how historical antisemitic tropes—such as Judeo-Bolshevism, accusations of dual loyalty, and exaggerated physical caricatures—have persisted and adapted across different cultural and political contexts. She also examines modern antisemitic rhetoric, including the Deadly Exchange conspiracy, which falsely blames Jews for oppressive policing tactics, and Holocaust distortion, which ranges from minimization to outright denial. The discussion touches on the resurgence of slurs like "kike" and the misrepresentation of kosher certification as a Zionist scheme. Lastly, she analyzes the genocidal implications of slogans like "From the river to the sea" and the targeting of Jews in pandemic-related conspiracies.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Hey! Oh my gosh, it's Irina Tsukerman! Once again, we're talking to a smart and insightful lady. Today, we'll be covering more obscure forms of antisemitism that we haven't yet discussed, and this should probably wrap up our conversation on the topic. We've gone from a comprehensive overview of antisemitism to bizarre forms of it, and now we're moving into what I'd call "leftover antisemitism." Of course, this isn't the last word on the subject, because antisemitism tends to evolve—it's fluid.

Once again, as you explained yesterday or the day before, we are dealing with the idea of a cabal. This concept has been falsely linked to Kabbalah, which led to its distorted interpretation. So, what is this supposed secret group that is allegedly trying to establish an all-powerful global regime? The New World Order: I've even heard it referred to as the Jew World Order. However, the reasoning behind that seems to lack real depth—these conspiracy theorists appear to have no taste.

Irina Tsukerman: And because their imagination is limited, they fail to recognize that, if they were trying to be accurate, they would be looking at actual major state actors that are actively shaping global structures—multipolarity, Eurasianism, and other geopolitical shifts. But I suppose conspiracy thinking only takes you so far. The New World Order is an idea that keeps getting recycled, and sometimes, it even makes its way into mainstream contexts.

For example, when President George H.W. Bush used the term "New World Order," he wasn't promoting an antisemitic conspiracy. He signalled a shift in policy structure—a new direction for U.S. foreign policy as the Cold War ended. The Soviet Union was collapsing, and there was an opportunity to capitalize on presumed liberalization and unipolarity, with the U.S. emerging as the world's sole superpower.

However, conspiracy theorists—who are fixated on Jewish influence—seize on every major shift or potential change as proof that Jews are orchestrating events to consolidate their power. No matter what happens, they always reach the same conclusion: Jews must be behind it. Whether the issue at hand is globalism or anti-globalism, globalization or de-globalization, the conspiracy always morphs to fit the narrative, even when it's completely contradictory.

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The term New World Order itself is rarely clearly defined. In any world order, there will always be an elite with more power, wealth, and access than the average person. Whether it's a monarchy, oligarchy, democracy, technocracy, or republic, there will always be those with privilege and influence. Some people strive for power, some resent those in power, and others accept the system for what it is.

The idea that the world was once "perfect" and that sinister forces—in this case, Jews—are now trying to change it into something radically different and dystopian is, quite frankly, simplistic, bizarre, and cartoonish.

Jacobsen: You briefly mentioned QAnon in a previous interview but haven't discussed it in depth. While QAnon is no longer uniquely American, it originated within American conspiracy culture and political discourse—or at least, that's how I understand it.

Tsukerman: I would argue that it is important because the first mention of QAnon in common popular lore, as far as I know, came from two South African bloggers. Yes, which would make sense, given that South Africa is generally filled with all sorts of conspiracies, including homegrown ones—such as the false belief that raping a virgin can cure AIDS. I'm not even joking. It's a common misconception, which is one reason for the high prevalence of sex crimes in South Africa.

Jacobsen: That's horrifying.

Tsukerman: It is. It is. South Africa has a high crime rate, and of course, what happens is the opposite—AIDS is transmitted through sexual contact, so all this myth does is create more AIDS patients. So that's one homegrown conspiracy, which essentially comes from a lack of basic education about AIDS.

But QAnon is not one of those witchcraft-type conspiracies. It is probably tied to Russian influence within South Africa. More likely, it was fed to these bloggers through Russian intelligence services, similar to Operation INFEKTION—a Soviet disinformation campaign that originated in obscure publications in Germany and India before being increasingly normalized, "news-laundered," and mainstreamed until it reached specific demographics in the United States, such as the African American community and various left-wing groups.

At the time, Operation INFEKTION pushed the false claim that the U.S. deliberately invented and spread AIDS to eliminate African and Black populations and that it only affected Black people. This QAnon trajectory appears to follow a similar disinformation pattern—it started as a foreign import, emerging in an obscure online source before spreading like wildfire until it reached the top echelons of U.S. politics.

For example, former National Security Adviser Michael Flynn became one of its main proponents, as did Jack Posobiec—a former intelligence officer who later founded the conservative media company ONN in the U.S. He was also one of the main figures behind Pizzagate, which focused on baseless pedophile sex trafficking allegations involving Washington and Hollywood elites.

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Jacobsen: Some younger audiences might have assumed that Pizzagate involved the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles fighting the Shredder—but no, it's much worse.

Tsukerman: Yes, it's literally wild—oh my gosh. This conspiracy theory somehow linked Washington and Hollywood sex offenders to Hillary Clinton and other prominent Democrats, accusing them of running a child sex trafficking ring.

According to these claims, this ring operated out of a Washington, D.C., pizzeria called Comet Ping Pong, and conspiracy theorists alleged that a terrorist attack would expose these criminals. This specific version of Pizzagate began on dark web troll networks, including 4chan and the "HNs," platforms notorious for criminal activity, disinformation, and Russian conspiracy tools.

They claimed that Clinton's associates were paid in both money and children by foreign donors to the Clinton Foundation. Now, while it is true that the Clinton Foundation—like many NGOs and think tanks in Washington—had a "pay-to-play" element, there is zero evidence linking it to sex trafficking.

However, what is true is that Clinton, Donald Trump, and many other prominent individuals—both Democrats and Republicans—had connections to Jeffrey Epstein, who was involved in trafficking young and sometimes underage women and using blackmail against prominent individuals from all political backgrounds.

So ironically, we're seeing that QAnon conspirators are mirroring the Russian method of projection and diversion—essentially accusing others of exactly what they are doing. The people participating in blackmail schemes and MeToo-type activities are the same people who also spread conspiracy theories—but only against their political opponents.

Jacobsen: We have one last topic in this category: Zionist Occupied Government (ZOG)—the assertion that Jews secretly control Western governments.

It's not just the claim that Jewish organizations or Israel influences democracies through lobbying. It's not merely arguing that Western governments are democracies with Jewish involvement. It's asserting that Western governments themselves are mere covers for secret Jewish control.

Why?

Tsukerman: This idea is widely spread in the Middle East and undoubtedly builds on Soviet-era conspiracy theories.

The Soviet Union deliberately worked to merge anti-Zionism and antisemitism, fusing antisemitic narratives with Middle Eastern paranoia about U.S. foreign policy, xenophobia, pan-Arabism, and nationalism—especially in Ba'athist-dominated states like Syria and Iraq.

This was an intentional Soviet foreign policy strategy. The goal was to foster governmental and non-governmental opposition to Western nations, primarily the U.S. and the U.K. It was a deliberate geopolitical tactic designed to build social resistance against Western foreign policy—using paranoid, antisemitic conspiracy theories to polarize populations and weaken diplomatic cooperation between Western governments and Middle Eastern societies.

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Jacobsen: Let's discuss Judeo-Bolshevism—the claim that Jews were behind communist revolutions and other left-wing, authoritarian, or subversive movements.

Tsukerman: This belief originated from early communist movements, such as the Mensheviks. Still, it was also heavily promoted by the Nazis. While communists blamed Jews for capitalism, the Nazis weaponized antisemitism to accuse Jews of being traitors, communists, and agents of international socialism.

Let's not forget that the Nazi Party was socialist—but with a nationalist twist. Unlike international socialism, which sought to export revolutions globally, National Socialism (Nazism) was ethnocentric, chauvinistic, and focused on territorial expansion and annexation.

Slightly different variations—same expansionist, hegemonic, authoritarian, and antisemitic ideology. Both communists and Nazis accused each other of being controlled by Jews, and both used Jews as scapegoats for their perceived political enemies.

Historically, many Jews did join the Communist Party in Germany and the Soviet Union, often due to their opposition to historical oppression and the belief that communism could create an equal society where they would no longer face discrimination.

So, essentially, it was a deliberate political strategy—to separate Western governments from any chance of successfully engaging Arab and broader Muslim-majority Middle Eastern populations.

And, frankly, the same antisemitic narratives were exported to other parts of the world, including Latin America. This concept still survives in different forms today and is still fueled by the same sources.

Now, you have Islamist movements and groups feeding into this and helping fan the flames. These conspiracy theories persist despite greater openness, dialogue, and increased U.S. influence and presence in the Middle East. They haven't been completely—nor partially—eliminated on the ground.

Of course, the worst governments in Iraq and Syria have been removed. Still, the conspiracy theories continue—often outlasting specific regimes. These ideas persist in the public consciousness, media, and intelligence agencies, maintaining institutional continuity even as political leadership changes.

Jacobsen: Now, what about the phrase "Jew Down"—the stereotype that Jewish people are miserly or cheap?

Tsukerman: It's absurd. This kind of racial slur should have faded away along with many other offensive phrases that were common in past centuries. And yet, it still survives.

I've seen online celebrities use it, and for some reason, it doesn't trigger the same backlash or "cancellation" response that similar racial slurs would if they were directed at African Americans or other minorities.

The stereotype of Jewish greed and economic control is tied to historical misconceptions about money lending and usury. In medieval Europe, Christians were forbidden—by religious law—from charging interest on loans. However, Jewish law did not impose this restriction when

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lending to non-Jews. As a result, Jews could offer loans with interest, which allowed them to earn money that way.

At the same time, Jews were barred from participating in many so-called "legitimate" professions—such as law and government—unless they converted to Christianity. In response, many Jews focused on banking and finance because those were the few areas where they could work.

This perception of Jewish thriftiness was also linked to the extravagance of Christian monarchs. Many European rulers were expected to display wealth, to splurge on entertainment, and to spend vast sums on warfare.

Jews, however, had practical reasons for being financially cautious:

1. They needed savings in case of persecution, as history repeatedly showed they could be expelled anytime.
2. Wealthy Jews were often forced to bail out monarchs who had overspent on wars and luxuries.
3. Jewish communities had to pool financial resources—not only for communal needs but also to pay ransoms when pirates or bandits kidnapped Jewish individuals.

Because of these factors, Jews were less likely to spend lavishly and instead focused on preserving wealth. This clashed with European cultural norms, leading to the stereotype of Jewish stinginess.

Jacobsen: Now, what about Jewish Lightning and the Kosher Tax?

The fundamental premise behind Jewish Lightning and the Kosher Tax conspiracy theory is essentially the same—it's rooted in the belief that Jews operate through deception and hidden schemes.

These conspiracy theories are just as absurd as claims about subterranean tunnels, secret moon bases, and hidden Antarctic fortresses.

They all rely on the same kind of paranoid thinking—that Jews supposedly say one thing publicly while secretly manipulating events for their benefit.

Tsukerman: Jewish Lightning is the false claim that Jewish business owners commit arson on their properties to collect insurance money—a baseless and antisemitic trope.

The Kosher Tax conspiracy alleges that consumers are forced to pay extra for kosher certification on food products—a myth commonly spread by white supremacists and right-wing extremists.

Both of these conspiracies reflect the same underlying stereotype: the idea that Jews cannot be trusted, that they operate through dishonest financial practices and that they secretly control economic systems.

Another example of antisemitic projection, then.

Look, to some extent, there is a monopoly on kosher food certification in the U.S., which does make it significantly more expensive than non-kosher food. However, most people who consume

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kosher food are Jewish, except for the occasional non-Jewish patron dining at a kosher restaurant. Non-Jewish consumers generally do not purchase kosher food, which is more expensive. The higher cost of kosher certification is due to religious oversight requirements, which involve certifying bodies and inspectors, making the process more labour-intensive.

Naturally, as with any product that requires specialized certification, the cost gets passed on to the consumer. But there is no conspiracy—it is simply a standard business practice when high demand, limited supply, and additional production costs are involved. Most people are not affected because they do not buy kosher food. So, it's unclear what the conspiracy theory even alleges since this market is entirely voluntary and affects only those who actively seek out kosher-certified products.

However, the second part of this conspiracy theory claims that the extra cost of kosher products is not just compensation for the certification process but that these additional costs are secretly funnelled into Jewish organizations, Zionist causes, or the Israeli government. Of course, there is no evidence to support this claim. While some Jewish organizations that offer kosher certifications support Jewish causes in the U.S. or Israel, they do not redirect kosher certification fees specifically for political or nationalist purposes. There is no secret exchange taking place. These organizations exist in the same communal space. They may, separately, engage in charitable or advocacy efforts related to Jewish interests. The idea that kosher certification fees are some covert Zionist taxes is a classic antisemitic trope designed to fuel distrust toward Jewish businesses and institutions.

Now, moving on to cultural and social stereotypes, let's talk about the claim that Jews are clannish—that they only associate with their kind. In most cases, this is a patently absurd notion, especially in modern cosmopolitan societies where exclusivity is impractical. The irony is that this stereotype originates from the very same Christian societies that historically segregated Jews. In medieval Europe, Jews were forced into ghettos. They were legally barred from socializing with non-Jews unless they converted to Christianity. They were also restricted from many professions, often relegated to roles such as moneylenders and physicians—professions that required limited interaction with the broader Christian population. So, to the extent that Jewish communities were insular, it was not by choice—it was the direct result of discriminatory policies imposed by Christian rulers.

There was generally more social integration in Muslim-majority societies, but significant restrictions still existed. Intermarriage, for instance, was culturally and religiously discouraged in both Jewish and Muslim communities, but this was not unique to Jews—it was simply a common cultural norm across many societies at the time. However, when it came to friendships and social associations, Jews were not precluded from interacting with non-Jews. The one major limitation was food consumption—strictly religious Jews required kosher food, which was not always readily available. As a result, Jewish families often socialized within their communities simply because it was logistically easier to maintain religious dietary practices. But this was not due to hatred or a desire to exclude others—it was a practical necessity. The idea that Jews deliberately isolate themselves from non-Jews is simply a distorted reading of history.

Jacobsen: What about the idea that Jews lack real patriotic commitment?

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Tsukerman: That stereotype is closely tied to the concept of "rootless cosmopolitanism," which was aggressively propagated by the Soviet Union. It is also connected to the dual loyalty accusation, which became more pronounced after establishing the State of Israel. The claim suggests that Jews, because of their distinct ethnic and religious identity, cannot fully be loyal citizens of the countries they live in. Historically, this accusation was used as a political weapon—whether by European nationalists, Soviet communists, or modern-day antisemites—to frame Jews as outsiders, regardless of their actual level of civic participation. This idea implies that Jews are inherently disloyal to their home nations, particularly in times of war or political crisis.

But this argument falls apart under scrutiny. Jews have served in their respective nations' militaries, governments, and leadership roles for centuries. They have fought in wars, contributed to national economies, and played significant roles in science, arts, and politics. The accusation of dual loyalty is simply a convenient way to single out Jews for suspicion. At the same time, other ethnic or religious groups with transnational ties (such as Catholics with the Vatican or Muslims with Mecca) are not subjected to the same scrutiny.

Ultimately, these antisemitic tropes persist because they offer simplistic, scapegoating explanations for complex historical and social dynamics. Whether it's economic stereotypes, social exclusion myths, or accusations of political disloyalty, these narratives serve to isolate and vilify Jewish communities rather than engage with the real history and realities of Jewish life in different societies.

It's blatantly false to claim that Jews lack patriotism or have no national loyalty. Jews have served in governments and militaries of their respective countries for centuries, including in the Ottoman Empire, the United Kingdom, various European nations, and the United States—whenever they were not prohibited from doing so. When given the opportunity, they participated equally alongside everyone else and often displayed strong patriotic leanings. Of course, Jews also faced discrimination, and when the chance arose to relocate to Israel, many chose to leave—but at times, they were actively forced out. The idea that Jews lack rooted national loyalty is not just a falsehood—it is an outright libel, historically used to justify exclusion, discrimination, and expulsion.

Online antisemitic discussion forums and message boards have developed a coded language filled with tropes and insider terminology meant to obscure their bigotry from outsiders. Much of this language exists to ensure that, when outsiders peek in, they struggle to understand what's being discussed. It creates an exclusive, insular environment, reinforcing their ideological bubble. It is almost as if they are speaking their secret language, similar to a specialized jargon one might hear at CERN. Still, in this case, it serves a malicious purpose.

Jacobsen: This isn't the only example of coded language online. What about the triple parentheses, the echo symbol, e.g., “(((echo))),” or the use of words enclosed in triple parentheses?

Tsukerman: Much of this originates from the dark web and fringe online communities before being mainstreamed into social media discourse. The purpose of coded language is twofold. First, it allows users to bypass content moderation, evade anti-discrimination filters, and avoid

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being flagged by social media algorithms. Some platforms have automated systems designed to detect and remove antisemitic hate speech, so these users develop workarounds—using slang, memes, and coded symbols to keep their conversations hidden from automated detection and casual observers.

However, the second reason is more ideological. These coded signals are meant to reinforce the idea that shadowy forces are suppressing antisemitic discourse. This plays into the victimhood narrative—that those who spread antisemitic conspiracy theories are the "truth-tellers" who are being marginalized and persecuted. The same false grievance fuels the "War on Christmas" myth—the notion that people are forbidden from saying "Merry Christmas," even though no such ban exists.

The same logic applies here—antisemitic groups claim that they are "not allowed" to talk about Jews, even though antisemitism has existed in public discourse for centuries. While it may not be encouraged or celebrated, it has never been fully silenced or erased. However, these groups falsely equate the lack of mainstream promotion of antisemitism with censorship, deplatforming, and political persecution.

This is why coded language is so effective—it fuels conspiracy thinking, strengthens group identity, and fosters a sense of persecution. It creates an illusion of an underground resistance movement, where members see themselves as truth-seekers fighting against an oppressive system. In reality, they are simply reinforcing their delusions and manufacturing a sense of victimhood to justify their bigotry.

Jacobsen: We discussed this before, but it's striking how deliberate this strategy is.

Tsukerman: It's not just about hiding antisemitism—it's about making it feel subversive and rebellious so that followers believe they are engaged in some grand struggle rather than simply peddling age-old hatred.

Jacobsen: There is the stuff around the exaggerated big nose, smirking expression, and the rubbing of hands—the smirking merchant trope. Where does that stereotype reach its highest pitch? More generally, have exaggerated physical features been a consistent feature of antisemitic media for a long time?

Tsukerman: Absolutely. A lot of these visual tropes originate from Nazi propaganda. Still, they also predate that era, going back to medieval Christian portrayals of Jews in anti-Jewish conspiracy theories and artwork. Historically, Jews—including Ashkenazi Jews—had distinct Middle Eastern features, making them visibly different from traditionally white European populations. This natural ethnic difference was exaggerated grotesquely to emphasize otherness and foster polarization. The goal was to alienate Jews from the broader society by making them appear physically distinct and repulsive.

Later, right-wing white supremacist movements and the Nazis took this further. They deliberately depicted Jews as vermin-like creatures, portraying them as ugly, unhealthy, physically weak, and inferior to the so-called "Aryan race." This dehumanization strategy became a core part of Nazi propaganda, reinforcing the belief that Jews were not only socially undesirable but biologically subhuman. These ideas did not disappear after World War II—they continued to spread. They

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were later adopted by some Middle Eastern cultures, particularly in antisemitic portrayals of Israeli leaders.

In these depictions, grotesque physical exaggerations were often combined with bloodthirsty imagery, playing into age-old blood libel accusations—the false claim that Jews murder Christian or Palestinian children for ritualistic purposes. This imagery functions effectively as propaganda because people instinctively react aggressively toward ugliness. When an enemy is made to appear monstrous, it is much easier to justify violence or discrimination against them. Conversely, when someone looks similar to you, there is an inherent sense of shared humanity, making dehumanization more difficult.

This is why visual distortion in propaganda is so powerful—if someone perceives their enemy as ugly, alien, or monstrous, it reinforces pre-existing bias and makes them easier to hate. Furthermore, in regions where direct interaction with Jews and Israelis is limited, these caricatures become the dominant perception of Jewish people. Without real-life engagement, it is much easier to believe in negative stereotypes, to vilify an entire group, and to imagine them as inherently evil—rather than recognizing their humanity and common concerns.

Jacobsen: The idea of globalism and George Soros has been widely discussed. This builds into the dual loyalty accusation—the claim that Jews are transient cosmopolitans, the well-to-do "gypsies" of the world, with no real national allegiance.

This idea intersects with multiple antisemitic narratives. The accusation of dual loyalty suggests that Jews are never truly committed to their country of residence and that they serve a foreign agenda, whether it be Israel or a globalist conspiracy. At the same time, the reverse accusation exists—the claim that Jews have no loyalty at all, that they are rootless, transient elites who operate above nations and manipulate world affairs for their benefit.

These are contradictory narratives, but they serve the same function—to portray Jews as untrustworthy, disloyal, and fundamentally different from the majority population. Whether they are accused of controlling global capitalism, secretly running communist revolutions, or manipulating world politics, the result is the same—a scapegoat for society's problems.

The key difference between these two narratives—"dual loyalty" versus "no loyalty"—is that dual loyalty assumes Jews are working for another state (usually Israel). In contrast, the "no loyalty" claim paints them as opportunistic globalists with no national allegiance. However, both accusations lead to the same conclusion: that Jews are outsiders who cannot be trusted.

Tsukerman: This is why these tropes persist across different political ideologies. Whether it's far-right nationalists, far-left anti-globalists, or Islamist movements, the accusation shifts to fit the context. But the underlying purpose remains unchanged: to frame Jews as a permanent "other"—a group that exists outside the national fabric and is working against the interests of the majority population.

The underlying theme here is distrust—the idea that Jews cannot be trusted, that they have ulterior motives, and that their true intentions are unknowable. Even if those motives are not tied to any specific country, the accusation remains: "You never really know what these people are

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thinking." This fosters a sense of suspicion and alienation, reinforcing the belief that Jews should not be included in society.

This narrative suggests that Jews cannot be your friends, that you cannot defend them, and that they should not be included in elite institutions. It perpetuates exclusionary policies—justifying why Jews should be barred from private clubs, prestigious universities, top law firms, and high-ranking positions. The justification? "They are not like us." Their motivations are unclear, their allegiances are questionable, and their values are fundamentally different. This belief does not necessarily rely on physical differences. Instead, it suggests that Jews are internally distinct—culturally, religiously, and psychologically.

This fuels the desire to fabricate even more ambiguous suspicions—because as long as their true nature remains undefined, it provides an excuse to exclude them. There is also a deeper psychological element at play. Once a society opens the door to including culturally or religiously distinct people, it forces self-reflection. It challenges people to question their cultural identity, which can be deeply unsettling. As a result, some people project their insecurities onto Jews, questioning their motives and their loyalties rather than confronting their uncertainties.

Jacobsen: There is also the notion of blaming Jews collectively for the death of Jesus. The phrase "30 pieces of silver" appears in the Bible, referencing Judas Iscariot, who was portrayed as the ultimate betrayer who sold out Jesus to the authorities. How does this portrayal contribute to what could be considered biblical antisemitism?

Tsukerman: It's a strange contradiction. First, according to Christian tradition, the crucifixion of Jesus was prophesied—it was predestined and unavoidable. If that is the case, who can truly be blamed for it? If it was meant to happen, then the idea of "Jewish complicity" in deicide becomes self-defeating.

Second, Christian theology holds that Jesus sacrificed himself to cleanse humanity of sin. Suppose that sacrifice was a necessary and redemptive act. Shouldn't those who played a role in it be seen as fulfilling God's plan rather than as villains? If Jesus had not been killed, then there would be nothing to celebrate in Christianity—no resurrection, no redemption. Yet, for centuries, this paradox has been ignored, and the blame has been placed squarely on the Jews.

The idea that Jews collectively bear responsibility for the crucifixion was explicitly rejected by the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) in the 1960s. However, this decision only applies to the Catholic Church—it does not erase centuries of Christian antisemitic narratives, nor does it affect non-Catholic denominations that still perpetuate these beliefs. Even within Catholicism, older traditions and cultural biases remain deeply ingrained.

On a theological level, the accusation of deicide is nonsensical. If God is all-powerful and eternal, then God cannot be killed—the very concept of "killing God" is self-contradictory. The blame placed on Jews is not based on logical reasoning but rather on a need to scapegoat an entire group for a foundational event in Christian history.

This brings us to the Pharisees, often portrayed negatively in Christian texts. The ultimate accusation against the Jewish authorities of the time was that they did not accept Jesus as the Messiah. At its core, this is not a crime but simply a difference in religious belief. Yet, this

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theological disagreement has been weaponized for centuries and used as a justification for antisemitism, exclusion, and persecution.

The accusation isn't just that Jews killed Jesus—but rather, that they never accepted him. The deicide claim is essentially an exaggerated resentment, even though it makes no sense in many ways. The notion of betrayal is equally absurd, as it assigns historical and eternal collective responsibility to all Jewish people for the actions of one individual—Judas Iscariot.

Ironically, Judas was one of Jesus's disciples—meaning he was a follower, not one of the Jews who originally rejected Jesus. Those who did not accept Jesus as the Messiah owed him no loyalty to begin with. From the Jewish perspective, he was a potential heretic, making claims that did not align with Jewish theology. Judaism has specific messianic criteria, and by Christian accounts of the story, Jesus did not fulfill them.

Jacobsen: This brings us to a related antisemitic trope: the accusation that Jews use their influence to silence criticism. This stereotype suggests that Jews manipulate public discourse, suppress dissenting opinions, or smear critics through negative information campaigns.

The "poisoning the well" comes in—the idea that Jews preemptively discredit people before they can even present their argument? Poisoning the well is a rhetorical tactic where negative information is introduced about a person or group before they even have a chance to speak. It's like introducing a new colleague to others by subtly implying they are unpleasant or untrustworthy—but applied to an entire group. This tactic sets up bias in advance, making people dismiss the group's perspective without engaging with it fairly.

Tsukerman: One of the most common antisemitic claims is that Jews deliberately engineer criticism against themselves to avoid accountability. This is inherently bigoted because it targets an entire group with a sweeping accusation, denying individual choice or personal agency. That dehumanization is the essence of group-based bigotry, no matter the religion, ethnicity, or cultural identity involved.

Furthermore, this idea that Jews manufacture accusations of antisemitism to shield themselves from legitimate criticism is often used to perpetuate harmful stereotypes. Instead of acknowledging that Jewish communities—like all groups—are diverse and full of debate, these narratives present them as a monolithic bloc with a hidden agenda. In reality, Jews do not universally agree on anything, let alone on political issues like Israel or Zionism. However, antisemitic rhetoric erases these differences to create a single, caricatured enemy.

Jacobsen: And then there's the stereotyping of Israel as 100% Jewish—as though everything Israel does represents all Jewish people, regardless of reality. This is a tactic to frame Israel as a stand-in for all Jews—which, in turn, makes anything Israel does a Jewish action and, therefore, by antisemitic logic, bad by default. The language used around this often includes derogatory shorthand like "Zionist" or "Zio," which are frequently used as pejoratives.

Then there are thought-terminating clichés, like "Zionism is racism," which shut down discussion rather than engaging with historical and political complexities. Another phrase central to this discourse is "From the river to the sea."

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That phrase confused me when I first heard it. "From the river to the sea" has been used in different contexts. Still, in the most common political interpretation, it implies the elimination of Israel as a Jewish state—a call for Palestinian sovereignty over the entire land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea.

Tsukerman: Many people who repeat this slogan believe it represents a call for Palestinian liberation. Still, its historical and militant context suggests the removal of Jews from the region altogether.

At the same time, this projection of fear and dispossession is often inverted. The same people who accuse Israel of planning to take over Palestinian territory entirely use "From the river to the sea" to imply that Israelis are the ones threatening Palestinians with elimination. In reality, the phrase has been a rallying cry for groups that openly advocate for Israel's destruction, making it a clear example of how antisemitic narratives can be repackaged as political slogans.

At its core, the phrase is a placeholder for a broader antisemitic argument—one that frames Israel as an extension of Jewish global power and claims that the Jewish state exists purely as a tool of domination rather than as a nation with a complex history and diverse population.

The implication behind these arguments is clear: Jews should not have the right to a nation-state, even though other groups do. First, Israel is not an exclusively Jewish state, even though it is a Jewish nation-state. As we have seen with the recent Hamas release of prisoners, hostages included people of all backgrounds, including Bedouin Muslim Arabs, who were tortured and broken simply for holding Israeli citizenship—despite having no religious or cultural connection to Judaism.

Additionally, Israel is a pluralistic state, home to various ethnic and religious groups, including migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers from Sudan, South Sudan, Eritrea, and other countries. Many of these non-Jewish residents live in Israel without citizenship and have no direct ties to Judaism or Israeli nationalism. Furthermore, Israel has small but historically significant minority communities, such as the Samaritans, who are quasi-Jewish but reside in Palestinian territories and other regions.

Despite these realities, the claim that Israel is exclusively Jewish is often weaponized to delegitimize its existence. This is particularly troubling given the Holocaust, centuries of Jewish persecution, and the fact that Jews possess a unique, distinct cultural and religious identity. The outright opposition to Jewish self-determination, while other ethnic and national groups are granted the right to their states, is inherently bigoted and antisemitic. There is no other way to describe it.

What about Zionism? It seems that most Jews identify as Zionists, even if they criticize Israel heavily. Most Jews are Zionists, even if they are highly critical of Israel. The reason is that Zionism is deeply ingrained in Jewish history and tradition.

From a religious perspective, Zionism is not separate from Judaism—it is one of its core tenets. Many Jewish religious commandments can only be fulfilled in Israel under a Jewish-led government. This is a fundamental part of Jewish religious law. However, many people outside the Jewish community may be unaware of it.

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Even secular Jews, who do not practice religiously, often feel a distant connection to Israel—even if they criticize its policies or governance. Zionism is not a political ideology alone—it is also a cultural and historical movement rooted in the belief that Jews deserve self-determination, like any other people.

Additionally, Zionists are not exclusively Jewish—many non-Jews support Israel's right to exist for the same reason they support the national aspirations of other groups. There are diverse visions of what Israel should be, but the fundamental principle of Jewish self-determination remains the same.

The idea that Zionism is inherently shameful or evil is itself a form of antisemitism. The claim that "Zionism is racism" was aggressively pushed by the Soviet Union, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and other hostile actors. This false narrative was heavily promoted at the Durban Conference in South Africa, which was boycotted by Israel's allies because of its clear antisemitic overtones.

This rhetoric is designed to frame Zionism as a uniquely oppressive ideology rather than recognizing it as one of many national liberation movements. The goal of these campaigns has always been to defame Zionism, delegitimize Jewish self-determination, and portray Israel as a colonial project rather than a historical homeland for an indigenous people.

Jacobsen: What about the phrase "From the river to the sea"?

Tsukerman: "From the river to the sea" is a slogan that many college students and activists repeat without fully understanding its origins or implications—some don't even know which river and which sea it refers to. But its meaning is clear in militant and extremist contexts: it is a call for the destruction of Israel.

The phrase is not about converting Israel into a pluralistic state or reversing colonial structures. It is a euphemism for mass ethnic cleansing—the extermination or forced removal of all Jews living in Israel. The literal meaning of the phrase is that Israel must cease to exist, with its Jewish population eradicated or expelled.

This slogan has been used by terrorist organizations, including Hamas, whose charter explicitly calls for the destruction of Israel and the killing of Jews. While some activists ignorantly repeat it, believing it to be a call for Palestinian liberation, the historical and militant context of the phrase makes its meaning undeniably genocidal.

This is why the slogan is so dangerous—it is not merely a political statement but a rallying cry for violence used by those who openly advocate for Israel's destruction. When people use it without understanding its origins, they inadvertently lend credibility to an extremist ideology that calls for mass murder.

A lot of this rhetoric originates from Hamas's charter, which is explicitly genocidal and calls for the complete elimination of the State of Israel. It goes beyond opposition to Israel's existence—Hamas's ideology includes the claim that all Jews are cursed. According to this worldview, cursed people have no right to protection or inclusion in society. This rhetoric is not just anti-Israel—it is fundamentally antisemitic, targeting Jews worldwide.

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Jacobsen: Let's cover Deadly Exchange, Holocaust distortion, and the slur "kike" all at once. Deadly Exchange is an antisemitic conspiracy theory that falsely links Israel and Jewish organizations to oppressive police tactics worldwide. The idea is that whenever police behave ethically, Jews are absent from the conversation—but whenever police engage in brutality, Jews are somehow to blame. This narrative paints Jews as responsible for systemic police violence despite zero evidence to support this claim.

This conspiracy theory operates on selective framing. If the police act justly, Jewish involvement is ignored. If police engage in misconduct, it is attributed to a so-called Jewish connection—often linked to training programs or collaborations between U.S. and Israeli law enforcement. This follows the classic antisemitic pattern of collective blame, where individual Jews or institutions are held responsible for broader social injustices.

Of course, Israel is not immune to criticism regarding police misconduct—but police abuse exists in every country and affects Jews as well as non-Jews. In Israel, cases of police violence are investigated, and there are legal mechanisms for prosecuting misconduct. The idea that Jews or Israel are somehow responsible for global police brutality is completely baseless. Historically, Jews have advocated for police reform, including abolishing harsh punishments in military and law enforcement systems. In the U.S., Jewish activists have been at the forefront of civil rights and criminal justice reform.

And the slur "kike"—where does that come from?

Tsukerman: "Kike" originated during the mass migration of Eastern European Jews to the United States. Many Jewish surnames ended in "-ski" or "-ky," and some non-Jewish immigration officials shortened these names to "kai"—a pronunciation that evolved into the slur "kike".

It was not a common slur in Eastern Europe—there, other antisemitic epithets were more prevalent. In Western Europe, "Jude" or "Juden" was often used derogatorily. While "kike" has become less common in recent years, there has been a rise in modern antisemitic rhetoric, where Jews are smeared based on their perceived connection to Israel. Many contemporary antisemitic insults center around accusations of Zionism or conspiracies about Jewish global influence.

Jacobsen: And then there's Holocaust distortion with holocough—not just denying it, but twisting it into something else.

Tsukerman: Yes, Holocaust distortion comes in several forms. Some minimize the Holocaust, claiming it was exaggerated, while others deny it outright. Another tactic is to accuse Jews of exploiting the Holocaust to whitewash alleged Israeli abuses or gain sympathy for political purposes.

Now, there is also an emerging trend of blaming Jews for COVID-19—as part of a long history of scapegoating Jews for plagues, pandemics, and natural disasters. Conspiracies about the pandemic deflect from real issues, such as China's initial handling of COVID-19 and its lack of transparency. Instead, these theories redirect anger toward Jews, portraying them as manipulators of global health policies or profiteers of the crisis.

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This is not new—Jews have been blamed for everything from the Black Death in medieval Europe to financial crises in modern history. These conspiracy theories lack any scientific or historical basis. Yet, they persist because they provide an easy scapegoat for complex global events.

Jacobsen: We made it. Excellent. Thank you so much.

Tsukerman: Yes! Thank you.

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Irina Tsukerman on Bizarro Antisemitism

Irina Tsukerman, a New York-based human rights and national security attorney, examines how age-old antisemitic tropes are repurposed into modern conspiracy theories, blending medieval myths with contemporary fears of technology and global control. She discusses a range of absurd claims—from the notion of "Jewish space lasers" allegedly used to trigger wildfires to theories that the Rothschild family secretly owns the moon or that Jewish elites control the Internet, AI, and even reincarnation to maintain eternal power. These narratives explain, recycle and distort historical conspiracies, such as the blood libel and secret societies like the Illuminati and Freemasons, repackaging them with sci-fi elements like reptilian shapeshifters and occult mysteries. The speakers note that such theories rely on psychological projection—a tactic historically employed by Soviet and Nazi regimes to deflect blame—and have been amplified by social media and state-sponsored disinformation. They also highlight how far-right Christian and New Age conspiracies merge religious eschatology with pseudoscience to depict Jews as malevolent orchestrators of global events despite overwhelming evidence that modern technologies, including cryptocurrencies and blockchain, are decentralized and untraceable. While acknowledging the inherent absurdity and lack of evidence in these claims, Jacobsen and Tsukerman stress that the normalization of such narratives is dangerous because it fuels hatred radicalizes vulnerable individuals and undermines genuine public discourse. Ultimately, they warn that repackaged antisemitic myths not only distort Jewish identity and history but also contribute to a polarized society prone to real-world violence and systemic discrimination.

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As you may recall, there's a comedian and comedic actor named Mike Myers who had a series of movies called *Austin Powers*, featuring the character Austin Danger Powers. His nemesis in the movie was Dr. Evil, who wanted sharks with laser beams on their heads. Eventually, this was going to lead to a space laser. A common trope in some conspiracy theories about Jewish people involves space lasers and so on. But how did this even become a theory?

Irina Tsukerman: The phrase "Jewish space lasers" was popularized in 2021 due to a widely criticized social media post by U.S. Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene, who suggested that wildfires in California were started by a space-based laser linked to Jewish banking interests. However, humorous references to space lasers existed before, with figures like Mel Brooks using exaggerated science-fiction tropes in comedy. The idea always meant satire, but some people clearly don't understand the difference between humour, satire, parody, and reality.

Jacobsen: Now, let's see. What about cases we haven't discussed? This is funny. This is a much deeper well than I ever thought. How about intra-ethnic feuding? Some Sephardim are prejudiced toward Ashkenazim, some Ashkenazim are prejudiced toward Mizrahim, and so on.

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Does that happen? What issues are brought up?

Tsukerman: There are many different issues. First of all, there are religious divides between super-secular, Reconstructionist, or Reform Jews and more religious elements, such as Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox communities. People on opposite ends of the religious spectrum sometimes look down on each other.

There is also an attitude where anyone more religious than me is a fanatic, and anyone less religious than me is an apostate or heretic. This dynamic is not unique to Judaism, but it does exist.

Another issue is that, yes, there have been prejudices and ethnocentric attitudes among different Jewish communities. There isn't a broad standoff between Ashkenazim and Sephardim. Still, historically, in places where Ashkenazim have been the majority, they have sometimes viewed their traditions as normative. At the same time, those of Sephardim and Mizrahim have been marginalized.

For example, during the Holocaust, Greek, Romaniote, and Sephardic Jews were deported to Nazi concentration camps. Some Ashkenazi Jews initially did not recognize them as Jewish because they did not speak Yiddish and had different cultural practices.

Similarly, in Israel's early years, Ashkenazi Jews, particularly those from socialist backgrounds in Eastern Europe, dominated the government and institutions, leading to systemic discrimination against Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews in areas such as housing, education, and employment. Over time, these divisions have diminished, but tensions and disparities still exist in some aspects of society.

And when waves of Sephardic Jews from the Arab world and other regions arrived, they were often sent to peripheral towns that were underdeveloped or placed in poorly equipped refugee camps until those towns were built. They were treated as second-class citizens due to prevalent racism and cultural chauvinism.

Many Moroccan Jews who immigrated were highly educated and cultured, and they took offence to this treatment because they did not consider themselves any less educated than the European Jews. It became a cultural clash. Unfortunately, many Western and Eastern European Jews absorbed the stereotypes that were already prevalent in their respective societies. This dynamic was less about Jewish identity and the cultural environments in which these groups had been raised.

First, anyone who is different is often viewed through the lens of cultural otherness. The Sephardic Jews, for instance, did not particularly care for Ashkenazi food. There was a reason for this—much of Ashkenazi cuisine developed in impoverished areas where Jews were forced to live in ghettos and the Pale of Settlement, making do with whatever scraps were available. In contrast, many Sephardic Jews lived in elite societies and developed sophisticated culinary traditions.

This resulted in a reverse cultural standoff, some of which persists today, though to a much lesser extent. Israel has become significantly more integrated. Sephardic culture has gained mainstream

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acceptance and is now considered fashionable. Many modern social trends, particularly those influenced by intersectionality, have embraced elements of Sephardic identity.

Cultural breakthroughs have helped dismantle many of these barriers, but there was also a history of cultural isolation. For instance, Syrian Jews traditionally refused to marry outside their community and often did not accept converts to Judaism despite Jewish law prohibiting discrimination against converts. In some cases, they would even avoid marrying fellow Syrian Jews if they were from a different city. This intense insularity shaped marital and social trends.

However, that did not mean they were completely isolated. They conducted business with Jews from other backgrounds and with non-Jews throughout history. Still, these social divisions had lasting effects on relationships and integration.

Many of these cultural divisions have existed, and some still persist. There are remnants of Ashkenazi dominance in certain Jewish organizations and parts of Israeli society and infrastructure. However, with increased cultural fusion and integration, these divisions have significantly lessened over time. More Jews are migrating between the U.S. and Israel, further blending traditions and identities.

As Jews are now living together in shared spaces, they are naturally adapting and mixing. In Israel, they serve together in the military, work side by side, and intermarry more frequently. They are learning from each other's cultures, sometimes in creative ways, while also striving to preserve their unique traditions.

Many of these historical tensions are fading. While efforts are still needed to overcome them fully, the situation has improved considerably.

Jacobsen: What about intersectionality? This is typically a concept based on feminist analysis and theorization. That framework is used to identify cross-points between two or more social identities or forms of oppression.

So, what about cases where the issue is not intra-ethnic but rather related to feminist or so-called woke movements? In some instances, these movements propose something that appears benevolent but, in practice, leads to regressive and even antisemitic outcomes.

Tsukerman: Essentially, the intersectional Jewish feminist movement was quite prominent toward the end of the 20th century. However, with the rise of the BDS movement and the resurgence of anti-Israel and anti-Zionist narratives in academia, the movement's trajectory changed. Whatever its original intent, the movement, in its final iteration, became structured around a hierarchy of victimhood.

Within this structure, Jewish and pro-Israel participants—regardless of their feminist identities or other affiliations—found themselves at the bottom of the hierarchy. Many Jewish feminists were frozen out of the movement, ignored, or dismissed—particularly in the aftermath of the October 7th attacks. At that moment, many felt deeply dehumanized by their peers, who refused to condemn the mass rapes, massacres, abductions, and torture that had occurred.

The justification given was that the victims were Israeli women. Some activists viewed their suffering as secondary due to their opposition to the Israeli government or because they had

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come to accept the narrative that Israel is an apartheid state. But even if that were true, does that justify dehumanizing innocent civilians? Even if one assumes that the Israeli government is authoritarian, would the same logic apply to victims of sexual violence or murder in China, Iran, or Russia? Would people refuse to have compassion for them simply because they lived under an oppressive regime?

This attitude created a deep rift within the movement. The Jewish women who remained within the intersectional feminist structure had to suppress their Jewish identity—and certainly any pro-Israel views—to stay accepted. Others either formed their separate movements, which were more inclusive of Jewish identity, or abandoned intersectionality altogether to focus on their identity as Jewish women or pro-Israel advocates rather than feminists.

The mainstream of these intersectional feminist movements failed to step up when it mattered most. I'm not sure what the future holds for these movements. Still, unless they critically examine how political biases and stereotypes have overtaken their original mission of empowering women, they cannot remain successful. If they do not give voice to victims of international terrorism, authoritarianism, and patriarchy—regardless of nationality—their credibility is at risk.

Jacobsen: The rise of antisemitism in Canada is evident in the hate crime statistics. If you look at the data from Statistics Canada, it is clear. Among reported and verified hate crimes, the three most common are antisemitic, anti-Catholic, and anti-Muslim incidents. However, by far, the number one category—without comparison—is antisemitic hate crime. Atheists and secular types seem to take it on a chin or don’t have a report category.

In the United States, I assume the situation is similar. As far as I know, antisemitism is also rising in other countries. In some places, it remains at persistently high levels. What is your take on this?

Tsukerman: In some European countries, antisemitism has been a longstanding issue due to poor social integration. However, the contributing factors in the United States are slightly different, and multiple elements have fueled the increase.

I've mentioned some of them, such as the amplification of conspiracy theories through social media and the role of foreign state influence. Another factor is the rise of discourse theory and extreme identity politics, which began in academia with the oppressor-oppressed framework and has since permeated soft power institutions, shaping media coverage, educational policies, and public discourse.

You also have embedded organizations, such as CAIR (Council on American-Islamic Relations) and others, that have shifted their messaging to push narratives that include antisemitic elements. Even within governance, you see this influence—for example, the California ethnic studies curriculum, which was put on pause due to lawsuits over its antisemitic content.

Foreign state funding has also played a role in public K-12 education, not just in higher academia. For instance, Qatar has been involved in spreading educational materials in American public schools that exclude Israel from maps, essentially erasing its existence.

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Another issue is that many teachers are either not well-educated on these topics or are hesitant to take clear positions for fear of jeopardizing their careers. This has allowed antisemitic narratives to spread through teachers' unions, administrators, and within the broader education system. Many educators have been miseducated with the same extreme oppressor-oppressed ideology, which has taken precedence over critical thinking, rigorous academic pedagogy, and balanced historical perspectives.

The combination of all these factors has created an institutional foundation for antisemitism to persist and spread. People who are less educated and more inclined toward conspiracy theories tend to embrace antisemitic stereotypes as an anti-establishment stance. Meanwhile, those who align more with institutional authority often adopt these same stereotypes because they are reinforced by the authoritative sources they trust.

Because they tend not to question authority, both sides—those who trust establishment narratives and those who rely on alternative sources—often adopt positions they might not have reached independently. Instead, they accept what someone they view as an authority tells them, even if that authority is not part of the traditional establishment.

This ultimately results in a deterioration of critical thinking, humanistic values, and individual agency. Instead of judging people as individuals, there is an increasing tendency to generalize entire groups.

There is also a growing stigma surrounding the exploitation of political conflicts—such as those between Israel and Hamas—when these conflicts are imported into the United States and other Western societies. These tensions are being fought on local grounds, and Jewish and pro-Jewish students are often less prepared to respond. In contrast, antisemitic groups tend to be better organized.

This disparity in preparedness includes differences in emotional resilience, resources, organizational structure, and willingness to challenge the status quo without fear of consequences, such as expulsion, career setbacks, or legal repercussions. There is also a significant attitude gap between these groups.

Another issue is the false dichotomy that one must be either pro-Israel or pro-Palestinian. The pro-Palestinian position is often framed as aligned with governance and mainstream culture rather than as a general wish for peaceful coexistence. This framing ignores the possibility that addressing the extreme levels of aggression in society might require dismantling certain political structures that perpetuate conflict.

The complexity of the discourse has been lost due to a broader trend toward oversimplification, not just on this issue but in political discussions overall. People are increasingly forced into rigid ideological categories—socially, politically, religiously, and ethnically—without room for nuance.

What about people from multi-religious households? What about those who practice multiple philosophies or are multi-ethnic and have diverse backgrounds? What about individuals who reject such categorizations entirely? Even they are forced into binary ideological positions because of extreme polarization.

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Despite the clear increase in antisemitic incidents, there remains a tendency not to take antisemitism seriously. Some groups actively downplay its significance, arguing that Jews are exaggerating the issue. Others attempt to minimize Holocaust denial or dismiss extreme levels of antisemitism as something other than antisemitism itself.

There are also divisions within Jewish communities regarding how to address antisemitism. Some groups ignore antisemitism when it comes from political factions they support, creating a politically polarized and fragmented approach to recognizing and combating it.

This polarization undermines efforts to form a unified stance on what antisemitism is, how to recognize it, and how to respond.

Additionally, there is a tendency—driven by political correctness and the assumption that Jewish communities are generally law-abiding and non-disruptive—not to prioritize antisemitism as a serious issue. Since Jews are less likely to engage in violent protests or disruptive actions against authorities or other social groups, there is often less pressure on institutions to address their concerns.

Meanwhile, if antisemitic groups act aggressively, there is a widespread reluctance to confront them. No one wants to take the risk of pushing back against these movements' more radical and confrontational elements.

There is a tendency to overlook the Jewish community because, ultimately, what are they going to do about it? They might go to their representatives in Congress and lobby, hold a peaceful demonstration, or write about it in a newspaper. But they are not going to break windows, fight with the police, or engage in violent protests.

This perception of Jews as a law-abiding community is, paradoxically, doing them a disservice. It leads to them being taken less seriously, and, in some cases, it creates an impetus to put more pressure on the more reasonable side.

That is yet another factor at play. Still, another issue is that society does not know how to handle antisemites once they have reached their peak influence. People struggle to differentiate between freedom of speech as an individual right and the issue of providing platforms for hate speech.

There has been an intense internal political debate over when to de-platform individuals and when to allow them space to speak. Many are ill-prepared to engage in fact-based debates on these topics. Instead, public discourse has become more emotionally driven, with people favouring arguments that align with their preconceived beliefs rather than engaging with logic, evidence, and reasoned discussion.

This has also resulted in antisemitic figures being given a pass if they seem reasonable or correct on unrelated issues. For instance, figures like Tucker Carlson have been excused in broader political discourse because they presented what some perceived as a constructive framework on certain topics. As a result, they were able to push antisemitic narratives further, testing boundaries and growing bolder in their rhetoric. The less pushback they received, the more brazen their antisemitic and other bigoted statements became.

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That is another contributing factor. We can also discuss figures like Candace Owens and the bizarre conspiracy theories she has been promoting, which go far beyond typical antisemitic narratives. She has been pushing ideas related to Frankism, a historical religious movement associated with Jacob Frank.

Jacob Frank was a Jewish mystic and self-proclaimed messianic figure who led a controversial sect that rejected traditional Judaism in favour of radical theological and social ideas. His movement, known as Frankism, was marked by antinomian beliefs, secrecy, and conversions to Christianity.

Some fringe conspiracy theories attempt to link modern political figures to Frankism, promoting the idea that secretive and subversive elites are wielding hidden influence over global affairs. These theories play into longstanding antisemitic tropes about dual loyalties and fifth-columnist infiltration.

Frankism is frequently invoked in conspiratorial narratives claiming that secret elites manipulate politics. It aligns closely with a hardcore populist vision embraced by the far right. These theories are often tied to Illuminati-style claims, suggesting that hidden Jewish elites are orchestrating global power struggles.

This is similar to QAnon but less focused on accusations of sex crimes and more centred on the idea of a covert globalist Jewish elite engaging in deception. Figures like Candace Owens and other far-right conspiracy theorists have deliberately misused Frankism to push baseless claims about a supposed Jewish-controlled world order. There is absolutely no foundation for these theories, yet they continue to be amplified in far-right circles.

The idea of *globalist Jewish elites* and Jews as *globalists* or *ruthless cosmopolitans* has a clear historical lineage. You can trace a neo-Marxist link here because the Soviet Union used to label certain Jews as *rootless cosmopolitans*—a term used to justify antisemitic purges. Today, that rhetoric has evolved, with *cosmopolitans* and *globalists* used as veiled pejoratives.

We have seen this narrative persist for years, even being embraced by some right-wing Jews who attempt to align with these movements by focusing solely on the economic aspects of globalism. However, history has shown that no matter how much they try to fit in, this rhetoric inevitably turns against them. The broader and more far-reaching application of this idea now means that anyone with a particular set of ideas—especially those advocating for international cooperation or liberal democracy—can be accused of *globalism.*

This Jewish aspect plays into it in a deeply antisemitic way. For example, Kevin Roberts, the head of the Heritage Foundation, which was once associated with Reaganism but is now aligned with Viktor Orbán, the New Institute, and Russian nationalist ideology, has demonstrated this dynamic.

At one point, Roberts attacked someone simply for mentioning Leo Strauss, a conservative Jewish thinker, dismissing him as a *neocon* and *globalist.* It was a visceral reaction rather than a substantive political disagreement. The association of certain Jewish intellectuals with *globalism* is not based on ideological critique but rather on a deeply ingrained antisemitic reflex.

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This kind of rhetoric is far-fetched and transparently antisemitic, as the discussion itself had nothing to do with *globalism or neoconservatism.* Yet, the perception that many Jews are Democrats and part of elite institutions has fueled these stereotypes and will likely continue to do so.

Jacobsen: A lot of these conversations—especially ones involving figures like Candace Owens—whether or not they are deliberate in intent, function to expand the Overton window for antisemitic discourse. The details of what they bring up may not even be coherent or historically accurate, but they serve to normalize these narratives.

If there is any conscious ideological push, this seems to be its main effect: shifting what is acceptable to say in public discourse. That is probably the most dangerous aspect of the increasing use of antisemitic language and ideas in mainstream discussions.

What about left-wing versions of religious antisemitism?

We often see Jesus portrayed in Western media as a blond-haired, blue-eyed man of European descent—almost as if he were from Mississippi or the American Midwest. This version of Jesus is so ingrained in certain Christian communities that it has led to humorous memes, where people mistakenly put up images of Obi-Wan Kenobi from *Star Wars* as depictions of Jesus.

However, beyond this, there are sectarian religious movements, particularly within certain African American religious groups and other identity-based theologies, that promote the idea of a *Black Jesus.* There is also a broader, more problematic trend where some left-wing religious movements deny that Jesus was Jewish at all.

What do you make of these left-wing religious narratives and their versions of antisemitism, particularly those that attempt to erase Jesus' Jewish identity?

Tsukerman: First of all, the idea that Jesus was anything other than a Jewish individual living in that historical time frame is outright false. While accounts differ regarding what happened next, there is no serious academic dispute about his Jewish identity. The fact that some people feel the need to assign Jesus a specific ethnic or racial identity beyond that is troubling. If you are a Christian, then Jesus' ethnicity should not be of primary concern, as Christianity is centred on his teachings rather than his background. If you are an academic scholar, you should acknowledge historical realities rather than attempt to reshape them for ideological reasons.

Even more concerning is the recent push to identify Jesus as a so-called "Palestinian," a term he would never have used to describe himself. The Romans, who imposed the name *Palestina* on the region, were colonizers. Modern post-colonial movements should recognize this fact and, if they are consistent in their principles, should not be aligned with the terminology of the Roman colonial framework. Instead, they should acknowledge that the people living in that region at the time—including Jesus—identified as Israelites or Judeans, not Palestinians. They certainly did not call themselves Romans, as they lived under Roman rule as second-class citizens, at best, without full rights.

The historical use of the term "Palestinian" evolved much later. When it first became commonly used under the British Mandate, it was a descriptor for Jews living in the region before the

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establishment of Israel. The Arabs of the time did not identify as Palestinians; they referred to themselves based on their tribal names and Arab ancestry. It was not until the 1960s, when the Soviet Union played a role in fostering a national movement, that the term "Palestinian" began to be widely used as an Arab national identity. This anachronistic historical revisionism is ideological in nature, serving to erase Jewish historical identity, delegitimize Jewish ties to the land, and reframe religious narratives through a contemporary political lens.

This type of historical distortion is deeply troubling because it not only denies Jewish history but also introduces an unnecessary and divisive political element into religion. Religion is meant to unify people, promote healing, and provide a framework for coexistence. It is not supposed to be used to manufacture ethnic or religious division. When religion becomes a battleground for power struggles, it ceases to function as a religious institution and instead becomes a political tool. This is not a religious issue—it is a manipulation of history to serve a political agenda. What we see now has nothing to do with Christianity, Jesus, or genuine religious beliefs. It is an effort to impose contemporary political ideologies onto historical narratives to fit a specific agenda.

This approach closely resembles the KGB's tactics in Soviet Russia, where they sought to infiltrate and manipulate the Russian Orthodox Church, turning it into a state-controlled ideological entity rather than an independent religious institution. Instead of adhering to its spiritual traditions, the Church under Soviet control became an instrument of official narratives. Similarly, what we are witnessing today is an attempt to redefine religious history—not to promote faith but to weaponize it for political purposes.

Jacobsen: We previously touched on woke ideology and its antisemitic elements. This is one of those complex issues where progressivism sometimes overlaps with conservative or centrist positions in certain evidence-based areas. However, it takes on a different nature when it abandons evidence and becomes purely ideological. It warrants a distinct title that separates it from its original intent. In this case, *woke antisemitism* falls into that category.

Where do you think the overstretch occurs beyond what we have already discussed regarding left-wing religious antisemitism, historical revisionism, and religious narrative distortion? Specifically, how do you see the intersectional framework—originally developed in feminist analysis—used as a tool for this kind of ideological expansion?

Tsukerman: I would call it *regressive liberalism* rather than progressivism. It is regressive in the sense that it returns to tribalist politics, and it is illiberal because it fails to recognize individual rights, personal autonomy, and the moral agency of individuals. Instead of acknowledging that every person has their capacity for reason, conscience, and human rights—whether understood as natural rights or, for the religious, as divinely endowed—it judges people solely based on group identity.

That is not to say that group identity cannot be an influencing factor in one's worldview or experiences, but people still have the ability to make their own moral choices. The core values of the Enlightenment and the classical liberal tradition are the capacity for moral reasoning and individual responsibility. This principle is not merely a product of modernity—it can be traced

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back to Aristotle, who emphasized character over status despite living in a different historical context. If you look at his *Nicomachean Ethics*, particularly his treatise on friendship, he argued that true friendship is defined by virtue and character rather than by social position or external circumstances. That was an extraordinary idea in his time and remains fundamental today.

Similarly, in religious traditions, moral choice is considered one of the few things human beings have control over. Everything else—circumstances, fate, divine will—may be outside of our control, but moral autonomy is central to human dignity. Identity politics, in contrast, undermines this principle by reducing individuals to the circumstances of their birth rather than recognizing their ability to rise above them. Psychological factors, mental health, and environmental challenges can influence moral choices. Still, they are ultimately the defining aspect of a person's character.

When society shifts away from moral autonomy and instead judges people based on external categories—whether race, gender, ethnicity, or class—it erodes the very foundation of justice and individual dignity. Instead of allowing people to define themselves through their actions and values, identity politics forces them into predefined boxes, stripping them of the capacity for individual moral accountability. Unless we focus on a person's choices rather than external attributes, we lose sight of what it means to be human.

Jacobsen: What about sociocultural and psychological antisemitism? Sociocultural antisemitism is somewhat more obvious—it manifests within governance systems, cultural norms, or ethnic groups that adhere to ideological frameworks that contain antipathy toward Jewish people. These systems may institutionalize antisemitism in policies, education, or legal structures, making it a deeply ingrained societal problem.

However, psychological antisemitism is a bit trickier to analyze. What do you make of the psychology of an antisemitic individual? You referenced earlier how difficult it is to know what to do with someone who has already adopted antisemitic beliefs, particularly when those beliefs have become deeply embedded in their worldview. Is there a way to truly deradicalize such individuals?

When I spoke with a counter-extremism and counter-terrorism expert who worked for CSIS (Canada's intelligence agency) for 30 years, he was quite cynical about the prospect of fully rehabilitating former extremists. He expressed skepticism toward those who go on public speaking tours as *reformed extremists*, questioning whether any of them have truly abandoned their ideologies or if they change the way they present their beliefs.

Suppose antisemitism operates under a similar psychological framework as religious or political extremism. In that case, those who embrace it may never fully lose it. They might suppress it under social pressure or shift its form, but the underlying mentality could remain intact. What are your thoughts on whether antisemitism, once deeply ingrained, can ever be completely unlearned?

Tsukerman: I will start with the first element—sociocultural antisemitism—because culture plays a crucial role in shaping societal attitudes. Culture is more than just food, language, or identity; it influences social norms, governance, and how people perceive others. To take an

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extreme example, consider Gaza and the deep-rooted antisemitism that has developed over the decades. The issue is not whether every individual there supports Hamas—many people in Gaza disagree with Hamas, viewing it as corrupt and responsible for their suffering. However, this does not negate the fact that antisemitism has been systematically ingrained into the society. For decades, through media, education, and political propaganda, an ideology has been cultivated that promotes not just anti-Israel sentiment but outright hatred of Jews.

This indoctrination begins at a young age, with children being raised to view Jews not as individuals but as enemies. This kind of conditioning creates a deeply ingrained belief system that requires extensive and systematic effort to undo. It is not simply a matter of changing political leadership; it requires long-term psychological and cultural rehabilitation. We saw the effects of this indoctrination after October 7th, when masses of civilians voluntarily participated in attacks, following Hamas operatives into Israel and assisting in the abduction of civilians. Nobody forced them to do this, and they were not acting under direct coercion at that moment. Yet, they engaged in violence, cooperated with Hamas, and, in some cases, even took hostages into their own homes. Some went so far as to kill children from the Bibas family, demonstrating the extent of dehumanization that has taken hold.

Furthermore, when Israel issued reward offers for those willing to provide information on hostages or help them escape, not a single person came forward. This was shocking because even during Nazi Germany, there were non-Jewish civilians—*righteous gentiles*—who risked their lives to hide Jews or help them escape. Even in countries where collaborationism and antisemitism were widespread, individuals made moral choices to stand against injustice. Yet, in this case, there is no clear evidence that anyone in Gaza attempted to do the same. At best, some may not have directly participated in the violence, but they did not intervene. This reflects a severe moral breakdown—a level of societal dehumanization where war crimes and human rights abuses are not only normalized but celebrated. Such a collapse of basic human empathy indicates a deeply ingrained cultural problem that must be addressed for that society to function properly.

This leads directly to psychological antisemitism, which is even more difficult to counteract. Many individuals who harbour antisemitic beliefs may have never even met a Jewish person. They *know* they hate Jews, but they cannot articulate why. The hatred becomes instinctual, detached from reality, and embedded into their identity. At that point, it is no longer a rational belief but a deeply ingrained psychological disturbance. When an individual cannot separate their worldview from their hatred, they lose the ability to examine their own biases critically.

However, antisemitism does not always manifest in such extreme forms. Some individuals are simply ignorant—they have been fed misinformation or stereotypes without actively engaging in hateful behaviour. These people can sometimes be reached through education and exposure to accurate information. They may begin to question their biases if they encounter logical arguments or meet individuals who contradict their preconceived stereotypes. Over time, seeds of doubt can be planted, and they may shift their perspectives with the right exposure.

But once antisemitism reaches the level of fanaticism—when a person's entire identity is built around that hatred—it becomes significantly harder to undo. If someone defines themselves

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primarily by their opposition to Jews, Israel, or Zionism, rational arguments alone may not be enough to break through that indoctrination. I cannot say such individuals can't change; there are cases of people who have recognized the destructiveness of their beliefs and have worked to undo them. However, the deeper the indoctrination, the harder the path to deradicalization. It requires not just education but a fundamental transformation of worldview—something that many people may never fully achieve.

What would it take to undo antisemitic radicalization? I do not specialize in deradicalization, but it would require dismantling a person's deeply ingrained identity—something that has likely been reinforced since childhood or embraced so fully later in life that it has become their primary lens for understanding the world. To truly reverse such an extreme worldview, the person would need to be psychologically broken down and forced to confront the realization that their foundational beliefs were entirely wrong. Only then could they rebuild their identity around something positive as a substitute. This kind of transformation is not merely an intellectual shift; it is a complete reorganization of mindset, especially when antisemitism has become a core part of someone's identity.

There is, of course, a range of psychological engagement with antisemitism, just as there is with other belief systems. Someone who has been misinformed but has never internalized hatred may be able to change their perspective simply through education and exposure to different viewpoints. But someone whose entire identity is built on antisemitic ideology—whether due to upbringing or deliberate radicalization—requires a much deeper psychological shift. It is similar to mental health conditions: a person experiencing mild situational depression may recover with time and support, whereas someone with a clinically diagnosed condition may need intensive intervention. Similarly, some individuals may have been raised with the wrong ideas and never had proper exposure to alternative perspectives. In contrast, others have fully structured their identities around an antisemitic worldview. The latter group is far more difficult to reach and requires significant intervention to break down their ingrained biases.

Jacobsen: Soviet propaganda has been revised and rebranded over time. How has this happened in the current context? Was it done as a formal process, or has it evolved organically among ideological actors working in those spaces? How have narratives that closely mirror past Soviet propaganda emerged independently yet still align with the same conclusions and rhetoric?

Tsukerman: I would not say that these narratives emerged separately because Soviet intelligence agencies never truly disappeared, and neither did the tradition of information warfare they developed. Russian intelligence and propaganda operations have a five-hundred-year continuity, transitioning from the Tsarist era to the Soviet Union and now to contemporary Russian security agencies. Many of the narratives we see today are not new; they have been recycled, sometimes with slight modifications, but maintaining an unbroken ideological continuity.

A clear example of this rebranded propaganda is the *blood libel*, one of the oldest antisemitic conspiracies. In medieval times, the blood libel was the accusation that Jews kidnapped and murdered Christian children for occult rituals. While this idea had largely faded in Western societies, it resurfaced in the Middle East thanks to Soviet intervention. The Soviets deliberately spread these narratives as part of their broader effort to destabilize the region and turn Arab

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nations against Israel. The modern iteration of the blood libel takes many forms: false claims that Jews poison Palestinian wells, that they target children specifically for violence, or that they carry out hidden acts of mass murder. Some of these accusations have even included reports of dead children who later turn out to be alive, showing the sheer fabrication involved in these claims.

Another modern rebranding of this concept involves Ukraine. A widely circulated antisemitic conspiracy theory alleges that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, who is Jewish, is actively destroying Christian Orthodox churches or establishing "fake" religious institutions. The implication is that he is doing so because he is not Christian. Therefore, as a Jew, he is inherently hostile to Christianity.

However, the reality is entirely different. The actual issue in Ukraine is that Russia has used the Russian Orthodox Church as an instrument of intelligence and political influence. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church does not recognize these Russian-controlled churches, which Russian intelligence agencies have long infiltrated. Many ethnic Russians living in Ukraine also do not recognize these institutions as legitimate. As a result, Ukrainian authorities have treated them not as religious institutions but as fronts for security operations.

Despite the real security concerns at play, the antisemitic component of this propaganda seeks to frame Zelensky as an outsider, an imposter at the helm of the country, working to *erase Christian tradition* and *target Christians*. This rhetoric echoes centuries-old antisemitic tropes, now repackaged to fit contemporary geopolitical narratives. What we are witnessing is not new antisemitism but rather a continuous, evolving cycle of old conspiracy theories being adapted to new political contexts.

Tucker Carlson was one of the prominent figures amplifying these narratives using his large media platforms. His ability to inject these conspiratorial and antisemitic tropes into mainstream discourse has played a key role in their continued spread.

Jacobsen: Okay, so aside from one of the oldest and strangest antisemitic myths—the blood libel and ritual sacrifice—there's also the claim that these ideas have somehow been linked to modern organ trafficking and underground cabals. It feels like stepping into a conversation that suddenly shifts into discussing *realms*, as if we've left reality and entered the world of J.R.R. Tolkien. It's a strange thing. It's so completely abnormal.

These theories exist in extremely closed-off informational bubbles, where people consume and reinforce the same extreme ideas. To fully buy into them, one has to be disconnected from reality and entrenched in these insulated ideological communities. One of the more bizarre ones you brought to my attention was about shapeshifting reptilian hybrids.

People have likely seen clips on conspiracy websites, particularly in the Alex Jones ecosystem or from David Icke himself. These clips often feature low-quality graphics where someone's eyes *momentarily* appear reptilian—before returning to normal. It's always minor, a digital artifact or a compression glitch, but the conspiratorial mindset takes it as *proof*. They look away, look back, and suddenly, *Oh my God!*—the person is back to normal.

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But the deeper conspiracy, according to Icke and his followers, is that reptilian-human hybrids secretly control the world. In particular, conspiracists influenced by Icke claim that *Jewish elites*—most often the Rothschilds—are shapeshifting reptilian overlords. Their "evidence" includes completely mundane things, like someone licking their lips or blinking in a way they consider *weird*. Somehow, these minor actions become *proof* of an elaborate extraterrestrial conspiracy.

This theory merges elements of *sci-fi*, *occultism*, and *classic antisemitic stereotypes*, portraying Jews not just as scheming globalists but as literal non-human entities with supernatural abilities. It's one of the strangest iterations of antisemitism—a tripartite fusion of xenophobia, fantasy, and age-old conspiracy theories.

This is different from traditional antisemitic tropes, like depicting Jews as money-hoarders as if dragons (à la Smaug) or using racist caricatures with exaggerated features like big noses and scheming hands. Instead, this version takes it even further, arguing that Jews are an entirely different species, controlling world events from the shadows.

What do you make of how David Icke's ideas have been incorporated into these other conspiracy theories, creating this surreal blend of *sci-fi occult antisemitism*?

Tsukerman: The occult element in conspiracy theories is fascinating because it has been a recurring theme in both Soviet and early Russian propaganda, as well as in Nazi propaganda. Both ideologies had an unusual obsession with the occult. If you trace it back historically, during the Middle Ages, there was a widespread conspiracy theory that specifically accused Jews of being in league with the devil, practicing dark magic, and engaging in sinister rituals.

The *blood libel* was a major part of this, as demonic rituals were often believed to require blood sacrifices or the use of human blood to summon supernatural entities. While the premise is completely irrational, this madness has an internal logic. It builds on the portrayal of Jews as outsiders who do not fit into society but instead act as chameleons—blending in while secretly working toward global domination. This theme is closely tied to other so-called *traditional antisemitic* conspiracy theories, such as those about Jewish elites hoarding money and power.

Then there is the third element, which claims that Jews, particularly wealthy or influential ones, are shapeshifting—both metaphorically and literally. The metaphorical version argues that Jewish elites manipulate society by adapting to different roles and disguising their true intentions to deceive the public. The more extreme and bizarre version of this is the *reptilian conspiracy theory*, which has been folded into modern conspiratorial subcultures, particularly among followers of QAnon, pseudoscience, and conspiracy fiction. Some argue that David Icke's *reptilian* theory was inherently antisemitic from the beginning, as it aligns with these older tropes about Jewish deception, global control, and non-human status.

You may have heard the common joke about Mark Zuckerberg being a *lizard person*. It became a meme, especially after his congressional hearings related to Meta and Facebook. I assumed it was just a joke about his somewhat robotic demeanour when I first heard it. But when I connected it back to Icke's reptilian theory, I realized that these ideas had started infiltrating mainstream discourse. What began as a fringe, bizarre conspiracy theory started affecting certain individuals' perceptions.

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This phenomenon has gained a significant cult following. Many people are deeply engaged in these conspiracy circles—not just JFK conspiracy theorists but those involved in much weirder, more outlandish theories. The *reptilian* myth has influenced a wide range of online conspiracy subcultures, including QAnon and UFO enthusiasts. Interestingly, despite being commonly associated with those circles, QAnon is not strictly a right-wing movement—it has cross-sectional political appeal. Meanwhile, the UFO subculture has transformed from being a niche sci-fi fascination, once dismissed as *nerds in their parent's basements*, into something the Pentagon and other government agencies have officially discussed over the past few years.

In the UK, an entire division is now focused on analyzing whether some of these claims have merit. This shift into *official* discussions has fueled more speculation. Intelligence agencies have conducted bizarre experiments in the past—take *Project MKUltra* in the 1960s, for example—and the Soviet Union had its equivalent programs. Many conspiracy theories today harken back to an *anti-intelligence agency* mindset, drawing from real historical operations while incorporating wildly exaggerated and fictional elements.

All of this ultimately ties back into the *shapeshifting global elite* myth. David Icke is not just seen as an eccentric conspiracy theorist making up bizarre stories for a living—many see him as a tool, possibly being used by foreign powers to push these narratives into mainstream discourse deliberately. Whether intentionally or not, his ideas have contributed to the spread of antisemitic, anti-establishment, and deeply conspiratorial thinking on a global scale.

There is strong evidence that conspiracy theories, particularly those with antisemitic undertones, have a high degree of acceptance in Russia. This is an important factor to consider because it ties into a broader history of racial and eugenics-based antisemitism that emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. During this period, pseudoscientific racial theories falsely claimed that Jews had genetic traits that made them inherently deceptive or subversive. Nazi ideology took this to its extreme, using fabricated biological classifications to label Jews and other groups as genetically inferior, contributing directly to the Holocaust.

This same thread of pseudoscience has continued to evolve in modern conspiracy circles. One of the strange mutations of these theories involves the claim that Jewish elites are involved in genetic experiments aimed at altering human DNA. This is often linked to transhumanism, artificial intelligence, and the biotech industry. It is also tied into anti-vaccine conspiracy theories, with accusations that Jewish scientists or financiers are manipulating human genetics for nefarious purposes. These ideas are completely unfounded but persist in various subcultures that view scientific advancement through a paranoid, conspiratorial lens.

And who frequently comes up in these transhumanist conspiracy theories? Elon Musk, alongside a few other high-profile tech billionaires. While I am not suggesting that Musk himself subscribes to QAnon, occult accusations, or theories about a so-called *satanic cabal*, there are certainly people within these ideological circles who try to connect him to these narratives. Different subcultures—ranging from QAnon supporters to transhumanist skeptics—intersect unexpectedly. The transhumanist billionaires and the QAnon crowd are not necessarily the same people, but their beliefs overlap in certain areas.

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For instance, former General Mike Flynn, a prominent QAnon figure, is not a transhumanist. Still, he aligns closely with figures like Musk, Tucker Carlson, and current and former Trump officials. Despite their ideological differences, all of these conspiracy narratives seem to converge on antisemitic tropes, whether through overt accusations or more subtle dog whistles. Even when these theories have different angles—whether they focus on global finance, artificial intelligence, or biotech—they all somehow end up reinforcing the same core antisemitic narratives.

Jacobsen: Now, here is something I did not know before. The only time I have heard the term *golem* was in *Star Trek: Picard*, in one of the later seasons, maybe season two. In that storyline, Picard dies, but his consciousness is transferred into an artificial golem body, allowing him to live on despite his degenerative illness.

A conspiracy theory centred around the *golem*, twisting its origins in Jewish legend. In traditional Jewish folklore, a golem was a mystical creature made from clay to protect Jewish communities from danger. However, modern conspiracy theorists have warped this legend into something sinister, claiming that Jews possess the ability to create artificial, soulless beings that they use to control the masses.

What the hell is going on?

Tsukerman: This is yet another iteration of the same conspiratorial framework—one that takes elements of Jewish mysticism, particularly from Kabbalah, and weaponizes them against Jews. These conspiracies mix religious esotericism with occult paranoia, reinforcing the narrative that Jews are secretive manipulators of dark forces.

I am not going to comment on whether Kabbalah has any legitimacy as a mystical or spiritual tradition, but what is clear is that antisemitic conspiracy theorists have used it to fuel fears about hidden Jewish power. This is part of a broader historical pattern of distorting Jewish religious and cultural concepts to fit an antisemitic agenda.

At its core, this fearmongering is about *othering*—taking something poorly understood and turning it into a source of suspicion and paranoia. These conspiracies deny the moral foundations of Jewish traditions and instead try to project some form of *Jewish supremacism* onto them. The idea that Jews see themselves as a *chosen people* is deliberately twisted to suggest that they view non-Jews as inferior or disposable.

Ultimately, all of these narratives—from medieval *blood libel* myths to modern *golem* conspiracies—stem from the same fundamental antisemitic fear: the belief that Jews possess secret knowledge or power that they use to manipulate the world. It is the same myth, recycled repeatedly and adapted to different historical and cultural contexts.

There is an underlying *oppressor-oppressed* narrative woven through all of these conspiracy theories, but at this point, it is not necessarily confined to a left-wing ideological framework. It is a broader pattern of *scaffolding*—where an entire group is falsely vilified—because acknowledging that a group of people follows a moral tradition based on enlightened principles would undermine the dehumanization that fuels these conspiratorial movements.

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This is not just a political issue but a deeply rooted *ethical, moral, and philosophical struggle.* The projection of Jews as *demonic* is not new; it is simply another way to carry out smear campaigns and character assassination against an entire people and their traditions. This narrative has morphed, adapting to different historical and cultural moments. Still, ultimately, it has always been about *power*.

One could argue that people who fall for these conspiracy theories have something inherently wrong with them—that they are mentally unstable or overly prone to fantastical thinking. But those who actively *push* these narratives into the mainstream are not deluded. They know exactly what they are doing. They deliberately inject these bizarre elements—references to *dark forces, magic, demons, elite manipulation*—because they are effective tools for *fear-mongering*. Their goal is to manipulate the *uneducated masses*, fueling paranoia to serve a larger ideological or political agenda.

Today, we still see people rejecting modern science in favour of pseudoscience. Some individuals, instead of seeking proper cancer treatment, turn to *crystals and spiritual healing*—not because they are enlightened, but because they lack a scientific education. Suppose people in the 21st century can still fall for such obvious misinformation. In that case, it is no surprise that they also fall for these *mishmash conspiracy theories* about Jewish control.

One of the strangest developments is how the *golem*—originally a protective figure in Jewish folklore—has been distorted in modern antisemitic narratives. In these conspiracy circles, the golem has been recast as a symbol of *non-Jews*—the so-called *goyim nations*—being manipulated by Jewish elites. Jews, according to this narrative, are *shaping* non-Jews into puppets and controlling them from behind the scenes. This theme connects back to *classic antisemitic myths* about Jews orchestrating global events, from the *stock market crash* to *9/11* to *the Russian Revolution*. It is just another repackaging of the same old accusation—that Jews secretly pull the strings of world affairs.

But here is where it takes an even more bizarre turn. The *golem myth* has now been linked to *AI technology* and *media influence*. Conspiracists claim that Jews are using *machines* and *social structures* as modern-day golems to control society. They link this to *AI development*, *singularity*, and *transhumanism*—specifically, implanting neural chips in human brains. The claim is that Jewish elites are leading these advancements as part of a grand plan to manipulate and dominate the world.

It is beyond absurd. But what makes it even more ironic is that many of the *same people* who accuse Jews of promoting transhumanist agendas are *also* the ones *actively participating* in those same movements. The *biggest globalists*—the tech billionaires pushing transhumanism—are, in a sense, *globalists by definition*. Yet, they tend to align with the very people who blame Jews for being *globalists*. It is a contradiction that reveals the fundamentally incoherent nature of these conspiracy theories.

Jacobsen: Let's talk about the claims regarding Jewish people or Israel, particularly the accusations about *Jewish control of the weather.*

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This sounds eerily similar to the earlier conspiracy theories about *space lasers*. Still, in this case, it includes claims that Jews can *cause earthquakes*, *trigger hurricanes*, and even manipulate weather patterns for *political or financial gain.* It would be hilarious if it weren't for the underlying *real* antisemitism and racism behind it.

One of the most well-known proponents of this theory was *Louis Farrakhan*, who suggested that Israel had the power to create hurricanes. That's a recent precedent for this nonsense within our collective memory. When a prominent figure within the *Nation of Islam* makes such claims, it influences his community. It lends a dangerous level of credibility to something that should be dismissed outright.

What are your thoughts on this?

Tsukerman: Like many antisemitic myths, this one originated in *medieval Europe*. Jewish communities were often accused of causing *natural disasters, plagues, and famines*, usually as a pretext for persecution.

One of the more ironic aspects of this history is that during the Black Plague, *Jews had lower death rates* than the general population. But the reason was *not supernatural*—it was *hygienic*. Jewish laws and rituals included *regular hand washing*, which was *uncommon in Europe then*. Because of this, their mortality rates were sometimes lower, which led to wild accusations of witchcraft and sorcery. People could not comprehend why Jews weren't dying at the same rates, so instead of thinking logically, they resorted to conspiracy theories.

Additionally, Jewish dietary laws contributed to higher survival rates. *Rats*, which were the primary carriers of the plague, were *not kosher*, and Jewish households generally avoided contact with them. Kosher food laws also required strict cleanliness to avoid contamination by insects or diseases. These factors likely played a role in reducing plague deaths among Jewish communities. But rather than investigating the practical reasons behind this, *people blamed the Jews*. They used it as an excuse for further persecution.

Another factor contributed to the weather-related myths. Jewish prayers often include *requests for rain*, particularly because Judaism originated in *arid climates* where rain was crucial for survival. When Jews migrated to other regions, these prayers remained part of their tradition. However, in deeply superstitious societies, some people likely believed that these prayers had an actual effect on the weather, leading to myths about Jewish control over nature.

Fast-forward to today and these *ridiculous myths have never disappeared*—they have just been *updated* for a modern audience. Instead of medieval superstition, they have been repackaged into *pseudoscientific* and *technological* narratives about climate change.

Of course, *Louis Farrakhan* remains one of the most vocal modern figures spreading this nonsense. Whether he *believes his* claims or finds it *convenient* to push these ideas for political and ideological reasons is unclear, but the impact is undeniable.

Another example of these weather-control conspiracies involves the *Rothschild family*, who have long been central figures in antisemitic myths about Jewish control of banking and global finance. Even after many Rothschild descendants *ceased to be Jewish*—because of intermarriage

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with non-Jewish families—the conspiracy theories persisted. In reality, the Rothschilds were just *one* of many prominent banking families. Still, because they were Jewish, they became the *primary target* of these myths.

One particularly bizarre claim suggests that the *Rothschilds funded secret weather control programs*. The supposed program, *HAARP* (*High-Frequency Active Auroral Research Program*), is a real government research project that studies the ionosphere. Still, conspiracy theorists have turned it into a *Jewish-led* initiative for controlling the weather. The name itself sounds like something out of *Ghostbusters*, which only adds to the absurdity of the theory.

Then, of course, we have the infamous *Jewish space lasers*. U.S. Congresswoman *Marjorie Taylor Greene* promoted the idea that *Jewish-funded space lasers* were responsible for wildfires in California. It is yet another modern iteration of these age-old conspiracies—just repackaged with *science-fiction aesthetics* to appeal to contemporary conspiracy theorists.

At the core of all these narratives—whether about *plague*, *weather*, *financial control*, or *space lasers*—is the *same underlying antisemitic trope*: the idea that Jews possess *secret, supernatural*, or *technological* power that they use to manipulate world events. It's the same myth, repeated over and over again, just dressed up in a new language to fit the fears of the time.

It was in 2021, years before the latest wildfires. I'm afraid to think what conspiracy theorists will come up with next if even fewer wildfires were blamed on Jewish space lasers. U.S. Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene implied that elite Jewish bankers—continuing the longstanding trope about the Rothschilds—were involved in using directed energy weapons to cause environmental disruption for profit. This follows a pattern of antisemitic conspiracy theories that frame Jewish individuals or entities as secret global manipulators.

Some people have taken these ideas even further, not just blaming Jews broadly—whatever that means—but specifically accusing Israel of possessing secret technology to manipulate the weather for strategic advantage.

For example, in 2018, Brigadier General Gholam Reza Jalali, an Iranian general, accused Israel of "stealing rain clouds" to cause droughts despite scientific evidence refuting such claims. In reality, Iran's droughts are caused by climate change and severe environmental mismanagement, including the overuse of water resources, inefficient irrigation practices, deforestation, and the construction of dams that disrupt natural river systems. Rather than any external interference, these factors have significantly contributed to water shortages.

Cloud seeding is a scientifically studied technique to enhance precipitation. However, it is not a secret or exclusive to any one country. Ironically, the United Arab Emirates has been one of the leading nations in cloud seeding research, alongside China, the United States, and Russia. There is no credible evidence linking Israel—or Jewish organizations—to covert global weather manipulation. Cloud seeding involves dispersing silver iodide or sodium chloride into clouds to encourage rainfall. However, it is not a form of weather control like conspiracy theorists claim; it cannot cause droughts, hurricanes, or other major climate phenomena.

The practice remains controversial, with ongoing debates about its effectiveness and potential long-term climatic impacts. However, it is linked to multiple governments and scientific

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institutions operating within the framework of regulated meteorological research. While having greater control over weather patterns could theoretically be advantageous, humanity is nowhere near developing precise, large-scale weather control technologies. Some cloud seeding attempts have even produced unintended consequences, including excessive rainfall or failure to produce significant precipitation.

Despite the scientific facts, conspiracy theories persist. Why do such ideas persist, even when there is clear evidence that they are either entirely false or grossly misrepresented?

Several key factors drive their persistence:

1. Mistrust of Science and Government – Many conspiracy theorists distrust anything related to climate science, dismissing it as politically motivated or controlled by hidden elites.
2. Skepticism toward scientific explanations—Some people gravitate toward more fantastical, emotionally compelling explanations rather than accepting evidence-based reasoning.
3. Antisemitic Tropes – There is a long history of antisemitic narratives depicting Jews as secretive global orchestrators of political and financial power. The Rothschild family, in particular, has been falsely accused for centuries of manipulating world events despite clear historical evidence debunking such claims.
4. Social Media and Disinformation – The rise of social media algorithms has allowed misinformation to spread at unprecedented speeds, pushing extremist narratives into mainstream discourse. What once existed in fringe communities is now amplified worldwide, reinforcing existing biases and paranoia.

Jacobsen: I am shocked by how much nonsense is still being spread. Some conspiracy theorists go as far as to claim that the Rothschild family is connected to space-based weaponry or energy beams supposedly used for global Jewish domination. These claims are frequently intertwined with Illuminati, Freemason, and mind-control conspiracies, often targeting Ashkenazi Jews in particular.

Why is this subgroup singled out? Likely because Ashkenazi Jews make up the largest Jewish population worldwide and have historically been prominent in intellectual, scientific, and cultural achievements. This visibility makes them frequent targets for those who believe in secret global power structures.

These conspiracy theories often involve symbols, numerology, and coded gestures, claiming that these elements are evidence of covert world manipulation. However, such ideas are nothing more than modern iterations of centuries-old antisemitic myths repackaged for the digital age.

They claim that there are mind control techniques used to influence societies—whether through messaging in media, entertainment, or education. This is a more complex issue. I'm sure there are Freemasons out there who would probably find these claims hilarious. Let it be because there aren't that many Freemasons in the world.

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There are Christian, Muslim, Sikh, Jewish, and other Freemasons. The primary requirements for joining the Freemasons are to be part of the brotherhood and believe in God. Those are the two main conditions. Ironically, for a long time, Freemasons were mostly Christian and did not have much Jewish representation.

Tsukerman: The reason Freemasonry is often linked to conspiracy theories is that there is a longstanding tradition of combining antisemitism with myths about secret societies, claiming that shadowy elites manipulate world events.

It is a classic conspiracy theory that there is a "shadow state" or "deep state," or some secret cabal of globalist leaders pulling the strings. One of the biggest contributing factors to this narrative is The Protocols of the Elders of Zion. This fabricated text incorporated Masonic symbolism and themes, falsely linking Jews and Freemasons as co-conspirators in a global plot.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, there was a significant wave of anti-Masonic hysteria. Freemasons were accused—separately from Jews—of being a secretive, subversive force simply because they were an exclusive group that the general public didn't understand. It was easier to blame mysterious societies for societal upheavals than to analyze the realcauses—such as wars waged by European monarchs, economic crises, and political turmoil.

Ironically, European monarchies and the Catholic Church were particularly suspicious of Masonic groups and often linked them to Jewish financiers.

Why? Because they couldn't control them. Ironically, Jewish financiers were major contributors to European monarchies—funding wars, infrastructure, and economic ventures. However, monarchs who owed them money found it convenient to demonize them, blaming them for secretive plots rather than repaying their debts. This also prevented Jewish financiers from gaining too much political influence.

Another major conspiracy theory revolves around the Illuminati, a relatively short-lived Bavarian secret society. Over time, it was folded into larger conspiracy theories, often connected to Jews, Masons, and world domination.

In the 20th century, Nazi propaganda amplified these theories. The Nazis promoted the Judeo-Masonic conspiracy, falsely blaming Jews and Freemasons for both capitalism and communism, as well as for Germany's economic struggles.

Why? Because it was easy and convenient. The theory played into existing antisemitic Nazi imagery, which was obsessed with the occult, secret societies, and hidden power structures. Additionally, because the Nazis were National Socialists, they shared some of the same conspiracy theories that had circulated elsewhere.

It's easier to repeat past tropes than to come up with something original. Once a conspiracy theory is established and gains traction in the public consciousness, it doesn't need to be reinvented. Instead, it can be recycled and rebranded for new audiences, reigniting old fears and prejudices.

Francisco Franco in Spain and Benito Mussolini also made similar claims to justify political repression. However, while they promoted authoritarian control, they were not as obsessed with

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the destruction of world Jewry as the Nazis were. Nevertheless, they leveraged antisemitic rhetoric to rally public support, even when it was not always necessary against actual Jewish communities.

In the 20th century and today, far-right and other online conspiracy theorists continue to make similar claims, suggesting that Jews, Freemasons, the Illuminati, Lizard People, and other shadowy groups control governments, banks, and the media. These theories often ignore basic contradictions—such as the fact that many of the world's largest banks are not controlled by Jews.

For instance, some of the biggest financial backers of Western institutions today are not Jewish financiers but the government of Qatar, which has made massive investments in Western banks, media organizations, and real estate. However, this fact is not convenient for conspiracy theorists, so they ignore it.

Jacobsen: Now, here's one I hadn't heard of before, but it seems relevant—the claim that Jews possess time travel technology. According to this bizarre theory, Jewish people allegedly have ancient knowledge or have discovered ways to bend time using advanced physics to control world history. Some versions of this claim even involve manipulating quantum mechanics to shift historical events in their favour. I have no words for how absurd this is. But what are your thoughts?

Tsukerman: These theories fold into broader antisemitic myths that portray Jews as having hidden power over society, science, and technology. Ironically, the same people who most aggressively accuse Jews of such control are often the ones obsessed with acquiring these powers for themselves.

For example, this idea of Jewish control over time sometimes takes a metaphorical form. Essentially, Jews control history through media, education, and cultural influence. Holocaust denial is one of the biggest examples of this, with conspiracy theorists claiming that historical narratives are manipulated to serve Jewish interests. More recently, Inquisition denial has emerged in similar circles, claiming that persecution of Jews in medieval Europe is exaggerated.

For obvious reasons, this is such an enormous stretch that it has not gained mainstream traction. Instead, it mostly appears in far-right and esoteric conspiracy circles, where people peddle claims of Jewish manipulation of reality. These ideas draw on science fiction themes, blending into conspiracy theories about Lizard People, interdimensional beings, and other fringe beliefs.

Another variation is the idea of Jewish control over global travel and borders. You can imagine how this conspiracy theory exploded during COVID-19 when global travel restrictions were imposed. Some conspiracy theorists claimed that Jews controlled airports, visa systems, and international travel regulations as part of a global dominance strategy. What people can invent and how little evidence they need to persuade others to buy into their nonsense is astonishing.

Some of the same people who push these theories also claim that Jewish-owned banks and organizations dictate global migration patterns and engineer geopolitical crises for financial gain. This theory resurfaced around major financial crises, such as the 2008 financial collapse.

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During the Occupy Wall Street movement, some people within those circles were influenced by these ideas—not all, but certain segments. The 9/11 financial conspiracy theories also played into this, with claims that Jews benefited financially from the attacks. This claim is both false and rooted in classic antisemitic tropes.

Those patterns—essentially, the same old antisemitic narratives repackaged in different forms. The connection between space and time and Jewish mysticism is interesting because it blends Kabbalah, the Golem legend, and pseudoscientific claims about time and space manipulation.

Some stem from pop culture adaptations and misinterpretations of Jewish mystical traditions. The Zohar and other Kabbalistic texts discuss divine time and spiritual dimensions. Still, conspiracy theorists twist these ideas to claim evidence of real-world time control.

These people, of course, don't know what they're talking about. They misinterpret Jewish religious and philosophical texts, bending them to fit conspiratorial narratives while ignoring historical reality. Instead of studying these traditions properly, they favour pseudoscience, sci-fi speculation, outrageous claims, and outright fabrications.

This also ties into the broader conspiracy that Jewish elites are supposedly infiltrating and taking over secret societies. The claim is not that Jews exist in these spaces but rather that they are infiltrating, dominating, and controlling them from within.

Part of this stems from a tendency to look for scapegoats to explain economic and political instability. Elites—especially Jewish elites—become the most convenient targets for such blame.

Jacobsen: Conspiracies in this space tend to be split into two broad categories:

1. Scientific or pseudoscientific theories
2. Pseudospiritual theories

Both are tied to antisemitic racism and are rooted in longstanding prejudices. On the pseudoscientific side, one of the most prominent conspiracy theories is about sinister genetic experiments aimed at creating a super-race or altering vaccines, food, and pharmaceuticals to control populations.

This theory often merges with anti-vaccine movements, falsely claiming that Jewish billionaires, such as George Soros or executives at Pfizer, are engineering biological control mechanisms.

That's the pseudoscientific side. The pseudospiritual side involves concepts like energy vampirism and demonic possession.

- The energy vampirism claim suggests that Jews drain the life force or energy of others, either physically or metaphorically, by controlling economies, spreading despair through mass media, or influencing global events.
- The demonic possession claim is pushed by religious extremists, who allege that Jews possess demons, are possessed by demons, or work with Satanic forces to corrupt the world.

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- Some evangelical circles even claim that Jews secretly control the Antichrist or that the Devil uses them as his agents on Earth.

What are your thoughts on these two categories—the pseudoscientific theories and the pseudospiritual ones?

Tsukerman: The genetic conspiracy theories are particularly interesting because they project onto Jews the very things that the Nazis and Soviets themselves did.

One of the biggest false claims is that Jews engaged in selective breeding or genetic manipulation to strengthen their influence or purity. But let's be clear:

- Jews did not do this.
- Who did? The Germans and the Soviets.

The people who accused Jews of engaging in eugenics and genetic manipulation were the very ones doing it themselves.

Yes, some Jewish communities have historically been insular and did not marry outside their faith for cultural and religious reasons. However, they never engaged in eugenic breeding programs or genetic experiments—aside from medical testing for genetic illnesses, which is common in any population with a long history of close-knit communities.

As is often the case with antisemitic conspiracy theories, these claims blame the victims while projecting the real actions of others onto them.

- Under the Nazis, Jews were falsely labelled genetically inferior and subjected to eugenics programs, forced sterilizations, and medical experiments in concentration camps.
- After Hitler came to power, Jews became victims of racial purity laws that sought to eliminate them.

Yet, conspiracy theorists, today twist history to make it seem as if Jews were the one's engineering eugenics programs when, in reality, they were the primary victims of such policies.

We are seeing a lot of Russian conspiracy theories, particularly those rooted in Soviet disinformation tactics, which continue to shape narratives today. These aren't just about Jews, but about how the Soviet Union—and now contemporary Russia—accuse others of doing exactly what they are doing first. This is partly because they believe everyone operates the way they do—that if they engage in certain actions, so must their adversaries. It is also a deliberate propaganda tactic, allowing them to deflect criticism by accusing others preemptively. Other authoritarian regimes and political groups have now adopted the same approach worldwide.

One prominent example of this is the claim that Jews are involved in genetic engineering projects to manipulate global populations or to create biological advantages exclusive to Jewish people. This surfaced heavily during COVID-19 when conspiracy theorists falsely claimed that the virus somehow spared Ashkenazi Jews. Robert F. Kennedy Jr., despite positioning himself as pro-Israel, was among those spreading this baseless theory. The irony is that he now holds influence over public health discussions despite having peddled such unscientific and antisemitic narratives.

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Jacobsen: I often discuss these issues with Muslim, Jewish, and secular friends, many of whom are highly qualified in geopolitics, Jewish affairs, and related fields. These individuals possess deep knowledge in their respective fields. Yet, despite their expertise, we all arrive at the same frustrating conclusion: the sheer stupidity of it all. Every day brings new exasperating conspiracies; no matter how absurd they get, they keep spreading.

And if you think it stops there, it doesn't. Some conspiracy theorists take it even further, claiming that Jews were not just immune to COVID-19 but actively created bioweapons targeting non-Jewish populations. This is an escalation of the earlier claim—suggesting that Israel has developed bioweapons specifically designed to target certain ethnic groups.

Tsukerman: This theory is directly linked to Soviet disinformation and follows the classic KGB playbook. This particular bioweapon conspiracy theory is a Soviet creation, which has been actively disseminated across the Muslim and Arab world, as well as other regions where the Soviet Union once had substantial ideological influence. It has resurfaced in different forms but follows the same core structure—a fabricated accusation used to delegitimize and vilify Jewish communities.

Another longstanding genetic conspiracy theory is the Khazar theory. This false claim, which is extremely common in the Arab and Muslim world, alleges that Ashkenazi Jews are not "real Jews" but rather descendants of the Turkic Khazars. Some extremists use this theory to argue that modern Jews have no legitimate claim to Jewish ancestry or Israel.

While it is true that a small group of Khazars converted to Judaism in the medieval period, this has no connection to the mainstream Jewish population. Jewish law permits converts from any ethnic background. Once someone converts, they are fully Jewish—just like those born into Jewish families. The Khazar theory is a deliberate attempt to delegitimize Jewish identity and their historical connection to the Middle East. It is also an attempt to undermine the argument for Jewish indigeneity in Israel despite overwhelming genetic and historical evidence showing that even Ashkenazi Jews share deep Middle Eastern ancestry.

Then there is the particularly bizarre claim that Jews have genetically modified their DNA for intelligence, longevity, or financial success. This conspiracy suggests that Jewish success is not due to cultural or historical factors but instead to deliberate genetic manipulation—implying sinister, unnatural motives behind Jewish achievements.

At its core, this conspiracy theory is driven by envy. It echoes classic antisemitic stereotypes, portraying Jews as hyper-intelligent, manipulative, and controlling. It is far from a benign narrative—it is actively harmful and promotes dangerous misconceptions.

Fortunately, not many people take this idea seriously—at least, not yet. But in today's digital age, anything can be amplified. The risk is that such conspiracies fuel hate crimes, violence, and targeted attacks against Jewish communities. These theories are actively promoted by neo-Nazi groups, white supremacists, extremist online forums, and, of course, Russian state-run media.

Some Russian-backed media outlets have specifically spread the false claim that Jewish genetic manipulation is tied to political control. This follows a familiar pattern, where Russia amplifies and exports antisemitic conspiracy theories to destabilize societies and sow distrust. These

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fabrications serve political agendas but can have real-world consequences, especially when they inspire violence and systemic discrimination.

The "Jewish energy vampire" conspiracy theory is yet another variation of longstanding antisemitic myths, which portray Jews as parasitic, exploitative, and draining the resources of others. This concept has been recycled repeatedly, and guess who loved this version of it? Hitler. He described Jews as vermin and framed them as exploitative parasites. However, in his case, he meant it literally, not just metaphorically.

The energy vampire narrative takes this further, diving into occult conspiracies found in both Nazi ideology and Soviet-era disinformation. Some extremists and conspiracy theorists believe in the literal concept of an energy vampire—someone who drains life force or spiritual energy from others. This belief has deep roots in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. After the collapse of the USSR, these ideas reemerged in Russia's post-Soviet instability.

After the Soviet Union broke apart, there was an explosion of pseudoscience and frauds posing as spiritual healers. A prime example is Anatoly Kashpirovsky, a psychic healer who claimed to energize water by staring at it. People were encouraged to drink this "charged" water to heal illnesses. This sounds absurd, but I saw these people in action—it was a real phenomenon.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, if some charged water with good energy, there had to be energy vampires—people who drained energy with bad mojo. These ideas morphed into broader conspiracy culture, blending with occult narratives and modern internet-driven myths that thrive in conspiracy forums and social media spaces.

The roots of this conspiracy go back to the medieval blood libel—one of the oldest antisemitic myths in history. Jews were falsely accused of kidnapping and draining the blood of Christian children for ritual purposes. The "energy vampire" claim is simply a modernized version of this lie, arguing that Jews metaphorically drain the life force of non-Jews.

Today, antisemitic conspiracy theorists claim that Jews drain nations through financial manipulation, banking control, or globalist agendas. These accusations are often directed at figures like the Rothschilds or professions with significant Jewish representation, such as lawyers, psychologists, and doctors.

Some conspiracy theorists merge occult symbolism with antisemitism, creating paranormal adaptations of old myths. They claim that Jews are not only energy vampires in a metaphorical sense but also spiritually or psychically draining the life force of others. And, of course, we have David Icke, who popularized the reptilian shapeshifter conspiracy—another wild antisemitic claim.

According to Icke, much of the Jewish elite and their allies possess supernatural energy-draining abilities. Honestly, where was this guy all my life? He should be making Hollywood horror films, not spewing nonsense conspiracy theories.

Many people think QAnon is just about child sex trafficking and Pizzagate, but in reality, it has absorbed and adapted antisemitic myths into New Age spiritual frameworks.

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QAnon followers believe in a vast network of global elites, and their ideas go far beyond claims about pedophiles in Hollywood and Washington. Some insist that Hollywood bankers and media moguls are part of a life-force-draining elite, echoing classic antisemitic propaganda repackaged for the digital age.

This is no longer just about accusing people of sex crimes—now it's about accusing them of being energy vampires. This claim is completely dehumanizing, reinforcing the ignorance, conspiracy thinking, and paranoia that fuels radicalization.

Historically, these types of accusations have led to pogroms, expulsions, and genocides. What's particularly dangerous now is how these ideas have merged with occult and paranormal themes, making them more appealing to broader audiences—not just traditional hate groups and far-right extremists but also New Age spiritualists, UFO believers, and conspiracy enthusiasts.

These narratives mainstream antisemitism beyond the usual hate groups, drawing in people who may not initially hold antisemitic beliefs but become indoctrinated through exposure to these conspiracy-driven subcultures.

And that's the real danger: once antisemitic myths enter alternative communities, they gain legitimacy among people who don't see themselves as racists or extremists. This allows old hate to be repackaged for new audiences, keeping antisemitic conspiracies alive for yet another generation.

Jacobsen: The first time I heard this was as a joke—a risky joke, nonetheless—in a recent Dave Chappelle comedy special on Netflix. He mentioned "space Jews" as part of a routine. Where does this come from?

Tsukerman: Chappelle used the phrase "space Jews" as a joke, making a sideways commentary about Israel and Palestine. It was a play on words, referencing Jews and space travel, but with an underlying political message. Some took it as a lighthearted jab, while others saw coded language reinforcing antisemitic stereotypes.

Regarding the concept behind the joke, Chappelle references a sci-fi movie trope—one where an oppressed group leaves their homeland, gains advanced technology, and returns to reclaim it. He applied this idea to Jewish history and Israel's establishment, making the argument that Jews "left," modernized, and then returned and took over everything.

The problem with this analogy is that it reinforces classic antisemitic stereotypes—depicting Jews as secretive, powerful, controlling, and manipulative. The Israel-Palestinian parallel in the joke played into the common misconception that Israel was an all-powerful military force crushing an underdog when, in reality, Israel's early survival was far from assured.

The historical context matters. At the time of Israel's establishment, multiple Arab armies attacked from all sides. The Arab states actively opposed the creation of a Palestinian state, not because they supported Palestinians, but because they did not want Israel to exist at all.

Meanwhile, Israel received little outside help. The Czechoslovak government provided some weapons, later France became an ally, and only much later did the United States become Israel's

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strongest supporter. Israel was militarily outnumbered at its founding but benefited from better strategy and organization. At the same time, the Arab forces were highly disorganized.

So, the idea that Israel was an overwhelming force from the start is historically inaccurate. That's why some Jewish groups found Chappelle's joke misleading, if not outright harmful.

Chappelle later claimed he was not being antisemitic, but the joke sparked controversy because many saw it as dog-whistling—using coded language to convey antisemitic stereotypes without stating them outright.

This led to a broader debate about intent versus impact. Was Chappelle actively spreading antisemitic ideas, or was he provoking discussion through satire? Even if he didn't mean harm, did his words reinforce dangerous conspiracy theories?

Jewish organizations largely viewed the joke as, at best, distasteful and insensitive and, at worst, perpetuating harmful stereotypes. Meanwhile, free speech advocates defended him, arguing that comedians should be able to challenge societal issues.

Netflix stood by Chappelle, continuing to support his specials, but the free speech argument here is not about whether he had the right to say it—of course, he did. The real question is whether he used stereotypes instead of thoughtful critique to discuss a real conflict.

Was he helping free speech or promoting misinformation and reinforcing negative stereotypes? That was the bigger issue.

That's why "space Jews" became a flashpoint in debates about antisemitism, free speech, and the role of comedy in social critique. It raised questions about which jokes are appropriate, which are antisemitic, and which are harmless ribbing based on cultural archetypes.

Some argued that the joke was provocative but valid, while others believed it was dangerous and contributed to antisemitism.

What would be most interesting, though, is if anyone has measured the impact of that joke on public attitudes toward Jews and Israel. Did it increase antisemitic beliefs? Did it reinforce stereotypes? Without hard data, it isn't easy to gauge the real-world consequences beyond immediate backlash and commentary from advocacy groups.

Shortly after the "space Jews" controversy, Chappelle hosted Saturday Night Live in November 2022 and addressed Kanye West's antisemitic comments. Kanye West is unquestionably antisemitic—his statements about Jews align directly with classic antisemitic tropes. The only people who downplayed his remarks were his staunchest supporters, like Candace Owens.

During his SNL monologue, Chappelle referenced Kanye's antisemitic rants, which included accusations about Jewish control of media and finance. These ideas aren't new—they are deeply rooted in centuries-old antisemitic propaganda. And yet, rather than directly condemning Kanye, Chappelle's monologue walked a fine line, making light of Jewish influence in media while mocking how openly Kanye said it. This divided public opinion again. Some saw it as calling out antisemitism, while others believed he was normalizing it by laughing it off.

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This remains a key example of how comedy can blur the line between critique and harmful reinforcement. Whether Chappelle intended it or not, his remarks became part of a larger conversation about how antisemitic narratives spread, evolve, and become mainstreamed through cultural discourse.

These are mainstream examples of classic antisemitism. Chappelle mocked Kanye's approach, opening his monologue by acknowledging antisemitism in all its forms before saying, "And that, Kanye, is how you buy yourself some time."

He then joked that Kanye had broken the rules of show business, implying that openly criticizing Jewish influence leads to consequences. Some viewed this as a satirical critique of antisemitic conspiracies, while others believed he was reinforcing and endorsing them.

There was also a broader debate about how Hollywood handles antisemitism compared to other forms of bigotry. Some critics argued that Hollywood is more permissive toward antisemitism, citing how figures like Mel Gibson—who made overtly antisemitic remarks—were eventually allowed to return. At the same time, those accused of racism against Black or other marginalized groups often faced permanent ostracization.

Many Jewish organizations, including the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), criticized Chappelle for normalizing the idea that Jews control industries. Others argued that Chappelle was provocative, not hateful, using comedy to expose contradictions.

Regardless, Netflix continued to support Chappelle, as we know. But figures like Simon Howard saw his remarks as part of a growing normalization of antisemitic rhetoric. As for Kanye West, I don't think I need to recite the full litany of pro-Hitler, anti-Jewish threats, and conspiracy-laden rants he has made in recent years.

He has gone on multiple antisemitic tirades, both in person and online. On Twitter (now X), he infamously threatened to go "DEFCON 3" on Jewish people and repeated banking and media conspiracies. He praised Hitler and the Nazis during an interview with Alex Jones. This is another example of the thin line between satire, comedy, entertainment, and conspiracy theories.

As we know, Alex Jones lost a massive lawsuit filed by Sandy Hook families after he spread conspiracy theories denying the shooting. The consequences for West, however, were mixed.

Yes, there were major financial and industry repercussions—many companies cut ties with him, including Adidas, Balenciaga, and talent agencies. However, some argued that these actions were not taken as a moral stance against antisemitism but rather as a business risk response to his controversial and indefensible hate speech.

Meanwhile, West remained popular, continued to do business, and was renormalized by Elon Musk, who allowed him back on Twitter/X after initially banning him. Despite the fallout, he eventually returned to the public sphere, making similar remarks again.

This suggests that the consequences were not as severe as Chappelle had implied in his monologue.

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Jacobsen: Okay, so, what about Hollow Earth theory and the claim that Jews have subterranean secret underground cities where they hoard treasure? That's what I'm talking about—pure sci-fi nonsense repackaged as antisemitic conspiracy. Some versions of the Hollow Earth theory go even further, claiming that Jews are the descendants of an ancient underground race that secretly controls human civilization from beneath the Earth's surface. There are various Hollow Earth conspiracies, some blending metaphysical and occult beliefs.

Tsukerman: Certain theories involve reincarnation, artificial birth, and genetic manipulation, tying into pagan and neo-pagan mythology. Others merge these ideas with modern fears about cloning, artificial wombs, and DNA hacking, claiming that Jews are behind these technologies—much like conspiracy theories about genetic modification for intelligence or financial success.

So essentially, the same antisemitic tropes keep getting recycled, but with a sci-fi, paranormal, or New Age twist.

Alternative history and hidden civilizations—basically, Jews are woven into almost every conspiracy theory, no matter how absurd. The subterranean conspiracy theory is one of the more widespread ones, claiming that Jews operate in hidden underground networks to control global events.

This idea traces back to Hitler's propaganda, where he compared Jews to vermin, portraying them as creatures that live in tunnels, scurry underground, and hide from daylight—a dehumanizing stereotype designed to justify persecution. Over time, this evolved into myths about Jews secretly hoarding wealth and conducting sinister activities below the surface.

In medieval Europe, Jews were falsely accused of living in underground tunnels to carry out secretive financial manipulations and blood libel rituals. The image of Jews sitting in basements counting gold coins became a widespread stereotype, reinforcing the idea that they operated outside public view while exerting secret influence.

During the Nazi era, propaganda expanded this narrative, portraying Jews as a hidden force controlling governments and economies. Nazis even claimed that Jews had secret underground bunkers or bases, using this to fuel wartime propaganda. But guess who had underground bunkers?

Jacobsen: Hitler himself.

Tsukerman: His underground bunker system spanned across Europe, and he spent his final days hiding in one in Berlin.

Today, QAnon and far-right extremists claim that Jewish elites use underground tunnels for trafficking, wealth hoarding, and secret societies. But guess who has been involved in human trafficking?

Figures like Andrew Tate and those associated with Jeffrey Epstein. It is important to note that Epstein's network wasn't politically one-sided—his visitors included Bill Clinton, Donald Trump, Prince Andrew, and others from across the political spectrum. These people were well-known public figures, not hidden elites.

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Yes, Epstein was Jewish, and some conspiracy theorists tried to link him to Mossad. Still, in reality, his operation appears to have been a self-serving blackmail scheme targeting wealthy individuals—not part of any grand Jewish conspiracy.

Jacobsen: Now we move to the reptilian shapeshifter story, which blends Jews, their so-called allies, and reptilian overlords controlling subterranean bases and secret underground cities.

What baffles me is how much of this originates from one man—David Icke. He has somehow absorbed the strangest conspiracy theories from history and combined them into one overarching narrative. It's almost as if he researched every bizarre accusation ever made against Jews or secret societies and decided to compile them into a single unified myth.

Tsukerman: At this point, I'm starting to wonder if David Icke is even a real person. His name appears behind almost every outlandish conspiracy theory of the modern era.

In the Middle East, propaganda has accused Jews of digging underground tunnels for espionage or sinister religious purposes. But guess who builds underground tunnels?

Terrorist organizations like Hamas and Hezbollah. They actively use underground tunnels for smuggling weapons, transporting militants, and carrying out attacks—exactly the kind of activity they accuse Jews of doing.

Jacobsen: Now, coming back to Hollow Earth and occult theories, there is a myth claiming that Jews are part of an ancient subterranean race or that they maintain secret underground societies.

These theories blend sci-fi, New Age mysticism, and antisemitism, making them popular in conspiracy forums. While they aren't yet mainstream, they are growing—and given how quickly online extremism spreads, it's only a matter of time before they gain wider traction.

Tsukerman: The problem is that these myths do more than sound ridiculous. They reinforce the usual stereotypes about Jewish secrecy and manipulation, feeding into far-right extremism and terrorist radicalization.

Jacobsen: And that's where the real danger lies—these theories aren't just harmless internet nonsense. They have inspired real-world violence. Some have even been cited in manifestos of extremists who believe in a global Jewish cabal. Now, here's an interesting linguistic question—why do the words "sinister" and "cabal" keep appearing in these conspiracies?

Tsukerman: The word "sinister" appears because these conspiracies are designed to sound shadowy, vague, and ominous. It's not just about something being illegal—it's about implying ulterior motives that can't be easily proven or disproven. That's what makes them so powerful for conspiracy theorists.

Jacobsen: And "cabal"?

Tsukerman: "cabal" comes from the Kabbalah, Jewish mysticism. Over time, it was co-opted by conspiracy theorists, who use it to describe a secretive, all-powerful Jewish group running the world. It's deliberately vague, which is what makes it so enduring. No evidence is required because the accusation is built on secrecy and ambiguity.

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It's all about creating an enemy that is both invisible and everywhere at once—a boogeyman people can blame for anything. A cabal is a small group that controls large swaths of powerful institutions. Conspiracy theorists obsess over secretive groups, particularly tight-knit ones because they imply an extreme concentration of power in the hands of a few conspirators.

A lot of these theories are just re-adaptations of classic antisemitic tropes, but conspiracy theorists keep inventing more creative interpretations. Some have even claimed that the dwarves in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* are a coded Jewish stereotype due to their focus on craftsmanship, gold, and isolation from other societies. I don't find that argument convincing, but it's interesting how deeply people read into these things.

Jacobsen: The New Messiah and the Anti-Messiah. The theory goes like this: Jews are supposedly plotting to install a false messiah to deceive the world or are secretly working with the Antichrist to bring about the end times. In other words—they can't win either way.

Tsukerman: That's right. No matter what, they're framed as the villains. The "Jewish Antichrist" and "Jewish Anti-Messiah" myths take Christian eschatology and apocalyptic literature and twist them with antisemitic conspiracy theories.

There's a huge difference between Jewish and Christian beliefs about the Messiah and the end times. Still, conspiracy theorists weaponize these differences to cast Jews as agents of deception or demonic forces. Essentially, they position Jews as the opposition to the "true" Messiah, preventing Jesus' return.

Historically, these claims were used to justify discrimination and violence. The original Christian idea of the Antichrist described him as a false messiah who deceives humanity before the Second Coming of Christ. Some medieval Christian interpretations falsely linked the Antichrist with Jews, claiming he would be a Jewish religious or political leader who misleads the world.

From a Jewish perspective, the Messiah is not Jesus or a supernatural figure. Instead, he is a human leader, a Jewish king from the Davidic dynasty, expected to restore the Jewish monarchy in Israel.

In Jewish tradition, when the Messiah arrives, Jews worldwide will return to Israel. After wars and turmoil, the world will enter an era of peace under this leader's reign. There is no supernatural component—just a restoration of monarchy with a benevolent ruler.

This completely differs from the Christian concept, which portrays the Messiah as divine and ushering in the world's end.

Medieval Christian texts accused Jews of rejecting Jesus and "preparing" a false messiah, an idea that Christian theologians like Martin Luther later obsessed over. Luther wrote extensively about Jews aligning with the Antichrist and helping to prepare for his arrival.

This shows how old these ideas are. Throughout history, they were used to justify pogroms, expulsions, and forced conversions.

The Protocols of the Elders of Zion further reinforced these ideas, portraying Jewish elites as working toward world domination under a false messianic figure. This book blended multiple

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antisemitic myths into one, creating a bizarre mix of medieval theology, secret societies, and political conspiracy theories.

And now, far-right Christian nationalist movements have recycled these ideas, claiming that Jewish leaders and movements are preparing for Antichrist rule. Of course, nobody can define exactly what this would look like. They say, "Jews are aligned with Satan," and leave it at that.

In Jewish tradition, there is no "Antichrist" in the Christian sense, but there is a parallel concept in Jewish apocalyptic texts—a figure known as Armilus.

Armilus is a false messiah who opposes the true Jewish messiah, Mashiach ben David. "Mashiach" is a title, not a name—the name given in later rabbinic texts is Menachem.

In some versions, Armilus is depicted as a corrupt ruler or a deceiver who gains power before being overthrown by the Jewish messiah. However, in Christian depictions, the Antichrist is almost always tied to Jewish identity—while in Jewish sources, he is not. Jewish texts often depict him as a foreign leader or supernatural figure who misleads people under pretenses.

So, once again, we see Christian theology repurposed as an antisemitic weapon rather than understanding Jewish traditions on their terms. The current wave of far-right Christian conspiracies, particularly among evangelical fundamentalist groups, claims that a future Jewish leader will be the Antichrist. They point to false interpretations of Israel's role in prophecy, repackaging old religious antisemitism for the modern era.

And, of course—David Icke. Let's remember that name. He is everywhere in these conspiracy theories. Whether it's religious antisemitism, sci-fi narratives, or globalist conspiracies, his name keeps surfacing.

Other conspiracy theorists take this even further, claiming that Jewish politicians, bankers, and elites are advancing the Antichrist's agenda. According to them, all Jewish influence is secretly working toward this goal.

How do they reconcile Christian eschatology with sci-fi conspiracies? That's a good question. Maybe we should ask David Icke himself—I bet that would be an interesting interview.

But it's not just Christian fundamentalists pushing this. QAnon and other conspiracy groups have latched onto these ideas, blending Christian end-times prophecies with their theories.

I initially thought QAnon was just about Pizzagate and sex trafficking conspiracies, but it turns out it's so much bigger than that. They claim that Jewish globalists are preparing the way for an Antichrist figure, merging far-right Christian narratives with their own New World Order, Illuminati, and banking conspiracies. This creates an entirely new framework of paranoia.

The problem with these narratives is that they completely distort both Judaism and Christianity, turning them into tools for fearmongering and extremism. Instead of promoting genuine religious understanding, these conspiracies fuel persecution, spread antisemitic tropes, and incite hatred. There is no upside to any of this.

Jacobsen: And now, we reach one of the weirdest claims yet—that Jewish people control reincarnation. According to this bizarre theory, Jews decide who gets to return to Earth in new

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forms. They reincarnate in new forms to retain power while at the same time stealing or hijacking non-Jewish souls to prevent non-Jews from achieving spiritual enlightenment.

In this sinister plot, Jews supposedly trap souls in an endless cycle to maintain their dominance over the world. This is a wild combination of New Age mysticism, antisemitism, and science fiction.

Tsukerman: Believe it or not, it's still rooted in classic antisemitic myths—just with a New Age twist instead of a Christian theological one. The claim is that Jews steal the identities or souls of non-Jews to further their secretive political agenda. Reincarnation, in this narrative, becomes a tool of control—a way for Jews to return in new forms while remembering their past lives, ensuring they stay in power across multiple lifetimes.

This ties into other tropes about alleged Jewish immortality, such as the legend of the Wandering Jew—a figure supposedly cursed to walk the Earth for thousands of years.

In conspiracy circles, Jews are often depicted as a secretive, unyielding group that stays in control for centuries, almost like Jewish vampires—or worse.

Jacobsen: And then there's the "soul hijacking" claim. In this version of the conspiracy, non-Jews are reincarnated into Jewish bodies as part of a master plan for Jewish world domination. Essentially, Jews are depicted as supernatural parasites, using mystical and occult powers to manipulate human reincarnation. So once again, we see the same antisemitic themes repackaged in a different form—Jews as manipulative, parasitic, and controlling supernatural forces to retain power.

Tsukerman: There is also the cultural and spiritual hijacking conspiracy, which claims that Jews use reincarnation to infiltrate other cultures and steal the essence of other religions. This distorts traditional Jewish teachings, particularly Jewish mystical traditions such as Kabbalah, which do have concepts of reincarnation but in very specific ways.

In Jewish tradition, reincarnation is not about power or control but about free will and moral improvement. Jews do not remember their past lifetimes because doing so would negate their ability to make independent moral choices in their current lives. The purpose of reincarnation is to elevate the soul through moral refinement—correcting past transgressions, making better choices, and spiritually advancing.

In this view, people may reincarnate to achieve personal growth and repair past mistakes. However, the key element is that they do not remember their previous lives, which ensures they can make independent moral choices without being influenced by past identities.

As you can see, this is completely different from the twisted narratives found in conspiracy theories. These false ideas merge New Age mysticism and pagan beliefs with conspiracy culture, blending spiritual and mystical elements with political paranoia.

Some conspiracy theories combine and compound multiple supernatural ideas—including soul-switching, shape-shifting, and soul-trapping. These ideas are central to David Icke's reptilian conspiracies, but now they are being specifically applied to Jews.

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Needless to say, this is dehumanizing, bizarre, and perpetuates dangerous stereotypes. It fits within extremist ideologies, further radicalizing those prone to believing in conspiracy theories and increasing the risk of real-world violence.

Beyond that, it distorts spiritual understanding and misleads people about actual Jewish beliefs. It takes reincarnation—a concept found in multiple religious traditions—and weaponizes it for hate, division, and fanaticism, transforming it into a paranoid and absurd narrative.

Jacobsen: Now, onto one of the strangest claims yet—that the Rothschild family secretly owns the moon. The theory alleges that the Rothschilds hold secret elite meetings on the moon, using hidden technology and a global surveillance system to control humanity. Some even claim this is connected to Israel's lunar space missions, which are supposedly an attempt to reclaim an ancient Jewish colony on the moon.

Tsukerman: This is complete nonsense, but you can see how it evolved from existing Rothschild conspiracy theories.

The Rothschild family has long been falsely accused of controlling global wealth, politics, and media, even though their influence today is nowhere near what it was centuries ago. Most members of the Rothschild family are not even Jewish anymore. Yet, conspiracy theorists continue to depict them as puppet masters secretly controlling the world.

The idea behind the "moon ownership" theory is that the Rothschilds have extended their global wealth and influence beyond Earth.

But guess who is trying to expand their off-world real estate? Not the Rothschilds—but Elon Musk. I do not see the Rothschilds in the space business, but Elon Musk is. This entire conspiracy ties into space-related paranoia, climate conspiracies, and extraterrestrial myths. Some claim that the Rothschilds secretly colonized the moon to expand their wealth and influence despite zero evidence of any human existence on the moon beyond the Apollo missions.

And, of course, this conspiracy also intersects with moon landing denialism. Some of the same people who believe the U.S. never landed on the moon now claim that the Rothschilds were the first to colonize it.

It even blends into SpaceX and moon colonization fantasies, particularly those surrounding Elon Musk, where wealthy elites are imagined to have exclusive access to outer space resources for personal gain.

The pattern is clear—these conspiracies continually recycle old antisemitic tropes, mix them with modern fears about technology, space exploration, and global control, and create elaborate fictions to justify their paranoia.

Is there someone else who fits these descriptions? Because, once again, it's not the Jews or the Rothschilds. So, in many of these cases—though not all—there is a deep element of psychological projection. This is a deliberate reversal of reality, similar to what we've seen in Soviet and even some Nazi conspiracy theories.

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Soviet intelligence literally and deliberately projected their actions onto their adversaries, accusing them of doing the things they were guilty of. But they aren't the only ones.

They exported this tactic around the world. It's so widely adopted that it's hard to say whether Russian intelligence is still driving these narratives or has become common practice because it works so well. Regardless, the result is the same—deflect attention from those engaging in manipulation while fabricating wild stories about Jews.

Yes, exactly. But let's be clear—no Jewish real estate is on the moon. There are satellite images, photographs, and extensive lunar research, but none convinces conspiracy theorists. They continue to claim that Jews secretly own the moon and control hidden lunar resources.

All right, now onto another absurd theory—that Jews control the Internet itself and are working on uploading their consciousness into machines, creating eternal digital rulers who will dominate the world forever.

This conspiracy merges science fiction with supernaturalism and recycles antisemitic myths in a technological context.

Guess who is trying to create the Singularity?

Hint: It's not the Jews.

Yet, the idea of Jews controlling the Internet persists. Conspiracy theorists claim that elite families in the tech industry secretly control the Internet's infrastructure, content, and the flow of information.

Yes, Mark Zuckerberg is Jewish, but he's among the few Jewish figures in tech leadership. Most of the top leaders in Silicon Valley are not Jewish at all, so it's unclear who these conspiracy theorists even think they're talking about.

One of their most ridiculous claims is that Jews engineered the World Wide Web itself to gain invisible control over global communication.

If that's the case, maybe they should take it up with Al Gore since he famously claimed to have "invented the Internet." I'd love to see those two groups debate each other. Of course, historical facts completely contradict this narrative. The Internet development involved a diverse group of engineers, researchers, and institutions, none of whom were part of any secret globalist conspiracy.

Now, let's talk about the AI and mind-uploading conspiracies. Various scientists and theorists have explored the concept of merging human consciousness with technology, but no one has made more progress in this area than Elon Musk—once again, a non-Jewish figure.

His company, Neuralink, is developing brain-computer interface technology. It aims to help disabled individuals regain movement and potentially enhance human cognitive abilities.

But let's be clear—Neuralink is not unique. Several competing projects are working toward similar goals, including non-invasive brain-computer interfaces. None of these projects are anywhere near achieving "mind-uploading" or digital immortality.

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Yes, some researchers have speculated about the possibility of preserving consciousness through AI, but nothing remotely close to this exists. And yet, conspiracy theorists claim that Jews are trying to upload their consciousness into machines, ensuring perpetual control over the world. The idea of mind control through technology is far-fetched, especially considering that AI is nowhere near as intelligent as many assume.

Merging human consciousness with machines is an incredibly complex challenge, far beyond the capabilities of current AI models.

Jacobsen: And now, we move to another conspiracy theory involving cryptocurrencies. Some conspiracy theorists claim that Jews created Bitcoin, Ethereum, and other cryptocurrencies as a global trap. Satoshi Nakamoto, the pseudonymous creator of Bitcoin, might be a Jewish figure working within a secret cabal to undermine the global economy. Of course, this theory makes no sense, considering that Satoshi Nakamoto's identity remains unknown and that cryptocurrency was designed as a decentralized system free from traditional financial controls.

Tsukerman: Ironically, cryptocurrency is often promoted by libertarians and anti-establishment groups—many of whom are the same people spreading antisemitic conspiracy theories.

The idea that Jews are behind cryptocurrencies contradicts itself because conspiracy theorists also claim that Jews control traditional banking. If true, why would they deliberately create an alternative financial system that weakens their grip on global finance?

This proves that these conspiracy theories are not logically consistent—they exist purely to justify antisemitic narratives.

So, to summarize:

- Jews do not control the Internet.
- Jews are not behind the Singularity.
- Jews are not secretly uploading their consciousness into machines.
- Jews did not create Bitcoin to undermine the global economy.

These conspiracies are nothing more than modern adaptations of centuries-old antisemitic tropes, repackaged with science fiction, AI paranoia, and financial fearmongering.

This is a newfangled conspiracy theory since Bitcoin and cryptocurrency are relatively recent inventions. But like every other modern conspiracy, it recycles old antisemitic stereotypes and adapts them for technological advancements.

It's hilarious—and honestly, predictable—to see how medieval antisemitic myths are being repurposed for the digital age, used to explain away complex technological developments, while still carrying an antisemitic aftertaste.

One of the more absurd claims is that Satoshi Nakamoto, the pseudonymous creator of Bitcoin, is secretly Jewish. There is zero evidence to support this, but, of course, when has a lack of evidence ever stopped conspiracy theorists?

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Jacobsen: And the claim that Jewish elites are using cryptocurrency to dismantle traditional financial systems in order to seize global economic control is self-contradictory for one very simple reason.

These same conspiracy theorists also accuse Jews of controlling traditional banking and financial systems—which generally oppose cryptocurrency due to its disruptive potential.

So, let's get this straight:

- Jews allegedly control the banks.
- Jews also allegedly created cryptocurrency to destroy the banks.
- But Jews are also accused of wanting to accumulate power by controlling banks.
- And somehow, they're sabotaging themselves to take over the system they already control?

Now tell me—does that make any sense?

Tsukerman: No, of course not. But conspiracy theories don't have to be logical.

One of the defining traits of antisemitic conspiracy theories is that they do not need internal consistency—they only need to affirm the general narrative that Jews seek power at all costs, even if it means contradicting themselves along the way.

According to this theory, decentralized cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin were specifically designed to operate outside traditional banking systems, allowing Jewish elites to control global financial transactions secretly.

This is stupid and wrong on multiple levels. The whole point of Bitcoin and other disruptive technologies is that they are decentralized and untraceable, making it nearly impossible for any centralized group—including the so-called "Jewish elites"—to control them.

Jacobsen: They also claim that cryptocurrencies bypass government regulations and undermine traditional economic structures, but guess who benefits most from that?

Not Jews—but human rights activists in authoritarian countries, tech entrepreneurs, and, yes, criminal organizations and terrorists, most of whom are not Jewish at all. And yet, cryptocurrency is still framed as part of a Jewish-led globalist agenda. The irony is that cryptocurrency is the ultimate anti-globalist tool.

Tsukerman: Let's not forget the bizarre contradiction within these conspiracy circles.

The same people who accuse Jews of accumulating power through traditional banks are often the same people who support cryptocurrencies. Many of the loudest pro-crypto advocates, including the tech libertarian crowd, are not Jewish at all.

So, what we're seeing is two opposing conspiracy theories coexisting—one claiming that Jews control global banking and the other claiming that Jews created cryptocurrency to disrupt global banking.

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That's exactly why this entire theory is so bizarre and illogical. It also ties into the larger New World Order conspiracy, which claims that Jewish financiers are orchestrating a global economy under their control. But this completely ignores how blockchain technology works—decentralized, anonymous, and resistant to centralized control.

If anything, blockchain technology makes it harder for any single group—including Jewish elites, banks, or governments—to control global financial transactions.

This is one of the worst-designed conspiracy theories because it fails its logic test. There is zero evidence for it, and it exploits distrust in financial institutions and new technologies, attempting to merge two opposite fears into one narrative.

At the core, some people are more afraid of technological innovation than they are of traditional financial elites. Otherwise, they wouldn't be pushing both of these contradictory ideas simultaneously.

That's why I'd love to see the two groups of conspiracy theorists—the pro-banking and pro-crypto—debate each other and see who wins. If we're lucky, they'll cancel each other out.

Naturally, this fuels extremism, hatred, and confusion. But so far, the cryptocurrency conspiracy crowd is relatively small because, as I mentioned earlier, many of these people benefit from Bitcoin and embrace it for its decentralized nature.

Quite frankly, this may even be a fabricated conspiracy theory manufactured by certain elites who want to weaponize fear and create an artificial controversy to control the cryptocurrency narrative.

There are so many layers to this that I wouldn't be surprised if some conspiracy theorists work against each other, feeding different versions of events to create paranoia and division.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Irina.

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Historical Antisemitism, Populism & Modern Jewish Identity (Dr. Jason Weixelbaum)

Dr. Jason Weixelbaum, a historian, writer, filmmaker, and organizer, explains his background and his work on the dramatized film "A Nazi on Wall Street," which follows a Jewish FBI agent investigating Nazi espionage during World War II. He outlines two academic approaches to antisemitism: one that views it as a persistent, centuries-old prejudice and another as a dynamic, evolving phenomenon shaped by historical and cultural contexts. The conversation examines how conspiracy theories—from The Protocols of the Elders of Zion to modern references involving Henry Ford, George Soros, and Elon Musk—fuel anti-Semitic sentiments. They also explore populist rhetoric's role in designating "the enemy" and discuss how terms like "self-hating Jew" are used to cancel critical viewpoints. Additionally, the speaker considers generational shifts in Jewish identity, respectability politics, and the importance of solidarity, critical thinking, humour, and hope in countering hate. Both maintain a scholarly tone and stress the need for historical understanding and evidence-based analysis to address and overcome contemporary hate and division. Their conversation comprehensively examines hate, accountability, and the power of informed discourse.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Today, we're here with Dr. Jason Weixelbaum. He is a writer, producer, musician, and organizer. He grew up in Los Angeles in a family involved in the entertainment industry. After witnessing ethical failures in the mortgage securities sector, he pursued a Ph.D. in history, focusing on American corporate involvement with Nazi Germany. In May 2020, following the passing of his father, he founded Elusive Films to bring critical historical narratives to the screen—most notably developing, as previously discussed, *A Nazi on Wall Street*.

I've encountered—not a wide range, but—a variety of orientations regarding the definition of antisemitism. That is likely a more accurate way to phrase it. Definitions tend to be relatively consistent when experts are asked directly. However, what I have found more distinctive is the framing or philosophical orientation behind these definitions.

One common approach is to treat antisemitism as a persistent phenomenon—something that has manifested over many centuries. Another sees it as dynamic and evolving, suggesting that any fixed or narrowly defined concept of antisemitism is inherently limited due to its historical and cultural fluidity.

So, how do you approach antisemitism in an academic context, and how do you define it—if you believe a precise definition is even appropriate, whether complex or simple?

Dr. Jason Weixelbaum: That's a great question. And, as with any meaningful inquiry, I stand on the shoulders of giants—many brilliant scholars have written extensively on the subject. As I glance at my working library next to my desk, I see works by Hannah Arendt, Elie Wiesel, Deborah Lipstadt, and many others.

My understanding probably lies somewhere between the two orientations you mentioned. Scholars often refer to antisemitism as the oldest form of hatred or prejudice. It has existed in various forms for over two millennia. And, like all historical phenomena, it evolves. The

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manifestations of antisemitism during the Holocaust, for instance, are different in character and form from how it appears today.

Contemporary scholars tend to explore what aspects of antisemitism have remained consistent and what has changed over time. Today, of course, we are navigating a very complex and painful moment, particularly with the ongoing Israel–Hamas conflict that has ignited a significant global rise in anti-Semitic rhetoric and violence. At the same time, it is a humanitarian crisis for Palestinians as well. The broader geopolitical situation is tragic and fraught.

For my work, I find it somewhat more straightforward to focus on World War II and the Holocaust, where antisemitism was systemic, codified, and genocidal. It was ideologically explicit and institutionally enforced, which makes it somewhat easier to analyze historically.

It's also worth noting that, in the United States, during my father's childhood—which would have been in the 1940s and 1950s—it was still legal for universities and private institutions to practice discriminatory admissions policies against Jews. Quotas limiting Jewish enrollment at prestigious schools like Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, among others, were only formally dismantled in the following decades. That is not ancient history; it was within living memory.

As Faulkner once wrote: "The past is never dead. It's not even past."

We could spend much more time discussing antisemitism. Still, I want to underscore one key motivation behind *A Nazi on Wall Street*. I chose not to make it a documentary but rather a dramatized narrative with a strong human perspective so viewers can engage emotionally and personally.

At the story's center is a Jewish character—an FBI agent. Historically, there were very few Jewish agents in the FBI during the early 1940s. This character is based on real individuals and is intended to bring visibility to a Jewish protagonist in a position of moral and civic leadership during a time when Jews were often portrayed as victims or outsiders.

He happened to be an authority on organized crime—specifically on prosecuting the mob. So, he had some clout, and he was tasked with tracking down a Nazi spy. That creates a fascinating dynamic.

Amazingly, this is a true story. I constantly have to pinch myself, and I remain surprised that no one else has tried to tell this story yet. So yes, it was important to me.

Although the character at the center of the story may harbour doubts—about his faith, his country, or even about democracy—this is, after all, a film noir true crime story. In such stories, all of those foundational ideals are under threat. Our protagonist—who may or may not be a traditional "hero"—must confront his values to make it to the other side. I try to draw as much from historical material as possible. However, I dramatize and fill in certain blanks regarding that specific character.

But anyway, I digress.

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Jacobsen: Regarding the contemporary roots of antisemitism, how would you frame a feasible explanation or description, particularly across the 20th century and into the present, beginning with the early 2000s through 2025? Where do you locate the manifestations we are seeing today?

Weixelbaum: Yes. As I mentioned in our earlier conversation, one of the reasons I am particularly attuned to the dangers of populism is the phenomenon of the politics of outrage. This political framework is constantly constructed as "the people versus a vague elite." The targets of this outrage shift over time. Still, the underlying mechanism is the same: a group of anxious and fearful individuals looking for enemies—people to blame, dominate, and feel powerful in the face of their insecurities.

The truly frightening aspect of populism is that the identity of the so-called "enemy"—this amorphous, shadowy elite—eventually becomes associated with Jews. This is something you can observe repeatedly throughout history.

Modern antisemitism is deeply rooted in this populist mechanism. Many scholars may disagree with my perspective—and that is fine—but based on my reading of history and my scholarly work, I would argue that this dynamic unfolds as: it is "the people" versus "the rich," "the people" versus "the bankers," then "the people" versus "the politicians," and eventually, "the Jews are behind it all."

A widely accepted historical narrative is relevant here. There was immense political upheaval in the early 20th century, particularly in Russia during the lead-up to the revolution. The ruling elites in the Russian Empire—using "elite" here in a non-populist, descriptive sense—sought to suppress the Bolsheviks, Communists, and Socialists who were rising against them.

One of the tools they used was weaponized antisemitism. During this period, a document emerged called *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. It is a fabricated text that falsely claims a secret cabal of Jews is conspiring to control the world's governments, financial systems, and societies for their benefit and amusement. It is, in essence, a conspiracy theory steeped in bigotry and hatred.

The problem arises when this toxic narrative intersects with people of wealth or influence who are uneducated or highly susceptible to conspiracy thinking. One prime historical example is Henry Ford. Ford, a self-made industrialist, was enormously wealthy and powerful. Still, he lacked a formal education and became one of the most prominent purveyors of anti-Semitic conspiracy theories in the United States. He funded the distribution of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion. He published* anti-Semitic content in his newspaper, *The Dearborn Independent*, which had a significant impact on public opinion in the 1920s and beyond.

This pattern—the confluence of fear, populist rhetoric, conspiracy theory, and power—remains a central mechanism for understanding the persistence of antisemitism in the modern era. The people around Henry Ford played a significant role in shaping his worldview. In particular, he had a German secretary in the United States who introduced him to *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. And, of course, populist rhetoric always offers a simple answer to complex global problems—"obviously, it's the Jews."

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Ford embraced this narrative. And because he possessed immense wealth and influence, he amplified the reach of the *Protocols* in a way that might never have occurred otherwise.

Some argue with my interpretation, but history unfolded as it did. Unfortunately, this kind of conspiracy can take on a life of its own. Even in the pre-internet era—during the age of newspapers and radio—it spread explosively.

As the old saying goes, "A lie can travel halfway around the world before the truth has a chance to get its pants on." And here we are. The myth of a secret Jewish cabal remains a potent instrument of antisemitism. It has evolved, but its core remains the same.

Today, instead of invoking the *Protocols*, many conspiracists use "George Soros" as a shorthand. Simply saying "Soros" is now enough to invoke the entire anti-Semitic trope for some—recasting the old narrative in modern terms.

Jacobsen: My take on cabals is similar to that of Pete Holmes—the comedian. He once made a great point about *Conan*. He said that whenever someone starts talking about "realms" in fantasy stories, he immediately checks them out.

Similarly, whenever someone starts talking seriously about "cabals," for me, it's usually a sign that a conspiracy theory has taken them.

Weixelbaum: This kind of medieval, fantastical language.

Jacobsen: It's fascinating how language reveals the underlying framework of someone's worldview. Certain ideas and biases attach themselves to specific vocabulary—often without the speaker realizing it.

I did an interview earlier today with a well-known gospel group. They've been performing for decades, and their father was famous before them. One thing that stood out was the concreteness of the Southern language. To a Canadian ear—particularly mine, from a small town in British Columbia—it's striking. Maybe less so for someone from Alberta. But for me, it's vivid and tactile: "tin can," "brick house," "wood fireplace," "stove." The language feels like what it's describing.

So yes, when people use the word "cabal," it sounds medieval—just like "realm" does. And I've realized that this language can be an early warning sign. It can raise my radar.

Weixelbaum: And for someone like you—with a heightened sensitivity to language and how people express themselves—I'm sure it resonates even more deeply.

Jacobsen: Sure, yes. It's like the difference between "New Yawk" and "Noo Joisey"—subtle but distinct.

Weixelbaum: In *A Nazi on Wall Street*, the main character is from New Jersey, but he ends up running the New York office. Is there tension there? Perhaps.

Jacobsen: But please, continue with your thoughts on the concept of a "cabal."

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Weixelbaum: Yes, absolutely—it's become a buzzword. Any time you can pack a multitude of complex ideas into a single word, it becomes a powerful rhetorical device, and antisemitism is no exception. These narratives travel well.

They spread virally, and they are then amplified by individuals who are eager to do so. Again, Henry Ford comes to mind. So does Father Charles Coughlin, who was essentially the Rush Limbaugh of his era—a populist radio host in the 1930s who reached tens of millions of listeners.

Antisemitism always could spread widely and quickly. The sad part is that today's social media platforms are even more potent for disseminating these ideas. I am unsure how much we need to review the history again—Gamergate, the rise of Trumpism, 4chan, and the Groypers. All of it has entered the mainstream to the point where someone like Elon Musk feels comfortable amplifying conspiratorial or white nationalist rhetoric and even reportedly appearing in photos making gestures that have been interpreted as Nazi salutes.

So, that is where we are.

It is terrifying to be a Jewish person in this environment. It is deeply unsettling to see anti-Semitic ideas gaining traction both on the populist right and, increasingly, on the populist left. It's not a great feeling.

As an American Jew, I feel confident saying that the vast majority of us are uncomfortable with the current leadership in Israel and with the war. Many of us are also troubled by how this conflict has created cover for anti-Semitic rhetoric, even within movements that are grounded in legitimate concerns—such as the Free Palestine movement.

The Free Palestine movement certainly raises important, valid arguments. Absolutely. But then we see right-wing figures wearing keffiyehs and joining protests—not out of solidarity with Palestinians but as a means of co-opting the message to promote anti-Jewish sentiment. That is extremely disturbing.

I have seen it online, too: white Christian nationalists—bad actors—aligning themselves with a movement that, on the surface, appears left-wing but which they are instrumentalizing for their hateful agendas. It is not a good time. Not for anyone.

And so, again, I feel morally obligated, as a member of the Jewish community, to tell a positive Jewish story. One is about an American FBI agent trying to stop Nazism—trying to defend democracy. He is not perfect. He is deeply uncertain whether democracy in America can endure, especially given the extent of public support for authoritarianism in the 1930s.

The "America First" movement, which we still hear about today, has its historical roots in that era. And there was a lot of debate and disagreement within the Jewish community at that time. How should we respond to Nazism? Should we fight back? Did we fight back enough?

I think about books like *I Cannot Forgive* by Rudolf Vrba and *Legends of Our Time* by Elie Wiesel. These are complex, painful reflections on Jews—then and now.

What we are facing today is overwhelming. It can be isolating.

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And, of course, that isolation is precisely what anti-Semites want to see. So, it is essential that even if our voices shake, we speak out. When we talk about solidarity, it is not conditional. We do not get to decide that one group is excluded.

If we are serious about solidarity, we must advocate for Jewish people, Palestinians, and everyone in between.

Jacobsen: Group psychology can offer a helpful framework when analyzing sociopolitical dynamics.

On the far right, we often see overt forms of anti-Semitic language—explicit imagery, dog whistles, innuendo—especially on platforms like 4chan and 8chan. Things like placing names in triple parentheses, referring to "the bankers" or "the elite" as veiled stand-ins for Jews, and so forth.

When called out, these individuals often frame themselves as victims—part of some imagined, persecuted group—within a larger conspiratorial narrative, just as you mentioned earlier.

On the political left, the dynamic is different. It's less about outright denialism and more about obfuscation or misrepresenting context. I do not know if this comes from the fact that left-leaning discourse often emerges from academic circles, where there's a higher literacy rate. Thus, the language must be more nuanced or sophisticated to justify certain positions.

That is what I see, or at least what interview experts share with me. How do you see these things being framed today? Do you note any historical parallels in how groups on the right and the left engage with these ideas? Is there anything relevant that contributes to this line of inquiry?

Weixelbaum: Yes, I agree with your observations. On the right is this "wink and nod" approach—the classic schoolyard bully behaviour of "I'm not touching you" while causing harm. It's a way of bullying while pretending not to, and it is very much intentional.

On the left, the issue is often buried in rhetoric. I have been disappointed by parts of the academic community. It has felt isolating as a scholar to watch post-colonial research and discourse get twisted into an older, more insidious form of discrimination.

You can criticize the Israeli government, of course. But suppose you are making the argument that Israel should not exist. In that case, you are—knowingly or not—making an argument for ethnic cleansing.

No matter how much Frantz Fanon you cite, the core of the argument becomes apparent when you ask a person plainly: "What is your plan for removing all the people who currently live there?" And, "What if they do not want to leave?"

At that point, every single time, the response is obfuscation. As you said—it's a pivot to rhetoric, a shift to some vague ideological talking point that avoids addressing the practical, moral implications of the argument. If you are advocating for ethnic cleansing, at least own it.

On the right, it is less about obfuscation and more about trolling. Unfortunately, this tactic also has a long history.

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Let me give you a historical example. In the late Weimar Republic—after the temporary ban on the Nazi Party was lifted in the late 1920s—the Nazis entered parliament alongside other parties. But when sessions were gaveled into order, the Nazis would often all stand up in unison, smile, and march out of the chamber.

Then, immediately afterward, they would hold a press conference and claim that the government was paralyzed. "See?" they would say. "This is why democracy doesn't work. This is why we need more power." They were the ones who deliberately paralyzed the system and then used that dysfunction as propaganda against democracy itself.

Jacobsen: How are global responses failing—from local institutions to international frameworks—in addressing the rise of antisemitism? For instance, there have been dramatic spikes in anti-Semitic incidents in places like New England. It is harder to tell in some regions because the hatred has always been virulent. In others, antisemitism remains low, likely due to a lack of historical traction.

Weixelbaum: It is incredibly disappointing, upsetting, and alienating to watch people conflate eliminationist views toward Israel with broader post-colonial liberation struggles.

This has been especially painful to witness within specific segments of the Black American community. It created real tensions during the 2020 election. Many people wanted to support Kamala Harris—a woman of colour—and Black Americans, who are the base of the Democratic Party.

But a vocal minority also framed the anti-Israel movement as inherently aligned with the Black struggle. Public intellectuals like Ta-Nehisi Coates, for example, have drawn such connections. While those arguments are often made in good faith, the implications can be problematic when they collapse in nuance.

We also see something structurally similar in Ireland: the argument that Ireland's historical struggle for independence from British rule mirrors the Palestinian cause. And that, somehow, this justifies advocating for the nonexistence of Israel. That kind of framing is alarming.

Unfortunately, antisemitism spreads virally across borders and cultures. What we are seeing now echoes the rhetoric of the 1930s—"The Jewish question." "What are we going to do about the Jews?" "No one wants them."

I co-edited among a few others a book with some of my mentors called *FDR and the Jews*. It recounts an often-overlooked historical episode: the Évian Conference of 1938. President Roosevelt sponsored the conference to persuade other countries to accept Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi Germany.

Delegates from more than 30 nations attended—though I may be off slightly on the exact number; scholars, please do not crucify me for that. But what is essential to remember is this: almost no country agreed to take in Jewish refugees, not even the United States. Congress rejected the premise outright. The only country that volunteered to accept refugees was Cuba. That was it.

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It was a heartbreaking spectacle. And the question we must ask ourselves now is: if something similar were to happen today—if Jewish refugees were once again seeking safety—would the international community respond any differently? The answer might be no. And that is a chilling thought.

Jacobsen: Let me pivot to something more reflective: among Gen Z Jewish kids, do they still anchor themselves in Holocaust memorialization the way older generations—say Boomers or even pre-Boomers—might have? Not necessarily in the "remember trauma" sense alone, but in the tradition of familial and communal remembrance—of using memory to contextualize the present and energize resistance to any resurgence of fascism or authoritarianism?

Or are they more like a Norwegian-American kid whose grandparents immigrated to Minnesota in the 1950s or 1990s, and within a generation, they no longer speak Norwegian, no longer know Danish, and identify as thoroughly American—disconnected from their ancestral past?

Weixelbaum: Yes. That's a sore spot for me. I'm Gen X. And among my younger millennial colleagues and friends—and certainly among Gen Z—I've noticed a significant generational shift in how they view Israel and Jewish identity more broadly.

I am not particularly religious myself, but after Trump's election in 2016—especially after Charlottesville—I felt the need to reconnect more intentionally with the Jewish community. It was the first time I joined a synagogue and started attending services more regularly—not just on the High Holy Days. I come from the Reform tradition—what we jokingly call the "bacon-eating Jews"—not particularly observant, but culturally and communally Jewish.

I still have my grandfather's tallit, the prayer shawl he passed down to my father, and the prayer shawl my father passed on to me. Unsurprisingly, Jews often return to or become more involved with religious or cultural traditions as they age. That is not unique to Jews—it is a broader human pattern.

However, I have noticed that many younger Jews do not feel the same connection to Israel. Part of that may stem from growing up more secular and less rooted in religious tradition. If you go to a Shabbat service—even one happening right now on a Friday evening, just down the street from where I am—you cannot help but notice how deeply embedded the concept of Israel is in Jewish liturgy, memory, and culture.

Of course, there is a distinction between the modern political state of Israel—founded after World War II—and the idea of Israel in religious and cultural tradition. These are not identical concepts, and they sometimes overlap in contradictory ways.

But I do wonder—when I hear younger, often secular, assimilated American Jews saying things like "I'm an anti-Zionist Jew"—what does that mean in practice? How do you reconcile being observant, even loosely, with rejecting the very concept of Israel? It feels, to me, antithetical to the foundations of Jewish religious tradition.

And how much of this comes down to a lack of knowledge. Some of these individuals are highly assimilated and do not observe much. Then, some observe but seem to twist themselves into rhetorical pretzels to hold their views. The Jewish faith does allow space for questioning,

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argument, and reinterpretation. That's one of the things I love most about Judaism—it embraces debate.

That's what the Talmud is: rabbis writing in the margins, disagreeing with one another, sometimes even saying, "No, that's wrong—here's how I see it." That's why so many Jews became scholars and lawyers—it's part of the intellectual tradition. It's a stereotype, but like many stereotypes, there's a grain of truth.

Still, I find it alienating and disturbing. I want to share some of them and say: "Hey—come listen. When you're at a service, actually listen." There are Jews who violently disagree with me on this, and I understand that. But it does not make it any less painful.

I'm probably ruffling feathers by saying this—but it's my perspective. When everyone is standing in the synagogue with their hands covering their eyes, reciting the Shema—the literal opening words are *"Shema Yisrael"* or "Hear, O Israel." Those are the first three words of one of Jewish tradition's oldest and holiest prayers.

How can someone reject the idea of Israel entirely on the one hand while fully embracing Jewish faith and ritual on the other? Of course, people do—and that is their right. But I find it very difficult to reconcile. I struggle to understand that position.

Moving from the theological back into the political, what we see today—especially in populist movements—is a departure from rational, fact-based discourse. Populism thrives in an emotional world, not a logical one. Its primary engine is sustained outrage and the relentless manufacture of enemies.

Once the identity of "the enemy" is established, everything else—facts, policy, history—must be shaped to fit that narrative. That narrative must fuel resentment and elevate a hero figure or demagogue.

People may be upset with me for saying this, but what the right wing is doing now mirrors this dynamic exactly. One day, they were championing unregulated capitalism. The next day, they are saying things like: "It's good that the stock market is down," "Tariffs are good," or "Economic collapse is good—we don't need all these material possessions." The logic shifts to fit the political moment and supports whomever the hero of the day happens to be.

That is where this all starts to intersect with Judaism again. It is painful. And yes, eventually, these movements tend to move on to some other shiny object to be angry about. They already are. But for now, Trumpism has captured and focused the energy of so many.

It is extraordinarily frustrating to witness this, and it is heartbreaking to grieve the loss of friends along the way—friends I've lost because of these deep, polarizing disagreements.

Jacobsen: So—here's the question: Zionism, in the most generic sense, refers to support for the existence of a Jewish state. But even that broad definition opens up much complexity.

It does not imply a monolithic ethnostate of 100% Jewish heritage, culture, or ethnic background. That would be a naïve assumption, especially considering that last I checked, the third-largest political party in Israel was an Arab Palestinian party.

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And then there's Christian Zionism in the United States—people like Mike Huckabee who actively support the existence of Israel, often for theological reasons tied to end-times prophecy. Some in that camp go further, rejecting the two-state solution altogether and framing Jewish sovereignty in purely religious terms.

Weixelbaum: All right—wow. That's a big question with three major parts. I'll start with Christian nationalism because I have some family members on my spouse's side who believe in it. And to be precise—it does not just frustrate me; it repulses me.

They deserve to know exactly how I feel. Christian Zionism, as promoted by many evangelicals, is directly tied to an apocalyptic fantasy in which Jews burn in hellfire unless and until they abandon their faith. That is the theological underpinning of their support for Israel. It is disgusting.

We should not sugarcoat it with all the flowery rhetoric they use. That's what it is: a belief that conflict in Israel will trigger the apocalypse, leading to the Second Coming, during which Jews will either convert to Christianity or face eternal damnation. That is the basis of their so-called support for a Jewish state.

And it disturbs me deeply that so many right-wingers and members of the Republican Party back Israel for that reason. It is not welcome support. I reject it. It is grotesque—there is no other word for it.

Essentially, they believe that everything will eventually be OK—for them—if I, as a Jew, am tortured for eternity unless I admit I was "wrong" for being Jewish. No, thank you. They can take that and shove it. You can print that. Anyway, that's the first part.

Part two—the Zionist extremists who reject a two-state solution—are also deeply problematic. Democracy cannot coexist with an ethno-nationalist project that excludes large swaths of people. Despite some criticisms from the left, inclusion must be fundamental. If you are going to govern democratically, you must include everyone. As you mentioned, one of the largest political parties in Israel is Arab. There are at least two million Arab citizens living in Israel. That fact is routinely ignored by anti-Israel critics.

Now, it is a thorny and complex issue. More must be done to expand democratic inclusion within Israel. It is undeniably challenging to do that when you are surrounded by groups and governments that openly call for your destruction.

Let us also not forget that Jews have been ethnically cleansed from many surrounding countries. Take Yemen, for example. There were once thousands of Jews there. Today, there are virtually none. That's not just sad—it is alarming.

I believe firmly in a two-state solution, which has long been the internationally recognized path forward. However, I am frustrated by the failures of earlier generations that left this unresolved. I am incredibly frustrated by UNRWA's role in perpetuating the problem. In many cases, it has helped foster environments in which anti-Israel forces can thrive unchecked.

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And let's be honest—Hamas tunnels were discovered underneath UNRWA facilities. That is not a minor issue. That is a profoundly problematic breach of humanitarian neutrality. Trying to spin that as a non-event is absurd.

The institutions enabling this cycle need to go extinct so we can get back to the hard but necessary work of building two states. That is the only path forward that honours the rights and lives of both Israelis and Palestinians.

And frankly, for the sake of the Jewish people, we must pursue this. Because, as we are seeing yet again, unresolved conflict brings the old spectre of antisemitism right back to life. And on a personal level, I would love to see that spectre buried once and for all. So—those are the first two. What was the third part again? Remind me.

Jacobsen: To recap the three threads, the first involves what a theologian described as "apocalyptic Christian Zionism"—the type Mike Huckabee endorses. It differs from more moderate forms of Christian Zionism in that it is rooted in eschatological fantasy. These believers view the reclamation—not only of the occupied Palestinian territories but of all surrounding lands, including current Israeli territory—as essential to triggering the Second Coming of Christ. In this narrative, the end of days arrives, and the Jewish people must either convert, recant their Judaism (whether Orthodox, Conservative, or otherwise), or suffer eternal damnation. That is their theological framework, and it is deeply troubling.

The second thread is the rejection of the two-state solution by some of these Christian Zionists, often aligned with far-right political actors in the United States. They oppose any diplomatic resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, favouring instead a maximalist, biblically justified annexationist vision. And yes, we would need several days to explore the complex history of the two-state framework—how it has been supported in theory and subverted in practice by different actors. However, since we focus on antisemitism, I will leave a deeper geopolitical analysis aside.

The third form is perhaps the most socially corrosive: a soft exclusion that emerges in progressive spaces in the West—particularly on college campuses. A clinical social worker and two clinical psychologists, all of Jewish heritage, recently raised this in a published group dialogue. They shared an example from Columbia University: a Jewish student, who may or may not have a strong stance on Israel, is asked to renounce support for Israel to join a gardening club. This is not a political debate but a condition for participation in basic student life.

It is that kind of gatekeeping—of requiring ideological alignment as a prerequisite for inclusion—that places young Jews, especially those just entering adulthood and university, in an impossible position. These students may not have sophisticated political views yet; they may be ethnically or culturally Jewish, but that alone becomes grounds for exclusion. That's a deeply troubling trend. Of course, there are many other Zionisms—labour, political, cultural, revisionist, and post-Zionist—but the three we discuss here are the most socially visible and practically consequential today.

Weixelbaum: Yes—exactly. Why do they not just say, "No Jews allowed"? That is the subtext of so much of this. Come on. That's what is so frustrating.

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And, yes, say what you will about the tenets of national socialism—but at least it was overt about its ethos. (That's a *Big Lebowski* quote, by the way, but also relevant.) What we see now, especially from the far left, is obfuscation. There's this constant effort to bury the message under euphemisms. "We're not anti-Jewish—we're just anti-Israel." But then I want to stop them and ask, "Wait—are you saying I cannot join your club or be part of your space simply because I believe the State of Israel, born in the aftermath of the Holocaust and surrounded by hostile neighbours who have repeatedly sought its destruction, has a right to exist?"

That is the prerequisite for my exclusion?

I want to quiz them. I want to ask, "What do you know about Judaism? Can you recite the Shema prayer's first three words—one of our tradition's most sacred prayers?" What are those first three words?

Shema Yisrael—"Hear, O Israel."

Jacobsen: Also, gold star for the most Jewish word I've heard this year: *Shema*.

Weixelbaum: *The Shema*—that's right. And for me, the level of obfuscation I hear from some people when discussing Israel and Judaism tells me they fundamentally do not understand Judaism at all. Judaism and the concept of Israel are deeply interconnected—religiously, historically, and culturally.

Some of the rhetoric today veers into outright historical revisionism. You hear people claim, absurdly, that Jews are not native to the land of Israel. But we know that's false. The oldest Jewish cemetery in Jerusalem, on the Mount of Olives, contains graves that are thousands of years old. You can visit them. It is not theoretical—it's a literal place. This is not a people who "sprang into existence in 1949." Jewish presence in the region spans millennia.

If you applied that same revisionist logic to any other group—say, Indigenous nations in North America—and told them, "Sorry, your connection to this land is invalid," or "Your nation should not exist," it would be rightly recognized as ridiculous, even comically racist. But somehow, when it comes to Jews, there's an asterisk. There's always an exception. And that isn't comforting.

When the solidarity movement on the left starts drawing ideological lines where Jews are excluded or uniquely scrutinized, then we are no longer talking about leftism. We are talking about populism. And that's the problem.

For the cheap seats, let me say it clearly: populism is very good at co-opting social justice rhetoric. But its core mechanism is always the same—identifying and destroying enemies. Once Jews are designated as that enemy, populist movements will twist, adapt, and steal whatever rhetoric suits the moment. The outcome is always the same: destruction.

If I may digress for a moment—because this is personal and painful—let me tell you what *leftism* means.

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Leftism means public health. It means people who do not spend their time posting memes on social media but are instead in hospitals, schools, and nonprofits trying to find real solutions to improve people's lives. I work with those people every day.

Many of them have lost their jobs for the so-called "crime" of trying to protect others—people doing their best to keep communities safe and healthy. That is solidarity, and I respect that kind of moral seriousness.

It is not about saying, "This group gets extra privilege" or "That group should be excluded." It is not about playing oppression Olympics or creating racial hierarchies. It is about making sure we do our best for everyone. We try, we fail, and we try again.

We must think carefully about the terms we use, the ideas we promote, and how they affect real people. That is what solidarity looks like: not spending all your time online finding enemies to destroy or dunking on people for clout.

That is not leftism, as far as I'm concerned.

Jacobsen: How do you build this into your writing?

Weixelbaum: Ah, great question. As a science writer, especially before the previous administration, I found it relatively easy to advocate for public health. It was meaningful work—you could go to sleep at night knowing you were helping highlight the critical efforts of hardworking scientists, often those behind the scenes, doing the essential work that now—only now, in their absence—people finally seem to recognize and care about.

My experience in public health informs a great deal of my political writing. I have written for Democratic campaigns and nonprofit initiatives, and I've always believed in advocating for the public good. That is an area where you can generate real buy-in. If we drill down into ideology, yes—it is often a left-wing concept, the idea of "the commons"—that solidarity has no boundaries and everyone deserves access to shared public goods.

And you know what? Even conservatives—especially in regions like rural Pennsylvania—often care about public parks, clean air, open space, and wildlife preservation. Those are shared values. I worked on a voter guide during the 2020 election. I was told that it reached over 300,000 unique voters in Pennsylvania alone. I used that kind of framing to create common ground.

That matters. That is how we can move people. We need more of that. We need to de-radicalize this culture and walk people back from the ledge. It cannot always be about what we are against—about what we hate. I know it is frustrating, and I am ranting now.

Jacobsen: We also saw similar political undercurrents and troubling spikes in Europe. Take Germany, for example—the rise of the AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) marks a sharp uptick in populist rhetoric and far-right sentiment within a previously more reasoned political environment. In the United States, antisemitism has manifested across nearly every sector of society. Every demographic and every political bloc has seen some level of it—there is no clear partisan divide.

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Here in Canada, looking at the most recent census data and hate crime statistics, the majority of reported hate crimes are anti-Semitic. That is followed at some distance by Islamophobic or anti-Muslim crimes, and then anti-Catholic ones—which surprises some people but makes demographic sense given that roughly 40% of Canada identifies as Catholic.

What I have not seen as much attention paid to, however, is the experience of atheists, agnostics, and humanists. In Canada and the U.S., I do not believe the state data fully reflects the animus many from those communities report. However, early-stage studies suggest that non-religious individuals face widespread hostility. In the U.S., the hatred directed at secular people appears to be tri-partisan—coming from Republicans, Democrats, and Independents alike. I am unsure how the Green or Libertarian parties factor into that, but the trend is worrying.

That's more of a side comment. But to bring us back on track: in Europe today, what are you observing regarding the current manifestations of antisemitism? How would you compare that to what we see in the United States? After that, maybe we can touch on other regions as well.

Weixelbaum: Germany is understandably the most frightening case because of its historical legacy. I was relieved to see recent electoral results in which the AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) lost ground, and cooler heads prevailed. But still, the echoes of the 1930s and the viral spread of far-right populist movements globally are alarming.

And not to sound like a broken record, these movements often emerge from a profound anxiety—a deep sense of unease about one's place in the world. This is something that has been studied extensively. Everyone always wants to know: how did the Nazis come to power? What led an advanced society, filled with culture and learning, into such darkness?

When I taught courses on the Holocaust and Nazi Germany—both to undergraduates and graduate students—the book I consistently used was *The Nazi Seizure of Power* by William Sheridan Allen. Despite the generic-sounding title, it is an incredibly insightful text. It focuses on a medium-sized town—not a major city, but a large town—in Germany between the late 1920s and a year or two after the Nazis took power.

The value of the book is that it dives into the local dynamics. Who became a Nazi? Who resisted? What patterns emerged? And some of the answers are surprising. While many supporters did come from the working class and those devastated by the Great Depression, some of the most ardent Nazi loyalists were middle-class citizens—people who still had something to lose. It was precisely their sense of vulnerability, their fear of downward mobility that made them susceptible.

They had a measure of comfort and stability but were plagued by fears of losing it—about their status, identity, and place in a rapidly changing world. Those are the same underlying dynamics fueling far-right movements today. It is not always the most downtrodden who turn to extremism. Often, it is the anxious middle class.

We live through intense and accelerating change—culturally, politically, economically, and scientifically. With the advent of instant communication and real-time information, the velocity of change feels overwhelming. The only constant in history is change, which now feels turbocharged.

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So it's not surprising that amid this paradigm shift—this moment when new world order is forming—right-wing populist movements are surging. And to be fair, populism is not exclusive to the right. Left-wing populism can also emerge from the same base of anxiety. The language may differ. The targets may vary. But the emotional mechanism is strikingly similar.

What is perhaps most unsettling—and this goes back to Allen's book—is the role of the so-called "respectable people." These were well-educated individuals, people from liberal or centrist traditions, who you would expect to resist extremism. But they became true believers. That's always the danger.

It reminds me of the darkly humorous line: "I voted for the leopard-eating-face party, but I didn't think they'd eat *my face*." And now, in America, we're watching people panic as their stock portfolios suffer under the chaos they helped usher in.

At the core of all this is status fear. It is not about poverty—it is about fear of falling. That is what fuels so much of today's radicalism.

Jacobsen: How do you see Reform Jewish communities responding to this rise in antisemitism? We can also talk about Conservative and Orthodox communities. Still, I understand your personal experience and commitments might be more grounded in the Reform tradition.

Weixelbaum: That's a thorny one. The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) is one of the oldest and most visible Jewish organizations in the United States. They've been around for a long time and are often seen speaking for the broader Jewish community. But I want to be precise—I can not speak for the Reform Jewish community. As the saying goes, "Two Jews, three opinions," right?

That said, there is a bifurcation happening. The ADL appears to be increasingly aligned with the political right in the United States, at least in terms of what they excuse or remain silent about. For example, I believe they downplayed Elon Musk's very public gesture, which many interpreted as a Nazi salute. Unless I hallucinated that, they publicly suggested it was not a Nazi salute. Did that happen? Because if so, that's extraordinarily disturbing.

Who exactly are they protecting in that scenario? It certainly is not the majority of American Jews—most of whom are deeply unsettled by the sharp rise in anti-Semitic rhetoric, attacks, and threats.

As a Holocaust scholar, I find all of this more than worrisome. I see patterns repeating. And it is paralyzing. Many of us are shocked, frozen, watching this unfold. I cannot help but think of relatives a couple of generations back—Jews living in Germany in the early 1930s, after the Nazis rose to power. What were their conversations like around the dinner table?

"What do we do?" "Do we stay? We have jobs. We have family here." "But if we leave, where do we go?" "Is anywhere else safer?" Those same conversations—impossible calculations—are happening again around modern dinner tables. That I can tell you with confidence. And the terrifying part is that no one knows where it leads. All we know is that we are in a worsening crisis that feels familiar and unprecedented.

So yes, the Reform community has a wide range of reactions and disturbances. When I attend synagogue, almost every sermon includes some reflection on the rise of antisemitism, the sense

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of isolation, and the complexity of the moment—especially in light of the Israel-Gaza conflict. Many are leaning deeper into their Jewish communities for support. But even those spaces can feel isolating, particularly when everything gets tangled up in the geopolitics of the Middle East.

As for consensus? I do not think there is one yet. What we *can* say—based on voting patterns—is that the vast majority of American Jews supported the Democratic candidate in the last election, mainly because they hoped it would reduce the threat of antisemitism and far-right extremism. But then we hear rhetoric from Trump claiming that Jews who support Democrats "aren't real Jews." That isn't comforting.

As one of my mentors joked—thank you, Dr. Lichtman—"Ah yes, noted rabbinical scholar Donald Trump is now deciding who counts as Jewish." I'll cite my source there. He was on my dissertation committee, and, funny enough, he still is. I don't know what the next move is for my community. I know this: I do not feel safe right now.

Jacobsen: There was a roast once of Joan Rivers by Gilbert Gottfried. And... the guy who always talked like *this* and used to squint all the time. He had this entire bit, one of the funniest comedic monologues I've ever heard. It was at a roast of Joan Rivers, and the whole thing was wrapped around this outrageous story of them supposedly making love.

He begins with: "There's been much talk about the much-maligned Joan Rivers' vagina." Then he dives in: "How old is it? How *dry* is it? How many men died during its construction?" And from there, it just keeps escalating.

I have always thought that kind of ribbed, ruthless humour would make brilliant advisory commentary—biting, observational, but disarming. It would also make a good framework for writing something timely.

Weixelbaum: You are touching on something vital there. Humour matters—deeply. And it is something I have been thinking about since our last conversation.

People often ask me, as someone who studies fascism and authoritarianism, "What's going on?" "Help me understand." So, I explain the dynamics. And then they say, "Now I'm depressed. What can I *do*?"

For a while, I struggled with how to respond. But I do have an answer now: humour. Humour is one of the most potent tools we have against populism, right-wing extremism, and fascism—ideologies that thrive on fear, anger, and isolation.

Populist and fascist movements feed on rage. Their ecosystem depends on sustaining grievance, amplifying resentment, and keeping people in constant outrage. But humour—especially the kind deeply rooted in Jewish culture—can deflate that. Humour says, "Why are you so angry? It could always be worse."

That kind of wry, self-aware humour takes power out of authoritarianism. It exposes how brittle and ridiculous it is. Humour interrupts fear, and fear is what fascism feeds on.

Right now, I am looking across the room at my copy of Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. So much of that book is about the psychological dimension of authoritarianism.

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How it isolates people from each other, creates internal fragmentation, and dissolves the social glue. I have felt that. I am living it. These past few months have been tough. I've struggled.

But I remind myself—and others—that maintaining a sense of humour is not frivolous. It is essential. Humour disarms the very forces trying to isolate us. And Jewish humour, in particular, has always had that capacity. It is both cathartic and piercing. Think about *Springtime for Hitler*—one of the greats. That's Mel Brooks turning fascism into farce and, in doing so, stripping it of its menace.

Jacobsen: I was a drama student in high school. I wrote two plays and acted in a few others. I remember the feeling of trying to put complex things into words—translating emotion into performance. Humour lets you turn the angle, even just 15 degrees, maybe 40. As George Carlin once said, *something* has to be out of proportion for something to be funny. There must be a distortion, which creates the comedic break. He was probably right.

Now, we've talked about Europe. We've talked about America. What about the Middle East? What do you see there—in terms of literature, plays, or cultural and artistic output—that could be considered universal, cosmopolitan, or inclusive? And how does that compare to material that is explicitly or implicitly antisemitic? What's the cultural landscape like there?

Weixelbaum: What's coming out of the region, culturally? I wish I could point to specific examples right now. I do. But I would be dishonest if I tried to speak with authority on the current Israeli or Palestinian cultural scenes. I've just been too distracted lately—consumed by the immediate, by what is unfolding right in front of me.

That said, this conversation is a prompt—a reminder to pay more attention to what is happening beyond the headlines and my professional tunnel vision. What I would *like* to see, what I *hope* is happening, is that somewhere—amid all of this darkness—there are Jews, Arabs, and Palestinians using humour, art, and culture to build bridges. That is where hope lives.

As Mister Rogers used to say, "Look for the helpers." The artists—the people who build connections through creativity—are helpers, too. That matters to me on a deep level. Even though I went into a technical, scholarly, scientific career, art is where my soul resides. It is where healing begins, where we can address even the most entrenched, painful problems.

I will not pretend to be familiar with specific plays, films, or cross-cultural artistic collaborations right now. I do not know. But I am sure they exist. And I urge anyone who sees, hears, or experiences them to *amplify* them. We need so much more of that. We need more beauty, courage, and humanity in this space. That is how we start to reverse this damage.

Everything that is made can be unmade—including violence, division, and hate. And it *must* be unmade. One of the tragic yet redemptive features of the human condition is that we do not live very long. That means that every new generation brings an opportunity for change. Every student, every curious young person, has a chance to do things differently—to break cycles of inherited trauma and violence.

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We need to nurture that. We need to commit to that. And I say this while fully acknowledging that I have been caught up in the acrimony. These past months have been deeply upsetting. I've felt defensive and anxious—like I am under attack all the time simply for being Jewish.

That's not a sustainable emotional state for anyone. And yet, it is the reality for many of us. That is why we need to stand together, yes, and also *work* together. I know it sounds trite—but it is essential.

Jacobsen: Who do you see as having the most significant influence in these cycles? Not in the conspiratorial sense—because, of course, both the far right and far left love to cast blame in ways that feed their narratives. On the far right, the MAGA crowd is obsessed with George Soros. On the far left, it is often white nationalists or Christian nationalists who are scapegoated.

But not through that lens—through a sober lens. Who do you think is *most emotionally invested* in perpetuating anti-Semitic tropes? Who are the real influencers of this?

Weixelbaum: Unfortunately, it is becoming an increasingly familiar roster. Elon Musk is now at the top of that list. I wish more of my friends had been skeptical ten years ago when so many had stars in their eyes about Mars missions and underground tunnels and electric cars. I remember telling people, "I saw him make a crude ejaculation joke at a sitting senator on social media—are we sure this is the visionary you think he is?"

That was a decade ago. And now we're seeing the consequences. It does not surprise me. Musk has become a central figure in this disconcerting space—one that combines right-wing bullying, antisemitism, racism, and the broader aesthetic of fascism. It is not just rhetoric anymore—power, influence, and cultural permission to hate.

And then, of course, there's Steve Bannon. He is deliberately trying to build an international network of far-right—and frequently antisemitic—organizations and parties. He is not subtle about it. He's a strategist for global extremism.

Of course, there is the elephant in the room: Donald Trump. Ever since he said, "wonderful people on both sides" after Charlottesville, he has empowered and emboldened a movement that had long been lurking in the shadows. He mainstreamed it. He gave permission.

And the result has been a disturbing rise of far-right, fascist-adjacent sentiment—not just in America but globally.

And in practice, of course, the consequences are devastating. Look at what happened in Oklahoma City—evacuating buildings rebuilt after earlier bombings by far-right racists. It is hard not to see the throughline—the ideological connections—between the present and the violent past. And we cannot ignore the other elephant in the room that we should have talked about much earlier: Vladimir Putin.

Putin has been deliberately amplifying antisemitic groups and narratives, stoking division in Western societies for years—mainly through disinformation and social media manipulation. This is not speculation; this is well documented. Peer-reviewed research papers, intelligence briefings, and journalistic investigations all point to the same conclusion.

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Jacobsen: Regarding President Vladimir Putin and the leadership around him in the Kremlin—this is not theoretical to me. I've been to the region twice. The first time, I stayed for two or so weeks; the second time, it was just shy of a month. I was initially doing war journalism alongside a Romanian journalist and then with two journalists the second time. I returned in mid-September last year.

The second book of those conversations will be out either this weekend or next week. I have all the materials ready now.

One Ukrainian Jewish researcher I spoke to—someone I trust—explained that there's significant antisemitism being spread online within Ukraine. But—and this is key—it is not organically Ukrainian. It is generated by bots or external forms of influence operating within Ukrainian digital spaces.

So, what we are looking at is not simply internal cultural bigotry but an externally imposed disinformation campaign. It is a very different kind of front—psychological and cultural.

A lot of this weaponized antisemitism ties back to disinformation campaigns that distort historical memory, particularly around sensitive topics like the Maidan protests and Independence Square commemorations—for example, debates about which symbols should be allowed during national remembrance ceremonies. Christian crosses were broadly accepted—seen as representing "real" Ukrainian history—while Jewish symbols like the menorah were rejected, with the implicit message that Jewish history is somehow foreign or lesser.

This kind of symbolic exclusion is powerful. It says: *your history doesn't count here.*

And that is just one layer. There are more profound, more academic forms of distortion—historical revisionism, outright denialism, and tropes echoing longstanding antisemitic slurs. Some of the antisemitic language in Ukrainian is either metaphorical or explicitly refers to antisemitic archetypes.

So yes, this is an ongoing and growing phenomenon. The real questions become: How widespread is it? Who are the sources? What networks are responsible—bots, trolls, foreign agents, or localized enablers? And most importantly, how do you deal with it? How do you respond meaningfully?

There's also the matter of broader propaganda systems operating in the region, which we can reevaluate momentarily. I'll let you respond first—and if I remember the other thread I was thinking of, I'll gently nudge us back to it.

Weixelbaum: Yes. There is an undeniable irony here—because Ukraine has a profound Jewish history. The city of Odessa, for example, had one of the most vibrant and vital Jewish communities in Eastern Europe. Then came the devastation of the Holocaust during World War II. And after that, the repression under Stalin. These communities were deeply wounded—historically, demographically, and spiritually.

And yet, Ukraine now has a Jewish president. That is extraordinary. It complicates every lazy narrative about antisemitism being innate or immutable in Eastern Europe.

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Still, I had some difficult conversations with friends at the beginning of this horrific war Putin has launched against Ukraine. Many of the online attacks that emerged in those early months were not even focused on Ukrainians themselves—but were broader attempts to muddy the waters, sow confusion, fracture alliances, and revive ancient hatreds under the guise of nationalism.

Putin has used antisemitism not just as a domestic tool—but as a geopolitical weapon. These disinformation campaigns—especially antisemitic ones—have not remained confined to Eastern Europe. They are percolating into the West. And it isn't comforting. I have friends—ostensibly left-wing, progressive friends—who are now parroting Kremlin propaganda, insisting that "Ukraine is full of Nazis."

One of the tactics antisemitic trolls love to use is calling Jews "Nazis." They know exactly how hurtful that is: Holocaust inversion, which is an academic subfield specifically devoted to studying this They do it precisely *because* it is emotionally brutal for us. And now we are seeing the left-wing version of it as well—people saying that "Jews are committing a Holocaust in Gaza" or that "Israel is a Nazi state."

I have had to bite my tongue at family gatherings—hearing distant relatives or friends say this to my face. I have had to sit there and… breathe because it is not just an intellectual insult but a deep personal wound.

Anyway, circling back to Russia and Ukraine—there is a longstanding connection between trolling and fascism. They go hand in hand. Nazi rhetoric always had that element of winking, nodding plausible deniability. "What? I'm not bullying you—I'm just asking questions." It is trolling in its most dangerous form. And online, that style of communication has been supercharged.

Putin and his massive troll infrastructure have taken this model and run with it. Over the past decade, they have waged not only a physical war in Ukraine but a sustained psychological war across Western societies—using antisemitism as one of their most effective wedge tools.

As we noted earlier, some call antisemitism the oldest form of racism. And in terms of weaponization, it is undoubtedly one of the most enduring and effective ways to fracture liberal coalitions. So, no—it does not surprise me that this is happening in Ukraine. I only hope that my Ukrainian brethren—especially those resisting both invasion and ideological pollution—stay strong.

I say this personally. I am half Ukrainian—on my maternal side, ironically, the *non-Jewish* side of my family. And with both the war in Ukraine and the escalating crisis in Israel and Gaza, this past year has been incredibly difficult for me. I care deeply about both conflicts. I follow developments on both fronts daily.

To answer your question—what can we do to combat this?—we need to use every tool available to fight trolls and disinformation. That means humour, blocking, and zero-tolerance policies. It means well-designed moderation tools in digital spaces. These are not optional anymore. They are necessities.

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Above all, teaching critical thinking. My spouse is a university librarian, and this is what they do—teach media literacy, especially to young people immersed in online spaces. It is one of the reasons I married them. The front line in this battle is teaching people to analyze, evaluate, and contextualize.

Interestingly, New Jersey—the same state we joked about earlier—is the first state in the U.S. to mandate media literacy instruction in high schools. That is huge and incredibly important. So yes, these are our tools: humour, education, moderation, and community standards. And we have to *use* them. because what we are up against is not just offensive—it is corrosive.

And I remembered the other point I wanted to raise: the irony that the culture which sacrificed the most soldiers and civilians in the fight against Nazism—namely the Soviet Union, and in particular, Russians—is now one of the largest global exporters of neo-Nazi rhetoric and antisemitic propaganda.

It is stunning. And it has brought me to a rather bleak thought. You know how the old saying goes: "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice"? Lately, I have started to feel like… maybe it bends toward *irony.*

Jacobsen: The arc of the moral universe may lead toward irony. Maybe not toward justice but toward irony. Not necessarily in the cosmic sense but in the rhetorical and moral one. That feels about right. Perhaps the larger arc is justice, but the *subtext*—its lived texture—is irony. There's a kind of tragic subset of moral physics where irony is inescapable.

And it reminds me—there was a famous director, brilliant in his craft but less so in his personal life. He did some awful things involving his stepdaughter—Woody Allen. I remember an interview he gave maybe five or ten years ago. He said, "The longer you live, you stick around, and you start to see that about every hundred years, everything gets flushed again." There's this sense that no matter how much progress we think we've made, it cycles back.

That's why irony feels so present. We can have these elevated conversations about moral arcs and cycles, but the reality—the texture of it—feels more ironic than linear. Even though lifespans have doubled, and we have access to medicine, infrastructure, and relative safety, we still carry the existential dread our ancestors had.

Shakespeare wrote about the brevity of life when people were dying at 30 from cholera or dysentery. Today, we say the same things in a world where we can live into our eighties, albeit often at the cost of financial ruin due to medical debt. So yes, there's an irony in that, too: I have so much and still feel like it's never enough.

All of this folds back into a broader loss—not just of ethics but of what I'd call *the aesthetic of ethics*—the performative veneer of moral seriousness without its substance.

Weixelbaum: You asked earlier what informs my writing and communication. The more I reflect on it, the more I realize that when I advocate for hope, resilience, and humour in the face of terrible things, I'm not just writing for others.

I'm writing to myself. I'm saying: *Jay, don't lose hope. Don't become hardened. Don't become cynical. Stay human.* If I can convince myself, I can convince one other person, too.

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I once wrote a piece called *Observation on Hope* about my Holocaust research. I don't know if you've seen it, but it explores how people found hope even in the absolute darkest circumstances. That's important right now because, without hope, there is no resilience. Without resilience, there is no humour. And humour, as we've discussed, is a powerful antidote to despair.

And hope—real hope—is not dependent on facts. It is not about optimism. It's about maintaining agency over our attitudes when the external world is spinning out of control. And I'll admit: I need to work on that myself.

Jacobsen: Which playwrights or authors do you think are most insightful—most nuanced—about antisemitism? Who manages to poke at it pointedly and profoundly?

Weixelbaum: Oh man, that's a tough one. There are so many, and I should have done some homework before this conversation. I can point to plenty of scholars who've shaped me. We already mentioned Hannah Arendt, of course.

But I will have what the French call *l'esprit de l'escalier*—staircase wit. I'll think of the best answer *after* we finish talking.

The name that comes to mind right now is Rudolf Vrba and the book *I Escaped from Auschwitz*. It's not a work of fiction or a play, but it reads with literature's intensity and moral clarity. It's a true story.

Vrba was a young man when the Nazis captured him and sent him to Auschwitz. The way the camp was structured, the Nazis needed inmates to serve as a skeleton crew to help run operations—while the rest of the Jews were murdered wholesale. Vrba arrived with a small group of other young men. Slowly, one by one, he watched each of them lose hope.

And the conditions were beyond inhumane. The electric fences were nearly complete. The Nazi army was winning battles in the East. Death was constant—gas chambers operating continuously, corpses piling up, no apparent escape.

There was absolutely no *rational* reason for hope.

And yet, Rudy held onto something—a spark, a conviction that if he could escape and *tell the world*, it might change something. It might matter.

That's why the story stayed with me. It's not just a tale of survival—it's a story of moral defiance. A refusal to surrender to nihilism, even in a world designed to erase you.

And so, Rudolf Vrba's companions lost hope individually. Auschwitz was not only emotionally and spiritually devastating—it was physically excruciating. People died constantly. It was easy to catch cholera. As you said earlier, death by diarrhea was very real. If you were assigned to corpse duty—handling the dead—you were essentially given a death sentence. The bodies were diseased, the work was degrading, and the conditions were impossible.

Sometimes, a guard might simply decide to shoot you. There was no logic. No justice. It was terror by design.

Vrba, against all odds, ended up being one of the last surviving members of his cohort. But as he watched his companions fade—one by one—he made a decision. He would *not* lose hope. And

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what's remarkable is that his hope wasn't rooted in optimism or evidence. It was, in my reading, an *act of defiance*—a conscious refusal to let the Nazis strip him of his humanity.

He chose to keep hope out of *spite* for the horror surrounding him.

Once he took that stance—once he reclaimed his attitude—it unlocked a kind of clarity. He began to observe his surroundings with fresh purpose. He started asking: *What can I learn here? What information can I gather? How can I escape? How can I warn the world about what's happening?*

Eventually, he secured a job near an office—close enough to overhear guards and staff talking. He began collecting fragments of information. In Auschwitz, information was more valuable than food. And over time, through small acts of connection and trust, he formed a plan. He learned that a portion of the electric fence was not yet complete. He pieced together a disguise—a costume he could use in the countryside—and managed to obtain forged papers, money, and supplies.

His escape plan was to hide in a trash pile near the unfinished section of the fence, wait until the timing was right, and then slip out undetected.

And he did it.

He hid while the Nazis searched for days—with dogs, with patrols. But they never found him. Vrba became one of the few people ever to escape from Auschwitz and live to tell the world what was happening inside.

The lesson I take from that is simple but profound: *Hope is not based on data.* It's not "I have hope because X, Y, and Z factors line up." Hope, in its most accurate form, is an *act of will*. It's a decision—an act of resistance in despair.

And if you can hold on to hope under those conditions—when the world is on fire around you—it is one of the most powerful things you can do.

Because here's the other insight: Attitudes are viral.

We have spent so much time in this conversation talking about the virality of grievance—how anger spreads online, how trolling works, how authoritarianism capitalizes on emotional contagion.

However, negative emotions are *not* the only thing that spreads.

Hope is also viral.

When one person holds onto hope and refuses to break, that resilience inspires others, building courage, community, and friendship.

Yes, the online world is designed for rage clicks and hostile engagement. But we can counteract that, saying, "No, I will not give into despair. I am going to stand for connection, for decency, for hope."

That's what I take from Vrba's story.

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There are many other examples—many other brilliant Jewish figures, especially comedians, who have used humour to fight antisemitism. But *this* is the story I wanted to share today because it reminds us that even in the most horrifying circumstances imaginable, a spark of human dignity can survive. And sometimes, that spark is enough to change everything.

You mentioned Elon Musk earlier in connection with all of this.

Jacobsen: I recently heard a joke that made me laugh, albeit darkly: Elon Musk is the first person in history to be radicalized by his algorithm. It's funny—and also devastatingly accurate.

Weixelbaum: This is no longer the premise of a speculative film—it is not probable, perhaps, but entirely plausible. It is no longer science fiction. What we are seeing now is a highly targeted reality, facilitated by rapid technological advancement and openly encouraged by political operators who have a well-documented history of stoking disinformation campaigns—especially those built on antisemitic conspiracy theories. One of the most prominent figures in this regard is Steve Bannon. His sociopolitical and cultural influence, though perhaps more subdued in recent months, remains ever-present, particularly in the advancement of antisemitic and white nationalist rhetoric masked beneath the thin veil of right-wing populism.

Bannon is the perfect case study for my argument throughout this conversation about populism. Ironically, he began his political journey aligned with left-wing populist movements. And if you trace his ideological trajectory, it is no surprise that he ended up on the other side of what some call the "horseshoe"—where the extreme ends of the political spectrum begin to resemble one another. What's deeply troubling is that Bannon sees the potential of transnational right-wing alliances and actively works to cultivate them. His alignment with Viktor Orbán in Hungary, his sympathies toward Putin's regime, and his likely connections to similar elements in Germany and elsewhere illustrate a more significant, chilling truth: this is an international movement. This is not an American problem—it is a global one.

And that fact has clear historical parallels. One of the core themes of the *Nazi on Wall Street* project I've been developing is the international nature of Nazism itself—how it crossed borders, how financial and ideological alliances supported its rise. The protagonist in that story—though maybe not a hero—is tasked with confronting this exact ideological export. Bannon, in many ways, is today's equivalent. He understands and exploits the mechanisms that make populist movements dangerous: rhetorical subversion, half-truths, conspiracies mutating into antisemitic beliefs, and, critically, the addictive emotional thrill of trolling and dominance. He leverages all of these to expand his reach and strengthen his networks.

What makes Bannon especially dangerous is his precision. He knows exactly how these movements feed on emotional energy. He's aware that populism thrives not on policy but on grievance. He exploits the mechanisms of conspiracy, engages in the "wink-and-nod" language of plausible deniability, and rewards people for their cruelty. This little endorphin rush comes from trolling others online. It is dominated by design, and Bannon is its engineer.

The most disturbing aspect, perhaps, is how the legal system—despite occasional action—has failed to stop him. Individuals like Bannon are often rebuked or penalized but rarely neutralized. They're usually empowered once they've gone through the system and come out the other side.

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They have a martyr complex and a renewed sense of purpose. They double down. They go harder. And that terrifies me.

Many felt relieved when they heard rumours that Bannon and Elon Musk were at odds. But even that is not necessarily reassuring. What we are witnessing might be what I call "competing authoritarianism"—where influential individuals vie to out-fascist one another, not because of ideological differences but because of egotism and rivalry. And that, too, is rooted in history.

This dynamic reminds me of the *Führerprinzip*—the "leader principle" from Nazi Germany. The concept holds that there can be only one ultimate authority. These kinds of leaders do not believe in succession planning. They believe in dominance, not continuity. They see themselves as indispensable. And once the "load-bearing villain," as I sometimes call them, begins to falter—physically, politically, or otherwise—everything beneath them starts to collapse.

Trump is a perfect example of this. His influence, while immense, is tied to his persona. If he declines—as it seems he might—that entire structure destabilizes. And while that may cause hope, it also opens up dangerous power vacuums. The Bannons of the world are not gone. They are waiting in the wings.

This is why I often draw comparisons between scientific progress and political authoritarianism. There's an old saying in science: *progress happens one funeral at a time.* Because people do not change their minds about fundamental truths, they hold onto them—desperately, irrationally—until they die. And in politics, particularly in these authoritarian and antisemitic circles, we see the same principle. These figures will not relinquish their grip voluntarily. They will not evolve. They are fossilized in their ideologies. They are not just individuals but outcrops—manifestations—of a system and worldview. And when they are gone, their structures often go with them.

And maybe that's what gives me some hope: not that things will improve naturally, but that history moves—sometimes with terrible cost—but always with movement. And in that movement, in those moments of rupture, there's a chance for something better to emerge.

Jacobsen: Because you mentioned that these are "load-bearing villains," and they tend to be terrible at succession, the natural question is whether we can find some hope in that fact—that they do tremendous damage but rarely pass on their legacy in any formalized, robust way.

Weixelbaum: And that is exactly right. It might be a good way to emphasize this conversation and yesterday's one. Populism and fascism, by their very nature, contain the seeds of their destruction. These movements flourish in liberal societies. That's the paradox. It is precisely the openness, the pluralism, and the tolerance of liberal systems that allow them the space to emerge and grow.

It is easy to be seduced by the politics of grievance by emotionally charged movements built on outrage and fantastical, irrational thinking. You get drawn into this world where nothing matters except what you are mad about and how you can further your divisive cause through rhetoric. But these movements cannot sustain themselves on that anger alone. They spring from liberal societies because they *have to*. You cannot get a populist or fascist uprising in a political vacuum.

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They require institutions to target. They need freedom to exploit. And ultimately, they are corrosive. They destroy the very institutions that allowed them to exist in the first place.

Populism thrives on division. It is anti-coalition by nature. It is my way or the highway, and it escalates through dominance. And on a long enough timeline, the hero of a populist movement almost always becomes its next enemy. That is the entire function of populism: to create enemies to destroy. So, these movements eventually kill themselves. In the process, they cause catastrophic damage to the liberal societies from which they sprang. But they cannot last forever. Because, in the end, you cannot eat anger. You cannot be sheltered by rage. Anger cannot quench your thirst or fill your stomach. Outrage and grievance are powerful mobilizers but do not build stable societies.

People need the basics. People need clean water, safety, jobs, and public services. That is why we created governments in the first place. That is why civilizations exist. So, it is not a question of *if* the populist movement will implode. It will. The real question is: *how many people will suffer before that happens*? That's the tragedy. Hitler envisioned a thousand-year Reich. He got twelve. He and his inner circle were far more disciplined, organized, and ideologically coherent than the band of opportunists and tech demagogues currently circling Trump, Musk, Bannon, and others. So yes, they, too, will burn out. But the concern—the fear—is that they will take many people down with them before they do.

Are there acute examples of this dynamic in American culture? Absolutely. One of the clearest examples is the Populist Party of the late 19th century. It was born out of a legitimate crisis. There was widespread anxiety, especially among farmers suffering from unregulated capitalism. There were few protections against the boom-bust cycles of the economy. These farmers lacked access to credit. A restrictive monetary system punished them. And so they formed a movement —the Populist Party—one of American history's most dramatic grassroots movements.

It rose quickly. There was genuine energy behind it. The arguments were valid—about the elites and economic injustice. But as with most populist movements, they turned to demagogues. The most famous was William Jennings Bryan, a fiery evangelical preacher who fused religious revivalism with political rhetoric. Ultimately, the movement collapsed. It burned out fast. It could not hold its coalitions together. The internal contradictions were too great.

There's even a cultural artifact of this moment that most people don't realize is tied to that political era: *The Wizard of Oz*. It's often read as a populist allegory. The Yellow Brick Road represents the gold standard. The Emerald City is Washington, D.C. The Scarecrow symbolizes the American farmer. The Tin Man represents industrial workers. The Cowardly Lion as Bryan himself—loud, blustering, but ultimately ineffective. It's a brilliant metaphor for how populist movements often begin with legitimate grievances but collapse under the weight of their mythology and internal contradictions.

So yes, they implode. But we should never assume that their implosion is without cost. *The Wizard of Oz*, yes. L. Frank Baum was a political commentator of his time and wrote *The Wizard of Oz*, a parable about the populist movements. Dorothy is in Kansas, the symbolic heartland of the American farmer and populist base. Along the way, she travels on the Yellow Brick Road,

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which is widely interpreted to represent the gold-based monetary system of the time. She's heading to the Emerald City—green, of course—symbolizing the idea of flexible money, or "greenbacks" as they were called in those days. In Baum's original story, Dorothy doesn't have ruby slippers; she has silver slippers—another reference to the silver standard advocated by populists as a more forgiving and inclusive economic model than gold.

And who does she need to convince along the way? First, she meets the Tin Man, who represents industrial workers. The issue is that he has no heart—cold, machine-like, and dehumanized by the industrial economy. Then there's the Scarecrow, who represents farmers. He's portrayed as lacking a brain—not because he is unintelligent, but because farmers were often viewed as uneducated or politically naive. Then there's the Cowardly Lion—widely accepted as a caricature of William Jennings Bryan himself: all thunder and roaring rhetoric, but ultimately a coward who falters when real courage is required.

And, of course, they discover the man behind the curtain once they reach the Emerald City—the so-called elite. It's all smoke and mirrors. It's a performance, a trick. There's no wizard, no magical solution. That's the final blow of Baum's allegory: populism often revolves around spectacle, but it's all illusion behind the curtain. So yes, we have a deep tradition of political metaphor embedded in our cultural texts—texts like *The Wizard of Oz*—that many Americans and people worldwide do not realize are coded critiques of political movements like populism.

Many historians will likely bristle at this interpretation. I can feel their hackles rising already. This is my read. My expertise is more focused on the far-right and Nazi variants of these movements. Some may argue it's only "populism" if it originates with the 19th-century American farmers' movement. But we need to expand our definitions if we are going to understand what is happening before our eyes today.

Jacobsen: Do "load-bearing heroes" in positive movements suffer from similar issues in terms of legacy, sustainability, and passing along institutional wisdom? Or do they tend to be more successful than their authoritarian counterparts?

Weixelbaum: That's a great question—and yes, it's a serious problem. Historians have a term for this: the "Great Man Theory." It's the idea that singular, towering individuals drive historical progress. And that is a problematic lens because it oversimplifies how real, lasting change happens. While people certainly gravitate toward figures like Lincoln or FDR here in the United States, we too often forget that their successes came from legions of people working behind the scenes—drafting legislation, managing logistics, creating new bureaucracies like the Social Security Administration, or organizing massive efforts like the Allied invasion of Normandy.

These aren't one man's achievements—they're many's achievements. There's an essential place for individual inspiration, no doubt. But the danger—especially with populism—is the temptation to attach the movement's identity to one charismatic person. And once that person is gone, the whole thing often collapses. Populism loves a demagogue. It loves a figurehead who personifies grievance and rage. Maybe it's just human nature—we want a hero to show up with a cape. But we keep making the same mistake: hoping someone will save us.

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We need leaders who understand that solidarity is not a one-person show. We need heroes who are humble enough to empower others, decentralize their influence, build sustainable institutions, and show—by example—that real change takes everyone. Leadership should be about lifting others, not consolidating power. The more people involved in shaping that future, the more resilient it becomes.

Jacobsen: That's a compelling point. Thanks for the insight. Now, I heard a trope—the first time I heard it, it was thrown at Dr. Norman Finkelstein, the independent political scientist. Depending on one's point of view, he's had a mixed career because he tends to divide people—often due to his stances or barbed commentary.

Weixelbaum: Yes.

Jacobsen: Or barbed—or I guess you could say—cutting humour, often used as punctuation to his historical work. So, I've done some interviews with him. He took part in my first book between 2019 and 2021, along with many others: Gideon Levy from *Haaretz* and Omar Shakir from Human Rights Watch. We did ten long-form interviews—many citations and very academic-leaning coverage. John Dugard, Michael Lynk, S. Michael Lynk was the UN Special Rapporteur at the time, before the current one. In between, while based in Malaysia, another interim rapporteur quit and became the executive director of ASEAN—the organization, not the political union. That was an interesting contextual detail.

So, those were some of the great center— and left-wing voices. International organizations like the UN—non-political bodies—were also included. I had a group discussion with all three of those special rapporteurs. Since they're all legal minds, the conversation revolved around one technicality: Is the annexation of Palestinian territory *de jure* or *de facto*?

That ended up being the only distinction that the entire conversation focused on. We did not have much time, but we still discussed that issue long.

So, when I first heard the phrase "self-hating Jew" used about Norman—Norm—it was used derisively or as a term of contempt. That term raises a lot of questions and emotions. So, on first take—in an academic sense—what is the meaning behind the term politically, and what is the purpose of such a term when it is not used purely as a descriptor? Then, we can touch on the deeper aspects also at play.

Weixelbaum: Yes. I've known that term since I was a kid in the early '80s. I know it's been around even longer than I have. It doesn't originate with the current conflict or crisis in Israel and Gaza.

At least from an academic perspective, this is a subset—a mechanism or phenomenon that I've encountered with other minority groups as well. It falls under what's called respectability politics. That term comes from the Black American experience I've learned about and encountered. It describes the way individuals within marginalized communities may try to curry favour with groups that are oppressing them, which in turn creates division within the leading minority group—whether it is Jewish people, Black people, or others.

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We've seen this, too, with some immigrants who voted for Trump and then later found themselves being deported. It's quite something to witness.

There are many great scholarly works on this. The main factor I've observed in scholarly discussions is a negotiation between the oppressor and the oppressed. Historians have used "agency" to emphasize that oppressed people still maintain some power in shaping their reality. But what can be disturbing is how that negotiation sometimes plays out—with members of minority groups identifying with their oppressors and attempting to emulate them.

You also see this dynamic in women's history scholarship. Some of the most virulent supporters of anti-feminist movements can be women who view their status through the lens of, "If I become the best enforcer of this patriarchal system, I'll gain special favour." If they push other women down, they might believe they'll gain acceptance or status within that anti-feminist framework.

So, this is not unique to Jews—it's a phenomenon that appears across different historically marginalized groups. It stems from that negotiation mechanism, and it is divisive and difficult. Particularly malign actors—those who know precisely how divisive such dynamics can be—are adept at weaponizing these respectability politics.

Think about the example of Black Republicans. Take Herman Cain, for instance. He seemed so invested in Trump that he attended a Trump rally and contracted COVID, which ultimately led to his death. Talk about making the ultimate sacrifice for a group that had, at that point, shown considerable hostility toward the Black community—especially amid the Trump administration's rhetoric and actions against the Black Lives Matter movement.

I could go on about this, but that gives a solid picture.

Jacobsen: Outside of that term's political or academic analysis, there are deeper aspects to its usage—especially geopolitically. In Norman's case—disregarding where someone stands politically, whether on the left, right, or center—the term "self-hating Jew" was not being used purely as a descriptor. It was deployed in a very particular way. When I saw it being used, it seemed to be a term of convenience. It was being employed to immediately discredit or cancel his line of reasoning in political science about the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

Now, on cancel culture—I've seen this happen across the political spectrum, so I do not think it is a culture so much a tactic. Then, some bad actors in specific political orientations use it, which can be mistaken for an entire culture. So how are you seeing this term—"self-hating Jew"—used? And how do you see people describe how it feels to be called that?

Weixelbaum: Yes. The irony is—and this connects to our earlier discussion—through my encounters and the loss of friendships since October 2023, some of those people have been Jewish. And ironically, someone else might call them self-hating Jews. I never have—because, yes, it's a trope. It's a way of shutting down conversation.

My response, of course, is to ask questions. "What do you know about Judaism?" "Let's talk about the historical connection between the idea of Israel and Judaism." Let's unpack that instead of using a term like "self-hating Jew" to end a discussion.

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Typically, though, that moment of shutdown happens when I start asking those questions—because I'm the one who gets shut down. I am not the one using that label to cancel someone. Instead, the cancellation often comes toward me.

Now, I know of Norman Finkelstein and understand the criticisms. He leans heavily into genocide rhetoric, and many who use the term "self-hating Jew," in his case, believe that is a line he has crossed. However, that rhetorical framing is often a perversion of more rigorous discourse. Genocide scholars, in general, are much more careful about using that term. It's specific. It's weighty.

So, yes, it's easier for someone to shut him down with, "Oh, you're just a self-hating Jew," rather than interrogate the argument. But what does genocide mean? That's the question. Then, we would have to talk about Raphael Lemkin, who coined the term and wrote the UN Convention on Genocide.

But does anyone want to go there when they are scoring points on the internet?

Jacobsen: Their first question would be, "Who?"

Weixelbaum: Yes, exactly. That's the point. So, this becomes a teachable moment. But then, also—what? What comes after that? If you are going to open that genocide door, then follow me. Let me put on my historian hat and take you by the hand. We will explore the problematic conversations among international lawyers about what genocide is and what it is not.

They knew the term could become continuously expansive—used to describe every instance of mass violence. And unfortunately, war continues to exist. Those legal scholars and human rights advocates at the time were concerned about misuse, which is why they were so specific when defining the term in the Genocide Convention.

There's also a companion document—the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights. A great book that discusses this is *No Enchanted Palace*. The author is Mark Mazower. It dives into the early days of the UN and the foundational debates. We need to demystify these types of things—the terms we use.

So, yes, to go back to "self-hating Jew," it is, in a way, our community's particular flavour of cancellation. Our version of "pull up your pants" was the language used in the 1990s as a form of internalized respectability politics.

When we talk about respectability politics within the Black community, it was that old line: "You're sagging, you're listening to gangster rap, and you're making us all look bad." It is the same thing today—except, instead of listening and interrogating arguments that might have some validity, there is this instinct to shut them down entirely.

I disagree profoundly with Norman Finkelstein's definition of genocide. What is happening with Israel and Gaza is a terrible war—I do not think it is genocide. However, who am I to argue against the masses who feel otherwise? There is a scholarly debate to be had, of course.

But yes, it is a way of cancelling someone, as you noted. On a personal level, how does it feel when someone uses that label? If someone were to call me a "self-hating Jew," yes—it would be

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shocking and frankly absurd. Which Jews are we even talking about? I certainly do not identify with the small minority of right-wing Jews.

Wait—I have been called that. I was called a self-hating Jew by a childhood friend who is now a far-right-wing Jew. His argument was basically: if you vote for Democrats, obviously you hate Israel because a subset of American Democrats are highly critical of Israel or anti-Israel. Therefore, I must be a self-hating Jew.

How does that feel? It feels ridiculous that we even had this conversation. I worked as a researcher at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in D.C. It seems ridiculous to me that someone would throw that at me.

Especially throughout this conversation, I hope you've seen that I feel more protective than ever of my Jewish community in the face of growing antisemitism. I think this reflexive urge to circle the wagons, to protect. At the same time, what the state of Israel is doing under Netanyahu is horrendous. He should not be in power. He should be in jail.

He is another politician we've talked about whose only reason for seeking and holding power is that he's running from the law. We have a big problem with that. Someone—I forget who, but a Jewish leader—once said, "Netanyahu is probably the worst leader for Jews since the Bronze Age." Some terrible Bronze Age kings made us look quite bad, so I do not know.

To be called a self-hating Jew—especially by a non-Jew—is incredibly divisive. These are internecine conflicts: who deserves to be in the in-group or the out-group? It is not good. It is corrosive. We should stay away from it.

Jacobsen: Jay, thank you very much for speaking with me today. I appreciate it. This was a substantive conversation.

Weixelbaum: I look forward to reading your writing, and I appreciate your listening. Thank you so much.

Jacobsen: Thanks. I appreciate it, Jay.

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Resilience and Faith: Leading Kyiv's Jewish Community (Rabbi Ariel Markovitch)

Rabbi Ariel Markovitch, Director of JCC Beit Menachem and founder of Shabbat Young Professionals Kyiv, shares his journey as a Jewish leader in Kyiv, Ukraine. Formerly a business development manager in Shanghai, his experiences abroad strengthened his Jewish identity and inspired his leadership. Rabbi Markovitch emphasizes the importance of Holocaust remembrance, interfaith dialogue, and education in combating antisemitism. He reflects on the challenges of community-building during wartime, the spiritual resilience of Ukraine's Jewish community, and the relevance of traditional teachings in modern life. He discusses how faith, trust, and community have helped many navigate the psychological toll of war. Markovitch draws wisdom from Torah and Talmud, advocating values such as selflessness, compassion, and restorative joy, primarily through life events like weddings. The conversation concludes with reflections on ethical living, the importance of rest, and gratitude for meaningful connection in uncertain times.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Today, we're here with Ariel Markovitch, a Jewish community leader based in Kyiv, Ukraine. He serves as the Director of JCC Beit Menachem, a Chabad-affiliated Jewish community center. He is the founder and director of Shabbat Young Professionals Kyiv, an initiative to engage young Jewish adults within the Chabad-Lubavitch movement. Before this, he worked in Shanghai as a Business Development Manager at a CLOV company. Ariel received his education at a Chabad yeshiva affiliated with the Talmidei HaT'mimim network. He actively participates in Holocaust remembrance and other Jewish community events. He often appears alongside prominent figures, including Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, to promote Jewish heritage and resilience in Ukraine. Okay, first question: What inspired you to pursue a leadership role within the Jewish community, and how has your upbringing influenced your approach to leadership?

Rabbi Ariel Markovitch: First of all, I believe this—well, it's hard to say maybe it's destiny—but I see it as a responsibility. We all have a role in improving the world, and I do what I can. I think, and hope, that I contribute positively by being a Jewish leader in Kyiv, Ukraine. That's how I came to this work and what I feel called to do.

Jacobsen: What was a pivotal moment in your career that shaped your commitment to Jewish advocacy and community building?

Markovitch: It started when I was in China—specifically in Shanghai. Before that, I had studied in a Chabad yeshiva and received semicha, rabbinical ordination. I was far from my roots when I moved to Shanghai to work in business development. That distance helped me realize the importance of the Jewish community and identity. I felt a strong connection to Jewish life even more deeply from afar. I loved that feeling, and I realized that it was meaningful and fulfilling to share it with others—so I brought that energy back to Kyiv.

Jacobsen: In Shanghai, what did you learn about business development? Did you find any similarities between Chinese and Jewish cultures?

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Markovitch: First of all, I hope I understood your question fully. When I arrived in Shanghai, many people told me how similar Chinese and Jewish cultures are. They noted that both ancient civilizations deeply respected tradition, family, education, and community. I loved China. There were some cultural adjustments, of course. One challenge, for example, was hospitality. In Chinese culture, offering food when welcoming someone to your customary home is impolite—it is rude if the guest does not eat.

But I keep kosher, so this creates a dilemma. What we did was simple: Before visiting someone's home, either I or a colleague would call in advance to respectfully explain the dietary restrictions and ask if we could bring kosher food. Everyone understood, and we found a way to respect each other's traditions. It worked well, and I still think very highly of Chinese culture—it's beautiful and rich in values.

Jacobsen: What drew you back to Kyiv? More on an emotional level—when you look at the past three years, if not the last eleven, how do you see Jewish culture's and people's resilience within Ukraine?

Markovitch: Over the last eleven years, people in Ukraine—Jews and non-Jews alike—have become more Ukrainian in identity. You hear more Ukrainians being spoken in the streets. Growing up in Kyiv, I didn't hear Ukrainian in the city. Over the past eleven or twelve years, that's changed. You hear the language more often; people talk about it more openly.

Of course, that shift has accelerated, especially in the last two years. But one thing that hasn't changed is that Kyiv is not only a beautiful city—it's full of very kind and welcoming people. You can feel that.

For example, it was difficult for my wife at first. She had studied a bit of Russian before we arrived, but people in Kyiv told her, "Now you're in Ukraine, you need to speak Ukrainian." For me, Ukrainian is a new language, so it was challenging.

But what stood out was people's reactions. You can see it's not about rejecting you when you speak with someone. It's not hostility. If anything, they accept you as you are. Maybe the right word is "respect." So overall, the experience has been very positive. It's made things much more manageable.

Jacobsen: As the Director of JCC Beit Menachem in Kyiv, what are the most pressing needs of the Jewish community you serve?

Markovitch: Over the past three years, the most frequent requests we've received have been for humanitarian aid. Unfortunately, since the war began, most of our programming has focused on distributing food, clothing, medicine—whatever we can offer. That's been the primary focus. Before the war, we had various programs. We operated a school and a kindergarten and had many initiatives for youth and older people. But since the full-scale invasion, the urgent need has overwhelmingly been humanitarian relief.

Jacobsen: When you hear propaganda—which seems to have diminished somewhat recently—particularly in the early days of the invasion, around the narrative that President Zelensky is a neo-Nazi, what was the reaction within the Ukrainian Jewish community?

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My interpretation, personally, is that it's absurd. Zelensky was a comedian before entering politics. And now, Russia has essentially turned him into a living punchline to one of the most surreal jokes in Eastern European history—accusing a Jewish president of being a neo-Nazi during wartime.

What kind of commentary did you hear among the Jewish community in response to this propagandistic claim?

Markovitch: First of all, my personal feeling comes from family history. My father was born in Ukraine, and my grandparents were born in Uzhhorod, Ukraine. The entire family was taken to Auschwitz by the Nazis and their collaborators. Most of the family did not survive. Some did. I'm named after my great-grandfather, who was in Auschwitz.

So when people talk about Nazis, it's not just a historical topic for me—it's deeply personal. These are horrific stories. There are no words to describe the pain and loss. And to call someone a Nazi—it's completely disconnected from reality. It's a powerful word that should not be used lightly.

Frankly, there's nothing to comment on. It's not related to the truth in any way. And unfortunately, it's not even something one can laugh at. It's too painful, too serious.

Jacobsen: How do you balance traditional Jewish values with the modern, dynamic environment of Kyiv's young professional scene?

Markovitch: That's a good question. The younger generation in Ukraine is very dynamic and highly developed. This is reflected in the IT sector and the many international companies based here—especially in Kyiv.

Judaism here isn't just about a Bar Mitzvah or coming to synagogue for major holidays or family events. In Kyiv, our Jewish community is like a home. We have many programs—even a soccer team, for example. People can do what they love while surrounded by good friends who respect and care for them.

Often, not just individuals connect but their families as well. It feels like a big extended family. It's a home.

Jacobsen: How has the ongoing conflict affected antisemitism in the region?

Markovitch: I can mainly speak about Kyiv since I live here. From my perspective, I haven't seen an increase in antisemitism. What I do see, unfortunately—including in myself—is that people are less patient. After three years of war, that's understandable. It wears people down. However, I haven't noticed anything that suggests an increase in antisemitism as a result of the conflict. That's my personal experience.

Jacobsen: In your experience, what has been effective in combating antisemitism?

Markovitch: Education. Punishment is already too late. We need to prevent antisemitism before it starts—and that begins with education in schools. People need to know the facts.

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We've discussed conspiracy theories, such as those involving the Rothschilds or others. When people are educated and know the truth, even if someone makes a joke, they recognize that it's unreasonable and likely won't repeat it.

Of course, we'll never achieve 100% prevention, but education can significantly reduce the likelihood. Also, we should give voice to people who've suffered for their identity—not just Jewish people but anyone who has been persecuted for their faith or background. We should have lessons in schools and universities that make these experiences real and human for others. I believe that would help.

Jacobsen: What role do Holocaust education and remembrance play in your work?

Markovitch: I believe education is essential—not because people necessarily know nothing, but because we can always give people more knowledge, more depth, especially about the Holocaust.

In Kyiv, unfortunately, we have Babi Yar, the site of one of the largest massacres of Jews during the Holocaust. Many people were murdered there. Our community has a few survivors who lived through Babi Yar. They come and speak with people—especially young people—so they understand that this is not just a slogan like *"Never again"* without substance.

It already happened. And it did not occur a thousand years ago. It happened during the Second World War—just a few generations back. So first, we help people understand that the Holocaust was real.

Unfortunately, if we do not remain vigilant, something similar could happen again. That is why remembrance is so critical.

Jacobsen: How do you ensure that these efforts resonate with younger generations? Regardless of culture or tragedy, keeping memory alive is always a challenge—to instill a sense of history and the importance of preventing it from repeating. How do you make sure that message connects with young people?

Markovitch: First, we record videos and audio interviews with survivors. We share these stories directly with the younger generation so they can hear them firsthand.

Second, after every lecture or program, we asked the participants what they liked and didn't. We gather feedback so we can improve future programs. We want the message to reach them truly—to enter the heart, not just the ears. And we adapt each time to make it more meaningful.

Jacobsen: Can you share a personal or family story about the Holocaust that continues to inspire your advocacy work today?

Markovitch: Yes. Probably the most challenging story for me is one my grandmother told me about her mother—my great-grandmother—who was taken by the Germans from her home in Uzhhorod, Ukraine, to Auschwitz.

Three times, they tried to kill her.

The first time, a Nazi soldier aimed and fired a gun at her—but somehow, the bullet did not go off. She was miraculously saved.

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The second time, they announced they would execute a specific number of people—I don't remember the exact number. Everyone stood in line, and she was the person just after the last one to be selected. For example, if they said they would kill ten people, she was number eleven.

The third time, something similar happened again. And each time, she survived.

She used to say, even in the darkest moments, you can see—when it is your time, it is your time. But when it is not your time, you survive, perhaps because you still have something meaningful to do.

Jacobsen: Regarding misinformation and propaganda—earlier, you mentioned that sometimes the appropriate response is no response because of how absurd such claims can be. But how else do you respond to misinformation or propaganda that distorts Jewish history or fuels antisemitism?

Markovitch: If someone wants to do something harmful, of course, that's not acceptable. But in many cases, it's not because we avoid the topic when we say we do not wish to comment on it.

It's because once you begin to comment or debate something that is entirely false or absurd—like calling a Jewish leader a Nazi—you're already legitimizing it by treating it as something reasonable enough to argue over. By entering the discussion, you open the door for someone to say, "Maybe it's true," or "Maybe it's not." And to me, that's completely illogical.

There is no basis for it and nothing to respond to. It's harmful, but it is so far from reality that even debating it risks giving it a false sense of legitimacy.

Jacobsen: What strategies have you found effective in fostering interfaith dialogue and cooperation in Kyiv, especially during times of crisis? You mentioned rabbinical work earlier—what has worked well in dialogue, particularly between the Jewish and Orthodox Christian communities?

Markovitch: I have several friends who are pastors and religious leaders in other communities. We're on excellent terms—we're friends.

I think that when someone truly believes in what they do and is a sincere and good person—someone with integrity and kindness—then dialogue becomes natural. I feel that way about them; they feel the same about me.

We may have theological differences, but we have mutual respect. That's the key. Building bridges between communities, even during challenging times, is possible with respect and genuine goodwill.

Jacobsen: Let's say you believe in a Creator, in God—and at the same time, there's a long history of persecution of the Jewish people. That's putting it mildly. Within a theological or eschatological framework—whether or not one believes in the coming of the Moshiach (Messiah)—you may still think there is purpose: a purpose for the world, a purpose for you as an individual, and a purpose for your people within the faith.

How do you make sense of that? How do you interpret such a history through a theological or humanistic lens?

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Markovitch: First of all, I ask myself the same question. If you meet Him before I do—hopefully not before I turn 129!—or if you meet someone who has met Him, please ask and let me know.

I do not have a clear answer because, honestly, I don't think there is one—not one we can truly understand.

But I believe the question of antisemitism is part of a broader question: why is there evil in the world? Why are people unkind to one another? Why do we have theft? Why do people kill? It is the same root issue. And I, like many, would love to have an answer.

There's a well-known rabbi—Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, the Chief Rabbi of Great Britain. Someone once asked him the same question: *how can evil be in the world?* He responded, "I don't know—and maybe it's good that I don't know."

Because if we did know, we may begin to accept evil. If we had a logical explanation for it, maybe we would come to terms with its existence—as though it belongs. But we are not supposed to accept it. We're supposed to question it, to oppose it, and to recognize that it's wrong.

The fact that we don't understand why evil exists keeps us from tolerating it.

Jacobsen: Do you find any aspects of promoting Jewish identity—or navigating its complexities—difficult?

Markovitch: Most things about Judaism, I feel, don't need to be—I don't know the exact word in English—maybe "sold." There's no need to sell it because the core message is universal.

If people were good people—not necessarily keeping every detail of Jewish law, like observing Shabbat or eating kosher—but good people who followed the basic moral teachings, the world would be much better.

If people had followed even the Seven Noahide Laws—more general ethical principles for all humanity—the world would have been much improved.

Teaching those values is not hard. Most people agree when you explain them. The challenge comes not in accepting the ideas but in implementing them. Finding someone who understands or agrees with the values is not difficult. The more complicated part is helping people live by them.

That part—not always easy.

Jacobsen: Do you have difficulties maintaining multicultural unity within the Jewish diaspora? This may be a strange question. For instance, say you're in Kyiv and meet people of the same faith and shared background. Still, they come from France, Morocco, Canada, Portugal, Uruguay, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Somalia, etc.

Do you encounter challenges in those multicultural contexts? For some people, it's an issue. For others, it is not.

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Markovitch: I do not see this as something related explicitly to Judaism but rather to people in general. Anyone who has lived in a place for several generations—say, Ethiopia or France—will naturally adopt aspects of the local culture.

When, for example, someone from France, someone from Belgium, and someone from another country are all in the same room—even if they all believe in one God—they will still have different jokes, manners, and ways of interacting. That is cultural, not religious.

But today, we are blessed to live in a time when we can travel, connect with people from many countries, and experience the rich diversity of Jewish life. For me, that's a big plus.

Jacobsen: Are there different types of antisemitism that members of Reform Jewish communities face compared to those in Orthodox or Conservative communities?

Markovitch: I think that over the last year and a half—as we mentioned earlier—a lot of Jews have experienced antisemitic incidents, regardless of denomination. It has had nothing to do with what they believe.

In many cases, the individuals affected could not have cared less about religious observance. I've heard stories of people being targeted even though they had never been to a synagogue—and in some cases, they did not even know they were Jewish.

For example, children at school might say to them, "You have a Jewish name, so you must be bad." That was the moment some of them realized they were seen as Jewish.

These incidents increased sharply, especially after October 7th.

Jacobsen: What lessons have you drawn from your work in Israel, and how has your engagement with international figures like Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis or Meir Ezri Han influenced your approach to leadership?

Markovitch: When we encounter people from different countries and different perspectives, it is not just that we *can* learn from them—we must learn from them.

The more people, cultures, and identities we engage with, the better we understand one another. You mentioned Rabbi Mirvis, the Chief Rabbi of the UK. He is a brilliant and insightful leader. Speaking with someone like him is not just a chance to learn—it also deepens your appreciation for your community and communities abroad.

In this case, we spoke specifically about the Jewish community in England, and I gained a new perspective from that. Encounters like these broaden your point of view.

Jacobsen: What lessons did you learn from leading your community through the Russian invasion in 2022?

Markovitch: "Believe in good, and it will be good."

It's a straightforward sentence, but living by it is incredibly difficult.

I stayed in Kyiv with my parents, wife, and three children when the war started. We stayed together as a family, and it was tough. At one point, my wife looked at me and said, "Promise me that we will not die." We could hear bombs outside. There were gunshots.

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It was not pleasant.

I do not know—maybe it was a mistake—but I told her, "I'm not God. I can't promise you that." She did not like that answer, understandably so.

We went through several challenging moments. It was not easy at all. But what kept me grounded was something I learned from my grandmother, a survivor of Auschwitz: If you are still here, then you must do good. You must try to change the world.

And that starts with your immediate surroundings. That's where your impact begins.

Especially now, I believe in being good. When we focus on good things, we don't just shape our internal mindset—we change our environment. The people who come to us, speak with us, and share our space are affected by it—and we are, too.

I learned that from the war. I should have taught it earlier. I don't know, but this is what that moment taught me.

Jacobsen: How do you help your community cope with the spiritual and psychological toll of the conflict?

Markovitch: We work with psychologists who come to the community to support people. A few months ago, there was a rocket attack near our school—the school my parents founded 25 years ago, the school I attended as a child.

We had a rocket strike there.

Unfortunately, it's not the first time something like this has happened. But psychologists came to the school to help the children. Talking with the kids was hard work—especially for the professionals.

Even for me, speaking with children about what's happening is incredibly hard. But of course, we do it. We must do it.

Especially now—in 2025—we understand that helping someone is not only about providing physical needs like food or shelter. Emotional support is just as important.

Sometimes, it's even more critical. And we see now, more than ever, how crucial that support is. The last three years have been more complicated than I imagined when I first became a rabbi in Kyiv.

Jacobsen: What passages in the Torah have you found particularly helpful—for yourself or others—when words of encouragement have been needed during the conflict?

Markovitch: One of the most potent verses is the Shema: "Shema Yisrael, Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem Echad."

"Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One."

This verse teaches that there is one God; we must know that. My English may not be perfect for translating this entirely, but it is a core part of our belief.

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Many people have asked me, especially those outside Ukraine, "Have you seen miracles? How can you be thankful when there is so much suffering?"

Yes, it's true—so many people are going through unimaginable hardship. But nearly every person I've spoken to, from Kyiv and other parts of Ukraine, has a story of how something happened in a dark moment—something small, sometimes meaningful. And they felt God's presence. They saw how God helped them.

If you zoom out, it may look like endless chaos. But when you zoom in, you see individual stories—moments of grace and connection, moments when someone felt they were not alone.

That's what people have shared with me.

Jacobsen: How do you explain tragedy to your children?

Markovitch: That's a good question. There are two aspects to it.

First, there's the broader question of why there is evil in the world—and as I mentioned earlier, I do not have an answer to that. We all continue to wrestle with it.

Second, perhaps more critical for my children to understand is that even though tragedy exists, they must be vigilant, aware, and responsible. They must do whatever is in their power to help prevent such things from happening again. That awareness is essential.

Jacobsen: How do you collaborate with Ukrainian authorities and international organizations to counter antisemitic narratives or incidents?

Markovitch: We work closely with the Ukrainian government, and I can say this not just from personal opinion—it's something I've seen consistently at every level of government: the Presidency, the Prime Minister's Office, and the municipal level, including city mayors.

Whenever we raise concerns—if there is an antisemitic incident or something questionable—the authorities respond immediately. They act quickly to address the issue, stop the person responsible, and also take steps to prevent future incidents. I'm sincerely grateful for their continued support. They do a lot.

As for international partnerships, we work with several Jewish communities and interfaith organizations worldwide. But when it comes specifically to addressing antisemitism in Ukraine, most of the coordination happens directly with the Ukrainian government.

And because the government has been so responsive, we've not had much need to involve large international religious organizations in these cases.

Jacobsen: Here's a trickier one—how do you distinguish between incidents where people are reacting emotionally to something that only *seems* antisemitic versus cases where it is antisemitism?

Markovitch: That's an important distinction—and yes, we've encountered it. Just a few months ago, we had a situation in Kyiv where someone wrote antisemitic graffiti in multiple locations.

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When we discovered it in the morning, my father, the Chief Rabbi of Kyiv, contacted the authorities immediately. They investigated, checked security cameras, and soon identified the perpetrator.

It turned out to be a 14-year-old boy.

The authorities brought him in for questioning and asked my father to come as well. When they spoke with the boy, they realized that he had been influenced—someone had reached him through Telegram, or maybe TikTok, and told him to do it.

This is what we discussed earlier—often, people act out of ignorance, not hate. They don't know who Jewish people are or what Judaism stands for.

In this case, the boy did not appear to have malicious intent. He was misguided and very young. I do not remember the final decision, but I believe the authorities planned for him to participate in some educational programming instead of facing criminal charges. The Jewish community chose not to press charges.

My father felt—and I agree—that sending this boy to prison would likely ruin his life. He's still a child. From what we saw, he's not inherently bad. He needs to learn.

Yes, we do make distinctions. Some cases are explicit acts of hatred, and others—like this—are acts of ignorance. We have to find different responses for different situations. I hope we can continue to do that with wisdom and compassion.

Jacobsen: Not every part of life has a clear conclusion. Much of life feels more like James Joyce's *Ulysses*—you never really know what's happening or how it ends. There's much incompleteness in the world.

It's almost as if life combines a Rorschach inkblot test and Gödel's incompleteness theorems—open to interpretation, yet fundamentally unresolvable in parts.

Are there any incidents you've encountered that *seemed* like antisemitism—had all the markings—but you never got a conclusive answer? Something that left you wondering?

Markovitch: When something happens, it's important to remember that two people can witness the same event and come away with entirely different interpretations of what happened.

Many times, if it's not a clear-cut, harmful, or explicitly antisemitic act, then we have to ask—maybe it's just us. Perhaps it's how we saw it.

Of course, we cannot accuse anyone without evidence, especially if we are not even sure anything happened. So yes, there are ambiguous cases, and we're left with maybes.

Jacobsen: What do you think is the role of Jewish cultural heritage in shaping Ukrainian national identity?

My professional example is that our mutual colleague Anna Vishnikova pointed out that some Christian communities wanted only Christian symbols to memorialize Maidan Square or Independence Square. To them, only the cross represented Ukrainian identity.

They believed there should not be menorahs. And to me, that's not correct.

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In more nuanced terms, how do you see Jewish cultural heritage being integrated into Ukrainian national heritage?

Markovitch: I don't know the exact details of the story involving Maidan. But in general, in every country—and especially in Ukraine, which is very democratic—there is space for people to live together peacefully.

It's essential to have interfaith meetings and dialogues so that people can get to know one another or at least understand that we are not just individuals living in one country. We are Christian Ukrainians, Muslim Ukrainians, and Jewish Ukrainians—and that's okay.

That's exactly how it's supposed to be. That's what a democratic society looks like. So I don't just think we *should* have that level of integration—I believe we already do.

Jacobsen: How do you integrate Chabad's spiritual teachings into your daily leadership?

Markovitch: Just one quick correction—it's Chabad, not *Sha-Bad.*

Jacobsen: I anglicized it—I'm Canadian. I'm foreign. I don't know any better!

Markovitch: [Laughing] I thought it was *Sha-Bad* before someone told me, so it's okay. As for Chabad, the Talmud contains many stories that shape how we see leadership and relationships. For example, there's a story about one person building a house, and then his neighbour also builds a house… There's a story in the Talmud that initially seems simple.

Two neighbours build houses next to each other, and suddenly, one wants to make a wall between the homes—either to block the view or mark property lines. One neighbour wants the wall, and the other does not. They argue.

That's the entire premise. And yes, it's a long story, but that's the situation we study today in the Talmud.

People ask, "Why should I care? This story was written over two thousand years ago. What does it have to do with me?"We might even joke about it: today, we talk about a wall between the U.S. and Mexico—why should this ancient wall matter?

But every story in the Talmud has layers. At first glance, it seems like a story about two neighbours—disconnected. But the truth is, it's not just a story—it's a framework for law, and it's deeply relevant.

For example, in that story, one neighbour says: "I don't like when my neighbour can see into my house. He opens his window and watches what I do. I want to build a wall." But the wall would benefit both of them, so he wants shared responsibility—he does not want to pay for the entire wall himself.

The Talmud says that if the wall is one or two meters high, both neighbours must contribute financially—it's a shared interest. But if one wants the wall to be even higher, that neighbour must pay for the additional height himself. It's fair, proportional, and balanced.

From that single story, we derive so much modern legal wisdom.

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For instance, what if someone looks at your computer screen, reads your messages, or invades your digital privacy? What if someone looks at you in a way that makes you uncomfortable? Is that a crime? What kind of boundaries should exist?

We can trace the roots of these questions back to Talmudic principles. At first, they may seem outdated, but when you understand the spirit of the law, you see how powerful and relevant it remains today.

So yes—when we reduce these stories to surface-level anecdotes, they seem unimportant. But digging deeper, we find ethical structure, legal precedent, and moral insight that still guide us today.

Jacobsen: What facets of Judaism are uniquely Jewish regarding ethics? Perhaps even the aesthetic of that ethic—its moral symmetry, the way it looks and feels in daily life.

Markovitch: Of course, we can start with someone like Moses, especially now—we're just a few days away from Passover, the Jewish holiday of Pesach. So, of course, we can talk about Moses. He was the great figure of that time—the leader, the liberator.

But if I look at recent history or even what's happening in the present, I think of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe. He was born in Ukraine, later moved to the United States, and became the leader of the Chabad movement, which now includes Chabad Young Professionals.

He fundamentally transformed Judaism. He didn't see it as ancient or static. He emphasized that we should live Judaism today, in 2025, just as meaningfully as it was thousands of years ago.

That's one part of his legacy. The second is that he envisioned a Jewish community in every country—and, in many cases, in nearly every city. It's not everywhere yet, but in so many places, you can arrive and find a community, a spiritual family waiting for you. That is a massive gift to Jewish life.

Jacobsen: What would you rank as the highest value in Judaism?

Markovitch: Not *me*. The highest value is not about *me*.

Jacobsen: So selflessness—to live for something greater than yourself. That's what I thought. Thank you for bearing with me—I'm making this conversation more than just about antisemitism. I'm trying to explore the deeper dimensions of Jewish thought, heritage, and resilience.

So now we've talked about God—particularly the theological premise of divine attributes, like benevolence and all-encompassing goodness.

But antisemitism isn't just a personal experience; it often strikes at something more profound. For Jewish people who are practicing or connected to their faith, when they're confronted with an antisemitic slur or act of violence, it can trigger a crisis of faith.

This happens in many religions. Have you seen it happen? Do people come to you struggling with faith under these circumstances?

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Markovitch: Yes, of course—it happens.

The most powerful example we have is after the Holocaust. We saw so many people respond in entirely different ways. Some people began to believe more deeply, while others moved away from belief altogether.

I've noticed here in Ukraine, especially over the last three years, that more and more people have started to believe more, not less.

And maybe it's not precisely belief—perhaps something more profound. People have told me, "We've started to understand that we are not in control of anything," even when we think we are.

If you look at just the last five years, we had so many plans—career plans, travel plans, business goals—and then came COVID. And with it, we realized that nothing is really in our hands.

Even now, some countries still haven't fully recovered from the pandemic. And then came the war in Ukraine. We started again—new plans, new ideas—and once more, everything was disrupted.

So what happened? Many people began to believe, or more accurately, to trust.

There's a big difference between belief and trust. Belief is intellectual. "Yes, I believe in God—why not?" But trust is different. Trust is knowing in your heart that there is something, someone, more significant than yourself at work in the world.

According to Judaism, trust does not mean sitting at home waiting for good things to happen. You still have to work hard, take action, and do your part. But at the same time, you come to that work with humility. You are not the king. You are not the one who decides everything.

So yes, I've seen this shift—especially over the last five years, but even more recently. More and more people are beginning to believe and trust.

Jacobsen: How do you comfort your children in difficult circumstances—war or hardship?

Markovitch: It depends—it depends on their age. Of course, there's a big difference between what you can explain to a two-year-old versus a ten-year-old.

But what we do know—unfortunately—is that we don't live in a perfect world. There's no question about it—we've seen it more clearly than we ever wanted to. This is not an ideal world.\ But that realization shows how much more work we have to do. We cannot just live in our little space and do nothing for society.

This moment in history shows us that we must engage. And the truth is, it's easier today than ever before. As you mentioned earlier, even if someone lives in a small town in Canada, they can still change the world.

With the Internet and platforms like Skype, we're connected—it's the same as living in a major city. Everyone has an opportunity to contribute. So yes, the world is far from perfect. But that means we must all do our part to make it better.

Jacobsen: Let's close on a hopeful note. Do you still perform weddings during the war?

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Markovitch: Yes, we do.

Jacobsen: That's incredible. Do you try to lighten the mood during those weddings, even in the middle of a war?

Markovitch: Of course, it's a different atmosphere. You have your mood, and then there's the general mood around you.

But I think it's essential for all of us to pause occasionally and work on our emotional state—to improve. It doesn't mean we care less when in a good mood; being in a good mood helps us function better. Think about an exam—if you're in a good state of mind, you're more likely to remember more. It affects the brain.

I'm not talking about going to nightclubs or anything like that. But weddings—that's a form of joyful resilience. It's pure happiness. It brings life into the world and gives us hope for the future.

This kind of happiness? I'd gladly have it every night.

Jacobsen: To wrap up, what are some of your favourite lines from the Talmud or your favourite phrases of Jewish wisdom? Even just words of comfort—whatever you feel would be a meaningful close.

Markovitch: There are two that I love.

First: "What you do not want others to do to you, do not do to them."

I hope that's clear. If you don't want something done to you, don't do it to others. It's a simple phrase, but it carries so much meaning.

Of course, it teaches you to be a good person, but it also pushes you to think about others—to consider how they will feel and how they might perceive your actions. Even though it's phrased negatively, it's deeply empathetic.

The second is from the Torah, which speaks about Shabbat. It says, "Six days you shall work, and on the seventh day, you shall rest."

I love that the Torah doesn't just say, "Don't work on Shabbat." It says, "Six days you must work." In other words, you must do your part, contribute to the world—and then rest.

It's a balanced ethic: work with intention and then rest with purpose.

The Torah teaches: "Six days you shall work." That means you actually must work. You must do whatever you can to succeed in your field—whatever that may be.

If you're a student, you must study with dedication. If you work—whatever your profession—you should give it your full effort, 100%.

But then comes the seventh day—Shabbat—and you must rest.

The idea is that we rest because God rested on the seventh day. That's why we pause and stop our work.

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And it's not always easy. We're often in the middle of something, and stepping away is hard. But just as we put our whole emotion, energy, and focus into our work for six days, we must also internalize that not everything depends on us.

We must understand that we need God's help to be successful in what we do. That's part of the balance—work hard and let go.

Jacobsen: All right. Thank you very much for your time, Ariel. It's been a pleasure to meet you. I hope you have a meaningful and fun Passover coming up.

Markovitch: Thank you very much.

Jacobsen: We'll be in touch.

Markovitch: Thank you. Bye-bye.

Jacobsen: Thank you.

Antisemitism With Dr. Joe-Joe McManus

Dr. Joe-Joe McManus reflects on evolving expressions of antisemitism in the U.S., highlighting its increased weaponization, particularly the conflation of anti-Zionism with antisemitism. While both the political left and right acknowledge antisemitism, financial influences and politicized definitions distort genuine understanding and solutions. Education and critical thinking remain

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vital tools in countering hate. McManus stresses that true change requires embedding antiracism and anti-oppression values into daily life, rather than relying on episodic activism. Systemic change, he notes, is a long-term endeavor that demands consistent ethical decision-making and broader cultural and economic transformation.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: When it comes to antisemitism, what has been your sense of it over the last five decades—or at least four decades—in the United States? To quote Paul Mooney, "Ain't nothin' changed but the weather." So, what has changed about the weather?

Dr. Joe-Joe McManus: Wow, that's an interesting question. I can't quite speak to five decades since I'm barely in my fifties, so I do not have personal experience that far back. But I can reflect on the changes I've seen over my lifetime.

What's been especially striking, as a Jewish person myself, is the weaponization of antisemitism. I do not remember that being as prevalent when I was younger. Of course, antisemitism has always been present, but the way it's being used now—especially in the media, government discourse, and other public arenas—has intensified, particularly in the context of what's happening in Gaza.

Over time, there's been a concerted effort to conflate anti-Zionism with antisemitism. That has never been my understanding, and it still is not. That conflation is a political maneuver.

Especially in the United States, there is very little general understanding of what Zionism is. Until recent years and recent events, the average American could not have even offered a basic definition.

So what we are seeing now is a bad-faith effort to equate anti-Zionism—and even

pro-Palestinian sentiment—with antisemitism. That is probably the most significant shift I've observed.

As far as the overall prevalence of antisemitism, I think it has remained relatively steady. There has been some excellent educational work done in schools and by nonprofits to counter antisemitism, and we've made some progress there. But the weaponization of antisemitism undermines that progress. It hurts the broader effort to end antisemitism.

Jacobsen: What works in countering antisemitism?

McManus: I am an educator, so my answer will always include education. We must understand concepts, systems, and history from multiple perspectives. We need to be taught how to think critically and distinguish fact from misinformation—or what some now refer to as "alternative facts," which is a dangerous and misleading concept.

The Internet has made that more difficult. With all the so-called "news" sites and the algorithms feeding people more of what they already consume, people rarely get exposed to other perspectives. We end up stuck in narrow content loops, especially on social media.

Even our more traditional media outlets have changed. And I hesitate to use the word "legitimate" when referring to some of them because many high-profile voices are not reporters. They are not delivering news but offering opinions, often dressed up as reporting.

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We must be clear about what constitutes a perspective and what is simply hate. I spend much time working on issues related to antisemitism, racism, and other forms of oppression, and one of the most significant problems I see is the framing of hate as just another opinion.

Too often, media will present "both sides"—as if white supremacy, antisemitism, homophobia, and heterosexism are differing viewpoints. That legitimizes oppression. It gives hate a platform under the guise of balance. And when we legitimize these things, they become part of the public's framework for what is acceptable discourse. People come to see them as just "another way of thinking" when, in fact, they are rooted in bigotry and harm.

Jacobsen: What do you see—in generic terms, although it is ironic to call them that—that the sociopolitical left in the United States tends to get right about antisemitism? And what do you think the sociopolitical right tends to get right? What would a healthy synthesis of those correct understandings look like regarding factuality?

McManus: Well, it is tough to talk about it as a binary, especially within the U.S. political system, which is heavily influenced by money. When you have organizations like AIPAC and others flooding both Republican and Democratic spaces with funding, it distorts political perspectives on all sorts of issues—including antisemitism.

There is just so much money in politics now. It costs a fortune to run for anything, and individuals like Elon Musk or political action committees can flood the airwaves and influence discourse. That financial influence makes it hard to speak about ideology with clarity because I am not sure much ideology is left—at least not in the way we once thought of it. There may have been more ideological consistency in the past, but now, the overwhelming presence of money changes the game entirely.

All that said, I do think one thing both sides agree on is that antisemitism is real. There was a time when I was younger when people would say, "Oh, racism isn't real anymore—it's a thing of the past." The same was said about antisemitism. But we are nowhere near being post-racial or post-antisemitic. Those are delusional ideas. They may be aspirational, and I'm fine with aspiration—but let's not mistake aspiration for reality.

So yes, both political sides acknowledge the reality of antisemitism. However, both have also been corrupted by differing and often politicized definitions of what antisemitism is. The IHRA definition, for example, seeks to equate criticism of Israel or anti-Zionist viewpoints with antisemitism. I think that conflation has done real damage to public understanding.

So while it is good that people now take antisemitism seriously, the way it has been weaponized—particularly when aligned with campaign donors or threats to political standing—is deeply troubling. That kind of manipulation, in service to whoever is funding or threatening your campaign, is something we need to talk about more honestly.

There is this sense of, "Oh, well, if you do not side with us, we are going to fund someone to run against you." That kind of corruption of the concept is hurting us. It makes it harder to help people understand what antisemitism is and how to counter it. I think politics, right now, is doing a disservice to those of us who have been fighting against antisemitism for a long time—trying to educate people on what it looks like and how to address it.

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Jacobsen: One idea that has come up in a few of these interviews, including off-tape conversations, is the notion—or tacit argument—that antisemitism may not be something that can ever be fully eradicated but rather something perennial to mitigate as much as possible. The idea is that this might be a more realistic stance, given that people have whole lives to live, and activism, for most, comes in seasons. Few people are full-time activists. So it becomes about picking your spots, picking them well, and doing so throughout your life. What do you think of that idea?

McManus: It is pragmatic. One of the things I tried to do in the book, *A Brother's Insight* — while it is primarily about race—is to help people understand how to integrate opposition to all forms of oppression, including antisemitism, into their daily lives.

I think the key, whether it is antisemitism or another form of oppression, is to make this a core part of who you are. Yes, there will be times when you speak up more or find an opportunity to act on a particular issue. But if it becomes part of your identity and value system, then it informs your daily decisions—what you purchase and from whom, what you accept in your friendships and relationships, how you vote on a school board, how you show up as a parent or student, and even how you approach hiring and promotion.

That is a more realistic and sustainable way to shift systems over time. Yes, for those of us who do this work full-time, we are focused on addressing systemic issues every day—and we are under attack right now, including those of us working against antisemitism.

Many of us are being targeted because we are clear about what antisemitism actually is, and the vast majority of us are also saying we are against genocide, any genocide. That has put us in opposition to much of the political rhetoric we have discussed.

However, from that pragmatic standpoint, the best approach is for individuals to adopt these anti-oppression values as part of who they are.

When something becomes part of your core values, it guides your daily decisions. It determines what you support and what you reject. In the book, I pose a question: "How racist does a politician have to be for you not to vote for them?" Or, "How racist does a first date need to be before you decide not to go on a second one?"

These are real, everyday decisions. And we need to make opposition to any form of oppression part of our core values. When we do that, it becomes a consistent influence on everything we do.

The reality is that we have been dealing with these issues of oppression for a long time. And for them to end, it is going to take time. It is going to take a shift in global culture, education, and economic systems.

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Riane Eisler on Antisemitism, Zionism, and Israel's Path to Partnership

Riane Eisler, an Austrian-born American systems scientist, futurist, and human rights advocate, is renowned for her influential work on cultural transformation and gender equity. Best known for *The Chalice and the Blade*, she introduced the partnership versus dominator models of social organization. She received the *Humanist Pioneer Award*. Drawing on neuroscience and history, she argues that peace begins at home and calls for a shift in worldview to build more equitable, sustainable, and compassionate societies rooted in connection rather than control. The three books of hers of note that could be highlighted are *The Chalice and the Blade*—now in its 57th U.S. printing with 30 foreign editions, *The Real Wealth of Nations*, and *Nurturing Our Humanity: How Domination and Partnership Shape Our Brains, Lives, and Future (Oxford University Press, 2019)*.

In this interview with **Scott Douglas Jacobsen**, Eisler examines Homer through her partnership versus domination lens, arguing *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad* glorify the hero as killer and vilify the feminine. With colleagues Melanie Lynch and Catherin Connor, she is developing a reframing amid a planned 2026 film adaptation by Christopher Nolan starring Matt Damon. Eisler connects Homeric narratives to her four cornerstones—family and childhood, gender, economics, and care for Earth—insisting peace begins at home. She contrasts the blade with the chalice, symbolizing nurturing power and transformation. Penelope's subordination and the execution of enslaved women exemplify domination's logic. The interview, recorded October 18, 2025, invites reconstructive storytelling.

Interview conducted on October 18, 2025.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Today, we're here with Riane Eisler. We're going to be talking primarily about *The Odyssey*, following the faith-based conversation, language, and narratives. Why *The Odyssey*?

Riane Eisler: I was surprised, going back to *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad*, to find that Homer was the propagandist—the secular propagandist—for what I call the domination system. I had thought about the fact that *The Odyssey* is full of references to the older, more partnership-oriented system in which female figures and deities also played a significant role. But I didn't realize how *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad* are pure propaganda for the hero as a killer—the hero's journey centered on the hero as a killer.

National Geographic has prominently covered Mary—famously, a December 2015 cover story on how the Virgin Mary became "the world's most powerful woman," and more recent historical features—Mary as the only female figure in a very strange pantheon where only the Father and the Son are divine, and she, the mother of God, is the only mortal figure. Maybe they will also share a new analysis of the Odyssey. It's in the air, this revisiting. It's both deconstruction and reconstruction.

Jacobsen: Do you find that this reinvention or re-presentation within a contemporary cultural milieu is almost like—metaphorically—an immune system reaction, the mythos defending itself from diminution?

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Eisler: I don't think of it as the immune system, though I like that idea. The immune system of humanity is at risk because of the domination system. As I've said many times, we're not only interconnected by technologies of transportation and communication but also by technologies of destruction, such as nuclear bombs, and more slowly by climate change caused by technology guided by a domination system. We are facing an existential risk. You may be right that this revisiting is, in a sense, an immune system reacting to the contemporary regression to rigid domination systems, which idealize the hero as killer.

The reaction does consist of both deconstruction and reconstruction because we humans need stories—we live by stories. The stories we've inherited, whether secular or religious, are not only justifications of domination but also vilifications of the female. You see clues of that throughout *The Odyssey*. The four cornerstones are all there.

Jacobsen: What values do cultures use to define the "hero," and why is the killer elevated within that set of values in *The Odyssey*?

Eisler: Domination systems are held together by fear and force—fear of pain, whether it's fear of being fired by those on top or punished by caregivers or parents. It's something taught very early. I always return to the four cornerstones research identifies: family and childhood; gender; economics—because we don't reward care, which is coded subordinate and "feminine" though it is central to the distinction between domination systems and partnership systems; care for people starting at birth; and care for Mother Earth.

Mother Earth—that's another clue, isn't it? And of course, there's story and language. When we intervene in story and language, we take into account all four of these cornerstones, plus probably a fifth one, which I didn't make a cornerstone because it's implicit: fear and violence, pain or pleasure, holding the system together.

I wrote about this in *Sacred Pleasure*, which came out in 1995 with HarperCollins. That book prefigures much of my later thinking and writing.

Jacobsen: How are women as personae portrayed in *The Odyssey*? Some general characterizations—how is the female form represented and implicitly judged in *The Odyssey*? You also hinted at this earlier.

Eisler: One of the core components we haven't recognized as linked to the domination system is how nearly all progressive social movements over the last 300 years have challenged the same thing, a tradition of domination —whether the Enlightenment, which questioned the so-called divinely ordained right of kings to rule; the feminist movement, which questioned the so-called divinely ordained right of men to rule over women and children in their homes; the anti-racism movement, beginning with abolitionism; the environmental movement, challenging the so-called divinely ordained right of man to dominate nature, or the peace movement.

If you look at war rather than peace, the assumption is that peace is not just an interval between wars. Peace begins at home. That connects the dots between the first cornerstone—family and childhood—and warfare. People who are raised in domineering households, in highly punitive environments, learn those models of power early on.

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Research shows that people raised in domination households—highly punitive environments—are much more likely to accept and support wars. But the point you're making is about the female form, and I want to emphasize this, how integral the subordination of women and rigid gender stereotypes are to all four cornerstones.

We've long assigned fixed roles to the male and female forms and ranked the male over the female, with no one in between, even though there have always been people in between. This ranking is central to all four cornerstones. We have a gendered system of values in economics: there's always money for weapons, for wars, for the hero as killer—but somehow never enough for feeding, nurturing, and caring for children. It's a very irrational system, what I call "reality stood on its head."

In reimagining *The Odyssey*, the female forms are either vilified—the Sirens devour men; Scylla and Charybdis are a monsters—or sexualized, reduced to sexual objects for the male hero. Yet within *The Odyssey*, figures like Circe and Calypso remain powerful female archetypes. That power is a remnant of earlier, partnership-oriented traditions. But in the Homeric framework, these figures are vilified, and even Penelope—though still powerful in her way—is subordinated. Odysseus, the hero as killer, must be her consort to gain legitimacy, but she herself is portrayed as obedient and constrained.

Even her son, Telemachus, can tell her to be silent—an astonishing reflection of the patriarchal norms of the time. Telemachus, the son of Odysseus and Penelope, is ordered by Odysseus to execute the enslaved women after they clean up the carnage left by his slaughter of the suitors. Odysseus is a killer—that's his defining trait—and that legacy of violence has persisted into our modern epics, our blockbuster films where the hero kills the villain.

The villain isn't always female today, but in *The Odyssey*, the villains are often female, including the enslaved women. There's no trial, no notion of justice or human rights—only the rule that might makes right.

Jacobsen: If the phrase could summarize the dominator model in that kind of literature, "might makes right," what would be the equivalent summary statement for a partnership model?

Eisler: It's *The Chalice and the Blade*—two symbols, both powerful. The blade represents domination, power over others, and it has become embedded in our language and institutions. The chalice, by contrast, symbolizes partnership, the power to nurture, to sustain, to create rather than destroy.

It's a sign of movement toward partnership thinking to reject that older idea of power as domination. Ultimately, in the domination system, power means the power to take life—the hero as killer. The chalice represents a very different power: the power to nurture life. Women's bodies, for example, produce milk—literally sustaining life.

This creates what I call a biological obstacle to domination. So, in the mythology of the domination system, women and female archetypes must be controlled or diminished. The Jungian archetypes are steeped in this framework. The *animus*—the masculine principle—has agency, while the *anima*—the feminine—is either man's inspiration or his temptation and ruin.

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We've been indoctrinated from birth into this domination mythology. That's not to say Jung didn't make valuable contributions. His concept of the *shadow* is an important one, and we're still in a transitional period where these frameworks coexist.

Would a society oriented more toward partnership still require such archetypes? A society where care work is economically rewarded, and children aren't raised in fear or physical pain? What's clear is that our task now is to show that there's a better alternative—and that alternative is partnership, a system of mutuality rather than of in-group versus out-group.

Jacobsen: As a side note, historically, how has the chalice been used—either in ritual or mythology? Since we're talking about old myths, it seems appropriate to explore that. The blade's symbolism is obvious, but the chalice's story seems more elusive.

Eisler: I'm not an expert on the mythology of the Holy Grail, which of course is the chalice, but obviously it's been co-opted into later stories. In the Arthurian legends, for example, the hero encounters the Grail and transforms. Through contact with the Grail, he gains the capacity for empathy, which is a profoundly human trait.

That story is one of the few that makes explicit the possibility of transformation. We are a remarkably flexible species; we can change. We can recapture our capacity for empathy. But even in that story, the empathy is directed toward a king, a superior within a rigid social hierarchy—which is rarely noted.

Jacobsen: *The Odyssey*—what are some of your original findings in reframing it?

Eisler: I think, first of all, it's essential to recognize the clues to an earlier time. All of Odysseus's major adversaries are female monsters—the vilification of the feminine as a narrative device.

The vilification of the female—of woman—is everywhere. Penelope remains an influential figure, so the clues are still there. The hero is the killer; he slays monsters, exploits Calypso and Circe sexually, and ultimately gains his power through Penelope, who becomes his instrument for authority and rulership.

There are so many signs of domination in *The Odyssey.* Take the double standard surrounding Odysseus's infidelities with Circe and Calypso. His sexual adventures are treated as natural and unremarkable—of course, he does that. Meanwhile, poor Penelope must remain chaste, endlessly weaving and fending off the suitors.

Then there's the execution of the enslaved women, killed supposedly for having relations with the suitors. Were they forced? Did they even have a choice? It doesn't matter to the narrative; they're vilified and slaughtered without question. The scene is a chilling emblem of absolute power and moral hypocrisy.

Jacobsen: That raises the question—how would one rewrite *The Odyssey*? If we're engaging in both deconstruction and reconstruction, what would *The Odyssey* look like if it were not only the hero's journey but the journey of both hero and heroine?

Eisler: We've never really had the heroine's journey as a central theme of mythology.

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Jacobsen: In contemporary media—which I don't watch much of—the heroines often invert the male model. They become violent, aggressive, adopting the same dominator values in a So, basically, the female form becomes the man-killer hero, and what's changed is the shape, not the content.

Eisler: Absolutely. She's still conditioned to accept that as the "normal" or "natural" order. It reminds me of what Gandhi said: we must not mistake the habitual for the natural norm. That observation is profoundly relevant.

Because when the heroine imitates the hero, nothing changes—it's still the same story. It still glorifies killing. That's NOT re-mything; it's cooption!

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Riane.

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Amos N. Guiora on Antisemitism, Anti-Zionism, and the Politics of Criticism

Amos N. Guiora, J.D., Ph.D., is a legal scholar and former IDF Lieutenant Colonel whose work focuses on institutional complicity and the legal accountability of bystanders and enablers. Shaped by his Holocaust-survivor parents and counterterrorism background, Guiora pioneered legal frameworks addressing bystander culpability, authoring *The Crime of Complicity*, *Armies of Enablers*, and *The Complicity of Silence*. His advocacy inspired Utah's 2021 bystander law. Through the Bystander Initiative at the University of Utah, he advocates for criminalizing enablers, arguing that religious, educational, or athletic institutions often prioritize protecting perpetrators over victims.

Guiora speaks with **Scott Douglas Jacobsen** about the complex intersections of antisemitism, anti-Zionism, and legitimate criticism of Israel. Drawing on his personal history as the child of Holocaust survivors and his professional background in law and counterterrorism, Guiora distinguishes between anti-Israel sentiment and antisemitism, noting how political leaders like Netanyahu exploit the confusion for strategic gain. The discussion explores Holocaust denial, intra-Jewish tensions, Orthodox-secular divides, and international law, emphasizing the need for precise definitions and caution in labelling. Guiora stresses that criticism of Israel is not inherently antisemitic.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: We are here with Amos Guiora, Director of the Bystander Initiative. We are going to discuss antisemitism today. This is one of the last interviews in that series for *Conversations on Antisemitism*, so thank you for participating in it.

Dr. Amos Guiora: I appreciate it. My pleasure.

Jacobsen: I have encountered several different approaches to this issue in the broader discussion. There are two main streams. One argues for a static definition, while the other supports a more fluid, ongoing conversation. When you think about antisemitism, what kind of language do you use to approach it, if at all?

Guiora: I think one needs to be cautious about instinctively throwing down the flag of antisemitism. However, as I told you when we spoke a couple of days ago, I view this through the lens of being an Israeli, not necessarily as an American Jew. From the perspective of an Israeli, it has been nearly two years since October 7, 2023.

As someone deeply involved in demonstrations, rallies, and efforts against the government, I am fervently—an understatement—opposed to the Netanyahu government. That does not make me anti-Israeli in any way. I firmly believe that criticism of this government, whether by Israelis or by non-Israelis, by Jews or non-Jews, is entirely legitimate.

I belong to the camp that says legitimate criticism of Israel, when based on knowledge and understanding, is not antisemitic. Full stop. I have friends who, with reasonable minds though differing views, believe that all criticism of Israel is inherently antisemitic. I do not subscribe to that position.

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So, putting on my Israeli hat—well, I do not have much hair, but still—I see criticism of what is happening as necessary. The fact that hostages remain in captivity—the 49 hostages still being held—and the reality that we are engaged in a purposeless war in Gaza all compel me to be highly critical. As you know, I have spoken at rallies in Haifa and Jerusalem. I am also writing a book about Netanyahu's enablers, naming them by name. None of this makes me antisemitic.

So, the definitional issue is this: do we say that any criticism of Israel is automatically antisemitic? I do not think so. Is there antisemitism in some of the criticism? Indeed, remarkably, it is not grounded in knowledge or understanding. However, as a lawyer, definitions are crucial. Words must be narrowly defined, specifically defined, and carefully applied.

So I am very cautious about labelling, "Oh, he is antisemitic, she is antisemitic." Is there antisemitism? Of course there is. An attack on a synagogue is antisemitic. The attack in Chile, which I saw reported the other day, was antisemitic—attacks on synagogues, attacks on Jews. You are in Canada: the Jewish man who was attacked in front of his children in Montreal—that is antisemitism. I saw something similar in Paris.

However, there are also situations involving Israelis. I think it was in Barcelona: an Israeli family was sitting in a restaurant, speaking Hebrew. The owner approached them and asked, "Are you speaking Hebrew?" They said yes. He told them, "Leave now." Is that antisemitic, or is that anti-Israel? I do not know.

Where does Zionism, or anti-Zionism, fit into this analysis? I define myself as a Zionist who believes in the state of Israel. Obviously, I served in the IDF, and I absolutely believe in the legitimacy of the state of Israel. I assume—though, as the first three letters of the word remind us, assumption can be risky—that anti-Zionism is the denial of Israel's right to exist. I know that position is out there.

Notwithstanding the UN resolution many decades back, I take anti-Zionism to mean the denial of Israel's legitimacy. I also know there are Jews who are anti-Zionist. My assumption—and I say this cautiously—is that this position denies Israel's right to exist. For me, is that antisemitic? Or is that anti-Israel? It lies somewhere between those categories. I do not always know what that means. There is also a revisionist history that contributes to this.

However, the state of Israel exists, and it is not going anywhere. To deny its existence, for me, is far off the beaten path. I do not understand where that comes from. Much prejudice toward Jewish people seems to depend on a prior definition—what is a Jewish person?

Now, you pointed out something intriguing: the history of the Israeli Supreme Court, which dates back many decades—if I recall correctly, to the early 1970s or early 1980s. The question in that case was: *What is a Jew?* What was the impetus for the case? What was the deliberation process? Moreover, what was the outcome?

I admit I do not know enough about the case itself. However, I can tell you that, traditionally, there has never been much question about what defines a Jew. According to the Torah, a Jew is someone whose mother is Jewish. Unlike in Islam, where the father's faith determines identity, in Judaism, it is the mother's faith that is considered significant.

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There has been a lengthy discussion of what it means to be a Jew. Years ago, it was in *Haaretz*, the Israeli newspaper. There was an article debating whether one primarily identifies as an Israeli or as a Jew. That is a fascinating question. If I have to choose between the two, I define myself as an Israeli.

I also think, in the context of historical antisemitism, that reasonable minds may disagree. However, there is a strong school of thought that says Christianity historically placed blame on Jews as the "Christ killers." In 1965, Pope Paul VI issued *Nostra Aetate*, a declaration rejecting that charge and affirming that Jews collectively were not responsible for the death of Jesus—it was the Romans. However, for nearly 2,000 years, the accusation of Jews as Christ killers hung over us.

In the Middle Ages, antisemitism manifested in other forms: Jews were portrayed as bloodsuckers, accused of ritual murder, or seen as running the banks—stereotypes tied to families like the Rothschilds. The "Christ killer" accusation was perhaps the most important element of this long history of antisemitism.

Fast forward to Hitler: Was Hitler antisemitic? Of course—virulently antisemitic. There was no state of Israel at the time, so the Holocaust was entirely about Jews. The Holocaust is the seminal event in the history of antisemitism, unhinged as unhinged can be.

In Israel today, we have both Orthodox (including Hasidic) Jews and secular Jews. The conflict between secular and Orthodox Jews is very real. Many in the Orthodox community, by rabbinical order, refuse to serve in the IDF. For secular Israelis like me, and for those of us whose children serve in the IDF, this refusal is outrageous. There are no words for it.

To give an example: there is a cartoon showing soldiers marching in one direction to the draft while Orthodox Jews head the opposite way, travelling to Ukraine to pray instead of serving. This captures the sense of division.

So the question arises: Does my criticism of Orthodox Jews for refusing military service make me antisemitic? I do not believe so. However, among secular Israelis, there is genuine hatred toward the Orthodox for this reason. I can point to friends who say openly, "We hate the Orthodox." Moreover, when they say hate, they mean hate.

On the other hand, just three weeks ago, extremist Orthodox groups declared "war on the state of Israel." They even posted banners to that effect. They then held a violent demonstration two weeks ago. Frankly, I was sorry the police did not crack down harder.

So it is not very easy.

Jacobsen: It is the Pope's "relationship status." *It is not very easy.* I think that sentiment applies here as well. Now, what about something I have not explored as much in conversation—the issue of intra-Jewish, or inter-subethnic, tensions: Ashkenazim versus Sephardim versus Mizrahim, and so on? Today, these often surface as jokes. People have told me such jokes, though the terminology can be strong.

Guiora: Jokes, of course, are often rooted in reality. If someone harbours hatred within the broader Jewish community, does that count as antisemitism? First, I do not think antisemites in

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the broader world distinguish between Sephardic Jews, Russian Jews, Ethiopian Jews, or Ashkenazi Jews. To them, a Jew is a Jew. That is a different question from what you are asking.

Historically, when the state of Israel was founded, it was led mainly by Ashkenazi Jews from Europe, including Ben-Gurion and others. When Jews from Middle Eastern countries, particularly Sephardic Jews, came in the 1950s—many from Morocco—it is well documented that they felt discriminated against by the Ashkenazi establishment. That reality was very much present at the time.

Where are we now, in 2025? The situation is no longer what it once was. Intermarriage has played a role in bridging divisions, and the IDF serves as a great melting pot. In the army, Jews from Yemen, Ethiopia, the broader Middle East, including Sephardim and Ashkenazim, as well as Russians, all serve together. The shared experience of service brings people together.

That is not to deny that discrimination existed in the past. I remember when Ehud Barak, either running for prime minister or already serving, publicly apologized to Sephardic Jews for the discrimination they experienced in the 1950s. You cannot argue with people's lived perceptions; if they felt discriminated against, that was real for them.

However, by 2025, I do not think this will remain a significant issue. Some may still use it—perhaps politicians for their own expediency—but in the broader sense, within the context of antisemitism, distinctions between Ashkenazi, Sephardi, Mizrahi, and other Jewish groups are, in my view, a non-issue.

Jacobsen: It is politically incorrect for many people to express certain prejudices openly. However, during periods of rising antisemitism, people will seize upon whatever current issue exists and use it as a justification to air their preexisting biases—under the pretext of the present controversy.

Guiora: I understand that. As I have mentioned, I give numerous talks. On occasion, I have faced demonstrations, had police protection, or even been spat on while inside a car. I never felt that was antisemitism. I felt they were attacking me as an Israeli, full stop.

After my Holocaust book came out in 2017, I received death threats. Those threats were posted on neo-Nazi platforms—one styled after *Der Stürmer*—and in other places. In my opinion, those threats were antisemitic. They included terrible things: "Hang your favourite Jew," or "Who wants to see Amos's bloody scalp?" That was clearly antisemitism.

By contrast, when I have faced demonstrations against me, I felt those were anti-Israel, not antisemitic. Once, I was invited as a keynote speaker at a major conference on antisemitism. It was a great honour. There were so many police that they even escorted me to the men's room.

I told them, "Fellas, I can take care of myself. I do not need police with me in the bathroom." Was the heavy security due to fear of protesters? Was that fear about antisemitism or anti-Israel sentiment? Given the context of the conference, I assume antisemitism.

However, in other talks, when people shouted things about Israel, I considered that anti-Israel, not antisemitic. I believe there is a clear distinction between the two.

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Jacobsen: Do you think antisemitism is rising?

Guiora: According to groups like the ADL and AJC, who track statistics in the U.S. and Europe, the answer is yes. However, distinguishing whether incidents are anti-Israel or antisemitic is not always straightforward.

For example, recently in New York with my wife, we made a conscious choice not to speak Hebrew in the streets. Is that fear of anti-Israel reaction or fear of antisemitism? I do not know.

We are very conscious of these things. When I travel, I refrain from wearing anything that identifies me as Israeli. The Israeli Foreign Ministry has issued strong recommendations—almost guidelines—not to speak Hebrew in public, not to wear swag with Hebrew writing or Israeli symbols.

I have a religious Israeli friend who wears a kippah. He planned to travel to Europe with friends, all of whom also wear kippot. However, the security concern was significant. Simply being visibly Jewish today, in certain places, carries real risk.

My friend said he would only travel with his group if they did not wear kippot in Europe. One of his friends replied, "I will not take my kippah off in Europe." My friend responded, "Then I cannot go with you." So is that fear of anti-Israel sentiment or fear of antisemitism? Yes—it is both.

Jacobsen: Do you think that from an outside perspective, there is really no distinction being made between Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews? If someone hates Jewish people, they hate Jewish people. When a person is yelling in the street, "Fuck the Jews" or whatever, they are not distinguishing between Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews. I do not think they even know the difference. Alternatively, if they do, it is irrelevant.

Jacobsen: Has there been any legal progress since that 1970s case?

Guiora: To my understanding, no. The question remains open. According to Jewish law, a Jew is defined as someone born to a Jewish mother. That has raised complicated questions regarding conversion. For instance, who conducted the conversion? Was it an Orthodox rabbi or a Reform rabbi? To the best of my knowledge, the State of Israel—through the Chief Rabbinate—does not recognize conversions conducted by Reform rabbis. That remains a live issue.

From my perspective, anyone who sincerely wants to convert to Judaism should be welcomed. However, the Rabbinate, dominated by Orthodox Judaism, does not recognize non-Orthodox conversions. Politically, the government often accommodates this because it needs Orthodox parties for coalition-building. That is simply the reality.

It reminds me of something: years ago in Ireland, there was a debate about priests offering televised blessings for those unable to attend services. I joked—if you record it and replay it throughout the day, do you receive perpetual indulgences? I will leave that question to you.

Jacobsen: What about outside Israel, in census data? How are people defining Jewish identity around the world?

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Guiora: Good question. Here in Utah, as I understand it, when you ask leaders of the Jewish community how many Jews live here, the standard response is about 5,000. It is a round number that gets repeated because there is no precise count. That is how the community itself tends to present it.

If someone's father is Jewish but the mother is not, then in Israel, they would not be identified as Jewish. For the sake of community purposes elsewhere, they might be accepted as Jews—but not in Israel. Today, in much of the West, such individuals would indeed be considered Jewish. However, in Israel, the Orthodox Rabbinate controls these questions, and their position is clear: Jewish identity follows the mother.

Outside Israel, particularly in Reform communities, there is much greater tolerance. If someone wants to decide that they are a Jew, the response is often, *Zay gezunt*—so be it. My view is similar: if somebody wants to define themselves as a Jew, God bless them. Seriously.

Jacobsen: What circumstances have you felt involved in genuine, virulent forms of antisemitism directed at you, not just anti-Israel sentiment?

Guiora: I grew up in Ann Arbor, Michigan. I did not experience antisemitism in my childhood. Perhaps once, at Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio, someone said something foolish. In law school at Case Western—no, not at all. Working in Washington, D.C.—again, not at all. Serving in the IDF for 20 years—none.

Now, having been back in the United States for 20 years, the only antisemitism I have personally experienced was tied to the Holocaust book I published. That brought death threats.

I received one typed letter, postmarked Cleveland, Ohio. (You probably do not even know what a typewriter is—you are too young.

Jacobsen: They invented typewriters at about the same time they invented dirt.

Guiora: Anyway, the letter said: *Amos*— not "Dear Amos," just "Amos." The writer had read my book or read about me and wrote, "The next Holocaust is sure to happen, and you will be one of the first victims." That is antisemitism. There were also comments online, like: *Raise your hand if you want to see Amos's bloody scalp.* What is that?

Jacobsen: Unless this person knew of some obscure historical practice about scalping Jews, it is simply violent antisemitic language directed at me personally.

Guiora: Once, at three o'clock in the morning, I woke up to a whole series of threats. By seven or eight in the morning, they began posting my home address. That is serious. With the Holocaust letter, when my address was made public, we immediately reached out to the police. I understand that someone also contacted the FBI, which was the right thing to do. The moment you publish someone's home address, that crosses a dangerous line.

What is Holocaust denial? Let me tell you a story. In 2005 or 2006, I was invited to debate the legality of what some call the "fence" and others call the "barrier" between Israel and the West Bank. I was to debate a professor of law.

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On my way to the debate, one of my research assistants called me and said, "Professor Guiora, have you read what he writes?" I told her I had not. She said, "He is a Holocaust minimizer." I asked, "What the hell is that?" She explained: "He acknowledges that the Holocaust happened—thank you—but he says it was two million victims, not six million."

So I arrive at the debate. We debate the barrier, not the Holocaust. However, as the only child of two Holocaust survivors, whose grandparents were murdered in the Holocaust, I refused to shake his hand afterward—no reason to.

Later, I received a scathing letter from the university provost accusing me of violating principles of academic dignity and integrity. I considered my options: (1) respond politely, (2) write, "Dear Mr. Provost, go fuck yourself," or (3) delete the email. After thinking it through—tick, tick, tick—I deleted it.

A couple of years later, I ran into the same professor, the Holocaust minimizer, at a conference. He greeted me warmly: "Amos, it is great to see you!" He extended his hand. I looked at it and refused again. No way I would shake that hand.

Now, is he antisemitic? Is he an idiot? Is he anti-Israel? What is that?

Jacobsen: What it brings to mind is the deeper concept of intersubjective agreement—how we define ourselves, how we define our history, how we define offence, and then how we define each other in relation to all those things. It is a sliding scale across all of them.

Guiora: Exactly. When the death threats came in after articles about my book, I had to confront my late mother with this reality. She had no idea Holocaust denial even existed. Living in Israel, it was outside her frame of reference. I remember the painful conversation: not only explaining that people deny the Holocaust, but that some of those same people wanted to kill her son. She could not grasp it.

My mother could not wrap her mind around Holocaust denial. That is no trivial matter. By the way, my mother did not define herself as a Holocaust survivor—she defined herself as a Holocaust *winner*. She defeated the Holocaust. For her, denial was incomprehensible.

I remember sitting with her in her apartment in Jerusalem. This is how my mom spoke: "Are you fucking kidding me?" Moreover, I said, "No, Mom, I am serious." She could not, would not, wrap her mind around it.

Jacobsen: What is Holocaust denial? At its core, it says: *It did not happen.* Holocaust minimization says: *Yes, it happened, but the scale was smaller—two million, not six million.* That is just another form of denialism, a style of revisionism. On a conceptual spectrum, you could call one pole Holocaust acceptance and the other pole Holocaust denial. In between lies minimization. So yes, it is denial, just by another name.

Guiora: As you know, I am frequently interviewed and meet with numerous people. There are only two categories of people with whom I absolutely refuse to interact. One: neo-Nazis. Two: Holocaust deniers. With them, there is nothing to discuss. They are utterly anathema to me. I engage with a wide range of people—I have even dealt with Hamas. But neo-Nazis and Holocaust deniers? No way.

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Jacobsen: Does your being ex-IDF complicate matters, in terms of how people conflate Israeli and Jewish identity—directing hatred at Jews through their opposition to Israel?

Guiora: That is a fascinating question. Are the mistakes in Gaza being used as justification for antisemitism? That is the issue.

Is it antisemitism to call Israel's actions "genocide"? Some of my American Jewish friends would say yes—instinctively. However, I also have Israeli friends who are deeply, deeply concerned about what the IDF is doing in Gaza. They are not antisemitic. They are Israelis criticizing their own government.

Would some of them say that international criticism of Israel is antisemitic? Perhaps. I have friends who believe that. However, for me, criticism of Israel—especially informed, substantive criticism—is not the same as antisemitism.

The mainstream does not think about Gaza through the lens of antisemitism. They think about it through the lens of: *What is Israel doing in Gaza?* That is how Israelis themselves frame it.

Jacobsen: Even if it has not been settled in Israeli courts for over fifty years, are there other courts that have a standard, working definition—not widely accepted, but at least functional? Of antisemitism? Or of "Jew"?

Guiora: [Laughing] Jesus, I hope the rest of the world has better things to do than to ask, *What is a Jew?* Please. When this Gaza war ends, the ICC (International Criminal Court) or the ICJ (International Court of Justice) may have to decide what to do with Netanyahu and others. My expectation is: nothing.

However, I do not view that through the lens of antisemitism. I view it through the lens of international law. Are alleged war crimes being investigated or not? That is the question. Still, I have no doubt some frame it as antisemitism.

For example, some of my friends argue that any potential arrest warrants against Netanyahu or former Defence Minister Yoav Gallant are predicated on antisemitism. Their reasoning is: "There are no arrest warrants against Hamas. There are no arrest warrants against Hezbollah. There are no arrest warrants against others. Therefore, if the only arrest warrants are directed at Israelis, it must be antisemitism." I am aware of that argument.

However, realistically, no one is going to arrest "Bibi" Netanyahu. No one is going to arrest Yoav Gallant. Any such warrant would be performative.

Is it performative because of antisemitism? Some people absolutely say yes, especially when looking at the long list of others who have committed atrocities. There *is* an ICC arrest warrant against Putin for war crimes related to Ukraine. There have also been proceedings against leaders like Duterte at the International Criminal Court, though not Assad of Syria, despite his horrific record.

So yes, there is a legitimate debate about selective justice. However, whether that stems from antisemitism is contested.

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Jacobsen: On March 17, 2023, following its investigation, the ICC issued arrest warrants for Vladimir Putin and Maria Lvova-Belova.

Guiora: Putin has not been arrested—unless I somehow missed CNN today—and he will not be arrested. And neither will Netanyahu. These warrants are performative.

Why do I say that? Because, frankly, Putin does not even know the thing exists, and if he does, he does not care. I have had people ask me, "Is Netanyahu worried about being arrested?" Jesus Christ—people do not understand Netanyahu at all. The only things he cares about are Israel and the United States. Europe, for him, is utterly irrelevant.

He uses Macron in France for his own domestic political advantage. If Macron does not understand that, then Macron needs a lesson from Netanyahu, unless Macron himself is also playing a double game for his domestic politics in France, perhaps with elections coming up.

Jacobsen: Years ago, Bill Maher interviewed Netanyahu—this must be over a decade ago. They discussed what is now commonly referred to as Christian nationalism. Certain American evangelicals want events in Israel to unfold in a particular way because they believe it will trigger the Second Coming of Jesus. It is apocalyptic theology. It instrumentalizes Jewish people for someone else's religious narrative.

Guiora: Every time Israel is attacked—or when a European leader declares support for a Palestinian state—Netanyahu reframes that criticism as antisemitism. He plays it directly to his political base in Israel. It is a tactic. Does Macron realize that when he makes statements about a Palestinian state, it gives Netanyahu another rallying point at home? Perhaps Macron is aware of it and is utilizing it for his own base in France. Maybe not.

Jacobsen: That reminds me of Bill Maher's point in that interview. Netanyahu, when the second coming arose. He joked, "We will have that conversation when it happens." It was a sharp line. It connects to something much older. There is a saying often attributed to Roman or Greek thinkers: The wise consider religion false, the ordinary people consider it true, and the rulers consider it useful.

Guiora: Marx later echoed it with his line, "Religion is the opiate of the masses." The point is the same: religion—and by extension, Israel in this context—is being used instrumentally.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Amos.

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Hugo Daniel Estrella Tampieri on Latin American Antisemitism: Data & Solutions

Hugo Daniel Estrella Tampieri is a journalist, professor, conflict management and human rights specialist, and secular humanist. In 2023–25, he served as Advocacy Director on the Board of Atheist Alliance International, working across Latin America and Europe. He founded the Argentine Secular Humanist Association and formerly represented Latin America in Humanists International (formerly IHEU). Estrella founded and chaired the International Student/Young Pugwash from 1999 to 2003, contributing to peace-focused and humanist networks. He has taught at the University of Pisa's Master's program in Peace Studies and the Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna's International Master's program in Human Rights. He was CFI's Transnational Director and UN representative for the Council for Secular Humanism. He is a scholar and a member of the University of Pisa's Interdisciplinary Center on Jewish Studies. He was also a consultant to the Hebrew University of Jerusalem's Program on Peace Teaching. He teaches and writes on secular ethics, disarmament, and the religious dimensions of totalitarianism.

In this interview with **Scott Douglas Jacobsen**, Estrella examines Latin American antisemitism in 2025. He cites post–October 7 surges in incidents, mainstreaming older conspiracies (Protocols, blood libel, "Andinia Plan"), and Holocaust distortion. Argentina's context includes President Javier Milei's symbolism, while Chabad-Lubavitch is clarified as a religious, not a political, organization. Estrella distinguishes anti-Israel policy critique from anti-Jewish harassment, flags Soros-centred conspiracism, and warns about persistent online disinformation. Solutions prioritize education, secular integration, youth exchanges (similar to the Erasmus program), and robust fact-checking. Measurement should combine surveys with socio-political indicators of unrest. He argues that prosperity and pluralism reduce scapegoating, whereas inequality and populism fuel a resurgence of hostility across the region.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: All right. I am here with you. If you ask what data best captures antisemitism's trajectory in 2025 across Latin America, region-wide monitoring shows sharp increases since the October 7, 2023, Hamas attacks and the ensuing Israel–Hamas war. In Brazil, the Jewish umbrella body CONIB reported a 961% month-over-month surge in reports in October 2023 compared to October 2022, and its 2024 annual tally reached 1,788 cases (up 26.8% from 2023 and approximately 350% from 2022). In Argentina, the DAIA recorded 687 complaints in 2024, 15% higher than in 2023, and highlighted more violent street assaults. These spikes align with record highs observed in parts of Europe (e.g., the UK's highest-ever 4,103 incidents in 2023), although baselines and monitoring methods vary by country.

Hugo Estrella: What has become mainstream in many places are older antisemitic ideas that had been quieter in public life: blaming "the Jews" for political discontent or inventing conspiracies about control of governments or territory. In the Southern Cone, for example, the "Andinia Plan" fantasy about a Jewish takeover of Patagonia is a well-documented antisemitic hoax with neo-Nazi roots.

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Likewise, medieval tropes such as the blood libel and the charge of "deicide" (that Jews killed God/Jesus) are classic, long-discredited forms of antisemitism. However, they still circulate online and in protest culture.

Specifically, regarding Argentina, President Javier Milei was born and raised a Roman Catholic. He has publicly expressed interest in converting to Judaism, but has not converted. He appointed Rabbi Shimon Axel Wahnish as Argentina's ambassador to Israel and announced that Argentina intends to move its embassy to Jerusalem in 2026. As of August 31, 2025, this move has been announced but not yet completed.

Also, to be precise about labels: Chabad-Lubavitch ("Lubavitchers") is a Hasidic movement within Orthodox Judaism—a religious movement, not a political or "fascist" faction. Moreover, the literary reference: Umberto Eco (not "Humberto") explored the manufacture of antisemitic conspiracies—including the notorious forgery *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*—in his novel *The Prague Cemetery* (2011). Scholars universally recognize the Protocols themselves as a fraud.

Finally, while Latin America has clearly seen increases, the intensity of these increases can differ by country and over time. Several European countries also registered unprecedented levels after October 7, which is a valuable context when comparing "how bad" things are across regions.

I would even say folkloric, but it is not a massive phenomenon as we see happening in Europe with the left-wing demonstrations and the pro-Gaza or pro-Palestinian groups that deny the existence of Israel and are beginning to target Jews in Europe. Fortunately, that is not yet happening here. However, the tendency and atmosphere are present, and the situation is ripe for these individuals to emerge nowadays. However, it is not something that is mainstream within the intelligentsia.

At the universities, for example, no one is promoting cutting ties with Israel. It is a very popular phenomenon, but confined to lower socioeconomic layers of the population. It has not yet become part of the political agenda or mainstream political discourse. It is far from that. However, it could become something worse. One never knows how these things will end.

Jacobsen: What are some blind spots? So you have data. You capture specific trends. However, some things are not captured in the data. Those missing pieces are the blind spots. What are the blind spots that the data is missing? What are other areas of further study—ways to identify new types of antisemitism that are legitimate phenomena but not pursued in current research? Two possibilities come to mind. First, old forms of antisemitism that have always existed but have not been studied much. Second, with the advancement of communications technology, the internet, and new forms of social organization, new expressions emerge.

It could be as stark as the difference between print culture, which produced publications like *Der Stürmer*, and today's websites, such as the *Daily Stormer*, or message boards like 4chan or 8chan. However, it could also be more subtle—for example, antisemitic tropes appearing in video games or in media content. That is not being studied enough to capture it.

Estrella: In my view, it is still more connected to traditional antisemitism. What you mentioned are technological upgrades—new ways of adapting the same old prejudices to different

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audiences. They strike at various levels but remain linked to the same groups: ultranationalists, conspiracy theorists, and people who claim to "really understand what is going on in the world," who then add the "Jewish factor" as part of society's problems. But nothing fundamentally new. The groups are basically the same: ultra-nationalistic and conspiratorial.

Whether from fascists or certain left-wing groups, you hear claims that the United States, Israel, George Soros, capitalism, weapons manufacturers, laboratories, and even vaccines are all somehow part of the same conspiracy. There is something for every taste—different aspects of antisemitism tailored to various audiences.

For example, I was talking to my new neighbour, the son of a lifelong friend who just moved in next to us. It came out in conversation that he said, "You know why the Israelis are so interested in the support of President Milei? Because they will run out of soldiers, they need Argentine youth to be brought to fight for them. That is what they want." I thought—What are you talking about? Where does this even come from? However, this illustrates how, depending on the person you speak with, an antisemitic comment may emerge at some point.

Being Jewish, we are used to that. It happens in most circumstances. What is different now is that with Gaza in the news, it has worsened and become more widespread. People feel the need to impose order on things they do not understand. Instead of applying Occam's razor, they prefer conspiracy theories as explanations.

Moreover, if you try to explain rationally, most people prefer the irrational over the rational. They distrust evidence. It is more exciting for them to believe spy stories than to accept simple facts.

As I said, it is widespread—but not too severe here. Confrontations still happen, however. For instance, abroad, in Italy or Spain, I have had to remove many friends from Facebook because of offensive comments they posted or repeated, simply because I am Jewish. People assume I side with Netanyahu, even though I have always opposed him.

There is no way to put it into words. They insist: "I am not antisemitic, I am anti-Zionist." However, when you press them, what they really mean is that Jews should be expelled and Israel should not exist. They argue: "You invaded the country." That does not match historical fact, yet they are blind to evidence. Such rhetoric is not typically used in Argentina. It may appear among some on the extreme left in Argentina or Chile, but it remains confined to niche groups. It is not popular or mainstream.

Jacobsen: A question: which narratives are most active now? For instance, Holocaust distortion—which could mean minimization, denial, or something else—or the "Great Replacement" theory, or the Count Richard von Coudenhove-Kalergi conspiracy theory. These issues arose during my interview with Dr. Alon Milwicki, the senior researcher at the Southern Poverty Law Center. You see many of these trends fracture into various variations. Some are sci-fi, fantasy, or supernatural in tone. Others are grounded in real-world events but misinterpreted, misinformed, or explicitly racist. From your perspective, what narratives are most common now?

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Estrella: I would not say that Holocaust denialism is dominant—that is mainly off the table. What I see today, though, is partly the result of how Prime Minister Netanyahu and some extreme right-wing figures in Israel have politicized the Holocaust.

Estrella: This has produced what I call a kind of "Holocaust-ification," which, in my view, is even worse than denial. It takes the Holocaust and says, "You see, now you are behaving like the Nazis. You learned from them."

To me, that is more damaging than outright denial. It is terrible. As I said, it is partly the responsibility of those on the Israeli far right who argue that every criticism of Israel's government today is based on antisemitism. That position flips arguments upside down and allows others to claim: "Well, antisemitism was not so bad—because if there had been more antisemitism, perhaps it would have prevented what you are doing now."

It is deeply worrying that the Holocaust—something so unique, so terrible—has been manipulated in this way. Only people with a superficial understanding of what the Holocaust was, and of the magnitude of its crimes, would compare it directly to events in Gaza today. The situations have little or nothing to do with each other. Such comparisons show how some are using Holocaust memory not to honour history, but to diminish its singularity.

The way people live with Holocaust history—especially in Europe, where the crimes occurred—has been a burden for many. Now some feel "relieved" by being able to say: "We were not so bad, because you are just as bad. It is time to equalize things."

I am not speaking about Latin America here. I mean Europe. These are the kinds of discourses you hear in protests and demonstrations. For example, think back to the Gaza flotilla incident about fifteen years ago, when Israeli forces boarded a ship carrying activists. Many of us—Jews included—who support Israel and also support peace were horrified by that and opposed it. However, if the slogan "Freedom for the flotilla" is turned into "Palestine free from the river to the sea," then we are in serious trouble.

So the problem I see is that Holocaust memory is backfiring—what you might call Holocaust backlash—because of how Netanyahu and others have used it politically. What Netanyahu and his allies are doing worries me very much. That is one narrative that horrifies me. You also asked about Holocaust denial and the Great Replacement theory.

That theory is also present in Argentina. It appeared in the 1950s and 1960s in the Patagonia region. Today, it is not something popular, but you begin to hear it from people who would have never voiced it before. There is the situation of Israeli boys and girls who, after finishing their military service, travel abroad—often to the Himalayas or other remote places—to clear their minds after the harrowing experiences of the army. They are still very young, and they want to reconnect with nature and escape from violence. Some Israelis have travelled to Patagonia, where they hike and explore the forests.

Thus, the conspiracy began to circulate: that they were coming to Patagonia because they wanted to settle and create a "new Israel." The claim is that Israel is too small, too troubled, so Israelis supposedly intend to take over Argentine and Chilean sovereignty and build a new Jewish state there. This same conspiracy also circulated in Chile.

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In the 1990s, a wealthy Jewish businessman, Douglas Tompkins, founder of The North Face and Esprit, purchased large tracts of land in southern Chile and Argentina. He was deeply involved in environmental conservation. Chilean nationalists spread rumours that he was buying the land to establish a "new Israel." In reality, when he died in 2015, he left the land to the Chilean government with the stipulation that it be preserved as protected nature reserves. The conspiracy theories collapsed with time.

However, this is precisely the kind of discourse we see in replacement narratives: that Patagonia is sparsely populated, so "it would be easy to replace" the locals. It remains explicitly tied to that part of the land, Patagonia.

Jacobsen: Where do antisemitic tropes intersect with the broader conspiracy mindset?

Estrella: Part of the conspiracy mindset—or really the backbone of it all—goes back to *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Historically, this forgery emerged in the early 20th century, drawing on antisemitic themes that had circulated since the late 19th century, particularly in France during the Third Republic.

Historically, antisemitic narratives were often backed or organized by Catholic forces and intertwined with anti-democratic and anti-Republican movements. They go back to that period and retain the same structure to this day. They appeal to people who feel uncomfortable with liberal democracy or with socialism as part of democratic pluralism, as well as to those who harbour nationalist fears of diversity. These narratives have also become linked to newer minority groups that were not visible at the time.

What used to be framed as a "Judeo-Masonic" conspiracy—accusing Jews and Freemasons of working together to destroy Christian roots and national strength by promoting rationalism, doubt, and democracy ("the rule of numbers over the rule of the best")—has evolved. Today, it incorporates anti-feminist rhetoric, anti-atheist prejudice, and above all, homophobia.

For example, in many countries, population decline is discussed as a demographic challenge. Some conspiracy-minded groups blame this not on economic or social trends but on "accepting homosexuals as equal to heterosexuals." Figures like Vladimir Putin, who is one of the most vocal opponents of LGBTQ+ rights, reinforce the idea that tolerance of homosexuality is leading to societal collapse, arguing that it undermines "traditional families" and fuels demographic decline. It is, of course, absurd, but these views are widely spread.

This links back to antisemitism because Jews have historically struggled for equality, for secularism, and for recognition as equal citizens in minority contexts. Because of this, Jews have been accused both of driving the communist agenda and of exploiting capitalism. The contradiction does not matter—Jews are made the scapegoats in both narratives.

In the United States, for instance, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), an organization historically associated with Jewish lawyers and activists fighting for civil rights, is now dismissed by some as part of a broader "anti-traditional" agenda. All of this ties into the recurring fear that diversity itself destabilizes society.

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Moreover, now, with trans people, LGBTQ+ visibility, and gay pride movements, we see how this logic extends. In Hungary, for example, during Budapest Pride, European liberal leaders had to march in solidarity to prevent participants from being beaten or jailed. This is part of the ongoing narrative of Jews and now other minorities being cast as "infections" in the healthy body of the Christian nation.

So today, Jews are no longer the only visible minority targeted. Other minorities—LGBTQ+ people, feminists, secularists—are blamed with the same conspiratorial logic once reserved for Jews. Moreover, it is interesting to see how these older patterns of scapegoating have been expanded and repurposed.

People who, in theory, should be embracing Jews—because we are on the same side in terms of equality and minority rights—are sometimes marching in defence of Hamas. That is the most baffling thing. For instance, movements like "Rainbow for Gaza," where LGBTQ+ people show support for Hamas, are beyond imagination. However, still, the Jew will always be seen as the Jew, even when one would expect a natural alliance with other minorities.

This is especially ironic since there are so many gay Jews, so many atheist Jews. I myself say: I am Jewish and an atheist. I belong to the tribe, but not to the religion. Most Western Jews are free thinkers. Since Spinoza, Jews have given the world both a rational God and atheism. We are, in a sense, both the "bodies" and the "antibodies" within the same people.

To return to your question, it is the same mindset applied to different historical situations. Those who defend tradition, nation, and the "untouchability" of the past always stand against the enlightened. In the end, it is obscurantism against enlightenment.

Jacobsen: Now, outside of conspiracies, what about geopolitics? For example, geopolitical disinformation. It can be used in almost absurd ways, but with tragic consequences. Take the Russia–Ukraine war: at the start of the full-scale invasion on February 24, 2022, the Kremlin spread the narrative that they had to stop a "neo-Nazi takeover" of Ukraine. This was used as a pretext to justify their aggression, an international crime. The implication was that Nazis ran the Ukrainian state, yet its president, Volodymyr Zelensky, is both Jewish and a former comedian. So, Russia's message was that a Jewish "neo-Nazi" was leading the country. That is far-fetched, but it has a more concrete and seemingly grounded logic than the more abstract conspiracies. What about geopolitical disinformation or misinformation in this regard?

Estrella: That is very evident in the discourse Putin directs toward the West. He knows he has a dual audience. On the one hand, there is an anti-European, antisemitic, nationalist current that includes elements of the far right in Italy and leaders like Viktor Orbán in Hungary. On the other hand, some support Putin because he presents himself as defending "traditional values" of family and nation. Moreover, he has significant financial resources to support these groups within their own national politics and political games.

And then it triggers the reaction of the nationalist groups, who are also racist and do not want to accept any migrants. For example, Putin facilitated the transfer of Syrian migrants into Belarus, pushing them toward Poland. This was a way of destabilizing the European Union and

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supporting extreme right-wing movements. It is the twisted mind he has—he knows how to exploit the West's fears, and the concerns of Europeans in particular.

Look at what has happened in eastern Germany, where a majority of people in some areas now vote for the AfD (Alternative für Deutschland). One has to acknowledge that Germany did an excellent job with denazification and with accepting responsibility for the Holocaust, but this did not take hold in the same way in the former East Germany. That region has become a stronghold of neo-Nazis.

In terms of geopolitics, I believe this trend will continue. Moreover, of course, in North Africa and across much of the Islamic world, there has always been antisemitism. Strangely, it is not as bad in Iran. In Iran, they are both anti-Israel and antisemitic, of course, but Iranian Jews are somewhat protected. They even hold a reserved seat in the parliament. This dates back to ancient times, to the Babylonian exile following Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of the First Temple. The Jews who live in Iran have been there for millennia, so they are treated as part of the fabric of the country.

The same can be said about Jews living in Turkey, although the attitude there is more ambivalent. Both Iran and Turkey differentiate between their "own" Jews and Jews abroad, whom they regard as enemies because Jews in the diaspora are seen as part of the modern democratic, liberal world forces that threaten their authoritarian or monarchical systems.

This is quite worrisome. On the other hand, in the United States, we see people unquestioningly supporting the extreme right in Israel. For example, the born-again Christians who feel it is their duty to help Israel because they believe that once Israel triumphs, it will trigger the Second Coming of Jesus. It is nonsense—so much nonsense—but it becomes politically significant when articulated in the political arena.

Moreover, when I say "semi-religious," I also mean the left wing that still clings to a kind of faith that Putin somehow represents a continuation of the USSR. These ideological distortions, whether religious or pseudo-religious, are deeply problematic when intertwined with politics.

Jacobsen: Oh, this one comes up quite often, both in interviews and outside of them. What distinguishes anti-Israel rhetoric from anti-Jewish harassment in civic spaces? For instance, a student who has no geopolitical interests but happens to be Jewish may still get harassed. Suppose someone has genuine geopolitical or policy disagreements with the Netanyahu government but no anti-Jewish sentiment whatsoever. They would not endorse any harassment of Jews—indeed, they might even be Jewish themselves. How does one thread that line? Obviously, it becomes harder when geopolitical tensions rise, because the "red button" is much bigger and more prominent. I will leave it to your discretion how much you want to address this.

Estrella: I would focus on one last name, which represents the whole madness: Soros. For more than thirty years, George Soros has been cast as the number one enemy, the supposed bandit or threat. Why? Because he chose to promote liberal democracy, to support the normalization of Eastern Europe after the Cold War, and to strengthen liberal values and rationalism. For this, he became the number one villain in the eyes of so many.

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In the minds of conspiracy theorists, everything is linked to some underground management. For some, it is the Illuminati, for others, Freemasonry, but for many, it is Soros. Moreover, since Soros is Jewish, the logic goes "one plus one." Even though he has nothing to do with the Israeli government—indeed, he is against Netanyahu and the religious right in Israel—he is still blamed for what is happening today.

The same happens with liberal Jews around the world. Anti-Zionist rhetoric quickly transforms into antisemitism in practice—whether in Greece, Italy, Spain, or anywhere else.

I read something recently that captures the dilemma perfectly: there is no way out. If you are a Jew and vocal in support of Israel, then you are blamed for what is happening in Gaza. If you are a Jew and against what is happening in Gaza, then you are branded a hypocrite, because you still want Israel to exist. In that case, you are not to be trusted—you are considered even worse than someone supporting Netanyahu.

So there is no escape. Whatever we say or think, we are still hated, because we are all cast as part of a conspiracy to erase Palestinians from the earth.

Moreover, of course, conspiracy theories multiply: some claim Israel wants to build a "parallel Suez Canal" through Gaza, and therefore must eliminate the Palestinians living there. Others insist Israel intends to seize oil or gas reserves under Gaza. These theories are absurd, but they circulate widely.

We are guilty of everything. It is no longer just the old charges—that Jews killed Jesus, poisoned wells, or spread plagues—though even those persist. During the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, conspiracy theorists claimed Jews put microchips in vaccines to control people's brains, or that COVID itself did not exist.

Some conspiracy theorists described COVID-19 itself as a Jewish invention. They claimed people pretended it existed so that Jews could sell vaccines first, and then use those vaccines to "enter people's minds" and control them. Again, we see this tied back to the myth of the "Elders of Zion."

Jacobsen: This is a good point to shift into solutions. What historically informed, evidence-based practices help reduce the harms of antisemitism?

Estrella: Once, the very existence of Israel was presented as a solution. Many nationalist groups believed that the establishment of Israel would liberate their own societies by sending Jews away, making their countries "Jew-free." That was their distorted idea of a solution.

In terms of a liberal mindset, the real solutions were education and general social well-being. In the 1960s, for example, antisemitism was far less widespread than today. It was the time of the baby boom, economic growth, and a broad sense of well-being compared to the war and postwar years. That prosperity reduced the perceived "need" for an enemy.

At that time, many Jews were also deeply involved in the advancement of science and technology. Because science and technology enjoyed popularity and prestige in the 1960s, Jews were often regarded as an asset. I believe antisemitism is closely linked to social conditions: when populations experience general well-being, the impulse to blame minorities decreases.

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In my view, the problem is that the post–Cold War era was poorly managed. The collapse of the Soviet Union was a significant historical moment, but it occurred at the wrong time and under the most shortsighted leadership. After World War II, enlightened leadership helped shape a more equal world, one founded on education, human rights, and the principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter.

By contrast, after the Cold War, inequality increased. Many believed that anything was possible, but instead of channelling the resources saved from the arms race into improving lives, those resources were squandered. Rather than investing in people, education, or quality of life, the period was dominated by neoliberalism and conservative politics.

Instead of distributing the peace dividend fairly, inequality grew. The West abandoned models that had worked during the Cold War—welfare states, investments in education, and socialized healthcare systems, such as those in Canada. Instead of following that path, post–Cold War politics widened the gap between the rich and the poor.

After the fall of communism, European governments began dismantling welfare states. The logic was: "There is no longer a communist threat, so why should we invest in people? Let us privatize everything. Let people pay. Why should I pay for your healthcare? Why should I pay for your education?"

This shift was reflected in the culture. It was so well captured in Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho*, later made into a film. That novel perfectly expressed the ethos of the late 1980s and 1990s: greed, individualism, and disregard for social responsibility. In my view, this was the basis for the enormous inequality we live with today.

Inequality has bred pervasive fear—fear of losing one's job, fear of losing one's home, fear of starting a family because you do not know whether you can support children. Meanwhile, billionaires like Elon Musk or the ultra-rich could solve many global problems in a single day, yet masses of young, educated, capable people lack stable jobs and must take on 30- or 40-year debts to buy a home. This breeds frustration.

If that frustration exists in the center, it is even worse at the periphery. In the heart of the West, it creates instability: people no longer trust democracy and instead vote for populist leaders. At the borders, it generates war, aggression, and extremism.

To me, this is the actual root cause of today's instability. It began in the late 1980s, with the advent of Reaganomics in the United States and Margaret Thatcher's policies in the United Kingdom. These policies triumphed just as the world was being reshaped after the Cold War. However, instead of offering equality and opportunity, they offered inequality and austerity.

In many African and Near Eastern countries, groups that had once been communist or pro-communist during the Cold War shifted toward Islamism, because religion became the only ideology available as an alternative. This occurred partly because local elites failed to manage the transition effectively. Islam, with its community networks and strong social bonds, filled the vacuum left by communism. However, it also fueled authoritarianism and religious extremism.

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This, I believe, is not something dependent on Jews themselves but on broader social conditions. What affects us directly is how these conditions give rise to antisemitism and conspiracy theories.

From the Jewish side, it is also necessary to resist the pull of ghettoization. For many years, Jews fought hard to leave the ghetto, to win equality and full participation in society. However, with renewed attacks against Jews worldwide, combined with rising Islamist radicalism and antisemitism in Europe, some Jews have turned back toward religion and a sense of ghettoization.

I do not think this is a good path, though I understand why people choose it out of fear. They feel safer retreating into insular communities—living in the same districts, sending their children only to Jewish schools, joining clubs only for Jews, often surrounded by guards. This response may feel protective, but in reality, it isolates us again.

Jacobsen: So you are distinguishing between voluntary community life, such as kibbutzim, which are still integrated with broader society, and a closing off from society altogether?

Estrella: EKibbutzim and community spaces are different—they integrate into society. What I mean here is cutting relations with broader society, not mixing, not sharing schools, universities, or clubs. That is what I fear. Unfortunately, many people, particularly those between 45 and 60 years old, have adopted this approach in recent years. Younger generations, fortunately, are less inclined toward it. However, I do see ghettoization returning in parts of Europe, and it troubles me deeply.

In the United States, harassment of Jewish students at universities—often by people on the left or center-left—also raises the risk of Jews retreating into ghetto-like isolation. Fear can push communities to retreat into what feels like safety, but is ultimately a false sense of security.

Jacobsen: Let me ask you this: What about civil society partnerships—NGOs, CSOs, and grassroots organizations that work steadily through networks over time? Can they reduce levels of antisemitism? What works in practice?

Estrella: People often speak of interfaith or religious dialogue, but I am skeptical of that. It is not about organizations or religions talking to each other. The key is a secular, mixed society. The more secular and integrated a society is, the more tolerant it tends to become.

From preschool through university, children and young adults must grow up in a diverse environment. That is the only way for others to realize that Jews are not alien, not a threat. We are just neighbours, classmates, and friends. When people grow up together, they learn that they have different traditions and different foods at certain times of the year, and it can even be fun to share those differences. However, it does not make us enemies.

The only long-term solution is to struggle for secularism, for diversity, and for a society where people accept that we are all human and we are all different. That is what leads to tolerance and resilience against antisemitism.

It is better—and in fact beautiful—to be different. We should not see any threat in diversity, whether in the colour of someone's skin, their beliefs, or any other characteristic. It is simply a

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fact of life. You may be short, tall, blonde, or anything else, but at the end of the day, you are a person and deserve acceptance for who you are. We must place the center of our lives not in belonging to this or that group, but in our shared humanity.

That is why I call myself a humanist. We must acknowledge that we are all human. The more we accept that humanism stands for peace, respect, and equality, the fewer problems we will face in living together.

Jacobsen: Let me approach this from a more modern perspective, which is more challenging. How should educators build resilience not only to the classic antisemitic myths, but also to misinformation amplified by AI-generated content? Images and videos can increasingly be faked, but the real challenge already lies in audio and text, where our minds are less adept at distinguishing fact from fabrication. How do we build resilience to this stereotyping and disinformation?

Estrella: I am comfortable addressing this because I am a trained social communicator. From the perspective of communication theory, I rely on the idea of "two-step communication." People tend to believe not only what they directly receive but also what is filtered through someone they regard as a reference or authority. In society, when we encounter information—even if it is fake—we often rely on a trusted figure in our circle to help us interpret it. That can be a safeguard, but it can also be dangerous.

Fortunately, with the flood of fake news today, many associations and organizations exist that focus on checking the accuracy of information. These fact-checking organizations play a crucial "second-step" role, countering misinformation and reinforcing truth. They must be supported and strengthened.

At the same time, some groups reinforce falsehoods—the anti-vaccine movement is a typical example. Even some medical doctors or scientists with misguided views act as "second-step communicators," lending false legitimacy to disinformation.

To counter this, we need stronger fact-checking groups and also readiness for debate at different levels. At one level, dialogue is key: when talking to someone convinced by misinformation—for instance, about vaccines—we should avoid attacking and instead engage in a respectful conversation. The goal is to plant a seed of doubt and introduce alternative perspectives.

At another level, however, more vigorous pushback is necessary. We have seen this in the public sphere with figures like Richard Dawkins, who confront misinformation and pseudoscience head-on. Both approaches—dialogue and confrontation—are needed, depending on the audience and context.

The stronger forms of response are necessary when confronting those who exploit misinformation for financial gain or political advantage. They deliberately manipulate ignorance and profit from it, so the pushback must be firm.

Jacobsen: Then let me ask: if you were to measure antisemitism, what indicators could reliably show a rise or fall over, say, a year? In other words, how do we measure it correctly? To propose antisemitism as a form of prejudice is to define it as a conceptual construct with distinct

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properties. Once we determine those properties, we can measure them, track them annually, and assess trends. So how do we measure it both reliably and validly?

Estrella: As I said before, you can conduct sociological analysis through surveys, polls, or other traditional methods for measuring attitudes—much like marketing studies. You examine antisemitic attitudes across populations in a structured way.

However, I also consider more than just direct measures; I also take into account the socio-political conditions of a given place. If there is social unrest, frustration, or widespread problems, antisemitism is likely to rise. I am convinced of that link.

Antisemitism does not emerge out of nowhere. It is deeply rooted in the traditions of Christian societies—whether in the West or the East. In the East, in the lands of the former Byzantine Empire (Turkey, Greece, Russia, and surrounding regions), antisemitism has often been more vocal and overt. In the West, it persists as well, though in more subtle forms, partly due to the Reformation, Enlightenment, and other historical developments that have tempered its expression.

Social and philosophical progress over the centuries has made antisemitism in the West more subtle. However, whenever there is social unfairness, unrest, or political instability, antisemitic demonstrations or sentiments will likely resurface.

Jacobsen: Let us suppose you were given a large sum of money—imagine a Looney Tunes bag with a dollar sign on it—and told, "Fund any initiative you want to combat this problem." What would you do?

Estrella: I would do the same as Mr. Soros. I would invest in education, specifically in programs that immerse young people and young professionals in the joy of moving from one country to another—something akin to the Erasmus program in Europe. Such exchanges expose people to diverse social and political environments, enabling them to learn from different cultures. This helps to educate the future leadership of the next 20 years.

I would create something like a Rotary-style organization devoted to investing in the brightest minds, regardless of their social background, and educating them in the values of diversity, liberal democracy, and the Enlightenment.

Jacobsen: Does the Argentinian context have any unique factors in this regard?

Estrella: Argentina was, in many ways, similar to the United States in the late 19th century. It was even more liberal in terms of its population, institutions, and secularism. It served as a good example of the "melting pot" idea. Moreover, in Argentina, the melting pot worked better than in the U.S., where the "salad bowl" model prevailed. In the U.S., you could be mixed, but you remained separate—still a potato, an onion, or a lettuce leaf. In Argentina, you became something new.

This melting pot worked. There was little, if any, racial tension. That was a positive thing. However, when economic troubles accompanied conservative rule, Argentina adopted the worst possible solution—populism. This ruined a country that had once been stronger than Canada or

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Australia. At one point, we were the fifth-largest economy in the world. However, 80 years of populism destroyed the potential of a country that could have been much greater.

They have dismantled almost all of the social safety net. What little remains, the new president is trying to destroy. Public education, free universities, and a robust healthcare system remain, but are under threat.

These were the things that made Argentina different from much of Latin America. It was a middle-class society. Public hospitals, scientific institutions, and a robust research system supported the development of a broad middle class. However, much of that middle class was nearly erased in the 1990s.

Now, what remains is being destroyed. Public hospitals, as well as the national system of science and research, are being defunded. If this continues, it will put an end to what was once a good country to live in.

Jacobsen: That brings us to the end. Hugo, thank you very much. You have given me a lot. Thank you very much. This will be a good contribution to the project.

Estrella: Let us stay in touch. Thank you. Goodbye.

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Identity Frames, Antisemitism, and Democratic Backsliding — An Interview With Kristen Renwick Monroe

How do identity frames shape antisemitism and altruism?

Prof. Kristen Renwick Monroe is Chancellor's Distinguished Professor of Political Science at UC Irvine and the founding director of the UCI Interdisciplinary Center for the Scientific Study of Ethics and Morality. A political psychologist and ethicist, she has authored influential books—including *The Heart of Altruism*, *The Hand of Compassion*, and *Ethics in an Age of Terror and Genocide*—that explore how identity, not just reason, shapes moral choice. Her scholarship has earned multiple APSA Best Book awards, Pulitzer and National Book Award nods, and prestigious lifetime-achievement honours.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen interviews Monroe on identity, moral choice, and antisemitism. Monroe explains how identity frames shape rescuers, bystanders, and perpetrators during the Holocaust, emphasizing that human connection counters dehumanization. She recounts life stories showing how recognition of shared humanity fosters altruism. Monroe warns of rising antisemitism and democratic backsliding, drawing parallels to Weimar Germany and critiquing Trump's norm erosion and authoritarian tendencies. She highlights the dangers of "us versus them" mentalities and stresses the importance of dialogue programs, shared experiences, and humanizing stories as practical policies to reduce prejudice and sustain democracy.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Today, we are here once again with the world-renowned political scientist and longtime mentor, Professor Kristen Renwick Monroe, a distinguished professor of political science at the University of California, Irvine. All the questions are prepared, so this will make my life very easy. You have argued that identity frames constrain people's experience of the morally possible. How does this lens explain the persistence of antisemitism?

Professor Kristen Renwick Monroe: I have reviewed some of your questions, and I am not sure I can answer them directly, but I will try to provide a general response. One of the things I found when I was studying the Holocaust was that identity tends to constrain the choices that everybody has. People who were rescuers of Jews were guided in their choices by how they saw themselves in relation to others. They saw themselves as connected to everyone through a shared humanity.

The bystanders—people who knew what was happening, maybe felt bad about it, but did nothing—often saw themselves as weak. They were not high on what philosophers call agency; they were not people who thought they could change the world.

Perpetrators, ironically, saw themselves as under siege. They believed they had to protect the "body politic" of the German people from supposed invaders who were trying to defile it. Their attitude toward Jews, Roma and Sinti, and Social Democrats (among others persecuted by the Nazi regime) resembled how one might view a pest invading a home: something to be eradicated.

So how does this relate to antisemitism? What strikes me is that if you see the humanity in another person, it is much more challenging to categorize them as "the other"—as someone

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different, threatening, subhuman, or attacking you. If you see them as people just like you, it becomes harder to harm them.

In that sense, if you see the humanity in a Jew, for example, or a Palestinian, or any group, you will be more likely to treat them better. Antisemitism, like other prejudices, classifies people as belonging to a group that is different from you. Because they seem different and threatening, you fear them and mistreat them. But when you recognize their humanity, prejudice tends to lessen—not just antisemitism, but also prejudice against Palestinians, Muslims, ethnic minorities, or people with a different skin colour. Seeing others as just like you makes it easier to treat them with decency and harder to mistreat them.

Jacobsen: You wrote about rescuers—those who perceived Jews as "people just like us." What practices cultivate an altruistic perspective in a technology-heavy society?

Monroe: Again, I am not sure I can answer that question. I do not know if I have any special insight into a highly technological society. What I did find is that rescuers see themselves as very much like other people, and that self-perception shapes their behaviour. For example, if there is a school shooting and you do not have a child in that school, you will be upset and feel bad about it, but your response will not be the same as if you do have a child there.

You're going to rush to the school, you're going to try to see what is happening, and you're likely to take further steps to prevent it from happening again in the future. And so, if you are someone who sees yourself as close to others, you are likely to be upset when people are treated poorly. It does not matter what group they are in.

We have rescuers like Oskar Springer, who was featured in the book *The Hand of Compassion*. He said, "I did not think it was right to mistreat Jews any more than I thought it was right to mistreat Black people in America in the 1950s when we came here." So I think that if you feel you have ties to everybody through a common humanity, you are going to treat people better, because they are just like you.

Jacobsen: You interviewed rescuers, bystanders, and Nazi supporters. What specific dehumanization mechanisms emerged from this conversational data? This is hinging on specific dehumanization mechanisms.

Monroe: I think Otto articulated it very clearly for me. Otto saved over 100 Jews. He married a Jewish woman—he was in love with her. It was not a marriage simply to save her, although it did save her. He was eventually arrested and put into a concentration camp in Upper Silesia, which at that time had been annexed by Nazi Germany from Czechoslovakia and incorporated into the Third Reich.

He said that one day he was out walking, and there was a guard with him. A few Jews had escaped, and they were chased down and shot. Otto asked the man, who he described as slow—he said there was a lot of inbreeding in that part of the world, so perhaps the man had some developmental issues. The guard was carrying his big gun, seeing himself as the master of the universe. Otto asked him, "Did you ever have to kill anybody?" The guard said, "Yes, I had to kill three Jews once. When you get an order like that, you have to be hard. They really weren't human anymore."

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And Otto said that was the critical factor. Once you distance yourself and dehumanize, you can do whatever you want to people, because they are no longer like you. They are someone else. They are the other. They are different, frightening people who are going to hurt you.

I think that is the root of most prejudice—that you begin to think in terms of "us versus them." That is one of the most troubling things happening in many parts of the world today. I am not sure whether to call it populism or white Christian nationalism, but it reflects a mentality of separation: we are "us" and they are "them." Once you do that, the process of distancing begins.

We saw this here on the campuses of the University of California, Irvine, in 2024, when protests broke out over Gaza and Israel. Some students, including Jewish students, expressed concerns about how Israel was treating Gazans. Many Jews also spoke out forcefully. At one point, the students occupied a building they were not supposed to enter. The chancellor called the police, and suddenly, there were police everywhere. Students were arrested, and some were mistreated. A couple of faculty members who were trying to help the students were slammed to the ground and mistreated as well.

I was thinking about this, and I recalled my time in graduate school at the University of Chicago in the 1970s, when anti-war issues were still very much alive and Nixon was president. A man I was very close to, Joseph Cropsey—I had never taken a course with him, but his office was next to mine and we spoke often—was one of the many academics who signed a full-page ad called *Academics for Nixon*.

I stormed into his office and said, "Mr. Cropsey, what is wrong with you? How could you possibly have signed this? Youcannot support Nixon—he's horrible!" And instead of saying to me, "You're out of line, young lady. Get out of myoffice,"—which I was, since I was calling him on the carpet—he said, "Sit down, and let me explain why I did what I did."

He treated me as someone who was a valued member of the community, who might have misunderstood what he was saying, but who was nevertheless worth saving and worth talking with.

I thought about that in contrast with the attitude the chancellor here at Irvine had toward the students. He saw them as "the other." They were people disrupting the peace, people who could harm the university and damage his standing. And so he took one course of action.

I believe that how you perceive people, especially in relation to yourself, has a profound influence on how you treat them. If we are interested in antisemitism, we can look at Jews—especially some of the more religious Jews whose clothing is different from what you and I wear. For example, women may wear wigs; there are practices like the mikveh; the lifestyle can look very different.

You can see these differences as threatening, or you can see them as simply interesting and distinctive. And I think howyou perceive such differences will directly affect how you treat people.

Jacobsen: You emphasize moral salience. What are the relevant metrics to see changes in moral salience toward Jews over time?

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Monroe: That is an interesting question. Again, I do not like framing it just in terms of antisemitism. I think it is a broader question that applies to any group against which prejudice is directed.

Think about it: why should we care how people worship God in the privacy of their own hearts? What difference does it make to me? Why should I care if your skin is darker than mine?

You might notice I have a bandage on my nose right now from having a basal cell carcinoma removed. I have light skin. You have light skin. In our culture, light skin is often perceived as a sign of "good skin." We are not prejudiced against people with light skin; we are prejudiced against people with dark skin. Why? What difference does it make? In some ways, people with darker skin do not face the same problems I do. Maybe their skin is superior to mine. I wish I had more pigment so I would not keep developing basal cell cancers.

So the question of why a society chooses to discriminate against one group versus another is critical. I do not think anybody really knows. For example, in ancient Egyptian society, the rulers often married their brothers and sisters to keep power within the family. We now know, genetically, that this is not the healthiest way to ensure vigorous offspring.

Today, we have laws against incest, and psychologist Jonathan Haidt has shown that people often find the idea "icky." They are not comfortable with it. But in that society, it was acceptable. Cleopatra, for example, is believed to have married her brother at one point.

I don't know much about Cleopatra. But the larger question of how we accord moral salience—why we assign specific differences political or moral significance—is, I think, the critical issue here. I do not think we really understand it.

It tends to be imposed by the dominant group that holds the most power. For example, Europeans, who were more advanced in terms of military technology, went into Africa, conquered territories, and took slaves. Dark skin became the justification for what they were doing—because slavery, in itself, is wrong, they needed a rationale.

Slavery has existed since antiquity, but it was not the same as the chattel slavery practiced in the United States and the British Empire. Traditionally, it was tied to war. You took prisoners of war, regardless of who they were. You might kill the king, but you would often take the queen and the subjects as slaves. That form of slavery was justified simply by military might.

If you had the power, you could dominate others, and you justified it based on whatever difference you considered relevant. In the case of European colonialism, skin colour became that marker. Europeans had lighter skin and more advanced military technology, and so dark skin was often framed as inferior to justify conquest.

Now, I do not know if that is the full explanation—I am not a scholar of slavery—but that is my best interpretation.

Jacobsen: The Koreans have the most extended continuous history of slavery of any civilization. Again, I am not a scholar on that. That is why I have conversations with experts. All right then: why are life story interviews uniquely suited to understanding antisemitism's effects on moral choice?

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Monroe: I think life stories are important because they reveal the essence of a human being. You have to see the humanity in the other person. There is a great deal of work in social psychology that demonstrates this.

For example, Daniel Bar-Tal, a distinguished Israeli scholar, wrote extensively about how people perceive "the other." One story he recounted was of an assailant entering a school intending to kill. The teacher engaged him, looked into his eyes, and kept repeating, "You are just like us. Why do you want to do this?" Eventually, he did not carry out the killings. Establishing a human connection made violence less likely.

I had a friend in graduate school, Ben Ginsberg, whose father was a soccer player in the Soviet Union. He had played against a German player when he was in high school. Years later, as a Jew being marched along by the Nazis, he happened to be recognized by that same German. The soldier moved him to the end of the line and, when they turned a corner, told him to get out. That shared bond of soccer, remembered across years and war, was enough to save his life.

It is a small thing, and one might ask, why would that matter? But it did. That is the power of human connection. If, for some reason, you can see that others are just like you, or that you share something in common, you are less likely to mistreat them.

Life stories are the best way to convey that. They communicate who the person is, and they make you feel something about them—something that reminds you that they are, in fact, just like you.

Jacobsen: If identity, rather than abstract reason, guides moral action, which policies realistically reduce antisemitism?

Monroe: I think it comes down to humanizing stories—anything that helps you see the other person as a human being.

We had a program here for many years called the *Olive Tree Initiative*. The olive tree, of course, is a symbol of peace. The program brought together Arab Muslim students and Jewish students at UC Irvine. They would meet regularly—once a week or so—to talk about prejudice. Then they travelled to Israel and Palestine, visiting Muslim communities and Israeli Jewish communities. The goal was to help them see their common humanity.

It was modelled on programs in Northern Ireland, where Protestants and Catholics had conflicted for centuries. Both groups were Christian, but their religious division—Protestant versus Catholic—had fueled violence for over 500 years. In those programs, students spent a year preparing, and then they were hosted in the United States by families that modelled peaceful coexistence.

One example I recall is a Catholic girl from Northern Ireland who stayed with a couple named Bruce and Rita. Bruce was Protestant, Rita was Catholic. When they married, Bruce even offered to convert to Catholicism for her, though she never asked him to. They were not especially religious, but they lived together in peace.

The girl staying with them was baffled by two things. First, she could not understand why Bruce went to work every day. She called him a "dirty old man" because, in her experience, most men she knew were unemployed and living on government support. Second, she could not grasp how

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Bruce's brothers remained Protestant while Bruce himself identified with Catholicism after marriage—and yet the family lived harmoniously without conflict. That confused her sense of identity boundaries.

The same dynamic exists elsewhere. In Rwanda, for instance, there were many marriages between Tutsis and Hutus. Their children could not easily be categorized as one or the other. In the film *Hotel Rwanda*, the central figure, Paul Rusesabagina, was a Hutu married to a Tutsi woman. Their relationship showed how identities can intertwine across supposed divides.

So when people are placed in situations where they see a peaceful coexistence modelled—whether Protestant and Catholic, Hutu and Tutsi, or Jewish and Muslim—it provides them with a roadmap, they begin to see that it is possible, that it is not such a big deal, and that people can, in fact, live together in peace.

That is the kind of policy that works. Structured programs that encourage dialogue and shared experiences are helpful. But it also requires an internal shift. At first, you may simply wonder: "Why are these people able to live together in peace without conflict?" Then, gradually, you recognize that it is possible for you, too.

Jacobsen: Side note: I was invited to the Rebuilding Ukraine conference. Many prominent figures were there, and one of the keynote speakers was Romeo Dallaire.

Monroe: He's an interesting person. After the Rwandan genocide, he attempted suicide—it was so difficult for him to live with what he had witnessed. If you look at the film *Hotel Rwanda*, there's a powerful and gruesome scene. The character modelled on Dallaire, played by Nick Nolte, says to Paul Rusesabagina, "You're nothing. You're not even human. You reAfrican, and the Europeans don't care about you."

What Paul then does is have everyone call anyone they can to say goodbye and ask for help. One of those calls connects him to the head of Sabena Airlines, who tells him, "What are you talking about? They're going to kill you." That contact jolts action into place. It was a human connection that shifted the situation—emotional bonds, not abstract reason. That'swhat put pressure on people. It's a powerful movie. Dallaire is a fantastic person. Yes, he is still alive.

Jacobsen: What is a common term or conceptual schema people use when they describe that moment of moral switch—whether it happens over time or in a sudden window?

Monroe: That's an interesting question—what happens when people suddenly *see*.

Take the film *Schindler's List*. It is shot in black and white, except for two key moments. One occurs as Oskar Schindler is riding near the cliffs in Kraków, overlooking the ghetto clearance. Amidst the chaos—people being rounded up, violence everywhere—there is a single child in a bright red coat. That splash of colour draws his eye. It becomes the moment when he perceives the humanity of the victims, when he realizes there is something he could do.

At the end of the film, after liberation by the Soviet army, the story transitions from black and white to colour. Survivors walk to Schindler's grave and place stones upon it. Each actor is paired with the real person they portrayed, if still alive. I watched this with my son, who was twelve at the time. He had watched the entire movie without much reaction. But when he saw

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that final sequence, he turned to me and asked, "Is this a true story?" I said yes, and he broke down. He had endured the film, but the realization that it was true overwhelmed him.

Cognitive psychologists have noted that when a single bright azalea is placed in the middle of a beige room, your eyes are immediately drawn to it. That is what Spielberg was doing with the girl in the red coat: creating that jarring moment of recognition that pierces abstraction and forces you to see.

I think there are moments when something suddenly happens, and you see things in a different light. It's like the paradigm you've been living with cracks open. Suddenly, you realize there is another way of doing things.

Those are the moments that cause people to change. It's hard to know what triggers them—it could be any number of things, and sometimes you only understand them in retrospect.

I interviewed a Dutch woman who later became a psychoanalyst. At the time of the war, she was about 19 or 20 and training as a social worker. One day, she came out of class and saw the Gestapo seizing children from a Jewish orphanage, throwing them into a truck. Some Dutch women tried to stop them, and they too were thrown into the truck.

She said it happened so fast that she froze. She stood paralyzed, wondering what was happening, and only gradually came to realize the truth. Years later, she told me, "We all have memories of times when we should have done something, and we didn't. Those memories burden us for the rest of our lives." That day marked her decision to dedicate herself to helping people.

Sometimes the trigger is precisely that: a moment when you realize, *I should have acted, and I didn't.* You don't want to live with that version of yourself, so you change. These moments can come in many forms, but they all involve a sudden shift in how you see the world.

Jacobsen: Your recent work engages with democratic backsliding in the United States and, I presume, Germany. What parallels to Weimar-era dynamics matter most for understanding today's antisemitism?

Monroe: Too many—and that is the frightening part. When I began a book project with students at the Ethics Center, I would read the day's newspapers and think: Am I reading current events, or am I reading my research on Weimar Germany? The parallels are striking.

Weimar was a functioning democracy—fragile, young, but real. And then things began to unravel. Hitler rose to power, and small shifts accumulated into a catastrophe.

There's now an entire literature—almost a separate field—on how democracies die. The patterns are remarkably consistent. Strongmen—whether autocrats or would-be dictators—tend to:

- Attack the press, undermining independent journalism (something Trump has explicitly done).
- Stack the courts with loyalists.
- Divide society into "us versus them."
- Legitimize conduct that previously would have been unthinkable in public life.

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Not long ago, it would have been impossible to imagine a presidential candidate in the United States telling a rally crowd to "throw the bum out" or calling an opponent a "whore." That erosion of norms is precisely the kind of cultural shift that opens the door to antisemitism and other forms of dehumanization. Trump once called Kamala Harris a whore. He bragged about grabbing women "by the pussy." This is a coarsening of public discourse to its lowest level.

There is also a total disregard for truth. Trump simply invents things without concern for accuracy. Look at Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s rhetoric on vaccines—there is no respect for evidence. The scientific data on vaccines is overwhelming, just as it is on climate change. It is not that climate scientists are evenly divided. Roughly 99 percent agree that anthropogenic climate change is happening. Yet Trump dismisses this consensus and substitutes his own narrative.

These are classic warning signs of authoritarianism. Dictators and strongmen constantly erode truth first, because once truth is gone, power can be anything they declare it to be.

The parallels to Weimar are, again, too many. And the most troubling part, to me, is that Americans often assume, "Once Trump is gone, things will return to normal." That will not happen.

There is a powerful line in the German television series *Line of Separation*, which dramatizes how norms collapse in stages. We have already shifted our baseline of what counts as normal political behaviour.

Think about Mitt Romney. He faced public backlash for strapping his dog to the roof of his car—a minor lapse compared to today's political outrages. Romney was, by all accounts, a fundamentally decent person, yet he was sharply criticized. Trump, by contrast, has committed countless violations of decency and democratic norms, and instead of being universally condemned, he continues to command loyalty.

Miles Taylor, the former DHS official who wrote the anonymous New York Times op-ed in September 2018 ("I Am Part of the Resistance Inside the Trump Administration"), later said something chilling: the worst thing is not what Trump did to democracy, but what he enabled Americans to do to themselves.

That, I think, is the tragedy. The American public has become overwhelmed. It is like a child running through a house, knocking over everything in sight—by the time you clean up one mess in the living room, the child is already destroying the kitchen. The pace and chaos leave people exhausted, disoriented, and unable to keep up.

There were "grown-ups in the room" trying to control Trump. The worst thing is not what he did to democracy, but what he allowed us to do to ourselves.

That is the tragedy: the American public is overwhelmed. There is so much chaos, so much scattershot action. It is like a child running through a house, knocking things over—by the time you clean up the mess in the living room, the child is already tearing apart the kitchen. People cannot keep up.

We don't know where to turn. He has "flooded the zone." And that is not accidental—it is a deliberate strategy articulated by Steve Bannon. Trump himself may not be fully aware of the

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tactic; he often lacks knowledge of the history or the tools he's using. For example, someone had to explain to him the War Powers Act of 1973, and he had no idea what it was. He certainly did not know the Latin concept of *comitas* (reciprocal respect among nations). Trump is not well-educated, despite his claims about attending Penn. Reports suggest he even paid others to take his exams.

The point is that he has created such an overwhelming stream of crises that the opposition cannot decide where to focus. And unless they figure this out before the 2026 elections—if they go in thinking, "All we have to do is beat Trump"—they will be stunned.

Because Trump has supporters who genuinely like what he is doing, I have good friends who say, "At least he's doing something." One of my own sons once supported Bernie Sanders, but after Sanders lost, he voted for Trump because he felt the Democrats had abandoned the working class. It was his way of punishing them. Now he will not even speak to meabout politics, and maybe about other things as well. That estrangement is painful.

But the bigger picture is this: we are in a dangerous situation. More than 70 million people voted for Trump. That was not an accident or a fluke. It represents a broad current in American society. And when you look at what's happening in states like Florida—rolling back vaccines, restricting abortion rights—you see the downstream effects.

Republican-controlled states are doing all kinds of things Trump wants them to do. Hardly anyone in the party is challenging him. A few have tried, but they've been driven out.

One of my former interns, now at Stanford, worked on the House Oversight Committee this past summer. He told me that even Republican members who personally dislike Trump admit they call him whenever they face political trouble. A senator from Missouri said as much: Trump will pick up the phone and threaten, "I'll primary you from the right." That'sall it takes—people fall into line.

Look at Susan Collins. She claims to disapprove of Trump, but she consistently votes with him.
Jacobsen: And then there's J.D. Vance, now Trump's vice president. Vance once called Trump "America's Hitler." Now he's number two.

Monroe: Vance is, in my view, a total opportunist. At first, he seemed cynical, but now he appears to be a true believer. He has embraced white Christian nationalism. That's striking because his wife is not white—she's Indian-American, a brilliant woman who graduated from Yale Law and clerked for two U.S. Supreme Court justices. You would think that kind of background would temper such ideology. Instead, they're pushing a vision that echoes the old Nazi slogan of "Kinder, Küche, Kirche"—children, kitchen, and church. In plain terms: women barefoot and pregnant in the kitchen.

It's strange, but many people see this as "traditional" and comforting. Margaret Atwood, in *The Handmaid's Tale*, captured this paradox perfectly. When she was asked about the older women in her story who enforce patriarchal rules, she explained that even enforcers gain a measure of power they would not otherwise have in a repressive system. So, in practice, it becomes a "for thee, not for me" dynamic. They enforce oppression but carve out authority for themselves within it.

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Monroe: *The Handmaid's Tale* is frightening to read now. It was always a frightening book, but today it feels closer to reality.

Jacobsen: Margaret Atwood once joked, "We didn't change the picture, we changed the frame." And that's the point—if you shift the frame, the story itself changes.

Monroe: That is what worries me most: they are changing what counts as usual. Take this idea that America could annex Canada as the 51st state. Where does that come from? Yet some people like it. They say, "That's a good idea, the Canadians would be happy."

Jacobsen: There's a kind of imperial fantasy at work: retract U.S. influence abroad while extending it across the Americas, creating a "Gulf of America." It's a bizarre and illegitimate notion, but you can see how it fits into a Trumpian legacy of empire.

Jacobsen: Thank you very much for the opportunity and your time again, Kristen.

Monroe: Good seeing you—good to talk with you.

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Dr. Herb Silverman on Secular Activism, Jewish Identity, and Antisemitism

How does Herb Silverman's secular activism challenge antisemitism and religious privilege in America?

Dr. Herb Silverman is an American mathematician and secular activist. A Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Mathematics at the College of Charleston, he founded the Secular Coalition for America and the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry. In 1990, he ran for governor of South Carolina to challenge the state's ban on atheists in public office. His lawsuit, *Silverman v. Campbell*, led the South Carolina Supreme Court in 1997 to strike the religious test for office. Silverman is the author of Candidate *Without a Prayer* and *An Atheist Stranger in a Strange Religious Land*, and writes frequently for *The Humanist* and *Free Inquiry* magazines.

In this interview contribution to an upcoming book entitled *Conversations on Antisemitism* from In-Sight Publishing with **Scott Douglas Jacobsen**, Silverman discussed how his Jewish upbringing, shaped by Holocaust trauma, led to early mistrust of Gentiles and resistance to his interfaith marriage, but also how personal relationships softened those prejudices. He reflected on reclaiming slurs like "Bagel Boys" through humour, and on how Jewish identity can persist without belief in God. He distinguished antisemitism from legitimate criticism of Israel, stressing that opposing specific leaders or policies is not the same as opposing Jews as a people. He emphasized the importance of humanistic ethics, clarity in rejecting vague "God-talk," and secular coalition strategies to protect equality and reduce prejudice. His reflections bridge personal memory, legal activism, and cultural commentary—showing how secular identity can coexist with, and even strengthen, Jewish identity in confronting antisemitism.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What is the overview of background and thoughts on antisemitism for you?:

Dr. Herb Silverman: I grew up in a primarily Jewish neighbourhood, in part because my family wanted to avoid antisemites. I was raised never to trust Goyim (Gentiles) because some of my relatives died in the Holocaust. Many family members were upset when I married a Gentile, Sharon Fratepietro. One Orthodox aunt refused even to meet Sharon. This is common in Orthodox families, which causes lots of pain in those families.

As a child, I enjoyed playing baseball, and our team (mostly Jews) played in Little League. Some of our opponents started to call us the "Bagel Boys." We knew they meant this to be a racial slur, so we changed our team name to "Bagel Boys".

In high school, I enjoyed math, and a guidance counsellor told me I should major in accounting. I was planning to do so until another teacher (Jewish) said to me that Jews are rarely hired by accounting firms in Philadelphia, where I lived. I am glad I majored in math instead of accounting, for reasons that have nothing to do with religion.

In my interview for a teaching position at the College of Charleston, the department chair (Hugh Haynsworth) asked if I was Jewish. When I asked him why he wanted to know, he said they almost hired a Jew who told him about all the days he would not teach because of his religion. I

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told Hugh that I was not religious, and I was hired. We have a Jewish Studies program whose head was Ralph Melnick. Hugh saw me talking to Ralph and asked me what field Ralph was in. I said he is a "kike-ologist". When Hugh asked what that was, I told him he should ask Ralph, which he did. It is easier to get away with racial slurs when you are a member of the tribe.

The nice thing about being a Jew, unlike most religions, is that you do not have to believe in any gods. Moreover, it is easier to criticize antisemitism.

Jacobsen: In "Why I Like Being a Jew," you emphasize Jewish identity without theism. How does non-creedal identity change thoughts on contemporary antisemitism?

Silverman: When people see those of us without belief in gods, they might start questioning their own beliefs. It might make them less hateful of Jews, especially if they were against Jews because of verses from the Christian Bible.

Jacobsen: You have been called a "self-hating Jew." You affirm pride in Jewish identity. What criteria help you distinguish intra-Jewish critique from antisemitic rhetoric?

Silverman: I have been called a self-hating Jew because of comments I have made about Israel. Some people think that Jews must love Israel. Not true. I support the state of Israel because of the antisemitism that existed before the state was founded. However, I dislike many of their leaders, especially Netanyahu. We should all have the right to criticize the behaviour of countries, without thinking they should not exist. As an American, there is much I criticize about America.

Jacobsen: Your essay "Jewish Atheists and Koufax Jews." It maps diverse Jewish self-definitions. How do such categories complicate stereotypes?

Silverman: One of the best days for Jews was October 6, 1995, when the premier pitcher in baseball was Sandy Koufax. He refused to pitch in the World Series on that day because it was Yom Kippur, considered the holiest day of the year for Jews. Americans back then worshipped baseball, often considered the most quintessentially American sport. Many people stopped hating Jews when they learned that Koufax was a Jew. Did Kofax go to synagogue on Yom Kippur? No. He was an atheist who stayed in his room. I define a Koufax Jew as an atheist who refuses to work on Yom Kippur. I am not one, but I respect Jews who are.

Jacobsen: As a child, your Jewish team reclaimed "Bagel Boys." What have you learned about reclaiming language?

Silverman: That it helps to have a sense of humour, and show it.

Jacobsen: Family fears shaped by the Holocaust. It led to warnings about trusting Gentiles. Your interfaith marriage drew objections. How can communities address historical trauma without reinforcing reciprocal prejudice?

Silverman: Treat people as individuals, not stereotypes. Eventually, most of my family grew to like Sharon.

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Jacobsen: You were asked about being Jewish. During an academic job interview, no less, your constitutional case ended South Carolina's religious test. What policy and institutional reforms best prevent religion-based gatekeeping?

Silverman: Follow the law and keep government out of religion. As individuals, we have the right to be religious or not to be.

Jacobsen: In "God-Talk for Atheists," you argue for explicit language. How does imprecise God-talk in public life enable antisemitism?

Silverman: We need to explain clearly to people why we do not believe in any gods. This should have nothing to do with antisemitism. We should ask antisemites why they hate Jews.

Jacobsen: Your public stance evolved from "Why I No Longer Support Israel" to "What It Would Take for Me to Support Israel Again." Where do you draw the boundary in these commentaries?

Silverman: Israel is facing the same kind of struggle that many other countries have encountered -- between democracy and theocracy. Unfortunately, Israel has recently been headed in the wrong direction. I will again become a supporter of Israel when it lives up to the ideals in its Declaration of Independence by putting human rights and social justice above sectarian concern and treating its minorities as truly equal citizens. Right now, Netanyahu is bombing innocent civilians in Gaza and starving many of its citizens. Israel needs to display more humanity, especially by helping the homeless and the suffering through no fault of their own.

Jacobsen: As founder of the Secular Coalition for America, what coalition strategies counter antisemitism?

Silverman: The mission of the Secular Coalition is to increase the visibility of and respect for secular viewpoints and to protect and strengthen the secular character of our government. It says nothing specific about antisemitism. However, as far as I know, no supporters of the Secular Coalition are antisemites.

Jacobsen: In later reflections on "being a Jew," you connect humanistic ethics with Jewish cultural continuity. What educational approaches reduce scripturally conspiratorial antisemitism?

Silverman: Humanistic ethics is consistent with Jewish cultural identity, whether or not the Jew believes in a god. People should stop BELIEVING THE BIBLE IS TRUE.

Jacobsen: You distinguish criticism of Israeli policy from antisemitism. What analytic test do you use in practice?

Silverman: If someone opposes all Jews, regardless of their beliefs, that is antisemitism.

Jacobsen: Which definitional framework helps most in public debate, e.g., the IHRA working definition, the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism, or another?

Silverman: The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance focuses on combating antisemitism, and the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism focuses on antisemitic behaviour in Israel and Palestine, and supports Zionism. I think both organizations are worthwhile, but they

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sometimes have problems with interpretations. The governor of South Carolina (Mc Master) signed into law an anti-Semitic bill and pointed out that the oldest continuously operating synagogue in the country is in Charleston, where I live. Kahl Kadosh Beth Elohim celebrated its 275th anniversary this year. It was founded in 1749, before we were a country.

Jacobsen: What contemporary "dog whistles" or recurring tropes do you see?

Silverman: People try to say that the US is a Christian country.

Jacobsen: You suggested that a visible, non-creedal Jewish identity can soften prejudice rooted in scripture. What evidence persuades you?

Silverman: Jews can ignore scripture. That's what we Jewish atheists do. We still strongly oppose antisemitism.

Jacobsen: When does in-group humour defuse a slur? When does it risk normalizing it?

Silverman: Humour is the best policy. People need to understand that I am using humour.

Jacobsen: Your family's Holocaust-shaped caution toward Gentiles eased through personal contact. What practices help honour intergenerational trauma?

Silverman: We need to convince others that we can't blame people for what happened before they were born—like the Holocaust.

Jacobsen: What matters most for countering conspiratorial antisemitism?

Silverman: Trying to convince others not to blame Jews for what they view as evil in the world.

Jacobsen: You favour clarity over vague "God-talk." Where does imprecise religious language entrench majority-faith privilege? What concrete fixes might work?

Silverman: People often claim to be Christian when they haven't read the Bible. Ask them precise questions about Christianity.

Jacobsen: Regarding speech about the Gaza war, what standards keep debate fierce but non-dehumanizing?

Silverman: Don't assume you know what opponents believe. Ask them specific questions.

Jacobsen: Looking at *Silverman v. Campbell* experience and *Torcaso v. Watkins*, what remaining practices function as religious tests?

Silverman: We should always follow the US Constitution regarding religious tests.

Jacobsen: Within secular coalitions, what processes prevent antisemitism without chilling legitimate disagreement?

Silverman: Ask questions about what their problem is with Jews.

Jacobsen: Which trend indicators do you trust most to gauge the prevalence of antisemitism?

Silverman: What people say about why they have problems with Jews.

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Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Herb.

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Valeriia Kholodova: Ukrainian Jewish Resilience in War

Valeriia Kholodova is a Ukrainian non-profit program manager who leads regional programs for Hillel CASE (Central Asia & Southeastern Europe), coordinating Jewish student life across Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Belarus and Azerbaijan. Born in Donetsk, she moved to Kyiv in 2014 and later to Israel, continuing her Hillel work remotely. Her portfolio spans student engagement, educational and cultural programming, and community support. Kholodova has been affiliated with Hillel since at least 2010 and appears in coverage of Jewish communal responses to the wars in Ukraine and Israel. She previously studied at Donetsk National University. She organized regional events and training.

In this interview with Scott Douglas Jacobsen, Valeriia Kholodova contrasts 2014's shock with 2022's full-scale war, describing Ukraine's Jewish community evacuating thousands, delivering food, cash-like certificates, blankets, power banks, and water to besieged regions, while sustaining traditions and programs. Students face disrupted schooling, isolation, and trauma, yet volunteerism grows and Hillel expands group therapy and safe spaces. Ties to Israel are intimate, but attention follows immediate danger. Language shifts to Ukrainian/English, and collaboration with civil society deepens; identity increasingly fuses as "Ukrainian Jewish," symbolized by Tryzub-Magen David jewelry. Regional ties persist despite limits (e.g., Belarus). Jewish solidarity strengthened. Amid devastation, resilience and conscious identity harden under pressure.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: People may know—or may not—that there is a sizeable Jewish heritage in Eastern Europe, and Ukraine is one of those places as well. When the war first started in 2014, and then really escalated in February 2022, what was the reaction of the Jewish community at those times? How have people found solidarity in community, helped the war effort, and drawn inner strength from tradition, for instance?

Valeriia Kholodova: The situations in 2014 and 2022 were completely different. When it happened in Donetsk and Luhansk, I was living in Donetsk with my family. At that time, nobody understood that it would be a protracted conflict. We helped a lot—we supported Jewish people and stayed connected with them. The most vulnerable group was older adults who could not leave their homes. They were not active; they were afraid. We were in touch with them every day, checking what was happening.

I remember that I was working in HACED, a charity foundation, and we helped many people evacuate to other parts of Ukraine. At that time, the Dnipro, Kharkiv, and Kyiv regions were safe places. But even though it was a local conflict, it was excruciating.

For example, that summer I participated in Taglit. Do you know Taglit? It's a program for young people—ten days in Israel. In that group, we had 40 students. Only five of them returned to Donetsk. People tried to survive. We didn't really understand what was happening. It was a shock for us. After that, I moved with my family to Kyiv.

Before the full-scale war, I lived in Kyiv. Honestly, I couldn't believe it could happen. My supervisor from Israel called me, because at that time I worked in a Chabad charity foundation. He asked if he should prepare an extra budget in case something happened. I told him, "No, it's

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not possible, there's no way." But he asked, "What do we need to be ready for if it does happen?" I told him, from my experience: "You need cash. If it happens, you won't be able to do transactions or use the banking system. If you want to help Ukrainian Jewish people, you need to have cash."

Unfortunately, it did happen. I was in Kyiv. I woke up at five in the morning because my friend called me. I asked, "Alina, are you crazy? Why are you calling me at five in the morning?" She told me, "Valeria, it's happening."

I was very calm. At that time, I lived in central Kyiv. I didn't hear planes or any other noise. That is my private story—it's not about what the Jewish communities were doing at that moment.

We tried to stay in a safe place for one week with my friends and my supervisor. But what did the Jewish community in Ukraine start doing at that time? They consolidated around this problem. They began evacuating people. I don't know how many buses and how many planes went to Israel.

At that time, we organized buses to travel to Kyiv twice a day. I can speak about Kyiv, but I know this was happening across Ukraine—to Moldova, Romania, Poland—many different directions. That was the first thing. The second was helping people with food.

Before the war, I had already established a system to assist those in need every two months. It was my charity project, although I was the chief of the project, not the founder. Every two months, we would give people certificates so they could purchase food or other necessities. When the war began, we expanded this. Everyone who asked for help received food certificates. I remember we bought many blankets and other basic supplies. It was tough to organize.

I think it was April or May, I don't remember exactly. At that time, the Chernihiv region was under occupation, and we provided food for the Jewish community there. It was not very easy. We used all our connections with the army and with volunteers, because it was a border region. I don't know how many cars of humanitarian aid we sent there. But whatever we could do, we did. It was a tremendous and organized effort.

After that, the situation kept changing. Every day, we created new ways to help people who remained in Ukraine, because every day and every month brought new challenges. For example, in one winter, there was a blackout. Our primary targets then were to provide power banks, lamps, batteries, and other things that would help people survive.

In Mykolaiv, they had a problem with water because Russia destroyed the water pipes. We sent as much water and as many water-cleaning supplies as we could to that region. We constantly monitored what people needed and tried to provide it. Unfortunately, now it has become almost routine.

At the beginning, during the first few months, it was a shock, and we were trying to survive. Now, people are still trying to survive, but also continue their lives. Almost all Jewish organizations in Ukraine continue their work—not only with humanitarian aid, but also with values, traditions, programs, and engagement. They are trying to continue their everyday life in this wild world.

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It is not very easy. For example, a few days ago, I just returned from Ukraine. We organized a camp for Jewish families with children who have trauma. But in reality, now 100 percent of people in Ukraine are living with trauma. We had some critics, but it was important for these families.

Many families lost a father or a mother, leaving children alone. It is tough to see what has happened to people during this period. They are trying to live their lives, but now they need more than just material help. They need strong psychological and social support.

Jacobsen: What about the student experience through all of this? You have contact with students. How has their experience of studies been? For many people, studies are a crucial part of intellectual, emotional, and social development. It is where they interact with intelligent peers pursuing different and diverse fields. How has this situation impacted their sense of self at this time of life, as well as the logistics of studying?

Kholodova: If you want, I can tell you about one student—my son. I have an adult son; I am not so young. When the war started, he was 15. Now he is 18. For me, it feels like a lost generation, because it has been very complicated.

Before, there were three years of COVID. They stayed home, studying online. Then the war started. I don't know how many months of education they missed, because many families tried to send their kids out of the country, and universities and schools worked only online. Even now, many schools and universities continue online. This generation has missed the skills to communicate face-to-face. They are afraid to go out and form social circles.

I can speak about students in general, not only Jewish students. In this situation, Jewish organizations like Hillel and others working with Jewish youth and students are doing a great job. They work with students face-to-face, offline. They talk to them, help them, and create safe spaces for communication and for their needs. This is very important now, but still very difficult. I don't know what will happen in two or three years with this generation.

All situations are different. Some young people adapt to this situation much better than others. However, during these three and a half years of war, this generation, specifically the student community, has become increasingly active in volunteer projects. They try to do something, not only ask for help. There are many volunteer projects both inside the Jewish community and across Ukraine.

We will see in time. Now it is very complicated to say more, because many psychologists describe this as post-traumatic stress disorder. But it is not post-trauma—we are still in trauma. Post-trauma will come later, I hope, after Ukraine wins this war.

It doesn't matter if students live inside the country or outside. Believe me, it is not very easy. I have been a refugee once or twice. I changed my life, but I was an adult. My son has changed his life one, two, three, four, even five times. The war first started when he was seven. It is tough. He doesn't know where his house is, where his belongings are, where his friends are, or where his safe place is.

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Jacobsen: How do students with a connection to Israel view things? People often assume they all do, but not everyone with a Jewish background necessarily has that connection. Some may have citizenship, while others may not, but they still feel a sentimental bond. Others, however, don't have geopolitical considerations at all—they care about their lives in their own country. People are complicated, and their circumstances are unique.

So, in terms of how they see things, but for Ukrainian Jewish people who know the war in Ukraine, and then see the war in Gaza, do they feel a sense of solidarity around both of these wars? Or do they tend to focus on whichever war is closest to them—if they're in Israel, they focus on Israel; if they're in Ukraine, they concentrate on Ukraine?

Kholodova: First of all, Jewish life in Ukraine is a little different from Jewish life in Western Europe. Thank God, and thanks to our work, the level of antisemitism here is lower. That is very good. I have been working in the Jewish community for over twenty years—possibly twenty-two or twenty-three, I don't remember exactly. We have numerous projects and programs, and we frequently engage with students and the broader community about Israel.

For us in Ukraine, Israel has never been seen as an aggressor. For us, Jewish life and Israel are equal values. After October 7, of course, we provided much information about what was happening. Our students were monitoring closely because a very high percentage of Ukrainian Jewish people have direct connections to Israel. Maybe your grandmother, your grandfather, your uncle, or your friend lives there. Maybe someone you knew from Taglit or Hillel lives there. The connection is direct and very strong.

But when you are sitting under bombs in Ukraine—in Kyiv, Kharkiv, Dnipro, or another region—of course, you are worried about yourself. It is excruciating, yes, what happened on October 7, what happened in Gaza, or what happened in Jerusalem during that terrible terror attack. But when you are under bombardment in Ukraine, your focus shifts to your own problems and survival.

That does not mean what happens in Israel is not essential. It is necessary, but your focus changes. In Ukraine, we work very strongly with Israeli topics. We have programs because it is necessary for us to make sure antisemitism in Ukraine does not grow. We know that even in Israel, there are antisemitic people, but we want Ukraine to remain a safe place for Jewish people and students. We want it to continue being a place where being Jewish is an honour.

I can also speak from my personal experience. When I was in Israel under Iranian bombardment, of course, I was less worried about what was happening in Kyiv at that moment. But when I was in Kyiv under Russian bombs, my focus was on surviving there.

The connection between Israel and Ukraine is powerful. First, because for many years our programs have had direct ties with Israel. Second, because of the close, personal connections, face-to-face. I don't know a single person in the Jewish community in Ukraine who doesn't have some near relative, friend, or even a neighbour in Israel.

Jacobsen: What support has Hillel provided to students and communities since February 24, 2022? And what are things that students and communities want but you can't provide because of the circumstances?

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Kholodova: Initially, when the war began, we focused on providing our students with necessities, such as food, food boxes, and safe places to stay. I can give you an example. Ukraine is not a small country, and it is beautiful—I love Ukraine. But the western regions, like Lviv and the Carpathian Mountains, were much quieter. In contrast, Kharkiv is very close to the Russian border, and it faced daily attacks.

When the war started, many students from Kharkiv evacuated to Lviv. They stayed in apartments with Lviv students. For us, Lviv became a hub. It was a gigantic form of support. We couldn't afford apartments at that time, but Lviv students invited those in need and provided them with a place to stay. For many months—maybe up to a year—Kharkiv students lived in Lviv thanks to this solidarity.

We also opened a program for psychological help. It wasn't private consultations, but group therapy. Now, all Hillel branches in Ukraine have something similar to a psychology club or meetings with psychologists to try to provide help. For example, less than a few weeks ago, we had a large summer forum in the Carpathian Mountains. Before that, we received training from the Trauma Coalition in Israel, which worked with our staff. We are doing what we can, but you must understand: the people working in Jewish organizations in Ukraine are in trauma, too. Sometimes they burn out even faster than participants.

It's not like the situation where you live in a safe place, come to Ukraine, help people, and then return to your "unicorn reality." For example, I live in Israel. In June, I took my son there for the summer holidays. Just a few days later, the Iranian war began. We sat in our apartment, and my son, who is always joking and trolling me, said, "Come on, what's next? Somalia?" You try to find a safe place to live, and every time something new happens. I guess I am a fortunate girl.

It's our reality now. But you know, for example, I feel very safe when I am at home in Israel. I'm not afraid. When I am in Ukraine, it is much scarier to see what happens. Even when you check the news or sit under the *Shahids*—the drones—you know what it is, and it is not very comforting. But every morning you wake up and try to live.

Jacobsen: What about young people who are still developing their core Jewish cultural identity and sense of self while war is happening? It's a tricky question—how does that work for them? What issues come up?

Kholodova: It's exciting—really, a very interesting question. My husband is Israeli, and he's not from the former Soviet Union. His grandparents came to Palestine before. He is Ashkenazi Jewish, and you need to understand why I start with this story.

He always asks me, "Lerochka, I don't understand why people want to be Jewish. I was born Jewish. I had no choice. I live in Israel, and I am Israeli. I don't even know what happened on my eighth day when I was circumcised; nobody asked me who I am. But I don't understand why people who live outside of Israel—people who for twenty years didn't think of themselves as Jewish, didn't even know they were Jewish—suddenly want to become Jewish. Everybody hates us."

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For him, before he met me, he didn't even know what Jewish life outside Israel was like. So when a Ukrainian girl in Israel told him about Jewish community life, he was shocked. He asked, "What is this?" It was a funny story, but I think it explains something.

Why do people want this identity? Because for them it is essential. Jewish life in Ukraine is exciting. When I started working twenty-five years ago, Jewish life in Ukraine had always offered many more opportunities than ordinary life—seminars, camps, activities, and good speakers. It was a very bright life at that time. Even before the war, and during the war, Ukraine has maintained a high level of social life. You can still find many activities. But if you work with Jewish values, and you live them, then people want to be Jewish and proud of being Jewish.

It is not complicated—if you believe that being Jewish is something to be proud of, you can share those values with your community, your students, and the people around you. They begin to share your values with you. And thankfully, in Ukraine, being Jewish is now safer than, for example, in France, Italy, or other countries.

Jacobsen: I have a question less about the core and more about the periphery. Hillel works in Belarus, Moldova, Georgia, and Azerbaijan. How does the war context affect people in those countries—people who, at least as far as we know, are not being bombed daily by UAVs, ballistic missiles, and so on?

Kholodova: For example, we cannot speak directly with Belarus. We have excellent private relationships between staff and students, but we cannot organize common programs or projects at this time. First of all, Ukrainian society would not understand. We cannot explain, "Listen, Jewish life is separate from the war." It is too sensitive. And it is also dangerous for people in Belarus, for students and staff. They cannot show that they have connections with us.

In other countries—Moldova, Georgia, Azerbaijan—the situation is different. The general position of these countries is much closer to us, so communication is not a problem. Georgia especially tries to support us, because they know—they were in the same situation, and even now they are in a similar situation, as their government is a proxy of Russia.

We have had problems, but believe me, they were inside our own circle, inside our staff. We solved them and found solutions. Now, it has become more complicated. Before the full-scale war, and even before 2014, we used Russian as a universal language. Now in Ukraine, we use only Ukrainian. Our colleagues often do not understand us, so we try to use more English. That is how we have found a way to move forward together.

Jacobsen: You're a refugee. I've known other Ukrainian Jewish refugees. Do you see parallels between Jewish cultural narratives in history and the current displacement experienced by Ukrainians?

Kholodova: I connect my refugee experience more with Ukrainian history. It feels like a different context. I am a refugee, yes—but it is more tied to Ukraine's story.

Jacobsen: That's actually a perfect point. How do Jewish communities and institutions like Hillel work with wider civil society organizations during the war?

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Kholodova: We do much collaboration. During the war, many volunteer organizations opened in Ukraine. They help in many spheres—supporting the military, assisting refugees, and caring for animals. Ukraine has become like a big volunteer hub. Everybody is collecting money, food, and power banks.

Before 2022, Hillel already had many volunteer projects. However, perhaps 90 percent of our volunteer activity took place within the Jewish community, as that is our mission. Now, in every city, every Hillel, every organization has powerful connections with other volunteer and social foundations. It is important.

You are not only Jewish in Ukraine now—you are Ukrainian Jewish in Ukraine. People here carry both identities, and sometimes they are equal. Before the war, being Ukrainian was natural—nobody wanted to kill you for that. They targeted you because you were Jewish. Now they want to kill you because you are Ukrainian. So you hold both identities.

I know many Jewish students who wear jewelry with the Magen David or the Hamsa. But now I also see much jewelry with the Tryzub—the Ukrainian trident—combined with the Magen David. It has become very natural: "I am Ukrainian Jewish." Just like in Israel, you are Israeli Jewish; here, you are Ukrainian Jewish.

Of course, we've expanded our social activities, and our students are very active in volunteer projects. For us, this is natural. It is crucial for Ukraine, but it is also essential for the image of the Jewish community, to show we are not separate.

I'm sure you have heard of Rabbi Asman in Kyiv. He continues his work. His community is very active. He is a fascinating person.

When the war began, Rabbi Asman started helping not only Jewish people but all Ukrainians. Why? Because you need to show that Jewish people care not only about their own close circles, but also about the country they live in. It creates a perfect image. Especially after October 7, with antisemitism always present, it is essential to show we are not separate.

It is the same with Hillel. Of course, our mission is to work with Jewish students and communities, but you cannot live in this country and say, "Don't touch me, I'm not involved." If you are Ukrainian Jewish, you must also share Ukrainian values—especially now.

I am talking about the Central Synagogue in Brodsky. Asman works very effectively in the political sphere. He meets with Budanov and Zelensky, invites them to the synagogue, travels to Washington, and has connections with Trump and other spiritual leaders. It is essential—he does excellent work.

Jacobsen: I was thinking about that the other day. Whether someone is secular or religious, the political and interpersonal importance of religion—and the tactful use of religion—is critical in building and maintaining ties when it is such a central factor in so many people's lives.

Lessons you can teach us. What can the global Jewish community learn from the responses of Ukrainian Jews in their moment of crisis—not only over the last three years, but also in the years preceding it? How can they learn from you in terms of the type of response you have given to this war and the crisis that follows it?

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Kholodova: First of all, we always feel a powerful connection with the international Jewish community. It is not only about Ukraine and Israel. For example, Hillel in Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia are all part of Hillel International.

And I remember how, from the very first moments, they called us many times, trying to support and help us. In life, some crises destroy relationships, but some crises make them stronger. This crisis, this terrible situation, worked in the second way. It brought the Jewish community closer, even more than before.

I feel this strongly. Hillel in Poland, for example, was pleased to help our students when they fled to Poland. And not only Poland—they stayed in touch with us, asking what we needed. The Jewish world is global, and it is exciting. I am happy that we are strong and we are together, no matter what happens around us.

Jacobsen: That leads to a very tricky question. What about relations between Jewish communities that share identity as Jews, whether Reform, Orthodox, or Conservative, but who live in countries at war with each other?

Palestine and Israel are different—there are not many Jewish people in Palestine, as far as I know. But in Russia, there are a lot of Jews. In Ukraine, there are a lot of Jews. Canada has many Jewish people. America has many Jewish people. If Canada and the United States went to war with each other, the same question would apply. How does that complicate cultural maintenance and cultural identity?

Kholodova: Yes, it's a tricky question. You want to catch me! I can't really answer now what I think about such a situation. I hope it will never happen, because believe me, I don't want to see it become true for our state.

But I can share a joke. With my refugee experience, one day I asked my husband, "Maybe we should move to New Zealand." He asked, "Why New Zealand?" I said, "Nobody knows about New Zealand. I think it's the one safe place in the world." He said, "Don't go to New Zealand—if you go there, something will happen there too!"

You need to understand the reality. Who is guilty in this situation? For example, if you had asked me fifteen years ago about my thoughts on Russia, I would have said, "They are our brothers. I speak Russian. I live in Donetsk," and so on. But the context changes depending on what happens.

If Canada attacked the United States, you would be guilty. If America attacked, you would be guilty. You need to understand the situation—what happened before, what the reasons are, whether you are defending or being attacked.

I hope—and I wish for all people in this world—that they never experience what I have lived through. I had to start life over twice as an adult. Starting life again and again is very difficult. I managed it—I am happy I met my husband in Israel, I continue my work, and I love what I do. But it is painful, and not everyone can do it. Not because they are not strong, but because it is simply very tough and painful.

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Jacobsen: Let me wrap up with this question. One thing I've taken from some of the travels I've faced is an analogy: with languages, every language on the surface looks different, but underneath there is a shared structure that allows us to learn, speak, and, with education, write a language.

I feel more and more that people are the same way. Cultures may look very different, but when you interact one-on-one—especially now that translation removes language barriers—you find the same frustrations, the same joys, and the same humanity.

What positives have you taken away from this war? I know it feels strange to ask about positives in the middle of such devastation, but in terms of resilience, what have you seen in people as they rebuild identities, sometimes fusing them? For example, the way many Ukrainian Jews mix those identities into something new.

Kholodova: The example of jewelry I gave earlier is about something you can touch—a symbol you can see. But I think identity is also built inside—in your soul, in your heart. Usually, you become conscious of your identity when someone tries to destroy it.

Before 2014, I never gave much thought to my identity—whether I was Ukrainian or Russian. I spoke Russian because it was normal for me at the time. I didn't face the kind of situation that forced me to reflect on it.

It may sound strange, but this is why Jewish people preserved their identity for thousands of years. They were forced to. They couldn't relax; they had to think about who they were. And now it is the same with Ukrainians. Unfortunately, identity often becomes stronger in the most challenging situations.

You start to understand who you are, and you need to make a choice. Not everyone in Ukraine has made this choice, but I'm sure that 95 percent of Ukrainians now understand that they are Ukrainian—or Ukrainian Jews. Some people sit and wait. Perhaps they wait for communism to return; I don't know.

However, this is not just about Ukraine; it's about the entire world. For example, if you went out tomorrow morning, had your coffee, and asked 10 or 15 people what they would do if war started in their country, half of them would probably say they'd look for ways to get to New Zealand.

That's human. It's not "normal," but it is part of human nature.

Jacobsen: Any closing thoughts or quotes based on the conversation today?

Kholodova: In Hebrew, there is a phrase: "Over, over, God."

Jacobsen: Excellent. Valeriia, thank you very much for your time today and for participating in this. I greatly appreciate it.

Kholodova: Yes, thank you. Good night.

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Severyn Ashkenazy on Anti-Judaism, Tzedakah, and Church Power

Holocaust survivor and hotelier **Severyn Ashkenazy** recounts his family's prewar comfort in Tarnopol (now Ternopil, western Ukraine), their survival while hiding for roughly twenty months in a rural cellar, and a lifelong commitment to art and philanthropy. Ternopil's total population was about 50,000 on the eve of World War II (1939), and is estimated at ~225,000 in 2022. The city's Jewish population was about 18,000–18,600 around 1939–June 1941; after the war, only about 139 Jews from those present when the Germans arrived were recorded as surviving in the city, with a further few hundred surviving via evacuation to the USSR or military service.

In conversation with Scott Douglas Jacobsen, Ashkenazy argues a thesis (his interpretation) that centuries of "anti-Judaism," later branded antisemitism, were sustained by church authority; he points specifically to Vatican conduct during and after World War II. That critique reflects Ashkenazy's viewpoint and the argument developed in his book *Swords of the Vatican: Reflections of a Witness to Evil*. He contrasts public stereotypes with the Jewish communal ethics of *tzedakah* (charitable obligation) and learning, notes the widely discussed phenomenon of outsized Jewish contributions in science, and emphasizes education and historical memory. The discussion also touches on Ukraine's wartime realities and evolving definitions of Jewish identity. These are framed as Ashkenazy's perspectives; readers should examine the underlying evidence and counterarguments directly.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Today, we are here with Severyn Ashkenazy to discuss antisemitism from both historical and lived perspectives. To set the stage: during World War II, how did your family live before the war, and then during the early parts of the war?

Severyn Ashkenazy: My family was comfortable—financially and socially. My mother was a pianist who spoke several languages; my father was a food chemist with strong mathematical skills and ran an extensive delicatessen and distribution business in Tarnopol (now Ternopil). Before the war, Tarnopol was a regional center near the Soviet border. (Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939; the Soviet Union invaded from the east on September 17, 1939.)

We were comfortable enough that, in 1937, a leading Polish chocolatier (as I recount in *Swords of the Vatican*) tried to recruit my father for a Chicago chocolate venture. My father—also a Talmud student—decided against it, believing we should not risk a stable life. Two years later, there was nowhere to go. When German forces occupied Ternopil on July 2, 1941, mass violence against Jews followed, the ghetto was established that year, and deportations to Bełżec and mass shootings at sites like Petrykiv (Petrykowo) occurred in 1942–1943. Of roughly 18,000–18,600 Jews present as the Germans arrived, only about 139 were recorded in the city after liberation in mid-1944, with a few hundred more surviving via evacuation or service in the Red Army. My immediate family—my father, mother, brother, and I—survived as an intact unit, hidden in a peasant family's cellar for about twenty months.

Jacobsen: For twenty months, you were hidden in a peasant family's cellar. As a child, what were the psychological challenges you faced? And, for the adults, in hindsight, what ethical challenges did they face in that context?

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Ashkenazy: As a child, because my parents were with us, I did not feel unsafe. They gave me the security a child needs. I did feel fear and anxiety. My mother was always with my brother and me, and my father joined us whenever he could. In the final eight months of our time hiding, we were in a cellar—more precisely, a cramped space under a basement—roughly six by twelve feet. Eventually, eight people lived there around the clock. Of those eight, six survived. They were hiding with us.

Jacobsen: What about your brother's passion for art?

Ashkenazy: That passion came from my father, and his love came from his father. My parents' major customers included the local aristocracy and the army. When they could not pay their bills, they sometimes sent a steward to settle accounts in kind. If there was no money, they brought a piece of art or an antique.

I remember one time we ended up with an old halberd—an approximately eight-foot pole weapon with an axe-like blade at the top, used historically in warfare. In French, it is *hallebarde*; in Polish, *halabarda*. Those were the sorts of objects that came through the door. When my father returned from Vienna, he realized my grandfather was an Orthodox Jew—not Hasidic, but traditionally observant as many were at that time—and he discovered a trove of paintings depicting Jesus and Mary, including Madonna-and-Child images. He recognized that we had, almost by accident, a collection. That is how we became art collectors.

My father always loved art. I have a photograph of my parents in a small apartment in Orléans, France, where they ultimately escaped communist-controlled territory. Behind them, you can see unframed paintings and the piano. This was part of my brother's and my life, as it was theirs.

Art became something we pursued. When my father became comfortable again, he would sponsor an artist, and one of them painted my mother. His name was Oliver Foss; he was, at one point, well known. His brother was the composer Lukas Foss. Oliver later taught at UCLA, which is how I ended up at UCLA—because of him. That is where the art came from. In a way, we were forced into becoming collectors.

Jacobsen: In my interviews about the current war in Ukraine, certain myths fall away when one scratches the surface. Reconstruction, for example, does not wait for the last shot to be fired; it begins as soon as the first bombs land. Forms of violence—sexual violence among them—become weaponized in war, but they existed beforehand in less concentrated forms. With that analogy in mind, in European societies after World War I but before World War II, where did you observe antisemitism—perhaps in "lighter" forms, yet still persistent?

Ashkenazy: You are not touching on something new. Before the 1870s and 1880s, the phenomenon was commonly referred to as anti-Judaism. The term "antisemitism" was popularized in 1879, and, despite the literal root "Semite," it came to be used almost exclusively for hatred of Jews.

Antisemitism has been a problem for roughly two millennia. Call it anti-Judaism if you prefer; in many respects, that is more accurate. Much of it arose in religious contexts. The antisemitism of the last 1,500 years, in my view, must be laid chiefly at the feet of the Catholic Church. There is no doubt in my mind. People could not always say so openly because they were afraid. Church-

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backed institutions exercised immense power, and persecution could be deadly. The Spanish Inquisition's last execution occurred in 1826, and inquisitorial structures persisted into the nineteenth century in various forms. There were sermons, edicts, and pogroms inspired or tolerated by the clergy. We should place responsibility where it belongs, while acknowledging that intensity and forms of hostility varied by era and place.

It began as a religious contest and evolved into a centuries-long anti-Semitic movement. From there, it equated to hatred. Hatred is as old as humanity. In the Bible, Cain and Abel: one brother envied the other and killed him. That is a primitive, early example. Then came religious fanaticism, conquests, and the persecution of those who did not believe as others did—and you have antisemitism. It is as simple as: "My God is better than your God."

Antisemitism is not something that needs formal instruction; once it starts, it can become instinctive, passed from generation to generation. It is hatred. It exists within us, waiting to be unleashed. Once authorized, the worst human instincts surface.

You asked about Ukraine today—this is what we see. When hatred is unleashed, you release our worst instincts. What do you get? Pain, rape, death, torture, hunger—everything. But you must ask: where did it start? Who promoted it?

Even today, the Pope refers to a political leader in the West Bank as a "messenger of goodwill." Yet that man is a killer who calls for eliminating Jews, citing verses from the Qur'an. Who was Muhammad? In my view, an illiterate wanderer who created stories to escape an older wife, disappearing for weeks at a time. Nonsense. But people believed him. Of course, they believed him. His wife would have been embarrassed that her husband had multiple partners for years, so he became a prophet. And this legacy persists.

When we were children in the ghetto, we were told the last place to seek refuge was the Church. They would call the Gestapo. If our parents were gone, they might baptize us and keep us. There is a letter from Pius XII to a bishop in France, who asked if Jewish children should be returned after the war. The answer was: not if they were baptized. They belonged to the Church.

So, if you analyze it, the Church bears primary responsibility. As children, we thought, "Pretend we are brothers, and they will help us." But they would not. The couple who saved us were decent, but we paid them. It was a business transaction. They were kind, yes, but their hearts were not the only factor—their pockets mattered, too.

Jacobsen: Have there been individuals within the Church who acted on a legitimate moral basis to counter this long history?

Ashkenazy: This is almost a joke. Out of hundreds of thousands of priests—today perhaps a million clergy and, with nuns, many more—the Church points to possibly two thousand who suffered, were killed, exiled, or tortured by the Nazis. Statistically, that is almost nothing. One percent would be ten thousand. Two thousand is two-tenths of one percent. And we do not even know why all of them were killed. Some may have been anti-Nazi for other reasons.

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The Church plays this game: when accused of complicity, it points to Father So-and-So as an example. One man out of billions of Christians. It is ridiculous. Of course, some individuals could not live with what they saw, but who truly protested?

In 1941 or 1942, the government in Vichy France—Marshal Pétain, Laval, and others—asked the Vatican whether Nazi laws against Jews conflicted with Christian teaching. The answer from bishops and cardinals was that there was no conflict. That is documented. It was reported in the work of the International Catholic-Jewish Historical Commission. So, for the Pope to say he did not know what was going on is false. He knew.

Pope Pius XII was not neutral. He enabled Hitler. After his death, a book published by his close confidante revealed details. They knew everything. That is the reality we are left with.

And then, consider the refusal to recognize Israel. Israel declared independence in 1948. The Vatican, the last major central authority to do so, recognized Israel only in 1993—forty-five years later. That delay says everything. The Vatican had even complained to President Roosevelt about Jewish plans to establish themselves in Palestine, warning it would "sadden the Pope" if it were allowed.

If you study the record, you find blood on the Church's hands from the beginning. In antiquity, Church leaders such as the bishop of Milan and John Chrysostom in Constantinople incited violence against Jews. Forced conversions and expulsions accompanied these campaigns. If you look carefully at history, the blame must be placed where it belongs.

And today, the Vatican has not fundamentally changed. During the Second World War, the Vatican did not aid the Jews; on the contrary, it was, in my view, Hitler's partner. Yet when the Nazis needed assistance, the Vatican and allied channels were there. Adolf Eichmann, for example, was able to obtain a Red Cross passport and a Vatican-issued travel document, part of the so-called "ratlines" that helped Nazi fugitives escape Europe. Many fled to South America or the Middle East, where some later served as military advisers in wars against Israel.

If you look into it, what you find is shame. Shame on people. I say "people" because 2.6 to 2.8 billion are Christians, and 2.1 billion are Muslims—humanity's shame.

So, if you ask about antisemitism and do not examine the role of the Church, you have missed the point. It is like blaming one shooter for killing two people in Washington without asking where the ideology that fueled him came from. Where did it come from? Either the Church or the state. There is nowhere else to look.

Have you ever had a serious discussion with an Islamist? With a Muslim? With a believing Muslim? Many defend their faith, but rarely in a serious way. Have you sat down with one?

Jacobsen: It depends. I have sat with Sufis and Quranists, some of whom are highly educated cosmologists. But Islamists, no. I have not sat with one, though I am sure that would be an educational experience. There is a particular psychology to fundamentalism.

Ashkenazy: I have read the Qur'an in three languages because I could not believe its absurdities. Since I do not read Arabic, I read it in Polish, French, and English. I keep copies next to my

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chair. One was abridged—still more nonsense. I have annotated another completely, pencil in hand. If you force yourself, and you are writing, you should do the same.

We already know what the Church thinks. I have friends—one is Casey Olderman, a prominent American actor. He and his wife have been my friends for a long time, even before she married him.

During the Second World War, did you hear that the Church lifted a hand to save Jews? Of course, here and there, a family saved ten Jews, especially children. But did you also hear that the Church actively helped Nazis? That is the part people leave out.

And today, what do we see? After the killing of 1,200 Jews and the taking of 250 hostages, no great sorrow came from the Vatican. Who takes hostages in the 21st century, other than criminals or warlords? Savages. We are dealing with savages.

No one stands when presented with secular codes—the Napoleonic Code, the Magna Carta, the Constitution. People may respect them in theory, but they do not rise to their feet. But when the Torah is carried in synagogue, every Jew rises, even if he does not know why. At the age of four, I was instructed to blow a kiss toward the Torah. This matters. We listen to the law.

Who knows? I will ask you a few questions, and you will see how ignorant we are about the subject, because either no one dares to speak, or no one cares. What is the most critical law in Judaism?

Jacobsen: No idea.

Ashkenazy: It is more important than all the other 613 laws put together. Charity. You see? It is a law. Want to test it? Go to the nearby church dressed as a homeless man and ask the priest for $500. He will almost certainly say he has a hole in his roof, that he is collecting money himself before the winter. He will apologize, but he cannot help you. That is the standard answer.

Now go to a synagogue. The rabbi will call an Ashkenazi congregant and say, "My discretionary fund only allows me to give $100. Can I count on you for the rest?" And how can you say no to the rabbi? So the man receives his $500. That is the standard.

When I was in business, this was a daily occurrence. If not from this rabbi, then from another. They never asked for themselves, always for others. Jews are different. Non-Jews have no idea who Jews really are. All they see is, "Look at how much money the Jews gave to the University of Victoria or Vancouver." To them, it just means, "They are rich."

We thought they were rich. We are not rich. We are obligated to be charitable. It is not philanthropy—it is law. Have you ever visited UCLA, a public university?

Jacobsen: I have been to UC Irvine and Long Beach, but not UCLA, as far as I recall.

Ashkenazy: Look at the donors. Look at the names. Many are now Smith. They used to be Silverberg, now they are Smith. You can tell.

There are about two percent Jews in California, and yet roughly half of the donors to public universities—not Jewish ones—are Jewish. I mention this because the subject comes up constantly: "Jews have money." Yes, on average, Jews may have more than some Americans, but

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we are not the richest people. The richest are not Jews. Jews are singled out as wealthy, and even more so because they give, and giving is the law.

But no one wants to see it this way. That is antisemitism. Jews give not because they wish to, but because they must. And they provide not only to Jewish causes, but also to non-Jewish ones. The world says, "They have so much money they do not know what to do with it, so they give it away." That is the explanation outsiders use. The truth is: it is endless. We cannot stop.

And when a Jew does something shameful—Madoff, Epstein—we are furious. I would have killed the man myself. He did not need to commit suicide, but by his crimes, he shamed an entire people. We remember these men, and we are not happy. It irks us. Why did he not think of how his actions would harm the Jewish people?

We are angrier at Madoff and Epstein than non-Jews are. We are ashamed. But only Jews know this. No one else is interested—because God forbid anyone admit that this could be a good side of Jews.

I will soon publish a book called *Jew, Who Are You?* Because Jews do not know who they are. If I ask you—because you are a good man, curious, someone who wants to leave something behind, which is commendable—you are mine, you are my Jew. You must understand that: by doing good.

But if I ask you, "Why are you? Who is a Jew for you? What makes a Jew a Jew?"—most Jews themselves do not know.

Jacobsen: I once spoke with a child of Holocaust survivors, Amos Guiora, as part of this book project. He served in the IDF and did significant work on enablers, abuse, and related contexts. He made a strong legal point—because he is a jurist. He explained that the Israeli Supreme Court once tried to define what a Jew is, and to this day, no solid definition exists. There is only an acknowledgement that there are multiple definitions that different groups consider legitimate. So it remains a rhetorical question, a good one. It connects to your point about self-identification. It is a similar quandary, a similar conundrum.

Ashkenazy: Well, let us speak about Muslims for a while. How many Muslims are there in the world? About 2.1 billion—second only to Christianity, which has about 2.6 billion. Their numbers are rising. How many Nobel Prize winners have come from 2 billion people?

Jacobsen: I know Abdus Salam won one alongside Steven Weinberg, but not many. When I looked at this with a Jewish colleague, we noted that Jews make up about 0.2 percent of the world's population but have earned a disproportionately large share of Nobel Prizes. Per capita, the rate is roughly 100 times higher than expected. For Muslims, I do not know the number.

Ashkenazy: The Jews? Of course. Roughly 25 to 26 percent of all Nobel Prizes in the sciences have gone to Jews—about 240 or 250 laureates—while today the global Jewish population is only 15 or 16 million. Compare that with Muslims: four Nobel Prizes in science. One laureate shared his award with two Jewish colleagues; another married his colleague'swidow and raised her children as Jewish. So, four from 2 billion. I mention this not to belittle anyone, but because the contrast is so striking. It gets repeated often, like Einstein being the only Jewish name many

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people remember. But the pattern tells you something about who Jews are. If you look at that, you see their law, their main law, their most important law: charity.

Two thousand years ago, the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (c. 37–100 CE) wrote about his people. In *The Jewish War and Antiquities of the Jews*, he noted that Jewish families placed extraordinary emphasis on educating and raising their children. For him to make such an observation meant he was describing a practice already deeply rooted in his time.

So Jews have long valued education. A Jewish family would not be a Jewish family if it did not strive to do everything possible to educate its children.

Yesterday, I was watching the news, and someone was interviewed about the current situation at Harvard and the many Jewish presidents and deans throughout its history. At one point, he claimed, "Forty percent of our professors are Jews, and close to thirty percent of students are Jews." That was an exaggeration. In reality, Jewish representation at elite American universities has historically been high compared to the population size. At certain times in the late 20th century, Jews made up roughly 20–25 percent of Harvard's faculty and student body, though today it is closer to 10–15 percent.

So how do you reconcile this with antisemitism? Antisemitism does not appear on a fixed date, nor does it vanish on one. When I came here in 1957, Harvard and other Ivy League schools had only recently abolished *numerus clausus* quotas that restricted Jewish admissions—a system in place for decades. Being a Polish Jew, I did not even consider applying. I attended UCLA, which I loved, and I am grateful that I did. But when one of my children proved to be a good student, I made sure he went to Harvard and secured strong letters of recommendation from the head of the parents' association, who was a close friend.

Is the name Theodore Bikel familiar to you? He died in 2015. Bikel was a celebrated actor, folk singer, and activist, famous for playing Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof*. He was also president of the American Jewish Congress at one point, though not of Harvard's Parents' Association—that may have been a different Theodore altogether. Still, Bikel is often remembered in this broader cultural context.

I did everything I could to educate my children. My second one could not get into UCLA because he had not studied appropriately in high school. I sent him to a remedial school for a year so he could qualify for UCLA. It was that important to me that my children had piano lessons and every educational opportunity possible.

I did not always travel first class, but I used the money for their education—whether it was to learn Spanish, French, or Chinese, or to send them abroad to study in Shanghai or Moscow.

And so did my friends. Among my Jewish peers, I was not unusual. It is striking today, as I spend more time with my generation, when we gather for music evenings or social occasions, how deeply this shared value of education and culture remains.

I know, for instance, two people who cannot wait to tell everyone that their children are at Princeton or Harvard, or that they study medicine, or that they are doctors or lawyers. It is amusing—they steer the conversation so they can boast.

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And you do not find this in many societies. But you do in the Jewish world, because education is that important. You still see it today. Look at Israel: 7.5 million Jews, and their laboratories and universities are thriving.

Germany has three top universities, because before World War II, it was the intellectual center of the world. Germany, with a population of over 80 million, has three universities ranked among the world's top 100. Israel, with 7.5 million Jews, also has three in the top 100.

I was not even looking for this. Someone once asked me to check Israeli universities for possible study abroad. I checked, and yes—three appear among the world's top 100. Interesting. Apart from the Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium, you do not find another Catholic university in the top 100. What a world.

Soon, I will publish *Jew, Who Are You?* I want Jews to appreciate who they are. But that is not what you are seeking here. You are looking for antisemitism. We can cover that in a separate interview if that interests you. Right now, I have many fires going, and I want to make sure none of the eggs in each pan get burned.

Jacobsen: Soft-boiled or hard-boiled? Different timing for each plate.

Ashkenazy: The question that could interest you is one I can speak to with some measure of knowledge, going back 60 or 70 years. I was part of a family and a milieu where these subjects were discussed among friends. It was not the central topic, but it came up often. So if you ask me questions, I can respond. If not, I will digress, as the mind sometimes insists.

I must set this in context: I am an individual. I cannot live in every era or in every country. Human academic pursuits are too varied and too deep for any one person. I can have conversations with experts.

Whether their expertise stems from lived experience, scholarship, or serving as representatives of institutions, they can speak accurately on behalf of their communities. By gathering these perspectives, I can provide a clear and concise delivery system in conversation, synoptic in presentation. That too has value, even if it is not strictly academic.

So tell me: what would you like me to speak about? Ask me the questions that interest you. If I know the answers, I will gladly tell you.

Jacobsen: Suppose you were to examine the interactions between different groups—how they have treated Jewish friends, colleagues, co-citizens. The real question becomes: what sustains the view of Jews as "the other," and what allows the transition to seeing Jews simply as human beings, with the same dignity, respect, and rights as everyone else? Following from that: what works, and what does not?

Ashkenazy: It is an all-encompassing question because you are asking how people live together in a community without feeling separated. Well, education. My sense is that hate—antisemitism—is not instinctive. It is directed for a reason. Education can erase barriers to a great extent. But education is not one-directional. There is no prescription for "uneducation." Education is what we have learned—not only in schools, which have existed in their modern form for only a few centuries, but long before that. For most of the last three or four thousand years, if you could

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afford education, it came from parents or from religion. Religion took over the role of education. It was about what they taught you.

And what did they teach? Often, to benefit the institution itself. Eventually, religion became a self-serving organization. That holds across traditions: among the most orthodox Protestants, among Muslims, certainly among Catholics, and also among Jews. If you are what is called a Haredi Jew—an ultra-Orthodox Jew—you are bound within a closed educational system. The same is true of ultra-Orthodox Muslims, who at the extreme may kill for their faith. The same occurred in Christianity, less so after the Protestant Reformation, but very much so in earlier Catholicism.

Now we have a large portion of the world divided by what people are taught, and of course, they end up believing it. You ask about antisemitism—well, look around. Competing religions, in their struggle for legitimacy, often decided that to win a place in the sun, they had to push out or eliminate the others. Each of the major Western religions has at times claimed to be the one true faith, insisting that all others must convert.

Hence, the attacks on Jews began some 1,600 to 1,800 years ago. The result is that a people who might number 150 to 200 million today instead number around 15 million, on what some describe as their "last legs."

During Roman times, Jews were as many as 8 million out of a global population of perhaps 250 to 300 million—about 3 percent of the world's people. They were more numerous than the Romans themselves, who counted roughly 5 million citizens.

In the post-Roman world, you see Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, and Romania. If you add those populations together, 5 million Romans gave rise to hundreds of millions of descendants. The Jews, on the other hand, kept shrinking because of continual persecution.

It is almost impossible to stop the persecution of Jews because it is not embedded in the traditions of others to defend them. Once one wave of persecution ends, another emerges—sometimes two, three, or four generations later. Look at the map: the Jews often do not seem to stand a chance. You can hardly find Israel on it.

Look at the 1947 United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine, which proposed a Jewish state and an Arab state. Have you seen it? I encourage you to. It is as if someone tried to sell you a condominium with the kitchen on the sixth floor, the living room in the cellar, the desert as the bedroom, and hallways connecting them in broken pieces. That is what they offered the Jews.

If you study the map, you see that what was proposed was unacceptable to everyone. The Jewish state was divided into three noncontiguous areas, easily cut off and eliminated. That Israel survived is miraculous. No one expected it to. One glance at the map shows it was not defensible, not manageable, and barely governable.

And remember, this was thirty years after the Balfour Declaration of 1917 had promised British support for a Jewish homeland. Theodor Herzl, the father of modern political Zionism, had earlier travelled across Europe in the late 19th and early 20th century seeking support. He met emperors, sultans, popes, and politicians. None gave him what he wanted. The Sultan of the

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Ottoman Empire was hospitable but refused land. The German Kaiser gave him nothing. The Pope told him bluntly, “You did not recognize our Lord; we cannot recognize you.” He added that if Jews ever had a state, the Church would try to proselytize them out of existence.

The English betrayed them. The French betrayed them. If you read the record, it is remarkable. From the beginning, the idea of a Jewish state was under siege. Since Herzl proposed it in the 1890s, Zionism faced hostility. And since Israel’s actual founding in 1948, the state has been besieged in one form or another.

The most prolonged siege in recorded history, incidentally, was not in Israel but in Ceuta, a Spanish city in North Africa, where Muslim forces pressed intermittently for centuries. Israel, however, lives in a state of siege to this day.

The most prolonged continuous siege in history lasted about 30 to 32 years. But the Jews have lived under siege, in a broader sense, for more than 150 years in the modern era. And then you read this nonsense—“They will recognize Palestine.” What is Palestine? Who are these people?

What do they teach their children? Can they form a country of their own? They are Egyptians, Syrians, Saudis, Iraqis, Lebanese—you name it. Do you know how large Libya is? About a hundred times the size of Israel or Gaza. And what is the population within a thousand kilometres? Around 7.4 million. So why can't they relocate their brothers and sisters if safety is the issue? Instead, they fight among themselves and against the Jews and Egyptians alike.

And then, the money. Can you imagine a billion dollars a year being poured into this? You would think most of that money would come from their brothers and sisters. But no. Saudi Arabia gives about $100 million a year—hardly generous, considering that is roughly what the Saudi crown prince spends annually on his private jet. That is the only substantial Muslim contribution to UNRWA, the United Nations agency that supports Palestinian refugees.

Where is Yemen? Where is Sudan, where hundreds of children die every day? Of course, no Jews are involved there, so the world stays quiet. But with Jews, they are suddenly the villains—genocide, they say.

Can you imagine someone with a high school degree, never mind a PhD, calling this genocide? They are out of their minds. We know what genocide is. By misusing the word, they pollute its meaning. They risk making the Holocaust meaningless by cheapening the term “genocide.”

Imagine, for a second, that Iceland attacked Canada. How long would it take before Iceland was reduced to a parking lot?

Jacosben: They do not even have an army

Ashkenazy: Yet, the response would be overwhelming. Or take Puerto Rico—if Puerto Rico attacked the United States, it would be a parking lot the next day.

But in the Middle East, in the 21st century, you have supposedly civilized people taking hostages—children, women, the elderly. That is gangster behaviour, kidnapping for ransom. Sometimes even gangsters fail at that. And yet this is tolerated? It is impossible to accept.

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But the Jews—wow, the Jews are attacked. "They killed 50,000?" Well, let us see who these 50 or 60,000 are. First of all, they were forewarned that the area was unsafe and would be bombed or attacked. They could have moved.

Second, many of these people protect the gangsters, the Hamas fighters, if you will. They protect them and stay where they are because they want to. Their lives are so bleak that they prefer to die as martyrs, believing they will be promised heaven. That idea sustains them. And if they are desperate to feed their families, someone will take advantage of that desperation.

Jacobsen: So, within that political lens—people seeing the Jew as "the other" and trying to expand the moral circle to achieve more inclusive dignity, respect, and ethical consideration—what do you think?

Ashkenazy: This is one man's opinion: I believe it is too late to seek genuine reconciliation—an intelligent reconciliation—between Jews, Christians, and certainly Muslims. For Muslims, reconciliation would mean Jews leaving Israel, surrendering. At best, they would allow Jews to survive as a minority under Muslim rule, as has often been the case in the last 800 years.

In my opinion, the differences are irreconcilable. That leads either to the disappearance of the Jews or to their confinement somewhere so they no longer exist as Jews. Because to the primitive mind, the Jew is unacceptable. The very idea of the Jew is an impasse.

Jean-Paul Sartre explained antisemitism as envy, which can bring you to kill the person you envy. That theme is in the Bible—Cain and Abel. Envy is at the root. A Jew is seen as a foreign body.

I know this from Poland. Even today, because I speak Polish fluently, most non-Jews I meet there say to me, "Your father was Jewish, but not your mother?" In other words, before they can befriend me, they want to make sure I am not fully Jewish. That happens invariably. So I know who I am dealing with.

I once invited a professor of history from a major university to dinner—twice—before I realized he was a learned individual with a degree. I joke when telling the story that you can get a PhD through your brain or through your ass. Just sit long enough, and you will get it. I know that for sure now.

But this is only part of my experience. It is not that I do not have phenomenal, devoted friends who are not religious and not Jewish in Poland. My closest friend there was a Frenchman from an intelligent family. His father was the Chief Justice of the commercial court.

That was his son. We were friends until he died. I even helped his daughter when she wanted to learn the hotel business. To this day, she is like a child of mine. So yes, there are close friendships. But as a group—for the vast, vast, vast majority—no.

It will not happen. There is a barrier. You cannot see it, you cannot even understand what the barrier is. Jews have a great deal to offer, and they are more than willing to share it. When I say they have a lot to offer, they are, to a great extent, the intelligentsia of the Western world.

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Maxim Gorky, the Russian writer, once said that whenever he met an intellectual in Tsarist Russia, that person was almost always a Jew. He wrote it down. And he was not an antisemite. He understood Jews were not a danger but a benefit.

So, what is the preeminent profession of Jews?

Jacobsen: I would say law or physics—teachers of law and physics.

Ashkenazy: Teachers. My daughter is a teacher. I am proud. She has a master's degree from Columbia and a BA from UCLA. I am pleased because she is a teacher.

And if it were not for Jewish women teachers, women in America might have stayed hidden. Jewish women represented a significant share of women teachers in the United States during Truman's time. The world does not know it. Why would they?

Did you know Columbus was Jewish? No? You see? Why are we hiding it? Jews always suspected he was Jewish, but we did not have certainty. Now we do. It is widely reported—though historians still debate it—that Columbus may have had converso ancestry, that he received financing from conversos, Jews who had converted under pressure, and that he took persecuted Jews with him. That is how perhaps a dozen or more ended up in the Americas. For centuries, Jewish financiers and merchants contributed to exploration and trade, though this rarely appears in schoolbooks.

And of course, people eventually agreed Jesus was Jewish. But not everyone accepts it. If he ever existed, he was a rabbi stirring trouble. In Poland, a lawyer once told me, "I can accept that Jesus was Jewish, but not Mary, his mother." Because in Poland, Mary is considered the Queen of Poland. For him, it was unacceptable that she be Jewish. And this came from a highly educated man.

What do you do with this? So—this is what you have. We are at an impasse. Unless we surrender—which the world may one day insist upon—because for Jews, life is more important than our own country. It is. The most important thing is life. We have no paradise waiting for us after death. And certainly our wives would forbid us a harem, if you think about it. We do not have compensation in the afterlife.

So if you ask me, reconciliation is impossible. Maybe when there are only a couple of million Jews left, and they are all Orthodox, they will end up confined to Brooklyn or some small town in Israel. That will be the end of it. We are not wanted.

Would you believe that in 1938, at the Évian Conference, when Jews were being persecuted, outlawed, beaten, killed, and pursued, none of the 32 countries represented moved a finger to help? Not one.

Churchill could have called the New Zealand prime minister—who was part of the British Commonwealth—and suggested taking in 100,000 Jews. He did not. Roosevelt could have called any Latin American country and offered trade incentives in exchange for accepting Jewish refugees. He did not. On the contrary, in 1939, the ship *MS St. Louis*, carrying more than 900 Jewish refugees, was turned away from American and Canadian ports. It was forced back to

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Europe under the shadow of warships in the North Atlantic. Many of its passengers later perished in the Holocaust.

So this is what we had then. Why would it have changed today?

And now the world blames Jews as perpetrators. Why is the world as a whole not saying: *"We will come and force you, so-called Palestinians, to release the hostages—or face consequences"*? Instead, they accuse Jews of cruelty while hostages are killed one by one.

Jacobsen: I have not heard that. No, the Jews should stop and then talk? Are they out of their minds? Just think about it. If you did this to Canada—yes, I repeat myself—are you kidding? If Iceland were to attack, you would throw everything you had at them. If you had no weapons, you would pummel them with rotten eggs. And the world would not say a word. Not a word.

You mentioned earlier that you do not see a rational reconciliation as possible anymore, particularly between Jews, Christians, and Muslims. What about a non-rational or emotional reconciliation—not only among the Abrahamic religions, but also with other major population centers in the world, like the Chinese? Or if the Vatican were to step in?

Ashkenazy: If the Vatican did what the King of Spain once did—intervened—it might reverse matters. But they will not. They need this hatred. The absurdity of religion itself prevents them from making such a move. The Vatican created and sustained antisemitism. I am writing a book on this irreconcilability. Almost finished.

And when I reread it for corrections, I cannot believe we Jews are still here. Literally everyone has tried to kill us. At one point, we almost disappeared. If it had not been for Poland, we might have vanished five, six, or seven hundred years ago. Poland gave us a respite. They had the intelligence to see Jews were useful. They invited us in and gave us two to three hundred years of relative peace. That pause allowed Jewish life to stabilize and endure.

Then, of course, the Russians began massacres again centuries later. And they have not stopped.

So when you read history, it is astonishing that we are still here. The King of England—Edward I—expelled the Jews in 1290. (You mentioned 1060, but it was 1290.) Before that, Jews had lived in France, in places like Poitiers, doing well. England invited them, and they contributed to the country's wealth. Then, as always, they were turned on.

And then they threw us out. For centuries, Jews were barred. They were then accepted back in the mid-17th century, under Cromwell, mainly due to economic necessity.

Do you know that England has never formally repealed the Edict of Expulsion of 1290, issued under Edward I? On the books, technically, it was never rescinded. The King of Spain, however, in 1992—on the 500th anniversary of the Alhambra Decree of 1492—apologized to the Jews. He invited them back and offered Spanish citizenship to any Jew who could prove Sephardic ancestry. It was not easy to document, but they accepted applications.

That was an apology. Now, Jews in Israel will tell you there was also a curse. At the end of the 15th century, rabbis pronounced a curse on Spain for expelling the Jews. That curse, they say, was only lifted in 1992 with the apology. And after that, Spain began to recover economically.

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Few people talk about this. Jews are afraid to say it, and non-Jews would never give credit to Jews for Spain's renewal. But if you look at Europe, Spain has been stagnant for centuries. Now it is doing better—paying its debts and moving forward. Coincidence? Maybe. But interesting.

Jacobsen: What about this dual-loyalty myth? The trope that Jews, wherever they are, somehow harbour loyalty both to their host state and to an outside state, meaning they cannot be trusted—whether they live in a place of respite like Poland or in a place of persecution like Weimar Germany?

Ashkenazy: I would invite you to look at the actual record. The most important law for Jews is charity. Did I mention that to you? Yes, charity.

Now compare: look at Catholic schools, universities, or a Catholic church. Or look at USC, which was initially a Protestant—specifically Methodist—school. Look at who the donors are. Jews send their children there. Proportionately, their children tend to serve in the army, often as officers, due to their education. This myth of dual loyalty ignores reality.

However, examine the facts and draw your own conclusion. Jews comprise approximately 1.8% of the American population. Find out how many serve in the police force or the army—you will see they outperform their numbers in service to the country.

They also support non-Jewish institutions to a considerable extent. Just look at them: they serve in the army, they serve in the police, they serve in politics. Even when they are wealthy, they give their time. They do not serve to enrich themselves. Jewish governors are not Trumps. They leave office poorer than when they entered. The idea of using public office to enrich themselves would not even cross their minds. Look at them—how devoted they are.

They teach. And yes, they are Zionists. They are Zionists, but they do not make much money in Israel. Israelis know that at any time, what has been happening for the last 1,600 years could happen again—in Canada or the United States—any time.

It almost happened in the United States. Hitler himself said he learned from the United States how to handle the Jews. That is what he said.

So when you ask if Jews are loyal, the answer is: they are faithful. They are not saints—you have the Maddows and you have the crazies. They do not physically kill anyone, but we are not proud of them.

Every time a Jew does something wrong, all Jews feel ashamed. It is a kind of collective guilt. We all apologize. But we are people. And we are highly educated—proportionally, among the most educated communities. Take the Fairfax District here in Los Angeles. It is mainly Jewish, middle-class, or lower-middle-class. Many people there live off their Social Security checks.

Yes, Jews have gained wealth, but contrary to myth, they are not the wealthiest group in America. Still, if you look at the 25 most prominent philanthropists in the United States, how many are Jews? Out of the top 25, about 12 are Jewish. And how many Muslims? Zero. You see the point.

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And these Jewish philanthropists are not necessarily the wealthiest people, but they give the most. That is the difference.

So when you ask if Jews are loyal, I say yes. In Canada, for example, there are around 350,000 to 400,000 Jews—about one percent or less of the population. They are Canadians. They are loyal.

I have cousins in Canada. One of them is the Dean of Linguistics at Columbia. How many Jewish professors are there at the University of Toronto, one of the world's top universities? I do not know, but it is worth checking. Given the small size of the Jewish population, their representation in academia is notable.

It would be an interesting exercise, even for you. Take McGill, take the University of Toronto, the University of British Columbia in Vancouver—check how many Jewish professors they have. Remember, Jews are only about one percent of the Canadian population. See how many professors come from that one percent. See who the philanthropists are. That would tell you something about loyalty.

Look at the teachers. If my daughter had not inherited some income from her late mother, she could not have afforded to be a teacher in New York. Teaching does not pay. And yet, Jews still choose that path. That is loyalty. Because, believe me, if she had opened a liquor store, she would make much more money than teaching.

Jacobsen: What about the relationship with non-Abrahamic populations? For example, with Chinese or Indian communities?

Ashkenazy: Yes. I went to Shanghai. My son studied at Fudan University. He is fluent in Chinese—that is my Jewish pride, I must admit.

I visited Shanghai several times. During the war, the Chinese gave Jews free entry. The Jews ended up in Harbin, in northeast China. Harbin became a major center for Jewish refugees, mainly from Russia. And the Chinese treated them with respect.

My son was in a class of foreigners, and when his teacher—a woman—learned he was Jewish, she invited him to her home to meet her daughter. That is how much regard they had.

And did you know that at one point, a Polish Jew became a general in China? For twenty years, he played an important role, working closely with the leadership of the time. No one talks about it. In the 1910s and 1920s, he advised the Chinese government and influenced policy. China did relatively well under his guidance.

But these things are not advertised. You will not read it in the papers, whether from Jews or non-Jews. Just like with Columbus, people will not tell you the Jewish angle. But I am of another age, and I have to say it.

So, China—do you know who translated the Talmud into Chinese?

South Korea, they want to know. Many are becoming Christian or Catholic—about 30–35% of South Koreans now are—but they have also translated the Talmud. Why? Because they want to know why Jews are so smart.

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South Koreans emerged from being colonized by Japan, pushed around by China, and exploited by the Western world. Now that they have built their own power, they look around and ask, "What do Jews read? What makes them so successful?" Their ambassador explained: "We figured Jews read the Talmud, so we'd better read it too."

Almost no one knows this. Maybe a few thousand people care enough to know. But Jews themselves cannot even say it openly. If they did, they would be accused of bragging. Jews are expected to remain modest.

I once asked a friend of mine to read Cleveland's—well, never mind that. Think about India. What about India? There is no antisemitism there. Few Jews live in India, but the Muslim world around them—Pakistanis and others—were taught to hate Jews. What does an Afghan know about Jews? Nothing. Jews left Afghanistan long ago. In Muslim countries, there are practically no Jews left. And you will not find a single Muslim university that ranks among the world's best.

Do you know the two oldest universities in the world, known as universities? Let me tell you. You should pay me five cents per lesson. That is what education is for—teaching, including the learning of charity.

The University of Bologna, in Italy, dates to the 12th century. Then there is Oxford, founded in the 12th or 13th century. But earlier than these, two universities in the Muslim world are still operating. One is al-Qarawiyyin in Fez, Morocco, founded in the 9th century. The other is al-Zaytuna in Tunis, also from the 9th or 10th century. They are the oldest still operating. But in truth, their diplomas do not carry the same weight internationally. They are religious institutions, not centers of modern science.

Now, compare that with India. In the 5th century, India had one of the greatest learning institutions in the world: Nalanda.

Nalanda was truly a depository of some of the most precious documents of its time—arguably more precious than the Library of Alexandria. It was destroyed in the 12th century during a Muslim invasion. They burned it to the ground, along with other centers of learning.

Muslims did not exist in the 5th century, when Nalanda was established. That was in Gupta India. The destruction happened much later, around 1193, when Bakhtiyar Khilji invaded. Nalanda Mahavihara was wiped out. Today, India has created a new institution called Nalanda University, but it is not the same. Few people know this history.

I once told you—I read the Qur'an in three different languages. Yes, Jews do that. (Laughing)

So if you ask me, the cycle is the same: temporary admiration, then fear, then hatred and jealousy. That is what Jews encounter. People do not know who Jews are. I just finished a book—it should be printed by the end of the month, though it has been delayed. It is titled *Jew, Who Are You?* In it, I explain what a Jew is, what he has been taught for 3,000 years. I felt compelled to write it because Jews themselves do not know who they are, and non-Jews certainly do not.

Jacobsen: And in that light, what sustains the hatred?

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Ashkenazy: Hatred continues. Sometimes there is temporary relief—"today's Jews are not responsible." But then the old accusations return. Jewish law is obvious: you cannot accuse the children of the crimes of their parents. Yet Jews are blamed for killing Jesus Christ across a hundred generations. It is absurd.

Look around—peasants in different countries raise their children from the age of six to work the fields, ensuring the inheritance and feeding the family. They are good farmers. But do not ask them to write a book. That is not their world.

The Jews, by contrast, uniquely—though not entirely uniquely—educated their heirs. European aristocrats did something similar: they had preceptors, music teachers, and dance teachers for their heirs. But for Jews, the education of children was central across the whole people, not just the elite.

Not necessarily all the children—just the heirs, so that the aristocracy could maintain governance. That tradition goes back thousands of years. But it was limited to aristocrats. Girls did not count. At best, they learned dance or manners.

The aristocrats taught their sons to inherit power—kings, czars, noble houses. But Jews, by contrast, are educated broadly. Józef Piłsudski, the general and president of Poland after World War I, once wrote that Jews were closest to the aristocracy precisely because they were educated. He valued the Jewish contribution and was one of the few Polish leaders to support the Jewish community openly.

Jacobsen: Yes, and alongside the aristocracy, the Church also had a role in education. It partnered with rulers to reinforce authority. Who, then, do you think has been most instrumental in combating antisemitism—and who in advancing it?

Ashkenazy: Certainly, the religions have been central—both in promoting antisemitism and in possessing the power to end it, if they would tell the truth. Perhaps the Vatican, facing Islam's growing strength, might someday change. But Islam discourages critical education. In many places, children are taught only to recite the Qur'an by heart, drilled by semi-literate clergy.

And look at Christianity. Remember Martin Luther? At first, he hoped Jews would convert. When they did not, he turned to hatred, urging persecution. That is where Protestant antisemitism began. Few mention it, but it is written plainly in his words.

Yet, the Protestant Reformation also gave rise to some of the world's most significant centers of learning. Look at Europe and the United States: Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Stanford, Oxford, Cambridge. These are Protestant institutions, or at least emerged from Protestant traditions. Protestantism aligned with knowledge rather than treating it as an enemy. That was progress.

The Catholic and Muslim institutions, by comparison, did not keep pace in higher learning. They remained tied to dogma rather than opening themselves to science.

One has to recognize this: the Vatican holds the key. Everyone else can try, but there are 2.6 billion Christians worldwide. Despite the Reformation, Protestants and Orthodox Christians still retain a respect for the Vatican. If the Vatican gave the signal, perhaps 1.6 billion Catholics and

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another billion Christians would follow. Tell the truth—do not invent stories. But knowledge is dangerous to both Islam and Christianity.

The Jews, however, have no such conflict. Whether the stories of God, Moses, and Sinai are legend or history, they are beautiful. Moses may not have been related to the Pharaohs, but someone like him surely existed. And monotheism—whether fact or legend—is meaningful. If you tell a rabbi you are an atheist, he will say, "That's all right, you can still be a Jew." You cannot be an atheist Catholic or Muslim, but you can be a secular Jew. Jewish identity is not contingent on belief.

The essence is education. From generation to generation, parents teach their children at all costs. No Jew would argue against it—except perhaps the ultra-Orthodox, who resist secular learning. But even there, children slip into the modern world through the internet.

Jacobsen: I'd like to turn to specific historical cases. Do you have commentary on the expulsion from England in 1290, or from Spain in 1492, or on the Soviet anti-cosmopolitan campaigns?

Ashkenazy: England, yes. The expulsion was in 1290 under King Edward I. It was economic. The monarchy and the Church were eager to acquire Jewish wealth. They decided that immediate confiscation was more important than long-term prosperity. Through decree, the Jews' assets were seized. For 400 years, England stagnated financially—struggling with France, fighting on the continent and off it.

Cromwell, centuries later, realized that Dutch Jews had transformed Holland into a financial powerhouse through trade and finance, particularly with the Dutch East India Company. He saw the potential. So despite English antisemitism, he readmitted Jews in the mid-17th century—not out of love, but pragmatism. He knew Jews were good for finance and growth.

Jacobsen: And Spain in 1492?

Ashkenazy: That was Vatican-driven. First came the medieval Inquisition, which was not only against Jews but also against Christian groups the Church considered heretical—like the Cathars in southern France. They were extraordinary: women were equal, they lived communally, and they respected Jews. The Church fought them for 200 years, finally wiping them out. In a single day, a French prince's army killed some 30,000.

Then came the Spanish Inquisition at the end of the 15th century, aimed first at conversos—Marranos, Jewish converts suspected of secretly practicing Judaism. And finally, in 1492, Ferdinand and Isabella issued the Edict of Expulsion under pressure from the Church. That was the end of Spanish Jewry's Golden Age.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Severyn.

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Antisemitism, Jewish Identity, and Humanist Repair with Psychotherapist Sapira Cahana

Sapira Cahana is a New York–based psychotherapist, writer, and Jewish educator whose work examines antisemitism, identity, and intergenerational trauma through a humanist lens. Drawing on clinical practice and historical study, she explores how stereotypes, gendered tropes, and social positioning shape Jewish experience across Europe, the Middle East, and the Americas. Her scholarship engages pluralistic audiences, translating complex debates—Orientalism, emancipation, racialized antisemitism, and internal community tensions—into accessible language. Cahana is attentive to intersectionality, including Jews of color and LGBTQ+ Jews, and to the therapeutic value of naming harms and boundaries. She advocates for dignity, curiosity, and dialogue as tools for resilience.

In this interview with **Scott Douglas Jacobsen**, psychotherapist Sapira Cahana maps antisemitism as a shifting social construct rooted in stereotyping, exclusion, and dehumanization. She traces European emancipation's paradox—greater visibility paired with new hostilities—alongside internal Jewish debates over assimilation and separatism. Cahana highlights gendered and racialized tropes, the compounded marginalization of Jews of color, and the therapeutic power of naming harms and boundaries. She discusses intergenerational trauma after the Holocaust and regional pogroms, while noting plural histories from India to Yemen and Ethiopia. The conversation urges a cosmopolitan, human-rights approach without erasing particular identities, insisting on dignity, curiosity, and evidence-based dialogue.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Today, we're here with the very tall New Yorker Sapira Cahana. This conversation is part of an extensive book of dialogues with a wide range of voices on the perennial subject of anti-Semitism. Recent reports have noted an uptick, making it a timely observation. It also seemed like a subject that could be examined from a pluralistic, cosmopolitan perspective. Naturally, people will disagree about definitions, approaches, and core issues. When you think about anti-Semitism, how do you frame its definitions, and how do you begin approaching it?

Sapira Cahana: Anti-Semitism is a historical construct. It is a term used to describe the collective experiences of prejudice, hostility, and violence directed at Jews, both historically and today. It refers to experiences of vitriol, pain, and dehumanization, where the individual Jew is subsumed into a negative collective stereotype.

Jacobsen: Is it always malevolent, or are there also seemingly benevolent stereotypes that fall under an anti-Semitic lens?

Cahana: Yes. There is anti-Semitism, and there is philo-Semitism—the latter meaning an idealization of Jews that still treats them as fundamentally "other." Ultimately, they are two sides of the same coin. This is because Jews have historically been positioned in complex and contradictory ways: sometimes cast as strangers and outsiders, while at the same time portrayed as a hidden force controlling society.

Jacobsen: For example, the conspiratorial notion that Jews form the secret sinews of power running society from behind the scenes. Are such views always conspiratorial, or are they

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sometimes grounded in hatred? And when conspiracies are involved, do they often drift into supernatural claims that cannot survive serious scrutiny?

Cahana: That dynamic can actually be worse than a standard conspiracy theory. Like many prejudices, anti-Semitism exaggerates or distorts partial truths. But it has a unique character because Jewish identity is diverse and cannot be easily defined. Stereotypes have often been contradictory: in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Jews were simultaneously accused of being Marxist revolutionaries on the left and ruthless capitalist financiers on the right. These opposites were weaponized at different times, depending on the needs of the accuser.

The form anti-Semitism takes often changes when Jews become more visible in broader society. In Europe, while Jews had faced exclusion and persecution for centuries, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries brought emancipation in many regions. As Jews gained greater civil rights and access to education, professions, and public life, anti-Semitic narratives shifted. Despite centuries of continuous presence, Jews were cast as "newcomers" or "outsiders," and their integration provoked fresh waves of hostility, culminating in both social prejudice and political movements that eventually gave rise to modern racial anti-Semitism.

Jews suddenly faced a new question. They were expected to be both highly integrated—"more German than the Germans"—while also struggling with how to preserve their own culture and adapt to a rapidly changing society. Movements emerged within Jewish culture that turned inward, internalizing the external gaze. Communities reshaped their narratives of self, redesigned places of worship, restructured services, and even created Sunday schools, all in an effort to appear more integrated. This was a survival process born of repeated exposure to being treated as outsiders.

At the same time, there were counter-movements. As assimilation spread, some resisted. In the traditional Orthodox community, thinkers like Rabbi Moses Sofer (the Chatam Sofer) strongly opposed assimilation. He rejected internalizing the anti-Semitic gaze and instead promoted a separatist stance, urging Jews to maintain distance from the broader society. This created another form of "othering," where Jewish identity was preserved at the cultural and social periphery.

So within Jewish communities, there was a deep tension: some sought assimilation by stripping away markers deemed "strange" or "Oriental," while others actively resisted and doubled down on distinctiveness. This produced an internal clash, shaped further by the persistent external gaze of non-Jewish society.

Jacobsen: What about the pressures of prejudice to prove oneself? For instance, you could have a culture that deeply values intellectual life and academic achievement, but the prejudice of the wider society creates an additional pressure: the need to work even harder to prove belonging. Does this dynamic fit with what you've described?

Cahana: Yes, especially in the European context. To some extent, this also applies in the Middle Eastern context, but I'll focus on Europe because the word "anti-Semitism" itself arose there, tied to Orientalist ideas that treated Jews as the internal "other." That framework continues to shape much of our current understanding of anti-Semitism. Of course, other historical experiences also mattered—such as the Spanish Inquisition or the status of Jews as dhimmis

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(second-class citizens) in parts of the Middle East. But in Europe, Jews were simultaneously libelled and restricted, yet also permitted to work in certain professions that others avoided.

Most Jews lived precariously, often expelled from their villages through pogroms and episodes of real, concrete violence. For example, in Norwich, England, archaeologists recently uncovered the remains of Jews murdered around the 12th century, evidence of massacres and expulsions. Jews expelled from England in 1290 moved into new lands, such as the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. This cycle of displacement and resettlement repeated across centuries.

Every expulsion forced adaptation: new languages, new cultures, new economic niches. Mobility itself became a form of survival currency in the medieval and early modern world, especially as broader European societies shifted from rural villages to expanding cities. For Jews, this constant movement was both a necessity and a cultural expectation.

Jews were also excluded from many trades and guilds, which meant they had to find other economic niches. A class of wealthy Jews emerged as merchants and moneylenders—not out of inherent preference, but because those were among the limited options available. When you cannot join a guild, you become resourceful. That economic positioning later hardened into stereotypes.

Jacobsen: Do many of those older tropes still carry into the present day? They are recycled as a political currency by people seeking a convenient, universal scapegoat.

Cahana: Yes. Those tropes are alive in the modern era. It has been only about three generations since the immense trauma that affected Jewish communities across Eastern, Central, and Northern Europe, as well as parts of North Africa and the Middle East. For example, the Holocaust in Europe and massacres such as the 1945 Tripoli pogrom in Libya left seismic ruptures in Jewish populations and cultures. A great deal was lost in a very short period of time. If trauma spans three generations in Jewish communities, then it also marks three generations of human history globally. The intergenerational transfer of this trauma is still unfolding.

At the same time, there is an evolving conversation—ideally one grounded in human rights and humanism. The hope is for a growing collective recognition of the intrinsic worth of every human life and, more broadly, all living beings. That current exists, though not universally embraced. Tribalism and chauvinism remain strong forces, which is why I anticipate that anti-Semitism will persist. Human history is replete with such vitriolic patterns, and while I hope they diminish, they are unlikely to disappear overnight. Our deepest prayer is that eventually, no one will be dehumanized.

Jacobsen: What aspects of anti-Semitism tend to glance off the armour, so to speak? Many Jews—religious or secular—may dismiss certain stereotypes as irrelevant. But are there particular tropes that break through and sting more deeply?

Cahana: I think the most insidious forms are those tied to gendered experiences. Anti-Semitism often portrays Jewish men as effeminate, weak, overly intellectual, scrawny, unassuming—or conversely, predatory. Jewish women, meanwhile, are stereotyped as either unattractive or hyper-attractive and hyper-sexualized. The French literary figure of *la belle juive*(“the beautiful Jewess”) is a striking example: she is admired for her beauty but still objectified and exoticized.

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These kinds of tropes penetrate the armour much more directly because they reach into intimate categories of identity.

Jewish men and women have often been stereotyped as existing at extremes—either devoid of sexuality or defined by excessive sexuality. Both categories are dehumanizing. Liberal or progressive Jews also become targets, cast negatively because of their politics or identities. Think of figures like Judith Butler, or Jews in queer and disability communities. Their Jewishness intersects with other marginalized identities, which compounds the prejudice.

Jews of colour experience especially acute, layered anti-Semitism. They are sometimes denied recognition as Jews within the Jewish community while also facing racism externally. On top of that, they face the broader anti-Semitism already in circulation. This means they are pulled from both sides, suffering compounded forms of exclusion.

Jewish women also experience compounded anti-Semitism. They face bias both as women and as Jews. One of my favourite authors, Eliane Cixous, whom I deeply admire, coined the phrase *jéifemme*—a single word blending "Jew" and "woman" without a space in between. It captures the inseparability of the two identities and the unique prejudices that arise from that fusion. Those prejudices become deeply embedded in cultural narratives, sedimenting into the vitriol directed at Jewish women.

Jacobsen: As a psychotherapist, would you say there is a "heart" of anti-Semitism? And what do you think are reasonable ways to blunt its effects on both individuals and communities, however small or large?

Cahana: At the most basic level, simply being able to name and identify anti-Semitism is a defence. For example, if someone says, "It's so amazing, you come from such a tight-knit community—Jews really support each other," that may sound innocuous. It could even be true. But underneath, it often carries an architecture of suspicion, even when presented as admiration. Naming it allows us to unpack whether the comment arises from respect or from stereotype.

Training communities to recognize what counts as anti-Semitism is vital. It helps in navigating everything from small interpersonal missteps to large-scale denialism. At the minor end, it could be an awkward or misguided remark. At the severe end, it could be a central media platform undermining or denying the Holocaust. The through line is a refusal to accept Jewish testimony about Jewish experience—a mythologizing or conspiratorial disbelief that distorts history. And that dynamic, while especially visible in anti-Semitism, is also true for many marginalized communities.

Anti-Semitism reflects a dynamic found in other marginalized groups, too: outsiders mythologize the group and try to define its experience for them. For Jews, the act of naming anti-Semitism is about drawing boundaries—saying when something is acceptable and when it crosses a line.

The larger parallel is psychotherapy. In therapy, people identify personal limitations—the invisible lines that feel like violations when crossed. By naming those boundaries and exposing hidden structures, one reestablishes subjecthood and humanity. The same holds for communities. Naming the transgression—naming the violence—creates the possibility of response, resolution, and advocacy.

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Jacobsen: Would you like to do a ten-minute session on existential exchanges, or would you prefer ten more minutes on this topic? Could you share any personal experiences of being affected by anti-Semitism?

Cahana: I definitely can. Some experiences were innocuous, while others were egregious—most were minor, though some even originated within the Jewish community. For example, not being recognized as Jewish, or being asked to prove my Judaism. That's strange to me because I'm deeply steeped in Jewish culture. At times, people don't "read" me as Jewish, whatever the stereotype or prejudice behind that may be.

Because of that, I've been in situations where I don't reveal my Jewish identity and then overhear questionable comments about Jews. There's also humour—jokes about Jews—that I try to probe gently, asking where the joke came from or why it's funny. Other times, I've encountered discomfort or exclusion specifically because I am Jewish. In such cases, my response is to pursue dialogue, connect, and understand where the discomfort or desire for separation is coming from—and to respect it if it seems legitimate.

At the core, anti-Semitism is about dehumanization. The individual or group is collapsed into a negative collective image. If two influential Jews misbehave, it's not because they are Jews—it's because they are influential individuals misbehaving. If someone says "Jewish landlord," the issue isn't their Jewishness—it's their role as a landlord. But stereotypes overlay these realities with group-based prejudice, erasing individuality.

Jacobsen: Is there a common humanity revealed in the shared experience of being dehumanized—of being treated as a type rather than as an individual?

Cahana: There is a shared experience of being othered. However, not everyone who is marginalized gets lumped into a single group. That, in itself, is a privilege. Some people can walk through the world and be treated entirely as individuals—responsible only for their own joys, sorrows, trials, and triumphs. Others are constantly held accountable for a collective. That difference comes down to social positioning, ideology, power structures, and the web of relations in which one lives. It cannot be reduced to a universal human experience, because some people endure compounded oppressions while others encounter far fewer. Everyone has a subjective lens, but some subjectivities are recognized and honoured more readily than others.

Jacobsen: What do you love about Jewish identity?

Cahana: I love that Judaism offers a panoply of wisdom to draw from. Every time I think I've grasped what being Jewish means, I encounter another detail that reshapes my understanding. For example, Indian Jews for most of their history did not experience anti-Semitism in the same way European Jews did. Their identity was not primarily defined by oppression, but rather by community and continuity. That's fascinating.

In fact, Jewish women in early Indian cinema played remarkable roles. Because Jewish communities had fewer restrictions around public performance, some of the first actresses in Bollywood were Jewish women. Their freedom around body and performance gave them a visibility not readily available to others.

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Or take the case of the Himyarite king of Yemen, Dhu Nuwas, who converted to Judaism in the sixth century. The idea that a Jewish king once ruled outside the Land of Israel is historically striking. Similarly, there are the ancient connections between Judaism and Ethiopia—complicated, sometimes questioned, but deeply significant. Jewish history is filled with such surprising chapters.

And there are extraordinary figures, like Glikl of Hameln, a Jewish woman in the seventeenth century who wrote an autobiographical diary. Her words endure, providing a window into the inner life of a Jewish woman in early modern Europe. Discovering her story fundamentally reshapes our understanding of what Jewish women's lives were like in that era.

That is what I love: Judaism is endlessly kaleidoscopic. It offers one tiny frame on human existence, but when you look through it, you see infinite facets refracting outward. That richness makes me proud to be Jewish.

Jacobsen: Thank you very much for your time today.

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Articles

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Antisemitism, the Left and 1967 (Dr. Lloyd Hawkeye Robertson)

By Dr. Lloyd Hawkeye Robertson

Television was still "black and white" when I entered a high school oratory contest to talk about the U.S. war in Vietnam. A young Trotskyist subsequently recruited me to join the New Democratic Youth. I immersed myself in socialist political thought.

The U.S was a colonial empire and therefore, oppressive; however, as I understood Marx, capitalism was a necessary stage before socialism and eventual communism. The newly formed state of Israel was allied with United States and was, therefore, an oppressor. I noted that the majority of socialist thinkers I had been reading – Rosa Luxembourg, Leon Trotsky, Edward Bernstein, and even Marx himself were Jews. The Jewish Left must have switched sides out of self-interest – the worst sort of traitor. The Balfour Declaration was proof that Israel was a colonial Zionist plot from the beginning of the British mandate in Palestine in 1920.

We weren't told that most of European Jewry had rejected Zionism. From 1919 to 1932 only 120,000 immigrated to Palestine joining the 60,000 to 80,000 Jews already present. In comparison, 280,000 to 380,000 European Jews migrated elsewhere, mainly to the Americas. After 1932, as conditions for Jews in Europe became progressively worse, western governments limited Jewish immigration to their countries. We also weren't told that Britain had never allowed Jewish immigration to the 60% of Palestine east of the Jordan River or that in 1939 they stopped Jewish immigration to Palestine entirely. This trapped potentially hundreds of thousands who could have been saved from the holocaust. The Left has had more sympathy for non-Jewish refugees.

In an act of ethnic cleansing, 850,000 Jews were expelled from Arab lands following World War II. While the United States and France took 250,000 of them, most had no choice but to resettle in Palestine. In 1947, the United Nations offered a "two state" solution for that part of Palestine that was not already part of the new state of Jordan. The Jews accepted the plan and named their portion "Israel." The Arabs refused the two-state solution, invaded and lost. The majority of Arabs and all of the Jews were expelled from that part of Palestine designated for the other group. Why are the descendants of the Arabs still designated as refugees but not the descendants of Jews who also lost their homes?

Zionism was a movement for the re-establishment of a Jewish nation in Palestine. I opposed Zionism for the same reason I would oppose nationalism generally – it is restrictive of minority populations who may not fit into the ethnic and linguistic definition of "nation." I have since learned that the leaders who established the state of Israel were from the Jewish Enlightenment tradition and they implemented a constitution guaranteeing liberal values, secularism and democracy. Three quarters of Israel's population are Jews and a quarter of these are atheists. More than 20% of Israel's population are Arab Muslims with full rights of citizenship. Women, gays transsexuals and religious minorities have constitutional equality. In a nod to socialism, the two hundred and seventy kibbutzim that dot the landscape are rural communes. Why would the Left abandon the only people in the Middle East that have established a democracy with at least some semblance of socialism?

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In 1967 Canada got colour television and Egypt, Jordan and Syria once again invaded Israel. They lost. Israel took the Sinai Peninsula and Gaza from Egypt, the West Bank from Jordan, and the Golan Heights from Syria. This was also the year the Arabs from these regions began referring to themselves as "Palestinians," as distinct from other Arabs. In defence of the Left, Nasser of Egypt, Arafat of Palestine and the Baath parties of Syria and Iraq sounded like socialists but, like Josef Stalin in the Soviet Union, they needed totalitarian methods to compensate for their lack of popular support. All were eventually replaced by Islamists bent on restoring a Medieval view of mankind with a strict fundamentalist interpretation of Islam. Why did the Left support these reactionaries?

The Arab Palestinians were offered their own state with East Jerusalem as its capital in 2000 and again in 2008. Likud led by Benjamin Netanyahu was elected in 2009 on a platform opposed to such territorial concessions while favouring settlement expansion. The Israeli Labor Party has not had a role in government since. Why does the Left malign the Israeli Left?

With the return of the Sinai Peninsula, Egypt agreed to recognize Israel as a state. In 2005 Israel ended its occupation of Gaza "trading land for peace" by forcibly removing nine thousand Jews in 21 communities from the territory. The Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) won elections for the Palestinian Authority in 2006 and subsequently formed the government of Gaza. Since its founding charter promised the elimination of Israel, the Israelis have maintained a blockade to prevent Hamas from acquiring weapons. The Left has equated this blockade with occupation thus broadening the meaning of the term.

On October 7, 2023 Hamas led Gazans invaded Israel and murdered 1,200 mostly civilians, including 378 who were attending a music festival. They did not spare infants or elderly. They took 251 hostages in preparation for the inevitable counter-attack. The Left accused Israel of "genocide."

"Genocide" is a term that was coined to describe attempts to remove a people from the gene pool. Six million Jews were placed into concentration camps and systematically murdered. The population of European Jews decreased accordingly. There has been no corresponding decrease in Muslim Arab populations; however, the number of Syrian Christians dropped from 2.1 million in 2011 to 300,000 by 2022. Where is the outcry? At one time there were 14,000 Lebanese Jews but fewer than 20 remain alive today, yet one has accused the Muslims of genocide. Hamas has reported that 300 Gazans have died of hunger since October 7, 2023 but during the same time period 100,000 to 150,000 people have died from hunger in Yemen and 50,000 to 100,000 have died in South Sudan. Where are the demonstrations on Western university campuses opposing Yemeni and Sudanese "genocide?" Israeli forces have been targeting Hamas operatives who dress in civilian clothes and operate in civilian areas. In Ukraine the Russian forces actually do engage in indiscriminate bombing of civilian areas. Why has the Left has not organized mass demonstrations against Russian "genocide?"

We need to consider that Israel stands accused of genocide for defending itself from an enemy that refuses to release its hostages unconditionally and who refuses to surrender. The term "genocide" was created to represent the intentional extermination of a racial, ethnic or religious group from the gene pool. To expand the definition of genocide to mean "war crimes" or even

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the effects of war on civilian populations, we negate the meaning and purpose of the original concept. Expanding the definition in this way equates the holocaust with other phenomenon – thus erasing the significance of the concept – a clever form of holocaust denial.

The Left claims to be anti-Zionist, not antisemitic, but they appear to have a special set of rules for the only majority Jewish state in the world; and, their "Pro-Palestinian" campaign has resulted in attacks on synagogues and Jewish run businesses. Students have expressed fear of identifying as Jews in Canadian universities. Jews only represent 1% of the Canadian population, but in 2023 there were 900 police reported attacks on Jews representing 70% of all religiously motivated hate crimes in the country. In the modern context "anti-Zionism" has become an engine of Jew hatred. At least some of the Left can trace their antisemitism to a misreading of Marx who wrote: "What is the worldly religion of the Jew? Huckstering. What is his worldly God? Money. [...] In the final analysis, the emancipation of the Jews is the emancipation of mankind from Judaism" (Marx, 1844/2008).

These words were used by Stalin and his successors in the Soviet Union to justify widespread purges that killed or imprisoned thousands of Jews while equating Zionism with imperialism and fascism. The American Communist Party justified Arab pogroms against Jews in Palestine and North Africa while conflating Jewish financiers with plutocratic exploitation. Soviet bloc propaganda, allied with authoritarian Arab states, funded vicious campaigns demonizing Israel as a colonial outpost, and influencing the New Left of the 1960s and 1970s to adopt tropes of Jewish power and victim-blaming. Marx would not have been pleased. In the context of his writing, he was telling Jewish capitalists to give up on capitalism. His words were part of a movement that saw Jews embrace socialist and union activity in an attempt to integrate with workers the world over. But Marx's more literally-minded followers turned class politics into identity politics.

It began with Marcuse and the New Left in the 1960s (Coughlin & Higgins, 2019). In an act of revisionism, it declared students and academics, as opposed to workers, to be the revolutionary class. By the 1980s it had replaced workers in another way – designated identity groups were now seen as the primary victims of oppression. In the 1980s and 1990s this not-so new Left adopted postmodern relativism with at least one important difference – while postmodernism held that all knowledge is socially constructed by people with power, the new Left held that its own ideology could not be critically examined. Pinker noted this new belief system had the trappings of a quasi-religion (Pinker, 2003). This new religious movement that has become increasingly strident and intolerant is commonly referred to as "Wokism" (Robertson, 2021; Robertson & Tasca, 2022; Samuels, 2022).

Any religion or ideology based on identity groups and politics will inevitably favor some groups over others thus promoting racism. The tropes used to demonize Jews from the left frequently channel those used by 20th Century fascists. Since Enlightenment science and reason are seen as "Eurocentric" with Jews defined as ultra-white, the resultant demonization is often impervious to logic.

The media often see the Wokists as "the Left," but there is a branch of the traditional Left who believed Enlightenment tools of science and reason could be used to address social problems and

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build a better society. Guided by humanist compassion, Democratic Socialists like Bernstein sought to curb the excesses of capitalism while preserving individual liberty and human rights. They rejected the authoritarianism of both the far-left and the far-right championing free speech and open discussion to overcome the bias and programing that would otherwise determine our worldview. Over the years, my views have evolved accordingly. I still do not pretend I have it exactly right and I remain open to refining my understanding through continued reflection and dialogue.

Cold hearted orb that rules the night

Distorts the colours from our sight

Red is grey and yellow white

But we decide which is right

And which is illusion.

-The Moody Blues, 1967

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The Improbable Remains: An Open Letter to my Fellow Gentiles (Edan Tasca)

By Edan Tasca

“Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a Jew.”

— Martin Niemöller

“When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.”

— Sherlock Holmes

As horrifying as the enormity of October 7 was, no one was surprised about the potential for this savagery. We knew this was and always will be waiting to pounce. The closest things to surprising on October 7 were the cheered-on aspects: the parachute attack, the raped and dragged grandmother, and the dead children and babies. Extrapolating the casualties to scale, this attack was more than a full order of magnitude worse than 9/11. Anyone behind on their reading has ideally caught up now and knows what Hamas is about.

Yet on October 8 we witnessed behaviour even more shocking. It turned out that not everyone agreed that the October 7 display of unabashed and glorified cruelty was unacceptable. I had no choice but to notice that, as disgusted as I was on October 7, I was more disgusted on October 8. It horrified in a close to never-before-seen way, at least for those of us of a slightly younger age with no memories of WWII, the Holocaust, or its immediate aftermath.

The Leftish West seemed to be either siding with Hamas or turning a blind eye. Demonstrations. Chants. Official statements of sole Israeli guilt for the massacre of Israelis. Jewish students being blocked from campus buildings, because they’re Jewish. Astonishing, heartbreaking scenes of young adults eagerly tearing down posters of missing Jewish people, who might’ve been hostages. The same types chanting “Intifada!” and “From the river to the sea!”

I’m not sure anyone could have predicted the cruelty of these reactions on campuses and elsewhere. Here we have people we otherwise trust to be kind and intelligent — many humanists, mostly on the Left — cheering the massacre of civilians, blaming the massacre on the massacred, and calling for further massacres.

Gradeschoolers love a good pile-on. We’ve been forced to accept that Ivy League students often act like gradeschoolers. Where most pile-ons are for fun, this pile-on evokes the Holocaust and glorifies genocide. The string of grotesque reactions was capped by the coup de grace of a catastrophic silence from what seemed like everyone else, in particular the Left, where many Jewish people were shocked to learn they had unexpectedly few allies. For Jewish people and for humanity, there were tears to shed here.

Victimhood should never be travestied into a competition, but it is impossible to watch the depravity that unfolded on October 7 and 8 and not be reminded that throughout human history

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no ethnic group has been treated more poorly, with more contempt, and with more cruelty than the Jewish people. Anti-Semitism seems as old as recorded history.

Help me understand. On October 6, you didn't like Hamas. On October 8, many of you seemed a fan or at least comfortable. What inspired the shift? As Sherlock Holmes would, let's eliminate all factors that can't be responsible. Whatever remains must be the truth.

Israel/Palestine is too far away for fear and intimidation to have forced the shift in most. Equally obvious, your shift couldn't have been inspired by sheer carnage. You're not a psychopath. You wouldn't support wanton violence anywhere. You'd also criticize the group committing the violence. If October 7 had gone the other way, you would rightly despise the IDF.

Was revenge the inspiration? This seems the easiest and most likely reason, because of all the injustices performed by the Israeli government and in particular the IDF. There is no shortage of offences here. But you know well to avoid "they" problems because you know that groups aren't people. Punishing a random Israeli soldier for specific actions of the IDF — let alone punishing a concertgoer or grandmother — is as absurd as punishing the White Whale for Ahab's leg. Even if it weren't absurd, this wouldn't do because of what you teach your kids about two wrongs.

And even if two wrongs did make right, you wouldn't target your violence at concertgoers, children, babies, grandmothers, and kibbutz-living Palestine sympathizers, because they had nothing to do with anything except being Jewish. And we all know that vengeance — though brilliant for fiction — is a complete disaster in real life, because the cycle of violence and misery never ends.

And what would the revenge be for? Israel hadn't begun its counter-offensive. And the October 7 attack broke a ceasefire that had been in place since 2005. But with no shortage of prior IDF issues, we can pick anything here. Let's go with the popular view that Palestine is subject to colonialism. Israelis have been considered colonizers since they returned to Israel after being run out of many areas of the Middle-East. Israel is the traditional homeland of the Israeli people. It's impossible to colonize your traditional homeland. Our land acknowledgements to the Indigenous that start proceedings on campus and elsewhere remind of this.

Is it that Hamas represents your "progressive" comrades with whom you need to unite? Queers for Palestine notwithstanding, you know Hamas doesn't tolerate homosexuality. You know how poorly Hamas treats women. You know Hamas teaches children to hate Jewish people. You know there aren't difficulties with trans issues in Gaza, because there are no openly trans folks in Gaza. And you know exactly why there are no openly trans folks in Gaza.

You also know that Hamas hides its important strategic hubs and such under vulnerable areas like hospitals. Hamas will make unashamed use of human shields, including children and the infirm. Every Hamas policy is a nightmare that would disgust you in your world.

Maybe you haven't thought much past rooting for the underdog. Hamas is up against a government backed by the U.S. But unlike Hamas, Israel doesn't want any countries or peoples destroyed. A map will show you that Israel is a tiny island surrounded by an ocean of countries whose governments, like Hamas, want it and its people destroyed. Israel is also a country whose

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haters can be found all around the globe, even if, and maybe *especially* if, the haters have no experience with Jewish people.

Hatred of the Jewish people is ancient and precludes Netanyahu, the IDF, and modern Israel. And the Jewish people are a rare ethnicity that is universally rejected politically, because they aren't white enough on the Right and they're "too white" on the Left. Like death and taxes, Earthlings targeting Jews for mistreatment is systemic. If there's a David and a Goliath here, the group perennially under attack from every direction — with no safe home politically or geographically — is the Davidian underdog.

As a final defense of your softness on Hamas, you might offer, "Well, what do you expect?" Just like you'd never expect blacks to massacre whites; just like you'd never expect Tibetans or the Taiwanese or the Uyghurs to massacre Chinese folks; just like you'd never expect women to massacre males; you'd never *expect* the Palestinians to massacre Jewish folks. If you're expecting or even hoping for further violence from Palestinians against the Jewish people, you have to ask yourself why. It's unlikely you're falling for the bigotry of low expectations about Palestinians, because I don't think you believe that any ethnicity is inherently more violent than another.

Fear is not your main culprit for being soft on Hamas. Wanton violence itself didn't inspire your shift. It also seems impossible that revenge inspired you. Anti-colonialism couldn't have been sufficient. Championing Lefty politics fails, as does defending the underdog. And I refuse to believe that what inspired you was perhaps some form of racism. Not about Palestinians.

But on October 6, you didn't care about Hamas. Since October 8, many of you seem a fan. What's the explanation that remains?

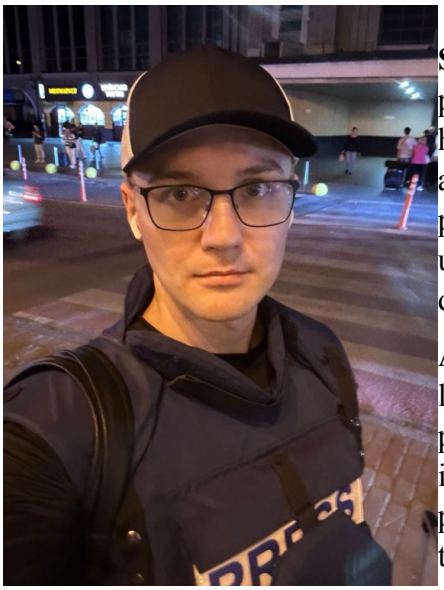
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Scott Douglas Jacobsen is a Canadian author, interviewer, and publisher, whose contributions to secularism, humanism, and human-rights discourse are distinguished by their rigour and accessibility. He established In-Sight Publishing in 2014 to produce freely available or low-cost e-books and periodicals under a Creative Commons license, thereby ensuring broad dissemination while safeguarding intellectual property.

As editor-in-chief of In-Sight: Interviews (ISSN 2369-6885), launched in 2012, Jacobsen curates and presents meticulously prepared, long-form dialogues with a wide range of interlocutors. These interviews include scientists and philosophers, activists and public intellectuals, addressing themes such as secular ethics, freedom of expression, evidence-based policymaking, and the global defence of human rights. His work appears regularly in peer-recognized outlets, including The Good Men Project, International Policy Digest (ISSN: 2332–9416), The Humanist (Print: ISSN 0018-7399; Online: ISSN 2163-3576), Basic Income Earth Network (UK Registered Charity 1177066), A Further Inquiry, Canadian Humanist Publications (CA Registered Charity 118833284 RR 0001), Uncommon Ground Media (UK Registration 11836548), The New Enlightenment Project, News Intervention, Canadian Atheist, Trusted Clothes (CN: 9562184; BN: 791402928RC0001), among dozens of others.

Jacobsen engages globally and interdisciplinarily with issues of social justice, belief plurality, and economic equity. Jacobsen has held the Tobis Fellowship in Research at the University of California, Irvine, on multiple occasions, contributing to empirical and normative studies on ethics and public discourse. He maintains active membership in numerous professional media organizations, fostering adherence to editorial standards and facilitating ongoing intellectual exchange.



His editorial leadership and commitment to open-access formats have generated a substantial, publicly accessible archive—known as the Jacobsen Bank—that documents contemporary secular and humanist thought. Based in British Columbia, he continues to expand the reach of his platforms, amplifying diverse perspectives and promoting evidence-based dialogue across cultural and disciplinary boundaries.

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