

Syllabus #1

August 7, 2015

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Contemporary Jewish Responses to Antisemitism: Informal Conversations with Jewish Students about their Attitudes toward and Understanding of Antisemitism

Description and Objectives of the Series of Conversations:

Growing up in relatively safe environments, surrounded by other Jews, many North American Jewish youth have learned about antisemitism, as mediated through distant stories of the past or as a warning expressed to them from within their communities about the longstanding hatred of other individuals and nations toward the Jewish people and culture. The recent horrors of the Holocaust and threatening (genocidal) attitudes toward the Jewish State of Israel stand as prime examples of this hatred iterated by the community, but education in Jewish Day Schools often does not convey a deeper analysis of antisemitism from multiple perspectives. When students arrive on campus and receive alternate versions and understandings of these events using critical, academic apparatuses, their past perceptions of Jews and their place in history may be upturned. Even though there is academic literature exploring the intricacies of antisemitism and providing elaborate arguments for the roots of antisemitism and its ideological underpinnings along with antisemitism's multifaceted and dynamic character over the centuries and its manifestations in different geographic regions till today, these aspects of antisemitism remain largely unexplored in mainstream and lower-level Jewish North American education, let alone in North American universities. In addition, there tends to be a taboo against speaking openly about contemporary antisemitism as it appears in reactionary Islamist ideology and right-wing neo-Nazi rhetoric. Does the taboo stem from fear? Lack of interest? Over-repetition? Related to past traumas? Fear of being labeled Islamophobic or racist? To what extent is antisemitism considered important to unpack and understand, not only for Jews, but as a way of decoding other forms of discrimination and hatred? In what ways do the distanced, yet internalized consciousness and discourse of antisemitism contribute to informing or blinding young North American Jewish persons' understanding of the contemporary reality and rise of antisemitism, as it takes shape more strikingly abroad, as well as to their own identities as Jews?

Jewish students may shirk off discussing contemporary antisemitism for many reasons, one of which may be that explicit and violent antisemitism in North America is not as common as it is in other parts of the world. Nevertheless, North American Jewish communities have seen an increase in explicit hate-crimes and vandalisms directed at Jewish schools and at synagogues. Many of these incidents are clustered around times when the political situation in Israel and Palestine is particularly tense. How do these events affect young Jewish adults' attitude toward themselves, their communities and toward their understanding of antisemitism? Do they draw links between these incidents and to wider political realities or do they consider the events to be random? How does one's social and religious upbringing influence one's views on this subject?

These informal conversations hope to provide a space to explore first-hand how antisemitism is experienced directly and more theoretically by Jewish students who have grown up in North American contexts. Through questions, discussions, worksheets, interviews, reading and responses, and a walking tour with the musée du Montréal Juif, we will reflect on these questions to form a better understanding

of young Jewish students' attitude toward antisemitism, their emotional responses to antisemitic incidents that occur in North America and around the world, and what aspects of antisemitism they think should be stressed in its academic study. Additionally, they will develop critical tools for understanding and unpacking the complexities of antisemitism and their relationship to it, so as to be able to approach the topic with multiple and critical lenses.

Eight Sessions: Participants will sign up to take part in this exploration and are expected to attend most, if not all the sessions. The sessions will last an hour and a half, and will take place in the evening throughout the year. Information gathered from the discussions may be used in future studies, but will remain anonymous. Each session will center on a discussion prompted by questions coupled with either something to read, to watch or an activity to do. When asked, participants will be expected to have read and prepared articles or reflections to bring to discuss for the next session. Readings will be provided and may change.

First Session: Antisemitism? Jew-Hatred? What is it? How would you define it? List different forms it can take? When and where was the first time you heard it? What were your reactions? Have you personally and directly experienced it? If so, what were the circumstances and what was your response? If not, have you taken note of antisemitism which you have not experienced? Do you relate to that term? Have you ever articulated your thoughts about antisemitism before? If yes, is there a difference with how you speak about antisemitism within a Jewish circle and to others? Do you think antisemitism should be a topic that is studied in an academic context, above and beyond the concern of Jewish communities? If not, why not? If yes, why? Have your thoughts about antisemitism evolved over time and if so, how?

Activity: Look at the list of various actions and determine whether you would consider it antisemitic or not? Ex. If a non-Jew would not like to marry a Jew, because s/he is Jewish? If someone thinks that Israel should not exist as a Jewish State? If a Jew makes a joke about the Jewish people using stereotypical tropes? If a non-Jew were to make that same joke?

Assignment: Take the questions that we asked during the session and interview a family member or friend Jew or Non-Jew about their understanding, experience and relationship to antisemitism. You may modify the questions.

Reading for next session: Kenneth L. Marcus. "The Definition of Antisemitism". *Global Antisemitism A Crisis of Modernity*. Vol 1. Ed. Charles Asher Small. (2013): 99-111. Print.

Jacob Katz "Misreadings" of Anti-Semitism. In *Commentary Magazine*.
<https://www.commentarymagazine.com/article/misreadings-of-anti-semitism/>

Second Session: Jewish responses to and explanations of antisemitism in the religious context. How do you respond to these texts? What questions do you have? If you have encountered these texts before, how have you understood them? Do they connect with other Jewish theological concepts?

Readings: Genesis 15:13

Exodus 1: 6-22

Deuteronomy 28

Ve'hi She'amdah: "In every generation they rise up against us to destroy us..." in conjunction with Sh'foh chamatcha.

(Chapter (find out which one from Steven!) by Jacob Katz about Jewish use of this...)

Judah Halevi, *The Kuzari* Book 1 Passage 111-beginning of 113 (+ other passages)

Watch:

Dara Horn. The Eicha Problem: What Jews Really Believe about Anti-Semitism. *Eli Talks*.

<http://elitalks.org/eicha-problem-what-jews-really-believe-about-anti-semitism>

Third Session: The most recent horror and tragedy that befell Jews in the 20th century—The Holocaust/Shoah. Around how old were you when you first heard about the Holocaust? Who told you and what was your reaction? What were you exposed first to, the Holocaust or World War II? What is the language that we use when we discuss the Holocaust? How has the Holocaust shaped your sense of Jewish identity, if at all? If you have no family who was directly persecuted in the Holocaust, what impact has the Holocaust had on your sense of Jewish identity? What is your experience with Holocaust education? What are some stories, ideas from this informal and formal education that continue to stand out for you? How do you think about the Holocaust at this point—is there more to discover or, in your opinion, has the subject been exhausted? Have you ever had to teach someone about the Holocaust who didn't know about it? If so, how did you handle the situation? What can be learned from the Holocaust and applied to genocide studies, or does the Holocaust lie in a separate category?

Reading:

Peter Novick. *The Holocaust and Collective Memory: the American Experience*. London: Bloomsbury (2000). Selections will be chosen.

Aharon Appelfeld. *Badenheim 1939*. Trans. David R. Godine. 1980 (The focus is intentionally not on the murders culminating in the Holocaust, but on the bustling, dynamic life that was cut off right before the war.)

(Donald Bloxham and A. Dirk Moses, "Introduction", in Bloxham and Moses (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Genocide Studies (in the field of genocide studies there is an enmity toward the holocaust.)*)

(Raphael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation—Analysis of Government—Proposals for Redress...*)(The murder as the focus of the Holocaust, not the persecution of the culture)

Forth Session: Overview of antisemitic hate-crimes that have occurred in North America (and briefly look at global antisemitism too) in recent years. How do we as individuals and as a community respond to these incidents? What is our responsibility, if any? How do we feel when antisemitic events are all

clustered together? How do we feel when we see blatantly antisemitic depictions of Jews or read about antisemitic incidents through the media?

Look at:

-List of antisemitic incidents around the globe in 2014

<http://www.adl.org/anti-semitism/international/c/global-antisemitism-2014.html?referrer=https://www.google.co.uk/#.VcL63PIViko>

-Jerome A. Chanes. *Antisemitism: A Reference Handbook*. P 216-223. Antisemitism in North America and U.N.

-Joel Kotek's presentation of images of Jews in media in Brussels

-The Hamas charter

Fifth Session: Israel. Antizionism and Antisemitism. Where is there overlap and where do they stand apart? Are there any experiences on campus related to Israel that you would like to discuss? (Talk about the UN, Zionism=racism.) How do you relate to Israel? How do you relate to the way that Israel is portrayed in the media? Or to the way that it is talked among people in your community and outside of your community?

Activity: Draw a spectrum or a map of how you view these terms: Criticism of Israel, Antizionism, and Antisemitism. Try to define them in relation to each other and by using examples.

Read: Dr. Samuel Schafler "Anti-Semitism in Historical Perspective"

<http://www.bjpa.org/Publications/downloadFile.cfm?FileID=573>

David Hirsh, "Anti-Zionism and Antisemitism Cosmopolitan Reflections". Ed. Charles Asher Small in *The Yale Papers: Antisemitism in Comparative Perspective*. ISGAP, New York, 2015. pp. 57-162.

Watch:

Crossing the Line 2: The New Face of Anti-Semitism on Campus

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tNDCcsH_wgU

Sixth Session: Self-Hating Jew. How would you define that term? How do you relate to it? In what context did you hear that term? Have you ever thought of yourself as one? Have you ever thought of another Jew in these terms? How does it interact with or differ from antisemitism? What is the fine line between stereotypes of Jews that are internalized by Jews through humor and self-hatred? To what extent and in front of what audience is it acceptable to be critical of common Jewish ways of thinking and behaving and at what point has the criticism crossed the line?

Read:

Paul Reitter. *On the Origins of Jewish Self-Hatred*. Princeton University Press, 2012.

Sander L. Gilman. *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews*. 1990.

(Meyer Levin, "Compulsion". 1956? Maybe)

C.R. Power and Sharon Power, "Embracing the Nation: Jewish Assimilationist and Anti-Zionist Responses to Modernity". *Global Antisemitism: A Crisis of Modernity*, Volume 1. Ed. Charles Asher Small. 113-119.

Dr. Lasha Darkmoon. "The Subtleties of Jewish Humor"

<http://www.theoccidentalobserver.net/2010/08/lasha-darkmoon-the-subtleties-of-jewish-humor/>

Seventh Session: Walking tour with Musée du Montréal about the diversity of Jewish Montreal and its experience of antisemitism.

Eighth Session: Do you think historical and contemporary antisemitism should be studied in Universities in North America? Why or why not? If yes, in what department would you place it? What are your ambivalences or precautions, if any? Have these sessions helped to broaden your understanding of antisemitism—if so, in what ways?