

A Language for and From Here: Introducing the Shofar Report, Part II

EMILY TAMKIN

Emily Tamkin is a journalist and author. She is a fellow with the Nexus Project Task Force.

How did we get here?

By “here,” I am referring to a place where American democracy is being dismantled and instrumentalized antisemitism is one of the tools taking it apart. Where the question of what it means to be an American Jew is at risk of morphing from a communal question to a matter of law, decided for political purposes, and where the charge of “antisemitism” is regularly used to try to silence criticism of Israel and US foreign policy.

What follows is a series of essays that tries to provide language with which to think and speak about the answer to that question: to describe the journey we followed to get here.

First, Lila Corwin Berman, professor of American Jewish history at New York University and a member of the Nexus Task Force, writes about [antisemitism and US history](#) – showing how the story of American exceptionalism toward Jews obscures antisemitism’s links to other hatreds and the way American Jews’ fates are bound with those of other minorities.

Next, Itamar Mann and Lihi Yona, associate professors of law at the University of Haifa, analyze [antisemitism’s place in the US legal system](#), arguing that efforts to quiet criticism of Israel by forcing Jewish identity into the framework of American law risk turning the question of “who counts as a Jew” over to the courts, excluding actual American Jews in the process.

Joshua Shanes, professor of Jewish history at University of California at Davis and a member of the Nexus Task Force, then takes us through a [history of antisemitic tropes](#) and their uses – and how some cynically claim tropes have been deployed in order to detract from criticism.

Finally, Irwin Kula, a seventh-generation rabbi and president emeritus of the National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership (CLAL), explores the [architectures of safety and power](#) older generations of American Jews have clung to – and why younger Jews are rejecting them.

Taken together, these essays paint a picture not only of American Jews’ past, but of our present. They should also provide insight into what could be our possible futures: the “there” toward which we might go. It is our hope that in better understanding how we got here, we might also find a language to describe how to move somewhere better.