

Name:

Class period:

**Do Now:**

**In your journal, answer the following questions. Make sure you are writing the FULL FIVE minutes. No stopping until the timer is done.**

After reading Harrison Bergeron in class, define “otherness”? What historical examples of “otherness” are there?

Lesson:

**Read the following excerpt and answer the following prompt:**

*The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*<sup>1</sup>, written by Geraldine Heng, states: “In 1218, Jews in England were forced by law to wear badges on their chests, to set them apart from the rest of the English population. This is the earliest historical example of a country’s execution of the medieval Church’s demand, in Canon 68 of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, that Jews and Muslims be set apart from Christians by difference of dress. In 1222m 1253, and 1275, English rulings elaborated on this badge for the Jewish minority - who had to wear it (men and women at first, then children over the age of seven)--its size, its color, and how it was to be displayed on the chest in an adequately prominent fashion. In 1290, after a century of laws that eroded the economic, religious, occupational, social, and personal status of English Jews, Jewish communities were driven out of England en masse, marking the first permanent expulsion in Europe” (15).

Make Connections between the Heng excerpt concerning English Jews in the Middle Ages and *Harrison Bergeron*. What are your own ideas about race in the Middle Ages?:

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<sup>1</sup> Heng, Geraldine. "Inventions/Reinventions." *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2019, pp. 15-55.

**Instructions:**

Breaking up into four groups, you will be examining four stations in the four corners of the room. You will spend 20 to 30 minutes with every article. Please leave your responses to the articles on the clipboard attached to every station. Remember the questions are guiding, but you may come up with other responses. **Do NOT forget to examine the images in the articles as well!** We will share our ideas at the end of the lesson prior to the writing assignment.

## Station 1

\*This article will be stationed on a laptop so students can access the images.

Questions to consider:

**Why is art important to culture/cultures?**

**How did different cultures work together? What does that say about the time in Europe?**

**Elaborate**

**Remember to click on the links and explore the artwork as well**

### Jews and the Arts in Medieval Europe<sup>2</sup>

Surviving works of art provide inadequate testament to the importance of the Jewish community of Europe in the Middle Ages. While always a minority population, and despite recurring, intense persecution and exile, Jews throughout Europe made key contributions to the intellectual life, art, science, and commerce of medieval and Renaissance Europe. Jews served as both patrons and artists, and the art that does survive reveals awareness by Jews of the artistic currents of the day and regular interaction with the majority

After the Romans' destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem in the year 70, the practice of Judaism shifted from a focus on sacrifice to the study of sacred texts, the celebration of holy days, and the religious observance of the life cycle, all of which provided opportunities for the production and patronage of art. Torah scrolls, comprising the five books of Moses, were undecorated, but Hebrew Bibles ([2018.59](#)) and other texts, were painted with narrative and decorative imagery. [Haggadot](#), books containing the text of the Passover Seder, sometimes depict scenes from the Bible or images of the contemporary celebrations of the Seder. Examples from [medieval Spain](#) are especially fine. (Jewish communities of the Iberian Peninsula have a particularly rich artistic and intellectual heritage owing to long periods of religious tolerance by both Muslims and Christians prior to the persecution of 1391 and eventually forced expulsion of the Jews in 1492 from Spain and 1497 from Portugal.) Works by Jewish scholars, such as the biblical commentator Rashi or the philosopher Maimonides, were also sometimes illustrated, as were books of science and law. Hebrew illuminated manuscripts might be painted by artists who also worked for Christian clients. The [Florentine](#) artist Mariano del Buono, for instance, was responsible for both a woman's [mahzor](#), or prayer book, and a Christian choir book ([96.32.15](#)). The most elaborately decorated Mishneh Torah to survive is the only known work for Jewish use created by the Master of the Barbo Missal, an artist who worked for important Christian patrons in Italy, including popes and secular princes ([2013.495](#)). Book decoration could also take the form of inventively rendered Hebrew script, such as [Arabic-looking](#) Hebrew texts.

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<sup>2</sup> Boehm, Barbara Drake, and Melanie Holcomb. "Jews and the Arts in Medieval Europe." In Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/jewm/hd\\_jewm.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/jewm/hd_jewm.htm) (originally published June 2008, last revised August 2010)

Though a number of ritual objects, such as Hanukkah lamps and kiddush cups, were prescribed for the proper observation of Jewish ceremonies, Jewish law gave only minimal instruction as to their form. Consequently, Jews often employed objects for religious rituals that might otherwise find a place in a Christian home, and recognizable, distinctive Jewish ceremonial objects evolved only gradually. For example, we know from manuscript illuminations that a secular drinking cup of glass or silver might be used as a kiddush cup, for blessing wine on Sabbaths and holy days ([06.141](#)). Wealthy Jews embraced the same luxury items favored by their Christian neighbors: [manuscript illustrations](#), coats of arms, or [Hebrew inscriptions](#) indicate that items such as ceremonial double cups ([17.190.609a,b](#)) and [aquamanilia](#) might sit in a Jewish cupboard.

Medieval synagogue architecture frequently adopted the form and decoration of contemporary Christian building. The synagogue at Regensburg, for example, built between 1210 and 1227, featured pointed arches, carved capitals and a rose window, as in a Gothic church ([26.72.68](#)). The thirteenth-century synagogue that survives at Prague similarly includes Gothic elements, including a non-figural, carved tympanum over the door.

[Medieval Christian objects](#) often attest to an intense dialogue with Jewish scholars. Because Christian faith developed out of Judaism, Christian theologians, beginning with Saint Jerome, were often intent on learning Hebrew. Others were eager to challenge Jewish belief, or were threatened by the Jews' lack of interest in converting. Persecutions linked to the [First Crusade](#) in 1096, the [Black Death](#), and later the Inquisitions, offer notorious examples of Christian intolerance and cruelty towards the Jews, and works of art can echo the sound of contemporary prejudice ([63.12](#)). Yet other works suggest a more nuanced Christian attitude about the heritage of Judaism. Among the most imposing are objects such as the massive bronze menorah in the Cathedral of Essen on the Rhine, where there was a thriving Jewish community, or the head of King David from [Notre-Dame](#) in Paris ([38.180](#)), where the University established a chair in Hebrew. The column figure of a prophet from Saint-Denis near Paris ([20.157](#)) is one of a series that, by the figures' placement at the entrance of the church, literally and figuratively provided the support necessary to sustain the church as the perceived rightful successor to the synagogue. Coincidentally, the figure comes from a [monastery](#) whose abbot was directly responsible for the Jews of the town. [Stained glass](#) in the church bears inscriptions proclaiming the relationship between God's covenant with Israel and Christian belief in a new covenant. Images of Jews and Jewish ceremony are often portrayed with remarkable accuracy. Some Spanish altarpieces, as recent scholarship has shown, portray the interiors of medieval synagogues and present biblical Jews in medieval costume ([25.120.929](#); [32.100.123](#)). These reflect Christian awareness of Jewish practice, and consultation with, or even the use of Jewish artists, to which surviving documentary evidence attests.

## Station 2

Questions to consider:

**What harmful effects happen when we “other” individuals?**

**Should we use modern terms when referencing history?**

**Do NOT forget to examine the images in the articles as well!**

### “Anti-Semitism” Before “Semites”: The Risks and Rewards of Anachronism<sup>3</sup>

by MATTHEW CHALMERS on JULY 13, 2017

“It’s anti-Judaism!” they barked. “There is no “anti-Semitism” until 1879.” The seminar at the Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies in Philadelphia had taken a gladiatorial turn. The cause? A terminological concern—something fairly common among Jewish Studies specialists. The critic’s objection? An offhand reference by the speaker to “anti-Semitism” in the sixteenth century.

True enough, prior to its emergence in late nineteenth-century Germany, no term with the root “Antisemit-” existed in common use (this is a complicated topic, so for more see chapter 2 of the book [Rethinking European Jewish History](#)). Even the term “semites” only emerges in the eighteenth century. “Semites” were defined (according to the best linguistic science of the time) by grouping together those who spoke languages such as Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic—as opposed to those languages called “Indo-European” (or sometimes, even more problematically, those with cultures designated as “Aryan”).

Many therefore argue that talking about “anti-Semitism” in the Middle Ages is anachronistic. So, what is it doing in a series dealing with medieval Jews and Jewishness? How helpful is it to talk of “anti-Semitism” before, as far as we know, anyone discriminated against Jews as semites—or even knew what a “semite” was? And how can thinking about that question let us think more deeply about the larger issues this [series](#) has concerned itself with—that is, race, racism, and the Middle Ages?

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<sup>3</sup> Chalmers, Matthew. "'Anti-Semitism' Before 'Semites': The Risks and Rewards of Anachronism." *The Public Medievalist*, edited by Paul B. Sturtevant, Ph.D., 13 July 2017, [www.publicmedievalist.com/anti-semitism-before-semites/](http://www.publicmedievalist.com/anti-semitism-before-semites/). Accessed 19 Mar. 2020.

“There’s No ‘anti-Semitism’ Before 1879”

**Allgemeine  
Zeitung des Judenthums.**

Ein unparteiisches Organ für alles jüdische Interesse.

<p><small>Diese Zeitung erscheint wöchentlich ein mal in 7 Bogen. Preis vierteljährlich 1 Mark. Infolge des Krieges sind die Preise für die Postzeitung oder deren Abnahme bedingt.</small></p> <p><small>Alle Werbungen und Zusendungen nehmen Anstellungen an.</small></p>	<p>Herausgegeben von <b>Rabbiner Dr. Ludwig Philippson in Bonn.</b></p> <p><small>Verlag von Baumgärtner's Buchhandlung in Leipzig.</small></p> <p><small>Beilagen werden mit 12 Mark berechnet.</small></p>	<p><small>In redactionellen Angelegenheiten steht man bis zu 10 U. Philippson in Bonn. Hauptsächlich der Interesse an W. Philippson in Leipzig und dessen Stellvertreter in Berlin, Breslau etc. steht man, welche die Besondere eingehen, findet in der successivsten Nummer Berücksichtigung.</small></p>
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43. Jahrgang. Leipzig, den 2. September 1879. № 36.

Jahrb. Festende Artikel: Zur Situation. — Der Kampf in Rumänien. VII. — Das 50jährige Jubiläum des jüdisch-theologischen Seminars in Breslau. — Streitschriften für die Juden. II. — Zeitungsnotizen: Deutschland: Westfalen, Deutsch-Brandenburg, Leipzig, Bremen. — Frankreich: Paris. — Serbien: Belgrad. — Bonn: Rottgen. Literarische Notizen. — Heilbronn: Correspondenz: Schreyer'sammlung. — Ein Bild aus dem Mittelalter (Gortz).

**Leitende Artikel.**

Bonn, 27. August.

**Dur Situation.**

Die außerordentliche Verwirrung, in welche die Parteien im deutschen Reich gerathen sind, und in der weder die Ziele noch die Maßregeln der einzelnen Parteien sich selbst und Anderen klar, aber ebenbürtig die Wege zu erkennen sind, welche die Staatsregierung zu beschreiten beabsichtigt, macht es uns zur besondern Pflicht, die Aufmerksamkeit nach zu erheben und die Symptome nicht zu übersehen, welche uns die nächste Zukunft angeben können. In lange schon und mit zu großer Anstrengung haben gewisse Parteien alle Welt gegen uns Juden aufzuheben, uns in jeder möglichen Weise zu verächtlichen und zu beschuldigen, unsere Stellung nach allen Seiten hin zu untergraben gesucht, haben zu diesem Zweck keine Mittel gespart, und wären sie die gemeinsten und niederträchtigsten, als daß wir nicht voraussetzen müssen, daß diese Parteien Weltentwürfen gegen uns im Schilde führen.

Seine Präferenzen bereits völlig entworfen. Wir werden dies sofort näher besprechen. Weniger entschieden kann dies von den conservativen Parteien angenommen werden. Ausschlag gebend ist endlich noch dieser Seite hin die Staatsregierung selbst. Es wird Jedem bekannt, daß es einem Rame, wie Fürst Bismarck ist, unmöglich ist, nachdem er auf dem Berliner Congreß der Nothwendigkeit aller Confessionen so nachdrücklich das Wort geredet, dieser irgend wie entgegen zu treten. Aber allerdings hat die Geschichte der modernen Politik zu oft Beispiele von der Handlung gegeben, welcher auch die ernstesten Staatsmänner sich unterworfen, so daß wir einen unerschütterlichen Ankergrund gefunden zu haben nicht verneinen dürfen. Dabei ist es doch ersichtlich, daß sich das preussische Staatsministerium immer mehr nach rechts verschoben hat, und der neue Cultusminister hat offen bekannt, daß er in politischer wie religiöser Beziehung in wesentlichen Fragen mit Jull nicht übereinstimme. Man gehört Jull zu der freiconservativen Partei und wir haben uns daher den jetzigen Unterrichtsminister weit mehr rechts zu denken.

Dennoch können wir gewöhnlich annehmen, daß in den jüngsten Veränderungen weit mehr ein Sieg des orthodoxen

The issue of *Allgemeine Leitung des Judenthums* in which the first known usage of antisemitismus appears (2 Sep. 1879).

There are two main schools of thought about the term “anti-Semitism.” Those in the first camp tie “anti-Semitism” to its linguistic occurrences—namely, when ordinary people used the words. They (correctly) note that the neologism “anti-Semitism” emerges onto the German literary scene around the 1870s and 1880s. To my knowledge, the first recorded use is in the Jewish newspaper *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* (2 Sep. 1879, p.564), which deployed it to criticize friends of a certain Wilhelm Marr, who planned to produce an “anti-Semitic weekly.”

Some, moreover, argue that while anti-Judaism has a long history, it wasn't until the late nineteenth century that racism—and hence “anti-Semitism”—became a primary principle of social organization. This, they suggest, was [catalysed by internal European nationalism and the so-called scramble for Africa](#). For example, historian David Engel writes:

...no necessary relation among particular instances of violence, hostile depiction, agitation, discrimination, and private unfriendly feeling can be assumed. Indeed, none has ever been demonstrated. Historians who, by treating some or all instances as part of a general ‘history of

antisemitism’ and theorizing about how the subject of that ostensible history should be defined, have nevertheless made such an assumption have done so on the basis not of empirical observation but of a socio-semantic convention created in the nineteenth century and sustained throughout the twentieth for communal and political ends, not scholarly ones.

In other words, as Engel argues, mashing together instances of anti-Jewish behaviour into “anti-Semitism” is misleading. It fails to reflect the situation on the ground in terms that those involved would have recognized. Thus, it forces often very different events into an artificially connected series, which inflates—and maybe even distorts—the significance of such events. The category of “anti-Semitism” ends up driving the history, not the other way around.

These scholars also suggest that it makes little sense to import a chronologically foreign term, “Semitic,” into any time or space in which its partner term, “Aryan,” was not used. This pair resonated in a specific political context. “Anti-Semitism” as a term became meaningful in debates about the assimilation and emancipation of Jewish communities throughout the developing democracies of nineteenth-century European nations—especially Germany. How, therefore, could the word have comparable meaning prior to those political and social settings which give it its documented, traceable historical content?

### From anti-Judaism to “anti-Semitism” in the Middle Ages



Frontispiece of 1596 republication of Martin Luther’s *Vom Schem Hamphoras* (1543), depicting the Judensau on the façade of the Wittenberg Stadtkirche

Other scholars, in the second camp, trace the origins of anti-Semitic behaviour to the Middle Ages. Some scholars even trace the origins of anti-Semitism back to ancient Greece and Rome.

That said, in general, specialists have been wary to extrapolate “Jewish” as a stable religious identity back before the collation and editing of rabbinic literature; the Mishnah (c.200CE) and the Talmud (c.600CE). After all, many of the characteristic practices of Jews that their opponents targeted (such as synagogue liturgy, festival observance, and halakha) rely on this literature and its interpretation.

Many scholars therefore follow a timeline similar to the one laid out in the 1960s and 1970s by historian Leon Poliakov in his monumental four-volume *History of Anti-Semitism* and explored by historian of Judaism Gavin Langmuir over the course of his thirty year career. This timeline argues that “anti-Semitism” kicked into high gear in the twelfth century, riding the wave of anti-Jewish violence in the wake of the First Crusade (1095-99). The medieval transformation of anti-Jewish imagery into a “staple” of European thinking vis-à-vis Jews then, as Professor Robert Chazan has talked about at length, results in modern “anti-Semitism.”

This transformation goes hand in hand with various arguments that the eleventh to thirteenth centuries saw the emergence of what R.I. Moore called a “persecuting society.” That “persecuting society” organized itself by grouping together those perceived as deviant (heretics, Jews, lepers) under a shared set of idioms for exclusion. It also more and more consistently portrayed the demonic in feminine form. It increasingly contrasted its own Christian identity to an imagined enemy of Christendom that sometimes took the form of a Jew and sometimes that of a Muslim.

By the convergence of these factors, Jews came to feature heavily in European Christian imaginings, both about contemporary Christendom and its future decline and fall. One of the most fascinating stories which the period produced is that of the ferocious Jewish lost tribes, becoming in Germany the “red Jews.” This race of monstrous destroyers would, it was feared, burst from behind the mountains of the far east and crash down onto Christian Europe. The *Book of John Mandeville* from the middle of the fourteenth century provides the Sparknotes version:

Men say that they will issue forth in the time of Antichrist, and that they will carry out great slaughter of Christian people. And for this reason, all the Jews that dwell in all lands always learn to speak Hebrew, in the hope that, when those of the Caspian mountains issue forth, the other Jews will know how to speak with them, and will conduct them into Christian lands, to destroy Christian people.





Propaganda slide c.1936 entitled “Throughout history, the nations defended themselves against Jewish usury,” reproducing three medieval depictions of Jewish economic activity.” This is how the medieval is pulled into a durable trend of anti-Semitic thought

Such a story departed from the Christian scriptures and from the history of scholastic exegesis, the interpretation of the Bible as taught in universities like Paris, Bologna, or Oxford. Rather, it constituted a **“durable ‘extra-Biblical system,’** combining three sets of old stories into a fresh anti-Jewish cocktail. First, old stories around Alexander the Great, in the traditions of the Alexander Romance, told of how the conqueror had imprisoned monstrous races behind a massive mountain chain in the east. This then merged with legends of the ten tribes of Israel lost after the conquest of the northern Kingdom by the Assyrians in 722BCE. Third, the biblical motif of Gog and Magog, the destroyers at the end of time, was added to the mix, tinged with viciously anti-Jewish rumors about ritual murder and child sacrifice.

Faced with such a sophisticated set of interlocking hostile attitudes and consequent pogroms, scholars from this camp have argued that such narratives are symptoms of a systemic fear of Jewishness: monstrous bodies, social threat, wielded as a weapon against the European Christian. This looks rather like an equation of blood, body, ethnicity, and religion. Doesn’t it thus make sense to include such systematic prejudice along with the “anti-Semitism” of later periods?

### Medieval “anti-Semitism”: A Useful Tool?

The key point turns, in part, on whether “anti-Semitism” is more appropriately thought of as a linguistic term—as the first academic camp holds—or a concept—as the second does. This academic debate is ongoing; there’s no chance of us resolving it here. Instead, steering away from the debate for a moment, what are the stakes of approaching pre-modern Jews with “anti-Semitism” in mind? Is it helpful to do so? What are the problems inherent in doing so?

On the one hand, there are some benefits to using “anti-Semitism” to refer to medieval anti-Judaism. Extending “anti-Semitism” back to the Middle Ages helps short-circuit arguments

that modern anti-Semitism emerges without any causal or ideological precedent. It shows, in other words, anti-Semitism's history.

Doing so also helps avoid overly rigid divisions between religious anti-Judaism and racial anti-Semitism. This type of division relies too much on separating the pre-modern from the modern, or the religious from the political, or the sociological from the psychological. People in the past, and the sources they left behind, do not chop these things up in the same way as we do—we should be careful in assuming they did. There was nothing inevitable about modern “anti-Semitism.” It resulted from specific, contingent ways of thinking, behaving, and fearing. And nor can it be bundled away as reliant on the religious past, or outdated racial thinking. It is a much more pervasive ideology; it conflates race and religion, and draws on both.

Moreover, “anti-Semitism” is admittedly an anachronistic term. But deploying tactical anachronism, [as professor of Medieval Literature Kathy Lavezzo points out](#), can help us understand what type of ideas we are dealing with. In this case, it helps signal that the history of Jews (and their identities) relies in equal measure on historical sources, their present-day relevance, and our own habits of language and conceptualization. In other words, it isn't just about what really happened. Our histories of Jewishness work best when they account for the effects of Christian anti-Judaism. If they don't, then they underestimate the effects of the past on our present ways of thinking about history.

Paying attention to this is particularly important when it comes to Jewishness. As Jewish Studies scholar [Cynthia Baker has recently argued](#) in her book *Jew*, to talk more generally about identity in America or Europe uses a vocabulary of difference reliant on past interactions with Jewishness. Professor of Religious Studies Annette Yoshiko Reed teases out the ramifications in [a recent Marginalia forum](#) addressing Baker's book:

Jewishness functions for Christianness perhaps akin to what [Frank B. Wilderson III](#) notes of blackness with respect to “the racial labor that Whiteness depends on for its unracialized ‘normality’”: it is the particularity without which a claim to universality cannot be articulated.

In other words, whiteness—and white supremacy—can behave as it does because it has learned to point away from itself, and instead point at black people as particular, different, as things worth pointing at. Without this act, whiteness could not function as a universal default; it might come to be seen itself as a thing worth pointing at.

In the same way, Reed suggests, it matters that Christians could point at Jews. Without that act of pointing, Christianity might never have become capable of being the assumed default position of

many Europeans and Americans. This all implies that past interactions with Jewishness lurk semi-submerged under many of our assumptions about the European Christian past—and our own identities in the present.

So, the question is not just whether such concepts and the terms relating to them are accurate. The issue at stake runs deeper than utility. Rather, how and to what degree, if used carelessly, do terms like “anti-Semitism,” “Jewishness” or “whiteness” have the power to quietly rewrite our histories? How much can these words veil, rather than reveal, the details? And how much do we care?

Drawing attention to the negative treatment of Jews in European history using a term that jars us, that stands out as anachronistic (i.e. “anti-Semitism”), rather than a more general term (i.e. “anti-Judaism”) can, perhaps, help train us to continually question which words we use, and consider how anachronistic they may or may not be. Such attention also helps us take a long hard look at what, therefore, we want to get out of the past.

### Medieval “anti-Semitism”: Obscuring the Past?



Lucas Cranach’s woodcut for the 1534 Luther Bible of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, with the foremost horseman outfitted as an Ottoman Turk.

On the other hand, interpreting all anti-Jewish activities as signs of “anti-Semitism” has its dangers. We have developed a robust rule-of-thumb for what “anti-Semitism” means: discrimination against Jews as a whole group. But stretching this “anti-Semitism” back into the Middle Ages risks implying that the story of those later classified as “semites” is a story only about Jews. This spurs us on to scrutinize the darker parts of the European Christian past—not a

bad thing in itself. But narrowing our view leaves out another piece of the puzzle: it threatens to obscure Islam from discussion, when European Christian identity formation cannot be understood without examining the ways that both Jews and Muslims were treated and imagined. As [Edward Said](#) writes, Arab and Jew were inseparable in constructing the category of “semitic”:

the transference of a popular anti-Semitic animus from a Jewish to an Arab target was made smoothly, since the figure was essentially the same.

Often, as Dorothy Kim (and others) argue, Muslims were even [fundamentally connected](#) with Jews in fraught relationships with medieval Christians. In his Dialogue of Peter and Moses, the twelfth-century Jewish convert Petrus Alphonsi inserted a heretical Jew into the backstory of the prophet Muhammad. The dress code “recommendations” in Canon 68 of the Fourth Lateran Council (another large church council, this time in 1215) targeted both Jews and Saracens. It notes that they could blend and become, to Christians, threateningly indistinguishable both from one another and from Christians themselves—even mistakenly resulting in prohibited sex:

In some provinces a difference in dress distinguishes the Jews or Saracens from the Christians, but in certain others such a confusion has grown up that they cannot be distinguished by any difference. Thus it happens at times that through error Christians have relations with the women of Jews or Saracens, and Jews and Saracens with Christian women. Therefore, that they may not, under pretext of error of this sort, excuse themselves in the future for the excesses of such prohibited intercourse, we decree that such Jews and Saracens of both sexes in every Christian province and at all times shall be marked off in the eyes of the public from other peoples through the character of their dress.



Jews identified with a yellow badge are burned at the stake, in the *Bildchronik* of Diebold Schilling (1515).

Furthermore, detaching “anti-Semitism” from its modern race-scientific core and its specific Euro-American history risks reintroducing an “eternal Jewish victim,” a character that slips out of our historical control. Anti-Semitic ideology often relies—like other modes of racial thought—on a hyper-realized Jew, whose characteristics are frozen in time. By losing the modern core of the ideology, we risk letting Jews become a stable constant around which history changes, and thus permitting this ideology in the back door.

In a [review essay](#) of three recent monographs on early modern Jewishness and race, scholar of religion Gil Anidjar makes a similar point. By stretching race—and racial “anti-Semitism”—back in time:

...the seat of progress, the center of this newfound and militant search for racism everywhere, is thereby washed clean of one of its most striking specificities: “the formation of a scientifically buttressed system of racial hierarchy,” the invention of a juridical and scientific mode of government which by way of military and bureaucratic (and scholarly) measures, transformed the populations of the world into mere instances of a narrow series of political categories: race or religion, caste or class, culture or gender.

Anidjar here reminds us that racism and thus “anti-Semitism” have their own concrete historical past. “Anti-Semitism” depended for its meaning on specific scientific and academic developments. Stripping away that concrete history implies that there is something about Jews in and of themselves, in any place and at any time, that solicits hatred. It freezes a fixed object, Judaism, as if what is important about Judaism when discussing “anti-Semitism” is that Christians victimize Jews—rather than giving any complex agency to Jews in history—and as if Judaism has been the same type of thing for over a thousand years. As Albert Lindemann [writes](#),

this can turn the Jew into a universalizable moral fable, turning both Jews and their antagonists into one-dimensional moral tales resistant to the more cautious tools of the historian—and even erasing any specific reference to their Jewishness:

Violent episodes against Jews burst forth like natural calamities or acts of God, incomprehensible disasters, having nothing to do with Jewish actions or developments within the Jewish world but only with the corrupt characters or societies of the enemies of the Jews. Even Jewish victims themselves in these accounts are implicitly denied their full humanity and often appear one-dimensional, passive and blameless, or heroic in a way that lacks a sense of human frailty and corruptibility under stress. Rather than tragedies, with often confused, inscrutable mixtures of motivations, conflicts between Jew and non-Jew emerge as simple stories of good and evil, innocence and guilt, powerless and powerful, heroes and villains.

### To Think with “anti-Semitism”—or Not



Cover of the 1937 publication of “Der ewige Jude [The Eternal Jew],” advertising a travelling anti-Semitic exhibition. Note both the whip—for bourgeois oppression—and the hammer and sickle—for communism.

So, on the one hand, it can be unhelpful to think in terms of medieval “anti-Semitism.” An “anti-Semitic” Middle Ages massages the medieval past into the shape—and limits—of our present concerns. An “anti-Semitic” Middle Ages dangerously risks ironing the Islam out of “anti-Semitism.” And an “anti-Semitic” Middle Ages risks letting modernity—and its specific racial and scientific attack on Jewishness—off the hook by tracing genuine “anti-Semitism” into times and places before the consequences of modernity were felt. As the infamous Nazi image of “Der ewige Jude” demonstrates, much of the imagery of anti-Semitism relies on collapsing anti-Jewishness into other forms of political anxiety at which we tend to look less askance, such as fear of communism or capitalist conspiracy.

On the other hand, thinking about the Middle Ages through the lens of “anti-Semitism” can be a good thing. Scrutinizing how the term “anti-Semitic” strays back in time similarly provides an opportunity to light up a different path through the mazes of the past. By making the process of concept-formation visible, we see more clearly what affects our own assumptions—and the behaviours helpful to us in making sure we write our histories, rather than letting our inherited assumptions speak for us. And it acts as an easily recognizable shorthand, a hook on which our thoughts can wriggle around.

In short, whether we want to use “anti-Semitism” or not, thinking about what is at stake in our choices can concentrate our attention on what we want to get out of the past. We—all of us spending time with the past, not just professional historians—remind ourselves of a somewhat awkward fact: our main historical challenges often come not from anachronism, which we are often rather good at spotting, but from taking for granted that we know exactly what’s at stake in the concepts and questions with which we approach history. Paying attention, instead, to how concepts like “anti-Semitism” distort or describe the past helps equip us to sensibly and sensitively negotiate our shared and contested pasts—especially on topics as fraught and urgent as “anti-Semitism” and race.

### Station 3

Questions to consider:

**Does this article change your ideas about the way Jewish people were treated in the middle ages? Why or why not?**

**How do images influence our thoughts concerning history?**

**Do NOT forget to examine the images in the articles as well!**

#### Why Medieval Art Is So Unflattering To Jews<sup>4</sup>

By Robert Chazan (Haaretz)



*Derick Baegert, 'Crucifixion,' Dortmund, ca. 1475. Propsteikirche, Dortmund.*

*"Dark Mirror: The Medieval Origins of Anti-Jewish Iconography," by Sara Lipton, Metropolitan Books, 416 pages, \$37*

Those wishing to gain insight into the maturation of Jewish studies over the past few decades would be well served to immerse themselves in Sara Lipton's recent book, "Dark Mirror: The Medieval Origins of Anti-Jewish Iconography."

Lipton has amassed a rich trove of Christian art as data for her study, and has brought to bear on these materials the eye and mind of a well-trained and sophisticated art historian. She has analyzed Christian art and iconography from multiple and original perspectives, and used them to buttress some recent and important themes in the history of Europe and its Jews. At the same

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<sup>4</sup> Chazan (Haaretz), Robert. "Why Medieval Art Is So Unflattering To Jews." Forward.com, Forward Association, 9 Apr. 2015, [forward.com/schmooze/218198/why-medieval-art-is-so-unflattering-to-jews/](http://forward.com/schmooze/218198/why-medieval-art-is-so-unflattering-to-jews/). Accessed 21 Mar. 2020.



time, Lipton has raised serious questions with respect to well-worn and widely accepted perspectives on the history of Europe and its Jews.

Lipton's early observations about the book's title serve as a fitting introduction to the complex thinking that readers will encounter in its pages: "It is perhaps more than a little ironic that a book that often seeks to modulate the too-blackened canvas of medieval Jewish history with shades of gray should be entitled 'Dark Mirror.' I have chosen this title, overworked metaphor and all, in part because it acknowledges that Christian images of Jews were indeed often dark and hostile.

But it is also intended as a warning that these images provide only a distorted view of the period: that Christian art must not be seen as transparently 'mirroring' either prevailing Christian attitudes or actual Jewish status. Indeed, I argue throughout this book that anti-Jewish imagery was a significant factor in the creation of the attitudes and conditions it is often held to reflect."

These ruminations serve as a warning to readers that they are about to be exposed to complicated and astute observations on the relationship of art to life, to the reinforcement of many prevailing modern stereotypes of anti-Jewish attitudes in medieval Christian Europe, and to the undermining of some of these stereotypes of ubiquitous and implacable Christian hatred of Jews.



'Christ Among the Doctors' by Albrecht Durer, 1506.

*'Christ Among the Doctors' by Albrecht Durer, 1506.*

The most important data utilized by Lipton are presented in the 112 illustrations that usefully accompany the text. Lipton organizes her materials into six chronologically arranged chapters, which enables her to highlight major changes that took place in medieval European society and in its artistic depictions of Jews – from traditional imagery of Jewish denial of Christ and responsibility for his crucifixion, to medieval imagery of Jews as usurers and murderers of Christian contemporaries. (Chapter Six – “Where are the Jewish Women?” – stands outside the basic chronological organization but nonetheless presents fascinating issues.)

Perhaps the most important perspective brought to bear by Lipton reminds her readers that Christian art was addressed to Christians, meaning that efforts to understand the portrayal of Jews must begin with understanding the Christian purposes of these depictions. In order to grasp these purposes, she begins quite properly with traditional Christian thinking, focused at the outset on Paul and Augustine.

It is the Pauline and Augustinian legacy (indeed Augustine saw himself as simply an explicator of his teacher Paul) that Lipton emphasizes in the first appearances of Jews in medieval Christian art, in the early 11th century, as deniers of Christ. She convincingly refutes the occasionally expressed view that Jews were introduced into Christian art as a result of heightened anti-Jewish animosity unleashed by the First Crusade.

In rebutting this view, Lipton reinforces the growing sense that the violence associated with the First Crusade must not be exaggerated. This anti-Jewish violence played no role in the papal call to the crusade, or within the Christian armies that successfully conquered Jerusalem in 1099; it was vigorously repudiated by the key spiritual figure that dominated the Second Crusade.



‘The Ritual Murder of Simon of Trent.’ Hartmann Schedel, *Liber Chronicarum*, fol. 254v, Nuremberg, 1493.

In a more general way, and as she promises in her explication of the title of the book, Lipton — like others writing of late on medieval European Jewry — dismisses the portrayal of medieval European Jewish history as a sequence of unremitting horrors. This view, formulated as part of the pre-modern sense of tragic post-70 C.E. Jewish history, was espoused by many in the earliest wave of modern Jewish history writers, most notably and most influentially by Heinrich Graetz. Recently, a number of historians of medieval European Jewry have distanced themselves from this simplistic paradigm.

There were certainly well-documented negative developments over the medieval centuries: accelerating limitations on Jewish life demanded by the leadership of the Church; the spate of expulsions from major European states beginning at the end of the 13th century; the outbreak of periodic anti-Jewish violence; the reflections of intensifying animosity in Christian literary sources; and the evidence provided by Lipton of similar intensification of animosity in the realm of Christian art.

Nonetheless, Lipton — like others — warns against facile exaggeration of this negativity. During the late-medieval centuries and despite the difficulties endured, European Jewry continued to grow and to constitute an ever-increasing segment of world Jewry, eventually coming to dominate the world Jewish scene.

At the same time, Lipton reinforces the sense projected by a number of recent students of medieval Jewish history that anti-Jewish animus did in fact intensify over the course of the late medieval centuries. Post-Holocaust ruminations on the factors that paved the way to genocide focused heavily on the legacy of traditional Christian thinking. This initially led to the clarification of negativity toward Judaism and Jews in classical Christian theology.

With the passage of time, the perception emerged that Christian views of Judaism and Jews were hardly static, that there was noticeable change from antiquity through the Middle Ages, and that new and major anti-Jewish themes emerged over the course of the medieval centuries.

Lipton's six chronological chapters trace the deterioration of Christian imagery of Jews during these medieval centuries – which, again, she insists must be seen against the backdrop of evolving Christian sensibilities, sensitivities and needs.

While each of these chapters addresses an identifiable stage in the process of deterioration of the imagery of Jews, to this reader the transition with the most impact appears in the chapter covering the years 1220 to 1300. During this period, the formats in which imagery of the Jews appears proliferated markedly.

Equally if not more important was the change in focus: “In moralizing imagery in various types of artwork, coins and coin-filled bags signified moneylending or avarice; cats, which were associated with hunting and nighttime and symbolized heresy, were shown with Jews; and crows, which collected shiny objects, and toads, which swelled themselves up, signaled greed and usury, the illicit amassing of wealth. Through these and other images, Jews, traditionally used to signify the outdated past, came to be identified with the most ‘modern’ of activities and tendencies — moneylending, philosophy, heresy, curiosity.”



*A miniature from Grandes Chroniques de France depicting the expulsion of the Jews // Wikimedia Commons.*

The transformation of European Jews from a relic of the outdated past to a source of present-day danger was a giant step in the deterioration of the imagery of medieval European Jewry.

Lipton's insistence on the complexity of the issues with which she deals and on the importance of maintaining balance and perspective — Jewish circumstances were hardly uniformly dolorous, but deteriorating imagery of Jews can be discerned and traced — is ultimately grounded in the fundamental ambivalence with which Christians (and perhaps especially medieval Christians) viewed the Jews of antiquity and their Jewish contemporaries.

On the one hand, Jews had paved the way for Jesus, who fulfilled the divinely revealed prophecies that foretold his advent and activities; on the other hand, Jews had themselves failed to grasp the meaning of Jesus' life and activities; the supposed divine punishment visited upon post-70 Jews served as a convincing sign of the reality of divine reward and punishment in the cosmos in general, and of the truth of Christianity more specifically.

Full awareness of this combination of positives and negatives is evident throughout Lipton's excellent study, and underlies the complexity and sophistication with which she treats her important subject.

*Robert Chazan is Scheuer Professor of Jewish History at New York University.*

## Station 4

Questions to consider:

**How does our interpretation of the past affect our present?**

**Why is accuracy of history important?**

**How do individuals manipulate history?**

**Do NOT forget to examine the images in the articles as well!**

### Medieval Scholars Joust With White Nationalists. And One Another.<sup>5</sup>

By Jennifer Schuessler

Each May, some 3,000 people descend on Kalamazoo, Mich., for the International Congress on Medieval Studies, which brings together academics and enthusiasts for four days of scholarly panels, performances and after-hours mead drinking.

But in recent years, the gathering affectionately known as “K’zoo” — and the field of medieval studies itself — has been shadowed by conflicts right out of the 21st century.

Since the 2016 presidential election, scholars have hotly debated the best way to counter the “weaponization” of the Middle Ages by a rising tide of far-right extremists, whether it’s white nationalist marchers in Charlottesville, Va., displaying medieval symbols or the white terrorist who murdered 50 people at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, using weapons inscribed with references to the Crusades.

And hanging over it all is an even more fraught question: Does medieval studies have a white supremacy problem of its own?

To some scholars, the answer is yes, and not just because the field is overwhelmingly white. Scholarship on the Middle Ages, they argue, helped create the idea of white European superiority, and still bolsters it today. There have been calls to “decolonize” medieval studies by confronting the structural racism that has kept both nonwhite scholars and nonwhite perspectives outside its gates.

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<sup>5</sup> Schuessler, Jennifer. "Medieval Scholars Joust With White Nationalists. And One Another." *The New York Times*, edited by Dean Baquet, Sulzberger, 5 May 2019, [www.nytimes.com/2019/05/05/arts/the-battle-for-medieval-studies-white-supremacy.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/05/arts/the-battle-for-medieval-studies-white-supremacy.html). Accessed 21 Mar. 2020.

On the other side are those who see the field as under siege by activists seeking to replace scholarship with ritualistic denunciations of white male privilege, pursued with a with-us-or-against-us zeal.

There have been vitriolic blog exchanges, expletive-laced social media conflagrations and [conference blowups](#). (Some members of the group Medievalists of Color have announced they will be boycotting this year's Kalamazoo conference, which begins on Thursday.) Facebook groups have splintered amid charges and countercharges of bullying, cybermobbing and infiltration by trolls.

In the middle are the broad mass of medievalists, who may sympathize with one camp or the other, but mostly want to stay out of the fray.

“People don't become medievalists because they want to be political,” said [Richard Utz](#), a literary scholar at Georgia Tech and president of the International Society for the Study of Medievalism. “Most are monkish creatures who just want to live in their cells and write their manuscripts.”

The term “medieval” came into use in the 19th century, to refer to Europe from roughly 500 to 1500, between the end of the Roman Empire and the rise of modernity. But while the field may seem divorced from the contemporary world, its own origins were hardly apolitical.

In Europe, academic study of the Middle Ages developed in tandem with a romantic nationalism that rooted the nation-state in an idealized past populated by Anglo-Saxons and other supposedly distinct “races.”

In the United States, universities, cultural institutions and wealthy elites drew on Gothic architecture, heraldry and other medieval trappings to [ground American identity](#) in a noble (and implicitly white) European history. So did Southern slaveholders and the Ku Klux Klan.

Today, the field is sprawling and interdisciplinary, and includes historians, literary scholars, art historians, philologists, archaeologists and others. Its boundaries have expanded past its traditional focus on Northwest Europe to include the Mediterranean, Eastern Europe, the Middle East and even, among those advocating a [“global Middle Ages,”](#) the entire world.

But it remains an intellectually conservative field that has largely resisted the waves of critical theory that have washed over much of the humanities in recent decades. It has also been slow to take up [the subject of race](#).

While archaeological evidence shows that Africans and other nonwhite people [were present](#) in medieval Europe, some scholars argue that race is a modern construct, with limited relevance in a period when differences in religion mattered more than skin color. But other medievalists see in such arguments a desire to wall off medieval scholarship from uncomfortable questions.

“It’s about asserting the racial and political innocence of the Middle Ages,” said [Cord Whitaker](#), an assistant professor of English at Wellesley College and a member of [Medievalists of Color](#). “For medievalists to try to protect the field from engagement with race is ultimately to try to withdraw from the world.”

If withdrawal from the world was ever possible, it has become harder lately. During the 2016 election, memes like Donald Trump in armor on a horse and [the Crusader slogan “Deus vult”](#) (God wills it) began proliferating on social media. White nationalists [stepped up recruiting](#) on college campuses, sometimes co-opting the language of identity politics with calls for students to explore their “white heritage.”



Some marchers at the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Va., in 2017 displayed medieval symbols, like the rune shown on this flag, which was also used by the Nazis. Credit...

Edu Bayer for The New York Times



Then came Charlottesville, where the sight of marchers carrying shields evoking the Knights Templar or holding banners with Anglo-Saxon runes came as a shock to many scholars.

“Medieval Studies always wants to be relevant,” said [Ruth Mazo Karras](#), a historian at Trinity College, Dublin, and president of the Medieval Academy of America. “But now we’ve become relevant in the wrong way.”

A week after Charlottesville, the Medieval Academy and 28 other scholarly groups released a statement condemning the “fantasy of a pure, white Europe that bears no relationship to reality.” Some medievalists overhauled their teaching, discussing misappropriations of history along with the history itself. Suddenly, professors began worrying about how to respond to students who might bring up white nationalist themes in class — or who might assume that medievalists themselves are white supremacists.

“We had to think about, ‘Who do they think we are?’” said Nicholas Paul, director of the Center for Medieval Studies at Fordham University and a co-editor of the forthcoming book [“Whose Middle Ages? Teachable Moments for an Ill-Used Past.”](#)

The idea of medieval studies as a haven for white nationalist ideas gained ground when Rachel Fulton Brown, an associate professor of medieval history at the University of Chicago, began feuding with Dorothy Kim, an assistant professor of medieval English literature at Brandeis, after Dr. Kim, writing on Facebook, highlighted an old [blog post](#) of Dr. Fulton Brown’s titled “Three Cheers for White Men,” [calling it](#) an example of “medievalists upholding white supremacy.”

Many scholars [were outraged](#) when Dr. Fulton Brown, in a riposte to Dr. Kim written a few weeks after Charlottesville, tagged the right-wing writer Milo Yiannopoulos, whose website then ran an article about the dispute. Last July Mr. Yiannopoulos followed up with a 16,000-word attack on the field, which assailed Dr. Kim and others as “an angry social justice mob.”

The article caused a furor, as scholars accused colleagues of providing screenshots of private Facebook conversations and surreptitious recordings of conference sessions to Mr. Yiannopoulos.

Since then, Dr. Fulton Brown has become more isolated, as some who initially supported her [have distanced themselves](#) after she began citing the far-right writer Vox Day and even, in a recent blog post, entertained the idea that the Christchurch shooting might have been a [“false flag operation.”](#) (Dr. Fulton Brown, in an interview, said the depiction of her as a white supremacist or a member of the alt-right is “a misnomer” that “depends on a fantasy about me.”)

But the climate of intense suspicion and division the feud helped foster, particularly on social media, remains.

Paul Halsall, editor of the [Internet Medieval Sourcebook](#), is among the scholars who remain friendly with Dr. Fulton Brown, the author of highly regarded studies of medieval devotion to the Virgin Mary, though he said he disagrees with her political views “profoundly.”

Last summer, he started two open Facebook groups after one dedicated to the Kalamazoo conference erupted in a dispute about racism and its comments policy, which resulted in a number of people, including its moderator, leaving or being expelled from the group.

Dr. Halsall deplored what he called the “cooties” approach that he says has taken hold, chilling debate.

“There’s this idea that if you talk to someone, you are stained,” he said. He added: “Anyone who is vaguely middle of the road or conservative is suddenly racist or white nationalist.”

Dr. Kim, a member of Medievalists of Color, said white medievalists who say they fear weighing in, lest they be accused of racism, are enacting a “classic white fragility script.” “Those of us from marginal, targeted groups have no choice” about speaking up, she said. “This is about our own survival in the field.”

Some efforts to make the field more inclusive have met with resistance. Last year, the Medieval Academy created an annual award for scholars of color named for [Belle da Costa Greene](#), the first manuscript librarian of the Pierpont Morgan collection, and an African-American woman who passed as white.

An anonymous group left a donation of \$350 with a letter declaring support for the idea of inclusion but objecting to “skin pigmentation as grounds for a scholarly grant,” according to Lisa Fagin Davis, the academy’s executive director.

Last year, there was an outcry after the Kalamazoo conference, which is run by the Medieval Institute at Western Michigan University, rejected a number of panels proposed by Medievalists of Color. An [open letter](#), signed by more than 600 scholars, denounced the organizers for “a bias against, or lack of interest in, sessions that are self-critical of medieval studies, or focused on the politics of the field.” The panels about race that were accepted, some scholars noted, were organized by white scholars.

Jana Schulman, the director of the Medieval Institute, said [procedures for selecting panels](#) this year were being overhauled to be more inclusive and transparent. She said she regretted that members of Medievalists of Color were [staying away](#), calling their critique of the field “important.”

“An individual’s area of interest completely colors what it is they look at” in the past, Dr. Schulman said. “Those of us in the field need to be aware that ours was maybe limited.”

**Written response:**

Making sure to reference *Harrison Bergeron* and at least one article, answer one of the following prompts.

- How can the misrepresentation of the past affect the future?
- How does labeling individuals as “others” harm society?
- What can people do to help dismantle harmful stereotypes in society?