

## **Anti-Semitism on College Campuses**

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Larry Bernstein:

Welcome to What Happens Next. My name is Larry Bernstein. What Happens Next is a podcast which covers economics, politics, and education.

Today's topic is Increasing Anti-Semitism on College Campuses.

Our speaker is Gary Saul Morson who is the Lawrence B. Dumas Professor of the Arts and Humanities and Professor of Slavic Languages and Literatures at Northwestern University. Saul's work ranges from literary theory, the history of ideas, and the relation between literature and philosophy in the works of Chekov, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy.

I want to learn from Saul about what is driving the current wave of antisemitism and why it is so universal? Why has the idea of intersectionality been interpreted to be that Jews are the oppressors? And how do you explain organizations that popped up like Queers for Palestine? And given the anti-Semitic attacks from other progressives, will left-wing Jews continue to vote and ally with anti-Israeli progressive activists?

Buckle up!

Saul can you please begin with your opening six-minute remarks with a framework to understanding antisemitism.

Gary Saul Morson:

My topic is the increase in antisemitism in the United States on college campuses. The key point is that it does not help to think of an anti-Semite as one group with one motivation.

The first type of antisemite is the type we are all familiar with, which is the incorrigible anti-Semite. This is a person who begins with a deep rooted hatred of Jews and then looks for reasons to justify it. The reasons might matter in how they appeal to others, but it does not matter in their conviction.

And the proof is that if one reason does not work, that they go to another. The history of antisemitism has been the switching. This has been one of the remarkable features of completely different justifications. So, you get religious justifications, social justifications, and then racial justifications; the Jews are all communists, and the Jews are all capitalists. With the incorrigible anti-Semite there really is no way to address it. You cannot appeal to them with reason because reason is not driving it.

The second type are people who do not think of themselves as anti-Semites because they do not begin with hatred of Jews. They arrive at anti-Semitic attitudes and policies, but that is not where they start and it's not their motivation.

For example, ideologies that are disseminated on campus called intersectionality, but there are others that are appeal to people in the name of fighting oppression, humanistic values that divide the world into the good guys and the bad guys.

It is common to invoke ideology where there is no middle ground. If you are not an anti-racist, you are a racist would be one formulation of this. That the world divides neatly into the oppressors and the oppressed and then in advance who to dislike because all the bad things that apply to one in the oppressor category apply to the others. They must be racist; they must be colonialists. Well, the only question is who you slot into which role. We can all think of examples. Radical feminists found themselves on the side of the oppressor when they were not sympathetic with the trans-movement.

Israel winds up with the Jews in the oppressor class. They are obviously not guilty of genocide, but anybody who's guilty of something in the bad category is guilty of everything that anybody in the bad category does. In another circumstance, this same thinking might have put the Jews in the victim category.

The problem here is the simplistic ideology that sees the world in black and white that will not open your mind to other possibilities. The people who do this are sincerely offended when you accuse them of antisemitism, even though they are saying these terrible things because their motivation genuinely does not start there.

A third group who do not start out as incorrigible anti-Semites, but believe something about Jews or Israel, which is horrible but false, but they believe it. The example is if I dislike Hamas or the Taliban, it is not because I dislike Arabs or Afghans. It is because of what I know these groups believe in and do. Suppose you believe something about a group that is horrible, but it is not true. That is what you get with a great deal of anti-Semites.

Recently I read a book called *The Nazi Conscience*, and all these groups were present. After the war, people were interviewed, and they completely distanced themselves from anti-Semitism and sincerely, they did not think themselves as anti-Semites. But then when you question them, they would say these appalling things about Jews. But they thought those things were the facts as opposed to what the anti-Semites believed, which was not. They had been convinced by the propaganda.

In Nazi Germany or in the Soviet Union, they have no other source of news. That is what a totalitarian society is. You understand why they might believe something that simply is not true. That is what they are told all the time and they never hear anything else. But in the United States, you can hear other things. The problem is people silo themselves. You either believe it because it comes from your source of news, or you discount it in advance because it does not come from your source of news. It must be from those bad people. So, it must be a lie. You are guaranteed never to have anything to change your belief. It is this silo effect that could lead you to believe anything, no matter how awful or absurd, not right away, but if it is repeated often enough, you will. I have much more sympathy with Russians or Germans who fell victim to this because they had no choice, but we do. I am much less sympathetic with the Americans who wind up succumbing when they easily could look for something else.

To combat, the first kind of antisemitism, I do not think you can do anything. To combat the second type, you must change our education system so that the intersectionality framework that divides the world into the good or bad, which is taught in our secondary schools and in our colleges, this is bound to lead to horrible things, not just anti-Semitism, but other horrible things too. Because when you do that, there are a group of people who are irredeemably evil, and you could do anything to them.

If people were shocked by those who the day that the Hamas attacks took place could justify that brutality, they could justify anything, and it would not have to be against Jews, it could be some other group some other time.

My favorite comment of Alexander Solzhenitsyn where he said, “The line between good and evil does not run between classes or races or any groups. It runs through every human heart including your own.” When you start thinking this way, you are not going to fall victim or much less likely. The third type where somebody believes in what is not true. We must persuade people not to silo themselves. Think maybe there are decent people who disagree with you. We used to think that about the Republicans, or the Democrats are wrong, but they are like us. When you silo yourself, then you can wind up believing in anything. You must be willing to listen.

Larry Bernstein:

When did intersectionality enter the school curriculum? What is the origin of this idea?

Gary Saul Morson:

I am using intersectionality as a shorthand for a certain ideological thinking. It doesn't have a neat beginning. When I was in college during Vietnam years, it was present. I did not call it intersectionality then. It was revolutionary thinking it might come from Maoism or Marxism. There could be different sources of it. It appealed to a relatively small group, but what we have seen in the last 50 years is that that group took over the university humanities and social science

departments, and gradually they introduced more of it until it reaches a tipping point where it accelerates.

When did we reach that tipping point? My guess is about 15 years ago that things were different. When 9/11 took place, people were able to pull together. But by 2010, I do not think that was the case anymore and that things have gotten worse since.

Larry Bernstein:

There is longstanding antisemitism in Germany, Russia and the rest of Europe and it is also pervasive in the Muslim world. And now today it is commonplace on US college campuses. Why is anti-Semitism universal?

Gary Saul Morson:

It spreads with the ideologies. It is an essential part of Western medieval culture and Islam. When those ideologies spread, it spreads with it so that long after Christian antisemitism is mostly a thing of the past, it has come up with justifications that can spread elsewhere. So, Mark's obviously no Christian, but if you read his essay on the Jews, it reads like Medieval or Martin Luther's attacks on Jewish hucksterism and Jewish money lenders.

It was different for the Muslims. In our time, Islamism borrows heavily from other totalitarian ideologies from Nazism and communism. There is also an argument which is that so many people hate Jews means where there is smoke, there's fire, and there has got to be a reason, right? So the more hatred there is, the more hatred there is.

Larry Bernstein:

Israel has thousands of Thai agricultural workers. On 10/7th, Hamas terrorists beheaded and murdered some of them and kidnapped others. Why did Hamas target the Thais if they were not Jews?

Gary Saul Morson:

They are working for the Jews their enemies. What Hamas did is what you do when you think you are dealing with the devil or his men.

Larry Bernstein:

You hear groups called Feminists for Hamas or Gays for Hamas. Hamas opposes feminist and homosexual rights as we understand them in the West. Why do organizations that were created for a single purpose like gay rights ally with another organization that opposes its core mission?

Gary Saul Morson:

One of my colleagues had a little sign that said Chickens for KFC. The same logic there. There are two explanations. One of them is intersectionality. If the Jews are on the bad side and the Palestinians are on the good side and the gays are on the good side and the straights are on the bad side. It is naive but that is what intersectionality produced.

There is a second reason. If you read the African American writer Richard Wright, who for a while joined the communist party. He has a famous essay where explains why he left, and these are the people who are going to support blacks in America. After a while he realized that that's just a convenient tool. They actually don't give it a damn. What they care is using something that will give them power. When he realized this was what it was, then he left.

Many of the people who run these groups know very well what the score is. Advocating for gay rights is like the communist advocating for black rights. It's what you do if you want to upset the system. It does not matter for people that Islamists will throw gays off buildings. You're not really concerned about gays to begin with. So, you have sincere people who just think in an intersectional way. And then you have those who are not sincere but know how to play this game. I keep thinking of Patrisse Cullors from Black Lives Matter who kept repeating that she was a trained Marxist. What is a Marxist trained to do? She clearly meant not someone who reads Marx. They are trained to think in precisely this way and to know how to use power in this way. She meant Marxist-Leninist. I imagine they are a minority. You do not need many. And there are some who their whole lives have been taught good guys and bad guys. If you raise people like this from middle school, you are going to get that.

Larry Bernstein:

Harvard was ranked last by FIRE last in free speech for all American universities. Former Harvard President Claudine Gay was an advocate to protect students from minor microaggressions like the use of the wrong pronouns, but with genocide of the Jews she discovered the virtues of free speech. Are double standards what upset people?

Gary Saul Morson:

All universities are the same. Free speech, if they believed it, is a wonderful standard, but it is not a great double standard. If they try to repress anyone they disagree with and all a sudden, they claim free speech in congress, then no way. If they had really had always been free speech players, it would have made sense. In the case of Harvard, it is likely that Claudine Gay really is an intersectional DEI that is what she made her career and therefore the Harvard Board picks her. They know what they are getting because she had been doing that beforehand. Dividing the world in that way. I take it in a matter of sincere conviction. But in some places, university administrators learned back in the sixties that if they stand up against the mob, nobody defends them, and they get fired.

We have to reach the point where boards of trustees, and faculty hopefully, but that's the long shot, will say, "no, we know that this is the right stand to take. We're not going to let the mob." That is what it would have to take. What do you expect the university president to do if they make the right statement? They are out in a week.

Larry Bernstein:

The University of Chicago has a free speech policy, which requires that the school not take political positions that it be neutral like Switzerland to encourage debate on campus.

Saul, you have been selected to be part of a working group at Northwestern University to figure out what your university policies should be. Tell us about what your organizing principles are to establish a free speech movement on campus.

Gary Saul Morson:

The Chicago principle was neutrality, and the people can take stands that the university does not. That would be a lot better than what we have got, but it is not particularly good. What college should be doing is teaching people to have civil discussions, real dialogue, where they listen to people of other points of view. It is not shouting at civil discourse. We teach people empathetic listening to put yourself in other points of view to learn in the process. That is what universities should be doing. That goes beyond free speech. It goes beyond neutrality. The university has to be neutral to do that, but it should say, "if you want to scream awful things, you can do it. But we are trying to teach you to do better than that."

Larry Bernstein:

Next topic is protest on campus. Students will always be outraged about something. What should be the university rules to encourage civil discourse and allow protestors to articulate their message on campus?

Gary Saul Morson:

You can state your views. What you cannot do is intimidate people. That is crossing over into action. And clearly what has happened on campuses is not just stating views. It's way beyond. When you lock people in a room and bang on the door and scream slogans against them, the most generous interpretation of free speech does not defend that. But to draw the line there, you have already lost the battle. What you really have to do is get students from day one to realize what a productive civil dialogue and conversation is, and then they'll reject this kind of thing. People will not want to do it because they will instantly lose support because it runs against the ethos of the campus. But you got to help create that ethos.

Larry Bernstein:

Some employers have announced that they will not hire students who signed the pro-Hamas letter or who are affiliated with Students for Justice in Palestine. Some of these students are shocked and upset about this. They feel that the university should be a safe place to express opinions even for letters to the public at large.

Does it make sense for employers to adopt these hiring practices?

Gary Saul Morson:

The point is that you do not want those people in your organization, and you do not want Klansmen in your organization either. What one will avoid is taking that to the point where we do not want Democrats or Republicans in their organization. You could do that. And in extreme cases like this, it makes sense because they must work with other people. But you do not want there to be mission creep there where it starts being anybody who we think has bad views on anything we do not hire. You want to guard against that.

Larry Bernstein:

There have been several doxing truck incidents at various universities. For example, there was a truck on Columbia's campus that listed the names and showed the faces of students who signed a pro-Palestinian letter blaming Israel for the Hamas attacks against Israeli citizens. First, can you please explain what doxing is?

Gary Saul Morson:

Doxing is revealing the address, private information of people so they can be attacked, revealing. It comes from the word documenting.

Larry Bernstein:

A third party that is completely unaffiliated with the university are using doxing trucks, which are driving around campus on public streets. Does the university have a duty to stop the doxing trucks or to condemn them?

Gary Saul Morson:

If you sign a public document, then you are agreeing to be making it public. I don't see the problem there. If it was some private conversation, then that is completely unacceptable. But professors are always signing public letters. If you deliberately sign a public document, then you are saying you want it to be your name is public. That is why you have signed it.

Larry Bernstein:

I suspect one motivation for the doxing is that they want to embarrass and shame the students who made the anti-Semitic statements. This goes to your classification of the second group of

anti-Semites who do not view themselves as anti-Semitic. Instead, they think they are on the side of the oppressed and the oppressors in this case just happen to be Jewish. Here we have students who are shocked to be called out as anti-Semites in a public way, and they do not like it because of the social stigma and the fear of retribution.

At Columbia, students who were listed as anti-Semites on the doxing trucks did a sit-in with the Dean at Columbia demanding that the university both condemn the truck and stop them from parking on public roads near the university because they prefer not to be humiliated.

Gary Saul Morson:

I do not understand why you said prefer not to be humiliated. If they are antisemites and they proclaim it, then they're not being humiliated. That doesn't make sense. But I think it makes perfect sense to say, we do not want this truck on campus.

If I were at the university, I would say this is not a good way to promote civil conversation. We want real dialogue. Truck shouting at things is no different than people shouting mindless slogans. It does not promote dialogue. It is not a good way to address anything.

If you sign a publicly document and somebody broadcasts your name that is what you have deliberately done yourself. There is no problem with that. But as a university president, I would not like it because it does not promote civil discourse. It stirs the pot. What we want to do is have people have conversations, not just shout at each other. People who do that are getting the logical consequence of what they did to sign this document. But the university should still try to do better than that.

Larry Bernstein:

Most American secular Jews are liberal who support progressive causes. Many American Jewish liberals are in a state of shock that their progressive allies are condemning Jews and are expressing anti-Semitic opinions.

Saul, were you surprised?

Gary Saul Morson:

Not in the least. Jews at one point supported Stalin and the Soviet Union and were shocked that Stalin would sign a pact with Hitler. My mother was one of those communists who got shocked and quit the party. I grew up with this. This is not a unique situation.

Larry Bernstein:

Some political analysts suspect that many liberal Jews will become Republicans. How will progressive Jews deal with the cognitive dissonance?



Gary Saul Morson:

What's unique today is how educated Jews think of themselves as non-religious Jews. And when I was growing up, non-religious Jews, they didn't identify with the religion, but they still had a strong set of Jewish identity based on either Israel or the persecution of Jews in the Soviet Union or something like that. That is where the Jewish identity came from, not from religion, but at a later point being Jewish meant being left wing.

If you were not left wing, you did not belong. You do not belong in a reform synagogue; you do not belong with us. So, you cannot turn against the left wing even when they are anti-Jew. You have a choice, which are you going to pick? You are going to pick your Jewish identity or your left-wing identity. That's what the problem is. And some will go one way, and some will go the other or some will go one way and then change if it becomes too hard to be against the left wing. When your politics is based on identity, you are not going to make rational decisions.

Larry Bernstein:

I end each episode with a note of optimism. What are we optimistic about as it relates to antisemitism in the United States?

Gary Saul Morson:

I was genuinely surprised that businesspeople and donors realizing this is not just an antisemitism problem, but it is a larger thing. What I see gives some reason not to despair.

Larry Bernstein:

Thanks to Saul for joining us today.

If you missed our previous podcast the topic was Resistance to Change at Colleges. Our speaker was Brian Rosenberg who was President of Macalester College for 17 years and is now a visiting professor at Harvard's Graduate School of Education. Brian has a new book entitled Whatever it is, I'm Against It: Resistance to Change in Higher Education.

Brian explained why colleges cannot adapt and are incapable of moving resources towards what students are interested in studying. Brian discussed whether doing research improves teaching and whether tenured professors who are poor teachers should be put out to pasture. And we examined where colleges would be better off altering their governance to be more like the private sector where power is concentrated in the hands of its president and board of trustees instead of the faculty?

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Thank you for joining us today, good-bye.