

BOOK FORUM

The Historiographies of Premodern Critical Race Studies and Jewish Studies

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In recent discussions of Geraldine Heng’s foundational book, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, one chapter has received much critical attention: chapter 2, “State/Nation: A Case Study of the Racial State: Jews as Internal Minority in England.” This chapter and her separate book, *England and the Jews: How Religion and Violence Created the First Racial State in the West*, delineate how England, over 400 years, created the blueprint for an almost complete racialized state and continued to use Jewish racialization after Jewish expulsion in 1290.¹ She uses medieval England’s situation as a “case study of medieval race that concentrates on one country ...” and in so doing tracks how structural racism is attached to medieval English Jews. Heng explains her method and approach—microhistory and case study—as well as how this methodology reinforces her main argument about race in the medieval European past in *The Invention of Race*:

The aim of this book is to sketch paradigms and models for thinking critically about medieval race, ... that call attention to tendencies and patterns, inventions and strategies in race-making and identify crucibles and dynamics that conduce to the production of racial form and raced behavior.²

Chapter 2, a microhistorical analysis, explains how this focus on local context, political and religious power, and western European parallels reveal an “English example” of medieval Jewish racialization that is “at once situation-specific and resonant.”³

There is no equivocation about the scope, range, methods, and critical theories Heng uses to discuss the *Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*.

¹ See Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 55–109, and Geraldine Heng, *England and the Jews: How Religion and Violence Created the First Racial State in the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

² Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, 5.

³ Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, 58.

Her definition makes clear that race is biopolitical and sociocultural as well as dependent on “specific historical occasions in which strategic essentialisms are posited and assigned through a variety of practices and pressures, so as to construct a hierarchy of peoples for differential treatment.”⁴ Yet, certain reviews of her book have critiqued it specifically for things she has stated explicitly that she is not doing.⁵ Her book explains how white Christian hegemony works—a form of critical whiteness studies, which is a regular feature in critical race theory (CRT).⁶

Recent strident critiques of Heng’s book reveal several interlocking issues: (a) a refusal to make a good faith effort to read the book as she instructs—within the parameters of area, approach, and even her critical theoretical situatedness; (b) lengthy critiques from scholars who have no expertise in the particulars of the medieval English archive; and (c) a lack of understanding of CRT genealogies as they relate to the formation of US Jewish studies. The first issue is quite clear in the kinds of critiques scholars have made that appear to ignore Heng’s “Beginnings” section, which maps out “How to Read a Book on Medieval Race” (her subheading). The latter two issues speak to the importance of field expertise and knowing the methodological histories in the fields one is critiquing.

Medieval England’s Archive Problems

The introduction to Elisheva Baumgarten’s book *Mothers and Children: Jewish Family Life in Medieval Europe* states that though this is a history of Ashkenazi medieval Europe, she is not discussing medieval England “since the Hebrew sources from England are of a different nature from those on the continent, and, despite the existing contacts between Jews in England and in Ashkenaz, the communities’ traditions are not the same.”⁷ In her next book, *Practicing Piety in Medieval Ashkenaz: Men, Women, and Everyday Religious Observance*, Baumgarten explains her nondiscussion of medieval England as the direct result of archival material scarcity.⁸ Though more recent medieval Anglo-Hebrew work has

⁴ Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, 3.

⁵ For example, the expectation she will examine the global archive outside of Europe, even as she points to the potential formations of race and theories of race outside the global north.

⁶ An excellent explanation of how the two fields (CRT and CWS) intersect is laid out in Jennifer Beech, “Introduction to Critical Whiteness Studies,” in *White Out: A Guidebook for Teaching and Engaging with Critical Whiteness Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 3–10. As Beech explains: “In their introduction to the Rhetoric Review Symposium on ‘Whiteness Studies’ Kennedy, Middleton, and Ratcliffe (2005) note the cultural situatedness of the field: ‘Critical race studies takes its name from its function, which is to critique race and whiteness as they play out, paradoxically through visibility and invisibility, in US culture’ (361). Scholars tend to posit whiteness as an ideological, political, legal, and social fiction that places so-called whites in a position of hegemony over other non-dominant groups. The project, then, functions to unmask and interrogate these fictions. As part of critical multi-cultural and race theory, the project is anti-oppressive” (Beech, *White Out*, 3).

⁷ Elisheva Baumgarten, *Women and Children: Jewish Family Life in Medieval Europe, Jews, Christians, and Muslims from the Ancient to the Modern World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 6.

⁸ See Elisheva Baumgarten, *Practicing Piety in Medieval Ashkenaz: Men, Women, and Everyday Religious Observance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 4: “I have not included the Jews of

expanded the archival possibilities,⁹ Baumgarten's observations remain accurate: the medieval English Jewish documentary archive is scarce, especially in comparison to the English Christian sources. The Anglo-Hebrew archive is distinct from the materials in the Ashkenazi European archive. Thus, a review from a scholar working on Sephardic Iberian and Mediterranean Jewish culture, who seems unclear about the Ashkenazi Jewish archive's particularities across and specifically about the English Jewish archive, only reveals a lack of field expertise, even within medieval Jewish studies. The Anglo-Hebrew medieval archive is also sparse because Jews were expelled in 1290. In France, they were expelled in the late fourteenth century.¹⁰

Additionally, medieval England specialists know the archive was decimated because of specific historical exigencies. The main historical event that has affected the medieval English archive—concomitant with expected attrition that can happen in preserving the medieval documentary past—is Henry VIII and his looting and destruction of the Catholic monasteries and their libraries. As a specialist in medieval English women's writings, this was made starkly clear to me at a series of nuns' literacy conferences.¹¹ Although German scholars working on German nunneries often had intact nunnery libraries since the eleventh century, still in situ with more than 900 volumes, the English scholars could maybe identify one or two books (riches if you find four) connected to a prominent and well-funded nunnery linked to an international religious network.¹²

Instead of accusing Heng of erasing Jewish voices that the archive's material exigencies had already effectively erased, a more generative discussion would have been to question how to methodologically address the medieval English archive through collaboration and comparative work. Discussions in both Jewish studies and CRT can help in addressing the questions of ethics and methods in

England as a distinct group in this discussion, since sources from that community are not plentiful enough to provide an adequate picture of daily pious practice." Her footnote to this statement clarifies this further: "In relative terms, there are substantially more transmitted Christian sources than extant Hebrew texts in medieval Jewish communities in England." She finishes off her footnote by directing scholars to the work of Patricia Skinner and Robert Chazan: "See the volume edited by Skinner, *Jews in Medieval Britain*, as well as Chazan, *Jews of Medieval Western Christendom*, 154–67, for a survey of the sources available for medieval England." See Baumgarten, *Practicing Piety in Medieval Ashkenaz*, 228, fn 21.

⁹ See, for example, Adrienne Williams-Boyarin, *The Christian Jew and the Unmarked Jew: The Polemics of Sameness in Medieval English Anti-Judaism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021); Pinchas Roth, *In This Land: Jewish Life and Legal Culture in Late Medieval Provence*, Studies and Texts 223 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021); Pinchas Roth, "Medieval English Rabbis: Image and Self-Image," *Journal of Early Middle English* 1.1 (2019): 17–33; Pinchas Roth, "A Hebrew Debate Poem from Medieval England," *Journal of Early Middle English* 2.2 (2020): 83–89; Ruth Nisse, *Jacob's Shipwreck: Diaspora, Translation, and Jewish-Christian Relations in Medieval England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017).

¹⁰ Baumgarten, *Practicing Piety in Medieval Ashkenaz*, 7.

¹¹ See Virginia Blanton, Veronica O'Mara, and Patricia Stoop, eds., *Nuns' Literacies in Medieval Europe: The Hull Dialogue* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013).

¹² There are other examples in different fields—medieval musicology, for example—where similar issues with the medieval English archive reveals similar outcomes of extreme scarcity.

working through archives of racialized violence. In Todd Presner and Wulf Kansteiner's "Introduction: The Field of Holocaust Studies and the Emergence of Global Holocaust Culture," they sketch out Holocaust studies' historiography, methodologies, and ethics. They address "a scholarly transition in the disciplinary and discursive practices of historians to undertake resolutely comparative investigations of genocide with a global orientation."¹³ In working through a summary of Holocaust historiography through ethics, Presner and Kansteiner point to the emergence of a victim-centered viewpoint in Holocaust history.¹⁴ They further explain the turn in comparative genocide studies and the ambiguity of this turn within Holocaust historiography. They point to Aimé Césaire's work in *Discourse on Colonialism* (1955) and explain that "Césaire argues that the Nazi crimes of the Holocaust have not only been perpetuated across the globe repeatedly in the name of Western civilization ... but that these crimes have been 'tolerated' up until now because they had been perpetuated against non-European peoples. This is the ethical and historical challenge at the heart of comparative genocide studies."¹⁵ They discuss this methodological turn that "combines elements of moral and political critique with empirical integrity, particularly to integrate the history of the Holocaust into a broader story of colonial appropriation and ethnic cleansing."¹⁶ I bring in Holocaust historiographic discussions because of the Holocaust's centrality (as has been discussed, written, and critiqued) in the formation of US Jewish studies and how it underscores the field's own reassessment of its methodological stakes. They argue that the turn to comparative genocide studies has shifted Holocaust studies: "genocide studies have also shown how the Holocaust represents an unusual case of being, at one and the same time, both a colonial and subaltern genocide leading to especially destructive and persistent mass murder even after the project of empire had failed."¹⁷

Black feminists working through the archive of transatlantic chattel slavery have similarly discussed the ethics of the archive in relation to virulent, racialized, horrific violence. Saidiya Hartman's work foregrounds a discussion around scholarly ethics and the transatlantic archive of slavery.¹⁸ In her important article, "Venus in Two Acts," she questions the ethics and justice of handling an archive of death and violence:

¹³ Wulf Kansteiner and Todd Presner, "Introduction: The Field of Holocaust Studies and the Emergence of Global Holocaust Culture," in *Probing the Ethics of Holocaust Culture*, eds. Claudio Fogu, Wulf Kansteiner, and Todd Presner (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 1–42, esp. 4.

¹⁴ Kansteiner and Presner, "Introduction," 11–12.

¹⁵ Kansteiner and Presner, "Introduction," 36.

¹⁶ Kansteiner and Presner, "Introduction," 36.

¹⁷ Kansteiner and Presner, "Introduction," 39.

¹⁸ See Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, Race and American Culture (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007); and, more recently, Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals* (New York: Norton, 2019).

I want to do more than recount the violence that deposited these traces in the archive. I want to tell a story about *two girls* capable of retrieving what remains dormant—the purchase or claim of their lives on the present—without committing further violence in my own act of narration.¹⁹

Hartman goes on to ask how we may ethically “recuperate lives entangled with and impossible to differentiate from terrible utterances that condemned them to death.”²⁰

These questions of archival harm have been central to Black feminists working in this archive for several decades. Hartman’s theoretical method to address this problem of ethics and archival violence is “critical fabulation”: a “double gesture” that involves “straining against the limits of the archive to write a cultural history of the captive, and, at the same time, enacting the impossibility of representing the lives of the captives precisely through the process of narration.”²¹ Hartman, referencing Mieke Bal’s work, recalls the fundamental meaning of “fabula”—a narrative “building block” that reveals how actors (human and nonhuman) act on the experience of an event—and argues for “re-presenting the sequence of events in divergent stories and from contested points of view.”²² The power of this methodology lies in its ability to “jeopardize the status of the event, to displace the received or authorized account, and to imagine what might have happened or might have been said or might have been done.”²³

This work in theorizing a different methodology to address and not erase the lives in violent, horrific archives has been a focus for other Black feminist historians.²⁴ Black feminist scholars of the archive of slavery also have asked many of the same methodological questions being asked in Holocaust historiography. They have also discussed a methodological answer and praxis to the archive’s violence. A comparative discussion would offer ways to work through ethics in methodologies related to these archives.

A Tale of Two Disciplines

Finally, the genealogies of CRT and Jewish studies also reveal how field formation and methodological priorities are not necessarily the same. Heng’s work on medieval English Jews has been critiqued because her CRT work, which analyzes this archive, has been accused of not doing this work through Jewish studies. But the questions that should be asked are whether CRT work is central to Jewish

¹⁹ Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” *Small Axe* 12.2 (2008): 1–14, esp. 2.

²⁰ Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” 3.

²¹ Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” 11.

²² Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” 11.

²³ Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” 11.

²⁴ See Marisa Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), and Jessica Marie Johnson, *Wicked Flesh: Black Women, Intimacy, and Freedom in the Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020).

studies and how do field histories show us the complexities and priorities of Jewish studies and ethnic studies (where CRT is the foundation and has been developed).

Jewish studies has had a long history in higher education that goes back to early-nineteenth-century Germany and the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*.²⁵ Judith Baskin sketches out this history in the United States, including its establishment in the late nineteenth century and the growth of Jewish scholarship at secular institutions through American Jewish communal support.²⁶ Jewish studies shifted its focus between the two world wars, when “several elite institutions ... established positions in areas such as Jewish history and Modern Hebrew language and literature.”²⁷ Her description of Jewish studies’ trajectory considers a long history in US academia with a shift in US universities toward “particularistic area studies.”²⁸ This American configuration is confirmed in Martin Goodman’s account, which considers US Jewish studies as different from the aims of the nineteenth-century European goals and even Jewish studies’ establishment in Israel in the early twentieth century forward.²⁹ Goodman sees Jewish studies’ development within the rubric of various “minority studies” fields that are linked to identity politics but with a wish to distance Jewish studies from these fields as more “rigorous” and moving toward formations like “Judaic studies” or under “Hebrew studies.” This tension and ambiguous position in the North American university system is long standing and really asks the question of whether Jewish studies wishes to identify as an area studies or as an ethnic studies discipline and what that means.

I see this tension in critiques of Heng’s work as she brings in CRT, especially from ethnic studies and race and empire work. The US history of area studies and ethnic studies are not the same, but rather have completely different trajectories and priorities. In this way, I believe, the inability to articulate within Jewish studies its allegiance to either has also made it not articulate its relationship to CRT work. Area studies has had a history mired in the US military-industrial complex and the role of post-WWII America’s Cold War. Hossein Khosrowjahi describes how people do not know:

²⁵ For a history of Jewish studies, see Martin Goodman, “The Nature of Jewish Studies,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Studies*, ed. Martin Goodman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 1–13.

²⁶ Judith Baskin, “Jewish Studies in North American Colleges and Universities: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow,” *Shofar* 32.4 (2014): 9–26, esp. 10.

²⁷ Baskin, “Jewish Studies in North American Colleges and Universities,” 11.

²⁸ Baskin, “Jewish Studies in North American Colleges and Universities,” 11.

²⁹ See Goodman, “The Nature of Jewish Studies,” 4–5: “In North America, by contrast, Jewish studies took off in the last quarter of the twentieth century in an entirely different direction. A general liberal awareness, particularly in the United States, of the sometimes arbitrary and oppressive concentration of traditional scholarship on the achievements of the wealthy and powerful led in the 1960s to encouragement of minority studies, such as women’s studies and black studies. Jewish studies have flourished in many universities under the same general rubric, but with a rather firmer intellectual base precisely because of the solid work of the pioneers of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. The claim to intellectual respectability has often been bolstered by describing the subject as Judaic studies or by sheltering (not altogether satisfactorily) under the rubric of Hebrew studies.”

the long history of area studies departments' involvement in foreign policy, intelligence and security matters, and inversely, the US military-intelligence role in founding and shaping area studies programs in the most elite higher education institution in this country in the beginning and everywhere else later.³⁰

This history of area studies also meant more robust funding because of its utility to the US government. Area studies was not the only area that the US government had its hands on during the Cold War; you can look at the well-documented discussion of US creative writing programs after WWII and its interest in depoliticized literary output and literary theory.³¹

Meanwhile, the genealogy of ethnic studies departments stems from the 1960s history of civil rights. This ethnic studies' genealogy is the history of San Francisco State University and the 1968 five-month student strike of the Black Student Union with the Third World Liberation Front. These campus strikers asked for "a school dedicated specifically to Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State, as well as higher admission rates for students of color."³² Black students were "4%" of SFSU population "even though 70% of students in the San Francisco Unified School District were from minority backgrounds."³³ This would become the blueprint for the creation of other ethnic studies and specifically Black studies, Asian American studies, Indigenous studies, Chicana and Latina studies departments from 1969 forward (including the most recent creation of a Black studies department at Stanford University).³⁴ University students' protests connected to civil rights and antiwar campaigns created ethnic studies programs. Ethnic studies departments have prioritized critical race theory as a core curriculum.

The question of Jewish studies' relationship to ethnic studies and CRT has been discussed in American studies and even in ethnic studies journals. A 2012 *MELUS* special issue, "Finding Home: The Future of Jewish American Literary Studies," tackled this topic.³⁵ However, Jewish American literature could only

³⁰ Hossein Khosrowjahi, "A Brief History of Area Studies and International Studies," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 33.3-4 (2011): 131-42, esp. 132.

³¹ See Eric Bennett, *Workshops of Empire: Stegner, Engle, and American Creative Writing during the Cold War* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2015).

³² See Ilyne Castellanos, "Retelling History: Ethnic Studies in California Approved by Gov. Newsom," *Voices of Monterey Bay*, August 21, 2020 (<https://voicesofmontereybay.org/2020/08/21/retelling-history/>), and Asal Ehsanipour, "Ethnic Studies: Born in the Bay Area from History's Biggest Student Strike," *KQED*, July 30, 202, (<https://www.kqed.org/news/11830384/how-the-longest-student-strike-in-u-s-history-created-ethnic-studies>).

³³ Ehsanipour, "Ethnic Studies."

³⁴ Allyson Hobbs (@allysonvhobbs), Twitter post, February 22, 2021 (<https://twitter.com/allysonvhobbs/status/1364044829525610506>): "Stanford will have a Department in African & African American Studies! We are so deeply grateful to the Black Graduate Student Association @StanfordBGSA for their tireless work and dedication and so appreciative and thankful for our extraordinary faculty, staff & alums! @Stanford."

³⁵ Lori Harrison-Kahan and Josh Lambert, "Guest Editors' Introduction: Finding Home: The Future of Jewish American Literary Studies," *MELUS* 37.2 (2012): 5-18.

imagine itself primarily as an Ashkenazi Jewish American literary project. The special issue's coeditors admit to this lack of diversity: "Other notable absences include the extensive body of work ... by Jewish writers on lesbian and transgender experiences, and the less extensive, but equally fascinating, bodies of work by and about Jews-by-choice and Jews of color."³⁶ I believe this aligns with Eric L. Goldstein's work in *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* and his discussion of Jewish ambiguity and complexities historically in addressing racial difference that is seen in a Black and white continuum.³⁷

Jonathan Freedman's article, "Do American and Ethnic American Studies Have a Jewish Problem; or, When Is an Ethnic Not an Ethnic, and What Should We Do about It?" describes US Jews as somehow similar to US Koreans.³⁸ This comparison is used to deconstruct model-minority discourse, but not as a critique that explains that white supremacy invented model minority discourse as an anti-Blackness wedge.³⁹ Rather he imagines, "That both groups had access to such pools of capital made their experience far different from their peers in different ethnic communities, and this, ... might explain their relative success in the U.S."⁴⁰ In fact, as studies have explained, East Asian Americans have been more financially successful because "society simply became less racist towards Asians."⁴¹ This article started because two faculty of color told Freedman, as American studies' chair at the University of Michigan, that Jewish American history courses did not fulfill the ethnic studies requirement for the American studies major.⁴² I expect this request was to make sure that undergraduate majors had exposure to ethnic studies' CRT. A Jewish American history class, depending on the instructor, may or may not fulfill this requirement. Thus, even in a broader conversation within Jewish studies, there is a misunderstanding or a question of whether Jewish studies itself is prepared to regularly teach CRT work within the field. Is premodern Jewish studies that focuses on Europe ready to teach the field in relation to CRT? Is it ready to center premodern critical race studies?

Freedman's article also makes the case through an analysis of the work of the Iberian Middle Ages for a Jewish studies as ethnic studies vis-à-vis a vision of

³⁶ Harrison-Kahan and Lambert, "Finding Home," 13.

³⁷ See Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

³⁸ As a Korean American immigrant who was born in Korea and who did a subfield in graduate school in Asian American studies, both my situated autoethnography and identity as well as my graduate training in critical ethnic studies make me immediately see this article's gaps. I was also a 2013–2014 Frankel Institute of Advanced Judaic Studies fellow at the University of Michigan.

³⁹ See Ellen Wu's work on model minority myth and antiBlackness in *The Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013).

⁴⁰ Jonathan Freedman, "Do American and Ethnic American Studies Have a Jewish Problem; or, When Is an Ethnic Not an Ethnic, and What Should We Do about It?" *MELUS* 37.2 (2012): 19–40, esp. 21.

⁴¹ See Jeff Guo, "The Real Secret to Asian American Success Was Not Education," *Washington Post*, November 19, 2016 (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/11/19/the-real-secret-to-asian-american-success-was-not-education>), and Nathaniel Hilger, "Upward Mobility and Discrimination: The Case of Asian Americans," *National Bureau of Economic Research* (<https://www.nber.org/papers/w22748>).

⁴² I do not know the particulars of the ethnic studies requirement in the University of Michigan AS major. Freedman, "Do American and Ethnic American Studies Have a Jewish Problem," 19.

what can be seen as an area studies. Interestingly, he sees the importance of critical whiteness studies in this new reformulation:

They stretch our concerns back in time as far as the year 1179, when the Third Lateran Council began the process of consolidating Church power and reducing Jews to the status of enemy of Christendom, rather than just another sub group in Christian Europe. More generally, they ask us to pay attention to the formation of the Christian-state complex that defines the latter half of the so-called Middle Ages and served as the motivating force behind the imperial project... . Boyarin, Schorsch, and others give this sense of ethno-religious difference and dominance a concrete history, a narrative, and a genealogy that ramifies out in fields beyond Jewish studies, and especially to American and ethnic studies.⁴³

This is exactly what Heng does—"pay attention to the formation of the Christian-state complex"—that Freedman lauds in the work of premodern Jewish Iberian scholars. He also imagines that the future of Jewish studies (and ethnic and American studies) will be toward area studies:

A truly integrative vision on the model of a real diaspora studies, Atlantic studies, or area or regional studies that would include religious, ethnic, national, and global differences in a larger, globalized, and thoroughly comparative framework.⁴⁴

His vision of Jewish studies (and ethnic studies) is an area studies model. But Asian studies is not Asian American studies. Though Asian American studies works on diaspora, it does not have the same critical priorities as Asian studies. The center of ethnic studies has always and continues to be CRT work, race, and empire, and is grounded in resisting the university and the US government as a white supremacist institution and structure. Its formation has always been political, about identity politics, and about racial literacy.

When Geraldine Heng brought CRT and the work of "racial formation"⁴⁵ into her recent work, she was discussing how white Christian hegemony racialized medieval English Jews. She was not writing, per se, just on medieval Jewish anti-Semitism, but on the English state's racialization of Jews as a totalizing racialized community. The most comparable understanding of what this means is to look at the work of Jewish studies that theorizes racialization within the Jewish diaspora. This would be the work of Jews of color and their experiences now and in the past as Black Jews, Asian Jews, Chicanx and Latinx Jews, and Indigenous Jews within the United States. To describe racialization is to describe how white hegemony constructs power over racialized marginal groups. The question may be, what does it mean when Jewish studies' scholars enact what can be identified

⁴³ Freedman, "Do American and Ethnic American Studies Have a Jewish Problem," 34–35.

⁴⁴ Freedman, "Do American and Ethnic American Studies Have a Jewish Problem," 36.

⁴⁵ This term specifically references the foundational work of Omi and Winant. See Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 3rd ed. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014).

as a form of white fragility and white defensiveness when medieval English Jews are described as racialized and then a WOC writer explains how that operates, functions, harms, and eventually kills group members? What Heng describes is how Jewishness is racialized not how anti-Semitism operates without racialization. There is a difference, and I believe those who are most equipped to discuss and theorize this in Jewish studies are Jews of color working on CRT.

The Future of CRT and Jewish Studies

Currently, with the advent of increased focus on 2020 #BlackLivesMatters and the racial reckoning all academic fields are working through now, Jewish studies is also having a moment of racial reckoning that has begun to discuss critical whiteness studies and critical race studies. The 2020 AJS conference had as one of its plenaries a roundtable entitled “Why Racism Should Matter for Jewish Studies Scholars.”⁴⁶ The Katz Center at the University of Pennsylvania has organized a series of talks this year on “Jews, Race, and Religion” that includes discussions of critical whiteness studies and has a substantial discussion about race and Jews of color.⁴⁷ If we take Freedman’s belief that a turn to the histories of the past will help reframe Jewish studies, ethnic studies, and American studies, then I believe Heng’s work will only add to this important discussion.

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⁴⁶ AJS 52nd Annual Conference, December 13–17, 2020 (<https://www.associationforjewishstudies.org/docs/default-source/conference-files/ajs-conference-program-books/ajs2020programbook-web.pdf?sfvrsn=10>). The program included the following description: “This plenary addresses how anti-racism efforts can shape Jewish Studies pedagogy and research; considers the potential impact of Black Lives Matter on Jewish Studies; and explores the ways in which new research on the intersection of race, gender, and nation inform Jewish Studies research and teaching.”

⁴⁷ “Jews, Race, and Religion,” *Katz Center* (blog), November 30, 2020 (<https://katz.sas.upenn.edu/resources/blog/jews-race-and-religion>).

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