

On October 6 and 7, Indiana University hosted scholars from across the country and across departments who work at the cutting edge of inquiry into ideas about race and Jewish Studies in the United States. The “Jews, Race, America” Symposium, sponsored by the Borns Jewish Studies Program and CRRES and convened by IU faculty member Sarah Imhoff, provided the forum for these scholars to consider what critical thinking about race can say to Jewish Studies.

Jenny Sartori (Northeastern University) demonstrated how adoption by Jewish parents discloses assumed structures and features about the race of Jews. Judith Neulander (Case Western University) described how a discourse about genetics mimics racial definitions of Jewishness for New Mexicans who claim crypto-Jewish heritage. Elliot Ratzman (Temple University) enjoined scholars to think about the didactic and ethical value of popular accounts of “downpassing,” such as the film *Gentleman’s Agreement* and the work of contemporary Jewish comedians, for Jews. Jacob Dorman (University of Kansas) claimed that Jewish racialization and categorization needs to be seen through the eyes of Blacks, and that doing so allows more attunement to the structure of race in American society. In his work on geography, communities, and the eruv in Los Angeles, Dean Franco (Wake Forest) showed the assets and the limitations of race as a critical apparatus. Annalise Glauz-Todrank (Wake Forest) demonstrated the fundamental incoherence of the Supreme Court’s attempts to define Jewishness in *Shaare Tefilla v. Cobb*. The Court ultimately defines Jewishness only by making reference to the general perception of American culture in 1866—a conception of Jewishness that is not only a popular conception, but also one that it fully recognizes is outdated by 150 years. Benjamin Schreier (Penn State University) suggested that Jewish Studies itself, as it is practiced and conceived by scholars, relies on a foundational structure of Jewish identity even while it explores the ways that Jews and non-Jews continually reconstitute Jewish identity. Schreier also suggested that the way we currently cognize this stable substrate of Jewishness relies, in fact, on biologicistic or racialist logics. Each of these research projects demonstrates the instability and contingency of Jewish identity.

In the wake of the Holocaust, Jews and other Americans have been particularly concerned about applying the idea of race to Jews. However, this disavowal has disguised the ways that ideas about race still deeply structure some aspects of Jewish identity. Apart from studies on “Jews and Blacks” and anti-racist activism, contemporary popular and professional conversations about race in the U.S. rarely address Jewish identity. “Jews, Race, America” brought together scholars who are currently pushing this boundary, and the symposium began to develop a shared language for the future research in the area of critical race theory and Jewish Studies.