

How antisemitic conspiracy theories contributed to the recent hostage-taking at the Texas synagogue | The Conversation

By Jonathan D. Sarna

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The man who took a rabbi and three congregants hostage in Colleyville, Texas, on Jan. 15, 2022, believed that Jews control the United States of America. He told his hostages, as one revealed in a media interview, that Jews “control the world” and that they could use their perceived power to free Aafia Siddiqui, a Pakistani convicted in 2010 for trying to kill American soldiers and plotting to blow up the Statue of Liberty. The hostage-taker also demanded to speak to New York’s Central Synagogue rabbi, Angela Buchdahl, so that she would use her “influence” to help get Siddiqui released.

By invoking Jewish “power,” the gunman, later identified as Malik Faisal Akram, a 44-year-old British national, seemed to echo Siddiqui’s antisemitic views that Jews were responsible for the 9/11 terrorist attacks and had infiltrated American political and nongovernmental organizations. During her 2010 trial in New York, Siddiqui demanded Jews be excluded from serving on her jury.

As a scholar of Jewish history, I know that myths concerning “Jewish power,” “control” and “conspiracy” have circulated in America since before the Civil War and continue until today. They provide a simple, albeit imaginary, explanation for bewildering social changes that people find hard to explain and confront.

[...]

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