

FORMERLY 70 YEARS ACROSS THE SEA

ISRAELISM

DIRECTED BY ERIC AXELMAN AND SAM EILERTSEN

COMING IN
2019

Tikkun Olam Productions has announced the release of a trailer for its upcoming documentary film, '**ISRAELISM**,' set to be released in early 2019.

Israel is central to the political and cultural life of the American Jewish community. But it has also become a deeply divisive subject, as painful cracks have emerged within the Jewish community over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, inspiring argument, protest and even censorship.

ISRAELISM explores the past, present and future of the relationship between American Jews and Israel. Dozens of American Jewish thinkers, community leaders and activists share stories of falling in and out of love with Israel, and competing visions for a Jewish future, while Israelis and Palestinians describe how their lives are affected by the decisions of a community half a world away. Israelism asks how and why Israel became the cornerstone of American Judaism, what the consequences have been, and what will happen as divisions continue to grow.



WATCH THE TRAILER
vimeo.com/270219597

CONTACT

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PRESS KIT

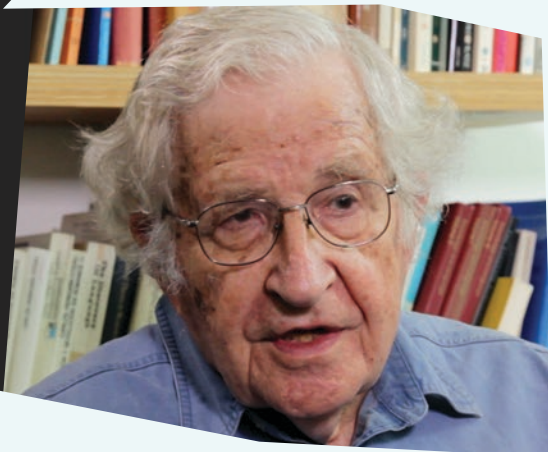
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SIMONE ZIMMERMAN
IfNotNow
Co-Founder



JEREMY BEN-AMI
J Street
President



NOAM CHOMSKY
Academic / Author



PETER BEINART
Journalist / Author
The Crisis of Zionism



REBECCA VILKOMERSON
Jewish Voice for Peace
Executive Director



ABRAHAM FOXMAN
Anti-Defamation League
National Director Emeritus

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ALSO FEATURING

RABBI ERIC YOFFIE Union for Reform Judaism president emeritus
CORNEL WEST academic and activist
SAMI AWAD Holy Land Trust executive director
AVNER GVARAYAHU Breaking The Silence executive director
PHILLIP BRODSKY The David Project executive director
MJ ROSENBERG former AIPAC staff and Media Matters fellow
DOV WAXMAN historian, author of Trouble in the Tribe
YEHUDA KURTZER Shalom Hartman Institute of North America president
EMILY MAYER IfNotNow co-founder
YONAH LIEBERMAN IfNotNow co-founder
RABBI ALISSA WISE Jewish Voice for Peace deputy director
RABBI JOSH WEINBERG ARZA president
RABBI BENNETT MILLER former ARZA president
RABBI JILL JACOBS T'ruah executive director
SARAH ANNE MINKIN sociologist
STEVEN M COHEN sociologist
JEREMY BURTON JCRC of Greater Boston executive director

BESHARA DOUMANI Brown University Middle East Studies chair
ISSA AMRO Palestinian activist
MICHAEL SFARD Israeli human rights lawyer
MYRON JOSHUA Israeli settler and peace activist
MOTI HEFRATI Israeli settler
SERGIO DELLA PERGOLA Jewish demographer, Hebrew University
SARA HIRSCHHORN academic, University of Oxford
BAHA HILO To Be There, Bethlehem
ELIAS DEIS Program Manager, Holy Land Trust
RACHEL SANDALOW ASH Open Hillel founder
GILI GETZ creator of The Forbidden Conversation
SARAH BRAMMER SHLAY rabbinical student and IfNotNow co-founder
LEX ROFEBERG rabbinical student, IfNotNow activist
ILANA LEVINSON IfNotNow activist and Unsettled podcast host
DAN FISHBACK playwright and Jewish Voice for Peace activist
DOROTHY ZELLNER former SNCC activist, Jewish Voice for Peace activist



ABOUT THE FILM

Israel plays an enormous role in the cultural and political life of the American Jewish community. Until very recently, it was considered a given that American Jewish institutions, and the vast majority of American Jews, would support Israel unconditionally. Yet this was not always the case, and it may not continue to be. Israel did not play nearly as large a role in American Jewish life before the fateful war of 1967, and recently painful cracks have emerged within the Jewish community over the harsh realities of occupation, horrifying violence in Gaza, and the bond between Israel's right wing government and the administration of Donald Trump.

Israelism examines how the close relationship between Israel and American Jews developed, how it has affected the lives of Israelis and Palestinians, and where it might be going, through interviews with dozens of political and community leaders, academics and activists. The film traces this relationship from the 19th century to today, as tumultuous events, from mass immigration to the United States, to the horrors of the Holocaust, to the creation of Israel, influence the political unity of the Jewish people. Jews enter the 20th century as a scattered, oppressed diaspora, and emerge only decades later with two large communities centered in two powerful nations: Israel and the United States.

After 1967 an American Jewish community that fears losing itself to secularism and assimilation turns to Israel as a source of Jewish identity and pride. Support for Israel becomes a cornerstone of American Jewish education. Meanwhile, Israeli settlements funded partly by American Jews gobble up Palestinian land, and American military and political support enable the repression of Palestinians demanding freedom and dignity.

Today, however, this relationship is in jeopardy. Israel grows increasingly right wing and nationalistic, as American Jews become more liberal and secular. Young Jews become deeply disillusioned and angry by the one-sided narrative they were presented in Jewish schools and synagogues, while the suffering of Palestinians becomes increasingly visible.

Israelism shows the rise of Jewish groups opposed to the occupation, from J Street to IfNotNow to Jewish Voice for Peace, and features the leaders of these organizations and leaders of mainstream organizations with which they have sparred. Palestinians describe their experiences under occupation and the growing solidarity between American Jewish and Palestinian activists, while Israeli settlers deny the existence of occupation and laud the support they receive from the United States. Concluding with the killing of protesters in Gaza that shocks the conscience of many American Jews, Israelism asks: what is the Jewish future?

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Director's Statement

The Israel of my childhood represented hope, strength, and perseverance in the face of a history in which the Jewish people have been brutally massacred and persecuted simply for their traditions and culture. Israel's story was one of Jewish redemption, and it made me proud to wear a Star of David around my neck. However, as I entered my late teens and began reading critical texts on the history of Zionism, I, like many other young Jews across America, was truly shocked by what I read. Almost every aspect of the narrative I'd fallen in love with and based my Jewish identity around, cracked. I became exposed to narratives of military occupation, and structural racism, committed by my relatives.

For many American Jews, Israel is a constant in their lives from their very earliest memories. Their camp counselors are Israeli, they travel to Israel frequently during the summer, and maps of Israel adorn their Hebrew school classrooms. Those who challenge Israel publicly face social isolation and scorn within their Jewish communities. This entrenched emotional connection to Israel, which often creates deep political loyalty, has profound impacts on American Jewish self-perception, the future of the Israeli state, and the lives of millions of Palestinians living under unending military occupation and land seizure.

Making this film has been painful, lonely, and beautiful. I love being Jewish because of how truly rich Jewish history is, and I'm fascinated by the dramatically different visions of the Jewish future that diverse Jewish communities are fighting for in Israel and the United States. I hope my film helps start and maintain important conversations about what it means to be Jewish in the 21st century, and where we hope to go as a people, in the US and in Israel, far across the sea.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

Eric Axelman | Director / Producer

Eric grew up in a small Jewish community in rural Maine. This film, his debut as a director and producer, represents years of studying and wrestling with the history, narratives, and realities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and a number of visits to Israel and the West Bank. He is the founder of Pushed Learning and Media, a nonprofit that uses performance and multimedia to talk about privilege, identity, and oppression. He has spoken and performed at TEDx and schools around the country.

Sam Eilertsen | Director / Director of Photography

Sam has worked on a dozen feature films, primarily as a cinematographer and editor. Recently he served as the director of photography on the narrative feature film *Vault* (2019), and edited the award-winning documentary *Man In Red Bandana* (2017). He has also created viral activist videos that have drawn hundreds of thousands of views and been featured by MSNBC, Talking Points Memo, The Intercept and many others. *Israelism* is his debut as a feature film director.

Gili Getz | Executive Producer

Gili is an Israeli-American actor, photojournalist and activist. His work in recent years has been focusing on Jewish-American politics and is published regularly in the American Jewish and Israeli press. He served as a photographer for the IDF and as a news editor for Ynet. Gili performed across the country in numerous theatrical productions. He is the creator of *The Forbidden Conversation* a play and conversation that premiered at the Center For Jewish History in the spring of 2016 and explores the difficulty of talking openly about Israel in the American-Jewish community.

Daniel Byers | Executive Producer

Daniel grew up in Africa and Nepal before launching his documentary film career, which has focused on indigenous rights and environmental action. He has tracked cartels in Honduras, chased snow leopards in Afghanistan, and rafted glacial lakes in the shadow of Everest. His films have been featured at numerous festivals including the Environmental Film Festival (DCEFF), Banff Mountain Film Festival and International Wildlife Film Festival.

CREDITS

Directed by **Eric Axelman and Sam Eilertsen**
Produced by **Eric Axelman and Nikolos Gonzales**
Executive Producers **Daniel Byers and Gili Getz**

Director of Photography **Sam Eilertsen**
Composer **Loren Fulton**
Edited by **Nikolos Gonzales**

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ERIC AXELMAN