

Podcast Name: *Our 7 Neighbors*

Episode 3: Dr. Laura Limonic

Welcome to season 4 *Our Seven Neighbors, Diversifying the Narrative, Immigration and Religion in America*, brought to you by the Interreligious Institute at Chicago Theological Seminary. Through an intersectional lens of Latinx voices, this season explores themes of immigration, mass migration, and colonization, and how diverse faith traditions can and do affect the story. Your host is Dr. José Francisco Morales-Torres, who is joined in today's episode by Dr. Laura Limonic, Associate Professor of Sociology at the State University of New York, Old Westbury. Dr. Limonic's research focuses on contemporary immigration in the United States, specifically the integration of ethnic and ethno-religious groups, particularly Latinx immigrants. Her recent book, *Kugel and Frijoles: Latino Jews in the United States*, addresses the intersections of ethnicity, race, class, and religion.

To begin, Dr. Limonic reflects on her family's experience as Jewish, Hispanic immigrants in a predominantly non-Jewish community. She emphasizes the cultural contrast between her Jewish upbringing in Argentina and the new environment in the U.S., where language barriers and being a minority made adaptation challenging. Her family began to celebrate Christian holidays with their Catholic neighbors as a means of building community, underscoring the complexity of navigating multiple identities. Her experiences as an immigrant shaped her sociological perspective, particularly her interest in the intersection of religion and identity. She explains how Jewishness and other ethno-religious identities are context-dependent, shifting based on the surrounding community, and how immigrants develop strategies, like code-switching, to navigate these multiple identities and fit in.

Then, Dr. Limonic explains that while many people believe Spanish-speaking Jews are a recent phenomenon, Jews have migrated to Latin America for centuries. Some Caribbean regions were home to thriving Jewish communities under Dutch colonial rule, which were not subject to the same religious persecution. These early migrations laid the foundation for today's Latin American Jewish communities, often migrating due to persecution and economic hardship. As various political and economic crises affected countries in Latin America, including the Southern Cone, many Jews fled to the U.S. Jewish institutions in the U.S. are working to be more inclusive, recognizing Jews who don't fit the traditional Ashkenazi, white, second or third-generation American profile. These efforts are increasingly focused on groups like Sephardic, Mizrahi, and Latino Jews. Latino Jews also face unique challenges when navigating political activism and religious identity. In closing, Dr. Limonic highlights the need for more understanding, empathy, and dialogue, especially in the face of rising antisemitism and the challenges of contemporary politics.

Links:

Learn more about [Our 7 Neighbors](#) and today's [guest](#).

Learn more about the Chicago Theological Seminary at [CTSchicago.edu](https://www.ctschicago.edu)