

ADL[®]

Antisemitism Uncovered

A GUIDE TO OLD MYTHS IN A NEW ERA

Introduction

On July 10, 1933, nearly a decade before the Holocaust, Dr. Paul Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi Minister of Propaganda, was on the front cover of TIME Magazine, stating “THE JEWS ARE TO BLAME!”¹

In the years that followed, millions of Jews across Europe were terrorized, hunted and murdered by Nazis, their collaborators and those coerced by them. While the Holocaust was unique in the systematic, industrial means it employed to annihilate the Jewish

people, large scale persecutions and killings of Jews did not start with the Nazis. They have happened during other times and in other regions. Indeed, hatred of Jews existed for millennia before the Holocaust and did not end with the murder of the six million. We must remember that the warning signs leading up to even the most lethal of social epidemics are typically far from immediate or obvious. And so today, it is our collective responsibility to recognize the patterns of hate-based prejudice, how this mindset takes root and even more so how it operates.

While antisemitism has sometimes escalated to violent or genocidal levels, it more often appears in subtler ways, such as insensitive remarks that are brushed off, or negative stereotypes that go unchallenged. We must never normalize even seemingly harmless forms of hate-based prejudice; this is what strengthens dangerous social attitudes, which can erode the values of even the most just society. Silence and complacency in the face of biased remarks or actions permit others to internalize harmful messages, making such messages commonplace. Antisemitism is unique in many ways, but,



Nazi Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels featured on the cover of Time, July 1933.

like other forms of hate, it grows in silence and blossoms in acquiescence.

And yet it is not always easy to recognize and combat antisemitism. For example, while knowledge of the Holocaust helped banish overt antisemitism in many contexts in the postwar decades, surprising numbers of young people today are unaware of the most basic facts about what happened to Europe's Jews during World War II. According to a nationally representative March 2018 survey, commissioned by the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, only 36 percent of millennials (ages 18-34) in the United States knew that six million Jews perished during the Holocaust.²

As survivors enter their final years and society moves forward, the Holocaust recedes from public memory, making Nazism appear almost other-worldly, like a historical impossibility. Moreover, many of those who truly are familiar with the history of the Holocaust or other massive anti-Jewish atrocities are unable or unwilling to recognize subtler manifestations of antisemitism, envisioning many contemporary Jews as a privileged group that is not sufficiently vulnerable to warrant significant concern or action. These and other factors explored below have contributed to a decrease in the previous

stigmatization of antisemitic attitudes and a tendency not to take warning signs seriously.

Antisemitism has commonalities with racism, anti-Muslim bias, xenophobia, homophobia, transphobia, misogyny and other forms of hate and discrimination. It also has certain unique characteristics as a specific set of ideologies about Jews that has migrated across discourses. In almost every part of society, this hatred has been conjured and adjusted to suit the values, beliefs and fears of specific demographics and contexts. We cannot fight antisemitism without understanding how it is both intertwined with other forms of prejudice and how it is unique.

This report will help to identify what antisemitism is and how it manifests, from the ancient past to the present day. With a long history as a distinct minority group living in exile, Jews in various contexts across the globe have been misunderstood and subject to harmful characterizations that have endured through the ages. Accordingly, Jews often have found themselves wrongfully scapegoated, reviled, persecuted, expelled and murdered. They have been an easy target from all sides, sometimes attacked for remaining “too different” from dominant majority cultures or conversely for blending in “too well”

within these same societies. Despite the diversity of Jewish people and of Judaism as a religion, antisemitism understands Jews as an unchanging, negative force in the world and draws on a deep reservoir of lies and propaganda to support that faulty understanding.

While antisemitism obviously harms and worries Jews, we must also be mindful that it threatens democracy and is an indicator of the health of a society as a whole, of a society's capacity to think reasonably and behave humanely. Antisemitism attacks Jews specifically, but it is the body politic that is ultimately impoverished by it.

We face complicated challenges in today's world. The lack of simple, straightforward answers embolden those who seek an easy culprit on whom to blame those problems. The hateful myths and conspiracy theories levied against Jews throughout history offer accessible templates for such blame. Cultures of silence and complacent attitudes have helped antisemitism to gain new currency in the United States and around the world. Without the requisite knowledge to recognize this evil, we are at a disadvantage to stop it.

In the pages that follow, we examine the history of antisemitism in order to understand its roots and how it has been linked with wider

narratives and power structures and, thus, to debunk the acceptance it has increasingly been granted. We then examine seven of the most common antisemitic myths. These tropes have been repeated knowingly and unknowingly, too often leading to violence. For each myth, we offer context and examples to help identify it.

With mounting threats against marginalized communities on today's global stage, there is urgency. In this environment, it is imperative for each and all of us, Jewish or not, to understand and speak out against the so-called oldest hatred and preempt future acts of violence such attitudes might encourage. We have to know what antisemitism is, to be able to see it in practice, and to be willing to oppose it now.

FOOTNOTES

- 1** Lilly Rothman, "It's Not That the Story Was Buried: What Americans in the 1930s Really Knew About What Was Happening in Germany," *Time Magazine*, updated July 10, 2018, <https://time.com/5327279/ushmm-americans-and-the-holocaust/>.
- 2** Claims Conference, Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany; "New Survey by Claims Conference Finds Significant Lack of Holocaust Knowledge in the United States," <http://www.claimscon.org/study/>.



20,000 people attended the German American Bund rally held at Madison Square Garden on February 20, 1939.

Definition of Antisemitism

In early 2017, the editors of the Merriam-Webster Dictionary tweeted, “‘Antisemitism’ is among our top lookups this afternoon.”³ Four days later, they reported the same.⁴

It wasn’t surprising, perhaps, that so many people wanted to know what the term meant. They were reading about it and hearing about it more regularly, as antisemitic incidents in the United States rose in numbers.

Merriam-Webster’s cogent definition — “hostility toward or discrimination against Jews as a religious, ethnic, or racial group”⁵ — fails to provide a thorough consideration of this complicated issue. Of course, no single definition is perfect. The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) convened a plenary of its 32 member nations in 2016. The researchers and scholars affirmed a lengthy working definition that begins with the following:

*Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.*⁶

The IHRA definition includes numerous examples of how antisemitism can be manifested, including in classic and current forms, such as when criticism of Israel crosses the line from fair critique of policies into antisemitism. Some examples include:

- Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor.

- Applying double standards by requiring of it a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation.
- Using the symbols and images associated with classic antisemitism (e.g., claims of Jews killing Jesus or blood libel) to characterize Israel or Israelis.
- Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis.
- Holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel.

This legally non-binding working definition provides valuable guidance for elected officials, law enforcement, university administrators, educational professionals and community leaders on what exactly is antisemitism and the many different forms it can take.

Why did it take a large panel to define a single term? Because antisemitism contains features that are both similar and different from other forms of hate or prejudice, reflecting a long, complex and specific set of histories regarding Jewish and non-Jewish relations.

As the IHRA's definition indicates, antisemitism encompasses hatred

of Jews on the basis of their existence as human beings, not simply as followers of the Jewish religion. It does so through contradictory logic that envisions Jews as both excessively powerful and as weak or even subhuman. In this respect, antisemitism departs slightly from racism. Racism often involves a clear power dynamic in which a privileged group believes itself to be naturally superior and attempts to retain its social advantages by persecuting or discriminating against other racialized groups. While most forms of racism focus on emphasizing the perceived weaknesses of another group, antisemites tend to portray Jews as both too strong and too weak, as well as the cause of all social problems.

The list of paradoxes is long. Jews have been blamed by racists for promoting racial equality and by racial minorities for promoting slavery and racism. Jews have been blamed by capitalists for preaching socialism and by socialists for alleged capitalist exploitation. Jews have been targeted by social conservatives for empowering sexual minorities and by queer activists for patriarchal conservatism. And the list goes on. Like non-Jews, Jews constitute a diverse population that does not act monolithically. However, the particular conditions of Jewish history, interpreted through antisemitic ideology, have contributed to perceptions of Jews as

nefarious actors and manipulative magicians, always to blame. Thus, unlike other kinds of prejudice, antisemitism is a paranoid mentality that intertwines an imagined Jewish essence in relationship with other ideological concerns, prejudices or aims. Ultimately, it rests on applying simple, false explanations to complex social problems. Across eras and cultures, these ideas about Jews have been used to justify exclusion, discrimination, violence and genocide.

The primacy of antisemitism tends to be contextual and periodic. Antisemitism typically surges in times of political or economic uncertainty as well as rapid social change, often used as a tool of political manipulation or populist anger. We have seen this again and again throughout history.

In nearly every generation, centuries-old antisemitic stereotypes and myths are recycled. And because antisemitism in the present draws inspiration from hateful ideas of the past, exploring the historical origins of antisemitism is the first step toward understanding and addressing it and working to restrain and, ultimately, eradicate it.

FOOTNOTES

- 3 Twitter; “Merriam-Webster”; <https://twitter.com/MerriamWebster/status/832339726644441088>.
- 4 Twitter; “Merriam-Webster”; <https://twitter.com/MerriamWebster/status/834047350926614533>.
- 5 Twitter; “Merriam-Webster”; <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/antisemitism>.
- 6 International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance; “Working Definition of Antisemitism”, <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/working-definition-antisemitism>.

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Antisemitism In History

Antisemitism has followed the Jewish community across continents and through history, both globally and in the United States.

Antisemitic myths continue to fester today.

HISTORY

Antisemitism in Global History

Although anti-Jewish hatred can be traced all the way back to the ancient world, the word “antisemitism” is a modern invention that emerged in the wake of rising European nationalism.

HISTORY

Antisemitism in American History

From the early days of independence, America’s founders imagined the United States as a land of religious tolerance. Article IV of the United States Constitution promised that religious tests were not to be used in elections to any American office or public trust.



American Nazi Party founder George Lincoln Rockwell with paintings of Hitler and George Washington.

Antisemitic Myths

The antisemitic myths about power, loyalty, greed, deicide, the blood libel, Holocaust denialism and anti-Zionism have persisted over time. A descriptive arc from historic origin to contemporary examples contextualizes the faulty logic behind each one.

POWER

Jews Have Too Much Power

Jews account for approximately 0.2 percent of the global population. And yet antisemites believe that this tiny minority is not only on a quest for total world domination, but is already in control of banks, the media, industry, government—even the weather.

DISLOYALTY

Jews Are Disloyal

Antisemites frequently suspect Jews of holding allegiance only to fellow Jews and to a uniquely Jewish agenda. Jews are accordingly seen as untrustworthy neighbors and citizens, as if they are inherently disloyal — or have inherently dual loyalties.

GREED

Jews Are Greedy

One of the most prominent and persistent stereotypes about Jews is that they are greedy and avaricious, hoping to make themselves rich by any means. They are seen both as relentless in the pursuit of wealth and also as stingy misers determined not to let any money slip from their grasp.

DEICIDE

Jews Killed Jesus

The myth that Jews collectively murdered Jesus, also referred to as “deicide,” has been used to justify violence against Jews for centuries. Historians as well as Christian leaders have agreed that the claim is baseless.

BLOOD

Jews Use Christian Blood for Religious Rituals

A major theme in antisemitic thought and propaganda is the blood libel, the myth that Jews murder non-Jews, especially non-Jewish children, in order to use their blood to perform religious rituals. Most prevalent in the medieval and early modern period, this peculiar accusation has plagued Jews and incited violence against them for centuries.

DENIAL

The Holocaust Didn't Happen

In the face of extensive credible evidence — volumes of governmental documents, thousands of eyewitness testimonies, firsthand admissions of guilt, photographs, film footage, meticulous written records, museums' worth of artifacts, not to mention the remains of the concentration camps, gas chambers and crematoria themselves — there are ongoing efforts to distort, disprove and conceal the facts of the Holocaust.

ANTI-ZIONISM

Anti-Zionism or Criticism of Israel is Never Antisemitic

Criticism of Israel is not in and of itself antisemitic. But much of contemporary anti-Zionism, or the delegitimization of Israel and its supporters, draws on and perpetuates antisemitic tropes.



Camp Siegfried, on Long Island, NY, was among the pro-Nazi summer camps affiliated with the German-American Bund.

Conclusion

After reading this report, we hope you will understand the faulty logic of the most pernicious antisemitic myths. You have seen what forms each myth can take. You know why each is wrong.

If you put this knowledge to action, you can help prevent antisemitism from growing in today's world and contribute to maintaining a civil society in which hate-based ideologies have no place.



Selma to Montgomery, Alabama March 21, 1965. March leaders (wearing leis) from left to right: John Lewis, a nun, Ralph Abernathy, Martin Luther King, Ralph Bunche, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel and the Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth.

Share Your Voice.

If you hear someone — such as a neighbor or coworker — use one of these antisemitic tropes, with or without negative intent, don't be afraid to name it. It might be a little awkward, but that's okay. If it's safe, it's good to interrupt intolerance when it happens. And if you hear an elected official or political candidate promote an antisemitic myth, call them out regardless of how they affiliate or how you vote. Leaders in our communities and our country should be held to the highest standard. When they fall short, confront them. Even when certain antisemitic myths may be used in what could be construed or intended as a complimentary way, they are still harmful to Jewish

people by propagating and seeming to validate inaccurate stereotypes about Jews.

Share The Facts.

When you call out antisemitism, avoid hyperbole and draw upon data and facts such as those provided in this report. Identify which faulty narrative is being emphasized — whether theological, eugenicist or political — in order to debunk misinformation, but don't engage in hysterics. Use social and traditional media to share information that's based in evidence. Write your member of Congress. Speak up at town halls. Your local ADL office can help.

Share Your Strength.

If you experience or witness an incident of antisemitism — whether that's graffiti at a local business, an alt-right protest in your community or anti-Jewish slander on social media — report it to ADL rather than dismiss it. ADL does our best to investigate incidents and respond quickly. And beyond just reporting a single situation, stand together with those who are bullied or marginalized in any situation. Allyship is a critical aspect of the fight for a more just and fair future.

It has taken millennia to shape modern antisemitism. It will take the collective effort of all of us to counteract this evil and shape a world

free from hatred, bias and bigotry. Let's get to work.

Note from the CEO

For more than a century, ADL has been battling antisemitism⁷ and fighting to secure justice and fair treatment to all. Every day we stand on the front lines, fighting hate for good.

Sadly, the past few years have been the most challenging that we have seen in recent memory: from Pittsburgh to Poway to Jersey City to Monsey to Colleyville, violent antisemitic incidents have become all too common. In fact, ADL has recorded a 60% increase in antisemitic incidents from 2016-2020. ADL's most recent *Audit of Antisemitic Incidents* found 2,024 antisemitic incidents were recorded in the United States in 2020, in the midst of a global pandemic. This marks the third highest year since ADL began tracking incidents in 1979.

We have seen antisemitism fueled by the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. In the early days of the pandemic, posts on social media and elsewhere explained the coronavirus as a plot created by Jews to expand global influence or for profit, adding to centuries of history of suggesting Jews created plagues or disasters to exert world control. When vaccines became available, a new surge of false antisemitic

conspiracy theories arose suggesting Jews created the vaccine for financial gain and world control. And, many, including politicians, have compared public safety measures, including vaccine and mask mandates, to the restrictions placed on Jews during the Holocaust. This rhetoric by our politicians and online is deeply concerning, but are not the only places we see antisemitism emerging. We see swastikas drawn into desks at school, students ostracized for supporting Israel on college campuses and synagogue windows smashed.

On top of it all, we have leading voices in the United States — from both sides of the political spectrum — who are normalizing antisemitism. They are using antisemitic myths and tropes about “globalists” controlling government, Jewish money destroying our borders or the dual loyalty of Jewish citizens. Amplifying it all are online platforms that tolerate antisemitism and hate, facilitating its unprecedented reach and accessibility. Not just adults, but children can easily find horrific hate online with a click or a swipe, 24 hours per day, seven days per week, 365 days a year.

Finally, this is all happening at a time when our collective memory of the Holocaust is fading. A recent Pew study indicated that Gen Z

knows less about the Holocaust than previous generations.⁸ *The ADL Global 100: An Index of Antisemitism* determined that only an estimated 54 percent of adults have even heard of the Holocaust.

Given this climate, ADL published this guide in March 2020. With *Antisemitism Uncovered: A Guide to Old Myths in a New Era*, we explain the history of antisemitism and the myths at its core. We ordered the discussion of each myth with descriptions of its historic origin and contemporary examples. With this modular structure, we built a bridge from past to present to crystalize and demonstrate why this hatred still haunts us. By offering this context and debunking these myths, this guide can educate people from all walks of life about what is and is not antisemitism, enabling all of us to stop its spread and call it out whenever and wherever it may arise. In March 2022, we launched a video series to further raise awareness around each of the seven tropes featured in this guide. You can find them in each chapter. We encourage you to share them and join us in fighting hate for good.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Greenblatt

ADL CEO

FOOTNOTES

- 7 Moving forward, ADL will use the spelling “antisemitism” instead of “anti-Semitism.” After reviewing the history and consulting with other leading experts, we’ve determined that this is the best way to refer to hatred toward Jews. For more, see <https://www.adl.org/spelling-of-antisemitism-vs-anti-semitism>.
- 8 Pew Research Center, Religion and Public Life, “What Americans Know About the Holocaust,” <https://www.pewforum.org/2020/01/22/what-americans-know-about-the-holocaust/>.

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antisemitism for nearly 50 years. His wisdom, passion for the legacy and future of the Jewish people and the respect with which he treats all of his colleagues strengthens ADL and inspires admiration among us.