



Antisemitisms

Antisemitism is more than prejudice, racism, or discrimination. It has common features with other hatreds, but it is uniquely complex. Antisemitic accusations are irrational and counterfactual. They often fixate on an apocalyptic logic that seeks to destroy a "secret, mythical Jewish power." Often presented in terms of salvation or redemption, antisemites demonize Jews while seeking some sort of vengeful reckoning against the perceived Jewish threat.

Focus Questions:

- Where does antisemitism come from and how does it give meaning to individual and collective identity?
- How does antisemitism act as a virus – mutating to penetrate societal norms?
- Hate cannot be publicly aired without some form of justification. What sources of authority within cultures have legitimated antisemitism?

Reflection Questions:

- What was surprising? Interesting?
- Questions? What needs to be clarified?
- Important ideas/themes?
- Challenges to your identity or assumptions?

Non-legally binding working definition of antisemitism: (U.S. Department of State)

"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."

To guide IHRA in its work, the following examples may serve as illustrations:

Manifestations might include the targeting of the state of Israel, conceived as a Jewish collectivity. However, criticism of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic. Antisemitism frequently charges Jews with conspiring to harm humanity, and it is often used to blame Jews for "why things go wrong." It is expressed in speech, writing, visual forms and action, and employs sinister stereotypes and negative character traits.

Contemporary examples of antisemitism in public life, the media, schools, the workplace, and in the religious sphere could, taking into account the overall context, include, but are not limited to:

- Calling for, aiding, or justifying the killing or harming of Jews in the name of a radical ideology or an extremist view of religion.
- Making mendacious, dehumanizing, demonizing, or stereotypical allegations about Jews as such or the power of Jews as collective — such as, especially but not exclusively, the myth about a world Jewish conspiracy or of Jews controlling the media, economy, government or other societal institutions.
- Accusing Jews as a people of being responsible for real or imagined wrongdoing committed by a single Jewish person or group, or even for acts committed by non-Jews.
- Denying the fact, scope, mechanisms (e.g. gas chambers) or intentionality of the genocide of the Jewish people at the hands of National Socialist Germany and its supporters and accomplices during World War II (the Holocaust).
- Accusing the Jews as a people, or Israel as a state, of inventing or exaggerating the Holocaust.

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- Accusing Jewish citizens of being more loyal to Israel, or to the alleged priorities of Jews worldwide, than to the interests of their own nations.
- 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.

Antisemitic acts are criminal when they are so defined by law (for example, denial of the Holocaust or distribution of antisemitic materials in some countries).

Criminal acts are antisemitic when the targets of attacks, whether they are people or property – such as buildings, schools, places of worship and cemeteries – are selected because they are, or are perceived to be, Jewish or linked to Jews.

Antisemitic discrimination is the denial to Jews of opportunities or services available to others and is illegal in many countries.

The “Mutations” of antisemitism, Rabbi Jonathan Saks

1st Mutation: Anti-Judaism

Jews are seen as religious enemies after the destruction of the second Temple in 70CE. False perceptions such as the Deicide myth (Jews killed Jesus, not the Romans) and the belief that Christianity had superseded (replaced) Judaism mark this early phase.

2nd Mutation: Demonic Anti-Judaism

The 11th century is a turning point in the mutation metaphor. The Crusades reshape anti-Jewish thought from the need to convert to the need to attack in preventative self-defense. Jews are demonized and through the trauma of the Black Death in the 14th century elaborate conspiracy theories and blood libel charges are leveled at Jews.

A turning point in Christian thought came when the myth of deicide was rejected by the Catholic Church with *Nostra Aetate* (10-28-65) at the Vatican II Council.

3rd Mutation: Racial Antisemitism

The 18th century Enlightenment sought to solve the “Jewish problem” by making Jews disappear through assimilation. The Enlightenment rejected authority and religious tradition. Although this restrained some of the false teachings of the churches it ironically opened a new phase of anti-Jewish thought: racial antisemitism. Church authority was unable to limit antisemitic violence emerging under

the guise of national identity. Often churches embraced nationalism from the roots of anti-Judaism. As Europeans controlled new empires in the late 19th century an ideology adopted by many was social Darwinism that believed that nations were in a “struggle for survival.” Not coincidentally, 19th century antisemitism was marked by the idea of “racial” struggle. The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, a fantasy created in Russia in 1902-03 became the new bible of antisemitic thought.

