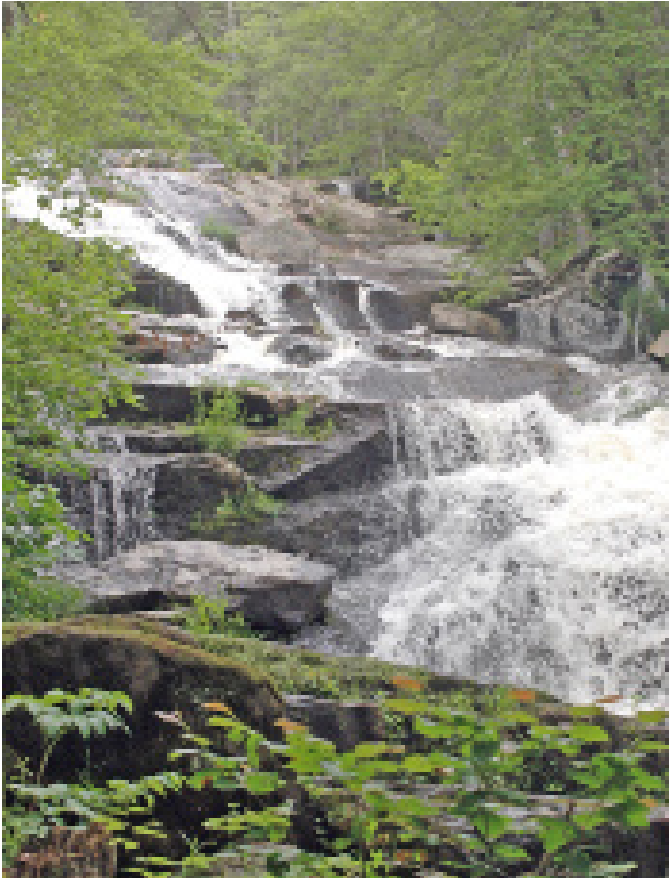


Anti-Semitism: Why Is It Everyone's Concern?

Cherie R. Brown and Amy Leos-Urbel



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RANDI FREUNDLICH

Anti-Semitism: Why Is It Everyone's Concern?

Introduction

A Jewish person is out with friends and someone makes a remark about Jews' controlling the media. The Jewish person decides to let the comment pass, but in thinking about it later realizes it was hurtful and anti-Semitic. She mentions it to a trusted friend and gets brushed off with the response, "Oh, don't say that. I know that person. They aren't anti-Semitic." The Jewish person suddenly doubts herself. She vows to think twice before raising the issue of anti-Semitism again.¹

A group of LGBTQ Jews from a local synagogue had marched together for ten years in an annual Gay pride march in their city. This year they proudly marched with a rainbow flag with a Jewish star on it. Organizers of the march came up to them to ask their position on Israel, and said these Jews would have to leave the march because their flag was upsetting to some marchers. Afterwards, back and forth attacks amongst LGBTQ activists and allies raged on Facebook.

Was kicking the Jewish LGBTQ group out of the march an act of anti-Semitism? Some thought yes; others thought no. A group of Muslim activists marched carrying a rainbow flag with a star and crescent (the symbol of Islam), and they spoke out afterward: "Why were Jews kicked out of the march while those coming from countries that perpetrate horrible violence against LGBTQ people were

¹ The terms "anti-Semitism" and "anti-Jewish oppression" are used interchangeably throughout this pamphlet. While the term anti-Semitism is less precise (there are also Semitic peoples who are not Jews), it is the term that has been widely used and understood to refer to the specific oppression directed against the Jewish people.

welcomed to stay and march? How could this be anything but anti-Semitism?”

What is anti-Semitism, and why is it everyone’s concern? Why is anti-Semitism so confusing and difficult to talk about or understand? This pamphlet offers a working definition of anti-Semitism. It explains how anti-Semitism is used to divide groups from each other and how it hurts everyone—Jews and non-Jews alike. It describes why anti-Semitism is particularly harmful to working-class people and how it is used to shield those who profit from an unfair system. And it concludes with action steps that Jews and allies can take to eliminate anti-Semitism.



ALAN EPSTEIN

What Is Anti-Semitism?

DEFINITION

Anti-Semitism is the systematic, institutionalized mistreatment of Jews. Over their long history, the Jewish people have been the target of both violent and subtle forms of persecution, including discrimination, expulsions, and genocide. For centuries, anti-Semitism has divided Jews from other groups and set up Jews as a buffer to protect those in power.

The three key elements of anti-Semitism are:

- **blame**—scapegoating Jews for problems on both a global and personal scale
- **isolation**—forcing Jews to live in restricted areas (sometimes called ghettos) and excluding them from participation in society
- **terror**—threatening their very survival as individuals and as a people. By singling out Jews for blame, anti-Semitism, or the more accurate term, anti-Jewish oppression (*see footnote on page 1*), frightens and confuses people of all backgrounds and identities.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Living as a minority without a homeland for nearly two thousand years, the Jewish people had to rely on the goodwill of rulers in each country where they settled. In exchange for a promise of protection for the Jewish community, a few Jews would serve as money lenders, tax collectors, or other public officials. The majority of Jews who settled in each country remained as impoverished as the general population. Jews were also prohibited from owning land and barred from joining craft guilds, which would have allowed them to integrate with their non-Jewish neighbors.

When the people of the area were ready to resist the oppressive conditions of their lives, they were encouraged by their rulers to direct their hatred and resentment at the Jewish community—rather than at their actual oppressors, the ruling classes. Jews would be deprived of civil rights and property, subjected to individual and mass murders, and threatened with deportation and extermination. After the violence subsided, the surviving remnants of the Jewish population would be “apologized to” officially in the original country or welcomed in new places of exile as martyrs. They would be given some assistance to rebuild their communities, and once again a few Jews would be encouraged to assume the same roles in relation to the rulers. (In the Middle Ages these Jews were called “Court Jews.”) In exchange, the whole Jewish community would be given temporary protection, and the cycle of toleration followed by attack would begin again.

ANTI-SEMITISM OPERATES BY DERAILING THE SOCIAL JUSTICE EFFORTS OF OTHER GROUPS

Anti-Semitism is important to understand because it continues to derail the liberation efforts of many groups. When Jews are singled out for blame, the attention of other groups gets diverted from identifying, and fighting against, the real causes of their own oppression. As long as anti-Semitism exists, the work of ending economic injustice, racism, sexism, Gay oppression, and other forms of oppression is also hindered. This is why anti-Semitism is sometimes called a “divide and conquer” mechanism. Anti-Semitism divides Jews from other groups and slows down the work of many liberation movements: Black liberation, Gay liberation, the women’s movement, the labor movement, and others. (See examples on pages 23 to 26 to understand how anti-Semitism slows down the work of other liberation movements.)

ANTI-SEMITISM AFFECTS ALL WORKING-CLASS PEOPLE

The real target of anti-Semitism is the working class. By setting up Jews as a scapegoat for the frustrations of other workers, anti-Semitism divides working-class people and can keep them from organizing effectively to secure equal access to the world's resources. Historically, when poor and working-class people were ready to stand up and resist oppressive conditions, Jews were often held up as the reason for their difficulties, and Jews became the target for their anger and resentment. Jews were the ones directly persecuted, but all working-class people were affected. By displacing their anger onto Jews, other oppressed people were less able to resist their own mistreatment.

In many countries, particularly in Western Europe, Christianity was also used by the state as a vehicle to spread anti-Semitism. While Christianity per se is not the cause of anti-Semitism, all church communities need to be vigilant and not unawaresly continue to spread anti-Semitism by failing to educate congregants that Jesus was a Jew and that Jews are never to be blamed for killing Jesus.

ANTI-SEMITISM IS NOT ONLY ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST

Most people would probably agree that overt acts of anti-Semitism are wrong: the bombing of synagogues, the desecration of Jewish cemeteries, the open acts of violence against Jews. But many people only recognize anti-Semitism in its most extreme forms. When you say someone is being anti-Semitic, people sometimes think that you are saying that the person is a Nazi or that Jews are about to be sent off to concentration camps. Anti-Semitism, in most people's minds, conjures up only one set of images—pogroms, concentration camps, and the Holocaust. In their minds, if a Holocaust is not happening,

then anti-Semitism is not happening. The daily impact of anti-Jewish oppression often goes unnoticed and denied. The invisibility of anti-Semitism, and the confusion about when something is anti-Semitic or when it is not, have made it almost impossible to challenge anti-Semitism effectively.

ANTI-SEMITISM CAN FUNCTION AS AN INVISIBLE THREAT

In certain periods, some Jews may have more access to economic and political mobility than people in other oppressed groups, so it doesn't look like Jews are oppressed. Even in these periods of relative calm, however, most Jews still feel fear and trepidation; they have no assurance that the cycle of oppression will not be repeated. Jewish people know from their history that when economic times get worse and a scapegoat is needed, anti-Semitism will become visible and Jews will likely once again be targeted.

For example, many of the Jews targeted for extermination by the Third Reich had been highly assimilated into German society before the Nazis came to power. As Germany struggled with the devastating effects of their defeat in World War I, Hitler was able to successfully use Jews as a scapegoat, convincing people that Jews were entirely to blame for the nation's deepening economic crisis. Even though many Jews were integrated throughout German society, the historic stereotypes were still sufficiently present in the minds of the German people that the scapegoating of Jews could be effectively employed.

Who Are the Jewish People and How Does Anti-Semitism Affect Them?

JEWS BELONG TO ALL GROUPS AND NATIONALITIES

Jews are not a race. Jews are members of every race. Jews have been citizens of many nations. They come from every country in the world and hold many different traditions and histories. All of these histories, traditions, and experiences are central to the whole Jewish experience.²

Estimates indicate that seventy-five percent of the fourteen million Jews in the world today live in Israel and the United States, with Jewish populations of 6.3 million and 5.7 million respectively. Seven countries in the world have Jewish populations between a hundred thousand and five hundred thousand.³ Ten countries each have between eighteen thousand and a hundred thousand Jews. Another seventy-eight countries have Jewish populations below eighteen thousand. Except in Israel, Jews are everywhere a small minority, estimated at 2.2 percent of the U.S. population and 0.2 percent of the total population of Europe.⁴

Some of the major groupings of Jews today include Mizrahi Jews (descended primarily from West Asian, majority-Muslim, and Arab countries); Sephardic Jews

² This pamphlet was written by people whose experience has been primarily as Ashkenazi Jews, and the pamphlet is therefore an understanding of anti-Semitism from that perspective.

³ In descending order, France, Canada, United Kingdom, Russia, Argentina, Germany, and Australia

⁴ Sergio Della Pergola, "World Jewish Population, 2016." In Arnold Dashevsky and Ira M. Sheskin (Eds.), *The American Jewish Year Book, 2016, Volume 116*, pp. 253-332. (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, 2016)

(descended from Spain, Portugal, and North Africa); Ashkenazi Jews (descended from Eastern and Central Europe); Ethiopian Jews and other African Jews; Indian Jews; Black African-heritage Jews; Asian-heritage Jews; Indigenous-heritage Jews; and Latino/a Jews. While white Ashkenazi Jews are the largest group overall, it is estimated that about fifty-two percent of Jews in Israel are Jews of color (Jews targeted by racism), and in the United States, twenty percent of Jews are likely to be Jews of color. In France, Jews of color are now a majority of the Jewish population because of recent immigration from the Jewish communities of North Africa.

THE IMPACT OF ANTI-SEMITISM ON JEWS: INTERNALIZED OPPRESSION

Like all other oppressed groups, Jews internalize their oppression and can turn its hurtful messages against both themselves and each other. Centuries of systematic persecution, policies of genocide, and near-extirmination only a few decades ago, have left many Jewish people frightened about their survival. These intense fears get passed down from generation to generation.

For example, a Jewish mother was distraught that she kept yelling at her four year old to put on his boots. She couldn't understand why she wasn't able to accept that he liked to move slowly. To help her understand what might be underneath her impatience, she was encouraged to yell out several times in a counseling session, "Put on your boots." After the fourth time yelling the phrase, out of her mouth popped the words, "You have to put on your boots now! If the Nazis come, I want you to have boots on or you won't stay alive." The mother had no idea that her impatience was rooted in her terror from her people's history in the Holocaust.

ANTI-SEMITISM IS OFTEN INVISIBLE OR DENIED

Anti-Semitism is rarely included in the “laundry list” of oppressions and social justice issues. It is also not usually mentioned in speeches or platforms at political marches and rallies. And unlike allies’ work on many other liberation issues (for example, white people working to end racism, men working against sexism, PFLAG [Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays], and other groups working against Gay oppression), there is not an organized allies’ movement of Gentiles working to end anti-Semitism.

When anti-Semitism is invisible or denied, Jews are left feeling that their fears are not based on anything real going on in the present. Instead they assume it must be their own personal problem, often concluding, “There must be something wrong with me,” or, “I must be crazy.” Jews often blame themselves for problems and don’t realize that there is a systematic oppression outside of themselves causing many of their difficulties. Without an accurate understanding that anti-Semitism exists, every struggle can become magnified as a personal, individual one.

Fearing betrayal, seeking to be in charge as a way to avert potential disaster, feeling unable to count on anyone else to do things well—these behaviors are all a direct result of anti-Semitism. And when these behaviors are not understood, it is sometimes too easy to just blame a Jewish person for any relationship difficulty. When a non-Jew notices that a Jewish person is having a difficult time relaxing or trusting other people, the non-Jewish person might just blame the Jewish person for those behaviors, never realizing that the behaviors are a direct result of centuries of persecution.



LYNDALL KATZ

The Dynamics of Anti-Semitism

WHY IS ANTI-SEMITISM SO CONFUSING AND DIFFICULT TO TALK ABOUT?

Anti-Semitism does not always fit neatly into classic understandings about oppression. Most of the time we think of oppressed peoples as being poor and disenfranchised. But the way anti-Semitism works is to give some Jews access to power and privilege so they can be visible, ready scapegoats when other oppressed people begin to rise up against the inequities that affect their lives.

Anti-Jewish oppression operates in a cyclical pattern. During those times when Jews seem to be free from overt persecution, it is tempting to conclude that Jews are not an oppressed group. But neither assimilation, acceptance, nor prominence for outstanding Jewish individuals, nor even economic mobility for the Jewish community as a whole, has ever been a guarantee that Jews will remain free from oppression.

UPWARD MOBILITY CAN SEPARATE JEWS FROM THEIR NATURAL ALLIES

The basis of many forms of oppression is economic, exploiting a particular group of people so that some groups have greater access to the resources of society and others have less. Anti-Semitism uses Jews as a scapegoat, so that when oppressed people rise up against their exploitation, they are directed to blame Jews as the cause of their problems.

A number of Jews have hoped that acquiring money or status could help them and their families gain safety and security and protect them from the threat of anti-Semitism.

Particularly after the Holocaust, when six million Jews were killed, many Jews were left terrified for their survival. Upward mobility and assimilation seemed like one way to try and protect their families from another Holocaust. But in reaching for upward mobility, they often became separated from people of color and poor and working-class people—including poor and working-class Jews. Some Jews stopped seeing themselves as strong allies to poor people and people of color. Although a sizable number of Jews today are poor or working class, they have become nearly invisible. When we can end the invisibility of working-class Jews and bring them where they belong, into the center of Jewish life, they can be a strong bridge between many Jews and all working-class people.

JEWES CAN HAVE THE APPEARANCE OF POWER

A small number of Jews today occupy highly visible positions in public life, which makes it appear as though Jews as a group have exaggerated economic or political power. In fact, as in the past, many Jews are not the owners of the corporations or the ones who ultimately profit from the labor of poor and working-class people.

But a large number of Jews are owners of small and medium-sized businesses. Many Jews are managers, doctors, lawyers, teachers, or social workers, and other Jews staff large corporate and governmental bureaucracies. These jobs have sometimes been called “middle agent” jobs because they can place Jews as a buffer between poor people and those in power. In these jobs, Jews exercise some degree of control over the daily lives of more visibly oppressed groups, especially poor people and people of color. When these groups are hurting, particularly during economically challenging times, they may look for someone to blame.

And who they see in their day-to-day life might be the local Jewish shopkeeper or landlord; the Jewish schoolteacher, social worker, or personnel manager. They don't see the major owners of wealth (most recently labeled "the one percent"). There is a long history of anti-Jewish attitudes and stereotypes, which many people are taught, such as all Jews are rich, all Jews are cheap, or Jews control many things. The expression "to Jew someone down" has been used to mean to get a good bargain. With these stereotypes in place, the blame for hard economic times can readily be deflected onto Jews. The frustration of poor and working-class people is thus diverted away from the underlying issues of racism and economic inequality around them and targeted instead at Jews.

ANTI-SEMITISM CAN LEAD TO DIFFICULTIES IN THE WORKPLACE

Many Jews have sought these managerial and professional jobs in the hope of increased security, as well as out of a desire to do work that can help to change the world. (Tikkun Olam, or "repairing the world," is a strong practice in Jewish teaching.) But being in these positions can lead to misunderstandings. A recent example occurred in a grassroots progressive organization. Several staff members sought out a consultant for help with their supervisor, saying she was pushy, aggressive, and controlling—all code words that are often used to describe Jews, and Jewish women in particular.

The frustration of poor and working-class people is thus diverted away from the underlying issues of racism and economic inequality around them and targeted instead at Jews.

The staff may or may not have been aware that their supervisor was Jewish. No one thought or said, “My supervisor is Jewish. That’s why I don’t get along with her.” They didn’t know that their difficulties with her had everything to do with the struggles that many Jews have—a sense of isolation (after a history of being forced to live in ghettos), a need to do everything oneself, panic about whether things are going to get done well, difficulty trusting that others will ever “be there,” and constant worry about impending work disasters. They may not have understood that their supervisor had most likely internalized a large amount of fear and panic, based on Jewish history, that made it hard to feel safe. They were unaware that their supervisor’s issues had roots in anti-Jewish oppression. Instead of finding ways to be her ally or looking honestly at their own contributions to the struggles, her staff simply blamed her for all of the problems at work. They missed the opportunity to examine their own behavior that had contributed to their supervisor’s struggle and to grow emotionally themselves.

This is an example of anti-Semitism. The staff reacted to their supervisor with disgust. She felt increasingly isolated and alone. They resented her even more. And it became a vicious cycle. Had they understood their supervisor’s struggles as a result of anti-Semitism, they might have had more compassion for her and a willingness to seek joint solutions. They might have also been able to acknowledge and address their part in the difficulties at work.

ANTI-SEMITISM OPERATES ON PERSONAL AND SYSTEMIC LEVELS

This type of vicious cycle also plays out systemically. Some claim, for example, that Jews own the banks, that Jews own Hollywood, that Jews control the media. In these instances, the actual history behind these stereo-

types is rarely known. For example, historically, Jews in Europe were not allowed to join most guilds. Similarly, many of the major trades in the United States blocked Jews from entry. In the twentieth century, film and television were brand-new industries, too new to have yet developed policies of exclusion (at least for some groups of white people). So Jews flocked to these industries as one of the few places they were allowed to enter. Understanding the history behind certain current practices can help to dispel the stereotypes attached to those practices.

In the current historical period, Israel is frequently singled out for blame for many of the difficulties in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For example, in the NGO documents for the United Nations conference on racism in 2001, Israel was the only country in the world that was mentioned for its racism. Is the continued occupation of Palestinian land racist? Yes. Is Israel the only country in the world that perpetrates racism? No. In a later section, we will describe some of the ways that the classic mechanism of anti-Semitism plays out in relation to Israel's role in the region.



LOUISA FLANDER

THE PERSONAL INTERSECTION OF RACISM AND ANTI-SEMITISM: THE “HOOK”

Ideally, Jews and peoples targeted by racism would be natural allies. There have been many historic moments of cooperation between Jews and different groups targeted by racism, particularly people of African heritage. Over time, Black Gentiles and Jews, particularly in the United States, have come to recognize that they have many experiences of oppression that link their peoples in a common struggle for social justice.

But there have also been too many moments of mistrust and division between Jewish people and Black African-heritage people—on both personal and political levels. One way to look at the difficulties over the years between Black Gentiles and white Ashkenazi Jews is to examine the intersection of racism and anti-Semitism. It can sometimes be talked about as a “hook.”

Jews (white Ashkenazi Jews, in particular) are sometimes scared and panicked as a result of a long history of betrayal and abandonment. This panic has left them, in certain circumstances, wanting to take charge of a situation, exert strong leadership, even urgently interrupt or take over if it looks to them like something could go wrong. These behaviors are a result of the history of anti-Jewish oppression, when things going wrong could mean imminent death. However, when these behaviors are acted out in relationships with Black African-heritage people, it is racism.

And Black people have learned over a long history of oppression that when white people get scared, Black people’s lives can be in danger. In the United States, for example, many states have what are called “stand your ground” laws. Under these laws, if a white person is afraid of a Black person, their fear may be considered a justifiable defense for shooting and killing the Black person. As a result, Black people may understandably want to run far away from any

white person who is acting out panic and fear. And yet, running away or abandoning a white Ashkenazi Jewish person because they show their fear is also anti-Semitism.

And that is the “hook”: Jewish panic can lead to acting out racist behavior, and the response to the racist behavior in turn can lead to abandoning a Jew, which is anti-Semitism. By understanding this intersection of racism and anti-Semitism, Black people and white Ashkenazi Jews can keep from getting caught in the “hook.” With this greater clarity, they can reach for a stronger alliance.

DO JEWS ALSO ACT OPPRESSIVELY?

Some of us may wish for a simple definition of “good guys” and “bad guys,” but Jews—like many peoples—function in both “oppressed” and “oppressor” roles.

Anti-Semitism is the systematic scapegoating of Jews. Anti-Semitism is never the fault of Jews. It is important to be clear that Jews don’t *ever* deserve to be persecuted. At the same time, in response to centuries of persecution, some Jews have sought protection, safety, and survival by aligning with those in power and by taking on oppressive roles and behaviors.

To see Jews only as oppressors misses the reality of the conditions of their existence. Singling out Jews for condemnation, because it is treating them unfairly and differently from all others, is anti-Semitic.

At the same time, Jews, like all people, need to be held accountable for oppressive behaviors. Lacking understanding, compassion, or awareness for Jewish struggles is never useful, and it prevents the unity necessary for real change toward a world without oppression. But ignoring or denying that Jews do oppressive things will not make Jews safer or end anti-Semitism. Instead, that course leaves Jews more isolated from the rest of the world’s peoples—which can also lead to increased anti-Semitism.



KEHILA CHADASHA

Where Does Israel Fit In?

WHY IS THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT SO CONFUSING?

In the same way that anti-Semitism has been confusing to many people, the issue of Israel has also been confusing to many of our allies—especially in progressive movements—and increasingly to some Jews. While it is beyond the scope of this publication to explore all of the complexities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, we will address a few key points.

It is important to make a distinction between the policies and actions of the Israeli government and the Israeli people. We can, and do need to take a clear stand against the oppressive policies of the government, while remembering and holding out the goodness of the people.

For many Jews, the establishment of the modern state of Israel in 1948 promised to fulfill the hope of ending centuries of persecution, which had reached an extreme level of destruction and violence only a few years earlier, in the Nazi Holocaust. Jews had been without a homeland for thousands of years, subject to the cycles of anti-Semitism in the countries in which they lived. It was hoped that with Israel as a national homeland, the Jewish people would finally have a safe place to build unity and exercise self-determination.

For Palestinians, the Israeli War of Independence in 1948 is often called *Nakba* or “the tragedy.” It was a devastating moment, one that led to their families’ being exiled and ripped from their homes in Palestine. Here were two oppressed peoples set up against each other, in competition for the same land and resources.

The Israeli and Palestinian peoples can be—and need to be—strong allies for each other in solving the problems facing that region of the world. The existence of the state of Israel is crucial to Jewish liberation, and the establishment of a Palestinian state is crucial to the liberation of the Palestinian people. Jewish liberation and Palestinian liberation are not in conflict. They can, and must, move forward together so that both peoples can experience full security and self-determination.

INCREASING THE ISOLATION OF ISRAEL AND SINGLING ISRAEL OUT FOR BLAME CAN ALSO BE ANTI-SEMITISM

Singling out Israel for blame for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be an example of contemporary anti-Semitism if all of the blame for the conflict is placed on Israel.

Many Israeli Jews have battled heroically to build cooperative relationships with Palestinians, and many Palestinians have battled heroically to build cooperative relationships with Israeli Jews. Some groups vilify Israel and communicate that Israel, or the policies of the Israeli government, are the sole cause of all of the current difficulties in the region. Others vilify the Palestinian people, claiming that there is “no one on the other side to talk to,” and that peace would be possible except for Palestinian intransigence.

Singling out Israel for blame reinforces the fears of the Israeli people and pushes them to support right-wing policies and militaristic solutions even more. Singling out the Palestinian people for blame ignores the very real daily oppression they endure and leaves them feeling even more isolated and in despair, which has sometimes led to increased violence.

The Occupation in the West Bank and Gaza needs to end. The current policies of the Israeli government (increased settlement programs, checkpoints, house demolitions, on-the-ground violations of Palestinian rights, and legal attacks on progressive organizations that challenge the status quo) are wrong and further increase the isolation of Israel from the world's peoples and, in the end, open Jews to increased anti-Semitism worldwide.

The isolation of Israel from its natural allies, the Palestinian people, continues to be a key part of locking anti-Semitism in place. No matter how difficult it might appear in the present moment to achieve a policy of two peoples, two homelands, it is in the best long-term interest of both the Israeli Jewish people and the Palestinian people. Both peoples have a right to national self-determination.

Another important, often-overlooked factor in perpetuating the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the use of the region to support a continued arms race. Russian, and now U.S., interests have been served by continually supplying a vast amount of arms in the Middle East. On the pretext of "supporting" Israel, the United States maintains control of the oil in the region by offering arms to Israel, Saudi Arabia, and others.

It is also important to acknowledge that racism toward the Mizrachim (Jews originally from Arab countries) by white Ashkenazi Jews has strongly contributed to the difficulty in building unity between Israeli Jews and Palestinians. Systemic, ongoing racism in Israel over decades toward the Mizrachim, including within the Israeli peace movement, has made it difficult to have Mizrachi leadership in the center of the alliance-building work that goes on between Israeli Jews and Palestinians. The Mizrachim need to be in the center of the leadership on Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts. They can also be a natural bridge between Palestinians and Israeli Jews.



PAM ROBY

Is It Anti-Semitism? A Few Helpful Guidelines with Examples

THREE USEFUL CRITERIA FOR DETERMINING IF SOMETHING IS ANTI-SEMITIC

Sometimes anti-Semitism is obvious and indisputable. In cases where it is not so clear, here are three helpful criteria for determining whether or not something is anti-Semitic:

1. Are Jews or Israel being singled out for blame?
2. Is a liberation movement (Black Lives Matter, the women's movement, Gay liberation, the labor movement) being diverted from its mission by attacks on Jews or Israel?
3. Does the situation, or the policy being proposed, increase the isolation of Jews from other oppressed groups?

CONTEMPORARY EXAMPLES OF ANTI-SEMITISM

At the United Nations NGO Conference on Racism: The United Nations Non-Governmental Conference on Racism in Durban, South Africa, in 2001, was a significant event that brought together thousands of anti-racism activists from all over the world. At the same time, the primary agenda of the conference was often derailed by the targeting and singling out of Israel for blame for all of the problems in the Middle East.

Some conference participants expressed hatred of Jews by wearing buttons that read "Hitler didn't do enough of his job." A cartoon was circulated at the conference depicting a

Jewish man with a hooked nose, a beard, and blood pouring from his hands, which were clasped in a greedy pose. The cartoon resembled oppressive “blood-libel” caricatures of Jews that had circulated for centuries in Europe. The former president of Ireland, Mary Robinson, the head of the non-governmental portion of the conference, when shown a copy of the cartoon responded, “If these anti-Semitic cartoons are being passed out here in Durban, then I’m a Jew.” At the closing ceremonies, a sizable number of the audience—people who devote their lives to fighting racism—booed her because she had taken a stand earlier in the week against anti-Semitism.

The United States walked out of the conference in Durban, claiming it was because of the anti-Israel rhetoric. In fact, the Bush administration was always unenthusiastic about participating in the conference because it didn’t want to risk possible legal ramifications of endorsing a policy that would include reparations for the descendants of Africans brought to the United States as slaves. The United States could conveniently stay silent about some of its real reasons for leaving the conference and instead claim they were only leaving because of the condemnations of Israel. This left the real motivations behind the United States’ leaving Durban hidden, and instead Palestinians and Jews were left fighting one another. This is a classic way that anti-Semitism works—setting Jews up to be blamed for larger systemic issues.

At the Creating Change Conference: At the Creating Change Conference, a large gathering of LGBTQT activists in Chicago, Illinois, USA, in 2016, A Wider Bridge, a group that supports LGBTQT activists in Israel, was invited, then uninvited, and finally re-invited to the conference. During the conference, members of A Wider Bridge, as well as other visible Jews, were physically attacked, and the police had to intervene. The rationale given for the attack was that anyone who supports Gay activists from Israel should

not be allowed into the conference because of Israel's oppressive policies toward Palestinians. Israeli LGBTQ activists were the only ones being condemned. Activists from other countries with well-known human rights violations were welcomed. This attack on U.S. Jews and Israeli Jews ripped apart the conference. Once again, the mission of an important liberation effort was undermined by singling out Israeli activists and Jews for condemnation.

In the Labor Party in England: The Labor Party in England was seriously weakened by attacks on Jeremy Corbyn from the right, in which anti-Semitism was used as a pretext for attempts to weaken and dismantle the party. Corbyn, a promising leader with a progressive program, had held several meetings with pro-Palestinian leaders. Although he also met with Jewish leaders and voiced strong support for Israel's right to exist while challenging the continued Occupation, the right attacked him and labeled him anti-Semitic. In the guise of "protecting Jews," the right was actually using Jews to weaken the Labor Party. This example demonstrates that people's rushing to defend Jews, or defend Israel, can still function as anti-Semitism.



JANET FONER

In the U.S. election in 2016: Periodic references to “Jewish power and influence,” by government officials and others, perpetuate the scapegoating and blaming of Jews. During the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign, for instance, the Trump campaign used a flyer with a picture of Hillary Clinton surrounded by Jewish stars, dollar signs, images of Wall Street, and the names of well-known Jews in the finance industry. The campaign withdrew the picture in response to criticism, but not before the subliminal message had been delivered: that Clinton, and the Jews who supported her, were to blame for the economic struggles of working-class people. In the year following the 2016 elections, there was a 67% rise in anti-Semitic incidents in the United States.

On U.S. college campuses: On many U.S. college campuses, there is growing conflict between Jewish students and other progressive students. In recent years, some Jewish students have been barred from participation in progressive coalitions, particularly if they hold positions in support of Israel. It is assumed that they could never be impartial, regardless of their personal position on the Occupation or Palestinian rights.

Student groups that support Palestinian liberation are building coalitions with Black Lives Matter, environmental groups, LGBTQ groups, and women’s groups. Some of these coalitions do not allow Jewish students to participate, particularly if they support Israel. This is an example of anti-Semitism. Sometimes these groups even block open dialogue and the airing of different opinions. While it is essential to be organizing with other groups on behalf of Palestinian liberation, in the long run, excluding Jews who care about Israel from these coalitions will not help win Palestinian liberation.

What Can We Do about Anti-Semitism?

COUNTER THE CORE ELEMENTS OF THE OPPRESSION

The core elements of anti-Jewish oppression are blame, isolation, and terror. Therefore, effective strategies against anti-Semitism must counteract these elements.

One example of an effective, proactive approach occurred several years ago at an anti-globalization conference attended by twenty thousand activists in Porto Alegre, Brazil. A number of groups tried to divert the conference with anti-Israel rhetoric à la Durban, but this time a joint Palestinian and Israeli peace effort triumphed.

The Jewish community of Brazil had been concerned beforehand that anti-Israel groups would dominate the conference. Instead of acting defensively, they had set up a three-day seminar before the conference called "Dialogue for Peace." The Jewish leadership had marched in all of the anti-globalization rallies. The chief rabbi of Brazil had joined dozens of others wearing T-shirts with the slogan "Two peoples; two states." Jewish activists had displayed banners that said "Yes to two states. No to racist hatred of Jews."

At the closing ceremony, a joint Israeli-Palestinian statement was read by both the founder of Israel's Peace Now and a member of the Palestine Liberation Organization. Twenty thousand activists stood and wept and cheered. Such efforts are the best antidote we have to anti-Semitism.

*The core elements of anti-Jewish oppression
are blame, isolation, and terror.*

PRACTICE THESE FOUR SPECIFIC ACTIONS TO REDUCE ANTI-SEMITISM

1. Set up groups for Jews to tell personal stories about anti-Semitism, its effects on them, and its derailing of social justice activities.

A useful model from the U.S. women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s was the structure known as the consciousness-raising group. By meeting regularly to share the details of their lives, these groups offered their members a supportive space to discover commonalities and differences in their experiences and to recognize that the personal is also political. We now need similar consciousness-raising groups for Jews on anti-Semitism. At each meeting of an anti-Semitism support group, each member can be asked: What has it been like to be a Jew this week? This month? This year? How have you experienced anti-Semitism today? What was an "aha" moment in your life when you realized there was anti-Semitism?

2. Create a non-judgmental atmosphere in which Jews can examine how they may also act out oppressive behavior.

Because Jews are a traumatized people with a long history of oppression, it is nearly impossible for many Jews to see themselves as both victims and oppressors (particularly toward the Palestinian people). We need to find a way to not blame Jews and at the same time make it safe enough to take an honest look at the oppressive things that are being done to Palestinians. In a safe setting like the anti-Semitism support groups described above, Jews can also explore such questions as: When did you first hear about Arabs or Palestinians in your family or synagogue? What would you have to face if you were to notice the depth of the oppression toward Palestinians and then speak up for the rights of the Palestinian people? The more Jews can find the safety with each other to acknowledge and

work through this biased conditioning, the more it will be possible for Jews to build powerful, lasting coalitions with their natural allies.

3. Create an allies' movement against anti-Semitism.

Allies are critical to ending anti-Semitism. They can start by examining the hurtful things they learned (consciously or unconsciously) about Jews, review their earliest memories about Jews, and answer some of the following questions: What did you first learn about Jews in your family or at your place of worship? When did you first hear about Jews? What would you have to face if you were never to allow Jews or Israel to be singled out for blame? Allies can then organize together, as non-Jews, to help defeat anti-Semitism. For example, they could make sure that anti-Semitism is included as one of the "isms" listed in a social justice program or march. They can take the lead in speaking up about anti-Semitism. They could also decide to attend a march with a banner, such as one saying "Jews and Allies United to End Anti-Semitism."

4. Welcome a diversity of views on what will bring about a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In the present period, much of the confusion and pain about anti-Semitism manifests in conflict about Israel and Palestine. It is necessary—although challenging—to understand the complexity of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We need to stop saying that all criticism of the policies of the Israeli government is anti-Semitic or that those who criticize Israel are automatically against Jews. We also need to take a firm stand against those who believe that Jews who do support Israel in any way should be isolated and not allowed to participate in marches, rallies, or other liberation work. Let's reintroduce the sound Jewish tradition of engaging in dialogue, argument, and thoughtful discussion (with a lot of listening to all sides) in order to increase everyone's good thinking.

A Call For Unity

Let us work together with all who are committed to social justice to embrace a commitment to end anti-Semitism alongside all oppression. As a unified movement, no longer vulnerable to the divide-and-conquer politics of anti-Semitism, we will be more effective at fighting for the liberation of all peoples.

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This pamphlet is a publication of *Jews and Allies: United to End Anti-Semitism*, a project of the International Re-evaluation Counseling Community. Its practices are based on the theory of Re-evaluation Counseling (RC).

You are invited to become acquainted with Re-evaluation Counseling and, if interested, to join the Re-evaluation Counseling Community. For more information or to find a local contact person, please see our website, www.rc.org, or contact the International Re-evaluation Counseling Community by e-mailing to ircc@rc.org or by calling +1-206-284-0311.