

UNDERSTANDING ANTI-SEMITISM

Anti-Semitism is a unique form of oppression in which Jews are targeted. Like all oppressive systems, it is a narrative of ideas that targets a social group ideologically or physically, or both. Though modern anti-Semitism has its roots in the obfuscation of Christian doctrine, today it manifests in religious, racial, and political mistreatment.



To understand anti-Semitism, we must understand institutional oppression.

Institutions—relatively stable establishments that create collective actions—are often manipulated by social groups that seek to benefit from them. Institutional oppression is precisely this mistreatment.

Historically, oppression has manifested through sexism, racism, classism, homophobia, and similar systems of ideas. By controlling and disempowering other groups, oppressors retained power. Anti-Semitism operates on both an institutional and individual level.

Oppression does not always manifest in physical violence. In fact, most oppression is invisible on the surface and manifests through laws, practices, and general prejudice that further inequality.

To understand anti-Semitism, we must understand what Jews are.

Simply put, Jews are an ethnoreligious minority—but what does that mean? What (or who) defines ethnicity and religion?

Though no definition is complete, some underlying currents persist: Jewish culture is rooted in a shared Diasporic tradition, memory, and history, while religion is rooted in shared practices. A Jew is NOT defined by ethnicity, location, or family lineage.

How do we place anti-Jewish oppression in context?

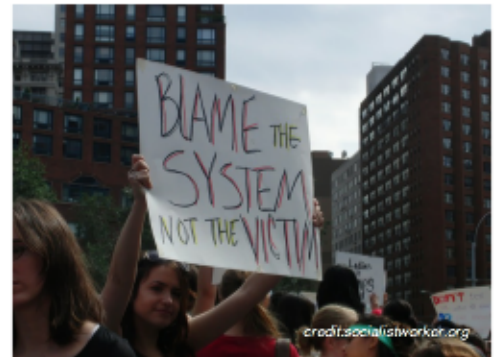
Though manifestations of anti-Semitism change, the root of anti-Semitism—like all oppression—remains the same. Though Jews live in relative safety in the United States and have generally lived free from violence in Western Europe since the Second World War, they are not wholly free from anti-Semitic experiences.

Because anti-Semitism is unique—like every oppression—it must be addressed separately. Groups within and outside the Jewish community directly address anti-Semitism; these include various Israeli institutions, the US State Department and its European equivalents, the Anti-Defamation League, local Jewish federations, the American Jewish Committee, CAMERA, and many other anti-racist groups.

Anti-racist groups are constantly fighting against an unjust status quo in which Jews (and other oppressed social groups) are targeted. All too often, leaders from kings to congressmen chose to channel their frustration at Jews instead of fighting those that cause the problems.

Can Jews be anti-Semitic?

Yes! One's heritage does not excuse prejudice. In fact, many Jews become complicit with their oppressors (examples in popular culture include the Judenrat or Lazar Kaganovich). Oppression can also be internalized—Jews may perceive themselves as cheap, weak, and 'different,' as well as push their identities underground.



ARE JEWS/ISRAEL TO BLAME FOR GLOBAL ANTI-SEMITISM?

Shortly after the Charlie Hebdo attacks and in the wake of an anti-Semitic shooting in Denmark, a Swedish radio journalist asked Israeli ambassador Isaac Bachman on air: "Are Jews themselves responsible for the progression of anti-Semitism?"

Ambassador Bachman was astonished by the question, claiming it was similar to asking if *women are responsible for their rape.*

Unfortunately, **victim blaming** happens all too often on college campuses.