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UNDERSTANDING ANTISEMITISM: A GUIDE FOR OUR PARTNERS

Antisemitism is the world's oldest and most enduring hatred. Like anti-Black racism, antisemitism is systematic and institutionalized in every political movement, society, and economic system in the world. The insidious nature of this disease makes it harder to identify and disrupt than most other forms of bigotry. Consequently, anti-Jewish ideas may sit in our spaces, often taking the form of blind spots and biases. If left unchecked, it will erode our movements for justice as we fall for the trap white supremacy has laid for us: a scapegoat to distract from the real forces behind oppression of vulnerable minorities.

WHAT IS ANTISEMITISM?

- In the most simple sense, antisemitism is anti-Jewish bigotry, or a bigotry aimed at the Jewish people.
- Many people think of antisemitism as a form of religious bigotry. This stems from a general perception that Jews are a community with a shared religion (Judaism).
- However, in its modern form, antisemitism acts more like a form of racism. Jews aren't often attacked for their religious beliefs. We're attacked for being Jews—part of the Jewish nation.

HOW DOES ANTISEMITISM MANIFEST?

- Antisemitism is largely based on conspiracy theories that blame Jews for the problems, real or perceived, of a society or community. In these conspiracies, the Jews are the secret force harming one group of people, or the entire collective.
- White nationalists in America, for example, hate Jews because of our commitment to the Civil Rights Movement and supporting the civic and political power of non-white communities. "Jews will not replace us!" is not a chant about the small Jewish population (16 million globally) taking over the white race (note: to them, Jews are not white), but rather, that Jews are joined in a massive conspiracy to subvert the white race, by replacing white control and white culture in America with people of color.
- In some communities of color, the conspiracy is inverted: Jews may be viewed as the ultimate embodiment of the evils of whiteness and race-based oppression. For example, subscribers to Louis Farrakhan's Nation of Islam perpetuate a dangerous lie accusing Jews of controlling the Atlantic slave trade. Some fringe elements of the progressive movement, including some Jews, allege that Israeli Jews train American law enforcement to terrorize and murder Black Americans. In both cases, the slanderous accusation is that Jews (whether in America or in Israel) work to harm, maim, or kill Black people.



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HOW DO I SPOT ANTISEMITISM?

- There are many classical antisemitic tropes: messages that are recycled throughout the ages to scapegoat the Jews for whatever is viewed as the ultimate wrong in any given society in any given moment. For example, throughout history, Jews have been violently attacked in societies that have normalized language calling Jews powerful, manipulative, bloodthirsty, wealthy, greedy, or working toward world domination. Please check out our simple but comprehensive [resource](#) to become more familiar with these dangerous tropes.

WHAT ABOUT ISRAEL?

- Criticizing specific policies of any government, from a place of knowledge, is always appropriate, even passionately. Decrying specific politics or policies of the state of Israel is not antisemitic.
- However, demonizing Israel, calling the state illegitimate, or advocating for its dissolution, is perceived by the vast majority of Jews in the world as explicitly antisemitic. Unless coming from a principled anti-nationalist who does not believe in states or borders for any peoples, the implication that Israel should cease to exist as a Jewish state is anti-Jewish.
- Demonizing Zionism is antisemitic because it seeks to undermine the right of the Jewish people to be liberated and self-determined in a sovereign state for the Jewish people in our indigenous homeland. It is up to the Jewish people to determine what persecution against us looks and feels like, and given that more than 90% of American Jews identify as Zionist, calling oneself “anti-Zionist” is overwhelmingly perceived by Jews to be antisemitic.
- Pushing Zionist Jews (90%+ of all American Jews) out of progressive spaces, or holding American Jews accountable for Israel’s actions is highly problematic. Creating litmus tests for Jewish participation in domestic justice movements—especially those that affect our bodily integrity and our rights as women, LGBTQ+ individuals, Jews of Color, immigrants, refugees, etc.—is antisemitic in that it demands that we have, and declare, our positions on complex geopolitical issues in order to advocate for our rights in the countries in which we live and vote.

WHY SHOULD THIS BE SO IMPORTANT TO ME?

- Antisemitism erodes the very fabric of a healthy society. Where conspiracy theories thrive, democratic societies which protect civil rights for marginalized communities cannot survive. Therefore, this is genuinely a shared fight and a problem that affects all of us. A frequent refrain and warning is that “what starts with the Jews, never ends with the Jews.” Fighting antisemitism is an urgent mandate for every American.
- As Eric K. Ward, a Black man who infiltrated the white supremacist movement by presenting as an anti-Jewish bigot, wrote in his seminal piece, [Skin in the Game](#), antisemitism is the very nucleus and animating force of white supremacy and white nationalism in America. We cannot defeat these existential threats to the democratic experiment without vigilantly fighting antisemitism everywhere it manifests.
- Check out our resource [“How Antisemitism Weakens Our Movements”](#) for more details.