

A banner with the text "AMERICAN UNIVERSITY AM" in a serif font, set against a background of a building facade and foliage. The banner is partially obscured by a dark horizontal bar.

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY AM

Understanding



Understanding Antisemitism: A Guide for American University

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campus. She consulted with a cohort of interested faculty, staff, and students. Some are experts in antisemitism. Some have experienced it at AU or heard confidences from those who have shared their experiences. She thanks Jason Benkendorf, Michael Brenner, Jessica Emami, Lisa Leff, Saul Newman, Lauren Strauss, and Amanda Taylor for their assistance and feedback on earlier drafts of this guide. Insights shared by AU students, including those in her fall 2022 Complex Problems seminar Antisemitism: Enduring Hatred, proved invaluable.

Because no unit on campus has systematically collected data on antisemitism from multiple sources, we have no sense of the breadth of the problem on our campus.

Nevertheless, antisemitism

animosity towards Jews past and present.

Perhaps the most important thing to understand about antisemitism on the campus today and how it affects our students is that they arrive at AU with knowledge—sometimes deep and personal knowledge—of how antisemitism affected Jews in the past, their own encounters with it in the present, and the sense that antisemitism will continue to be a factor in their lives into the future.

3. Understanding Judaism and the Jewish People

The Oxford English Dictionary defines Judaism as the religion or culture of the Jewish people. But that definition does not fully grasp the complexity of Jewish civilization with its theology, religious rituals, literatures, histories, languages, laws, ideals, and values. For more than three thousand years, Jews have adapted Jewish civilization to different times and places. In 1654, they brought it to what would become the United States of America.

The origins of the Jewish people lie in the ancient land of Israel where they made Jerusalem their ancestral capital. After conquest first in the early 6th century B.C.E. by the Babylonians and then in 70 C.E. by the Romans, a thriving Jewish Diaspora emerged in lands ringing the Mediterranean and beyond. Yet, some Jews remained in their historic homeland, which was renamed Palestine by the first-century Romans. Consequently, the land of Israel remains central to the self-identity of the Jewish people.

There are currently about 15.3 million Jews in the world, roughly 0.2% of the global population. Slightly more than 7 million live in the modern State of Israel. Approximately 6 million live in the United States.⁹ There is a variety of Jewish denominations and religious expressions. Moreover, many Jews around the world, eschewing a religious self-definition, call themselves culturally, ethnically, or nationally Jewish.

4. Antisemitic Themes and Claims

4.1 Understanding Christian Anti-Judaism

Christianity evolved out of first-century Judaism. Jesus was a Galilean Jew, and many of his teachings were seen as promises in the Hebrew Bible. The New Testament Gospels blamed the Jews for urging the Romans to crucify him.

As Christianity became a distinct faith, separate from Judaism, and then, as it became in late antiquity the dominant faith in the Western world, Christians continued to see Jewish enmity. The historian David Nirenberg sees hostility to Judaism lying at the heart of Western culture as it developed under Christendom.¹⁰

⁹ Jewish Agency for Israel, [Jewish Population Rises to 15.3 Million Worldwide, with Over 7 Million Residing in Israel](#), September 25, 2022.

¹⁰ Michael N. Dobkowski summarizes this as the argument of David *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* in his review; Jewish Book Council, April 11, 2013, <https://www.jewishbookcouncil.org/book/anti-judaism-the-western-tradition>.

The Church fathers, theologians who developed Christianity over the next half millennium, denounced the Jews for refusing to accept Christ and embrace Christianity. Their so-called Church to adopt a policy of permitting the Jews to survive but never to thrive.¹¹ Over the centuries that policy would result in laws restricting Jews and Jewish communities and even lead to the establishment of walled ghettos whose gates were locked each

Negative associations of the Jews and money appear in the Gospels where Judas betrays Jesus

¹⁶

¹⁷ Yet, in

the Middle Ages, limitations on Jewish economic endeavors forced Jews into pawnbroking and moneylending. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare gave the world the prototype of the greedy, wicked moneylender Shylock, who would carve out his bond from the flesh of his debtor. Jews have been stereotyped as greedy and avaricious, corrupted by money, and willing to use nefarious means to acquire it.

Criticism of greed and the financial sector often targets Jews as a group or references well-known Jewish financiers, like the Rothschilds. Even the terms _____ and _____ be antisemitic dog whistles.

Another antisemitic false claim about Jews and money asserts that the Jews controlled the

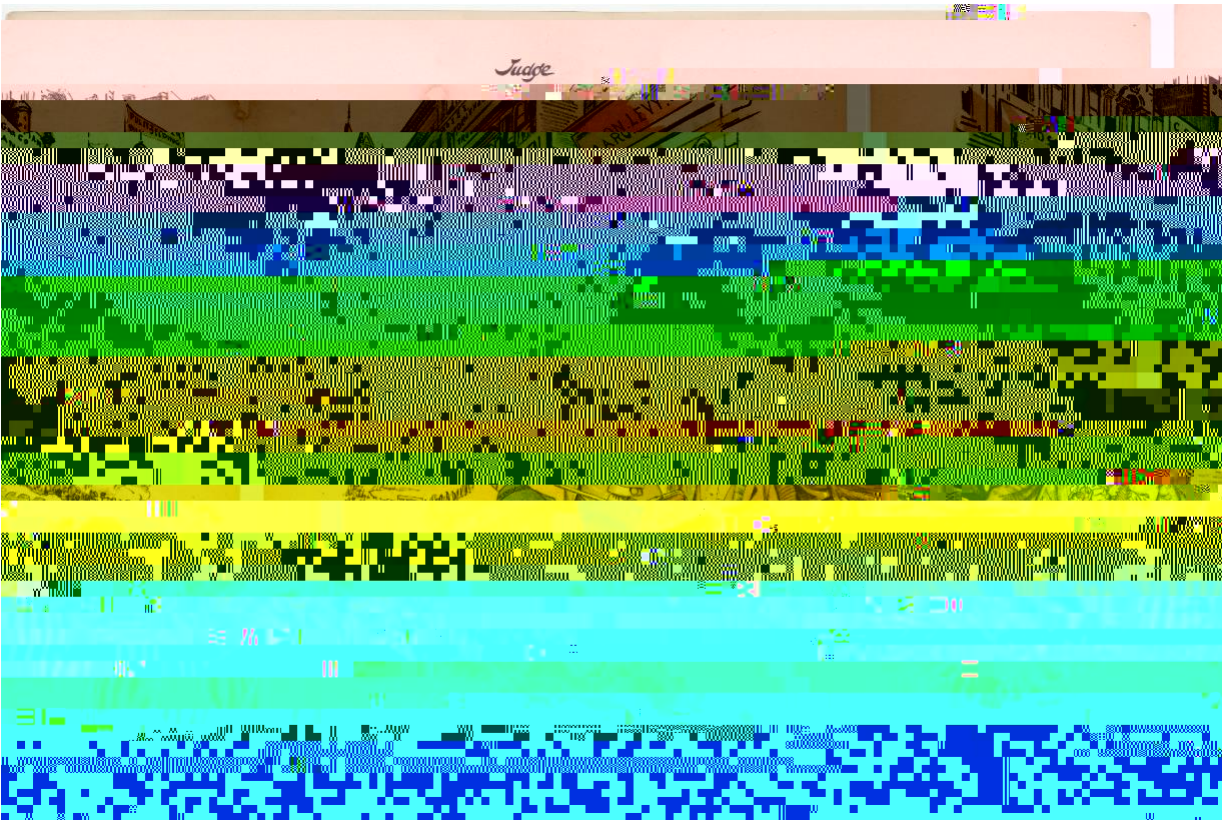
racialized as non-white.

U.S. postcard, 1901, published by Franz Huld
The German inscription reads: I send you the view of many of my fellow countrymen,
From the [Arthur Langerman Collection](#)

4.5 The Conspiracy Theory of Jewish World **EQ612 72 reW*nBTg/TT1 12 Tf189473.5.365**

Targeting all Jews as political radicals grows out of the history of Jews and left-wing politics. In Europe in the 1930s and 1940s, the Nazis, convinced that the Jews fomented communist revolutions as part of their plan for world domination, attacked so-called In the U.S. as in Eastern Europe, when early-twentieth-century impoverished Jews, radicalized by intolerable working and living conditions, were also drawn to labor unions and left-wing politics, antisemites vilified all Jews as revolutionaries and leftists.

A related conspiracy theory shows immigrant Jews taking over America as the



Judge Magazine, January 23, 1892

In *Skin in the Game: How Antisemitism Animates White* Ward explains

into the nation and the campaigns of civil rights, feminist, and LGBTQ movements.¹⁹

In the twentieth century, American Jews were also active in progressive movements that called for open immigration, cultural pluralism, and civil rights for African Americans. Today, about 70 percent of American Jews identify with or lean towards the Democratic

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<https://politicalresearch.org/2017/06/29/skin-in-the-game-how-antisemitism-animates-white-nationalism>, June 29, 2017.

bomb synagogues, Jewish community centers, and homes in the 1950s and 1960s. In

Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, a progressive organization aiding refugees and asylum seekers around the world.

4.7 The Accusation of Dual Loyalty

Antisemites accuse seekers around d{AntB2 Td()TjETQq0 0 612 792 reW*ñBT/TT0 12 Tf7261944 574.42 TdJ

The Zionist movement led to the establishment of the State of Israel. Zionism upholds the Jewish right to national self-determination, a right protected under international law.²¹

Zionism, one of many nineteenth-century European nationalist movements, was a response not only to discrimination against Jews but also to the violence of the pogroms, anti-Jewish riots in the Russian Empire. These attacks persisted well into the twentieth century before the rise of the Nazis, with an estimated 100,000 Jews murdered in Ukraine between 1918 and 1921.²²

Zionism is also rooted in the traditional Jewish belief that sustained the Jews across the millennia that one day they would return to Zion, the biblical name for Jerusalem and the historic Jewish homeland.

largest Jewish communities in Israel and the U.S. comprise about 85 percent of world Jewry.²³ For the great majority of American Jews caring about Israel forms a powerful part of their Jewish identities.²⁴

American Jews hold a variety of opinions about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

According to the *Working Report from the Association for Jewish Studies Task Force on Antisemitism and Academic Freedom*, of Israel is not equivalent to ²⁵ Recognizing that all university members not only have the right to their own positions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and that universities should neither stifle robust debate nor free speech, the report states:

position on Palestinian movements serves as a proxy for invoking hateful symbols and tropes (whether antisemitic, Islamophobic, or otherwise bigoted) and/or acts as a litmus test for inclusion in activities or clubs, then the protections of academic freedom no longer stand.²⁶

The *Working Report* recognizes that invoking bigoted symbols and tropes about the Israel-Palestine conflict crosses the line into hate speech. Similarly, demanding that students

other religions.

²¹ See, e.g., [United Nations Charter, Article 1 \(2\) Equal rights and self-determination of peoples](#), 1945.

²² Jeffrey Veidlinger, *In the Midst of Civilized Europe: The Pogroms of 1918-1921 and the Onset of the Holocaust* (New York: Picador, 2021).²³ Jewish Agency for Israel, [Jewish Population Rises to 15.3 Million Worldwide, with Over 7 Million Residing in Israel](#), September 25, 2022.

²³ Jewish Agency for Israel, [Jewish Population Rises to 15.3 Million Worldwide, with Over 7 Million Residing in Israel](#), September 25, 2022.

²⁴ Eight-in-ten U.S. Jews say caring about Israel is an essential or important part of their Jewish identities; Pew Research Center [Jewish Americans in 2020](#), May 11, 2021 (page 137 of the full report.)

²⁵ The Association for Jewish Studies (AJS) is the leading learned society for Jewish scholars. AU Professor Pamela Nadell is a past president of the AJS. AU Senior Professorial Lecturer Lauren Strauss currently sits on its board. Other members of the AU faculty are members of the AJS.

²⁶ Association for Jewish Studies, [A Working Report from the AJS Task Force on Antisemitism and Academic Freedom](#).

disassociate themselves from Israel in order to participate in any aspect of campus life violates the nondiscrimination policies universities uphold.

This is the crux of the issue for the campus. When does discourse about Israel cross the line to antisemitism?

Allegations that demonize Israel and Israelis by calling Israelis Nazis, accusing them of

ignoring that of other nations has crossed the line to antisemitism. Similarly, targeting Israel as a settler-colonial state not only denies Jewish history but also is used to demand that Israel, as a nation, cease to exist.

The following are some illustrations of how antisemitism around Israel is manifested, especially on the campus.

Denouncing Israel as a litmus test for participating in university life. When campus activists demand that Jewish students or Jewish student organizations denounce Israel in order to participate in their activities, the line to antisemitism has been crossed. These demands deny Jewish students the right to embrace support for Israel as an aspect of their intersectional identities.

Holding all Jews accountable for Israeli policies. When all Jews are held accountable for the actions or policies of the State of Israel, that is antisemitism. Jews born outside of the State of Israel are not its citizens. They do not vote there. They do not make its governmental policies.

Using antisemitic myths and symbols to criticize Israel. When those condemning

to the discourse over the Israel-Palestinian conflict.

Source: American Jewish Committee

[Behind the Numbers: Young American Jews' Encounters with Antisemitism](#), February 13, 2023

At George Washington University, Students for Justice in Palestine demonstrated outside the Hillel Jewish student building during the fall Jewish holidays protesting a speech by a former Israel Defense Forces intelligence official. Their is only one solution, intifada called for violence. The word intifada was first used to describe the armed uprising by Palestinians against the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.²⁹ (*See 3. Understanding Judaism and the Jewish People and 6. Antisemitism and Israel.*)

A Title VI complaint has been submitted to the U.S. Department of

In April 2022, at American University, the AU Muslim Student Association canceled its participation in a planned interfaith seder and Iftar event commemorating

Despite the fact that the event was supposed to be a joint celebration of religious

the Holocaust and 6. Antisemitism and Israel.)

- Some claims reflect prejudice and ignorance, such as when faculty assert that all Jews benefit from white privilege. That claim ignores the diversity of the American Jewish community, especially of the campus Jewish community: The Pew Research Center reports that 28 percent of Jews under the age of thirty are racially and ethnically diverse.³⁴
- Students report faculty inappropriately joking about Nazis or even making the Nazi salute in class. They feel this demeans the memory of the Holocaust. (*See 5. Antisemitism and Holocaust.*)

8. American University Resources

If you believe that, as a member of the Jewish community, you have been treated differently at AU, we encourage you to reach out to _____.

AU has significant resources to support students encountering difficulties, including facing antisemitism.

- For assistance in facilitating conversations among individuals, student groups, or student organizations, contact the AU Office of the Dean of Students for a [restorative practices request](#).
- -related services include individual and group psychotherapy, victim/survivor advocacy services, and crisis intervention (through free 24-7 AUProtoCall Services at 202-885-7979). Contact the AU [Center for Well-Being Programs and Psychological Services](#) for further assistance.
- Find more tips and tools on topics like mental and physical health, friendships and finding balance, log in to [You@American](#).
- AU has many [clubs and organizations](#). Several connect [Jewish students](#), among them [AU Hillel](#). The [faith communities](#) at AU are also important resources.

³⁴ Using the broadest definition of diversity offered as an example in this chapter, nearly three-in-ten Jewish adults under 30 (28%) identify as Hispanic, Black, Asian, other race or multiracial; identify as Sephardic and/or Mizrahi; or are immigrants or children of immigrants to the U.S. from outside Canada, Europe or the former Soviet Union compared with a total of 7% of Jews ages 65 and older who meet any of those overlapping dimensions of _____ Pew Research Center [Jewish Americans in 2020](#), May 11, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/05/11/race-ethnicity-heritage-and-immigration-among-u-s-jews/>