

Antisemitism, Anti-Zionism & Race Issue Brief

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*This **issue brief** is intended as an **internal** resource for Federation professionals. Not every suggestion or resource will be relevant to every Federation, particularly given the diversity of communities served around the country and differences in Federation sizes. We welcome feedback and encourage you to share information and resources you have developed to share with others across the Federation system.*

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Background

On October 7, 2023, during the holidays of Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah, Hamas terrorists launched an unprecedented attack on Israel from Gaza, firing thousands of rockets, breaching the country's borders, killing hundreds of Israelis, wounding thousands, assaulting hundreds, and taking dozens hostage. With remarkable haste, protest leaders and social media influencers began framing the conflict between Israel and Hamas in racial terms, projecting the American racial system onto the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and war against Hamas. Others likewise misapplied "anticolonial" frameworks to depict Israelis as "white settler-colonialists" oppressing Palestinians, who were deemed "brown" or "people of color." Academics then misapplied their research frameworks for other issues, drawing false parallels with South Africa and other societies fractured by race and caste.

These false, racialized constructs ignore Israel's history, erase the key role of Jews of color in Israel and Diaspora communities around the world, and ignore the 800,000 Arab and Persian Jews forced from their homes over the past century (most of whom found refuge in the State of Israel), and minimize Israel's longstanding efforts to make peace with the Palestinians.

The purpose of this document is to provide Jewish Federation professionals and lay leaders with a context for racialized antisemitism and anti-Zionism, masquerading as liberation and anti-racism, and to give them tools to combat these harmful misconstruals.

What is Racism?

Racism can mean different things to different people, yet it is helpful to look at definitions to frame this conversation. Researchers [Lorraine T. Dean and Ronald J. Thrope, Jr.](#) define various forms of racism, for example, in the following way:

Structural racism represents the totality of ways in which multiple systems and institutions interact to assert racist policies, practices, and beliefs about people in a racialized group. That definition retains its distinction from: *institutional racism*, which is racism within a particular type of institution; *systemic racism*, which is a descriptive term about racialized systems of power; *racial discrimination*, which is action that stems from racist beliefs; and *cultural racism*, which reflects the ideologies and societal norms about a particular racial/ethnic group.

Fittingly, Dean and Thrope published this definition in the [American Journal of Epidemiology](#), as racism has been and continues to be an epidemic in the United States and has significant health impacts for those affected.

Further, in the Aspen Institute's report, [Structural Racism and Community Building](#), structural racism is defined as follows:

Racism in twenty-first century America is harder to see than its previous incarnations because the most overt and legally sanctioned forms of racial discrimination have been eliminated. Nonetheless, subtler racialized patterns in policies and practices permeate the political, economic, and sociocultural structures of America in ways that generate differences in well-being between people of color and whites. These dynamics work to maintain the existing racial hierarchy even as they adapt with the times or accommodate new racial and ethnic groups. This contemporary manifestation of racism in America can be called “structural racism.”

Why is understanding Race, Justice, & Equity Critical for Combating Antisemitism?

- [Studies](#) on the intersection of hate show that spikes in antisemitism correlate with hate speech that targets other minorities and protected groups.
- [Nearly 20 percent](#) of all American Jews identify as non-European: 10% identify as Sephardi and/or Mizrahi (ancestrally from Spain, Southwest Asia, and North Africa), and 8% identify as Black, Asian, or Latin American.
- [15% of American](#) Jews under the age of 30 identify as racially and ethnically diverse, and 17% live in a household where at least one other member is a Person of Color (PoC).

Only [25 percent](#) of Israel's population identify as Ashkenazi Jews (Jews of European ancestry), while the majority of the Jewish population identifies as Mizrahi – Arab, Persian, Turkish, and other Eastern Jewish communities who would be identified as “people of color” in the United States. Most of these Mizrahi Jews are descendants of the 800,000 Jews expelled or forced to flee their countries of origin during the 20th century or Jews who lived in or migrated to the region prior to the 20th century.

- [21 percent](#) of Israel's population is Arab Muslim, Christian, or Druze. While discrimination exists in Israel, as in the United States and many other countries, these Arab citizens of Israel enjoy full and equal rights under the law. They hold positions of authority in government, the judicial system, the military, healthcare and other sectors of society.
- Historically in both Europe and America, Jews were placed between clashing factions of society in nearly all the major power struggles, including racial classifications, facing a double-edged sword of not being the “right kind” of white. Throughout most of European history, Jews were considered outsiders, sometimes tolerated and sometimes not, often forced to wear distinctive clothing, living in segregated neighborhoods, restricted in employment options, and subject to violence at the whim of the ruling class. [Well into the 20th century](#), universities, hospitals, industries, and even housing covenants had [quotas](#) for Jews or outright restrictions. In Muslim countries, Jews, like Christians, were tolerated as second-class citizens, subject to certain restrictions and special taxes.
- Justice is an important value in Jewish culture. Jews in America gained a reputation for being “agitators” and even “UnAmerican” for supporting, advocating, and defending Civil Rights, rights for women, LGBTQ+ rights, and more.

Intersection of Race & Antisemitism

- Antisemitism is perhaps one of the oldest and most persistent hatreds in human history. While Jews faced national conflict in the ancient world, antisemitism – the targeting of Jews for their beliefs and identity, began in earnest at least as early as the Greek domination of Judea in the 2nd century BCE as Greek rulers sought to impose Hellenism and erase distinctive Jewish practices.
- With the conquest of Judea and the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in the 70 to 135 CE period, Jews found themselves decimated, exiled and homeless. With the split of Christianity from Judaism, and the adoption of Christianity by Constantine, Jews found themselves increasingly vulnerable and the target of institutional discrimination.
- Church-based antisemitism manifested in restrictions on where Jews lived, the occupations they were allowed to work in, the barring of owning land, the persecution for Jewish religious observance, and the denial of protection from physical harm or humiliation. Jews were often portrayed by Christian clerics as satanic and evil, to be shunned and avoided.
- Jews have often been blamed for many of the world's troubles – from plagues, famine, economic hardship, and war in the past, to 9/11, COVID 19, and slavery today.
- Though there are [several definitions](#) used to define antisemitism, all of them share the components of dehumanizing, demoralizing, casting aspersion, limiting, and categorizing Jews as outside of society's care and protection.
- Jews in majority-Muslim countries were made to pay an additional tax and treated legally and practically as second class citizens, *dhimmis*.
- In the 18th century, as science rather than religion became the currency of post Enlightenment Europe, Jews were the targets of "[scientific racism](#)" – an ideology that appropriates the methods and legitimacy of science to argue for the superiority of white Europeans and the inferiority of non-white people whose social and economic status have been historically marginalized.
- With the advent of racial pseudo-science in the 18th century, antisemitism acted as a form of racism (racial antisemitism) as Jews were assigned an inferior racial category of Semites whose origins were from Asia and who had mixed with so many other people

(including Africans) to create a “mongrel” or mixed people considered physically and morally inferior to whites – yet could not be categorized as Asian or African (Black).

- Eugenics is the scientifically erroneous and immoral theory of “racial improvement” and “planned breeding,” which gained popularity during the early 20th century. Eugenicists worldwide believed that they could perfect human beings and eliminate so-called social ills through genetics and heredity. They [believed in](#) ridding society of individuals they deemed to be unfit through cruel methods, such as involuntary sterilization, segregation, and social exclusion.
- Both eugenics and latent antisemitism came together in the concept of racial categories as an organizing principle for Western societies.
- Jews were not deemed to be “white” or “European” according to these false theories of race.

How does Racial Antisemitism manifest in society?

- Jews are a global and multiracial people sharing many cultures, ethnicities, languages, and phenotypes. Yet they share one heritage, language, nationality, and culture originating from the Middle East, and modern-day Israel. This duality was foreign to many European cultures and deemed a threat or inferior.
- During the 19th century, the United States Bureau of Immigration classified [Jews](#) as "Slavonic." Still, the [Dillingham Commission](#) contended that linguistic, physical, and other criteria classified Jews as [Semites](#), thus "lower down on the Caucasian ladder".
- Racial pseudo-science designated Jews as a separate race, Hebrew or Semitic, who were described as "mongrels" or "mixed race" and therefore inferior to pure whites. For example, in 1910, Professor and theologian Arthur Abernathy published a book called *The Jew a Negro*, claiming Jews and Africans were racially identical.
- This thinking was used to limit Jewish U.S. immigration and place quotas for Jews in universities, housing, and American social and civic life, leading to Jews creating their own institutions. Many Jews during the Jim Crow era encountered signs, "No Negroes, No Dogs, No Jews" or "Gentiles Only."
- After World War II, the United States and other Western countries sought to distance themselves from their history of racial antisemitism, which was also the basis of the racialized propaganda and brutal genocide of Jews by Nazis. (It should be noted that the Nuremberg laws used against Jews were an adaptation of many Jim Crow laws in America and inspired by American eugenics theory). Jews increasingly were encouraged to think of themselves as white.
- Jews in America remained excluded from many professions through explicit discrimination and kept out of top colleges and universities through a quota system. Their reversion to other industries, such as law, medicine, entertainment and finance, reinforced conspiracy theories that Jews were controlling the country.
- Even today, Jews continue to be omitted from DEI curricula; anti-Jewish related biases are often misunderstood by the general public; and Jewish people often experience microaggressions, invalidations, assaults, and outright discrimination or violence.
- Anti-Jewish discrimination remains both religious and "racial." Yet many well-meaning discussions of antisemitism mistakenly focus solely on Judaism as a religion.

- In one form of contemporary antisemitism, Jews may be called upon to deny their identity as part of a people with a connection to the Land of Israel in order to be accepted socially.

Is the Arab-Israeli-Palestinian Conflict a Racial Conflict?

- Many Americans have incorrectly framed the Arab-Israeli conflict through America's Black-White dichotomy, miscategorizing Israelis as "white" and Palestinians as "brown."
- Projecting onto the conflict American or South African forms of racism appropriates the pain of Black Americans and Black South African communities.
- Racializing the Arab-Israeli conflict silences both Israeli and Palestinian voices in this unique ethno-religious and national sovereignty conflict, while reinforcing divisions between them.
- The racialization of the Arab-Israeli conflict was a well-documented tactic of extremists, including white supremacists and Soviet officials, who stoked these claims to destabilize collaboration.
- Many contemporary activists and agitators are reiterating the same talking points as Soviet and fascist propagandists.
- Israeli society is multicultural/multiracial with over 50 percent of the population being of non-European European ancestry.
- Non-Jewish Black/African Americans and European Jews were once both at the margins of American and European societies due to the pseudo-science of Eugenics (race classification) mixed with antisemitism.
- Black and Jewish people found parallels between themselves as evident in early writings on Black and Jewish consciousness movements, especially in the phases of Black Nationalism (Black Zionism) and early Zionism.
- Since the rebirth of the State of Israel in 1948, relationships between Black American and African leaders around de-colonization, and as Jews steadily assimilated to the core dominant society, the parallels of marginalization dissipated. Black American movements came to highlight parallels with African nations and other "developing" people, rather than those of Jews in America or Israel.

Is Zionism Racism?

- The Soviet Union originated the idea of equating Zionism with racism during the 1960's, during the debate in the U.N. leading to the passage of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, which passed in 1969.
- During that debate, the United States and Brazil wanted to include in the Convention a clause denouncing antisemitism. The Soviet Union feared the clause could be used to rebuke it for their persecution of Soviet Jewry, so they introduced a counterproposal.
- The [counterproposal read](#), "State parties condemn anti-Semitism, Zionism, Nazism, neo-Nazism and all other forms of the policy and ideology of colonialism, national and race hatred and exclusiveness." Resolution 3379 with this updated proposal language passed in 1975 with Arab, Muslim, and Eastern Bloc states comprising the majority of the votes.
- In reality, Zionism was developed as a movement for positive Jewish identity consciousness, self-respect, and self-determination. It is a response to the persecution of Jews in Europe, the Middle East, and around the world.
- One component of Zionism is a connection to the land of Israel as the historical, archaeological, cultural, and religious original home for Jews.
- Zionism has multiple expressions, including early, revisionist, political, religious, and cultural Zionism. Political Zionism, which was focused on establishing a modern nation-state, is the only aspect that most people know.
- Early Zionism as a movement for positive Jewish identity consciousness, self-respect, and self-reliance was seen as a [model for Black and indigenous communities](#), who began to interact with the concepts in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Why Israel is Not “White Settler Colonialism”

- Jews are indigenous to the Land of Israel.
- The Bible describes the millennia-old and continuous connection of Jews to the land.
- Many Jews were forced to leave the land of Israel due to atrocities of the Roman Empire – the archetypical European imperial enterprise.
- Romans murdered Jews en masse and forced them into slavery at the edges of their empire in 70 C.E., following the failed Great Revolt against their oppressive rule.
- To erase Jewish history, the Romans plowed over Jerusalem, the capital of Judea, renamed it Aelia Capitolina, and renamed Judea and the Galilee as Syria Palestina, from which the name Palestine emerged.
- The Jewish-Roman historian Josephus estimates the number of murdered and enslaved to be close to 1.5 million people.
- Despite this cataclysm, some Jews managed to remain in the land of Israel throughout the centuries.
- Jews in forced exile likely came to resemble the wider populations where they lived, including European populations, in part due to mass rape and sexual violence against them.
- Jews pray three times daily facing Jerusalem and pray for their return to Zion, as their ancestors have for 2,000 years.
- The word “Jew” comes from Judea, and the term “People of Israel” or “Israelites” comes from Israel. The people and the place are inextricably linked and have been throughout Jewish history.

More Resources

- [Atlantic Article: Why it's Become Harder to Joke about Antisemitism](#)
- [Atlantic Article on Dave Chapelle](#)
- [Video of Jon Stewart on Dave Chapelle \(Stephen Colbert\)](#)
- [EJP on Antisemitism is Everybody's Problem](#)
- [TikTok: What Happened to Black-Jewish Relations?!](#)
- [Bari Weiss Interview with Kareem Abdul Jabbar on Kyrie and Kanye](#)
- [Anti-Defamation League CEO Jonathan Greenblatt: Know Mercy with Stephen A. Smith](#)
- [Atlantic Article: Why So Many People Still Don't Understand Anti-Semitism](#)
- [The Evolution of Identity Politics with Eric Ward](#)
- [Comedian Josh Prays says Cancel Kanye](#)
- [International Holocaust Remembrance Day should unite Blacks and Jews](#)
- [Dangerous Words: Talking About God in the Age of Fundamentalism-Book by Gary Eberle](#)
- [Inversion technique for social media news gathering](#)
- [Counter Talking points](#)
- [Issue Brief: Anti-Israel Rhetoric and Resolutions in City Councils](#)