



**The Serling Institute  
for Jewish Studies and Modern Israel**

**Guide on Antisemitism  
for the MSU Community  
2023**



The Michael and Elaine Serling Institute  
for Jewish Studies and Modern Israel  
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

# Guide on Antisemitism for the MSU Community 2023

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## 1. Introduction

In the past several years, there has been a dramatic rise of antisemitism throughout the world, including in the United States.<sup>1</sup> In Charlottesville, Virginia in 2017, neo-Nazis shouted “Jews will not replace us” in torchlit marches publicized throughout the world. In October 2018, a man who had posted antisemitic attacks on a historically Jewish organization murdered eleven people at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh. In May 2021, Jews were violently attacked in New York City, Los Angeles, and in Boston. Reports of anti-Jewish provocations, assaults, and vandalism, as well as online harassment, reached historic levels in 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022.<sup>2</sup> Just between 2019 and 2022, the number of Americans believing in six or more antisemitic tropes has more than doubled from 11% to 29%.<sup>3</sup> While Jews account for only 2% of the American population, attacks on Jews and Jewish institutions have constituted the majority of reported religious-based hate crimes since the FBI began tracking such incidents in 1991.<sup>4</sup> In 2022 someone held four congregants of Congregation Beth El Israel Synagogue hostage in Colleyville Texas, because he believed that Jews are all-powerful and can get anyone released from jail.

Despite these realities, many Americans remain unaware of increased antisemitism in the United States and uninformed about the complex themes that signal the presence of antisemitism. This guide focuses on antisemitism in America and on its presence on college campuses. Faculty, staff, and students of the Serling Institute for Jewish Studies and Modern Israel at MSU have compiled the guide to assist the MSU community to better recognize antisemitism as it emerges on campus and to understand its impacts. Note that no single group or institution speaks on behalf of all Jews on any issue, including antisemitism; there is a diversity of Jewish thought, including within the Serling Institute. The Serling Institute community worked collectively on this document to contribute to achieving the goals of diversity and inclusion by encouraging members of the MSU community to pay attention to the experiences of Jews as well as other minorities on our campus. The main co-authors of this guide are Yael Aronoff, Kirsten Fermaglich, Ariana Mentzel, and Amy Simon. We appreciate the invaluable input of many Serling Institute faculty and students.

Here is a working definition of antisemitism: **Antisemitism is rhetoric, discrimination, prejudice, hostility, and/or violence against Jews or Jewish Institutions. Antisemitism also includes the promotion of anti-Jewish conspiracy theories.**

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Anti-Defamation League. "[Audit of Antisemitic Incidents 2021](#)" (In 2021, the Anti-Defamation League. ADL tabulated 2,717 antisemitic incidents throughout the United States. This is a 34% increase from the 2,026 incidents tabulated in 2020 and the highest number on record since ADL began tracking antisemitic incidents in 1979.) There was also a significant rise in antisemitism from 2020 to 2021 in many countries in the world: "[Antisemitism Worldwide Report 2021](#)," The Center for the Study of European Jewry, Tel Aviv University, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> See: Jemima McEvoy. "[American Jews still reeling from rise in anti-semitism after Israel-Hamas conflict survey shows](#)," Forbes.com, June 14, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Source: Anti-Defamation League, "Antisemitic Attitudes in America: Topline Findings," January 12, 2023. Available online: <https://www.adl.org/resources/report/antisemitic-attitudes-america-topline-findings>

<sup>4</sup> Source: FBI Hate Crimes statistics. See: Jeneé Osterheldt. "The Hate We Give," February 25, 2022. Available online: <https://apps.bostonglobe.com/metro/crime-courts/graphics/2022/02/hate-we-give/>



Please note that a single definition of antisemitism is simply advisory. The MSU community should know that the term has been defined in many ways.<sup>5</sup>

The term “antisemitism” was coined in the 1870s by German author Wilhelm Marr. It conflated concepts of language development with the new field of racism in the 19th century. The emerging field of linguistics categorized the traditional Jewish languages of Hebrew and Aramaic as Semitic; people like Marr then took this term and applied it specifically to Jews as a racial group. This was a pseudoscientific way of renaming anti-Judaism based on modern conceptions of race. While a category of Semitic languages does exist and includes Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic, there is no such thing as “Semite” as an ethnic or racial group. We use the term “antisemitism” today because of its long history of describing anti-Jewish hate. Some scholars call for this to change as the term itself is inherently racist and imprecise.

Antisemitism is not always expressed through intentional individual acts of hatred or violence. Just as with racism against Blacks, Latinos, Asians, or American Indians, microaggressions towards Jews can also be painful and rarely noticed or addressed. In recent years, Jewish students at MSU have shared experiences with antisemitism ranging from demeaning “jokes” about Jews to direct verbal and physical attacks. Some students do not know how to describe or define such incidents and many are uncertain about MSU’s willingness to take antisemitism seriously. There is also fear of backlash or retaliation by peers and even by professors. Silence and complacency in the face of antisemitic rhetoric or actions can lead community members to internalize harmful messages.

We begin this guide with a discussion of Judaism and the Jewish people. We then explore some of the varieties of antisemitism, which come in many forms and kinds. Next, we discuss common tropes or themes in the long history of antisemitism, and we illustrate how contemporary rhetoric often employs old antisemitic tropes transformed or updated to fit the modern world. While there are too many examples of international and national antisemitism, we use examples in this guide primarily from the MSU campus, many of them reported during campus forums on antisemitism. Students have shared over 100 incidents on campus in the past 6 years. Last, we offer a discussion about how antisemitism shapes some of the difficult debates about Zionism, Israel, and Jews on campus. At the end, we offer some recommendations about how to combat or respond to examples of antisemitism on campus and identify some resources students, faculty, and staff may find helpful.

## **2. Judaism and the Jewish People: An Overview**

Judaism can be defined as, among other things, a religion, ethnicity and heritage, a nation, a daily way of life, a system of ethics, and a communal memory of the past. As a religious tradition, Judaism is monotheistic (centered on the idea of one deity), and the Torah is its principal religious text (which is also part of the Christian Bible). However, religious belief is only one of the ways that Jews have defined and understood what it means to be Jewish. Jews have historically emphasized a peoplehood that also has strong ethnic, cultural, and even genealogical dimensions.

The Jewish people originated in the ancient land of Israel, had sovereignty in that land, and the temple in Jerusalem was central to their faith. Most Jews were expelled by the Roman Empire in 70 C.E., resulting in

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<sup>5</sup> Source: Association for Jewish Studies. "[Antisemitism & Academic Freedom \(Working Report\)](#)." February 9, 2022



a diverse global diaspora. As a result of this history, the land of Israel has been central to the self-identity of the Jewish people.<sup>6</sup>

There are currently about 15.2 million Jews in the world, roughly 0.2% of the global population. Of these, approximately 6.9 million live in Israel while some 6 million Jews live in the United States. There are multiple religious denominations of Judaism, each with their own unique traditions and philosophies. There are also many Jews for whom being Jewish is primarily a cultural, ethnic, or national heritage, and who do not see religious practice as central to their Jewish identity.

### **3. Varieties of Antisemitism**

Readers should be aware that there are varieties of antisemitism. Some antisemitism is religious in origin and reflects the historic conflict between early Christianity and Jews. Some antisemitism is more recent in origin, and views Jews as racially different from the peoples among whom they live and interact. This form of antisemitism frequently posits that Jews act as a subversive political, cultural, and biological threat. Another form of antisemitism reflects mythic views that Jews secretly conspire to control the world and somehow exercise enormous power to influence world events. The residue of such difficult history is a lingering presence of thought and tradition that focuses on Jews as a distinctive collectivity allegedly responsible for many or all wrongs and maladies in the world. People have adapted antisemitic thought to new conditions and circumstances, updating and modernizing familiar charges made historically against the Jews. For instance, some stereotypes about Zionism and/or Israel derive from and reinforce the long history of antisemitic accusations and tropes.

### **4. Common Antisemitic Tropes**

For centuries, antisemitism has been inscribed through a set of tropes or themes, which are significant and recurrent. Here are some of the most common of these tropes.

#### **4.1 Trope: Jews as Heretics**

Christianity and Judaism are intertwined traditions, but Christian attitudes towards Jews have historically also been hostile, leading to the proliferation of antisemitic tropes and themes. Christianity grew from Jewish roots - Jesus was a Jew from the province of Galilee, and many of his early followers were Jews who believed his message to be a fulfillment of the teachings outlined in the Torah. As Christianity became its own distinctive movement, however, some Christian descriptions of Jews and Judaism grew increasingly adversarial. Christianity became a major world power with the Christianization of the Roman empire, while Jews remained a small, largely powerless minority. Some Christians saw this as confirmation of God's rejection of the Jewish people, and a just cause for persecution. Other Christian theologians pointed to texts in the New Testament that blamed Jews for the death of Jesus as justification that Jews were a threat to Christians and Christianity. In addition to the claim of heresy, some early Christians maintained that Judaism had been rendered "obsolete" by the arrival of Jesus.

Jews living in European countries during the Middle Ages experienced economic and social discrimination, were expelled from towns and cities as scapegoats for contemporary problems and were even subject to

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<sup>6</sup> See Appendix for more information.



mass killings. Most Christians today denounce and reject these overt acts of hostility, and the Catholic Church officially repudiated the contention that Jews killed Jesus in the 1960's. However, the themes of historic antisemitic Christian rhetoric nevertheless still surface in the contemporary United States.

MSU Examples:

- 2015: a Christian student who was anticipating participating in the study abroad program to Israel was asked by a fellow student “Why would you go to Israel? The Jews killed Jesus.”
- 2022: a graduate student in a workshop on antisemitism in 2022 said that he grew up in an environment in which it had been accepted that Jews killed Jesus.

#### **4.2 Trope: Jews as Child Killers**

By the end of the Middle Ages, a new antisemitic trope emerged among some Christian communities in Europe who claimed that Jews used Christian blood in their religious rituals. Jews were accused of kidnapping Christian children and killing them to use their blood to satisfy their religious requirements. The “blood libel” led to prejudice, violence, and murder against Jews in hundreds of cases around the world with instances in Europe and the Middle East. No part of Jewish religious practice has ever used human blood. One recent manifestation of this trope is QAnon, an American-born conspiracy theory that claims that the world is run by a secret elite group of Satan-worshipping pedophiles, including George Soros, that kills babies.<sup>7</sup> This directly evokes the blood libel with the emphasis on George Soros, a Jewish philanthropist, who is often used by antisemites to represent all types of Jewish evil. Other recent manifestations evoke this trope by portraying Israelis as killers thirsty for children’s blood.

MSU Example:

- 2000: an invited speaker at MSU made the false accusation that Israelis harvest and traffic Palestinian children’s organs.

#### **4.3 Trope: Jews as Greedy and Avaricious**

The association of Jews with money is a longstanding one that dates to the early medieval era in Europe. The introduction of charging interest for money lending disturbed medieval Christians; in 1179 the Catholic Church prohibited this practice. Christians displaced their anxiety over this growing economic practice onto Jews, who were already a despised minority, by exaggerating Jewish participation in lending money. Although Jews engaged in money lending no less or more than non-Jews, these antisemitic connections over centuries have linked Jews with money. Criticisms of greed and the financial sector are often targeted at Jews in general and specific Jewish individuals such as the Rothschild family, and more recently George Soros. Even the terms “banks” and “bankers” can be used as antisemitic dog whistles because of this long-standing myth.

MSU Examples:

- Several students have reported hearing others use the term “to Jew someone down,” a common antisemitic term for haggling or bargaining.

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<sup>7</sup> Source: Chuck Todd, et al. ["Study finds nearly one-in-five Americans believe QAnon conspiracy theories,"](#) NBC News, May 27, 2021.



- 2021: a student asked another student picking up a penny, “What are you? Jewish?”
- 2022: a Jewish student’s classmate said, “I’m so surprised that you’re always talking about books and school because normally ‘your people’ only care about money.”

#### 4.4 Trope: Jewish Bodies as Malformed or Subhuman

Jews have been subjected to harsh, discriminatory, and inaccurate stereotypes that suggest that Jewish bodies are malformed or even grotesque; that Jews are transmitters of disease;<sup>8</sup> or that they are witches or embodiments of the devil. Images of Jewish bodies as weak, diseased, or subhuman are the product of both a long-standing antisemitic imaginary and of more recent racialization of the Jewish people. The belief that Jews have horns, for example, is anchored in ancient images of Jews as devils ministering to Satan.<sup>9</sup> Two of the most long standing and common negative stereotypes about Jewish bodies are that Jews have horns and that they have large hook noses.

MSU Examples and Examples from the Surrounding Community:

- 2019: a Jewish student at MSU was asked if she had horns by a fellow MSU student.
- May 2021: during a war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza, some students at the University of Michigan called for “nose checks” on social media to identify Jewish students who might support Israel.
- January 2023: Flyers accusing Jews of responsibility for the “Covid agenda” were distributed in the vicinity of the MSU campus, in driveways of Delta Township residents. See: <https://lansingcitypulse.com/stories/hate-flyers-found-in-delta-twp,36167>

#### 4.5 Trope: Jewish Control

Antisemites have long claimed that Jews possessed undue power and influence over government and media. These beliefs became especially virulent in the 20th century with the publication of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in Russia. The Protocols is a fake document published in 1903 that claims to record a Jewish world conspiracy to undermine Christian civilization. Although the document has been debunked multiple times, it continues to be widely translated, read, and sold throughout the world.

Henry Ford, founder of the Ford Motor Company, popularized *The Protocols of The Elders of Zion* through mass distribution of his newspaper the *Dearborn Independent*. The Protocols are just one example, however; there are many conspiracy theories about the inflated and destructive control of Jews. Popular conspiracy theories such as the New World Order and Illuminati are often based on this antisemitic trope. In addition, there are many negative stereotypes about Jewish power -- of Hollywood or the media for example

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<sup>8</sup> See: Donna Rachel Edmunds and Rossella Tercatin. "[One in five English people believe COVID is a Jewish conspiracy - survey.](#)" *Jerusalem Post*, May 25, 2020.

<sup>9</sup> See: Joshua Trachtenberg. *The Devil and the Jews: The Medieval Conception of the Jew and its Relation to Modern Antisemitism* (Jewish Publication Society, 1983) 44-53.



-- that do not necessarily involve conspiracy theories.<sup>1011</sup> Jews work in many industries, including media, but do not control them.

Characterizing Israel as being part of a sinister and all-powerful world conspiracy evokes the trope that Jews are plotting to control the world. This includes indiscriminately blaming suffering and injustices around the world as a Jewish or Zionist conspiracy and scapegoating Israel for all the problems in the region.

MSU Examples:

- 2020: a faculty member reported that students in her classes consistently say that Jews control the media, have extreme influence on United States foreign policy in the Middle East, and use that influence to damage US interests.
- 2021: for the twentieth anniversary of 9/11, a campus student organization painted the Rock with an American flag, with the caption “Never Forget,” and the number of victims lost in the 9/11 attacks. The word “Israel” was spray painted over the American flag, and the word “never” was painted over the flag. The graffiti evokes the antisemitic conspiracy theory that Israel was responsible for the 9/11 attack.
- 2022: There were multiple spots where the phrase “Jews Did 911” was written at the Sanford Woodlot and at the Bogue Street Bridge on May 31.

#### 4.6 Trope: Jews as Radicals

This trope developed over one hundred years ago, largely because a minority of Jews participated in the Marxist/Communist revolutions in Russia (1905-1917). The trope became popular in the United States when groups of Jews became active in leftist and pro-civil rights movements throughout the 20th century. The fact that a visible minority of Jews have been involved in radical movements, however, does not mean that they acted as a group or that they were the primary forces behind these movements. This trope of Jewish radicalism has led to extreme violence against Jews, from the mass murders of thousands of Jews in the Russian Empire from 1905-1921 to synagogue bombings in the United States in the 1950s-1960s. The most recent example of this trope emerging in American life was at the Tree of Life Synagogue shooting in Pittsburgh where the perpetrator justified his killing in part because the synagogue supported HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society), a progressive Jewish organization that supports immigration.

MSU Example:

- 1935: both antisemitism and anti-radicalism led hundreds of Michigan Agricultural College (MAC, now MSU) students to march on Jewish student housing, shouting antisemitic slurs at residents, and to attack a pro-peace rally, throwing several of its leaders (two of whom were Jewish) into the river. Although it knew about the planned attacks ahead of time, the MAC administration did nothing to prevent them, nor to investigate or punish the attackers. Both MAC students and administrators justified the attacks by

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<sup>10</sup> Comedian Dave Chapelle amplified some of these beliefs about Jewish control of the media in the Saturday Night Live opening monologue on November 13, 2022.

<sup>11</sup> Source: Anti-Defamation League. "[Antisemitic Attitudes in the U.S.: A Guide to ADL's Latest Poll.](#)" January 27, 2020.





calling the victimized students “radicals” and “reds.”<sup>12</sup>

#### 4.7 Trope: Dual Loyalty

It is antisemitic to accuse Jewish citizens of being more loyal to Israel, or to the alleged priorities of Jews worldwide, than to the interests of their own home nations. This accusation is hundreds of years old, and Jews have faced it in every place they have lived. During World War I and World War II, for example, Jews were accused of refusing to serve in the militaries of their home countries because of the assumption that they could not be loyal citizens of the state and that they were instead representatives of a Jewish nation. In France, Germany, and the United States those claims were investigated and found to be false; nevertheless, the idea has remained popular to this day. Today some hold Jews, Israelis, or Jewish institutions collectively responsible for real or imagined wrongdoing committed by Israel. This has led to threats, vandalism, verbal, and physical attacks. On university campuses, students have been pressured to leave student government or other organizations or to publicly condemn Israel or Zionism.<sup>13</sup>

University Examples:

- Spring 2022: a Jewish MSU student reported that fellow students constantly ask him to denounce Israel.
- Spring 2022: a Jewish student at Kalamazoo College applied for a paid leadership position with a social justice student organization. While interviewing for the position, the current president of the organization told the student he would need to delete any pro-Israel language and denounce his connections to Israel on his personal Instagram page to receive the position.
- 2020: at the University of Southern California, several Jewish students were harassed into resigning from student government because they were affiliated with Hillel, an organization for Jewish students.

### 5. Antisemitism and the Holocaust

The Holocaust was the persecution and murder of six million Jews throughout Europe by the German Nazi regime from 1933-1945. Thousands of years of vibrant Jewish life in Europe were destroyed. Jewish communities across the world suffered enormous physical, cultural, psychological, and spiritual losses. As a relatively recent genocide (many Jews today have close relatives who lived and died during the Holocaust), the Holocaust is the central modern trauma of the Jewish people.

Very often, antisemitism relies on Holocaust images to cause harm. For example, swastikas are frequently drawn on all types of private and public places (synagogues, cars, playgrounds, Jewish cemeteries, Jewish community centers, schools, etc.), to express antisemitism and white supremacy. Jokes about the Holocaust are another frequent form of antisemitism, as are slurs that refer to Jews as Nazis. Holocaust denial -- which includes denying the facts, scope, and mechanisms of the Holocaust -- denies the Jewish people their traumatic history. Holocaust deniers frequently accuse Jews of wielding the Holocaust to amass power.

Comparing Israel to Hitler’s Germany and to Nazis is an attack on Jews, Jewish memory, and Jewish

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<sup>12</sup> Source: Kirsten Fermaglich. "The Social Problems Club Riot of 1935: A Window into Antiradicalism and Antisemitism at Michigan State College," *Michigan Historical Review* 30, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 93-115.

<sup>13</sup> Several of these items are from the Nexus Draft White Paper, [“Understanding Antisemitism at its Nexus with Israel and Zionism.”](#) November 22, 2020.



identity. It is intentionally using a genocide against Jews to attack a Jewish majority state. It is a deliberate infliction of harm and contributes to Holocaust inversion and trivialization.

MSU Examples:

- January 2015: an MSU student, angry that his Jewish friend could not give him a ride, told that friend to “take the train to Auschwitz,” the Nazi death camp.
- September 2021: an individual joined a biology class group chat using a Nazi swastika as a profile picture and claimed that they study biology to prove that “Jews are scum.”
- October 20, 2021: the Director of the Serling Institute for Jewish Studies and Modern Israel received the following email:

From: nazi jew <nazijewholocooost@gmail.com> Subject: Program  
F you Israeli Nazi terrorist Euro trash colonizers of Palestine  
Your program promotes Nazi Jew terrorists

## 6. Antisemitism and Israel

Since Israel’s establishment in 1948, antisemitism aimed at Jews as individuals and communities has also been aimed at the Jewish majority state. The Zionist movement led to the establishment of the state of Israel. “Zionism,” in its essence is the belief, held by many Jews, that Jews as a people have the right to self-determination. (There are many different, contested *versions* of Zionism in philosophy and historical practice.) This essential idea undergirded the movement that led to the establishment of the state of Israel. Modern Zionism emerged from the nationalism and antisemitism of 19th century Europe, although it built on traditional Jewish beliefs that Jews would return to Zion (Jerusalem). The right to self-determination is protected under international law. Approximately half of the world’s Jews live in Israel.<sup>14</sup>

A majority of Jews outside of Israel support the existence of Israel as a Jewish-majority state. Versions of Zionism differ in their visions of state borders and of the identity of the state.<sup>15</sup> There is a lot of debate around Israel and Palestine and all university members have the right to hold their own positions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The goal of a university is to facilitate conversations, including ones about Israel, Zionism, and Palestinian rights. However, as articulated by the Association for Jewish Studies Taskforce on Antisemitism and Academic Freedom “if one’s position on Zionism and Israeli policies or

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<sup>14</sup> There are 157 Christian-majority countries and territories, 50 Muslim-majority countries, 2 Hindu-majority countries, and 7 Buddhist-majority countries. Israel is the only Jewish-majority country.

<sup>15</sup> During the 1967 war, Israel took control of the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem. Several Israeli governments over the past 25 years have negotiated giving up most of these territories for a Palestinian State alongside Israel. As of 2023, however, the West Bank remains under Israeli occupation. East Jerusalem remains under dispute, and most of the international community regards it as occupied by Israel. While Israel claims sovereignty over all of Jerusalem, some Israeli governments have offered most of East Jerusalem for a Palestinian State as part of a peace agreement. The current Israeli government formed in December 2022 is opposed to any such accommodation. Many Israelis do not agree that the Jewish Quarter of the Old City, in particular, is “occupied,” since Jews lived there continuously for hundreds of years; the need to keep it under Israeli control, for these Israelis, is underscored by the fact that the Jewish Quarter was destroyed during the period, from 1948-67, when it was under Jordanian rule, and Jews were barred from entering the Old City or praying there. In 1967 Israel also took control of the Sinai, which it returned to Egypt in the Israeli-Egyptian Peace Agreement in 1979. Before the Syrian civil war starting in 2011, Israel and Syria participated in land for peace negotiations over the Golan. Liberal, Religious, and Revisionist Zionists have differed over what the future borders of Israel should be.



one's 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."<sup>16</sup> It is legitimate to criticize particular Israeli policies, even vehemently, just as it is legitimate to criticize the policies of any government. Israelis criticize policies such as Jewish settlements in the West Bank, as do many Jews outside of Israel.<sup>17</sup> However, Israel can be a target of antisemitism and antisemitic behavior, in which criticism and antisemitism are tightly woven together. The list below is not exhaustive, but includes:

- **Using myths, symbols, images, attitudes, and negative stereotypes about Zionism and/or Israel that derive from and reinforce the long history of antisemitic accusations, and tropes:** Examples relate to tropes of dual loyalty, control (exceptional power and influence), conspiracy, and the blood libel.
- **Calling for the violent destruction of Israel:** This is basically a call for genocide, because it would lead to the destruction of half the world's Jewry.
- **Denying the history of Jews and Jewish sovereignty in ancient Israel:** This might include denying Jewish indigeneity to the region, the existence of the ancient Jewish Temples in Jerusalem, and the Jews' historic expulsion. It might also include ignoring the continuous Jewish presence in the region over the centuries.
- **Denying *only* Jews the right to self-determination by claiming that Jews, in particular, should be denied the right to define themselves as a people and to exercise self-determination. Anti-Zionism is not automatically antisemitic.** Anti-Zionism opposes the Jewish movement for self-determination and the right of the Jewish people to a homeland in the State of Israel. If one opposes nation-states in general, and opposes self-determination for other nations such as Tibetans, Kurds, Palestinians, etc., then anti-Zionism is not necessarily antisemitic.<sup>18</sup>

## 7. Promoting Constructive Conversation

The section above lists rhetoric and behaviors that clearly employ antisemitism. However, in academic and political conversations on Israel, there are controversial terms and rhetoric that have varied interpretations.

Some academics and political activists have used terms such as “settler colonialism” and “apartheid,” to talk about Israel. When used with nuance, and/or with careful academic comparison with other countries, these may not signal antisemitism. When used as slogans to delegitimize Israel or call for its destruction, these terms can promote antisemitism.<sup>19</sup> While the accuracy of these terms can be debated, a larger concern is that

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<sup>16</sup> Source: Association for Jewish Studies. "[Antisemitism & Academic Freedom \(Working Report\)](#)," February 9, 2022.

<sup>17</sup> [Over 100,000 Israelis](#) publicly protested the government's intended new policies every weekend in January 2023.

<sup>18</sup> Some of this articulation comes from the Nexus Draft White Paper, "[Understanding Antisemitism at its Nexus with Israel and Zionism](#)," November 22, 2020. More than 80% of both Jews and the U.S. general public consider anti-Zionism— as represented by the statement “Israel has no right to exist”—antisemitic. This includes 92% of Republicans and 83% of Democrats. (Source: AJC "[State of Antisemitism in America Report](#)" 2021.)

<sup>19</sup> Source: Anti-Defamation League. "[What Is... Anti-Israel, Anti-Semitic, Anti-Zionist?](#)," August 17, 2017.



they can obstruct constructive conversation. The use of these terms can evoke histories of antisemitic obsession with Jewish behavior and Jewish scapegoats when they treat Israeli actions and policies as exceptional among nation-states. This exceptionalism can be combined with antisemitic tropes or claims listed above.

Contested terms like “settler colonialism” should not stop a conversation. These terms should not be automatically condemned as antisemitic. And condemning these terms as antisemitic should not be automatically dismissed as stifling free speech. Individuals coming from different perspectives and backgrounds should be sensitive to the context of statements, their intent, and their potential impact upon free speech, as well as the harm that antisemitism can cause. Context is crucial in understanding antisemitism.

(See section 17 for elaborations on some controversial terms.)

## **8. Conclusion**

The goal of this guide is not to label anyone as antisemitic. We hope that this guide will help the MSU community understand more about how actions and words have a history and an impact on the Jewish community at Michigan State.

## **9. Making Michigan State University More Inclusive**

Rhetoric that is not overtly antisemitic can also abet antisemitism, have antisemitic effects, and contribute to a climate which does not feel inclusive to many Jewish students, faculty, staff, and community members. While academic freedom and free speech need to be respected, we can still encourage a campus climate which feels inclusive for Jewish members. Jewish students, faculty, alumni, and community members at times feel excluded. For example, the erroneous characterizations of Jews as only benefitting from white privilege and therefore not facing prejudice contributes to an environment which can make the campus less inclusive.

### **9.1 Inclusivity Related to Israel**

The campus community should be sensitive to the fact that many Jews feel a strong connection to Israel and feel that Israel is central to their Jewish identity. Members of the campus community are Israeli themselves, and/or have family and friends who live there. Demonization of Israel on campus is hurtful and alienating to many Jewish students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community members.

### **9.2 Inclusivity Related to Jews and Race**

American racial categories today typically label people as either white or people of color. Jewish people do not fit neatly into such simple categorizations. Up to 20% of Jewish Americans identify as Jews of color or mixed race. Moreover, throughout American history, even the majority of American Jews who have been



identified as “white” still experienced institutional antisemitism and were not always treated as white.<sup>202122</sup>

As scientific racism developed in the 19th century, racists identified Jews as racial “others,” like Africans, Asians, and indigenous peoples, all distinguishable by their physical features, their language, and more. Current white nationalists on the right, drawing upon this scientific racist ideology, regard Jews as a central threat to whiteness.<sup>23</sup>

At the same time, some leftwing progressives describe Jews as the ultimate representatives of whiteness. While many Jews currently do have access to white privilege (that is, they are understood as whites in America, with access to jobs, housing, and status not accessible to most people of color), this vision of Jews as “ultimate whites” reinforces antisemitic tropes of Jewish power, while at the same time also erasing Jewish ethnicity and culture. The erroneous characterizations of Jews as only benefitting from white privilege and therefore not facing prejudice contributes to an environment which can make the campus less inclusive. Both forms of Jewish racialization on the right and left harm and dismiss Jews.

### **9.3 Inclusivity Related to Observance of Jewish Holidays and the Sabbath**

Many students, staff, and faculty feel hurt and are disadvantaged when they must choose between their work on campus and practicing their religion. The university should make every effort to avoid conflicts between the Jewish calendar and the academic calendar. The dates of Jewish holidays are different every year, and Jewish holidays typically begin at sundown of the evening before the date listed and extend through nightfall of the following day. We applaud the university for implementing a major part of the new Religious Observance Policy in December 2022 and encourage it to implement the remaining parts of that new policy.

In addition, Jewish tradition requires observance of the Sabbath every Friday night and Saturday, prohibiting use of electricity, so observant students have no access to email, D2L, and cannot travel to class. Students should be excused without penalty from classes and other mandatory events on these days, and the university should discourage units from scheduling major events and faculty meetings on important holidays.

MSU Examples:

- 2015: one student reported that when informing a faculty member about classes that she would miss due to Jewish holidays, the faculty member questioned her at length about how she celebrated the holidays.<sup>24</sup>
- Jewish students repeatedly say that professors have threatened to fail them on an exam, and/or forced them

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<sup>20</sup> Source: Pew Research Center. [“Jewish Americans in 2020.”](#) May 11, 2021.

<sup>21</sup> See: Eric K. Ward. [“Skin in the Game: How Antisemitism Animates White Nationalism.”](#) Public Eye, June 2017.

<sup>22</sup> Source: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. [“Antisemitism in History: Racial Antisemitism, 1875–1945.”](#)

<sup>23</sup> See: “Skin in the Game.”

<sup>24</sup> The university policy is that students are granted the right not to go to class or take an exam on their religious holiday.



- to use 1 of 2 excused absences because they needed to miss class in order to observe a religious holidays.<sup>25</sup>
- Fall 2018: an MSU teaching assistant would not allow a Jewish student to submit an assignment early that was due on one of Judaism’s most important holidays and gave her a zero for the assignment because she was not able to hand in the assignment in person on the religious holiday.
- Spring 2023: Student reported feeling disadvantaged because she would not be able to avail herself of the opportunities provided for in the CANR job fair held on Yom Kippur, the holiest day for Jews.

## 10. Recommendations

MSU is committed to strengthening diversity, equity, and inclusion on campus. Current university goals for inclusiveness are stated as: “Providing opportunity for learners from all backgrounds – bringing their passion and talent to join a vibrant, intellectual community built on mutual respect – to experience and to multiply the benefits of the power of knowledge throughout their lives” (<http://splife.studentlife.msu.edu/character-and-goals-of-msu>). MSU’s new strategic plan, unveiled in October 2021, establishes DEI as a strategic priority and articulates the goal of becoming “a national leader in increasing diversity, promoting inclusion, ensuring equity and eliminating disparities on our campus and beyond.” Please see: <https://strategicplan.msu.edu/strategic-plan/executive-summary>.

**To strengthen diversity and inclusion at MSU**, we suggest adding education about antisemitism and providing a more inclusive atmosphere for Jewish students, staff, faculty members, alumni, and community members in these ways:

- Education about antisemitism as part of DEI training on campus, including orientations for students, faculty, staff, and administrators and training for residential advisors.
- Education and other relevant training about historical and contemporary forms of antisemitism, alongside other forms of anti-bias education, for DEI officers.<sup>26</sup>
- Investment in educating students and communities about antisemitism in the context of broader educational efforts about forms of exclusion, discrimination, and hatred.<sup>27</sup>
- Workshops on antisemitism for interested colleges, departments, programs, student groups, residential halls, etc., To arrange this, please contact the director of the Serling Institute for Jewish Studies and Modern Israel—currently Professor Yael Aronoff ([aronoffy@msu.edu](mailto:aronoffy@msu.edu)).
- We are pleased that a new and revised Religious Observance Policy was approved by the University Council in October 2022: <https://provost.msu.edu/academic-resources/religious-observance-calendar>. We also look forward to MSU implementing the remaining parts of the Religious Observance Policy in 2023, which include the recommendation to encourage academic and administrative units to plan major activities and professional meetings (e.g. the opening night of a major exhibit or lecture, a major faculty meeting) in a way that avoids such a conflict on major religious holidays.
- Broad participation in MSU “Conversations on Antisemitism and Islamophobia,” which is composed of four two-hours sessions open to all MSU faculty, students, and staff, through the office of Institutional

<sup>25</sup> This discriminates against Jewish students. The university policy says that a faculty member cannot punish a student for observing their religious holidays.

<sup>26</sup> Source: Association for Jewish Studies. ["Antisemitism & Academic Freedom \(Working Report\)."](#) February 9, 2022.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*



Diversity and Inclusion, should be offered every semester. You can register for the Spring 2023 sessions held on February 13, 27, March 13, and April 3 12pm-2pm here: <https://inclusion.msu.edu/education/intercultural-dialogue1.html>

- University-wide reports on antisemitic incidents to increase awareness and educate the campus.
- Programming by the Serling Institute, including regular lectures, films, exhibits, and performances exploring the diversity of the histories, cultures, languages, identities, and religion of the Jewish people, including programming specifically on the topic of antisemitism. Please see our website <https://jsp.msu.edu/> for upcoming events and email us to subscribe to our listserv for updates of events and/or newsletters at [jewishst@msu.edu](mailto:jewishst@msu.edu). We encourage students to reflect on several events in coordination with the director [aronoffy@msu.edu](mailto:aronoffy@msu.edu) so that they can include these in My Spartan Story <https://mystory.msu.edu/>.
- Courses that explore different aspects of Jewish histories, cultures, languages, identities, and religion offered in 10 different colleges and departments across the university. Please see <https://jsp.msu.edu/course-offerings/> for course offerings.

## 11. Campus Resources

- If a member of the MSU community would like to share their experience of antisemitism to get support, and/ or advice please reach out to the Serling Institute for Jewish Studies and Modern Israel (current director, Yael Aronoff [aronoffy@msu.edu](mailto:aronoffy@msu.edu)), and the Hillel Jewish Student Center (director, Robyn Hughey [director@msuhillel.org](mailto:director@msuhillel.org)).
- We encourage you to report any antisemitic incident to the MSU Office for Institutional Equity. See <https://civilrights.msu.edu/file-a-report/index.html>.
- In addition, you can report incidents to the Anti-Defamation League. See: <https://www.adl.org/reportincident>.
- For the MSU anti-discrimination policy please see [https://hr.msu.edu/policies-procedures/university-wide/ADP\\_policy.html](https://hr.msu.edu/policies-procedures/university-wide/ADP_policy.html).
- Seek MSU Counseling and Psychiatric Services (CAPS) for a variety of mental health resources at <https://caps.msu.edu/>.



## 12. Appendix

### 13. More Examples of Antisemitism at MSU

The following is a partial list of over 100 concerns from MSU students that have been voiced over the past six years at annual forums on antisemitism for students to share their experiences, sponsored by the Serling Institute for Jewish Studies and Modern Israel, and the Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion, along with MSU Hillel; some are also complaints voiced to faculty and to administrators. The examples used throughout the guide were taken from these forums but are not repeated in this list below.

#### 13.1 Common Tropes

##### 13.1.1 Jewish Control

- Spring 2008: a Jewish student reported that in a U.S. Foreign Policy course, a student presenter insisted that there is a “plot to stigmatize legitimate criticism of Israel, or in this case, the Israel lobby.” One of the two student presenters said, “Basically, an antisemite is anyone that the Zionists don’t like.”
- November 2022: Flyer suggesting Jews have devious and overpowering control over the US were found on North campus by the Union. A student brought a flyer to his professor.

##### 13.1.2 Jewish Bodies as Malformed or Subhuman

- 2015-2016: A Residential Advisor at MSU said that multiple Jewish students shared with him that they had been asked if they had horns.

#### 13.2 Holocaust-Related Antisemitism

- 2022: a student shared that she received on social media the comparison of Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett to Adolf Hitler.
- 2022: an MSU student harassed a Jewish student by sending them a Hitler meme and “joking” about showers and the Holocaust.
- 2022: a Jewish student at MSU was sent through social media a comparison of Israeli actions to the Holocaust.
- 2015: a student said that fellow students had told them Holocaust and Jew “jokes.”
- 2009: Jewish students found “I love Hitler” written on their dorm door.
- 2020: students in a class were allowed to give a presentation on any topic for extra credit. One student chose to make a presentation on Adolf Hitler and how he was the most persuasive person in history.
- 2015: a piece of paper with a swastika was tacked to the bulletin board outside the classroom where the “Jews and Antisemitism” class was being taught.
- 2015: in the ballot elections for the student senate a JMC student had written “Adolf Hitler” instead of their name, had copied a long series of Stars of David for their major, and did not vote for any of the senators listed.
- One student recalled a campus poster that equated the Star of David to the swastika.





### 13.3 Threats to Safety

- Summer 2021: threatening and harmful voice messages were sent to Cindy Hughey, the Director of the Hillel Student Center (and other local Jewish leaders).
- Spring 2019: a Jewish student who interned for the Hillel Student Center was harassed online and in person and faced several threatening antisemitic comments. The person threatening the student also messaged all the Hillel staff and left voicemails on their work lines claiming he was coming to “get the student.”

### 13.4 Vandalism

- February 2020: a Jewish student finds a swastika drawn on the armrest of her regular seat in a classroom in Anthony Hall.
- 2020: in accord with Jewish and biblical tradition, an MSU student attached a mezuzah and case onto the doorpost of their apartment. A mezuzah is a parchment inscribed with religious texts and attached in a case to the doorpost of a Jewish house as a sign of faith. A few weeks later the mezuzah and case were stolen. See: <https://thejewishnews.com/2020/02/04/on-our-doorposts/>.
- 2020: A member of the Pi Kappa Alpha (PIKE) fraternity spray-painted a swastika on the grounds of his own fraternity house. See: <https://thejewishnews.com/2020/02/17/msu-student-spray-paints-swastika-in-front-of-own-frat-house/>.
- 2019: during the Jewish holiday of Sukkot, two students entered the MSU Hillel patio and destroyed their Sukkah (a temporary shelter covered in natural materials, built near a synagogue or house and used especially for meals during the Jewish festival of Sukkot, the Feast of Booths). See: <https://www.wlns.com/news/local-news/east-lansing-police-investigating-vandalism-at-msu-hillel-jewish-center/>.
- 2017: Swastika was drawn outside of a Jewish student’s apartment in the Cedar Village area. See: <https://thetab.com/us/michigan-state/tag/cedar-village>.
- 2015: a swastika was etched into a Jewish student’s car door.
- 2019: the Hillel Jewish Student Center was egged on two separate occasions.
- One student reported that their resident mentor had found the line “Dirty Jewish Pigs” on the wall of a dormitory laundry room.
- May 31, 2022: MSU police department filed a report for graffiti located on a bathroom door inside Wells Hall. The messaging read “Fuck Israel” and “Jews Rule.” The statement “Jews Rule” was written inside of what appears to be an attempt to replicate the Star of David and was crossed out with an X.
- May 2022: Graffiti saying “Jews did 911” found on a path in Baker Woodlot. Photo taken and shared with MSU police.

### 13.5 Denials of Antisemitism

- 2022: a student described a close non-Jewish friend denying that the taking of hostages at a Colleyville Synagogue during the Shabbat service was antisemitic, even though the hostage-taker targeted and threatened Jews in a Jewish institution, because he thought Jews were all powerful and could get someone released from jail.
- 2021: a student in a class on antisemitism regularly rejected both the professor’s professional descriptions of antisemitism and classmates’ experiences with antisemitism.



## 13.6 Discrimination

- 2022: several MSU Jewish students reported that after making it to final rounds of acceptance in a fraternity, they were told that they could not join because they were Jewish.

## 14. Additional Resources

- 10 ways to Have Conscientious Conversation on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Available online: <https://www.adl.org/resources/reports/10-ways-to-have-conscientious-conversations-on-the-israeli-palestinian-conflict>
- AJC State of Antisemitism in America 2021 Available online: [https://www.ajc.org/fAntisemitismReport2021?utm\\_campaign=report2021&utm\\_source=print&utm\\_medium=release&utm\\_content=AntisemitismReport21release](https://www.ajc.org/fAntisemitismReport2021?utm_campaign=report2021&utm_source=print&utm_medium=release&utm_content=AntisemitismReport21release)
- How to Respond to Jokes and Slurs Available online: <https://www.adl.org/resources/tools-and-strategies/responding-jokes-and-slurs>

## 15. Further Reading

- Anti-Defamation League. "Antisemitic Attitudes in America: Topline Findings," January 12, 2023. Available online: <https://www.adl.org/resources/report/antisemitic-attitudes-america-topline-findings>
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## 16. Videos on Antisemitism

- Berkeley Model for Combating Antisemitism on College Campuses. Available online: <https://youtu.be/e9SQr-IdlaVE>
- Why is Antisemitism Still Around? | Antisemitism, Explained | Unpacked. Available online: <https://youtu.be/FAJfddwKraQ>
- Beyond Left or Right: Whose Fault is Antisemitism? | Antisemitism, Explained | Unpacked. Available online: <https://youtu.be/c3dKIDtAYXk>
- Is Criticizing Israel Antisemitic? | Antisemitism, Explained | Unpacked. Available online: [https://youtu.be/I4\\_wWA85ev8](https://youtu.be/I4_wWA85ev8)
- Do Jews Cause Antisemitism? | Antisemitism, Explained | Unpacked. Available online: <https://youtu.be/OnibxUjB7G0>
- Can Jews Be Antisemitic? | Antisemitism, Explained | Unpacked. Available online: <https://youtu.be/0TUHv-VvIreck>
- Is the Focus on Antisemitism Overblown? | Antisemitism, Explained | Unpacked. Available online: <https://youtu.be/FRZWZPDYj5k>

## 17. Elaborations

### 17.1 Judaism: An Overview and Elaboration

According to the Torah, the land of Israel has historically been central to the self-identity of the Jewish people. According to the Torah and archeological findings, in 1,000 B.C.E., King David ruled the Jewish people in the Kingdom of Israel. His son, Solomon, built the first holy Temple in Jerusalem, which became the central place of worship for Jews. The central focus of Jewish religious activity was the temple in Jerusalem, which was first destroyed by the Babylonians, rebuilt, and ultimately destroyed by the Roman empire in 70 C.E. In the wake of the destruction of the temple, a group of Rabbis created the Mishnah and the Talmud, a collection of teachings and commentaries on the Jewish laws contained in the Torah. Collectively, these rabbinic writings outlined a complex system of rules for preserving Jewish life in diaspora - that is, outside of the land of Israel. These rules include a detailed set of dietary restrictions, a religious calendar, and much more besides. For many religiously identified Jews, these laws continue to be central to the ways that they practice being Jewish today.



## 17.2 Clarifying the Differences Between Israel and Apartheid South Africa

Given that the controversial language of “apartheid” (and the associated language of “crimes against humanity”) has become pervasive, it is important to provide some context and clarification. In many instances (especially when used as a slogan, on a poster or social media feed, for example) the term “apartheid” is intended rhetorically to associate Israel with South Africa as an exceptional human rights abuser and pariah state. A strict comparison between Israel and South Africa would reveal wide differences: within the 1967 borders, Palestinians have equal political rights (as evinced by the fact several Palestinian political parties regularly have representation in the Israel Knesset, and in the government that lasted from June 2021 to December 2022 there was a Palestinian party, Ra’am, serving in the coalition government); Israeli law gives equal rights to all within the public sphere, giving all equal access to jobs, education, etc. Palestinian citizens of Israel have served on Israel’s High Court, and are represented in all occupations and spheres of public life, including higher education. There is prejudice within Israeli society, as is the case in most countries; that prejudice, along with the history of national conflict, have resulted in serious inequities between Jewish and Palestinian communities. The Israeli government formed in December 2022 is threatening to weaken the High Court, which would weaken the protection of minorities in Israel. It also has two blatantly racist ministers. But enshrining these inequities in a system of race-based laws, as was the case in South Africa, is largely absent from Israel’s legal and political system, and thus is a crucial, defining distinction between the two cases. Zionism is not based on racism, but on a nation-state idea which is similar to that of many other countries, and upon which the legitimate Palestinian claim to self-determination is also founded. Beyond the 1967 borders, while Israel’s occupation of the West Bank can be and is criticized by many, including Israelis, the legal structures by which it is administered are not based on an ideology of racial superiority.

Some human rights groups have recently applied this term to Israel and have themselves noted the distinction between South Africa and Israel; instead, they claim to draw on legal definitions of apartheid used by the United Nations and international law, which are far broader. These broad definitions of apartheid, which include the unofficial or official systematic discrimination against one group by another, could be applied to many countries around the globe, including the United States, and many other European and Middle Eastern countries. If those using this term against Israel claim to be using this broader legal definition, then this begs the question, why does one not hear that term being regularly used to describe other countries? It is this apparent treatment of Israel/the Jews as exceptional, the source/prime example of a much broader and more common injustice, that makes the label of apartheid, even in this broader sense, feel like a version of classic antisemitism for many Jews.

## 17.3 Clarification on Accusations that Israel Commits Genocide

When people hear the term, “genocide,” they often think of the murder of millions of unarmed people only because of their ethnicity, as in the Holocaust, Rwandan, and Armenian genocides. That is the dominant scholarly view and the dominant one in many peoples’ perspectives. There are some scholars who argue that the intentional massacre of a few hundred civilians equals a genocide. However, while there were incidents of Palestinian civilians being targeted (e.g., Dir Yasin), and without minimizing these war crimes, these were mainly not sanctioned by the political and military establishment. There were also massacres of Jewish civilians before the establishment of Israel in the British Mandate of Palestine, and tragically, under this broader definition of genocide, there have been and are hundreds, if not thousands, of genocides. Many



argue that, interpreted broadly in this way, the category then loses its utility. Some people might argue that they are referring to a “cultural” genocide, even when that adjective is not included. However, Palestinians have had the option of having their own schools in Arabic and freedom to practice and celebrate their cultures in many ways. There is discrimination and inequality, but not cultural genocide. Too often, the word “genocide” is thrown out as a weapon meant to suggest that Israel is intentionally conducting mass killings of unarmed Palestinians with the intention of eliminating the entire Palestinian people, which is false.





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