

The background of the cover features a sunset sky with soft pink and purple hues. In the foreground, there are trees with autumn-colored leaves in shades of orange and red. On the right side, a prominent Gothic-style brick clock tower with arched windows and a clock face is visible. The text is overlaid on this scene.

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

**Guide on Antisemitism  
for the MSU Community  
2024**



# Guide on Antisemitism for the MSU Community 2024

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## 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> Reports of anti-Jewish harassment, vandalism, physical threats, and violence (including murder) have risen significantly each year since 2019 and skyrocketed in 2023. While Jews account for only 2% of the American population, attacks on Jews and Jewish institutions have constituted the majority of reported religion-based hate crimes since the FBI began tracking such incidents in 1991.<sup>2</sup>

In Charlottesville, Virginia in 2017, neo-Nazis shouted “Jews will not replace us” in torchlit marches seen throughout the world. In October 2018, a man who had posted on social media antisemitic attacks about a 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 Boston during a war between Israel and Hamas. The years 2023 and 2024 continued to witness significant rises in hate crimes targeting Jews, and in New York in 2023, 44 percent of all reported hate crimes and 88 percent of religion-based hate crimes targeted Jewish victims.<sup>3</sup>

In East Lansing, in September 2022, students at MSU received class GroupMe messages threatening violence against Jews, illustrated by graphic images and videos, and in 2024 a man was sentenced to prison for threatening mass violence against congregants of the local Shaarey Zedek synagogue.<sup>4</sup> In September 2024 a Jewish student at the University of Michigan was assaulted for being Jewish.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Antisemitism in the United States: Statistics on Religious Hate Crimes 1992-2023: [jewishvirtuallibrary.org/statistics-on-religious-hate-crimes](https://jewishvirtuallibrary.org/statistics-on-religious-hate-crimes) & 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.) The ADL has been keeping records of antisemitic incidents since 1979. After October 7, 2023, it changed its methodology. But even without its methodology update, according to the report, 2023 still would have seen more than 7,000 acts of antisemitism, far more than any previous year. And the report says that even if all Israel-related incidents were removed, antisemitism still would have risen 65%. Luke Tress, ADL Says Antisemitic Incidents More than Doubled Last Year,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, April 16, 2024. 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. See: [adl.org/resources/press-release/tel-aviv-university-and-anti-defamation-league-publish-annual-report](https://adl.org/resources/press-release/tel-aviv-university-and-anti-defamation-league-publish-annual-report).

<sup>2</sup> FBI hate crimes statistics See: Jeneé Osterheldt. “The Hate We Give,” February 25, 2022.

<sup>3</sup> DiNapoli, “Hate Crimes Surges in New York Over the Last Five Years,” Office of the New York State Comptroller, August 28, 2024. Available online: [osc.ny.gov/press/releases/2024/08/dinapoli-hate-crimes-surged-new-york-over-last-five-years](https://osc.ny.gov/press/releases/2024/08/dinapoli-hate-crimes-surged-new-york-over-last-five-years).

<sup>4</sup> Dan Basso, “Man Accused of Threatening East Lansing Synagogue Agrees to Plea,” *Lansing State Journal*, October 31, 2022. Available online: [lansingstatejournal.com/story/news/local/2023/10/31/threats-east-lansing-synagogue-shaarey-zedek-seann-pietila/7139152500](https://lansingstatejournal.com/story/news/local/2023/10/31/threats-east-lansing-synagogue-shaarey-zedek-seann-pietila/7139152500) & Ed White, “A Judge Orders Prison for a Michigan Man Who Made Threats Against Jewish People,” *Associated Press*, March 4, 2024. Available online: [apnews.com/article/jewish-threats-michigan-synagogue-ec67dd841a86a6d3c53226b6587b95e9](https://apnews.com/article/jewish-threats-michigan-synagogue-ec67dd841a86a6d3c53226b6587b95e9).

<sup>5</sup> Andrew Lapin, “U of Michigan Condemns Assault of Jewish Student on Campus,” *Forward*, September 16, 2024. Available online: <https://forward.com/fast-forward/654369/u-of-michigan-condemns-assault-of-jewish-student-on-campus/>

After the October 7th Hamas attack in Israel, and the subsequent Israeli military response in Gaza, there were increasing reports of Jews being physically attacked and feeling physically unsafe on college campuses. One study found that 56 percent of Jewish college students felt in physical danger on their campuses from November 2023 through January 2024. About one in ten adults (8 percent) – equal to twenty million Americans – indicated in the same study that they were more willing to tolerate violent attacks against Jews in January 2024 compared to spring 2023. And about 10 percent of college students surveyed would permit student groups calling for genocide against Jews and find similar calls by friends and relatives acceptable. Thirteen percent of college students surveyed in the same study said that when Jews are attacked, it is because they deserve it.<sup>6</sup>

Despite these realities, many Americans remain uninformed about the complex themes that signal the presence of antisemitism.<sup>7</sup> The gravity of this situation led the Biden administration to develop a national strategy to counter antisemitism, including the U.S. Department of Education’s Antisemitism Awareness Campaign.<sup>8</sup>

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 opinion, 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.<sup>9</sup>

Here is a working definition of antisemitism: **Antisemitism is discrimination, prejudice, hostility, hate speech or violence against Jews or Jewish institutions because they are Jewish. Antisemitism also can include the promotion of anti-Jewish conspiracy theories.**

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<sup>6</sup> Robert Pape, Chicago Project on Security Threats, the University of Chicago, “Understanding Campus Fears After October 7th and How to Reduce Them,” March 2024. Based on two national surveys of 5,000 college students from over six hundred four-year academic institutions, with an additional 5,000 American adults as a comparison set, which were fielded from mid-December 2023 to mid-January 2024, and with the benefit of a previous baseline survey of 8,000 American adults fielded in Spring of 2023.

<sup>7</sup> One third of Americans over the age of eighteen are not familiar with the term antisemitism. Source: AJC “State of Antisemitism in America Report” 2021.

<sup>8</sup> Biden Administration “The U.S. National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism.” Available online: [whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/06/02/the-u-s-national-strategy-to-counter-antisemitism-key-actions-by-pillar-2/](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/06/02/the-u-s-national-strategy-to-counter-antisemitism-key-actions-by-pillar-2/) and the “U.S. Department of Education Launches Antisemitism Awareness Campaign.” Available online: [ed.gov/news/press-releases/us-department-education-launches-antisemitism-awareness-campaign](https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/us-department-education-launches-antisemitism-awareness-campaign).

<sup>9</sup> Students, staff, and faculty contributed widely to the first published Guide in 2022. The main co-authors have been Professors Yael Aronoff, Kirsten Fermaglich, and Amy Simon, with the input from Ariana Mentzel. They also wrote the subsequent updated editions in 2023 and in 2024. The 2024 edition was completed in September 2024.

Please note that a single definition of antisemitism is simply advisory. The MSU community should know that the term has been defined in multiple ways.<sup>10</sup>

The goal of this guide is not to label anyone as antisemitic for legal, disciplinary, or any other purpose. 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.

The term antisemitism was popularized 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 a “Semite” as member of 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 can be expressed through discrimination, exclusion, and violence. However, antisemitism is not always expressed through intentional individual acts of hatred or violence. Just as with racism against Black people, Latinos, Asian Americans, 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 to direct verbal and physical intimidation or 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. Some also fear backlash or retaliation by peers and even by professors. We encourage the MSU community to treat antisemitism like other hatreds. “All claims of antisemitism made by Jews, like all claims of discrimination and oppression in general, should be given serious attention.”<sup>11</sup>

In the wake of the October 7 attacks, 46 percent of American Jews report that they have altered their behavior out of fear of antisemitism.<sup>12</sup> Jewish students at MSU reported that they are afraid to put up mezuzahs, wear a star of David necklace, or identify themselves as Jewish on social media. 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. Next, we discuss common tropes or themes in the long history of antisemitism,

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<sup>10</sup> Association for Jewish Studies. "Antisemitism & Academic Freedom (Working Report)," February 9, 2022.

<sup>11</sup> Nexus Draft White Paper. “Understanding Antisemitism at its Nexus with Israel and Zionism,” November 22, 2020, p.1. Available online: [israelantiantisemitism.com/the-nexus-white-paper-understanding-antisemitism-at-its-nexus-with-israel-and-zionism](https://israelantiantisemitism.com/the-nexus-white-paper-understanding-antisemitism-at-its-nexus-with-israel-and-zionism).

<sup>12</sup> American Jewish Committee: The State of Antisemitism in America 2023. Available online: [ajc.org/news/new-ajc-report-46-of-american-jews-altered-behavior-out-of-fear-of-antisemitism](https://ajc.org/news/new-ajc-report-46-of-american-jews-altered-behavior-out-of-fear-of-antisemitism).



and we illustrate how contemporary rhetoric often employs old antisemitic tropes transformed or updated to fit the modern world.<sup>13</sup> While there are many examples of international and national antisemitism we could have drawn from, we use examples in this guide primarily from the MSU campus, many of them reported during campus forums on antisemitism. Students have shared over 125 incidents on campus in the past 7 years. Last, we offer a discussion about how antisemitism sometimes emerges in 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, how to consider issues of inclusion on campus, and identify some resources that students, faculty, and staff may find helpful.

## 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 (it is also part of the Christian Bible and the Muslim Quran). 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 ancient Mesopotamia. At some point in the first millennium B.C.E, they developed an attachment to a single god and the land of Israel; the Holy Temple in Jerusalem became central to their faith. They alternated between sovereignty and subordination in that land, with periods of expulsion and migration, until most Jews were expelled by the Roman Empire in 70 C.E. This ultimately resulted in a diverse global diaspora. As a result of this history, and bolstered by narratives recorded in the Jewish holy texts, the land of Israel has been central to the self-identity of most Jewish people for thousands of years.<sup>14</sup>

In 2023, there were about 15.7 million Jews in the world, roughly 0.2% of the global human population. Of these, approximately 7.2 million live in Israel while some 6.3 million Jews live in the United States. There are multiple religious denominations of Judaism, each with distinct 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 part of their Jewish identity.

## 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 Judaism. Some antisemitism is more recent in origin, and views Jews as racially different from the peoples among whom they live and

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<sup>13</sup> In 2024, 24% of Americans believed in six or more antisemitic tropes. Anti-Defamation League “Report: Antisemitic Attitudes in America 2024.” Available online: [adl.org/resources/report/antisemitic-attitudes-america-2024](https://www.adl.org/resources/report/antisemitic-attitudes-america-2024).

<sup>14</sup> In 2020, Eight-in-ten U.S. Jews said caring about Israel was an essential or important part of what being Jewish meant to them. See: [pewresearch.org/religion/2021/05/11/u-s-jews-connections-with-and-attitudes-toward-israel](https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/05/11/u-s-jews-connections-with-and-attitudes-toward-israel).

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. 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.<sup>15</sup>

## Common Antisemitic Tropes

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

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

Christianity and Judaism are intertwined traditions, but interpretations of some Christian texts have led to the proliferation of several 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 of the belief that Jews were a threat to Christians and Christianity. In addition to the claim of heresy, many 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 mass murder. 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 1960s.<sup>16</sup> However, the themes of historical antisemitic Christian rhetoric nevertheless still surfaces in the contemporary United States.

### MSU Examples:

2022: a graduate student in a workshop on antisemitism said that he grew up in an environment in which it had been accepted that Jews killed Jesus.

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."

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<sup>15</sup> Anti-Defamation League "Report: Antisemitic Attitudes in America 2024." Available online: [adl.org/resources/report/antisemitic-attitudes-america-2024](https://www.adl.org/resources/report/antisemitic-attitudes-america-2024).

<sup>16</sup> Read more: Cindy Wooden. "Pope, in letter to Jews in Israel, condemns antisemitism as a sin," United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, February 3, 2024. Available online: [usccb.org/news/2024/pope-letter-jews-israel-condemns-antisemitism-sin](https://www.usccb.org/news/2024/pope-letter-jews-israel-condemns-antisemitism-sin)

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

By the end of the Middle Ages, a new antisemitic trope emerged among some Christian communities in Europe that claimed that Jews kidnapped Christian children and used their blood in religious rituals. What came to be called the “blood libel” led to prejudice, violence, and murder against Jews in hundreds of cases around the world<sup>17</sup> even though 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 that kills children and uses their blood to maintain their youth.<sup>18</sup> This is a clear reference to the centuries-old blood libel. Furthermore, QAnon believers frequently cite George Soros, a Jewish philanthropist, as a core member of this secret cabal. Other recent manifestations of this trope portray Israelis as killers thirsty for children’s blood.

#### MSU Examples:

January 2024: a flier of a Starbucks coffee cup reading “blood, extra shot,” “Palestinian blood,” and “children blood,” appeared in the MSU Library.

Fall 2023: in a group chat for the class of 2027, students posted a claim that Israel was harvesting children’s organs.

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

### **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 moneylending 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 (a European family involved in banking) and more recently, George Soros. Even the terms “banks” and “bankers” can be used as antisemitic dog whistles because of this long-standing trope.

#### MSU Examples:

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

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.”

2021: a student asked another student picking up a penny, “What are you? Jewish?”

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<sup>17</sup> Hillel Kieval, “Blood Libel,” in S. Goldberg et al. (eds.), *Key Concepts in the Study of Antisemitism*, Palgrave Critical Studies of Antisemitism and Racism.

<sup>18</sup> Chuck Todd, et al. “Study finds nearly one-in-five Americans believe QAnon conspiracy theories,” NBC News, May 27, 2021.



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

For centuries, European and American discourse has featured harsh, discriminatory, and inaccurate stereotypes that suggest that Jewish bodies are malformed or even grotesque; that Jews are transmitters of disease;<sup>19</sup> or that they are witches or embodiments of the devil. 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. 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 is anchored in ancient images of Jews as devils ministering to Satan, for example, but it continues to function in the modern world as a symbol of Jews' embodied difference from non-Jews.<sup>20</sup>

Examples:

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.

September 2019: a Jewish student at MSU was asked if she had horns by a fellow MSU student.

### **Trope: Jewish Control**

Antisemites have long claimed that Jews possess undue power and influence over government and media. These beliefs became especially virulent in the early 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 nefarious Jewish control. 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 -- that do not necessarily involve conspiracy theories.<sup>21</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 on a Jewish or Zionist conspiracy and scapegoating Israel for all societal or political problems in the Middle East.

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<sup>19</sup> Donna Rachel Edmunds and Rossella Tercatin. "One in five English people believe COVID is a Jewish conspiracy - survey." *Jerusalem Post*, May 25, 2020.

<sup>20</sup> Trachtenberg, Joshua. "The Devil and the Jews: The Medieval Conception of the Jew and its Relation to Modern Antisemitism" (*Jewish Publication Society*, 1983) 44-53.

<sup>21</sup> Anti-Defamation League. "Antisemitic Attitudes in the U.S.: A Guide to ADL's Latest Poll," January 27, 2020.

MSU Examples:

2022: There were multiple places where the phrase “Jews Did 9/11” was written at the Sanford Woodlot and at the Bogue Street Bridge on May 31.

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.

### **Trope: Jews as Sexual Deviants**

Jews have long been identified as inappropriate in their sexuality—overly lustful, transgressive of gender norms, and/or sexually deviant. Jewish male circumcision has sometimes been identified as a part of this deviance. In the modern era, Jews have been associated with pimps, prostitution, and sex trafficking; with pornography; and with pedophilia and rape. Conspiracy theories surrounding Jeffrey Epstein, the wealthy sex offender who committed suicide while awaiting trial for sex-trafficking, for example, have highlighted his Jewish identity.

MSU Example:

October 2023: Fliers with the book cover of the book *One Nation Under Extortion* by Whitney Webb, which employs the tropes of Jews as sexual deviants and as part of international conspiracies, were distributed under faculty doors at James Madison College. An attendee at a session of the “Conversations on Antisemitism and Islamophobia” series also distributed the fliers to some participants.

### **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. The 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 calling the victimized students “radicals” and “reds.”<sup>22</sup>

### **Trope: Dual Loyalty**

This trope features accusations that Jewish citizens are more loyal to Israel, or to the alleged priorities of Jews worldwide, than to the interests of their own home nations. These accusations are hundreds of years old, and Jews have faced them 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 carried out 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>23</sup>

#### MSU Examples:

2023-2024: Students shared that they were constantly asked to denounce Israel and that fellow students have claimed that they do not want to sit next to a Zionist in class.

2023-2024: Students in a student group supporting Israel reported that they received harassing phone calls.

Spring 2022: a Jewish MSU student reported that fellow students constantly ask him to denounce Israel.

## Antisemitism and the Holocaust

The Holocaust was the murder of six million Jews throughout Europe by the German Nazi regime from 1933-1945 and the persecution of millions more. 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, Nazi 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.

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<sup>22</sup> 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>23</sup> Several of these items are from the Nexus Draft White Paper, “Understanding Antisemitism at its Nexus with Israel and Zionism,” November 22, 2020.

Jokes about the Holocaust are another frequent form of antisemitism. 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.

While academic spaces should always seek to foster the robust examination of historical and current events, it is important to keep in mind that comparing Israelis to Hitler and to Nazis can be read as an attack on Jews, Jewish memory, and Jewish identity, especially when the rhetoric comes in the form of sloganeering without real dialogue.

#### MSU Examples:

December 2023: During finals week in Wonders Hall several students screamed “I love Nazis! I am a Nazi! Fuck the Jews! Burn the Jews” out their window.

October 2023: A large image of Hitler appeared on the jumbotron of the MSU football stadium to illustrate a question about Hitler in a trivia quiz.<sup>24</sup>

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; Message: F you Israeli Nazi terrorist Euro trash colonizers of Palestine Your program promotes Nazi Jew terrorists

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.”<sup>25</sup>

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.

## 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. Currently, approximately half of the world’s Jews live in Israel.<sup>26</sup>

The Zionist movement led to the establishment of the state of Israel. Zionism developed from the nationalism and antisemitism of 19th century Europe as a belief in the Jewish right to national self-determination. It also built on traditional Jewish beliefs that Jews would return to Zion (Jerusalem). The right to self-determination emerged with the concept of nationalism in the 19th century, was reinforced through Woodrow Wilson’s 14 points in 1918, and then was enshrined in international law through the

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<sup>24</sup> Luke Joseph. “MSU apologizes for Hitler question on stadium scoreboard during pre-game trivia” *The State News*. Available online: [statenews.com/article/2023/10/msu-apologizes-for-hitler-question-on-stadium-scoreboard-during-pre-game-trivia](https://statenews.com/article/2023/10/msu-apologizes-for-hitler-question-on-stadium-scoreboard-during-pre-game-trivia).

<sup>25</sup> Jared Weber. “MSU investigating after recent antisemitic incidents in East Lansing,” *The Lansing State Journal*, September 23, 2021. Available online: [lansingstatejournal.com/story/news/2021/09/23/msu-investigating-after-recent-antisemitic-incident-east-lansing/5829383001](https://lansingstatejournal.com/story/news/2021/09/23/msu-investigating-after-recent-antisemitic-incident-east-lansing/5829383001).

<sup>26</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.

ratification of the UN Charter in 1945. It was again reinforced in 1966 by the UN Covenant and Civil and Political Rights.<sup>27</sup> Versions of liberal, revisionist, and religious Zionists, while all agreeing on the need for a state, have differed in their visions of state borders and of the identity of the state. Different Israeli governments have been influenced by these competing visions. Cultural Zionists did not view an immediate need for a state, but many thought that a state could eventually be established. For many Jews in and outside of Israel, their belief in the right of self-determination for Jews transcends the policies of different Israeli governments.<sup>28</sup> For many Jews in and outside of Israel, Jewish self-determination can and should go hand in hand with Palestinian self-determination in a state alongside Israel.<sup>29</sup>

There is a lot of debate around the subjects of 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, anti-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 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>30</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 particular policies, as do many Jews outside of Israel. However, criticism of Israel can be tightly woven with antisemitism. The list of ways in which criticism of Israel can incorporate antisemitism below is not exhaustive, but includes:

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<sup>27</sup> Wilson suggested through his 14 points that nationalities, defined as members of a nationality or ethnic group that share a cultural heritage, often associated with the place of its members’ birth or descent, should be guaranteed autonomous development.[https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/wilson14.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/wilson14.asp) The UN founding charter begins with a stated aim “to develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples.” <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text> Article 1 of the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights states that all peoples have the right to self-determination, which includes the right to determine political status, and pursue economic, social, and cultural development. The right of self-determination is considered essential for the right to protect human rights. [UNTC](#)

<sup>28</sup> Several Israeli governments over the past 25 years have negotiated giving up most of these territories for a Palestinian State alongside Israel. As of 2024, 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, as of September 2022, and 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 began 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.

<sup>29</sup> Pew Research Center report “Jewish Americans in 2020,” May 11, 2021. Available online: [pewresearch.org/religion/2021/05/11/u-s-jews-connections-with-and-attitudes-toward-israel/](https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/05/11/u-s-jews-connections-with-and-attitudes-toward-israel/)

<sup>30</sup> Association for Jewish Studies. “Antisemitism & Academic Freedom (Working Report),” February 9, 2022.



1. Using myths, symbols, images, attitudes, and negative stereotypes about Zionism and/or Israel, or their supporters, that derive from and reinforce the long history of antisemitic accusations and tropes.
2. Calling for the violent destruction of Israel and/or the expulsion of its Jews: this would lead to the destruction and/or expulsion of half the world's Jewry.
3. 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.
4. Denying *only* Jews the right to 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>31</sup> "Anti-Zionism is antisemitic if it denies Jews the right to self-determination while affording the same right for Palestinians, or if it denies Jews in Israel the rights to live and flourish as individuals and as a group there."<sup>32</sup> For example, at some protests in 2023-2024, the slogan "From the water to the water, Palestine is Arab" was chanted.
5. Using "Zionist(s)" as a synonym for a Jewish person, people, or institution(s).
6. Requiring or requesting Jewish people to publicly condemn Israel or Zionism. Holding Jews collectively responsible for Israel's conduct, or treating Jews or Israelis, simply because of their religion/ethnicity/nationality, as agents of the Israeli government.
7. Excluding, discriminating against, and/or targeting people based on their Jewish identity or ancestry or real or perceived connections to Israel.

Examples below include manifestations of one or more of the ways articulated above in which Jewish students have experienced antisemitism at MSU.

MSU examples:

August 2024: A residential advisor claimed in a meeting that the University is complicit in genocide because it is being brainwashed by Zionists. Many of the residential advisors and a supervisor present applauded this statement. The term "brainwashing" evokes antisemitic tropes of Jewish control, dual loyalty, and conspiracy.

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<sup>31</sup> Some of this articulation comes from the Nexus Draft White Paper, "Understanding Antisemitism at its Nexus with Israel and Zionism," November 22, 2020.

<sup>32</sup> The Nexus Project. "A Campus Guide to Identifying Antisemitism In A Time Of Perplexity." Available online: [nexusproject.us/a-campus-guide-to-identifying-antisemitism](https://nexusproject.us/a-campus-guide-to-identifying-antisemitism).

Fall 2023: A Jewish student received a voice memo from an anonymous number telling them to “enjoy hell with Netanyahu, bitch.”

Fall 2023: A student shared that “At a Halloween party, a student dressed up as Palestinian victim with fake blood, asked only me, who he knows is Jewish, what I thought of his costume.” The student felt targeted for being Jewish and left the party.

## 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 do not necessarily signal antisemitism. When used as slogans to delegitimize Israel or call for its destruction, these terms can promote antisemitism.<sup>33</sup> While the accuracy of these terms can be debated, a larger concern is that 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.

## 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.

### **Inclusivity Related to Israel**

The campus community should be aware that many Jews feel a strong connection to Israel and feel that Israel is central to their Jewish identity. In 2020, 82 percent of American Jewish adults said that Israel is

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<sup>33</sup> Anti-Defamation League. “What Is... Anti-Israel, Anti-Semitic, Anti-Zionist?,” August 17, 2017.

an essential or important part of their Jewish identity.<sup>34</sup> Members of the campus community are Israeli themselves, and/or have family and friends who live there. Demonization of Israel and/or of Israelis, including celebrating the massacres of Israelis, is hurtful and alienating to many Jewish and Israeli students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community members.

MSU example:

Fall 2023: A student told a Jewish student that “Jews are faking their trauma after October 7th.” This statement dismisses the emotional connections of many American Jews to Israel. It also ignores the fact that Jewish students, faculty, and staff have personal connections to Israel. In this instance, the Jewish student’s cousin was taken hostage by Hamas and executed on October 7th.

### **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 percent 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>35 36 37</sup>

As scientific racism developed in the 19th century in Europe and America, racists identified Jews as racial “others,” just as they identified Africans, Asians, and Indigenous peoples, as inferior racial groups 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>38</sup>

At the same time, some progressives on the left 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. All forms of anti-Jewish racialization (either coming politically from the right or left) harm and demean Jews.

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<sup>34</sup> Pew Research Center report “Jewish Americans in 2020,” May 11, 2021. Available online: [pewresearch.org/religion/2021/05/11/u-s-jews-connections-with-and-attitudes-toward-israel](https://pewresearch.org/religion/2021/05/11/u-s-jews-connections-with-and-attitudes-toward-israel).

<sup>35</sup> Pew Research Center. “Jewish Americans in 2020,” May 11, 2021.

<sup>36</sup> Eric K. Ward. “Skin in the Game: How Antisemitism Animates White Nationalism,” Public Eye, June 2017. Available online: [politicalresearch.org/2017/06/29/skin-in-the-game-how-antisemitism-animates-white-nationalism](https://politicalresearch.org/2017/06/29/skin-in-the-game-how-antisemitism-animates-white-nationalism).

<sup>37</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. “Antisemitism in History: Racial Antisemitism, 1875–1945.”

<sup>38</sup> See: “Skin in the Game”

## **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 or the internet, 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.

In addition, Jewish students should feel safe to identify as Jewish on campus, to celebrate their holidays, and to uphold Jewish traditions.

### **MSU Examples:**

Spring 2024: MSU, in violation of its new policy, held final exams on the first two days of Passover (the university did provide individual accommodations).

March 2024: A group of MSU students waiting in line to get into a bar, right outside of campus, called two Jewish students “Jewish motherfuckers and Jewish bitches” because they were wearing star of David necklaces.

November 2023: At a staff meeting for the Residence, Housing and Education Services, a neighborhood administrative coordinator presented a slideshow about upcoming events that included a menorah being displayed for Hanukkah. The coordinator then said that a table would be located across from the main desks in each neighborhood, and that if sitting at a desk across from a menorah caused anyone grief, they could opt out of working at the desk. A student approached the coordinator after the meeting, saying they had been uncomfortable with the suggestion that a menorah might cause anyone grief. The coordinator responded by saying that exhibiting a menorah could be seen as “taking sides.” The Jewish student explained that Jewish students celebrating a Jewish holiday should not cause anyone grief, nor should it be interpreted as taking a side.

Fall 2023: Students complained that Israel was demonized in classes that had nothing to do with Israel or Palestine. One complaint, for example, regarded a graduate instructor who, in discussing immigration in the context of health policy, brought up settler colonialism in Israel/Palestine which did not seem to have any direct connection to the course.

October 2023: in accordance with Jewish tradition, an MSU student attached a mezuzah and case onto the doorpost of their dormitory door. The mezuzah was ripped off and stolen during the first Shabbat after October 7th.

Fall 2019: Jewish students repeatedly say that professors have threatened to fail them on an exam, and/or forced them to use 1 of 2 excused absences because they needed to miss class in order to observe a religious holiday/s.<sup>39</sup>

Fall 2018: an MSU teaching assistant would not allow a Jewish student to submit early an assignment 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.

## 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."<sup>40</sup> 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."<sup>41</sup>

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:

1. Required in-person education about antisemitism, along with other prejudices, should be part of orientations and training for all incoming students, faculty, staff, and administrators. This education should also be required for all residential advisors, leaders of student organizations, residential hall staff, and all staff responsible for promoting DEI at the university.<sup>42</sup> This has already been established at other universities such as Berkeley and Northwestern; aspects of this recommendation have also been recommended by the Association of Jewish Studies, and by other universities' task forces on antisemitism.<sup>43</sup> At MSU, in 2023-2024, an online training on bigotry and hatred was developed. This is a welcome video, but longer in-person training would provide a deeper understanding.

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<sup>39</sup> This discriminates against Jewish students. The university policy says that a faculty member cannot punish a student for observing their religious holidays.

<sup>40</sup> Michigan State University. "Spartan Life Welcome Letter." Available online: [spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/index](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/index).

<sup>41</sup> Michigan State University. "Strategic Plan." Available online: [strategicplan.msu.edu/strategic-plan/executive-summary](https://strategicplan.msu.edu/strategic-plan/executive-summary) and [strategicplan.msu.edu/strategic-plan](https://strategicplan.msu.edu/strategic-plan).

<sup>42</sup> Association for Jewish Studies. "Antisemitism & Academic Freedom (Working Report)," February 9, 2022.

<sup>43</sup> Columbia University Report #2 on Student Experiences of Antisemitism and Recommendations for Promoting Shared Values and Inclusion, Task Force on Antisemitism, August 30, 2024. Available online: [president.columbia.edu/sites/default/files/content/Announcements/Report-2-Task-Force-on-Antisemitism.pdf](https://president.columbia.edu/sites/default/files/content/Announcements/Report-2-Task-Force-on-Antisemitism.pdf).



2. The university should include experts on antisemitism in efforts to explain harm done to Jewish community members when incidents of antisemitism are reported to the Office of Civil Rights.
3. The university should invest in educating students and communities about antisemitism in the context of broader educational efforts about forms of exclusion, discrimination, and hatred.<sup>44</sup>
4. The university should support and fund workshops on antisemitism by experts on antisemitism for interested colleges, departments, programs, student leaders, residential halls, etc.
5. All faculty should adhere to the new Religious Observance Policy, approved in 2022, and to check the new two-year religious calendar in drafting their syllabi to do everything that they can to avoid scheduling exams and oral presentations on major holidays.<sup>45</sup>
6. Academic and administrative units should 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. We look forward to MSU implementing the remaining parts of the Religious Observance Policy, which includes this recommendation to university administrators and faculty.
7. We encourage broad participation in MSU “Conversations on Antisemitism and Islamophobia,” which is composed of four 90-120 minute sessions open to all MSU administrators, faculty, staff, students and trustees through the office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion: [inclusion.msu.edu/education/conversations-on-antisemitism-and-islamophobia.html](https://inclusion.msu.edu/education/conversations-on-antisemitism-and-islamophobia.html).
8. We recommend university-wide reports on antisemitic incidents to increase awareness and educate the campus.

## Campus Resources

If a member of the MSU community would like to share their experience of antisemitism to get support or advice, please reach out to the Director of the Serling Institute for Jewish Studies and Modern Israel, Yael Aronoff: [aronoffy@msu.edu](mailto:aronoffy@msu.edu) or the director of the Hillel Jewish Student Center, Robyn Hughey: [director@msuhillel.org](mailto:director@msuhillel.org).

We encourage all victims of antisemitic incidents to report to the MSU Office for Civil Rights: [civilrights.msu.edu/file-a-report/index.html](https://civilrights.msu.edu/file-a-report/index.html) as well as to the Anti-Defamation League: [adl.org/reportincident](https://adl.org/reportincident).

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<sup>44</sup> ibid

<sup>45</sup> Michigan State University. “Religious Observance Resources.” Available online: [provost.msu.edu/academic-resources/religious-observance-calendar](https://provost.msu.edu/academic-resources/religious-observance-calendar).

Please consult MSU anti-discrimination policy for an understanding of the university’s policy regarding discrimination against all groups, including Jews: [civilrights.msu.edu/policies/MSU-Anti-Discrimination-Policy](https://civilrights.msu.edu/policies/MSU-Anti-Discrimination-Policy).

We encourage broad attendance to 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. Visit our website: [jsp.msu.edu](https://jsp.msu.edu) for upcoming events and email us to subscribe to our listserv for updates on events and/or newsletter 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 [mystory.msu.edu](https://mystory.msu.edu).

We encourage broad participation in courses that explore different aspects of Jewish histories, cultures, languages, identities, and religion offered in 10 different colleges and departments across the university: [jsp.msu.edu/course-offerings](https://jsp.msu.edu/course-offerings). We also offer a variety of courses on antisemitism, including a new 1-credit online course on antisemitism that is offered every semester. In 2024-2025 it is offered under the UGS201 subject code, section 740 and is entitled “Historical and Contemporary Antisemitism.”

If you would like workshops on antisemitism conducted by Serling Institute experts on antisemitism for interested colleges, departments, programs, student leaders, residential halls, etc. please contact the current Director, Yael Aronoff, at [aronoffy@msu.edu](mailto:aronoffy@msu.edu).

If needed, seek MSU Counseling and Psychiatric Services (CAPS) for a variety of mental health resources: [caps.msu.edu](https://caps.msu.edu).

## Appendix

### **More Examples of Antisemitism at MSU**

The following is a partial list of over 125 concerns by MSU students that have been voiced over the past seven 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 earlier in this guide were taken from these forums and institutional complaints but are not repeated in this list below.

### **Common Tropes:**

#### **Jewish Control**

November 2022: A student brought a printed flier to his professor that suggests that Jews have devious and overpowering control over the US. These fliers were found on north campus by the Union.

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. Later, unidentified people painted the word “Israel” over the American flag. They also erased the word “Never,” so that the Rock read “Forget/Israel” along with the number of victims lost in the 9/11 attacks. The graffiti seems to evoke the antisemitic conspiracy theory that Israel was responsible for the 9/11 attack.<sup>46</sup>

Spring 2008: a Jewish student reported that in a U.S. Foreign Policy course, a student presenter stated 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.”

### **Jewish Bodies as Malformed or Subhuman**

2015-2016: a residential advisor at MSU said that multiple Jewish students told him that they had been asked if they had horns.

### **Holocaust-Related Antisemitism**

October 10, 2023: a Jewish student reported that a professor at MSU taught a performance technique that was used in Nazi Germany to help heal Nazi soldiers while fighting in the war. The professor mentioned the dance’s origins multiple times with no comment on the immorality of the Nazi regime. When the Jewish student expressed discomfort, the professor replied, “So Israel or Gaza?” However, nothing in the class was related to Israel or Gaza, nor was the student’s expressed discomfort with the dance.

Fall 2023: in the Class of 2027 group chat, students posted images depicting Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu as Hitler and Gaza as Auschwitz.

2022: a student reported that she received on social media a comparison between Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and Adolf Hitler.

2022: a fellow student harassed a Jewish MSU 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.

2022: one student reported a campus poster that equated the Star of David to the Swastika.

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 wrote “Adolf Hitler” instead of their name, copied a long series of Stars of David for their major, and did not vote for any of the senators listed.

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.

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<sup>46</sup> Jared Weber. “MSU investigating after recent antisemitic incidents in East Lansing,” *The Lansing State Journal*, September 23, 2021. Available online: [lansingstatejournal.com/story/news/2021/09/23/msu-investigating-after-recent-antisemitic-incidents-east-lansing/5829383001](https://lansingstatejournal.com/story/news/2021/09/23/msu-investigating-after-recent-antisemitic-incidents-east-lansing/5829383001).

## 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.

Fall 2004: a Jewish student reported that her dorm roommate left a social media (AOL messenger) message about “hog-tying her up and throwing her out the window.” The roommate insisted she was just referencing a song lyric. This followed a prior incident when the same roommate had written on her LiveJournal (blog) that she was looking forward to Thanksgiving break to “get away from homework and the Jews.”

## Vandalism

Fall 2024: After the first week of classes, a swastika and the N word were spray painted on someone’s dormitory room door (who was neither Jewish nor Black).

Fall 2023: a Jewish Fraternity, Alpha Epsilon Pi, found its Israeli flag repeatedly taken down.

May 31, 2022: the 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 an apparent Star of David and was crossed out with an X.

Spring 2020: a Jewish student found a swastika drawn on the armrest of her regular seat in a classroom in Anthony Hall.

2020: an MSU student's mezuzah and case were stolen from the doorpost of her apartment.<sup>47</sup>

2020: a member of the Pi Kappa Alpha (PIKE) fraternity spray-painted a swastika on the grounds of his own fraternity house.<sup>48</sup>

2019: the Hillel Jewish Student Center was egged on two separate occasions.

2019: during the Jewish holiday of Sukkot, two students entered the MSU Hillel patio and destroyed their Sukkah (a temporary shelter built for ritual purposes in Judaism).<sup>49</sup>

2017: a swastika was drawn outside of a Jewish student’s apartment in the Cedar Village area.<sup>50</sup>

2015: a swastika was etched into a Jewish student’s car door.

## Denials of Antisemitism

Fall 2023: a student tells another student that “Hitler did not mean to kill the Jews.”

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<sup>47</sup> Maddie Gun. “MSU Student Educates Perpetrator Who Stole Her Mezuzah,” *The Detroit Jewish News*, February 4, 2020. Available online: [thejewishnews.com/2020/02/04/on-our-doorposts](https://thejewishnews.com/2020/02/04/on-our-doorposts).

<sup>48</sup> Corrie Colf. “MSU Student Spray-Paints Swastika in Front of Own Frat House,” *The Detroit Jewish News*, February 17, 2020, updated March 22, 2023. Available online: [thejewishnews.com/news/local/msu-student-spray-paints-swastika-in-front-of-own-frat-house/article\\_370476e7-7d34-50a8-b2b6-b9b377e8cd28](https://thejewishnews.com/news/local/msu-student-spray-paints-swastika-in-front-of-own-frat-house/article_370476e7-7d34-50a8-b2b6-b9b377e8cd28).

<sup>49</sup> WLNS.com. “East Lansing police investigating vandalism at MSU Hillel Jewish center.” October 22, 2019. Available online: [wlns.com/news/local-%20news/east-lansing-police-investigating-vandalism-at-msu-hillel-jewish-center](https://wlns.com/news/local-%20news/east-lansing-police-investigating-vandalism-at-msu-hillel-jewish-center).

<sup>50</sup> The Tab. “BREAKING: Nazi graffiti spotted near Cedar Village” Available online: [thetab.com/us/michigan-state/2017/09/04/nazi-graffiti-msu-cedar-village-7135](https://thetab.com/us/michigan-state/2017/09/04/nazi-graffiti-msu-cedar-village-7135).

2022: a student described a close non-Jewish friend denying that the taking of hostages at a Colleyville synagogue (perpetrated because the hostage-taker believed that Jews were all powerful and would release a prisoner from jail) was antisemitic.

2021: a student in a class on antisemitism regularly rejected both the professor's professional descriptions of antisemitism and classmates' experiences with antisemitism.

### **Discrimination and Inclusion**

Spring 2024: a student at a sporting event told a Jewish student that Zionists were using religion to guilt trip people into supporting Israel and that Jews don't belong in Palestine. Later, the same student sent the Jewish student a direct message saying, "You are a disgusting person, you are hurting Arab people, you should be ashamed."

Spring 2024: a student told the host of a Super Bowl party that "if a Zionist Jew is there, I will not attend." The host replied that they would "not uninvite their Jewish friend."

Spring 2023: a Jewish student reported feeling disadvantaged because a CANR job fair was held on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year for Jews.

Fall 2023: Students complained that Israel was demonized in classes that had nothing to do with Israel or Palestine. One complaint regarded a graduate student who was teaching a course, and in discussing immigration in context of health policy, brought up settler colonialism in Israel/Palestine which did not seem to have any direct connection to the course.

Fall 2023: Students were hurt that close friends were posting antisemitic things on social media. After their friends were not empathetic to them trying to explain why the posts were antisemitic, they had unfollowed them and lost friendships.

2022: several Jewish MSU 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.

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>51</sup>

## **Additional Resources and Readings**

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