

The Past Didn't Go Anywhere

Making resistance to antisemitism part of all of our movements

April Rosenblum

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Two Jews, a crumbling empire, and a struggling resistance movement walk into a bar...

For people who have committed themselves to fundamental social change, the situation we're stuck in with antisemitism is like a bad joke.

From one side, progressive and radical activists and scholars are being attacked by organized campaigns to brand us antisemites. In particular, it's virtually impossible to speak out critically about Israel without being charged with antisemitism.

At the same time, we face real currents of unchallenged anti-Jewish oppression in our movements and the world. This endangers Jews, corrupts our political integrity, and sabotages our ability to create the effective resistance our times demand.

The Left has long procrastinated on taking on anti-Jewish oppression. In part **we've had trouble because it looks different** from the oppressions we understand, which enforce inferiority on oppressed groups to disempower them. Anti-Jewish oppression, on the other hand, can make its target look extremely powerful.

Antisemitism's job is to make ruling classes invisible. It protects ruling class power structures, diverting anger at injustice toward Jews instead. But it doesn't have to be planned out at the top. It serves the same ends, whether enshrined in law or institutionalized only in our minds; whether it's state policy, popular 'common sense,' or acts of grassroots movements like our own.

It's always a real struggle for the Left to successfully tackle oppression within its own ranks. But when we do it, **our movements gain, every time**, from the deeper understandings that emerge. To start the process this time, we need some basic information about what anti-Jewish oppression is and how to counter it. But it has to come from a perspective of justice for all people, not from opportunistic attempts to slander or censor social justice efforts that are gaining strength.

In writing this, I do not want activists to put aside the vital issues we already work on to switch to this one. No battle today for peoples' basic human rights can afford to lose our energy and commitment. **What's called for is for us to integrate radical analysis of anti-Jewish oppression into the work we already do.**

May the ideas here strengthen us for all the tasks ahead.

April Rosenblum

Antisemitism is still a world problem

Sometimes people on the Left think the oppression of Jews stopped being a problem after the Holocaust. That's easy to think if what you know comes mostly from the U.S., where Jews have been unusually safe. To really measure whether antisemitism has power, you have to watch the global picture. **Take this small sampling:**

Anti-Jewish agitation in the halls of power:

Russia, January 2005: 20 parliament members and 500 prominent citizens asked the country's Prosecutor General to ban all Jewish organizations in Russia. Calling Judaism anti-Christian, extremist and inhumane, the group cited the medieval myth that Jews ritually murder Christian babies as fact, and said, "the whole democratic world is under financial and political control of the international Jewry."

Malaysia, October 2003: Addressing the world's Muslim leaders, prime minister Mahathir Mohamad declared that "the Jews run this world by proxy. They get others to fight and die for them," and "have now gained control of the most powerful countries."

Iran, December 2005: President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad declared the Holocaust a myth created by Jews. When a Right-wing Danish newspaper sponsored cartoons that demeaned Islam, demonstrators in a government-supported protest proclaimed the Zionists had pushed Denmark to it. Hamshahri, Iran's state-funded, widest-read news-paper, sponsored an international cartoon contest to encourage debate on "alleged historical events like the Holocaust." In a conflict where Jews played no part, it was Jews who were fair game.

Street-level violence, high-level denials

France, January 2006: Ilan Halimi, a 23 year-old Jew from a working-class suburb of Paris, was stalked and kidnapped by a gang that assumed, because he was Jewish, he would be rich. Halimi was then tortured to death over the course of three weeks. Residents from throughout the building joined in with the gang in a game-like atmosphere of torture. Halimi's mother warned French police of several recent kidnapping attempts on local Jews, but they told her to ignore the daily threats to kill her son, and the orders to collect ransom from synagogues. After Halimi's murder, the government resisted acknowledging it as an anti-Jewish killing.

Ukraine, August 2005: Halimi's was only the most publicized of periodic street attacks on Jews. Visibly recognizable Jews were most vulnerable, with frequent attacks on rabbis near synagogues. When rabbinic student Mordechai Molozhenov was beaten, stabbed and sent into a coma by skinheads shouting anti-Jewish slurs, top Ukrainian police officials declared it a case of mere 'hooliganism,' not antisemitism. Thirty rabbis begged for action, saying, "Calls to violence against Judaism and Jews are published in the press, freely distributed and sold. On the walls

of synagogues, buildings, bus stops and along the road, anti-Semitic symbols appear more and more often.”

Argentina, July 2005: In Latin America’s largest Jewish community, where the country’s only major terror attacks have targeted Jewish sites, more news emerged about the bombing of the country’s central Jewish community center in 1994, which killed 86 and injured 300. The government had resisted investigating, and police and officials are widely suspected of permitting or aiding in the bombing. In July, the president admitted that officials had for ten years been actively destroying evidence from the case. To this day, every suspect has gone free. Not hard to imagine in a country where eleven years earlier, the military dictatorship that killed 30,000 people disproportionately targeted Jews for arrest and disappearance, and reserved special torture for Jewish prisoners.

In 2007, what is anti-Jewish oppression?

It’s centuries of institutional anti-Jewish doctrines that get catalyzed in public when the mood hits. It’s a perverse form of street cred: a political consensus that crosses boundaries, used by mainstream politicians and rebel forces alike who expose “the Jews” to prove they will speak truth to power. Even in the U.S., where Jews have had 200 years of exceptional physical safety, it’s a background hum: be it rumors placing Jews or Israelis behind 9/11, the hit film that restaged the “Passion plays” which sparked annual Easter massacres of Jews in medieval Europe, or theories arising amid growing public disenchantment with the Iraq war that it was fought for Jewish or Israeli interests.

The point is not that the sky is falling, or that the Holocaust is on its way back; in fact, several other oppressed groups are in more imminent danger as we speak. But a status quo in which anti-Jewish theories are ‘common sense’ in countries around the world is a serious thing. It’s not an issue the Left can afford to ‘put off’ until later.

The past didn’t go anywhere. Antisemitism didn’t somehow naturally disappear after its worst outbreak. Our whole activist lives are based on the understanding that oppression doesn’t go away by itself. You have to take action. Whole peoples’ movements have to, collectively, for a real shift to occur. When was there a mass effort by radical movements to educate ourselves and the world and overturn antisemitism?

Oh. Well... then when will there be?

“But Jews are one of the most well-off groups in this country!”

How could Jews be oppressed?!

What comes to mind when you think of oppression? Poverty? Mass imprisonment? Exploitation of a group's labor? Theft of a country's resources? If you expect every oppression to look like those things, it may be hard to spot this one. The oppression of Jews often looks very different. But when you know the signs, you can see how the oppression of Jews today is alive and working the way it has for centuries.

A DEFINITION: **Antisemitism**, or **anti-Jewish oppression**, is the system of ideas passed down through a society's institutions to enable scapegoating of Jews, and the ideological or physical targeting of Jews that results from that.

The oppression of Jews has a lot in common with the oppressions that all kinds of other people are struggling with today. Racism, classism, sexism, homophobia and all oppressions serve twin functions: they control, endanger and disempower the targeted group, and at the same time, they help to keep a wider system of exploitation and inequality running smoothly. With antisemitism, it works like this:

- **Jews are isolated**, especially from other exploited groups – people who might normally be expected to team up with them and defend them in times of danger.
- **Other oppressed groups** get manipulated out of identifying and fighting the sources of their exploitation, instead being encouraged to **channel their anger at Jews**.
- **Jews are targeted** for violence or other danger, whether intentionally by local rulers, or spontaneously at the grassroots of society.
- In hopes of gaining safety, Jews are **pressured to cooperate** with rulers, to silence themselves and to not rise up against the powerful, for fear of greater targeting.

In the basic ways that it plays out, antisemitism is not so different from the ways that many diaspora communities get scapegoated throughout the world.

Every oppression is also unique in some ways. In antisemitism's case, it's how the oppression was born: Early Christian leaders portrayed the Jews as the killers of Jesus, an idea that got institutionalized when, in every land Roman imperialism conquered and converted, a popular conception was spread of **Jews as the "killers of God" in league with secret, diabolical forces**. Later, as European societies modernized and grew more secular, images remained of Jews as the source of ultimate evil.

Antisemitism as we know it, with its images of special, evil Jewish power, **began as a Christian, European phenomenon**; though Jews faced mistreatment in Muslim lands, it was a more generic 2nd-class citizenship applied to all non-Muslims. However, with European colonization and inroads the Nazis made, European-style antisemitic theories have increasingly also entered Arab, Asian and other societies.

Over its history, **anti-Jewish oppression has shifted forms** between religious, racial and political persecution based on the times. But some beliefs have become fairly consistent:

- Jews are mysterious, or act secretly behind the scenes
- Jews have abnormal or supernatural amounts of power
- Jews are disloyal to, or seek the destruction of, the society they live in
- Jews are disproportionately the cause of harm in the world
- Jews are unlike the rest of humanity (at best); or inherently evil, or tied to the devil (at worst)
- Jews are wealthy or greedy
- Jews are the “brains” behind the action

In a world that’s very difficult to change, anti-semitism makes things seem easy to solve. It lets us fix our gaze on an imagined group of greedy, powerful Jews at the root of the world’s problems, and moves our eyes right past the systems that actually keep injustice in place: capitalism, weapons dealers, oil companies, you name it... and the overwhelmingly non-Jewish ruling classes who benefit from it all.

And what exactly are Jews, anyway?

Jews are a globally-dispersed, multi-ethnic culture which is linked by a shared history of diaspora, and a religion (Judaism). Many Jews practice the religion; others are ethnic, **secular (non-religious)** Jews.

Within the culture are many Jewish ethnic groups, such as: **Mizrachim** (communities of Jews who never left the Middle East after ancient Israel was destroyed by conquest, but settled in regions such as today’s Iraq, Iran, Syria, etc.), **Ashkenazim** (whose ancestors made their way to Europe and founded communities there), **Sephardim** (whose ancestors formed communities in Spain and Portugal before being dispersed worldwide by the Inquisition), the **Cochin Jews** of India, **Beta Israel** of Ethiopia, **Ibo Jews** of Nigeria, and **many more**. Within each ethnicity lie plenty of differences as well.

Still other Jews share the religion but not the family lineage, and through conversion have become part of the Jewish people. Although orthodox religious law defines a Jew as one who has a Jewish mother or has had an orthodox conversion, many Jews reject this -believing, for instance, that a person who has some Jewish ancestors and who identifies with and cares about the culture, is a Jew.

Due to how often in history Jewish communities have had to hide their identities to escape persecution, there are also millions of people globally with unrecognized Jewish ancestry. In recent years, relative safety for Jews has allowed more open conversation about Jewish origins, and a growing number of communities are “coming out” as Jews.

Often, people hear the word ‘antisemitism’ and they shut down. They say, “You talk about antisemitism like it’s just about Jews...”

“But Arabs are Semites!”

That’s right: the term ‘Semite’ has gotten used on both Arabs and Jews.¹ And **Arabs and Muslims** – plus groups within them, like Palestinians – **are targets of intense violence and oppression.**

– After 60 years of fostering dictators and repressing democratic movements in Arab countries, the U.S. now has made it clear to Arab citizens worldwide that they are subject to U.S. bombing and occupation at will. Hundreds of thousands of Iraqi civilians have been killed without the U.S. so much as counting the dead; hundreds of prisoners tortured; and the U.S. calls it a gift: democracy for the benighted Arabs.

– U.S. Arabs and Muslims since 9/11 have faced forced registration, thousands of detentions without charges, deportation, and popular violence.

– Israel continues its violent 40-year occupation of Palestinian land illegally held since 1967. As Israel today annexes even more West Bank land, the U.S. government funds it, cheered by America’s powerful Christian Right. Meanwhile, Israel responds to Hizbollah by bombing Lebanon’s infrastructure to pieces, killing more than 1,000 and forcing more than one million Lebanese people into exile.

– And Europe, where the legacy began, with Crusader massacres of Muslims and Jews from Europe to the Middle East. Modern times brought 150 years of European colonialism to Arab lands, and immigrants from the former colonies have suffered decades of racist violence and scapegoating in Europe. New French laws purportedly aimed at pacifying tensions have now outlawed Muslim dress in schools.

All this has worsened the burden already faced by many Arabs and Muslims who struggle with severe repression and inequality under their own governments.

Arabs and Muslims worldwide are experiencing a seriously dangerous time. What does this mean, for talking about the threats facing Jews?

Maybe this should be obvious. But it is hard to grasp, and even harder to know how to act on.

Every oppression is different, and every oppressed group deserves our time and commitment to learning what their specific experience is like, and how we can best support their struggle for liberation.

A term we didn’t freely choose:

“Antisemitism” was a word popularized in 1879 by someone who was neither Arab nor Jewish, Wilhelm Marr. From the beginning it was chosen as a chic, new scientific word to show that Jews were an inferior race (not a religion that they could convert out of), and to replace the word Jew-hatred (Judenhass) so that Jew-haters could enjoy sounding more sophisticated.

¹ It is somewhat misleading to distinguish between Arabs and Jews. Millions of Jews are of Arab (& Persian) descent, and experience the profiling other Arabs are subject to, as well as racism in the Jewish community.

Marr and his colleagues used the term antisemites for themselves as something to be proud of. They built an organization to advocate discrimination against Jews, the Antisemites' League. When Marr and his movement designed this term to degrade a whole people, they couldn't care less that they were using it inaccurately by designating it for Jews specifically.

Although Jews didn't get to choose the term for their oppression — and oppressed groups rarely do — **over years being attacked by it, they have accepted the term** to describe the historical experience of being targeted for being Jews.

There isn't really one oppression that targets all those who were labeled "Semites" in a similar way.² But there is a larger oppression that both groups experience: **Orientalism**. From the Chinese Exclusion Act and the Third Reich to the Red Scare and the War on Terror, **the "West" has historically targeted Asians, Arabs and Jews** as mysterious, dishonestly and manipulatively intelligent, overly sensual, warlike, and barbarically loyal to their 'tribe' instead of to humankind.

² The term 'Semite' was itself an invention of European Orientalists, imposed on Jews and Arabs.

Meet the Amazing, Disappearing Oppression

Anti-Jewish oppression has been around a long time — it became government practice in Christian society about 1,700 years ago and only stopped having official Vatican approval in 1965. But **when anti-Jewish oppression isn't at its most brutal, it can be really hard to see.** How come this oppression can seem so invisible?

Partly it's that it allows Jews success. Many oppressions rely on keeping a targeted group of people poor, uneducated, designated non-white, or otherwise 'at the bottom.' Anti-Jewish oppression doesn't depend on that. Although at many times it has kept Jews in poverty or designated non-white, these have been "optional" features. **Because the point of anti-Jewish oppression is to keep a Jewish face in front,** so that Jews, instead of ruling classes, become the target for peoples' rage, **it works even more smoothly** when Jews are allowed some success, and can be perceived as the ones "in charge" by other oppressed groups.

Partly it's that it moves in cycles. Because it can allow Jews to 'move up,' antisemitism is cyclical: Attacks come in waves; but each time things calm down and Jews are able to blend in or succeed in society again, it gives **the appearance that anti-semitism is 'over.'** In some of the most famous examples of anti-Jewish expulsion and mass murder (ie, medieval Spain or modern Germany), just prior to the attacks, Jews appeared to be one of society's most successful, comfortable, well-integrated minorities.

Internalized Oppression

Another factor that keeps anti-Jewish oppression under wraps is internalized oppression: the false negative views that members of oppressed groups come to believe about ourselves and our people, and the ways that we act in the world to accommodate our oppression as normal or acceptable, instead of challenging it.

Internalized oppression affects all oppressed groups. The form it takes depends on each group's history. **For instance, on an individual level, Jewish people** — especially men — often perceive themselves as physically weak. We were legally banned from being allowed to carry weapons for substantial periods under Christian and Muslim rule. European society excluded us from mainstream professions (farming, etc.) that strengthened the body. We were literally unable to protect ourselves and our families from mass violence and rape. Jewish people — especially women — often feel disgust about our-selves and our bodies, because, as the main racial 'Other' in Europe, European society and popular culture created its images of what was ugly and disgusting based on our Jewish faces, and its fantasies of what our bodies looked like.

Our political decisions are also affected. Historical attitudes toward Jews taught us to believe our own struggle was not worthwhile. Gentile European intellectuals, including thinkers who heavily influenced the Left, like Hegel, taught that Jews were a people 'outside' of history; prominent theories held that because Jews had no land of our own, we were a deformed group without a role to play in history and revolution.

The “Useful Jew”

For centuries, Jewish communities could be expelled from European towns at any time, for any reason and made homeless. Permission to stay lasted only as long as an area’s rulers saw local Jews as ‘useful.’ Ruling classes developed and passed down strategies to make good use of Jews’ vulnerability. Today, it’s important for us to look for the ways these strategies are still being used.

- **the “middleman”** -Rulers used Jews for “middlemen” jobs that put Jews in direct contact with the exploited, disgruntled peasantry, shielding rulers from the backlash for their unjust policies. A peasant might live a lifetime without seeing the nobleman who decided her fate; it was Jews who were the face of power at her door collecting taxes and rent, Jews who seemed in control, and Jews who faced the violence when peasants in poverty decided to resist.
- **the buffer zone** – Since Jews needed special permission to live in European areas, many rulers took advantage of them by settling them in the areas most vulnerable to military attack, or where restless subjects were likely to rebel. For the privilege of a home, Jews had to accept their role as the population that could be sacrificed.
- **the Court Jew** -History is full of unpopular kings who managed to save their asses by turning the crowds against a trusty (but disposable) Court Jew. As a king’s agent, a Court Jew might gain great personal privilege, even some power. But when problems arose, rulers counted on being able to divert mass blame and violence to the Court Jew.
- **the “pressure valve”** – Only a few might be tax collectors or Court Jew. But all of an area’s Jews were a ruler’s handy target: When the economy or other conditions became unbearable, Jewish homes provided a whole neighborhood where gentile masses could riot and let off steam

In addition, much developing revolutionary theory saw the groups that mattered in creating social change as the industrial laborers or peasants. But European Jews, having been excluded from many traditional trades, often didn’t fit neatly into those categories.

From both directions, Jews learned we didn’t matter; our only meaningful role in changing the world would be supporting other peoples’ struggles; in making ourselves useful. All this has compounded the biggest piece of internalized antisemitism: After centuries of experiencing other people not coming to our defense when we were target-ed by violence and persecution, Jews have internalized the idea that **there’s no hope of getting other people to stand with us.**

I know what antisemitism can be and do, when we internalize it. Antisemitism humiliates, isolates, and silences us; mutes our loud proud Jewish energy. How can we fight injustice powerfully if we fear our power?

– Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz

For Jews who struggle for social justice, that means we often stay quiet about anti-Jewish oppression: We learn to fight in support of other groups without requesting the solidarity we, ourselves, need.

For Jewish communities, it means **we lose sight of building a strategy for our liberation** by finding allies in other grassroots communities. Instead, we depend on those in power, hoping that if we are useful to them, they will protect us. At times that leads us to cooperate in the oppression of others.

Let's look at an example of how antisemitism works.

In the 1980s, as agribusiness gobbled up more and more profits, family farms across the Midwest failed. With farmers in desperate straits, white supremacist groups stepped in and saved the day by organizing relief. Along with aid, they provided farmers with vital information: It was “Jewish bankers” who were at fault for the farm crisis, and that’s who poor, white Americans would have to target for a real end to their problems.

I couldn’t help but think of this while walking the streets of Argentina, a country that collapsed after drowning in debt to the IMF, where amazing social movements have blossomed in response to crisis, but also where graffiti throughout Buenos Aires proclaims, “IMF = ☒ Jews.” Sometimes you want to say, “Pssst! It’s not Jews... It’s *capitalism*.”

That’s the nature of anti-Jewish oppression: To cover up the roots of injustice. To make people think they’ve figured out who’s really pulling the strings. This is one of the biggest reasons why it’s important for social justice movements to figure out and confront anti-Jewish oppression, for the movement’s own sake: because anti-Jewish oppression is designed as a way to keep people from understanding where the power lies. And it works.

It’s also why you’ll see more manifestations of anti-Jewish oppression popping up as social justice movements around the world grow stronger, and more people come to believe that radical change is necessary: People are seeking ways to liberate themselves and trying to identify who has caused the injustice around them.

If you liked COINTELPRO, you’ll love the Protocols of the Elders of Zion.

Remember COINTELPRO, the US government’s covert campaign to wipe out the most promising movements of the ‘50s, ‘60s and ‘70s? It used strategic rumors, forged letters and other tactics to successfully divide and destroy vital parts of the Black Power movement, the American Indian Movement, and others.

The Protocols of the Elders of Zion was the same thing, 60 years before. A forged text claiming to be minutes from a secret meeting of powerful Jews, it was circulated by officers of Russia’s Czarist secret police, who were worried about the growing revolutionary movement in Russia. Knowing how much of the movement’s grassroots momentum was coming from Jews, and knowing how easily they could divide the masses if they kindled already-existing antisemitism, police agents plagiarized another author’s work of fiction and rewrote it as the imaginary proceedings of a secret Jewish planning meeting for world domination. The Protocols, in distribution since around 1903, describe their plan to take over the world through communism, capitalism,

immorality — all possible angles. **In fact, it's from this document that the modern version of the myth of Jewish world domination got its start.**

Experienced activists will caution you not to assume COINTELPRO's tactics ever ended. Well, you needn't even wonder about the Protocols. They are being put to use around the world: in some countries taught as state-sanctioned truth, but sold worldwide, and bought by record numbers of people. But the **gravest insult to activists is that this fraud**, created with the specific intent to destroy activists and movements like ourselves, **is parroted** by some of our very own colleagues, in our own spaces.

And, though it's painful to acknowledge, antisemitism is already here in our movements.

The examples range from the high-profile...

The Adbusters magazine issue that ran a list of 50 prominent neo-cons and proudly exposed its investigation of which of them were Jewish, marking each Jew with a symbol.

The World Conference Against Racism in 2001, where activists, in the name of solidarity with Palestinians, handed out virulently anti-Jewish flyers and caricatures of demonic, money-hungry Jews.

The radical U.S. artist, whose posters fill the anti-globalization movement, who created an entry about Palestine for Iran's Holocaust-denial cartoon contest.

NOTE: In this pamphlet, I have chosen, where possible, not to show peoples' faces or use activists' and organizations' names. First, many perpetuate anti-Jewish behavior unintentionally; second, our goal should be not to shift blame to individuals, but to deal with the whole pattern.

...to the everyday:

The activist filmmaker, welcomed by KPFA radio and La Peña Cultural Center for her work on Palestinian rights, who sells videos on how Jews have designed everything from Marxism to Neo-Conservatism to covertly advance their own interests, publishes articles on Jewish exaggeration of the Holocaust, and argues for quotas to limit Jews in journalism.

The economic justice organization that shows a video which purports to explain wealth inequality — but instead focuses largely on the Rothschilds¹ and paints major (gentile) financiers and whole nations as mere pawns of a devious Jewish family.

The anti-police brutality demonstration where an invited community group calls for Jews and queers to be killed, and no one speaks out — not the demo's leaders, not any members of the audience.

The statements made in public meetings and on Indymedia, to little or no critical response, that the genocide in Darfur is an act of the Zionists, and that efforts to get people to fight against the genocide are ploys by the Zionists to distract attention from Palestine.

The comments one grows numb to: how we don't get media cover-age because the Jews, or the Zionists, control the media... how the D.A. who's destroying this community is, by the way, Jewish... and so on.

¹ A Jewish family, highly prominent in banking, particularly in the 19th century.

But the number of Leftists with real anti-Jewish beliefs is tiny. What has the bigger impact is not those individual Leftists who promote anti-Jewish beliefs, but the way that institutionally, people and organizations on the Left are so **silent, uncomfortable, defensive, and even accusatory** when someone brings concerns about antisemitism up.

It's the eye-rolls, insults or changes of subject when someone raises anti-semitism in a meeting or event...The refusals to include antisemitism on the list of oppressions a coalition stands against...Our correct work to prevent war on Iran, but our dead silence about the antisemitism Iran's leaders are promoting to the world...

Critics have suggested that incidents like these on the Left mean there's a "new antisemitism" afoot.

Is all this “the new antisemitism” that some observers have made so much of? Not really — because it’s not so new.

Unfortunately, antisemitism hasn’t just been a tool of elites. Radicals and resistance movements have taken part in it at many times in history. Check out a few examples:

- Some of the most important early figures in the Left perpetuated antisemitism. Anarchist forefather Pierre Proudhon’s treatises on capitalism used antisemitic imagery that calls to mind fascist theory more than modern-day anarchism. Karl Marx, in an early debate against an antisemitic colleague, made use of virulently racist images of Jews, painting a detailed picture of Jews as collectively greedy, soul-less and loyal only to money,¹ and insulted opponents with antisemitic and racist jibes in his private writings.
- In the 1880s, leading radicals and socialist newspapers in Russia encouraged Russian peasants engaging in pogroms (mass violence against Jewish towns). Narodnik intellectuals wrote that anti-Jewish pogroms were a first step toward real anti-capitalist consciousness, and should be celebrated.
- In WW2, as armed Jewish resisters fought back against the Nazis and Eastern Europeans resisted the German occupation, significant numbers of gentile fighters acted out anti-Jewish oppression at the Jews fighting beside them — refusing to team up in battle, even murdering Jews as they sought hiding places in their vicinity.
- In the early 20th century, growing Arab self-determination movements (including Arab Jews) struggled to wrest independence from their European occupiers. But with Hitler’s rise, key anti-colonial forces sought to bolster their anti-British resistance by bonding with the Nazi regime. Some, like Iraq’s Rashid Ali al-Kaylani, integrated antisemitic rhetoric, and several Arab Jewish communities suffered massacres. Anti-colonial governments came to power, but instead of bringing the pan-Arab equality of which so many had dreamt, many used Israeli actions as an excuse to target their indigenous Jewish populations. Facing violence and scapegoating, hundreds of thousands of Jews fled — often stripped of their property and sometimes, forcibly expelled.

¹ See <https://www.pintelevid.com/marx>. Marx words contrasted sharply with Jews’ reality; Jews in Marx’s own Prussia had still been in vast poverty as of the early 1800s. Marx himself had been baptized Christian by his Jewish parents to avoid the anti-Jewish discrimination that so often barred Jews from employment.

Nor is Leftist avoidance, denial and silence new.

For years, proud radicals dismissed charges of anti-Jewish oppression in the USSR. People raising concerns were ridiculed as bourgeois or accused of being anti-Communist propagandists. When official revelations finally started emerging in the 1950s about specially-targeted political violence and cultural repression against Jews in the Soviet Union, it shattered a generation of Jewish progressives.

What's really new isn't about the Left — **it's about the Right**. Ever since Israel won the '67 war, and suddenly looked to the U.S. like a handy little friend in the Middle East, the Right has put on a new costume: Defenders of Israel and the Jews.

It would be, shall we say, an understatement to note that in the vast sweep of history, Jewish liberation has not exactly been a pet cause of the Right. So why have they gotten away with making fighting antisemitism into a noble Right-wing issue?

Because the Left hasn't taken anti-Jewish oppression on. Whenever the Left is quiet about an issue that matters to people, it leaves a vacuum for the Right to walk into. They use it to their advantage, to draw in people worried about that issue, and as moral ammunition for their crusades.

The Revolution, the Jews, and the “Generous Offer”

We see the Right acting appalled at antisemitism, and think of it as a Right-wing issue. We don't realize, the Right got to take it because the Left was silent.

We see the Left not taking on anti-Jewish oppression, and we assume that means it's not a significant social justice issue. **We forget that every oppressed group we talk about today** — people of color, women, queers — **got on the agenda only after they fought** like hell against the established voices of the Left **to show that their oppression mattered.** The Old Left's perspective that all struggles were second to the class struggle meant all kinds of groups were shut up, dismissed and disrespected... all in the name of unity for the revolution.

Things have begun to change only due to the struggles and contributions of Black people asserting their autonomy and building independent liberation movements, feminists, womanists who forced the white-dominated feminist movement to face its racism, the American Indian Movement, Chicano/as, queers, and so many others on the New Left who, empowered by their examples, asserted rights to space, respect and support from others.

The Left's problem of silencing oppressed groups comes in part from **how Western European gentile revolutionaries** responded to **oppressed groups on their home turf.** When French Revolutionaries looked at the Jews, who had, for fourteen centuries, suffered violence, expulsions, poverty and locked ghettos, and decided to liberate them, a century of debates began in Western Europe about whether to grant equal rights to Jews.

But no matter how passionately Christian Europeans discussed freedom, equality and human rights, **they assumed that to be free, equal and human meant looking and acting like them.** Jews might be permitted their religion, but they'd be expected to trade in Jewish languages, clothing and distinctive cultures if they wanted real membership in the superior culture that was European civilization.

It was a bargain no self-respecting liberation movement today would touch — and the only offer Jews had. Jews kept working to assimilate for the next 150 years, as chances at integration slipped in and out of their hands. At the same time, they sought freedom by other means: through consistently high involvement in movements for reform and revolution. From Salonica to Moscow, Baghdad, Buenos Aires and New York, Jews helped form the base of revolutionary movements. There, they were allowed to succeed and welcomed into leadership as had never occurred in jobs and universities — but it was assumed they had to transcend their petty Jewish roots. In radical circles, as among their liberal emancipators, Jews were told that their Jewish identities should be a remnant of the past.

1950s — American Jews Push Their Ethnicity Underground

In the 1930s and 40s, Jewish culture — religious and irreligious — could be seen and heard on the streets of any American city with a Jewish presence. **In the aftermath of World War II and the Holocaust**, this was to change.

The U.S., now home to the world's largest remaining Jewish population, appeared to be the safest country left. American Jews knew they'd better not rock the boat. Plus, with the G.I. Bill, many were finally making it to the middle class. In the new suburbs, where Jews lived on the inside of white society for the first time, it was fine to have a different religion, but not to seem too "ethnic." Even for atheists, synagogues became the place to go to hang out with other Jews. Jewish identity was being molded into the guise of a mere religion, with the ethnicity and culture that had nourished Jews shoved out of sight.

Then, just as American Jews were still reeling from news of the European genocide, **McCarthyism exploded**. Progressive Jews became one of the central targets. Jews around the U.S. came under suspicion at work; many lost their jobs or whole careers. In one of world history's most publicized trials, two Brooklyn Jewish Communist parents, Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, were charged and executed as spies.

The once-large and active Jewish Left was hit hard. Rifke Feinstein of the Congress of Secular Jewish Organizations remembers that when McCarthyism hit, "whole communities of us [Leftist, Yiddish-speaking, secular Jewish schools and organizations] just tried to go underground, to disappear. But when it was over and we poked our heads up, no one else was there." Despite all this, the next generation of Jews were again disproportionately involved in justice movements. An amazing 1/2 to 2/3 of the white Civil Rights workers who went South, for instance, are estimated to have been Jews -despite Jews being 2-3% of the U.S. population. **Except now they tended not to identify as Jews**. 'Jews are a religion,' said many, 'and I'm not religious.'

Those Jewish activists, and Jews who became active in the later '60s, are now vital leaders and mentors in many of our movements. When they don't feel connected to their Jewishness, or understand anti-Jewish oppression as ongoing, it has an impact on how we all think — or don't think — about this oppression.

An Open Request From a Jew On the Left

Most historians agree that Jews have had a disproportionately large presence in almost every major social justice movement within their reach. So why, today, are Jews off in distant suburbs, seemingly more conservative all the time? The answer we on the Left usually give is, "Privilege." Jews became white, rose to middle class, and — boom! No longer directly affected, Jews lost their moral passion & abandoned their old progressive causes. The full story has much more to teach us.

In 1903, Jews were a radical force so threatening that the Protocols were published to neutralize them. 100 years later, the Left sees Jews as privileged and apolitical at best, or Right-wing oppressors at worst. Something happened in between...

Over the last few centuries, hundreds of thousands of Jews around the world have fought in social justice struggles. We fought not only because we longed for a better, more beautiful world,

but out of deep faith that freedom for all peoples would also, finally, bring freedom and safety to Jews.

The punishment for this revolutionary activity has been shared not only by radical Jews, but by quiet Jews who tried not to make waves. We have collectively been followed around the globe by the accusation that we're subversives tearing up the societies we live in. For our real and imagined radical activities, we've been jailed, tortured, and murdered by governments and anti-Jewish tinged movements around the world.

Yet Jewish communities are filled with people who once made their home in the Left, only to back away after continual encounters there with antisemitism. We've now had three generations of Jewish activists pull back from the Left for this reason: First in the '50s, coming to terms with Soviet antisemitism; next, those discouraged by the New Left's ignorance of Jewish oppression; now, young activists starting to feel hopeless about the tolerance of anti-Jewish rhetoric in the anti-globalization, anti-war and Palestine solidarity movements.

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There's still tons of Jews on the Left. But it's a lot easier to be there if you don't feel so Jewish (or if you shape your Jewish identity around criticizing bad actions by Jews); a lot harder when your Jewishness makes you notice the daily manifestations of anti-Jewish stuff around you. **Because we no longer have what so many Jews had in 1903:** the faith that our liberation was coming together with all the others. We've seen too much evidence that when the times gets confusing, we better watch our backs.

When the Left walks out on Jewish liberation, it isolates Jews from the one real strategy that can protect us from anti-Jewish targeting: Grassroots solidarity from people around the world. Without that, we turn to short-term tactics we can manage alone. That's why you'll see Jews pour their energy into building up a militarized Israel, with rights reserved for Jews. It's the half-baked protection of having somewhere to go — of being able to flee every time we need to. **But the Left also loses big.**

The Left mistakenly writes current-day Jewish oppression off as fake or minor because it's not based on poverty, skin color or colonized status. *But it's exactly that difference in our oppression that makes Jews a revolutionary force.*

Oppressed groups (including us) can often be fooled into thinking that if they just obtain surface reforms they'll be on their way to freedom: getting their group out of poverty, electing leaders who look like them, even winning a country. But **in the case of Jews, it is clear that the dangers to us will exist as long as there are 'haves' and 'have-nots' in the world at all.** That's because we're not just oppressed by the people at the top — we are continuously made vulnerable to violence and used as the 'pressure valve' whenever oppression grows worse for other groups. We can't escape the cycle of our oppression as long as systems of inequality run the world.

Jewish oppression affects all Jews, in all economic classes, and our oppression cannot be ended without fighting and transforming social in justice as a whole. What does this mean? It means

that *we are a reserve of revolutionary potential — in all classes, at all times*. If ruling classes don't have this in mind as a reason to repress Jews, they probably should.

Any Jew who comes to understand the nature of their oppression — and who realizes that the liberation of their people touches them more deeply than any clinging attachment to the status quo — **cannot help but become a radical**. Plenty of Jews haven't yet had that "click" of awareness. But a great many of us Jews already do understand this reality. One big thing that keeps us from mobilizing ourselves as a people is that we don't have the safety and backup of a Left that will defend us when anti-Jewish targeting rears its head in the world. For this, the Left needs to be brought to deeper awareness.

It will benefit social change everywhere when the Left takes up for Jewish liberation. When Jews have one direction in which we no longer have to look over our shoulders, that's when significant numbers of us will be able to stop clinging to stopgap measures and tap into our community's revolutionary potential. This will require both Jews on the Left deciding that we're worthy of solidarity and acting to get it, and gentiles facing up to their historic responsibility to end anti-Jewish oppression.

Time Out!

A Word to Jews:

For those of us who are burned out on dealing with the Left's ignorance toward Jews, hearing our concerns affirmed can feel like a huge relief. But, as Jews, **we've got problems of our own to fix**. Jewish communal institutions are supposed to serve us — to help us maintain our identity in a culture full of pressures to assimilate, to aid our families in times of crisis, to give us ways to express our ethics together. But **we're being represented by a mix of official Jewish leaders, who we don't elect, and business leaders and philanthropists**, the informal leaders whose desires shape our community's agenda because they can make or break Jewish non-profits that depend on their support.

We have a lot to correct — both in the American Jewish community, and in Israel, home to almost half of the world's Jews. We need to talk about the Occupation of the Palestinian people, the suppression of dissent about it inside the organized Jewish community, and the denials in many of our families that it's quite that bad. We need to expose those Jewish leaders buddying up to the Christian Right.

We need to commit ourselves to **fighting racism now in the U.S.** — even as we take pride in the active role of many Jews in the Civil Rights era. (One of the ways we could start is to help open discussions about America confronting and making reparations for the damage done by slavery. We could model for other Americans what it looks like to take this issue on, by acknowledging that there were Jews who participated in the transatlantic slave trade.¹) We need to awaken to our own diversity, and **bring Jews of color, working-class, queer and secular Jews into the heart of our community**, where they belong.

Facing the Occupation is the greatest challenge; especially because Jews do face danger, and Israel is supposed to be the one thing that keeps us safe. Many of us have been trained to think the best way to protect ourselves is to go along uncritically with Israeli policy, and channel our energy into halting any criticism of it. Let us begin to confront antisemitism itself — and call unjust policies what they are, while we search for solutions that could really make us safe. **We have the right and the duty to stand up for this.**

¹ A segment of primarily Spanish and Portuguese Jews took part, alongside white gentiles, in the slave trade. Jews' discomfort with acknowledging this has held back our ability to build alliances of trust with African American activists, and some in those communities have channeled their disappointment into antisemitism, blaming Jews for slavery as a whole.

A Word to White People: (white Jews included)

Up until now this pamphlet has assumed that we all already care about fighting racism against people of color. But the reality is, most of our organizations on the Left don't reflect that. Our organizations exist within a wider, institutionalized system of white supremacy, and ego, fear, resentment and confusion keep individual white activists from facing up to our obligation to prioritize racism as a political, and an everyday, concern.

Today the U.S. government's most high-profile target is Arab and Muslim people and nations. However, **all people of color remain under heavy attack**, from the government's willful abandonment of and even blatant aggression toward New Orleans' Black community, to the impending government plans to execute political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal, to the militarized Mexican border, police brutality, and targeted recruitment of youth of color to be cannon-fodder for U.S. wars.

When white gentiles or white Jews have trouble confronting white privilege, it can look more attractive and less uncomfortable to make an issue of antisemitism. Sorry — it won't be possible to choose between the two. **Anti-Jewish oppression can-not be dealt with in a movement that isn't also utterly dedicated to fighting the oppression of people of color**, both in the larger world and in our movements.

A Word to Everyone:

For most activists, it is ideally already common sense that criticizing Israeli policy or the ideology of Zionism is in no sense inherently antisemitic. But **in many places outside the Left, it's not common sense.** It's vital that activists — particularly those concerned about anti-Jewish oppression — take a stand when scurrilous charges of antisemitism are targeted at progressive organizations and scholars. That includes doing hard, long-term education and communication with activists who are unfairly attacked but who do have some antisemitism to rectify (a job for gentile allies).

“You’re not pro-Palestinian...”

...You’re antisemitic!” If you work to support Palestinian self-determination, you’ve heard this sort of thing countless times. Sometimes it comes from Right-wing ideologues whose aim is to shut down debate about Palestinian rights. Other times it comes from Jews who are so scared of real antisemitism that they can’t tell when a criticism of Israel is not driven by hatred of Jews. Either way, it’s insulting to activists and — above all — to Palestinians.

Yet instances of anti-Jewish behavior do come up in Palestine work more than many parts of the Left: **Why?** It’s not because Palestinian or Arab activists are more anti-Jewish than other people. In fact, they often have a sharper eye than others for catching and interrupting anti-Jewish thinking.

One reason is simple: Any issue where Jews are very visible will bring out the anti-semitism that already exists in the world. **Another is more complex:** In an issue where some Jews *do* have real power; it can get hard to tell what’s an accurate observation of unjust actions they have done, and what’s antisemitic thinking. For instance, if Israel gets continually allowed to flout international law; if pro-Palestine activists suffer censorship or are ruled out for funding or jobs because of controversy this issue raises, some activists start to mistake Jews for a vast powerful network, or a conspiracy that calls all the shots.

A third problem arises from normal activist tactics. We often fight campaigns by making our opponents look as bad as possible. The Left doesn’t have tons of money, or muscle on Capitol Hill. One of the strengths we do have is moral power to make the other side look bad enough that the world shames them into reversing their policy. In campaigns for AIDS funding, fair housing, prison rights, you name it, one of our main tactics is to make our opponents out to be **cold, cruel and inhuman.**

But when you use tactics like that on a group that’s historically been portrayed as evil and inhuman, where that image has been used for centuries as a tool to incite mass violence against them, **you tap into a larger historical power.** A power that’s bigger than the Left, and has its own momentum.

At the very birth of the Palestinians’ catastrophe lies antisemitism, the force that created the Jewish search for a modern state. And building a world that fights the oppression of Jews, and all humans, is the ultimate solution to today’s condition, in which Jews cling so hard to a tiny place of safety for themselves at the cost of oppressing Palestinians. **Yet Palestinians don’t have the luxury** of waiting for antisemitism to be eradicated to struggle for their own freedom. So let’s guarantee the short-term battle supports the long-term goals, by consciously building safeguards to Jews into tactics for Palestinian liberation.

It’s absolutely possible to critique Israel without being antisemitic — but it’s not automatic. You keep things clear when you **describe accurately and specifically what you oppose, and critique actions and policy as unjust — not people or nations as evil.** And when people suggest that they see targeting of Jews in something you’re saying or doing, don’t shoot them

down; seek out useful information in what they're saying that might help you give your message even more clarity and impact.

(It's true — everything in Column 1 takes longer to say, and is less catchy. But when you choose to make accurate, specific criticisms of Israeli policy, you do your small part to decrease the likelihood that I will be killed in a synagogue by someone who, misguided by anti-Jewish oppression, thought they would be helping Palestine.)

it was a good try, but time to rethink.

<p>Clear criticisms of Israeli policy & its backers</p> <p>“Israel has a repeated & ongoing record of human rights offenses.”</p> <p>“Many Israeli soldiers justify their actions toward Palestinians by saying they’re ‘just following orders.’”</p> <p>“The Zionist movement has included elements of racism from its early days, such as the claim that Palestine was “a land without a people for a people without a land.” Major Zionist factions have implemented conscious, intentional racist policy. Regardless of individual Zionists’ intentions, <i>Zionism as a whole has had racist & oppressive results for the Palestinian people.</i>”</p> <p>“AIPAC,^a weapons lobbies & others give U.S. politicians incentives to push anti-Palestinian policies, & attempt to silence & intimidate both Jews & non-Jews who raise alternatives.”</p> <p>“In this issue, as in so many, the corporate media provide one-dimensional, sensationalized coverage, usually biased toward whatever side the U.S. government is backing — when they cover it at all.”</p> <p>“Lack of a resolution between Israel & Palestine is one of several major regional conflicts preventing justice & stability in the Middle East. Outside powers such as the U.S. & Europe have played & play a role in sparking & perpetuating these conflicts.”</p>	<p>Antisemitic ideas often repeated by activists with no anti-Jewish intentions</p> <p>“Israel is a worse human rights violator than most or all other countries.”</p> <p>“Israelis are just like Nazis.”</p> <p>“Zionism is racism.”</p> <p>“The ‘Israel Lobby’ is what is pushing America off track & away from its true interests, or caused us to go to war.”</p> <p>“The media, controlled by Zionists, never talks about the plight of the Palestinians.”</p> <p>“The Israel-Palestine conflict is the root of violence & instability in the Middle East / of America’s bad relationship with Arab countries.”</p>	<p>Lines emerging directly from neo-nazi & antisemitic organizations</p> <p>“Israel is the root of the world’s problems.”</p> <p>“Israel is worse than the Nazis,” “This wouldn’t have happened if the Nazis were successful,” etc.</p> <p>“The Zionist conspiracy is behind this,” “Zionism is the root of the world’s problems today,” etc.</p> <p>“Israel / The Zionists /The Jews / The Jewish Lobby... is controlling the U.S. / the world.”</p> <p>“Zionist control of the media is part of a vast web of Zionist power overbanks & world governments, in their conspiracy to rule over humanity.”</p> <p>“Everything would be better if Israel was destroyed,” etc.</p>
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^a American Israel Public Affairs Committee, a major Right-wing, pro-Israeli expansionism lobby group

On targeting “Zionism”

A lot of activists work to avoid anti-Jewish oppression , and to make a distinction between Jewish people and Israeli misdeeds , by targeting their comments at “Zionists,” not Jews, and “Zionism,” not Judaism or Jewish culture. Unfortunately, this shortcut doesn’t work.

First, it backfires because major, organized antisemitic movements also use the term, for the opposite purpose: to spread anti-Jewish ideology without looking so bad. That’s why 2005’s international conference, “Zionism As the Biggest Threat to Modern Civilization” was co-chaired by neo-nazi politician David Duke. For many antisemitic groups, “Zionists” are the demonic Jews controlling the world, Protocol-style; and “Zionism” is the general body of evildoing by Jews. Because we activists are only suspicious of Jew-bashing, not attacks on “Zionists,” their antisemitic imagery makes its way right into our circles. Second, because it replaces one one-dimensional image of a ‘bad guy’ with another. It bypasses the actual work of avoiding anti-Jewish oppression: reshaping how we think and talk about Jews and Israelis to see them as 3-dimensional human beings, capable of wrongdoing like any others. Finally , using the term “Zionists” doesn’t protect Jews . It just makes people who bomb Jewish schools, synagogues, etc., call the people they’re killing Zionists.

Principled anti-Zionism has little to do with the fake “Zionism” that antisemites like Duke attack. There are many rational reasons why some people are opposed to the philosophy that there should be a Jewish state, just as lots of rational reasons motivate others to believe a Jewish state is necessary.¹

Zionism is not an insult. It’s not a catch phrase, a code word for racism or imperialism , or the name for unpleasant things done by Jews. It’s a nationalism, and, as often happens with nationalisms, it has not fully liberated its people and has oppressed others in the process. It stands for a huge range of beliefs and believers: from the Right-wing racist who wants to ‘transfer’ (forcibly expel) all Palestinians, to the person who wants Jews to have a self-determined state in the only land to which Jewish diaspora ethnicities around the world have shared a cultural tie, to the person who wants to keep living as a Jew in the “Land of Israel” but is open to living in a binational, Palestinian-Jewish state.

There’s no shame in thinking critically toward Zionism. But in a world of unresolved anti-semitism, there’s also no getting out of fighting this oppression head on.

¹ For instance: An anti-Zionist might rationally oppose Zionists’ having consciously established a state where they did, knowing that this would lead to dispossessing the Palestinian people. A Zionist might observe that Jews’ vulnerability was linked to being a permanently small minority and support Jews having one place where they are the governing majority.

Innoculate your Palestine work against antisemitism

- **If you're white, understand:** When you take no action to stop anti-Jewish patterns in our movements, you set Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims up to take the fall. Though historic Left mistreatment of Jews has largely been a legacy of white, European/American movements, Arabs and Muslims are the ones who today get publicly scapegoated for charges of Left antisemitism. Don't let them pay the price. Take the struggle on.
- Beware of saying Israel is the only country doing anything, or the worst case of any given injustice; it's often not true, and it gets used to justify global violence against Jews. Know and speak about countries guilty of similar offenses. This not only guard against danger to Jews; it brings a global perspective that strengthen the fights of all peoples, even while we focus on Palestinians.
- Be specific about the injustice you're talking about. For instance, don't jump into generalizations like "Israelis are like Nazis." Focus on the original thought that led there; ie, "Israeli policies like [blank] treat Palestinians as if they're not human."
- Remember that, as with every oppression, it's possible to spread antisemitic ideas without necessarily harboring any ill will toward Jews. Stay open to re-evaluating tactics, even though you know your intentions are positive and just.
- Don't casually use one-dimensional, charicatured portrayals of cruel Israelis. Rather than sensationalizing Israelis, and compounding anti-Jewish oppression in a world that already paints Jews as evil, help people see Palestinians: real people, suffering daily injustice, both mundane and extreme, and deserving of global attention.
- At the center of Palestinians' struggle for freedom and human dignity is their human and legal Right to Return to their land. But there are real reasons why Jews around the world fear losing majority control of Israel. If you fight for the Right to Return, understand the implications it could have for Jews in a world where anti-Jewish oppression has not been solved. Consider what role you can play in bringing about global safety for Jewish people.
- If people use opposition to the term 'antisemitism' to shut down discussion, by all means, speak of anti-Jewish oppression. But speak of it. Don't let fellow activists silence conversation about antisemitism by complaining that the word is wrong, and blaming Jews for the problem.

Above all, remember:

Taking care to resist antisemitism is not about walking on eggshells or acquiescing to pressure. It's about making a greater commitment to refusing to take part in oppression — and building movements that can win.

A final word about this twisty subject...

The foundation of Israel, and Israel's ongoing policies, have contributed to massive suffering for the Palestinian people.

And the country's actions, as well as its alliance with the U.S., fuel anger around the world at Israel.

But Israel did not, and does not, cause antisemitism.

Being angry at or critical of the actions of a country is different from buying into racist mythologies about a people. ** If there are people who believe not only that Israel acts unjustly, but that Jews control the world or that the Holocaust never happened, there are deeper anti-Jewish influences at work.** Israel doesn't indoctrinate people in Kiev, Denver or Paris to think that Jews are all rich, in league with the devil, or that they bake with children's blood. Israel doesn't make New York, Damascus and Mexico City vendors sell the Protocols, or fund local movie industries to televise them. It doesn't make Americans (activists included) so unaware of the world beyond our borders that we believe Israel is the only country committing the violations it has. It doesn't need to; because long before Israel or Zionism existed, the targeting of Jews was well entrenched in these lands.

One problematic way this occurs on the Left is when activists teach that things for Jews in Arab lands were fine until Israel came along. Jews *did* live in greater harmony in Arab lands than in Europe. But as religious minorities, they also experienced oppression which could range from mild, routine degradation to violent mob attacks. This legacy was compounded by colonizing regimes, who brought European antisemitic theories into the region. But the story was different in each country and each time; and in the hearts of many of the Jews who lived there, Arab culture will always remain home.

When Americans beat up Arabs and Sikhs after 9/11, **it wasn't 'because of'** what Saudi hijackers did; it was because of our society's pre-existing bigotry and lust for a scape-goat. Likewise, when Arab governments took advantage of growing conflict with Zionism and Israel to seize Jews' homes and savings and expel them; when people beat and murdered Jews in the streets in Syria and Aden in 1947, Libya in 1967, and elsewhere, it wasn't 'because of' Israel. So **don't tell us** that the global attacks on Jews will end when Israel stops what it's doing. Israel needs to stop oppressing the Palestinians because it's wrong — no further reason is needed. But when it does, anti-Jewish oppression will still be here, because it didn't start in '48. If it's going to end, you're going to have to help end it.

Why do many Jews fight so hard against the Right to Return?

The fact that many Jews fiercely oppose the Palestinian Right to Return, and the related vision of a peaceful bi-national state, **befuddles many activists, who see** a shared democracy where both Jews and Palestinians receive respect **as one of the most hopeful and just solutions** imaginable. But, along with Israel's denials of its responsibility for the refugee crisis, there is a second, and deeper issue involved: Jews have had convincing experiences that **lacking a place to run to can have life-or-death consequences.**

In 1938, 32 nations met in Evian-les-Bains, France **to discuss whether to allow European Jews** , desperate to flee the Nazis, **into their countries. 31 of them** — all but the Dominican Republic — **refused**. Evian was an awful culmination of centuries of Jews' attempts to flee forced conversion, violence and expulsion; to which Jews were vulnerable, partly because as a small diaspora they were **** minorities in every place****, at the mercy of elites. Many fear that if Palestinians achieve Return inside Israel's 1948 borders, win true democratic rights and grow to be a majority, it might end Jewish control over immigration to Israel, which many see as their safeguard in case of an anti-Jewish resurgence.

No matter how frightening a *physical* implementation of Return may sound, Jews must take the fundamental step to acknowledge Palestinians' *human* Right to Return.

Deconstructing common myths

It helps to get familiar with basic anti-Jewish myths. How many activists know, when they see images of Sharon eating babies, Israeli vampires, or protest signs picturing “Palestinian baby-meat,” “slaughtered with American \$ according to Jewish rites,” that they’re viewing an anti-semitic myth, the Blood Libel, in action since medieval times? Here are a few common myths.

Controlling the World / the Government

The idea that Jews control the government or the world began with traditional Church authorities passing down images of Jews as a group in league with the Devil, with special powers from the Devil that gave them evil control over earthly events. Christian rulers furthered the myth that Jews were in control, by sticking Jews in the ‘face of power’ roles with which everyday peasants interacted (ie, tax collectors).

As European culture grew more secular, the idea was modernized, and brought to a new level of worldwide fame in the form of 1903’s Protocols of the Elders of Zion forgery. During the Nazi years, this European propaganda was imported to non-European cultures, such as Arab countries, where oppression of Jews had previously been based *not* on myths of Jewish world power, but on simpler notions that Jews ought to stay in their place as 2nd-class citizens.

Left Examples: Activists expanding criticism of the ‘Israel Lobby’ to present Israel as the ‘tail wagging the dog’ that controls U.S. policy. The grassroots news websites and protestors’ signs that joined in spreading false internet rumors of an Ariel Sharon quote on Israeli radio: “We, the Jewish people control America, and the Americans know it.”

Causing the Wars / Causing the Loss of Wars

Somebody should write a pamphlet for activists just about how to respond when Jews get blamed for wars — it happens so regularly you can set your watch to it. Jews were the default “outsider” group in so many societies; always handy to tar-get when things went wrong. What’s more, Jews were treated so badly in many of these societies, it was usually easy for people to imagine that the Jews wished another country would take over and change their conditions. We can see this as early as 711, when the Muslim Moors conquered Spain. Christian Spaniards thereafter claimed the Jews had invited the Moors in.

In the past century alone we’ve had the 1894 Dreyfus Affair (high officers framed a Jewish captain for treason, and France exploded with anti-Jewish vitriol); the 1918 accusations by Germans that they had lost the World War because the country’s Jews had conspired a “**stab in the back**” against Germany; populist agitation before WW II in the U.S. and after it in Europe, blaming Jews for bringing them into “**the Jews’ war**” (in places like Poland, Holocaust survivors were murdered as they left the camps by Poles who blamed them for the war); 1950s anti-Communism,

which drew attention to Jewish progressives as a suspected “**fifth column**” seeking America’s downfall to the Reds, and executed the Rosenbergs for supposedly giving away ‘the Bomb’ to the Soviets; Arab Jews being treated as an **enemy within** by their governments; and everywhere, suspected of “**dual loyalties.**” Jews have so often been accused of **shirking** wartime duty that Jews in many countries maintain committees which defend Jewish veterans and keep records of the names and numbers of Jews who served and died in the line of duty, knowing they will literally need to prove their sacrifice next time the accusations return.

Left Example: Claims that the U.S. wouldn’t be in Iraq if it weren’t for a nefarious Jewish influence (the state of Israel and its lobby controlling us, a clique of Jewish neo-cons who’ve gotten the nation all off course, etc.). Anyone who’s been paying attention to Bush’s own vision, or to U.S. foreign policy since 1898, could have guessed we’d be trying to score one for the empire – with or without those neo-cons. As always, the big winner from these accusations is the corrupt government at fault for the war.

Controlling the Banks

Many myths, such as that Jews control the media, the banks and Hollywood, came from the concentration of Jews in certain fields due to institutional discrimination. For centuries in Christian empires, Jews were not legally permitted in mainstream professions. They often survived by working at trades forbidden to, or considered ‘beneath’ Christians – like professional acting, or collecting taxes or rent. One such job was money lending. Although some Jews were moneylenders and benefited from economic privilege, most remained poor, and the classic dynamic of anti-Jewish oppression went on: Jews who got to work did so at the price of everyday exposure to the violence and anger of poor peasants in debt; rulers got to use them as scapegoats in times of economic instability. The attacks that got channeled toward Jews were absorbed by the few money-lenders and the poverty-stricken majority alike.

Learn more: It gets easier to identify and reject antisemitism when you recognize the classic myths and their history. Take time to educate yourself on myths such as: that Jews control Hollywood or the media, that Jews killed Jesus, that Jews kill and/or eat gentile children (the Blood Libel), that Jews were at fault for the creation of racism (the ‘Hamitic curse’ charge), and more.

As a people that’s had so many reasons to hide, reclaiming beloved languages and culture that genocide, expulsion and assimilation have separated us from. As observant Jews, struggling to maintain our traditions without getting left out of our secular friends’ lives. As queer Jews, wishing we didn’t have to hold one side of ourselves back depending on which community we’re with...to name a few

Tips for every activist

- Whether you're a Palestine activist or not, 1) Help activists around you follow the tips from the 'Time Out!' section. 2) Don't think using the word "Zionist" instead of "Jew" means you've avoided antisemitism. 3) When people raise talk of antisemitism, train your mind to not go automatically to the Israel/Palestine conflict; consider the issue in its own right. Both are separate, vital issues that demand our concern.
- Fighting anti-Jewish oppression does not equal organizing against bad things Jews do and saying that will help end hatred of Jews. It means actively combating both anti-Jewish actions and beliefs, whether they come from overtly antisemitic movements or groups you think are cool and want to team up with politically.
- Mainstream Jews often feel more entitled than they should to accuse your work of anti-semitism. But many radical Jews have the opposite problem: We tend to doubt and dismiss ourselves when we notice anti-Jewish patterns happening. This holds our whole movements back. Help us out: Give us the space all oppressed groups should get, by letting us err on the side of noticing antisemitism "too much" as we figure it out.- Understand that Jewishness is a cultural identity, an ethnic identity and a religious (or non-religious) identity. Understand that racism plays a key part in anti-Jewish oppression, even if you retain the word racism to refer to people of color.
- Learn about and support Jews of color. Educate yourself about global Jewish communities and histories, and speak out in your organizing to ensure that the voices of Jews of color are heard — including the Jews of color who are sitting in front of you, asking you to listen. Don't assume that the Jew you're speaking to is Ashkenazi, or that the person of color you're speaking to is not Jewish.
- In antiracism trainings, acknowledge that antisemitism has historically been a major form of racism, and can still take the form of racism, as when people characterize Jews as sub-human or demonic. Don't assume that someone bringing up anti-semitism is trying to avoid focusing on racism. Taking a moment to affirm the importance of radical organizing against antisemitism strengthens your analysis, and allows you to maintain your chosen focus on racism against people of color.
- Have a plan in your organizations for what happens when it appears something antisemitic (or racist, homophobic, etc.) has been said or done. What will be said and who will say it? How will people check in with the Jews present later to support them and/or correct harm done? Be serious about carrying it out every time.
- Jewish internalized oppression is intense, and it's often invisible to those of us who are most affected by it, or whose ancestors were deeply impacted by it. Don't tokenize Jews

by choosing ones who don't think antisemitism is a big deal to represent the Jewish perspective in your events.

- Recognize that either antisemitism will be fought and ended by the Left, by our grassroots justice & liberation movements, or it will not be ended. No matter what the Right pretends to care about, it is not in the Right's interest to end anti-Jewish oppression. Stop waiting for someone else to do it.

What will happen if our movements don't act?

If we remain passive about anti-Jewish actions in our ranks and the world, we will put **Jews in increased danger** . That's all the reason we need to change.

In the larger world, our passivity will also help to strengthen **white supremacy**- its organized movements, and the whole culture that sees whites as good and pure, and Others (like people of color and Jews) as the ones messing everything up. We'll help Europe evade responsibility for the damage done by **colonialism** , as Europeans blame Israel for anti-Western feelings and instability around the world. We'll aid **reactionary regimes and movements** everywhere that seek to boost themselves by blaming their own actions on Israel, as the President of Sudan does when he claims the Darfur genocide is a hoax perpetrated by Israel.

Inside our movements, overlooking attacks on Jews will lure us into alliances with Far Right movements and visions. We will lose effectiveness at challenging the global systems we're up against, as our perceptions of new social developments are clouded by misjudgments of who are our allies and enemies. New activists, and people on the edges of our movements, will be allowed to hold onto wrong analyses of who has power in this world and where problems stem from.

We will **lose valuable activists** in our ranks who are uncomfortable with the targeting of Jews they're noticing around them. And on the most every-day level, we'll continue to enable **jerk-dominance** of our movements, attracting the sorts of activist leaders who used to get a kick out of making rude comments about people of color, and now enjoy getting to shock everyone with anti-Jewish declarations, without getting 'caught.

Most immediately, we'll leave Jews without hopes for solidarity, for alternative means of self-defense. As Jews flounder for ways to protect themselves, we'll continue to push them into the waiting arms of the Right, with its visions of empire and Armageddon. **That's dangerous to Palestinians, to Jews, and to the world.**

But what if we succeed in this?

But there's another future in our grasp. One that follows in the footsteps of the many radicals who have stood up against antisemitism, like French Socialist Jean Jaures and lesbian feminist Black radical Barbara Smith.

Clear sighted activists for generations have understood that **there's a bonus that comes from taking this struggle on:** Antisemitism is a warning sign that tells us we're not giving people a clear answer about where injustice originates, and what would solve it. Fighting it sharp-ens our analysis and forces us to get better at articulating our beliefs to a mass audience. If we say, 'The problems in the world do not come from the Jews,' it forces us to answer: What do they come from? **When the Left takes on antisemitism, it will be strength training** to help us gain the abilities we need to reshape the world.

A truly radical remaking of the world will include Jewish liberation: the condition in which Jews in every place in the world will live free from fear, free from threat of being targeted as Jews, and where our safety never depends on pleasing or remaining useful to any 'side', be it powerful elites or peoples' movements. In which we will live free of pressure (from ourselves or others) to blend in or assimilate; unashamed of our Jewish looks, languages, rituals and distinctive behaviors; and Jewish culture will be nurtured in all its diversity. In which those Jews who wish to will be able to participate in collective self-determination as a people, and/or live in autonomous Jewish space. In which Jews will be capable of defending ourselves, but will be defended and shown solidarity by groups around the world.

True Jewish liberation requires the commitment and action of both Jews and non-Jews world-wide, and is incompatible with the oppression of any other group: because no human group is expendable in revolutionary change.

When the Left finally gets that — not just about Jews but about liberation itself — then our efforts will truly make another world possible. Because the Left is not a mercenary army: We're not just in this to win, choosing sides and then fighting blindly for whatever side we're on. We're in this to make a different world. And taking on anti-Jewish oppression is the act of building a Left not confined to reaction, but propelled by a deeper vision of a world we would actually want to *live* in.

See you there!

Glossary

antisemitism – The system of ideas passed down through a society’s institutions to enable scapegoating of Jews, and the ideological or physical targeting of Jews that results from that. The term was first popularized in 1879 by German anti-Jewish racists who sought to build specific movements against Jews as an inherently inferior and threatening race (versus a religion, which could be escaped through conversion). For how it works, see p. 4–5.

Ashkenazi – Refers to descendants of Jews who settled in Europe, in countries such as Russia, Poland, Germany, Hungary and others, and shared common cultural features such as Yiddish language. Ashkenazi Jews currently make up the majority of Jews in the U.S., Latin America and Canada.

Blood Libel – The anti-Jewish myth, beginning in the 1100s, that Jews seek out and kill non-Jewish children. In its classic form, it accuses Jewish communities of seeking the blood of gentiles to use in Jewish religious rituals; for instance, as an ingredient in Passover matzah.

diaspora – refers to the breaking up and separating of the members of a people, and the geographically scattered communities that they create in the course of their travels.

gentile – (noun) A non-Jewish person; (adjective) non-Jewish. [From the Latin gens, clan.]

internalized oppression – The effects of a group’s oppression and dehumanization, as manifested within the oppressed group itself, in its individuals or its communities. A Jew coping with internalized oppression might believe stereotypes about Jews, point undeserved blame at other Jews, feel shame or disgust at parts of their looks or behavior that they think of as Jewish, feel general low self-esteem, find it hard to take a stand against antisemitism, or feel a desire to emphasize to others how different or separate they are from other Jews.

Jews – A globally-dispersed, multi-ethnic culture linked by a religion, Judaism. Many Jews practice the religion; others are ethnic, secular Jews.

Jewish liberation – The condition in which Jews in every place in the world will live free from fear, free from threat of being targeted as Jews, and where our safety never depends on pleasing or remaining useful to any ‘side’, be it powerful elites or peoples’ movements. In which we will live without pressure (from ourselves or others) to blend in or assimilate, unashamed of our Jewish looks, languages, rituals and distinctive behaviors, and Jewish culture will be nurtured in all its diversity. In which Jews will be capable of defending ourselves, but will be defended and shown solidarity by groups around the world. In which those Jews who wish to will be able to participate in collective self-determination as a people, and/or live in autonomous Jewish space. True Jewish liberation requires the commitment and action of both Jews and non-Jews around the world, and is incompatible with the oppression of any other group.

Jews of color – Jews and Jewish communities who are excluded from white privilege generally, and/or from Ashkenazi privilege in the Jewish community. Includes Mizrahi Jews, Sephardi Jews, Jews from other non-European communities worldwide, people of color who have embraced Judaism, and Jews of mixed heritage whose ancestry includes Jews of color. Jews of color currently make up the majority of Jews in the state of Israel.

the Left / Leftist — The diverse spectrum of social change movements, organizations and individual activists who seek to transform society into one which distributes resources justly, and lacks hierarchies of race, gender, religion, etc.

Mizrachi — Refers to Jews descended from the longest continuous Jewish communities in the world, founded after the destruction of ancient Israel, in countries such as today's Iraq, Iran, Yemen, Syria and Lebanon, and spoke languages such as Judeo-Arabic and Judeo-Persian.

Old Left — Refers to the mass movements and party organizations that flourished into the 1930s and '40s in the U.S. and were greatly wounded by McCarthyism. Old Left groups largely defined themselves in relation to European movements and theories, as opposed to the New Left which emerged after McCarthyism and Civil Rights, and took particular inspiration from global anticolonial struggles.

Orientalism — A discourse that portrays peoples and cultures of "the East" (Arabs and Jews, East Asians, South Asians, etc.) as essentially different from Europeans. Frequent themes include portraying them as dishonestly or manipulatively intelligent, overly sensual, war-like, mysterious, having 'primitive' tribal loyalties, etc. Also the term for classical Western study of "Oriental" cultures.

pogrom — A mass action of planned or spontaneous violence and property destruction directed against a marginalized community. The word was first widely used to describe government-condoned mob attacks on East-European Jewish towns.

Protocols of [the Elders of] Zion — A forgery written around 1897, first published in 1903, and used by Czarist secret police for years as a tool to inspire mass mistrust of the growing revolutionary movement and modernization. The text presents itself as minutes of a secret meeting of world Jewish leaders who lay out their plans to use both capitalism and anti-capitalist revolution to seize control of the world. A continual bestseller, it is often summarized or cited by antisemitic political leaders and social movements.

the Rosenbergs — Ethel & Julius, *z"l*. Jewish Communist couple executed in 1953 based on largely fabricated evidence that they gave nuclear secrets to the USSR. The case, which targeted their politics, was highly publicized to inspire fear and hysteria against Leftists.

secular — Non-religious.

Semite / Semitic — Linguistic term created by European Orientalists for the language family that includes Arabic, Amharic, Hebrew, Tigrinya, Maltese, Aramaic and others, which was then imposed on groups like Arabs and Jews to categorize them as a separate race.

Sephardi — Refers to the worldwide descendants of Spanish and Portuguese Jews who, when made refugees by the Inquisition, fled to, and founded new communities in, places such as North Africa, Turkey, the Americas, and parts of Europe. Examples of Sephardic languages are Judezmo/Ladino and Hakitia.

Zionism — One form of Jewish nationalism, based on the philosophy that a Jewish state (or cultural center, in some forms of Zionism) ought to exist, as a refuge for Jews and/or to 'normalize' Jewish existence, and that it should exist on or within the area of ancient Israel.

z"l — Abbreviation for *zichrono (or zichrona) l'bracha*: May their memory be for a blessing. Saying used in Jewish custom to commemorate the lives of loved ones.

Further Resources:

Anti-Jewish oppression's history:

- *The Devil and the Jews* by Joshua Trachtenberg (1944/1984);
- *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism* by George Mosse (1985);
- *Protocols of Zion* [documentary] by Marc Levin (2005);
- *Constantine's Sword* by James Carroll (2001);
- *Russian Antisemitism, Pamyat, and the Demonology of Zionism*, by William Korey (1995);
- "The Longest Hatred," in *New Internationalist* 372(2004);
- *Antisemitism in America*, by Leonard Dinnerstein (1994/1995)

Jewish history:

- *A Historical Atlas of the Jewish People*, Eli Barnavi, ed. (1992/2002);
- **The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History*, Paul Mendes-Flohr & Jehuda Reinharz, eds. (1980/1995);
- *Power and Powerlessness in Jewish History*, by David Biale (1986);
- *Torn at the Roots: The Crisis of Jewish Liberalism in Postwar America*, by Michael Staub (2002);
- www.newjewishagenda.org, [website] by Emily Nepon (2006);
- *The Holocaust in American Life*, by Peter Novick (1999);
- *Jewish Issues in Multiculturalism: A Handbook for Clinicians and Educators*, by Peter Langman (1999);

Radicals on antisemitism:

- "That's Funny, You Don't Look Anti-Semitic: An anti-racist analysis of left anti-semitism," by Steve Cohen (1984/2005);
- "The Cyclical Nature of Jewish Oppression," [skit] by Progressives Challenging Anti-Semitism Among Progressives (1998);

- *Yours in Struggle: Three Feminist Perspectives on Anti-Semitism and Racism, by Elly Bulkin, Minnie Bruce Pratt & Barbara Smith (1984/1991);
- “Anti-Semitism,” [speech] by Cherie Brown (2004);
- *The Socialism of Fools: Anti-Semitism On the Left*, by Michael Lerner (1992);
- *Reframing Anti-Semitism: Alternative Jewish Perspectives*, Jewish Voice for Peace, eds. (2004/6th ed.)

Jewish identity & liberation:

- *Chutzpah: A Jewish Liberation Anthology*, Steven Lubet & the Chutzpah Collective, eds. (1977);
- *The Flying Camel: Essays on Identity by Women of North African and Middle Eastern Jewish Heritage*, Loolwa Khazzoom, ed. (2003);
- *The Issue is Power: Essays on Women, Jews, Violence & Resistance*, by Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz (1992);
- * *The Colors of Jews*, by Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz;
- *Davita’s Harp* [novel] by Chaim Potok (1985/1996);
- ” *I’m Not White, I’m Jewish’: Standing As Jews in the Fight for Racial Justice*,” [speech] by Paul Kivel (1998);
- “*How Did Jews Become White Folks?*,” [short essay version] by Karen Brodtkin (Sacks) from *Race*, Steven Gregory and Roger Sanjek, eds. (1994)

Bringing an understanding of Jewish oppression into Israel/Palestine/Jewish-Arab work:

- “*A Big Piece is Missing From This ‘Peace’*,” by Loolwa Khazzoom, in *Clamor*#5 (2000);
- “*O Havruta O Mituta: How to Strengthen the Palestine Solidarity Movement By Making Friends With Jews*,” by Guy Izhak Austrian (2003);
- *Jews and Arabs*, by Albert Memmi (1975/1976)

Organizations (from varying perspectives):

- *Facing A Challenge Within*, www.facingachallenge.com;
- *Political Research Associates*, www.publiceye.org;
- *Engage*, www.engageonline.org.uk/home;
- *Catalyst Project*, www.collectiveliberation.org

Deconstructing anti-Jewish myths:

- See a list of excellent web-based articles, broken down by myth, at www.pintelejid.com/myths.html

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April Rosenblum
The Past Didn't Go Anywhere
Making resistance to antisemitism part of all of our movements
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