



STANDING AGAINST **Antisemitism**

Support Strategies for the Workplace



JENNIFER BROWN
CONSULTING

What is Antisemitism?



The last five years have seen a dramatic increase in hate crimes against the Jewish community, translating to more than seven antisemitic incidents a day in the United States. One in four Jewish people have experienced hate speech or other forms of antisemitic behavior, and more than 40% have changed their own behavior to avoid being targeted. Antisemitism remains a severe problem in the United States that cannot be ignored, so we must reflect on our DEI strategies and ensure we are including policies, practices, and procedures that foster inclusive workplaces for our Jewish employees.

What is Antisemitism?

Put simply, antisemitism is any “hostility toward or discrimination against Jews as a religious, ethnic, or racial group” (Merriam-Webster). But antisemitism is not simple; it is an insidious and often-overlooked form of oppression. According to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), antisemitism is “a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.” Though no definition is comprehensive, this working definition of antisemitism is broad and flexible enough to hold its many historical and contemporary manifestations.

So what does antisemitism look like in action? The following non-exhaustive list can help identify and address antisemitism in and beyond the workplace:

- Supporting, aiding, or attempting to justify the harming or killing of Jews.
- Holding Jews as a people collectively responsible for a real or imagined wrongdoing, criminal or otherwise, committed by a single Jewish person or group, or even by non-Jews.
- Holding Jews as a people collectively responsible for actions taken by the state of Israel.
- Accusing Jews of being more loyal to the state of Israel, or to the alleged priorities of a united global Jewry, than to the interests of the nations when they live and/or hold citizenship.
- Using symbols and images associated with classic antisemitism (e.g. of Jews killing Jesus or blood libel) or with contemporary antisemitic symbols (e.g. the swastika).
- Denying the fact or scope of the Holocaust, or accusing Jews of inventing or exaggerating the Holocaust.
- Otherwise perpetuating harmful antisemitic tropes and misinformation.

A great deal of antisemitic conversation revolves around the same few related tropes. For one, there is the idea that Jews are

manipulative schemers who control governments, the global economy, and the media. Antisemitic code words like “globalists” and “cosmopolitan elite” play on this trope. There is also the alleged greedy Jew, marked by their relentless pursuit of wealth by any means necessary, their willingness to double deal and cheat friends and neighbors. Coupled with this trope is that of the disloyal Jew who has only one allegiance, and that’s to other Jews. Together these tropes create the illusion of a ubiquitous, all-powerful Jewry, wealthy beyond measure, who advances a uniquely Jewish agenda to the detriment of non-Jews. In reality, only about 0.2% of the world population is Jewish. Of this small percentage, 31% of Jewish households earn less than \$49,000/year; less than half earn \$100,000/year. The myth of the greedy, power-hungry, disloyal Jew is just that — a myth.

Then there’s the particularly sinister trope of the Jew who commits blood libel, murdering non-Jews, especially children, and using their blood in rituals. A recent poll by the Anti-Defamation League found that the number of Americans who believe these stereotypes has doubled since 2019 to the highest level in decades, with 85% of Americans believing at least one antisemitic trope and 20% believing at least six. Apart from being untrue, these antisemitic tropes are dangerous; they serve as fodder for conspiracy theories, convincing hateful people that Jews are untrustworthy and conniving, animalistic and inhumane — the natural enemy of civilized society. Hate crimes ensue, affecting Jews of all ages, races, genders, and sexual orientations.

While it is important to note that antisemitism shares many qualities of — and often intersects with, complicates, and even intensifies — other forms of oppression (e.g. racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism), it is also important to acknowledge it in its particularities. Many anti-Semites espouse the alleged moral and aesthetic inferiority of Jews, and yet, in the logic of the antisemitic tropes they use to fuel their hatred, they cannot deny Jews’ financial and intellectual superiority. Therefore, unlike most other forms of oppression, which rely on the assumption that the oppressed person is socially and perhaps intellectually inferior, Jews are branded as an elite class incapable of experiencing oppression. Because of this perception of Jewish superiority, antisemitism — the effects of which are all too real and harmful — is often overlooked in DEI spaces and other justice-oriented conversations.

Antisemitism is dangerous to Jews and non-Jews alike. Experts have dubbed it “a canary in the coal mine;” instances of antisemitism signal a breakdown in the social order, and they tend to coincide with other antidemocratic trends in society such as contempt for scholarship and the further proliferation of conspiracy theories. As the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”

A Brief History of Antisemitism in the U.S.



Antisemitism neither started nor ended with the Holocaust. Anti-Jewish sentiment reaches back into antiquity, thus it will prove impossible to give a full accounting of the scope of antisemitism. This particular form of oppression has been able to endure for so long because it has morphed, adapted, and evolved over time, and, in the modern era, has taken on political dimensions and become embedded in the structures, systems, and institutions of our society.

Although in 1791, the First Amendment to the United States Constitution provided that Congress make no law prohibiting the free exercise of religion and implied this would be a nation tolerant of religious pluralism, Jews are still not completely safe to live out their religion and/or culture here. They never have been. On August 17, 1915, Jewish factory superintendent Leo Frank was lynched just outside of Atlanta. He'd been convicted of the rape and murder of 13-year-old Mary Fagan, but his trial and the media coverage surrounding it was awash with blatant antisemitism, and the Georgia governor eventually commuted Frank's death sentence to life in prison due to a glaring lack of evidence. Angered as much by Frank's Judaism as by his alleged crime, twenty-five men who called themselves the Knights of Mary Fagan kidnapped Frank from his jail cell and hung him from an oak tree before a local crowd. Frank's trial struck fear in Jewish southerners and inspired the formation of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), an international Jewish NGO that specializes in civil rights law. Frank was granted a posthumous pardon in 1986.

Less than a decade after Frank's lynching, Congress passed the Immigration Act of 1924, or the Johnson-Reed Act, which created new immigration quotas that favored northern Europe and limited immigration from southern and eastern Europe, reflecting anti-Catholic and antisemitic sentiment. The law did not change in the 1930s, which effectively prevented many Jewish refugees from escaping Hitler's Germany, where they were considered a separate, inferior race. There, across the Atlantic in September of 1935, the Nazi regime announced the Nuremberg Race Laws. The Reich Citizenship Law ensured that only racially pure Germans ("Aryans") could hold German citizenship, whereas Jews had no claim to citizenship or legal rights. The Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor banned Rassenschande ("race defilement"), or intermarriages and/or sexual relations between Jews and Aryans. Hitler's dream for a racist hierarchy became law, and over the next decade, six million European Jews would die in Nazi-run concentration camps during the Holocaust. Allied forces liberated the last concentration camp in January of 1945, and won World War II later that year. Although U.S. President Harry S. Truman favored a liberal policy toward displaced persons, the overwhelming majority of American citizens continued to oppose increased immigration, despite access to visual evidence (e.g. magazines and newspaper articles, movies) of Jewish suffering during the Holocaust.

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Semitic incidents, the United States has seen an uptick in antisemitic rhetoric and hate crimes since 2016. According to the ADL — and without yet knowing the statistics for 2022 — 2021 was the highest year on record for documented reports of harassment, vandalism, and violence directed against Jews. As of 2020, Jews comprised 9% of hate crime victims, and the victims of 58% of hate crimes in which a target was attacked because of religion or perceived religion. These numbers are troublingly disproportionate; only 2.4% of the U.S. population is Jewish. In October of 2018, 11 worshippers were gunned down by a conspiracy theorist with an AR-15 assault rifle at Pittsburgh's Tree of Life synagogue in what is believed to be the deadliest antisemitic attack on U.S. soil. Witnesses heard the gunman shout, "All Jews must die."

When the COVID-19 pandemic demanded that religious services move online for the safety and wellbeing of congregants, antisemitism changed with the times. Anti-Semites began to interrupt the virtual meetings of synagogues and Jewish schools — a phenomenon called Zoombombing. As of September 2021, there had been 196 documented instances of Zoombombing, 114 of which targeted Jewish schools and synagogues.

Antisemitism in the Workplace

Antisemitism is present in the workplace, too. A 2022 study surveying 11,356 workers of different faiths found that more than 50% of Jewish employees have experienced discrimination at work. A smaller survey of 1,131 hiring managers found that almost 25% wanted fewer Jewish workers in their industry. A similar percentage of hiring managers disclosed that they were unlikely to advance Jewish applicants, subscribing to the antisemitic trope that says Jewish people already have too much wealth and power as it is.

Even if Jewish workers are able to overcome antisemitic hiring practices, they often have to deal with biases and microaggressions at work. They might hear statements like, "Oh, you don't look Jewish," or, "Jews are always good with money," both of which rely on a monolithic narrative of Jewish people. They might be subjected to "Cheap Jew" jokes or the use of Holocaust references like, "Don't be such a Grammar Nazi." Perhaps they'll have to deal with the assumption that all Jews are Israelis or have a certain view on the conflicts in Israel or the

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Middle East. Perhaps they'll even face blame for the actions of the state of Israel. Often, too, Jewish employees suffer due to inequitable "Out-of-Office" practices for holiday observances. Because their religious holidays are not observed company-wide, Jewish employees must use personal days or vacation days to observe the holiday. Knowing all of this, what can you do to support your Jewish employees?

Workplace Strategies for Addressing Antisemitism

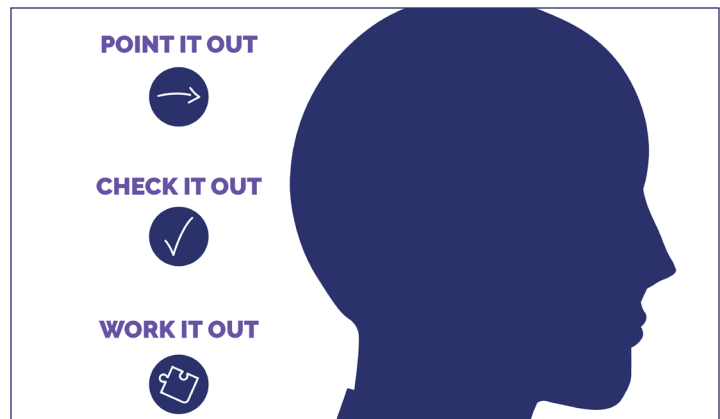
Include antisemitism in DEI conversations. Roughly 50% of Americans have never heard of antisemitism or don't know what it is. To combat conscious and unconscious bias, non-Jews must seek to understand antisemitism — where it came from, how it operates — without putting undue burden on Jewish people to educate non-Jews about their oppression.

- The United Nations General Assembly designated January 27th as International Holocaust Remembrance Day (IHRD) to commemorate the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the largest Nazi concentration and extermination camp. The purpose of IHRD is to honor the six million Jewish victims of the Holocaust and to develop and implement educational programs to help prevent future genocides. But education does not end when schooling does. Consider IHRD an opportunity to begin doing your own research and to make the fight against antisemitism — especially as it presents itself in the workplace — a top priority of your company.

Employee training and awareness. Educate your employees about what constitutes antisemitism and bias against the Jewish community, and teach them how to be active allies to their Jewish colleagues if they witness instances of antisemitism at work.

Incorporate conversations about antisemitism into company policies. Ask yourself what you are doing to communicate that your company stands against antisemitism for the benefit of all your employees. Implement DEI practices and ensure HR enforcement that reflects a work culture where antisemitic language and conversation will never be tolerated.

Address antisemitism when you see it or encounter it, at work and out in the world. Imagine you hear someone say, "Jews control Hollywood." This is an antisemitic trope that neglects the individuality of Jewish people and elevates them to an elite class of mysterious, conniving, all-powerful people who cheat and propagandize at every turn. This statement, "Jews control Hollywood," is not true, and it is harmful. What do you do?



- **Point it out.** Point out the antisemitic comment or behavior. Do it in the form of a question ("Did you just say 'Jews control Hollywood?'") or mirror the speaker's language back to them ("If I heard you right, you just said 'Jews control Hollywood.'"). This does not need to be confrontational. Oftentimes, antisemitism is unconscious. At this point, the person may become conscious of their bias and realize what they said was antisemitic. But if they don't, dig a bit deeper.
- **Check it out.** In a welcoming tone, ask questions to understand the speaker's perspective and to get them thinking ("Is there a reason you think Jews control Hollywood?" or "What makes you say that?"). Questions like these will get the person thinking about why they believe what they said they believe, or maybe even if they believe it at all. If the speaker still does not understand why what they said was antisemitic...
- **Work it out.** Inform the speaker of why what they said is offensive and what you would prefer ("I'd like to share with you..." or "What that communicates is..." or "What I would ask is..."). In this case, you might respond with something like this: "I'd love to explain to you, if you're open to it, how that is an antisemitic trope that's been around for centuries. What it does is... and so I hope that, moving forward, you don't use that trope, and that you realize that everyone is an individual, and no small group has any particular control over anything."

Holiday and cultural awareness. While Jewish holidays occur on the same dates every year in the Hebrew calendar, the dates of major Jewish holidays — and thus the dates Jewish employees may need to request off from work — vary from year to year in the widely used Gregorian calendar. [Consult a calendar of major Jewish holidays in 2023.](#) Being aware of Jewish holidays and culture can go a long way, especially in the United States, where Christian holidays and practices have long been prioritized in the workplace. Having a flexible leave policy — allowing employees to choose their own holidays as opposed to automatically observing a Christian holiday calendar — can help Jews and people of all faith groups feel included and important

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in the workplace. Do not schedule important meetings on Jewish holidays or email/text employees when they are out of office celebrating. This can cause employees to feel that they are missing out on something important or feel guilt for not being present when everyone else is.

Safe spaces and affinity groups. Given the rise in antisemitic language and hate crimes in recent years, having a safe space where Jewish employees can come together, share experiences, collaborate, and support one another is so important.

Show public support. How are you using your voice? Companies are microcosms of and examples for our larger society. When there are instances of antisemitism that affect your community, speak up. Put out a statement. Say something. Communicate to your team members that you support them. Uplift Jewish voices when possible — again, without demanding that Jews expend extra unpaid labor to educate you about antisemitism. Look for opportunities to partner with and donate to organizations focused on supporting the Jewish community.

In order to build more equitable and inclusive workplaces, DEI strategies must take into account our Jewish employees. It's time for all of us to stand up and take action against antisemitism in the workplace and society. You can learn more about this topic by watching our Advocacy in Action with Jennifer Brown Consulting Vice President Adrienne Lawrence in partnership with the Anti-Defamation League.

Learn More

[ADL: Shine A Light](#)

[Anti-Defamation League](#)

[Holocaust Remembrance](#)

[Jewish Book Council — Combating Antisemitism](#)

[Jewish Book Council — Antisemitism](#)

[US Holocaust Memorial Museum Podcast](#)

Sources

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[Auschwitz Memorial and Museum](#)

[Constitution of the United States First Amendment](#)

[Fortune — Almost 25% of American hiring managers don't want to advance Jewish people in hiring processes, alarming survey on workplace antisemitism finds](#)

[International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance — What is Antisemitism?](#)

[Jennifer Brown Consulting — Advocacy in Action: September Training](#)

[Jewish Virtual Library — Total Jewish Population in the United States \(1654 - Present\)](#)

[Merriam-Webster Dictionary Definition of Antisemitism](#)

[New Georgia Encyclopedia — Leo Frank Case](#)

[PBS — Antisemitic incidents hit a record high in 2021. What's behind the rise in hate?](#)

[The Jerusalem Post — Antisemitism: Jews target of 58% of all religiously motivated hate crimes in US](#)

[The Times of Israel — ADL: Number of Americans believing antisemitic stereotypes nearly doubled since 2019](#)

[US Holocaust Memorial Museum — International Holocaust Remembrance Day](#)

[US Holocaust Memorial Museum — Introduction to the Holocaust](#)

[US Holocaust Memorial Museum — The Nuremberg Race Laws](#)

[US Holocaust Memorial Museum — United States Immigration And Refugee Law, 1921 - 1980](#)

[Vox — The conspiracy theory that led to the Pittsburgh synagogue shooting, explained](#)

Jennifer Brown Consulting



Our Story

We are proud to be a Women-and-LGBTQ+ owned business.

Everyone deserves the opportunity to thrive as their full self in the workplace. This is the belief—and lived experience—that inspired Jennifer Brown to start JBC in 2006. Having navigated the corporate world as a member of the LGBTQ+ community, Jennifer was deeply familiar with the devastating individual and organizational impact of a workplace where employees feel pressured to cover essential layers of their identities. JBC, both in its own structure and in its work with clients, was built as an antidote and alternative to workplaces where assimilation is a prerequisite to belonging. The way we work, true belonging is achieved by recognizing, understanding, and celebrating one another's differences.

Our Philosophy

DEI is not compliance work.

In our experience—and when practiced the right way—DEI is soul-healing, culture-transforming work that everyone can benefit from, not only for their teams and organizations, but to unlock their own full potential.

We demonstrate how implementing long-term DEI strategies gives leaders access to their most authentic selves, so that they can open up that possibility for their employees, their colleagues, and their communities.

In our work, we are constantly reminded of the possibilities that effective DEI strategies can unlock on a company, community, and societal level. Getting there takes time, thoughtful planning and accountability, and a collective practice of compassion — JBC can be your coach and accountability partner at every step along the way.

We're not in the business of shaming or blaming our clients. None of us moves through life without internalizing bias, and just as we learn it we can unlearn it. JBC is here to help you see what's possible with a custom-made and thoughtfully implemented DEI strategy, and to guide you forward.

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