

History of European Antisemitism Glossary of Terms

Antisemitism: Antisemitism is hatred, discrimination, fear, and prejudice against Jews based on stereotypes and myths that target their ethnicity, culture, religion, traditions, right to self-determination, or connection to the State of Israel.

Blood Libel: “Blood libel” refers to a centuries-old false allegation that Jews murder Christians – especially Christian children – to use their blood for ritual purposes. It is also sometimes called the “ritual murder charge.” Blood libel dates back to the 12th century in England and has persisted, despite having no factual basis and having been officially repudiated by the Catholic Church and many secular authorities.

Crusades: Nine wars waged by European Christian rulers between 1096 and 1291 to win the Holy Land from Muslims. Jews, especially those living in an area of modern-day Germany known as the Rhineland, became the victims of overzealous Crusaders.

Deicide: (Latin. the murder of God) The false accusation that Jews are responsible for killing Jesus.

Diaspora: A population that lives in areas that are different from its place of origin; Jews living outside of Israel are often referred to as the “Jewish Diaspora”

Economic antisemitism: Economic antisemitism is the belief that Jews perform harmful economic activities or that economic activities become harmful when performed by Jews.

Emancipation: The removal of political restrictions on Jews; granting Jews the same rights as other members of society.

Eugenics: A pseudoscientific discipline dedicated to “improving” humanity through selective breeding of “desirable” or “superior” races, which emerged in the 19th century.

Ghetto: Separate areas of towns in which Jews were forced to live and were excluded from all activities of mainstream society. These Jewish quarters were often gated and locked at night. The English word ‘ghetto’ is believed to be derived from the Italian word giotto, meaning “foundry”, since the first Jewish quarter in Venice was near a foundry that once made canons.

“Jewish question”: Whether Jews could ever truly be equal members of European society.

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Jews: Accurate group name for the Jewish people as an ethnic and religious group, from 722 BCE to the present day. The source of the English term “Jew” originates from the Hebrew word “Yehudi”, meaning ‘from the Kingdom of Judah’, later called Judea until 135 CE. The term means: those that are grateful.

Judaism: The monotheistic religion of the Jewish people.

Judea: The name for the Jewish state in the eastern Mediterranean from 323 BCE to 135 BCE

Judensau (German for “Jew’s Sow”): A form of antisemitic medieval art, originating in the 13th century, illustrating Jews engaging in inappropriate or lewd acts with a female pig - considered an unclean animal in Jewish tradition. The popularity of this artform lasted for hundreds of years.

Land of Israel: English equivalent to the Hebrew term *Eretz Yisrael*; a region in the eastern Mediterranean comprising the ancestral lands of the Jewish people in the ancient kingdoms of Israel and Judah.

Miscegenation: A eugenics concept claiming that breeding between white people and people perceived to be of “lesser” races will “destroy the white race”; the existential danger of “race-mixing” is a common white supremacist and Nazi trope.

Monotheism: The belief in one god

Pale of Settlement: The area in part of the Russian Empire in which Jews were allowed to live from 1791-1917. It included what are now eastern Poland, all of Lithuania, Belarus and Moldova, much of Ukraine, and parts of western Russia. Beyond these borders, Jews were mostly forbidden to live.

Passover: The Jewish festival commemorating the Biblical exodus, the deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. During Passover, unleavened bread or matzah is eaten, and the story of the Exodus is reenacted through a ritual meal called a seder.

Pogroms: Russian word meaning “to wreak havoc, to demolish violently.” Historically, the term refers to an organized massacre of Jews which was often sanctioned or condoned by the Russian government.

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Political antisemitism: The hatred, discrimination, and exclusion of Jews based on the perception that they pose a political threat. This form of antisemitism often manifests through the belief that Jews wield excessive power and influence and that they exploit it to advance their own hidden political agendas.

Protocols of the Elders of Zion: A book first published in Russia in 1905, which purports to be the minutes of secret meetings held by Jewish leaders referred to as the "Elders of Zion" - where they discuss their plans for world domination. The Protocols was a clever forgery by the Russian secret police that has been used to manipulate public opinion, reinforce antisemitic stereotypes, and fuel conspiracy theories about and hatred of Jews. The book continues to be reprinted and widely distributed, particularly by Neo-Nazis, across the world.

Race: The term "race" is often used to categorize and differentiate people based on physical traits such as skin color, facial features, and hair texture. However, it's important to note that the concept of race is not a scientifically valid biological category. All people are part of the human race.

Racialized antisemitism: Prejudice or hatred of Jews as a supposed racial group whose "inherent biological" characteristics are perceived to be inferior and a threat to a "superior white race." Racial antisemitism roots itself in false pseudoscientific claims about heredity and genetics.

Religious antisemitism: Prejudice toward or discrimination against Jews based on the perception that Jewish religious beliefs and practices are harmful or pose a threat to society.

Replacement Theology: Christian belief that the Christian Church replaced or superseded the people of Israel (Jews) as God's chosen people, and that Judaism was obsolete. Adherents of this belief viewed Jews negatively for not believing that Jesus was the messiah. Source of many negative perceptions of Jews throughout history.

Social Darwinism: An overarching theory which misappropriates Darwin's notion of "survival of the fittest" by claiming that the powerful and "fittest" members of society are a result of evolutionary superiority.

Temple: When capitalized, the Temple refers to one of two sacred buildings established in Jerusalem that were the focus of Jewish religious life, ritual, and prayer. The First Temple (c. 10th century BCE-587 BCE) was destroyed by the Babylonians and the Second Temple (C. 516 BCE-70 CE) was destroyed by the Romans.

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Fifth column: A group within a society that works to undermine the larger group or national interests; a false accusation often leveled at marginalized groups during times of crisis.

Usury: Usury is the act of lending money at an interest rate that is considered unreasonably high or that is higher than the rate permitted by law. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam take a very strong stance against usury. Several passages in the Hebrew Bible condemn the practice of usury, especially when lending to less wealthy individuals. The Hebrew Bible's condemnation of usury led to the Christian tradition against money lending.