



Anti-Semitism can best be understood through a historical analysis. Persecution of Jewish people has a long history dating back about 3,000 years. Understanding how this oppression has persisted in different forms and seeing the cyclical pattern of anti-Semitism can help us recognize its continued existence and methods of functioning in today's world.

The oppression of Jews is characterized by alternating periods of apparent tolerance and assimilation, followed by periods of violent anti Jewish attacks. During the calm periods, Jews are allowed to assimilate into society and often into a visible "middle" position where they function as agents and buffers to the real power elite. Underneath this surface of relative security exist many anti Jewish attitudes and stereotypes and it often takes only a small stimulus to evoke them. When there is economic and political crises, Jews are targeted as the problem and used as a scapegoat for socioeconomic problems. The ruling class, aided by these pre-existing anti-Jewish beliefs, encourages other oppressed groups to direct their anger against the Jews rather than their real oppressors.

One way anti-Semitism is maintained is through stereotypes assigning certain specific characteristics to Jews as a group. Jews are believed to be aggressive, stingy, clannish, or pushy while Gentiles may take initiative, be thrifty, loyal, or assertive. On a personal level some people who would immediately interrupt racist jokes think telling JAP (Jewish American Princess) jokes is harmless fun.

In general, Jews know more about Christians than Christians know about Jews. In fact Christian religious holidays are national holidays, while Jewish and other religious holidays often go unacknowledged. Wishing everyone "Happy Holidays" in late December is an unintentional form of anti-Semitism. The major Jewish holidays, Rosh Hashanah (New Year) and Yom Kippur are in the fall and Passover is in the spring. Chanukah, which is the Jewish holiday closest to Christmas, is a much more minor holiday. Significant meetings and demonstrations are regularly scheduled on important Jewish holidays while no one would think of doing the same on Christmas or Easter.

Anti-Semitism is deeply embedded in our culture as well through language, standards of beauty, communication norms, and time itself. For example, in interpersonal communication the polite, restrained, middle-class, WASP pattern is viewed as normal, as right. The communication norm for other groups, whether working class, Black, Italian, Puerto Rican or Jewish is "other" and put down. Jewish syntax, "accents," and delicious Yiddish expressions disappear just as surely as does Black English in the attempt to fit in, to "make it," and to survive.

It is difficult for any dominant group to cope with the desire of "oppressed groups" to be both equal and distinctive. This is true for Gentiles who get angry because Jews want to maintain their uniqueness without being penalized for it. Jews pursuing assimilation and invisibility as coping strategies become fearful and discounting, as well, when other Jews act "too Jewish."

One of the subtle ways Jewish oppression is manifested in the movement is through denial. People have a hard time relating to Jews as an oppressed group; rather Jews are often regarded as having all the power and money, and often being on the "oppressor's side" in any

struggle. The oppression of Jews is not currently economic oppression, (although there are far more poor and working-class Jews than most people acknowledge) it is cultural, religious, and political. The issue of anti-Semitism is consistently left off the laundry list of oppressions (on leaflets, workshop offerings, and speakers). When people speak of doing outreach to different groups it's often labor, women, student, third world, and church groups, rather than religious groups.

For many, anti-Semitism has become synonymous with the Holocaust. Since the situation is clearly not that bad now, Jewish oppression is viewed as a thing of the past. Jews who raise concerns about the rise of oppression against Jews or about anti-Semitism within the movement are often perceived as raising side issues, diverting attention away from more important problems, over-reacting, bringing on the oppression by making such a big deal, or simply being paranoid. Such defensive and victim blaming reactions become part of the problem as well.

While the people of Nicaragua easily differentiate between the murderous, imperialistic policies of the US government and the people of the State, most US Progressives can not manage to make the same distinction for the state of Israel. It is possible to be critical of Israeli national policy while supporting Israel's right to exist. It is possible to grant Jewish people, historically and currently oppressed, the right to a homeland, as we support oppressed peoples the worldover in their struggle for national liberation. It is possible to support the liberation of the Palestinian people while supporting Israel's right to exist. It is possible to see that Israel's role in the geopolitical situation is similar to "buffer" role Jews traditionally have been manipulated into: Israel does United States' "dirty work," while receiving some privilege becomes the target of the just anger of other oppressed people, rather than the U.S., which is the real ruling power.

On the right, overt anti-Semitic violence, like violence against other oppressed groups (e.g. bombings, vandalism, and swastika-painting on the rise. Books are distributed claiming that the Holocaust, though only 40 years ago, never happen, ed. Nazi and White Power groups build arsenals and establish training bases in the hills. Jews are targeted the very same people that target every other oppressed group today, including people of color, lesbians & gay women, working-class and poor people, disabled people, and old, people.

All of us, (whether Gentile or Jew) learned anti-Semitism. It is now a responsibility to rid ourselves of the attitudes and change institution practices and cultural patterns that intentionally or unintentionally maintain anti-Semitism. We can start with ourselves, our friends and family the groups we work with, and the institutions to which we relate.

*The term Anti-Semitism was developed to refer to oppression of Jews; however, it is important to remember that Arabs are also Semitic people who are oppressed.