



Questions and Responses to Commonly Asked Questions

Drawn from PARCEO's Curriculum on Antisemitism from a Framework of Collective Liberation

Below are some suggested responses to commonly asked questions from our workshops on antisemitism from a framework of collective liberation. Each question could have additional or more elaborate responses, but we wanted to offer a few examples here.

1. What is antisemitism and how does it manifest?

- Antisemitism is discrimination against Jews, violence against Jews, or targeting of Jews *because they are Jewish*. Conspiracy theories, stereotypes, and tropes about Jews are also manifestations of antisemitism. Antisemitism is incompatible with collective liberation – as are all forms of racism and injustice.
- One of the most concerning manifestations of antisemitism today is white nationalist violence, which has been directed at many of our communities– immigrants; Muslims; Black, Queer and trans people; and Jews, among others.
- When he coined the term antisemitism in 1879, the German journalist and white supremacist Wilhelm Marr intended it to be a scientific-sounding term he could use to legitimize his hatred of Jews. The term has generally been used specifically to describe discrimination toward Jews since Marr popularized it.*

2. Responding to the statement that: “The movement for Palestinian justice/the Left has a problem with antisemitism”

- Every individual fighting for a more just world is not magically rid of oppressive beliefs that are pervasive throughout our society. With this reality, the movement for Palestinian freedom is extremely clear about its commitment to challenging all forms of injustice and racism, including antisemitism. That requires naming, unlearning, and transforming views that reflect any form of oppression when they surface.
- There is no basis to single out antisemitism as a particular problem on the Left. We can all always do better in our movements in reflecting upon, and then taking action, to challenge the ways we may articulate or reify harmful views or actions. That includes challenging, among others, Islamophobia, anti-Black racism, transphobia, and antisemitism.
- We need to be very careful and frankly suspicious when we hear statements that assert “The Left or far Left believe” and then make sweeping generalizations. Of course we know anyone can say something that is racist, antisemitic, Islamophobic, etc. from any community but those of us who are social justice activists know that principles of standing against all forms of injustice are central to our movements. We oppose those reactionary voices trying to make damaging caricatures of our movements.

In relation to protestors:

- Inaccurate and false charges of antisemitism are wielded to shut down protest and political dissent, to destroy the Palestinian movement for justice, and restrict activism in the U.S. more broadly. The effect of all this, of course, is to make critics of Israel afraid that their activism will smear them as antisemitic or even criminalize them.

3. What about those who express feeling unsafe as a Jewish person in relation to organizing in support of Palestine?

- Someone may feel uncomfortable with a particular political position critical of Israel or Zionism/in support of Palestinian liberation, but that is very different from being unsafe. It's important to make clear that this "discomfort" is related to being challenged by this political position.
- We need to also think about the safety and well-being of those falsely accused of antisemitism. False accusations of antisemitism can cause great harm to those speaking out for justice.

4. Isn't antisemitism different from other forms of oppression?

- While antisemitism has its own histories and manifestations of oppression, as do all forms of oppression, it is connected to other forms of racism, each related to particular social, political, and economic realities, local conditions, etc. That is, context matters. "Exceptionalizing" antisemitism or isolating it from other struggles does not further our work for justice, which requires challenging antisemitism together with others who face different forms of oppression.

5. What is Zionism and what is Anti-Zionism?

Zionism

- Zionism is the primary ideology that drove the establishment of Israel in the land of historic Palestine. Beginning in the late 19th century, as nationalism rose in Europe and as antisemitism intensified, the Zionist movement saw the "Jewish problem" as having a solution in a Jewish state.
- While there have been many different understandings and strands of Zionism, including the perspective that Zionism did not require being actualized in Palestine, the overarching political ideology and reality of Zionism resulted in the establishment of a Jewish-majority nation-state in the land of historic Palestine and the expulsion of 750,000 Indigenous Palestinians from their land and homes.

Anti-Zionism

- Anti-Zionism opposes the political ideology of Zionism that resulted in the establishment of a Jewish nation-state in Palestine and the expulsion of 750,000 Indigenous Palestinians from their land and homes.

- Anti-Zionists support the movement for liberation and justice for the Palestinian people, including their right to return to their homes and land.

Zionism and Anti-Zionism are political ideologies. A person of any religion, ethnicity, cultural group, or nationality can self-define as a Zionist or an anti-Zionist.

The difference between those who define themselves as Zionists and those who define themselves as anti-Zionists is not about one's views toward Jews, but, rather, reflects different political ideologies and perspectives.

6. What is the difference between anti-Zionism on the left and criticism of Israel coming from the right?

- Recently there have been some well-known right-wingers who are speaking critically about Israel, which some have called "right-wing anti-Zionism." But those on the right who criticize, or even hate, Israel do not come from an anti-Zionist, anti-colonialist framework. Anti-Zionism is not just about being "anti-Israel." It is an ideology that promotes equality and justice and specifically supports freedom for the Palestinian people alongside justice and dignity for all those experiencing injustice and oppression. That is markedly different from those on the right who espouse political views that are antithetical to a commitment to justice and liberation.

7. What about the IHRA definition? Isn't that meant to protect Jews?

- In recent years, defenders of Israel have urged universities, governments, and others to adopt a definition of antisemitism promulgated by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance Working Definition of Antisemitism (IHRA-WDA).
- The IHRA definition is not designed to clarify what antisemitism is, but, rather, to conflate antisemitism with criticism of Israel or Zionism. That is why the IHRA definition includes, among its eleven examples of antisemitism, seven which specifically focus on the State of Israel, *and not on Jews*.
- This conflation of antisemitism with criticism of Israel and Zionism, which has become exacerbated in recent years and pushed by the Trump Administration, has been codified into policies, bills, and actions that produce false attacks and charges of antisemitism.
- Claiming its intention is to prevent antisemitism, the IHRA's adoption has, instead, been used as a mechanism to silence and penalize critics of Israel and to limit political protest.

8. But what about data on antisemitism?

- The problem is that when an organization falsely considers criticism of Israel or Zionism as antisemitism in their data, the results will necessarily be skewed and inaccurate. For example, the Anti-Defamation League's (ADL's) data is widely used, but its [methodology and data](#) are severely compromised by including pro-Palestine, pro-justice actions in what

it claims constitutes antisemitism. When looking at data, it is crucial to understand the source, who is creating the data, for whom, and to what end.

**More on the term "antisemitism"--The term dates back to the mid-19th century and was first used by the German Jewish historian and bibliographer Moritz Steinschneider in 1860 to describe a new form of anti-Jewish hatred that was appearing in the work of scholars of linguistics. The word "Semitic" was first used as a linguistic and cultural classification to describe language groups from North Africa and Southwest Asia and then was applied to the people who spoke them. Both the Semitic languages and peoples were regularly classified in terms of backwardness and stagnation, whereas "Aryan" or "European" languages and peoples were marked in dynamic and progressive ways, reflecting the racist attitudes that were emerging at this time, in part due to the legacy of European colonialism. When the avowed German antisemite Wilhelm Marr proudly adopted the term "antisemitism" in 1879, he intended it to be a scientific-sounding way to describe a new form of anti-Jewish hatred that stressed Jews' alleged racial and national (rather than religious) differences. We use antisemitism in our curriculum to reference this historical trajectory.*

The "Curriculum on Antisemitism from a Framework of Collective Liberation" is devoted to understanding and challenging antisemitism grounded in a deep commitment to justice and dignity for all people. The sessions are geared toward universities and middle schools/high schools, social justice and community-based organizations, foundations, religious and cultural institutions, and others. PARCEO has created a series of hand-outs drawn from the curriculum.

This hand-out is excerpted from the curriculum.

PARCEO is available to facilitate 1, 2, and 4 hour workshops or classes in your school or community. Please reach out to us at antisemitismcurriculum@gmail.com.