

## A SHORT HISTORY OF ANTI-SEMITISM

### 1 Definition

Anti-Semitism is hatred of Jews simply because they are Jews. Sometimes referred to as "the oldest hatred," it has been called anti-Judaism when it targets Jewish beliefs and practices, and anti-Semitism when it targets the Jewish people as a hated "race." Historically, what began as a conflict over religious beliefs evolved into a systematic policy of political, economic, and social isolation, exclusion, degradation, and attempted annihilation. Anti-Semitism did not begin in the Nazi era, nor did it end with the close of World War II. Its continuance over the millennia speaks to the power of scapegoating a group that is defined as "other."

### 2 Biblical Times

Abraham, the father of the three major monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) led his family to Canaan, where a new nation — the people of Israel — came into being almost 1,000 years before the Common Era (BCE). During those many centuries before Jesus, the Hebrews (the early Jewish people) experienced intermittent persecution because they refused to worship the idols of local rulers, which was the custom at the time. This refusal to worship idols was seen as stubborn and was resented.

### 3 Anti-Judaism

In the year 70 CE the Jewish Temple was destroyed by the Romans and most Jews were exiled throughout the ancient world. After the advent of Christianity, a new anti-Judaism evolved. Initially, Christianity was seen as simply another Jewish sect since Jesus and his disciples were Jewish and were preaching a form of Judaism.

During the first few hundred years after the crucifixion of Jesus by the Romans, adherents of both Judaism and Christianity co-existed — sometimes peacefully, sometimes with animosity — as they sought to proselytize their faith in the same lands.

With the conversion of the Roman emperors, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. Early church fathers sought to establish Christianity as the successor of Judaism. Since both religions derived from the Old Testament, Christians sought to establish the validity of their new religion by claiming that it superseded Judaism. The unwillingness of Jews to accept Jesus as the Messiah was viewed as a challenge both to the Roman rulers and to the Christian faith.

### The Middle Ages

Leading up to the Middle Ages (from 300-600 CE), a new pattern of institutionalized discrimination against Jews occurred. Jews were forbidden to intermarry with Christians (399 CE), prohibited from holding high positions in government (439 CE), and prevented from appearing as witnesses against Christians in court (531 CE). As Jews were being officially ostracized, certain bizarre fantasies about Jews arose in Northern Europe that foreshadowed the anti-Semitism of the 20th Century. By this time in the Middle Ages it was alleged that Jews had horns and tails and engaged in ritual murder of Christians (for example, to make matzah for Passover). The latter allegation, referred to as the "blood libel," was fabricated by Thomas of Monmouth in 1150 to explain the mysterious death of a Christian boy. It recurs in English and German myths.

In 1095, Pope Urban II made a general appeal to the Christians of Europe to take up the cross and sword and liberate the Holy Land from the Muslims, beginning what were to be known as the Crusades. The religious fervor that drove men, and later even children, on the Crusades was to have direct consequences for Jews. The Crusader armies, which more closely resembled mobs, swept through Jewish communities, looting, raping, and massacring the inhabitants. Thus the pogrom, the organized massacre of Jews, was born.

During the middle of the 14th century, the Bubonic Plague spread throughout Europe, killing an estimated one-third of the population. Fear, superstition, and ignorance prompted the need to find someone to blame, and the Jews were a convenient scapegoat because of the myths and stereotypes that were already believed about them. Though Jews were also dying from the plague, they were accused of poisoning wells and spreading the disease.

In 1290, Edward I expelled the Jews from England, making England the first European country to do so. Over two hundred years later, on July 30, 1492, the Jewish community of Spain — some 200,000 people — was expelled by an edict issued by King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella. This was part of the larger Spanish Inquisition, which was carried out in part to convert Jews to Catholicism.

In 1545, Martin Luther, the founder of the 16th Century Reformation and Protestantism, wrote a pamphlet entitled "The Jews and Their Lies," claiming that Jews thirsted for Christian blood and urging the slaying of Jews. The Nazis reprinted it in 1935. Some scholars feel that these scurrilous attacks mark the transition from anti-Judaism (attacks motivated because of the Jews' refusal to accept Christianity) to anti-Semitism (hatred of Jews as a so-called "race" whose existence would contaminate the purity of other "races").

Increasingly Jews were subjected to political, economic, and social discrimination, resulting in the deprivation of their legal and civil rights. They were restricted to living in ghettos and, beginning in the 13th Century, were required to wear a distinctive emblem (a badge and/or a pointed hat) so that they could be immediately recognized.

Since the Church did not allow Christians to lend money for profit, some Jews became moneylenders. Once they became associated with the forbidden trade of usury, a new set of stereotypes evolved around Jews as money-hungry and greedy. As moneylenders, Jews were frequently useful to rulers who used their capital to build cathedrals and outfit armies. As long as the Jews benefited the ruler either through finance or by serving as a convenient scapegoat, they were tolerated; when it suited the ruler, they were expelled — from England in 1290, from France in 1394, and from Spain in 1492.

#### Anti-Semitism

The term “anti-Semitism” was coined in 1879 by Wilhelm Marr, a German political agitator. It coincided with the development across Northern Europe and the United States of a new pseudo-science based on theories of racial superiority and inferiority.

Many have asked why anti-Semitism turned genocidal in Germany, rather than in France or England, which had the same medieval heritage. Following World War I, Germany was a deeply troubled country. Having lost the war, its citizens felt humiliated by the defeat. The victorious countries, including the United States, France, and England, authored the Treaty of Versailles, a peace treaty that compelled Germany to give up territory and to pay large sums of money to the countries whose lands it had damaged. In addition to this social and economic degradation, Adolf Hitler employed a demagogic leadership that exploited the German cultural norm of obedience to authority and the long history of demonizing Jews. Hitler played up conspiracy theories of victimization about WWI, blaming Jews for poisoning Germany's body politic. He also called upon myths such as the “blood libel” to evoke fear that the Jews would contaminate what he referred to as the superior “Aryan race.” According to Hitler's doctrine, all Jews and their genetic pool had to be eliminated.

#### The Holocaust

There may be no more succinct description of the Holocaust than the statement issued by the Vatican on March 12, 1998:

This century has witnessed an unspeakable tragedy, which can never be forgotten: the attempt by the Nazi regime to exterminate the Jewish people, with the consequent killing of millions of Jews. Women and men, old and young, children and infants, for the sole reason of their Jewish origin, were persecuted and deported. Some were killed

immediately, while others were degraded, ill-treated, tortured and utterly robbed of their human dignity, and then murdered. Very few of those who entered the [Concentration] Camps survived, and those who did remained scarred for life. This was the Shoah.

As Pope John Paul II recognized, “erroneous and unjust interpretations of the New Testament regarding the Jewish people and their alleged culpability have circulated for too long...” and may have created anti-Jewish sentiment in some Christian minds and hearts. The progressive dehumanization that Jews endured — the image of the Jews' demonic “otherness” — made the Holocaust possible.

#### Contemporary Anti-Semitism

In Germany today, governmental safeguards against fascist anti-Semitism have been instituted and yet young neo-Nazi Skinheads, frustrated at rising unemployment, look for scapegoats. When they cannot find living Jews, they desecrate Jewish cemeteries. They also look for other vulnerable targets such as immigrant workers. Physical attacks against Jews and Jewish institutions in Europe come from some in the Muslim community under the guise of anti-Zionism. In Eastern Europe, the collapse of the Soviet Union has brought with it a rise in nationalist groups that use anti-Semitism to meet their political ends. There is even anti-Semitism in countries where there are virtually no Jews.

The United States has been unique in its constitutional separation of church and state, full provision for citizenship for Jews, and its institutional support of Jewish life from President Washington to the present. Despite enjoying the full benefits of citizenship, Jews are still being victimized by acts of hate. In addition, extremist groups and Skinhead youth promote racist and anti-Semitic world views and are actively recruiting young people through various means including music and the Internet. Although such groups constitute only a tiny minority, one of the lessons we learn about anti-Semitism is that we can never be complacent.

**MYTH #1:****JEWS ARE CHEAP, GREEDY, AND MATERIALISTIC;  
JEWS ARE GOOD WITH MONEY****Where does it come from?**

The myth of Jewish greed dates back at least to the New Testament story of Jesus forcing the Jewish moneychangers out of the Temple. Teachings concerning the "cursed" Jews radiated into all aspects of Christian culture, and notions of Jews as miserly and greedy took hold throughout Christendom. In the Middle Ages, some Jews became moneylenders — in part because they were forbidden to own land or join many of the craft guilds, and in part because the Church had forbidden Christians from practicing usury (lending money at interest). Usury was condemned as a sin, but since Jews were not subject to Christian law, and since kings and nobles needed cash, both the Church and the State appointed Jews as moneylenders and tax-collectors. In a classic example of blaming the messenger, Christians directed their anger at having to pay back loans and taxes against the Jewish moneylenders and tax-collectors.

More recently, some people believe that wealthy or successful Jews have gotten ahead due to cheapness, greed, materialism or their "natural skill with money" rather than through a commitment to education and hard work.

**What are the facts?**

Like all groups of people, some Jews are good with money; some are not. Some Jews are cheap; some are not. The same could be said for any group of people, whether they are defined by religion, nationality or, for that matter, hair color or weight.

In actuality, many Jews are not wealthy. There is a sizeable population of Jews who live in poverty, both in the United States and around the world. According to one study using data collected from the 2001 National Jewish Population Study, close to 1 million American Jews live in low-income households, defined as those that earn less than 150% of the federal poverty rate, or \$25,000 for a family of four.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup><http://www.jewishla.org/news/html/1104-poverty.html>

According to Jewish tradition, giving money to the poor and to others in need is not just encouraged, it is required. The Hebrew word *tzedakah* is often mistranslated as "charity," which itself comes from the Latin word "caritas" or heart. One gives charity "from the heart," that is, out of a desire to give. A more accurate translation of *tzedakah* is "righteousness," implying that *tzedakah* is given because it is the right thing to do, whether one wishes to give or not. According to Jewish law, *tzedakah* is a *mitzvah*, which itself is also often misinterpreted as "good deed." In fact, *mitzvah* means "commandment." And, like all commandments in Jewish law, the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah* is a requirement, not just a good deed.

Unlike the Roman rule of commerce, *Caveat Emptor* (let the buyer beware), which puts the burden on the buyer to be wary of unscrupulous sellers, Judaism dictates the opposite. According to Jewish law, the burden is on the seller to ensure that the buyer should benefit from any uncertainty in a transaction. For example, if someone wants to buy a pound of potato salad, Judaism requires the deli clerk to give the buyer a little extra, just in case the scale is not completely accurate.

**How can we respond?**

The assumption that the actions of a few typify the behavior of all is at the heart of bigotry. Every ethnic or religious group, including Jews, can count greedy or cheap people among its members. The charge that Jews are born greedy (or that greed is a "Jewish" trait) arises from medieval stereotypes of the despised, accursed Jew, and has nothing to do with the actual financial practices of Jews. In responding to someone who claims that Jews are greedy or cheap, you might question the generalization. Simply asking, "what do you mean by that?" may be effective; always push people to back up their generalizations with facts.

Be prepared, as well, with examples that deflate myths and stereotypes (and that do not perpetuate stereotypes about other groups). If, for instance, someone complains that Jewish landlords exploit their tenants, you might ask that person about knowledge of the records of non-Jewish landlords. You might also ask, "if a Christian storeowner were dishonest with you, would you describe the owner as a dishonest *Christian* merchant or just a dishonest merchant? If the owner were Jewish, would s/he be a dishonest merchant or a dishonest *Jewish* merchant?"

Finally, the myth that Jews are cheap is disproved by the entire Jewish tradition of *tzedakah*. In America, this religious call has resulted in a splendid record of Jewish philanthropy. It may be helpful to point out that Judaism urges generous giving, and not merely to Jewish causes. The 2001 National Jewish Population Survey found that 71% of Jews give to Jewish causes and 62% give to non-Jewish causes.

American Jewish philanthropists have included Julius Rosenwald, who built schools for Black children in the South during the 1930s; Nathan Strauss, who set up milk deposits which distributed pasteurized milk and infant formulas to families in poor areas of New York; Adolphus S. Solomons, who in conjunction with Clara Barton laid the foundation for the American Red Cross; and the Guggenheims, who established the Guggenheim Foundation to support the arts and artists in America.

This information is helpful as a demonstration of both the moral teachings of Judaism as well as the ethical practices of Jews. However, even presented with these facts, there will be some who maintain negative stereotypes, and it may sometimes be best to ignore these attitudes. As David Lloyd George, Prime Minister of Britain in the early 20th century, once said of anti-Semitic zealots: "In the sight of these fanatics, Jews today can do nothing right. If they are rich, they are birds of prey. If they are poor, they are vermin. ... If they give generously — and there are no more liberal givers than the Jews — they are doing it for some selfish purpose of their own. If they don't give, then what would you expect of a Jew?"

One last point: Out of simple ignorance or innocent thoughtlessness, many people use the phrase "Jewing someone down" to refer to haggling or other negotiation over price. You can let such people know that the phrase is offensive by using statements of personal feeling such as: "When you say, 'He Jewed me down,' it makes me feel like you are attacking me and my religion." You can also ask someone what he or she means by the phrase. Many people are just repeating a phrase they heard someone else use and don't understand its offensive nature. This is a teachable moment — an opportunity to inform the person about the negative message the phrase sends.

## MYTH #2:

### JEWES CONTROL THE BANKS, MEDIA, HOLLYWOOD, EVEN THE U.S. GOVERNMENT; JEWES HAVE A SECRET PLOT TO TAKE OVER THE WORLD

#### Where does it come from?

Anti-Semites point to "The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion" as proof of a Jewish conspiracy to dominate world political and economic sectors as well as media. This proven forgery, written by agents of the Russian czar in the late 19th century, claims to be the minutes of a secret meeting of Jews that details plans of Jewish leaders to rule the world. The proven forgery spread throughout the 20th century and continues to this day to promote the stereotype that the Jews own the banks and control the media.

In 2004, much of the Arab world watched a television mini-series based on "The Protocols" produced by the government of Syria and presented as the truth to its viewers. Among many lies, the broadcast included depictions of Jews killing a Christian boy for blood to make matzah for Passover and the brutal execution of a Jewish merchant by his fellow Jews for keeping his store open on the Sabbath.

The reality is that in societies, like the United States, that have extended rights and freedoms to Jews, individuals who identify as Jews have succeeded. For example, in the 109th Congress (2005-2007 congressional term), 11 Senators identify as Jews. This Jewish success story is not the result of some secret Jewish conspiracy to rule the world.

This myth is also related to the misperception that Jews are different, alien people with strange powers to control others. Some people who have never met Jews, or do not know them well, can build up some strange ideas about what Jews are like. During different historical periods, Jews were accused of killing Christian children, causing plagues, and setting out to destroy Christian society. If something went wrong, the Jews were said to have planned it. Today, there are even those who claim that AIDS was invented by Jewish doctors.

**What are the facts?**

It is easier to blame one group for everything bad that happens rather than try to understand the complex and multifaceted causes of problems. Conspiracy theories have always tended to be popular in difficult economic times, and Jews often surface as the traditional scapegoat. Many white supremacist groups today thrive on conspiracy theories and blame not only Jews, but also African Americans, immigrants, and even the Federal Government for everything that goes wrong.

The charge that Jews have been trying to take over the world is especially absurd in light of Jewish history. In almost every country where Jews have lived, they have been a small minority and have experienced centuries of persecution.

Jews have played a large part in the development of the movie industry and some find themselves in high-profile positions. Steven Spielberg and Barbra Streisand, among others, are examples of Jewish people with much status and power in Hollywood, but one only needs to watch the Academy Awards to see that Jews do not dominate the movie industry. Likewise, Jews constitute a small minority of the heads of Fortune 500 companies such as IBM, Exxon, and GE.

**How can we respond?**

It is important to recognize that this can be a subtle kind of anti-Semitism because we may not encounter it directly, but with a sudden, unexpected comment that can take us by surprise such as "Your people control ...." If someone makes this kind of comment, you might ask, "if Jews really ran the world, why have they been persecuted over the last several thousand years?"

If someone says that Jews own everything, emphasize that Jews are individuals like other Americans and need to be looked at as such. Even though certain high-profile individuals in an industry may be recognizably Jewish, that does not mean that the entire industry "is controlled by Jews."

Challenge assumptions: Ask if there's a "\_\_\_\_\_" way to run a bank or produce a movie. There isn't a "\_\_\_\_\_" way, and there isn't a Jewish way. You could respond with, "Why shouldn't Jews be involved in the media or finance?"

When faced with the accusation that the war in Iraq is the result of a small group of Jews in the U.S. government, you might point out that President George W. Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, then-National Security Advisor and current Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld were all in favor of the war and had the ultimate authority for making decisions for the United States, yet none of them are Jewish. As for the

fact that there are a number of Jews who have attained positions of influence within the U.S. government, it may be useful to point out that Jews are not the only ones who have achieved positions of influence within the U.S. government. It is important to remember not to rely on an individual's group membership to determine success or failure. One must look at a person's success or failure based on his or her individual characteristics.

**MYTH #3:****JEWS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DEATH OF JESUS****Where does it come from?**

The belief that the Jews killed Jesus grew out of interpretations of the trial and crucifixion portions of the New Testament. The Gospels describe Jewish religious leaders delivering Jesus to Roman authorities with the request that they execute him for blasphemy and public menace. In the Gospel of Matthew (27:25), it is written that Jews cried out, "His blood be on us and our children," as they demanded his crucifixion. As a result, Christians have historically held Jews collectively responsible for the death of Jesus.

**What are the facts?**

Crucifixion, the particular method used to execute Jesus, is forbidden by Jewish law. Moreover, Jesus did not commit any crime that is punishable by death according to Jewish law. It is widely agreed upon by current scholars that Jesus was executed by the Roman rulers of Israel, the same Romans who also executed tens of thousands of other Jews by crucifixion, including two others on the day Jesus was executed.

The myth of Jewish responsibility for Jesus' death is embedded in 2,000 years worth of Christian teaching and Western culture, starting with the gospels' attempt to define who the true Jews were. While most people respect the rights of others to adhere to the tenets of their religion, there has been a historic resentment against Jews by many Christians who cannot understand why Jesus has been so stubbornly rejected. Beginning in the Middle Ages, Christians believed that Jews desecrated communion wafers and killed Christian children to use their blood for matzah (the famous "blood libel"). Today, these issues come up in all sorts of ways, from history classes where the Crusades are taught as heroic times (thousands of Jews were slaughtered during this period) to literature and media that refer to Jewish responsibility for Jesus' death. The most recent widespread example is Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*. In Mr. Gibson's film, there is absolutely no ambiguity as to who is responsible for the death of Jesus — it is the Jews.

According to Christian theologian Carl Evans, "From the New Testament times to the present, it is difficult to find a single period when the Church has not acted shamefully toward the

Jews. I'm convinced that anti-Semitism has been such a powerful and persistent nemesis largely because of the Church's false witness against the Jews." To this day, some Christian children are still being taught that "Jews are Christ-killers" and "Jews drink the blood of Christians."

However persistent these myths may be, the Catholic Church has recently made significant steps to correct them. In 1965, the Vatican Council issued *Nostra Aetate*, which stated that Jesus' death "cannot be charged against all Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today." In 1992, the Catechism of the Catholic Church (a teaching guide) noted that no one is certain of what happened 2,000 years ago and that Jews as a collective group should not be considered responsible for the crucifixion.

**How can we respond?**

When someone labels you with something as loaded as "Christ Killer," it is easy to react emotionally. It is best in such a situation to avoid taking the comment to heart and to respond with objectivity. While reason will not work with everyone, it may be useful to point out that placing responsibility on a modern-day person for something that happened 2,000 years ago is absurd. Pointing out the Catholic Church's stance on the issue today may also get the person to stop and think. Keep in mind that comments like this often stem from ignorance, and do not necessarily reflect anti-Semitic attitudes. If you share facts rather than condemn people for such statements, they may be more willing to listen and learn.

You might point out, as an example, the irony of the blood libel, since Jewish dietary laws strictly prohibit consuming any type of blood.

Many choose to respond to this allegation by personalizing their response, "Are you blaming me for the death of Jesus? How can you hold me responsible for something that happened 2,000 years ago? I wasn't there, were you there?" While this type of response doesn't provide factual information, it does push people to reflect on what they are saying.

**MYTH #4:****JEWS THINK THEY ARE BETTER THAN EVERYONE ELSE****Where does it come from?**

According to Judaism, the Jews are the "chosen people." This concept has been misunderstood by both Jews and non-Jews alike. Many people have come to believe that by calling themselves the chosen people, Jews are declaring that they think they are better than other religious and ethnic groups.

**What are the facts?**

Being the chosen people does not mean that Jews have greater privileges than non-Jews. Rather, according to Jewish law, being the chosen people means that they have a special responsibility to uphold Jewish ethical teachings.

The idea comes from a portion of the Torah (the Jewish bible) in which the Jewish people were "chosen" to accept the responsibilities of the Torah and to be a "light unto the nations," that is, an example of good behavior for all. But the "chosen people" concept has been twisted over time by some who say that the title proves that Jews think they are better than non-Jews.

Jews, like most groups, are proud of their heritage and identity. However, this does not make them better than anyone else. Orthodox Jews interpret the "chosen people" idea to mean that they have a responsibility to keep the 613 commandments of the Torah. All sects of Judaism have acted on this ethical responsibility through their work on social issues.

Moreover, Judaism espouses the concept of the righteous gentile, whereby a non-Jew who follows the Seven Laws of Noah will receive the same rewards after death as a righteous Jew. Jews do not view being Jewish as an exclusive status reserved only for those who happen to be born into the faith. According to Jewish law, anyone can convert to Judaism by accepting the same responsibilities as the other members of the faith.

**How can we respond?**

It is important to clarify the "chosen people" distinction in order to break down the barriers of misunderstanding. Every religion has something unique about it — it is just this particular

phrasing that has led some to misconstrue the facts. As far as special privileges such as taking time off for holidays, these exceptions are granted to members of many groups, not just Jews. Most American schools, businesses, and government agencies strive to respect the diversity of people in the U.S. and the special circumstances that warrant absence from school or work.

In response to comments like, "Jews think they are so special," you can say that Jews sometimes feel different as a minority, and sometimes Jews are misunderstood because of their cultural and religious differences. Jews do feel a special connection with their heritage (as most groups do), but they do not as a group feel superior to others. The phrase "chosen people" refers to biblical obligations and is not meant to suggest that a hierarchy exists among religious groups.

If you hear someone complaining that the "chosen people" are asking for special privileges (e.g., the High Holidays off from school) because they think their chosen status puts them above the rules, you now know that they are misinterpreting or misunderstanding the facts. You can respond by pointing out that Jews desire the same rights to practice their religion as everyone else. Christian holidays, such as Christmas and Easter, are regularly observed through school closures and special programs. These observances are taken for granted in U.S. society, while observances of Jewish or Muslim holidays may be seen as "weird" or constituting special privileges. Pointing out this double standard might challenge others to think about the lack of equity.

**MYTH #5:****JEWS ARE A RACE, NOT A RELIGION****Where does it come from?**

The idea that Jews are not only a religious group, but also a racial group, was a centerpiece of Nazi policy, and was the justification for killing any Jewish person who came under Nazi occupation — regardless of whether he or she practiced Judaism. In fact, even the children and the grandchildren of Jews who had converted to Christianity were murdered as members of the Jewish “race” during the Holocaust.

The whole concept of “racial science,” and therefore the notion of the Jewish “race,” took root in Western Europe during the 19th century. In response to the decline of the influence of traditional Christianity, as well as the rise of Jewish assimilation and social mobility, anti-Semites adopted racial arguments as a new rationalization for their hatred of Jews. The argument can be summarized this way: Jews are different from non-Jews not because of their beliefs, but because of their physical nature; their “Jewishness” is not taught or acquired, but is inherited through their blood.

**What are the facts?**

It is important to recognize that the theories of Jewish “racial” difference were developed long before the modern sciences of physiology and genetics. Although today there is a scholarly debate over whether or not the term “race” has any scientific meaning, all reputable scientists are in agreement that, while physical traits — skin color, susceptibility to certain diseases — are inherited, there is no ethnic or racial predisposition to emotions, intellect, or morals. Therefore, the idea that Jews (or any other ethnic group) are predisposed to bad or undesirable behavior because of their genetic makeup is wholly unscientific.

A definition of Judaism based on physical or genetic traits is also misleading because Jews appear throughout the world. Generally, Jews resemble their non-Jewish neighbors in the countries from which they originate. Through centuries of intermarriage and conversion, Jews from Eastern Europe tend to look like Eastern Europeans; Jews from Ethiopia tend to look like Ethiopians; Jews from Turkey tend to look like Turks; Jews from India tend to look like Indians.

What unites Jews as a people, whether they come from Europe, Asia, Africa, or the Americas, is a common culture, rooted in a common religion. Jews throughout the world are joined by a religious and cultural heritage rather than a racial sameness.

**How can we respond?**

If someone tells you that the Jewish people are a race, ask them what they mean by the term “race”; most anti-Semites who parrot pseudo-scientific ideas have no clear definition of the term. Ask these people what a Jew “should” look like. Can a Black person be a Jew? Can an East Asian or Indian person be a Jew? Can someone be born a Christian and become Jewish? The answer to each of these questions is yes — and together they refute the idea of a Jewish race as anything other than a figment of the anti-Semitic imagination.