



## LESSON 2: The New Antisemitism

*After the Second World War...many assumed antisemitism as they knew it had become the persona non grata of the civilized world... What they did not anticipate is antisemitism innovating itself...assuming the old hatred with a modern facade.*

—LEV STESIN, AUTHOR

ESTIMATED COMPLETION TIME: 125 MINUTES

### INTRODUCTION

In this lesson, learners deepen their understanding about the features of contemporary antisemitism and the ways in which they exploit age-old hatred of Jews. Students are introduced to and examine some of the different forces that drive antisemitism in today's world, including white nationalism, Holocaust denial and distortion, and delegitimization of Israel.

### ESSENTIAL QUESTION:

How has antisemitism morphed in the contemporary era?

### OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Describe how classic forms of antisemitism have influenced and find expression in the new antisemitism.
- Explain how antisemitism may sometimes be related to white nationalism.
- Identify other features of the “new antisemitism,” including Holocaust denial and anti-Israel bias.
- Complete an evidence-based reflection on the features of contemporary antisemitism.

### PROCEDURES

#### **PART 1: What are some of the forces that drive antisemitism in today's world?**

*Post the supporting question above for students as you begin this part of the lesson.*

ESTIMATED COMPLETION TIME: 30 MINUTES

- 1** Explain to students that in this lesson they will examine some of the primary forces and manifestations of antisemitism today, which have both similarities and differences to earlier periods in history. To help understand the examples they will study, display and review the **Expressions of Antisemitism** handout and discuss with students. Point out that while contemporary antisemitism reflects elements of all these categories, this lesson will focus especially on “New expressions of antisemitism.”
- 2** Ask students if they are familiar with the Tree of Life Synagogue attack that took place in Pittsburgh in 2018. Allow them to share what they know and provide the following background as needed:

*On the morning of October 27, 2018 (a Saturday, the Jewish holy day) Robert Bowers entered the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, PA yelling “All Jews must die!” He opened fire on the congregants, killing eleven and wounding six others. Bowers told a law enforcement officer that Jews “were committing genocide against his people.” Authorities later found virulent antisemitic, xenophobic, and anti-immigrant posts on Bowers’ social media profiles. The last of his posts reflecting his belief that Jews are enabling undocumented immigrants to enter the U.S.–stated that “[Jewish organizations] like to bring invaders in that kill our people. I can’t sit by and watch my people get slaughtered. Screw your optics, I’m going in.” The Tree of Life shooting is the deadliest attack on the Jewish community in U.S. history.*

**3** This activity asks students to critically analyze strong antisemitic language and deduce how hateful rhetoric can escalate to violence. Students may find this language shocking or offensive. Consider strategies to maintain a safe classroom environment for students.

Project or distribute the **Tree of Life Synagogue Attack Word Cloud** handout and explain that it reflects some of the language the assailant posted online in the lead-up to the attack. In pairs or small groups, have students analyze the language for clues about what might have fueled his irrational hatred and to identify traditional antisemitic themes. Engage in a full group discussion on students’ findings, making sure the following themes are considered:

- The U.S. is being attacked and “invaded”; overrun by “foreign” and dangerous people (Jews, Israel, Muslims, migrants, refugees, etc.)
- Jews, Jewish organizations, and Israel are evil and engineering an “invasion” for self-serving purposes.
- White people in the U.S. are being “replaced” and their “way of life” threatened; they must unite and fight for their country.
- The Holocaust was justified and a modern-day genocide against Jews and other “enemies” (refugees, Muslims, non-White people, etc.) is warranted.

Conclude this activity with some or all of the following discussion questions:

- What emotions came up when encountering this word cloud? What words did your eye first move towards?
- Even if hate speech does not escalate to violence, why is it harmful and to whom?
- By analyzing this language, what conclusions can you draw about how hate escalates?

**4** Explain that an increase in white nationalism—such as that exhibited by Bowers as well as attackers involved in the 2017 Charlottesville rally and 2019 Poway Synagogue shooting in CA—is one trend that both fuels contemporary antisemitism and demonstrates its most deadly consequence. Project or distribute the handout, **White Nationalism**, and review this information with students. Discuss the following:

- How does the antisemitism promoted by white nationalist groups today build on old ideas? How is it different? (Refer to the handout, **Expressions of Antisemitism**, as needed.)
- How do you think the loss of life as a result of antisemitism has affected the Jewish community? Other targets?
- How can the targets of antisemitism and other prejudice work collectively to resist hate?

## **PART 2: What is the relationship between Holocaust denial and distortion and antisemitism?**

*Post the supporting question above for students as you begin this part of the lesson.*

**ESTIMATED COMPLETION TIME: 45 MINUTES**

**5** Ask students to define the word denial (the action of declaring something to be untrue). Ask students to define the word distortion (the action of giving a misleading account or impression). Explain that denial and distortion of the Holocaust and of Jewish victimhood are often characteristic features of contemporary antisemitism. Project or distribute the handout, **Holocaust Denial and Distortion**, and review with students.

**6** Show student the video, **Holocaust Denial, Explained**, from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Then introduce students to **Felix Sparks (bio)**, **Marta Wise (bio)**, and **Naomi Adler (bio)** and show their testimonies. Have students note key words and phrases that stand out to them and thoughts and questions that come up as they listen.

Discuss some of the following questions with students:

- What forms do Holocaust denial and distortion take? What belief systems are behind them?
- How are Holocaust denial and distortion a form of antisemitism?
- How do Holocaust denial and distortion attempt to delegitimize the State of Israel?
- Why might some people be influenced by the ideas of deniers or distorters?
- Naomi Adler says it is our job to make sure we know what is true. What are some steps we can take to make sure we are educated about important issues?
- Felix Sparks says he will fight the “stupidity and viciousness” of Holocaust denial to his “last breath.” What are some ways you can stand up to this form of antisemitism when you encounter it?

**7** Assign students to create a “found poem” using the notes they took in response to the videos. To accomplish this, they will choose at least ten key words and phrases from their notes that most relate to the supporting question. They write each word or phrase on a separate slip of paper and arrange the slips into a poem that answers the supporting question and communicates their point of view. When students finish, they silently exchange their poems with peers in groups of three and attach written comments to one another’s work using sticky notes. Following the exercise, collect students’ poems to check for understanding.

## **PART 3: How is delegitimization of Israel a form antisemitism?**

*Post the supporting question above for students as you begin this part of the lesson*

**ESTIMATED COMPLETION TIME: 50 MINUTES**

**8** Referring again to the **Expressions of Antisemitism** handout, explain to students that another aspect of “new antisemitism” is centered on opposition to the State of Israel, sometimes its policies and sometimes its right to exist at all. Ask students to share what they know about Israel and what have been their sources of information.

**9** Distribute and spend time reviewing the handout, **Antisemitism and the Three Ds**. Explain to students that one of the complexities of this form of antisemitism is that Israel often becomes the focus of the hatred of Jews, and treated with double standards. In this way, antisemitic ideas once directed at “the Jew” become centered around opposition to Israel, but because this criticism is directed against a country, this antisemitism is often able to disguise itself as political criticism. A classic symptom of the new antisemitism, Jewish people, regardless of where they live, have been increasingly targeted as responsible for the actions and policies of Israel. This rising hatred has led to harassment, discrimination and even violence. Explain that the “3Ds Test” helps us to break this down to be able to understand and identify this new form of antisemitism.

OPTIONAL: View the brief Yad Vashem video, **Anti-Zionism**, which features three professors discussing the origins of anti-Zionism, how it changed following the Holocaust, and how it relates to contemporary antisemitism.

**10** Tell students that in order to understand these issues more fully, they will review real-life contemporary case studies. Divide students into groups and distribute **Case Studies of Antisemitism** handout, assigning one of the example types to each small group. Instruct groups to discuss how antisemitism was at play in their scenario. The response should answer the supporting question and include evidence from the case studies to support their conclusions. Groups should report to the class and discuss their conclusions as time allows. (Note: As helpful, **The BDS Movement** overview document can be used as background for educators or as a student handout, if appropriate.)

**11** Instruct groups to discuss how antisemitism was at play in their scenario and to post a written response on the case study using sticky notes. The response should answer the supporting question and include evidence from the case studies to support their conclusions. After groups have posted their responses, they can be asked to report back to the class on their conclusions as time allows.

**12** As a summative assessment for the overall lesson, have students create a “3 x 3 journal” addressing the compelling question, “How has antisemitism morphed in the contemporary era?” The journal is a grid that includes three features of contemporary antisemitism that they have discovered on one axis, and three ideas that they have taken away about each feature along the other axis. They should include at least one piece of relevant evidence from the featured sources in each row of the grid.