

ANTISEMITISM POLICY TRUST



MYTHS AND
MISCONCEPTIONS
ABOUT JEWS

Contents

3 Introduction

4 Historical Myths

- 4 Jews consume human blood (The Blood Libel)
- 6 Jews killed Jesus
- 7 Jews have horns and big noses
- 8 Jews have polluted blood
- 9 Jews are descendants of the Khazars

10 Persistent Accusations

- 10 Jews control the world and politics
- 11 Jews control the banks
- 12 Jews control the media
- 12 Jews are the cause of all wars and worldly ills
- 13 Jews controlled the slave trade
- 14 The Holocaust didn't happen, but if it did, it was done on purpose to get money and Israel
- 15 Jews are not involved in British life and are more loyal to Israel

16 Modern Misconceptions

- 16 All Jews are white
- 17 Judaism is just a religion
- 17 Jews only vote for the Conservative Party
- 18 Jews have big families and drive big cars
- 18 Jews create their own ghettos and only marry other Jews
- 19 All Jews have the same name or surname
- 19 Jews have sex through a sheet

Introduction

Antisemitism is discrimination or prejudice against Jewish people. The UK is one of a number of countries which has adopted an official [working] definition of antisemitism which goes into further detail about the types of discrimination Jews can face.¹ Antisemitism comes from all sections of society, has been expressed by people from all political perspectives and has existed through millennia, leading to attacks, persecution and the murder of Jews across the globe. Antisemitism can be based on several motivations, including: religious, nationalist, economic and racial-biological reasonings.² Antisemitism can be found in attacks on Jews as a national collective, most commonly expressed as antisemitic anti-Zionism. Not all criticism of Israel is antisemitism, but this is where commonly the boundaries are crossed. Jews can be viewed by some racists as inferior, by others, Jews are often regarded as wealthy and controlling. Sometimes Jews can be seen as both. Such antisemitic conspiracy theories are pernicious; infiltrating society, often claiming to reveal the truth about world ills, but they seek to sow division within communities on the basis of antisemitic lies. Many of the antisemitic myths perpetrated against Jews, either as individuals or as a collective, can be traced back historically. All of the myths can be discredited. This briefing aims to serve as a guide to historical myths, persistent accusations and modern misconceptions alleged about Jews and the truth behind them. It is by no means fully comprehensive, with new conspiracy theories regularly coined and old tropes perpetuated on social media, and further reading is encouraged.

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1 <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/working-definition-antisemitism>

2 <https://cst.org.uk/data/file/b/c/Antisemitic%20Discourse%20Report%202015.1482423626.pdf>

Historical Myths

MYTH: Jews consume human blood (The Blood Libel)

TRUTH: The Blood Libel is a well-known antisemitic trope which falsely accuses Jews of ritual murder and the consumption of human blood in food. The Blood Libel is one of the oldest forms of antisemitism and has led to many instances of persecution against Jews across Europe. Today, manifestations of the blood libel are found far more infrequently, but are often still perpetuated, both in Europe and often in the Middle East. For example, in March 2020 Italian artist Giovanni Gasparo, painted 'Martirio di San Simonino da Trento (Simone Unverdorben), per omicidio rituale ebraico (The Martyrdom of St. Simon of Trento in accordance with Jewish ritual murder)' depicting the blood libel.³ In 2012 on television, Khaled Al-Zafrani of the Egyptian Justice and Progress Party, stated that Jews "take a Christian child, slit his throat and slaughter him. Then they take his blood and make their [matzos]".⁴ In 2005 in the Russian city of Krasnoyarsk, the murder of five boys was blamed on a "Hasidic sect" who were accused of murdering the boys in order to collect their blood and consume it for Passover.⁵

One of the first known accusations of blood libel can be found in Josephus' 'Against Apion'. Josephus, who lived between 38-100 B.C, wrote that the Alexandrian, Apion, an antisemite, accused the Jews of kidnapping a Greek each year and offering them as a sacrifice and then eating his organs.⁶ The accusation spread throughout the Middle Ages and the first case of Blood Libel in England took place in 1144 in Norwich, where a young Christian boy, William, was murdered. The Jewish community was blamed falsely for the murder, which has since been debunked. Several other false charges were made against the Jewish community, and this led to trials, executions, massacres and eventually expulsion from England in 1290 by King Edward I.

The Blood Libel myth has found its way into the British literary canon, including in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, in *The Prioress's Tale*, which tells of a child murdered by Jews: "From this time on the cursed Jews conspired, This innocent boy out of the world to chase. A murderer for their purposes they hired. Who in an alley had a secret place, And as he went by at his childish pace, This Jew seized on him, and held him fast, and slit His neck, and threw his body in a pit."⁷

Of course the murder of people is in complete violation of Jewish law and is anathema to Jewish tradition or ritual. Even the slaughter of animals is very strictly regulated in Jewish dietary law, 'kashrut', which bans the use of blood in cooking. Meat is salted in order to ensure an absolute absence of any blood in Jewish food. Jews are completely prohibited from consuming even animal blood, in any form. The idea that they are hungry for human blood is especially absurd.

Pope Gregory X (1271-1276) condemned Christians who falsified reports of Jewish ritual murder. In a letter on the Jews, he stated that, "occasionally that some Christians lose their Christian children, the Jews are accused by their enemies of secretly carrying off and killing these same Christian children and of making sacrifices of the heart and blood of these very children. It happens, too, that the parents of these children or some other Christian enemies of these Jews, secretly hide these very children in order that they may be able to injure these Jews, and in order that they may be able to extort from them a certain amount of money by redeeming them from their straits. And most falsely do these Christians claim that the Jews have secretly and furtively carried away these children and killed them, and that the Jews offer sacrifice from the heart and blood of these children, since their law in this matter

3 <https://www.jpost.com/Diaspora/Antisemitism/Italian-artist-accused-of-antisemitism-for-new-painting-of-blood-libel-622578>

4 <https://www.timesofisrael.com/egyptian-politician-revives-passover-blood-libel/>

5 Jonathan Adams and Cordelia Heß, *The Medieval Roots of Antisemitism: Continuities and Discontinuities from the Middle Ages to the Present Day*, 2018

6 Albert Ehrman, *The Origins of the Ritual Murder Accusation and Blood Libel*, *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (SPRING 1976), pp. 83-90

7 *The Portable Chaucer: Revised Edition*, Penguin, Translated and Edited by Theodore Morrison, 1977



1493 illustration depicting the murder of Simon of Trent and the blood libel

precisely and expressly forbids Jews to sacrifice, eat, or drink the blood, or to eat the flesh of animals having claws...we order that Jews seized under such a silly pretext be freed from imprisonment, and that they shall not be arrested henceforth on such a miserable pretext, unless-which we do not believe-they be caught in the commission of the crime. We decree that no Christian shall stir up anything new against them, but that they should be maintained in that status and position in which they were in the time of our predecessors, from antiquity till now.”⁸

More recently, in 1955, the Church of England admitted that the legend of nine-year-old ‘Little St Hugh’, allegedly murdered for ritualistic purposes by Jews in 1255 in Lincoln, was false.⁹ Hugh was later venerated as a Saint, and a shrine to him has been in place at the Lincoln cathedral since the period following of the

Jews from England in 1290. The plaque placed in 1955 stated that, “Trumped up stories of “ritual murders” of Christian boys by Jewish communities were common throughout Europe during the Middle Ages and even much later. These fictions cost many innocent Jews their lives. Lincoln had its own legend and the alleged victim was buried in the Cathedral in the year 1255. Such stories do not redound to the credit of Christendom, and so we pray: Lord, forgive what we have been, amend what we are, and direct what we shall be.”¹⁰

Today, as well as classical antisemitic tropes relating to Jewish ritual murder, Israel is sometimes accused of blood libel. For example, accusations of Israelis harvesting body parts or targeting non-Jewish children for murder persist.

8 <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/g10-jews.asp>

9 <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095949312>

10 <https://cst.org.uk/news/blog/2011/01/20/lincolns-blood-libel-and-seven-jewish-children>

MYTH: Jews killed Jesus

TRUTH: The concept of Jewish deicide, that Jews killed Jesus, emanates from the four gospels reflecting on Jesus's life, death and resurrection. Jesus was arrested by the Jewish council, or tribunal, and accused of blasphemy for claiming to be "King of the Jews." The Blood libel accusation is related to the accusation that Jews rejected and murdered Jesus, with the libel being said to be a ritual re-enactment of the murder. At the time, the Roman Empire controlled the province of Judaea, where the tribunal took place and therefore the Sanhedrin (Jewish court) had no jurisdiction. Brought before the fifth Roman governor of the province, Pontius Pilate, Jesus was subject to a trial in Pilate's court, the praetorium. Pilate did not see Jesus as a state threat to the Roman Empire but did nonetheless order his crucifixion and the death penalty was carried out by Roman soldiers. Historians have noted that there were many individuals at the time, including those from the Pharisees and Sadducees who led breakaway sects from the Jewish community, that were not persuaded by the Jewish

community, suggesting the Jewish people would have no reason to have attempted to prosecute, and ultimately call for the death of Jesus¹¹.

The myth of deicide, as with the blood libel, became a myth of Jewish evil. Since the time of the death of Jesus, the antisemitic libel of Jewish deicide has been used, especially in Christian Europe, as an excuse for discrimination and violence against the Jewish population. This persecution includes the bloody Spanish Inquisition after the community's expulsion from Spain in 1492, and the murder of Jews during the Christian Crusades into the Middle East during the Middle Ages. The concept of Jewish deicide has found a home in literature, art and has often been prominent at Easter, when Christians celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. For example, in 1903 the infamous Kishinev pogrom, now Chisinau, Moldova, members of the Jewish community were accused of murdering a number of children. The massacre took place after congregations left Church for Easter services and led to

two days of rioting, with almost 50 Jews killed and over 1,500 Jewish homes damaged.¹²

In 1965, the Second Vatican Council released a declaration, the *Nostra Aetate*, asserting that no Jews today, and not all Jews during the time of Jesus, were responsible for his crucifixion.¹³ Though some cite the Jewish high priest of the day, Caiaphas, as having lobbied for the death penalty against Jesus, accusing Jews of collective responsibility for his death is antisemitic. In 2011, Pope Benedict XVI reaffirmed that Jews were not collectively responsible for the death of Jesus.¹⁴



Depiction of Roman Governor, Pilate, presenting Jesus to the people of Jerusalem

11 <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/who-killed-jesus/>

12 <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2009/04/the-pogrom-that-transformed-20th-century-jewry/>

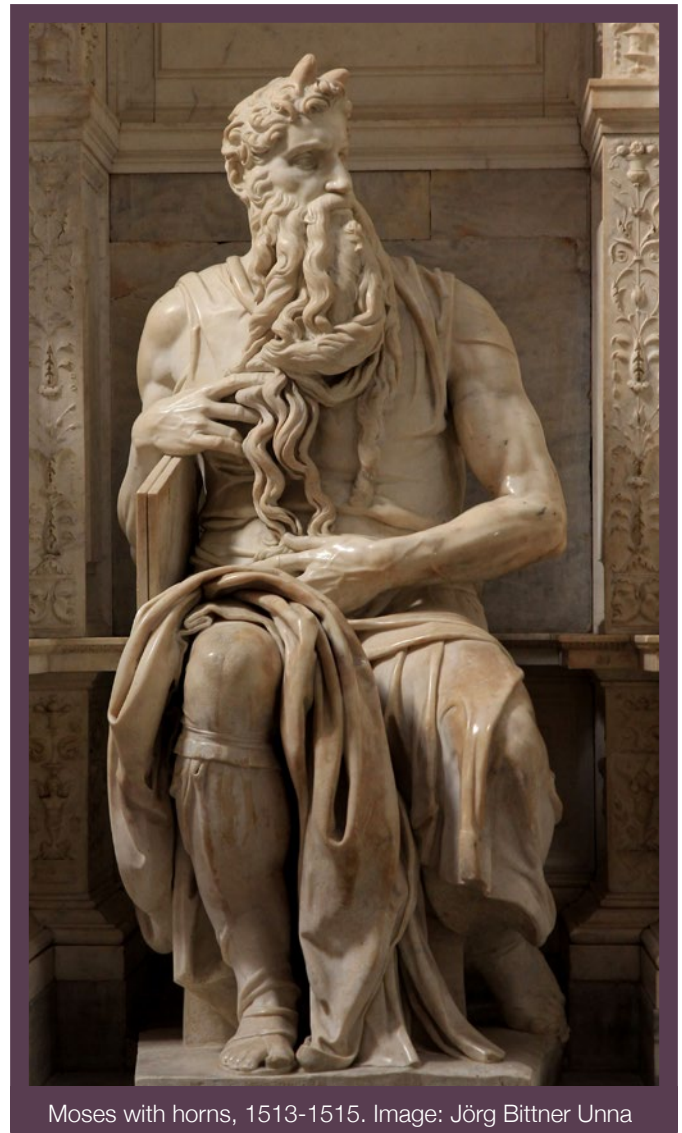
13 <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/who-killed-jesus/>

14 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/mar/02/pope-jews-jesus-death-crucifixion>

MYTH: Jews have horns and big noses

TRUTH: Racial or biological antisemitism, which assumes Jews possess inferior and negative physical attributes are racist stereotypes are caricatures. Many of these false antisemitic stereotypes include that all Jews have big noses and that Jews have horns. The idea of the 'Jewish-nose', one that is large and hooked, was proved categorically false in a study by anthropologist Maurice Fishberg in 1911. Fishberg measured 4,000 Jewish noses and found no discernable difference between a Jewish nose and a nose belonging to any other member of the American public at the time.¹⁵ This eugenics-esque study, although ethically dubious was a study of it's time, two decades before the Nazis gained power in Germany, which demonstrated the 'Jewish-nose' is just a myth. But this hasn't stopped it's perpetuation in literature, such as in Charles Dicken's infamous pickpocket Fagin, or in Nazi propaganda.

Accusations of Jews having horns emanates from the connection between the Jews with the devil in the New Testament, where Jews are viewed as the Children of Satan. As well as having horns, some readings of the New Testament, including in the Middle Ages, developed the idea that Jews were believed to smell of sulfur, the smell of the devil, the smell of fire and brimstone. These physical attributes are patently untrue.



Moses with horns, 1513-1515. Image: Jörg Bittner Unna

MYTH: Jews have polluted blood

TRUTH: In addition to biological antisemitism which accused Jews of having horns, big noses and a distinct smell, Jews have been accused of having contaminated blood. Some have argued that the concept of impure Jewish blood is a metaphor for wider racial inferiority. However, there is evidence that after World War I, serology, the study of blood, took on a racial characteristic. Studies which led to the discovery of different blood types led to various researchers trying to uncover and identify “racially pure” Germans through the study of blood.¹⁶

people could be determined to be of “German blood” in comparison to “Jewish blood”. If a person had one Jewish grandparent, they were viewed to have *mischling*, ‘mixed blood’. The editor of the infamous antisemitism newspaper, *Der Stürmer*, Julius Streicher, suggested a contortion of the blood libel. Instead of consuming a host’s blood, Jews would transfuse their own blood and inject it into the host, thus polluting from within.¹⁷ Historian David Biale, in his book examining ‘Blood and Belief: The Circulation of a Symbol Between Jews and Christians’, has suggested that like

the body, blood needs to be kept free from contamination. The German people, the *volk*, were seen as one body and thus must be kept free from blood contaminants, such as Jews.¹⁸ Far from a metaphor, in 1935 an SS member faced court for receiving a blood transfusion from a Jew. He was accused of racial corruption.¹⁹

In reality, there are over 30 blood types, which can be negative or positive, and run across all ethnicities and groups of people. Some groups are more likely to have some blood types, such as



Nuremberg Laws racial chart

This form of antisemitic stereotype and pseudo-science has been used to pass antisemitic legislation in the past, such as the Nazi Nuremberg Race Laws, which called Jewish and Aryan marriage and sexual relations “racial pollution” and *blutschande*, a blood disgrace. Jews were seen as *untermenschen*, sub-humans as they were not racially pure. Charts from Nazi Germany, used to explain the Nuremberg laws, reflected how

people of black heritage²⁰ being more likely to have the rare blood group, Ro.²¹ Ultimately, the concept that any race has a less ‘pure’ form of blood to another is clearly both offensive and untrue.

16 Rachel Boaz, *Serology in Interwar and National Socialist Germany*, Central European University Press, 2012

17 David Biale, *Blood and Belief: The Circulation of a Symbol between Jews and Christians*, University of California Press, 2007

18 Ibid

19 Ibid

20 <https://www.blood.co.uk/why-give-blood/demand-for-different-blood-types/why-more-black-blood-donors-are-needed/>

21 <https://twitter.com/GiveBloodNHS/status/92783145790049894>

MYTH: Jews are descendants of the Khazars

TRUTH: The Khazars were a multi-ethnic group who lived on a large swath of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia from the seventh century until the tenth. The Khazars were a Turkic people, and the theory claims that's Ashkenazi Jews are their descendants. There are assertions that members of the Khazarian ruling elite converted to Judaism, the so-called Khazarian hypothesis, but this has not been substantiated. The Khazar Khaganate was short-lived: it was sacked by the Kievan Rus during their campaign of expansion, which peddlers of this antisemitic theory claim was when the Khazars migrated West to Eastern Europe, where they became today's Ashkenazi Jews.

The antisemitism Kharian theory has been perpetuated by those of all political viewpoints who hawk conspiracy theories. For example, Arthur Koestler, who wrote extensively on the paranormal, in his book 'The Thirteenth Tribe', espoused the Khazar theory. Some on the right spread this theory because they want to diminish Ashkenazi Jews' right to live in Europe. Others espouse the hypothesis to undermine Jewish ties to the United Kingdom, or other states in which they reside, as a potential destination for a mass deportation of Jews. Some from the left support the hypothesis

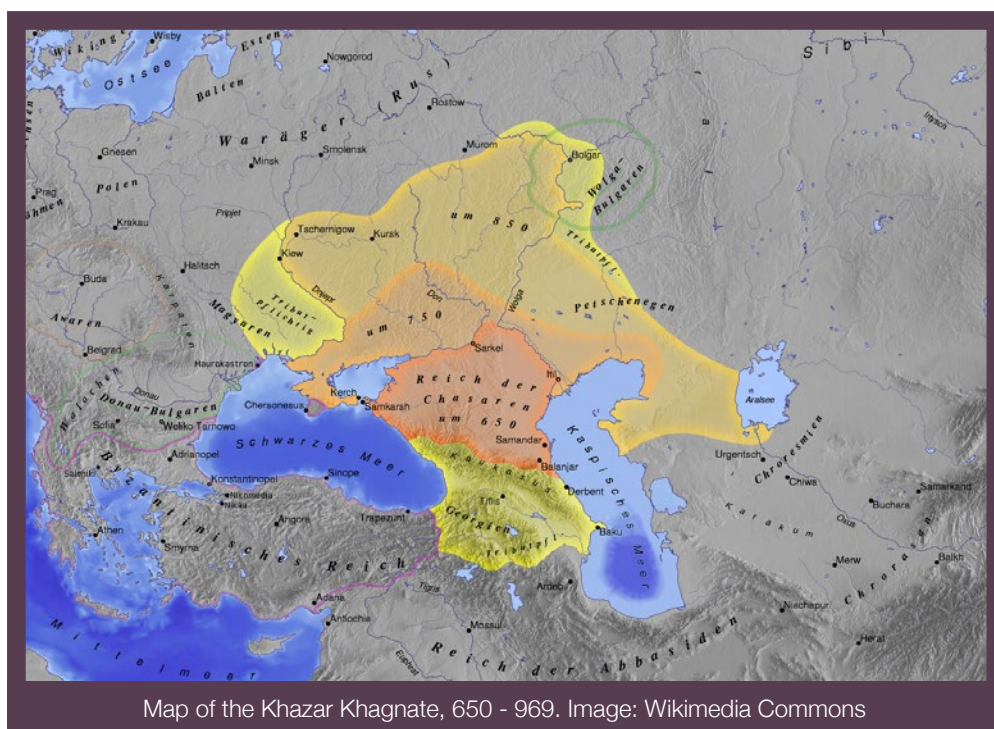
because they want to disassociate one critical element of Jewish history from Jews today: Israel. By claiming Jews hail from Khazaria they undermine any lineage between Jews today and the Biblical Jews of Judea.

Linguistically, studies into the origins of Yiddish, found that forenames or surnames belonging to Jews in Eastern Europe since over the past six centuries "do not contain any links to Khazaria".²² And Yiddish is mainly a Germanic language with Slavic influence, but crucially without Turkic influence. Archaeologically, almost no traces have been found of extensive Jewish habitation in the area. Genetically, flawed studies have looked into current populations in Georgia and Armenia, in the caucuses, to prove a genetic link to Ashkenazi Jews. However, groups and families in these areas would have migrated, so there is no verification for the claims.

Due to the geographical location of Khazaria along the Silk Road, it became a point of trading between peoples between the Middle East, China and the Caucasus. People would have travelled through, bringing with them all manner of religious beliefs. Some scholars have suggested that during the period of the Khazarian

Khaganate, Jews migrated to the Khazarian steppe, but this by no means indicates some sort of mass-conversion to Judaism, which created the entire Ashkenazi population.

In truth every group of people and every nation comes from a diverse and mixed biological, genetic and cultural lineage. Sociological theories of nationalism do not require genetic or cultural 'authenticity', or an 'authentic bond to the soil'. Neither the legitimacy of Israel – nor the legitimacy of any other state – is based on any such foundation.



Map of the Khazar Khaganate, 650 - 969. Image: Wikimedia Commons

Persistent Accusations

The antisemitic allegations outlined below, accusing Jews of all manner of control and manipulation, treats every individual Jewish person as an agent of the Jewish

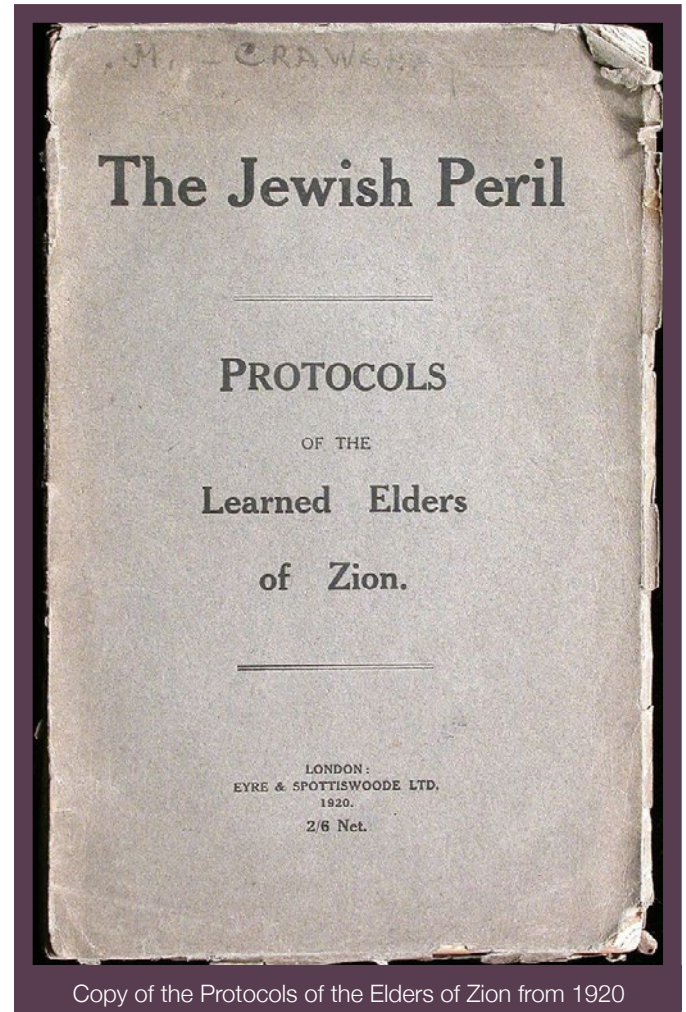
collective. There are, of course, powerful Jews, bankers who are Jewish and Jews in the media, but there is no Jewish conspiracy for which they operate.

ACCUSATION: Jews control the world and politics

TRUTH: Antisemitism often portrays Jews as a malign and secretive group that controls aspects of the world and alleges that Jews are connected to secret groups who also allegedly conspire to control the world, such as the Illuminati and the Freemasons. Jews have repeatedly been said to conspire against whatever society holds most dear – from Jesus Christ to the nation's interests.

The antisemitic trope found a new lease of life in the forgery 'The Protocols of the Elders of Zion', made public in Russian in approximately 1905. The Protocols were translated into many languages across the globe and were even promoted by The Times of London, which later went on to expose the Protocols as a forgery. The protocols allege that Jews conspire to take over the world by; controlling the press; destroying religion; controlling land; controlling world economies; spreading pornography; controlling education; and scheming to control many other aspects of life. The false concept of Jewish world control had been festering for some time in Russia and Eastern Europe before the protocols were published. For example, Jacob Brafman, who converted from Judaism to Lutherism, claimed the Talmud and the kahal, the former Ashkenazi autonomous governments, were used to subvert Russia.²³ In reality, the Protocols were revealed to be unequivocally fake. Perhaps drawing inspiration from those opposing Napoleon's liberal policies towards Jews, French author and satirist Maurice Joly wrote a pamphlet 'Dialogue in Hell Between Machiavelli and Montesquieu', published in 1864. Large tracts of the Protocols were directly lifted from Dialogue in Hell, confirming its fraudulent nature.

The idea that Jews in the diaspora, as a collective, are working to rule the world is as crass as it is offensive.



Copy of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion from 1920

23 https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Brafman_Iakov_Aleksandrovich

ACCUSATION: Jews control the banks

TRUTH: For over 2,000 years, Jews have been associated with money and have, in later years, consequently been accused of controlling the banks and the global financial system. In the United States, many antisemitic groups including the notorious Ku Klux Klan have taken this antisemitic libel and asserted that Jews control the Federal Reserve. As with the myth that Jews control the world and politics, the concept of Jewish power over global economies was encompassed in the antisemitic forgery *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. In a study by the Fundamental Rights Agency, 39% of Jews responded that they had heard non-Jewish people suggest that “Jews are responsible for the current economic crisis”. In Hungary, 92% of Jews had heard this being suggested.²⁴

The notion of Jewish control of the banks often comes hand-in-hand with the view that all Jews are wealthy. Historically, in the Middle Ages, as antisemitism spread through Europe, Jews were barred from participating in many professions, often forcing them to work with money.²⁵ Jews didn't become money lenders out of greed or ill-will; they were compelled to do it and were the legal-money lenders, but by no means the only ones practicing this profession. As providers of credit, Jews and other money lenders, played a vital role in the growing market economy and in promoting prosperity.

Today, the damaging myth of Jews and money has led to some using the word “Jew” as a verb, meaning to cheat or swindle somebody. We've seen the myth perpetuated in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, with the Jewish antihero, Shylock, a Venetian Jewish moneylender, hell-bent on revenge for debts owed to him.

The allegation of Jews all being wealthy is a false charge with no basis in reality. In Britain, many Jews migrated from Eastern Europe in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries to flee pogroms – anti-Jewish attacks – which were spreading across the continent. They often had limited financial resources and lived in the poorer and deprived areas of East London.



One manifestation of this antisemitic trope is the Rothschild conspiracy theory, which accuses the Rothschild family, and consequently Jews, of controlling the banks, economies and therefore all global money. Far from some all-powerful malevolent dark force, the Rothschilds are a large Jewish family with many branches descending from the founding member of the bank, Mayer Amschel Rothschild, born in 1744. Today, the Rothschild Group itself is an investment bank worth \$500 million, a fraction of the wealth of the comparable Goldman Sachs, a public company with a mammoth \$917 billion in assets.²⁶

²⁴ https://www.jpr.org.uk/documents/JPR_2017._Different_Antisemitisms_in_Sweden_and_across_Europe.pdf

²⁵ <https://www.bl.uk/learning/histcitizen/voices/info/antisemitism/antisemitism.html>

²⁶ <https://www.thebalance.com/best-investment-banks-4177807>

ACCUSATION: Jews control the media

TRUTH: As with the myths of Jewish world control, banks and politics, this antisemitic charge partly emanated from The Protocols of the Elders of Zion. This canard accuses Jews of controlling the media (such as the printed press at the time) to sow division within society and dilute morals and traditional family values. Possible explanations for this antisemitic trope include the prominence of Jews in media professions, such as journalism and theatre, in Europe during the 19th century, as many European cities such as Berlin and Prague were cultural hubs²⁷. This was not the case in Eastern Europe. Some have argued that if it were not for virulent antisemitism in Eastern Europe, there would be no Hollywood. Largely lower-class Jewish immigrants who fled pogroms in Europe and settled in the United States, were often blocked from established vocations. They went on to join what was considered the “lowly, if not whilly disreputable” motion picture business.²⁸ In Britain, the BNP leader Nick Griffin is widely credited as having authored a booklet ‘Who are the mindbenders’ published in 1997 and which updated the myth of Jewish media control. Today, this myth is perpetuated online, with memes purporting to show how every media executive is a Jew, or how Jews control the film industry and Hollywood.

However, if you look at those at the top of several key media giants, they are not Jewish. A snapshot in 2020 reveals that the BBC’s Baron Hall of Birkenhead, News Corp’s Rupert Murdoch and Netflix’s Reed Hastings are all not Jewish. There are, of course, Jewish people who work in broadcast media, the print media or are active in Hollywood. But the idea of some form of collective Jewish control of ‘the media’ is a false and therefore antisemitic charge.

ACCUSATION: Jews are the cause of all wars and worldly ills

TRUTH: Jews have been falsely accused of being behind numerous wars, terrorism, diseases and additional worldly troubles. This antisemitic canard is partly linked to economic antisemitism; the idea that Jews start all wars to profit from them.

During the Middle Ages, Jews were accused of being responsible for the black death, the bubonic plague, which ravaged Europe. It was a pandemic that caused the death of an estimated 25 million people.²⁹ This was a false accusation. However, as with many conspiracies it fed from kernels of truth. For example, there was a reduced degree of effect of the plague on the Jewish community at the time, which practiced swift burial of the dead, as is Jewish tradition. Jews were subsequently accused of poisoning wells, an accusation which persisted long after the period of the black death. Later, in the early 20th century, Jews were blamed for “stabbing Germany in the back”, the loss of World War I, a myth believed by many conservatives in Weimar Germany, a myth that Hitler opportunistically seized upon. In more modern times, conspiracy theorists have alleged that Jews are to blame for the September 11th 2001 terror attacks against America, as well as taking part in ‘false flag’ terrorist attacks. In some cases, these conspiracy theories will use the word “Israel” or “Zionists” instead “Jew”. This is a form of anti-Zionism which has crossed the boundary into antisemitism; blaming Jews as a collective for causing war or terrorism.

During the ongoing 2019-2020 Covid-19 virus pandemic, Jews were accused of being the cause of the virus within several antisemitic circles. Several themes emerged, including: the virus as a fake Jewish conspiracy, the virus as real but being spread by Jews for wicked purposes, and Jews as the principal spreaders of the virus.³⁰ These patently false accusations echo the antisemitic conspiracacy theory of Jews being the cause of the Medieval Black Death.

27 https://www.un.org/en/holocaustremembrance/docs/pdf/Volume%20I/The_History_of_the_Jews_in_Europe.pdf

28 Vincent Brook, ‘Still and Empire of their own: how Jews remain atop a reinvented Hollywood’, in *From Shtetl to Stardom: Jews and Hollywood: The Jewish Role in American Life*, Vol.14, Purude University Press, 2017

29 <https://www.britannica.com/event/Black-Death>

30 <https://cst.org.uk/news/blog/2020/04/08/coronavirus-and-the-plague-of-antisemitism>

ACCUSATION: Jews controlled the slave trade

TRUTH: Jews have been accused of controlling the Atlantic slave trade; transporting enslaved African people to Europe and the Americas between the 16th and 19th centuries. This notion echoes the antisemitic tropes contained in the Protocols about Jewish control and finance, as well as Jews being behind all the world's ills. In this case, it is alleged that if Jews didn't finance and therefore economically control the slave trade, there would have been no transportation of enslaved Africans across the Atlantic, a clear former world ill. This antisemitic canard has been peddled by those across the political spectrum. Louis Farrakhan, Leader of the Nation of Islam, who has been accused of being an antisemite, for comments such as "you are the synagogue of Satan, and you have wrapped your tentacles around the U.S. government,"³¹ who also accused Jews of suppressing African Americans, has supported it.³² Farrakhan has supported the debunked book, 'The Secret Relationship Between Blacks and Jews: Volume One', published by the Nation of Islam with no specified author, which distorts the historical record.³³ David Duke, the former Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, has also promoted this antisemitic trope, as has Jackie Walker, a left-wing activist and Labour Party supporter expelled from the party.

Jews were somewhat involved in the slave trade at the time, as ship owners, but to argue that they had a degree of extra control, were the chief financiers or were overrepresented in the trade, is a false charge with no historical basis. History professor Eli Faber, at City University New York, found that far from being

over-represented, "Jewish merchants and shippers were not involved at all; they represent a minuscule portion of owners of ships", and they were "directly proportionate" to their population.³⁴ Other studies have shown that Jews were only one of many minority groups who were involved in the slave trade, including "Arabs, Berbers, scores of African ethnic groups, Italians, Portuguese, Spaniards, Dutch, Jews, Germans, Swedes, French, English, Danes, white Americans, Native Americans, and even thousands of New World blacks who had been emancipated or were descended from freed slaves."³⁵



Memento Mori depicting a wealthy man with a small black boy, with moralistic questions in Hebrew, 1681 © Jewish Museum London

31 <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/louis-farrakhan>

32 Ibid

33 <https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-labour-s-latest-blaming-jews-for-slave-trade-1.5390569>

34 <https://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-arts-and-culture/books/137476/slave-trade-black-muslim>

35 <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/jews-and-the-african-slave-trade/>

ACCUSATION: The Holocaust didn't happen, but if it did, it was done on purpose for Jews to get money and Israel

TRUTH: The Holocaust took place from the time of Nazi persecution of Jews in 1933, through the 1941 decision for the 'Final Solution' where all Jews would be murdered, until the end of the Second World War in 1945. There is a plethora of evidence of the Holocaust, from the remains of the camps in Europe, witness testimony, Nazi documentation about their atrocities and photographs and film taken at the time. In Europe before the Second World War, according to the Federal Agency for Civic Education, there were 9,689,500 Jews in Europe³⁶. It is estimated that some six million Jews were murdered by the Nazis, with almost 97% of Lithuania's Jewish community, and 88.25% of Poland's Jewish community decimated. Holocaust denial, whether denying it happened outright or by distorting the facts, is antisemitic as it undermines the persecution, suffering and trauma the Jewish community experienced during this dark period of history, often with a view to repeating it.

The concept that the Holocaust, and murder of nearly 6 million members of the Jewish community, has been used for Jewish financial gain is insulting and antisemitic. Jews have rightly been entitled to reparations for their losses suffered during the Holocaust. It is estimated that between 1933 to 1945, the Nazis stole between \$12 and \$32 billion worth real estate from Jews.³⁷ An Israeli government report estimated total material damage suffered by Jews during the Holocaust to be worth \$240 billion.³⁸ This economic and material loss suffered by the Jewish community is not trivial.

The notion that the creation of the State of Israel was somehow concocted by Zionists who supported the Holocaust, or colluded with Nazis, as a means to an end, is false and antisemitic. This allegation partly emanates from a skewed interpretation of the Ha'avara Agreement of 1933, which was a transfer

pact between the Zionist Federation of Germany and the German government to give several Jews the ability to immigrate to British Mandate of Palestine, but only by surrendering all their assets. It was explicitly about currency export restrictions. The Nazis themselves opposed Zionism in all its forms, and the Ha'avara Agreement was simply a means to an end. Hitler didn't care where the Jews were, as long as they were gone. This was not the first wave of immigration; in reality, Jews had been moving to Palestine since the 1800s, to flee persecution and pogroms (racist and ideologically motivated murders and attacks).

The concept that the Jews schemed to cause the Holocaust to obtain the State of Israel, or today act with impunity against Palestinians, is another antisemitic conspiracy theory promoted today by those on all sides of the political spectrum. In 2019, Al Jazeera's AJ+ channel had to withdraw an Arabic video they had promoted which accused Zionism of being derived from Nazi ideology and for claiming that Jews exploited the Nazi massacres in Europe to gain the state of Israel.³⁹ Others accuse of Israel of today using the Holocaust to justify the oppression of Palestinians. For example, linguist Noam Chomsky said Israel was exploiting "the world's most horrifying atrocity in order to justify oppression of others. That kind of manipulation is really sick."⁴⁰ Accusing Jews as a collective, namely as the state of Israel, of using the Holocaust for insinuated reprehensible purposes is grossly offensive.

36 https://www.bpb.de/fsd/centropa/ermordete_juden_nach_land.php

37 Stephen Denburg, *Reclaiming Their Past: A Survey of Jewish Efforts to Restitute European Property*, Boston College Third World Law Journal, Vol.18 (Issue.2), 1998

38 <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/21/world/africa/israel-sets-holocaust-damages-at-240-billion.html>

39 <https://www.timesofisrael.com/al-jazeera-pulls-video-claiming-jews-exploited-holocaust-to-create-israel/>

40 <https://chomsky.info/dissent01/>

ACCUSATION: Jews are not involved in British life and are more loyal to Israel

TRUTH: The charge of dual loyalty, that Jews are more loyal to another entity such as Israel is an antisemitic myth that has persevered since the Roman era and some would argue since early biblical times. This antisemitic canard has led to the persecution of Jews throughout history, including famously Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a French artillery officer, who, in 1884, was charged with treason because he was not perceived to be loyal to France and subsequently faced antisemitic abuse. Dreyfus had ambitions of being an army officer, and the antisemitism employed against him constructed him as a Jewish army officer, an agent of the Jewish collective. The charges were false, and he was exonerated in 1906, but the falsehood of Jewish disloyalty continues. In Nazi Germany, the Nazis accused the Jews of stabbing their country in the back following the first world war, as they were disloyal to their motherland of Germany.

This antisemitic charge has not been consigned to history. Today many Jewish parliamentarians and those in public life are falsely accused of dual-loyalty; of serving Israel's interests rather than the interests of their local community and the country. They have a right to support Israel (or not) and to visit Israel, but that does not mean they are somehow bound to that foreign state, and to suggest they are is antisemitic because it repeats an old prejudice that Jews cannot be good citizens and patriots.

In Britain, Jews can be found in every walk of life, contributing to British society. There are Jews who serve in the Police and often join the Jewish Police Association. During World War II, approximately 1.5 million Jews served in the allied armies⁴¹, with over 100,00 having served in the British military over the past three centuries, and nearly 6,000 were killed while serving the country.⁴²



Military degradation of Captain Alfred Dreyfus, 1895

41 https://www.yadvashem.org/holocaust/about/combat-resistance/jewish-soldiers.html#narrative_info

42 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/history/world-war-two/11698268/Britains-Jews-stand-proud-ready-to-serve-Queen-and-Country.html>

Modern Misconceptions

MISCONCEPTION: All Jews are White

TRUTH: In Europe, many Jews appear white. This perception has been appropriated by the far-right to accuse Jews of infiltrating white, European society and denigrating their 'pureness'. For example, in French author, Renaud Camus's 'Great Replacement', non-European peoples have replaced white Europeans.⁴³ According to the far right, the Great Replacement includes white genocide, perpetrated by Jews. This is why at the Charlottesville 'Unite the Right' rally in 2017, protestors in the evening at the University of Virginia chanted, "Jews will not replace us".⁴⁴ Conversely, the claim that all Jews are white has been appropriated by other groups to accuse Jews of not suffering prejudice and to dismiss antisemitism or accuse Jews of lying about its existence, often when considering structural racism.

Jews are found all over the world, not just in Europe, and there are four main Jewish ethnic divisions within the global Jewish community today. Ashkenazi Jews have roots in Germany, and Central Europe while Sephardi Jews have roots in Spain and Portugal. Mizrahi Jews have their roots in the Middle East

including Iran, Iraq, Egypt, Sudan, Tunisia, Algeria, Syria, Libya and Morocco. Yemenite Jews form of a part of the Mizrahi branch, but are often considered an independent group. Finally, Ethiopian Jews have roots in Ethiopia and the surrounding area, who are also known as the 'Beta Israel', or the Children of Israel. Even within each group, and of course there are those that do not fall into the groupings set out above, there are different ethnicities and groups, each with their individual traditions and customs and therefore cannot be categorised as one ethnicity, such as 'white'. Jewish tradition dictates that the Jewish homeland prior to dispersal to the diaspora, was in biblical Israel.

Jews are targeted by white supremacists and neo-Nazis as being not what; they are said to be at the very heart of the non-white threat to the 'white race'. But sometimes opponents of white supremacism, antiracist movements, define Jews as white, and therefore as not part of the opposition to white supremacism. This excludes Jews from both 'white' society and from antiracist society. In some contexts Jews can pass as white, but that passing is always open to challenge.



Portrait of the Suleiman ben Pinhas al-Cohen family in 1944 in Yemen

⁴³ <https://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/blog/fear-filled-apocalypses-the-far-rights-use-of-conspiracy-theory>

⁴⁴ <https://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-white-virginia-rally-20170811-story.html>

MISCONCEPTION: Judaism is just a religion

TRUTH: Many Jews are not religious at all but still feel their Jewishness to be an important part of their identity. It has often been true that Jews who are not religious have nevertheless been targets of antisemitism and Jews are free to feel their Jewishness in whatever way works for them.

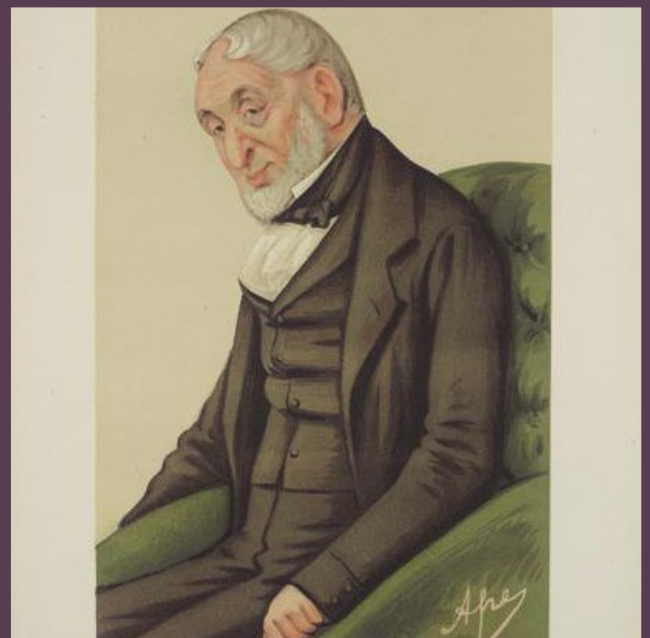
But when people try to define from outside, and sometimes in a hostile way, who is Jewish and who isn't, this is often experienced as antisemitism. According to Orthodox Jewish law, in Hebrew 'halacha', a person can be a Jew from birth if born to a Jewish mother, or by undergoing an extensive conversion process. Some streams of Judaism also recognise patrilineal descent (the father being Jewish). Previously, 'race' was viewed as a purely physical distinction, but today, a race is considered a social construct which constitutes a group of people who have a shared history, language, culture as well as many other commonalities. The Equalities Act 2010 includes colour, nationality and ethnic or national origins as definers of race.⁴⁵ Some people refer to Judaism as a 'nation', a group of people bonded again by a shared history, culture, language or territory.

Jews share a common history from the biblical times. Jews are now based throughout the diaspora, following several expulsions from the ancient land of Israel. This heritage of belonging to one group, although dispersed several millennia ago, unites the Jewish people. Different groups of Jews may speak several languages including Yiddish, have different cultural practices such as ways of dress and foods, but all have a shared religion and all the traditions that come with it; Judaism. Many Jews consider themselves to be culturally Jewish; namely, they do not attend synagogue or perhaps pray, but they have an alternate affinity to Judaism such as cultural practices, or through a connection to Israel.

British law defines Jews as a race, or an ethnic group, alongside other groups such as Sikhs and Irish Travellers.

MISCONCEPTION: Jews only vote for the Conservative Party

TRUTH: Jews are not politically homogenous and vote for every and any party. British Jews have also been selected as candidates for almost every party in the United Kingdom including the former Liberal party, the old Liberal Unionist party, the Labour party, the Conservative party, the Liberal Democrat Party, the Communist Party and the old Social Democrat party. In 2010, a Jewish Policy Research Poll⁴⁶ showed that 31% of Jews in the UK leaned towards supporting the Labour party, with 30% leaning to Conservatives and 11% to Liberal Democrats. More recently, a poll showed that 64% of Jews had planned to vote for the Conservatives in the 2019 election⁴⁷, after several years of allegations of antisemitism in the Labour party. The lack of support for the Labour party when Corbyn was leader should be an alarm bell for the party; why would Jews feel uncomfortable voting for them? Rather than a reason to see the Jewish community as the problem. Historically, however, Jews have a rich history of association with the Labour party, today through the Jewish Labour Movement, originally established as Poale Zion in 1903.



Lionel De Rothschild, Liberal Member of Parliament
© Jewish Museum London

⁴⁵ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/part/2>

⁴⁶ <https://www.jpr.org.uk/documents/The%20political%20leanings%20of%20British%20Jews.pdf>

⁴⁷ <https://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/election-poll-2019-survation-jn/>

MISCONCEPTION: Jews have big families and drive big cars

TRUTH: Jews come from all sections of society, and some have large families with many children, and some have smaller families or no children. A study recently showed that the Charedi community, the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community, had an average of 6.9 children. However, secular Jews had an average of 1.65 children⁴⁸. For those who have almost seven children, or sometimes, even more, they will need a larger car (though many Jews cannot afford cars, and some stereotypes of flamboyancy or wealth touch on aforementioned myths), but this is not the case for the majority of Jews in Britain, who are not ultra-Orthodox and who have fewer children. Jews in Britain are just like any other community; with a wide range in size.



MISCONCEPTION: Jews create their own ghettos and only marry other Jews

TRUTH: Ghettos historically have been used to house members of a minority community, usually as a form of segregation. The first ghetto was created in Venice in 1516, where Jews were forced to reside. Ghettos themselves have often been more impoverished than other parts of a city. During the Nazi period, ghettos were established to house Jews to prevent them from mixing or residing alongside what the Nazis viewed as the Aryan race. To accuse Jews of creating ghettos today is offensive.

In the United Kingdom today, many Jews choose to live in areas where there is access to a synagogue, kosher shops and other Jewish facilities. This is comparable to many different groups who live near services that they might require for religious or other purposes. Many Jews live in the larger cities, such as London and Manchester, with three out of every five Jews living in Greater London, but there are many smaller Jewish communities across Britain in smaller cities, towns and villages. In 2011, 263,436 Jews lived in England and Wales, according to the census, with Jews living in each of the 348 local authorities⁴⁹.

Between 1990 until 2006, the Jewish community in the United Kingdom fell from 340,000 in Britain to 270,000. Many Jewish people do not marry other Jews, with up to half the Jewish community marrying people outside of the faith.

⁴⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/may/21/religion.britishidentity>

⁴⁹ [https://www.jpr.org.uk/documents/2011%20Census%20results%20\(England%20and%20Wales\)%20-%20Initial%20insights%20about%20the%20UK%20Jewish%20population.pdf](https://www.jpr.org.uk/documents/2011%20Census%20results%20(England%20and%20Wales)%20-%20Initial%20insights%20about%20the%20UK%20Jewish%20population.pdf)

MISCONCEPTION: All Jews have the same name or surname

TRUTH: There is a misconception that there is a particular Jewish name common to all Jews. Numerous satirical shows play on Polish or German stylised names to emphasise this point. In truth, many Jews have changed their names over centuries, including those forced to change their names when fleeing antisemitism including during the Holocaust.

The name 'Cohen' is a common surname, originating in the bible. The name descends from the word 'Kohen' which means priest and the 'Kohanim' were the priestly group. It is the most common surname in Israel today, and there are many variants on the spelling. There are many other Jewish surnames which originate from biblical times, such as Levy, Isaac, Jacobs and Asher.

Traditionally, Jewish names are formatted as 'Forename' + 'Son of / Daughter of' + 'Father's name', so with time, surnames have changed. Other names adopted by Jews were historically based on one's profession, such as Cantor, the lead singer in the synagogue, or Fleishman, meaning butcher in German. Today, Jews can be found with a vast range of surnames, from the traditional Jewish names like Cohen, Levy and Goldberg, to very anglicised surnames like Smith, Jones or Taylor.

MISCONCEPTION: Jews have sex through a sheet

TRUTH: One more bizarre myth that has been perpetuated is the idea that Jewish couples have sex through a sheet. This is a false rumour which is not substantiated; no branch of Judaism calls on couples to have sex through a sheet. Sex in Judaism is not seen as shameful; it is encouraged as a means of procreation. There are many rules and restrictions in Jewish law, but the concept of a sheet is not substantiated. In Jewish law, there cannot be a separation between the two people. The myth may have originated by the use of the 'talit' or prayer shawl, which is a large rectangular shawl, which is worn by Orthodox Jewish men under their clothing, or over their clothing during prayers in the synagogue.



Fiddler on the Roof costume with a tallit
© Jewish Museum London

The Antisemitism Policy Trust's mission is to educate and empower parliamentarians, policy makers and opinion formers to address antisemitism. It provides the secretariat to the British All-Party Parliamentary Group Against Antisemitism and works internationally with parliamentarians and others to address antisemitism. The Antisemitism Policy Trust is focussed on educating and empowering decision makers in the UK and across the world to effectively address antisemitism.

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Antisemitism Policy Trust



mail@antisemitism.org.uk

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