



Voices Into Action is a free online educational program that brings key social justice issues to the forefront while meeting provincial requirements for secondary school curriculum.



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Contemporary Antisemitism



Girl who faced antisemitism in high school

Introduction

It is tempting to believe that the dark days of the Holocaust have been consigned to history. True, the Holocaust is over, and for that we are all grateful. But, have the causes of the Holocaust, antisemitism and the hatred of Jews, really been eradicated?

The truth is that there has been and currently continues to be an alarming rise of antisemitic incidents and attacks on Jewish people and their culture worldwide. While the most alarming increase has been in Europe, we in North America, and especially Canada, are not immune.

Antisemitism has different guises:

- It may be political, as in Hungary, where a far-right political party is gaining power. Typically, this form of antisemitism blames Jews for all that is wrong in their country, even though the Jewish population may be very small there.
- It may find expression in the media. This is usually, but not always, more subtle. It may find expression in caricatures such as editorial cartoons, biased reportage and commentary, or manipulation of language. It often resides in letters to the editor, where there are references to a “powerful Jewish lobby” and suggestions that Jews control the banks, the media and government itself.

- It may take the form of Holocaust denial. In some cases, the Holocaust may be dismissed as unimportant, irrelevant or distorted. A high profile case in Canada involved a German immigrant, Ernst Zundel, who published pamphlets asking *Did Six Million Really Die?* Clearly he was denying the Holocaust had ever taken place.
- It still exists in the form of historical blood-libels where Jews are accused of murdering non-Jews for nefarious purposes associated with religious practice. In times past, this would rear its head around Passover when Jews were thought to murder Christian children and use their blood in the making of matzoh (the unleavened bread eaten at Passover).
- It exists in the persistence of the *Protocols of Zion*. Published in Russia in 1903, this antisemitic trope accuses Jews of plotting to take over the world. Long been exposed as a forgery and a hoax, it is still popular in some quarters, especially in the Middle East.
- It may find expression in violence perpetrated against Jews. In France, one of the worst cases occurred in 2006, when Ilan Halimi, a young Jewish man, was taken hostage, and subsequently tortured and killed when the ransom demanded was too high to be paid. In another case, in 2012, a Rabbi and three children were shot and killed as they walked to school in Toulouse, France. In the recent unrest in the Ukraine, a Rabbi and synagogue in Kiev were attacked.
- It may be presented culturally, such as within the performances of Dieudonne M'bala M'bala, a French comedian, or in sport where recently some European athletes have raised their arms in the quenelle, a reverse Nazi salute.

More worrisome, since Jews form such a small minority, governments are reluctant to act on this new rise in antisemitism, seeing it as “an inevitable part of life.”

In the Netherlands, former Dutch defence minister and professor at Leiden University, Frits Bolkestein has said: “Jews have to realize that there is no future for them in the Netherlands and that they best advise their children to leave for the United States or Israel.”

One might conclude that the obvious answer to this is education about antisemitism and the Holocaust. Yet, in France, thousands of schools surveyed by the Ministry of Education revealed that history teachers were not allowed to teach the Holocaust due to backlash from parents, and the threat of possible violence. Some groups within the Muslim community have been trying to cancel Holocaust Remembrance Day.

While Canada has one of the best records for fighting antisemitism, we cannot be complacent. Some sobering facts:

- William “Bible Bill” Aberhart, premier of Alberta from 1935 to 1943, subscribed to the Jewish conspiracy theories of *The Protocols of Zion*. The Social Credit party which he headed, was the only political party in North America to officially endorse antisemitism.
- In the 1980s, high school teacher James Keegstra in Alberta, taught students that Jews were evil and the Holocaust was a hoax. Keegstra referred to Jews as “gutter rats.” In New Brunswick, teacher Malcolm Ross kept his beliefs out of the classroom but publicized them through letters to the editor. This went on for years until complaints from parents and widespread media coverage forced local Boards of Education to remove those racist educators from the classroom.
- In Montreal, a Jewish school was firebombed in 2004.
- Winnipeg is home to a blogger who maintains there is a “Jewish Satanic clique that dominates the world.”
- In 2011, a teenager approached a 15-year-old girl, pulled out a lighter and started flicking it near her head, saying, “Let’s burn the Jew.” A portion of the girl’s hair caught fire. The judge ruled that the boy was “a bully and a jerk” but that the incident was not antisemitic.
- All synagogues, Jewish schools and cultural centres employ security guards. Anyone wishing to enter must go through a security check first.



Professor Irwin Cotler

Former Minister of Justice & Attorney General of Canada - Interview on new Antisemitism

ACTION 1

Do

- Working with a **partner**, make a list of the different expressions of antisemitism and rank them in order of passive to active. Brainstorm other ways that antisemitism might be expressed. Which of these forms is the most dangerous and why?
- A well-known Dutch writer, Leon de Winter, says: "What is happening in the Netherlands and Europe is a prelude of terrible things to come. The great story of the love Jews have for Europe has come to an end. In this sense, the Nazis have been successful. The presence of the Jews in Europe will end." How have Jews contributed to the richness of life in Europe? Choose a country and research their contributions in various fields: literature, the arts, medicine, the sciences, academics. What other areas can you think of? How many of these contributions came from or involved Jews? Create a PowerPoint presentation of your findings.
- Why are people hesitant to speak up when they encounter an expression of antisemitism? What advice can you give to them?
- How has the Internet, especially social media platforms such as YouTube and Facebook been instrumental in the spread of antisemitic propaganda? How might these same platforms be used to combat antisemitism? Make a list of suggestions.
- Working with a small **group** of your classmates, do some research using the Internet and/or library resources. Create a timeline of antisemitic occurrences both in Europe and North America. Make your timeline impactful. Post it in the classroom. Analyze the various occurrences included to indicate the nature of the incident (e.g. violence).
- In the case of the girl whose hair was set on fire in Winnipeg, you can research the judge's ruling. Why

might he have decided this was not antisemitism? Do you agree with the ruling? Why or why not? The boy was ordered to write a letter of apology to the girl and to do a number of hours of community service. Do you think this was effective? The girl's lawyer argued that her "world had been turned upside down." What might this mean? What suggestions do you have for both the girl and the boy in this case to enable them to move forward with their lives in a more positive manner? Share your thoughts with your classmates.

- g. A common argument presented is that the people who express antisemitic sentiments are entitled to do so under the rubric of "freedom of speech." Conduct a formal debate in the classroom: Is "hate speech" an expression of "free speech"? Should there be "reasonable limits" placed on "free speech" to protect others?
- h. Over a period of time designated by your teacher, examine various media, especially newspapers, for expressions of antisemitism or bias against Jews: consider caricatures such as in editorial cartoons, letters to the editor, language, and opinion. Keep a file of your clippings and other findings. Share them with your classmates and explain your thinking. Identify 10-15 of your most striking examples and use them to create a found poem. Present your poem to the class. Rewrite or redraw some of your examples to present a more fair, accurate and unbiased representation.

ACTION 2

Discuss

Lessons from the Holocaust.

Irwin Cotler is the Member of Parliament for Mount Royal (Montreal) and the Liberal Party of Canada's Critic for Rights and Freedoms and International Justice. He is also an Emeritus Professor of Law at McGill University, former Minister of Justice & Attorney General of Canada, and an international human rights lawyer. He is founding chairman of the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights.

He writes: "We will speak up and act against racism, against hate, against anti-Semitism, against mass atrocity, against injustice, and against the crime of crimes whose name we should shudder to mention: genocide." Read the full article and discuss as a class how you might speak up and act against hate.

[Lessons from the Holocaust](#)

ACTION 3



The Mutating Virus: Understanding Antisemitism

Keynote address by Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks at the European Parliament, September 27, 2016