

# Antisemitism in a Historical Perspective

The George Washington University  
Spring 2022

HIST 2051.80  
JSTD 2002.81  
HONR 2053.81

T 11:10-1:00pm  
1957 E Street, B16  
Office Hours: T 2:00-4:00pm

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From North America to Europe, there has been a noticeable rise in antisemitism in recent years. According to the Anti-Defamation League, “2019 and 2020 were, respectively, the highest and third-highest years on record for cases of harassment, vandalism, and assault against Jews in the United States since tracking began in 1979.” During the fighting between Hamas and Israel in 2021, violent antisemitism surged in the US, with high-profile attacks in cities like New York and Los Angeles. Just last semester, there was a particularly ugly antisemitic episode here at GW, in which a fraternity with a substantial Jewish membership was vandalized and a replica Torah scroll was desecrated. Meanwhile, according to a recent study, 90% of European Jews believe antisemitism has increased in their countries and is a serious problem and 38% of Jews have considered emigrating because they do not feel safe in the EU.

The current spike in antisemitism, along with the debate over how to define antisemitism in the first place, serves as a backdrop for this course, which aims to trace the long pedigree and elusive meaning of antisemitism from ancient times to the present. We will focus primarily on antisemitism as a discourse—that is, as a shifting, but often recurring, complex of terms, ideas, beliefs, myths, symbols, and tropes—and less on analyzing actual acts of antisemitic violence. Is antisemitism what some have called the “longest hatred,” extending over millennia and continents? Or is it primarily a *modern* phenomenon that originated around the time the term was coined in 1879? Should we speak of anti-Judaism and antisemitism as distinct concepts, and if so, what is the historical relationship between them? Is Jew-hatred always simply a projection of irrational Gentile fears and fantasies onto Jews, or does it have any basis, however distorted, in Jewish actions and behavior? What is the relationship between antisemitism and other forms of group hatred? What similarities and differences do we find between right-wing and left-wing antisemitism? Is anti-Zionism antisemitism? These are among the questions this seminar will address. My hope is that you will emerge from this class armed with a historical perspective that will make you more clear-eyed, discerning judges of what constitutes antisemitism and more informed participants in the struggle to combat it.

## Learning Objectives

This course has several learning objectives that will serve as the basis for assessment. Students should emerge from this class better able to:

- Distinguish between and critique different theories and definitions of antisemitism.
- Grasp and explain both continuities and ruptures in the history of antisemitism.
- Articulate the relevance of a historical perspective on antisemitism to making sense of antisemitism in the present.
- Reason historically, e.g., by thinking contextually and concretely, avoiding unwarranted generalizations and anachronisms, perceiving change and continuity over time,
- Analyze both primary *and* secondary literature critically, e.g., by attending to things like context, structure, implications, and argument, distinguishing thesis from supporting evidence, considering alternative explanations for given data, discerning possible authorial biases, etc.
- Write a term paper that demonstrates research, writing, and analytical skills.
- Develop and hone oral communication skills.

### Course Assignments

- **Response Papers** (30%). Over the course of the semester, you will be expected to submit **three** 1-2 page papers responding to the week's topic and readings. I will furnish you with questions in advance of each class that can serve as the basis for a response paper. Alternatively, you can write about anything that strikes you as interesting and important in the readings. These papers should not simply be summaries of a particular reading; they should be more probing and analytical. You will be expected to upload your response paper to Blackboard (see "Assignments") no later than Tuesday mornings at 9:00 AM. The first response paper must be submitted no later than our fourth meeting (**February 1**).
- **Oral Presentation** (15%). Each student will be responsible for giving an oral presentation (roughly ten minutes) introducing one of the readings in class this semester. In the presentation, the student will:
  - Provide a *biographical portrait* of the author. The length of this section of the presentation will probably vary based on whether it is about a *primary source* (in which case it would be expected to be somewhat longer) or a *secondary source*. If you choose to present a secondary source, the biographical precis should focus less on the various academic titles/credentials of the author and more on the main themes and subjects of their body of work.
  - Describe its *historical context* (if the text is a *primary source*). This might entail tackling questions such as: when was the text written to our knowledge? What issues or problems or circumstances prompted the author to write it? Does the text offer evidence of any authorial/ideological biases? The goal is to provide historical background that can illuminate our understanding of the text in question.
  - Summarize the main points of interest in the reading and propose interesting points and questions for consideration and further discussion by the class.

- Speak with clarity and poise and forge a connection to the class through making eye contact, using hand gestures and vocal modulations to illustrate certain key points, etc.

Following the presentation, the student should upload whatever notes they have used to Blackboard (see “Assignments”). You may create a visual presentation with slides, but you are not obligated to.

- **Term Paper** (25%--5% (abstract); 20% (final paper). Students will have two options for their term paper (10-12 pages, double-spaced, 12” font). One is to produce a work of original historical research, based on a mix of primary and secondary sources, on a topic of interest to them that relates to the history of antisemitism. The other is to write a review essay based on at least three scholarly books or articles that deal with a common topic in the history of antisemitism. Whichever of the options you choose, your topic need not be something we are covering extensively (or at all) in class; it simply must be relevant to the subject of the course. All students should plan on meeting with me by the end of January to discuss which of the options makes the most sense for you. An abstract for this paper must be uploaded to Blackboard (see “Assignments”) no later than Friday, **February 18**; the final paper must be uploaded no later than Friday, **April 15**. Unless you have obtained an extension from me, failure to submit either of these assignments on time will result in a reduction of a full grade.
- **Final Exam** (20%). There will be a take-home final exam consisting of two essays of roughly 1250 words each. It will be posted the last day of class (April 19) and must be uploaded to Blackboard (see “Assignments”) no later than Friday, **April 29**. Unless you have obtained an extension from me, failure to submit either of these assignments on time will result in a reduction of a full grade.
- **Participation** (10%). This course will be taught seminar-style. To succeed it will require that you come to class prepared to discuss the topic and assigned readings. Participation can take the form of asking and answering questions (of me and of other members of the class), sharing insights and observations, requesting clarification of certain points, etc. What we want to try to avoid is a situation in which only a handful of students regularly contribute. That is one of the objectives of the response papers—to ensure that a broad range of students come to class with something to say. I realize that some people are simply more reticent than others. But to earn a high mark on participation, you will have to engage in class discussion. NB: There is no such thing as a stupid question. Don’t worry that what you’re asking might seem too basic. If you are confused, it’s likely others are as well.

## Course Readings

The following books can be bought or rented at the GW Bookstore (or through other websites) and are on reserve at Gelman Library. At the library, you should request the books under the HIST 2051 course listing

- Steven Beller, *Antisemitism: A Very Short Introduction*, 2nd edition (Oxford, 2015) (**Gelman E-Book**)

- David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (WW Norton, 2014)
- Richard S. Levy, ed., *Antisemitism in the Modern World: An Anthology of Texts* (DC Heath and Co, 1990)
- Paul Hanebrink, *A Specter Haunting Europe: The Myth of Judeo-Bolshevism* (Harvard UP, 2020)  
(Gelman E-Book)

In addition to sections of these books, you will find various other readings listed in the schedule of classes. These are alternately designated as **ER** (meaning they can be found on Electronic Reserve on Blackboard) or **Gelman E-Book** (which means they are accessible as an e-book in Gelman Library's collection). Occasionally, I have simply created a hyperlink to the reading on the syllabus.

T Jan 11      **Introduction**

- <https://www.state.gov/defining-antisemitism/>
- <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-combating-anti-semitism/>
- <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-bill/852/text>
- “[Antisemitism Training Video](#),” Antisemitism Education Initiative, UC Berkeley

T Jan 18      **Definitions**

- Steven Beller, *Antisemitism: A Very Short History*, 1-8
- Richard Levy, *Antisemitism in the Modern World*, 2-11
- Gavin Langmuir, “Toward a Definition of Antisemitism,” in *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism* (University of California, 1990), 311-52 (**ER**)
- David Engel, “Away from a Definition of Antisemitism,” in Jeremy Cohen and Moshe Rosman, eds., *Rethinking European Jewish History* (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization), 30-53 (**ER**)
- Nirenberg, 1-12
- Jonathan Judaken, “AHR Roundtable: Introduction,” in *American Historical Review* 123, no. 4 (2018): 1122-1135 (**ER**)

T Jan 25      **Judeophobia in the Ancient World**

- Josephus, from *Against Apion* (**ER**)
- Tacitus, from *Histories* (**ER**)
- Nirenberg, 13-47
- Peter Schäfer, *Judeophobia: Attitudes toward the Jews in the Ancient World* (Harvard, 1997), 197-211 (**ER**)

Th Jan 27      **“Blood Libel: On the Trail of an Antisemitic Myth”**

Prof. **Magda Teter** (Fordham University)  
5:00 PM—Zoom Link to Follow

T Feb 1

### Early Christianity and the Early Church

- Paul, “Epistle to the Galatians” (ER)
- Augustine, from *Reply to Faustus the Manichean* (ER)
- ---, from *City of God* (ER)
- John Chrysostom, from *Discourse against Judaizing Christians* (ER)
- Langmuir, “Anti-Judaism as the Necessary Preparation for Antisemitism,” in *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism*, 57-62 (ER)
- Nirenberg, 48-134
- \*Paula Fredriksen, [“Augustine and ‘Thinking with’ Jews: Rhetoric Pro- and Contra Iudaeos”](#)

T Feb 8

### The Medieval Roots of Antisemitic Myths

- Thomas of Monmouth, [“The Life and Miracles of St. William of Norwich”](#)
- Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews: The Medieval Conception of the Jew and Its Relation to Modern Anti-Semitism* [1943] (JPS, 1983), 11-53 (ER)
- Magda Teter, *Blood Libel: On the Trail of an Antisemitic Myth*, 1-43 (Gelman E-Book)
- Sara Lipton, “The Invention of the Jewish Nose,” *The New York Review of Books*, November 14, 2014 (ER)
- Nirenberg, 183-216

T Feb 15

### Race and Religion in Early Modern Europe

- [Sentencia-Estatuto de Toledo \(1449\)](#)
- David Nirenberg, [“Was There Race before Modernity? The Example of Jewish Blood in Late Medieval Spain”](#) (ER)
- George Fredrickson, “Religion and the Invention of Racism,” in *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton, 2002) (ER)
- Yosef Yerushalmi, “Assimilation and Racial Antisemitism: The Iberian and the German Models,” *Leo Baeck Institute Memorial Lecture* (1982) (ER)

T Feb 22

### Anti-Judaism and Enlightenment

- Richard Levy, *Antisemitism in the Modern World*, 37-46 (Voltaire)
- “Debate on the Eligibility of Jews for Citizenship,” French National Assembly, in Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, eds., *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Oxford, 2011), 123-5 (ER)
- Arthur Hertzberg, *The French Enlightenment and the Jews: The Origins of Modern Anti-Semitism* [1968] (Columbia University, 1990), 268-313 (ER)

- Adam Sutcliffe, “Judaism and the Politics of Enlightenment,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 49:5 (Jan. 2006): 702-15 (ER)
- Nirenberg, 325-86

T Mar 1 **Nationalism and Romanticism**

- Richard Wagner, “Judaism in Music” (ER)
- Beller, 11-56
- Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York, 1964), 13-30 (ER)
- Jacob Katz, *From Prejudice to Destruction: Anti-Semitism, 1700-1933* (Harvard, 1980), 175-94 (ER)

T Mar 8 **The Marx Problem**

- Bruno Bauer, “The Jewish Problem” (ER)
- Karl Marx, “On the Jewish Question” (ER)
- Edmund Silberner, “Was Marx an Anti-Semite?” (ER)
- Robert Fine, “Rereading Marx on the Jewish Question: Marx as a Critic of Antisemitism?” in Markus Stoetzler, ed., *Antisemitism and the Constitution of Sociology* (University of Nebraska Press, 2014), 137-59 (ER)
- Nirenberg, 423-59

T Mar 15 **SPRING BREAK**

T Mar 22 **Antisemitism: Name Change or New Idea?**

- Levy, 49-93, 104-12, 125-27 (Wagner, Stoecker, Treitschke, Marr, Drumont, Antisemites’ Petition)
- Beller, 57-73
- Shulamit Volkov, “Antisemitism as a Cultural Code: Reflections on the History and Historiography of Antisemitism in Imperial Germany,” *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 23, no. 1 (1978): 25-46 (ER)
- Katz, *From Prejudice to Destruction*, 245-300 (ER)

T Mar 29 **The Myth of Judeo-Bolshevism**

- Paul Hanebrink, *A Specter Haunting Europe: The Myth of Judeo-Bolshevism*
- Jonathan Frankel, “The Non-Jewish Jew Revisited: Solzhenitsyn and the Issue of National Guilt,” in Richard I. Cohen, Jonathan Frankel, and Stefani Hoffman, eds., *Insiders and Outsiders: Dilemmas of East European Jewry* (Oxford: Littman Library, 2010), 166-87 (ER)

T Apr 5 **Hitler, Germans, Nazism, and the Holocaust**

- Adolf Hitler, “A Letter on the Jewish Question (September 16, 1919) (ER)
- Levy, 203-223 (Hitler)
- Beller, 74-100
- Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews, Vol. 1: The Years of Persecution, 1933-1939* (Harper Perennial, 1997), 73-112 (ER)
- Zygmunt Bauman, “Modernity, Racism, Extermination I,” in *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cornell UP, 1989), 31-60 (ER)
- A. Dirk Moses, “Redemptive Antisemitism and the Imperialist Imaginary,” in Christian Wiese and Paul Betts, eds., *Years of Persecution, Years of Extermination: Saul Friedländer and the Future of Holocaust Studies* (Continuum, 2010), 233-54 (ER)
- Doris Bergen, “Antisemitism in the Nazi Era,” in Albert Lindemann and Richard Levy, ed., *Antisemitism: A History* (2010), 196-211 (ER)

T Apr 12

### **The New Antisemitism?**

- Beller, 101-27
- Meir Litvak and Esther Webman, “Israel and Antisemitism,” in Albert Lindemann and Richard Levy, ed., *Antisemitism: A History* (2010), 237-49 (ER)
- Jonathan Judaken, “So what’s new? Rethinking the ‘new antisemitism’ in a global age,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 42: 4/5 (2008): 531-60 (ER)
- David Schraub, “White Jews: An Intersectional Approach,” *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 43, no. 2 (2019), 379-407 (ER)
- Primary Sources: IHRA, JDA, and Nexus Definitions and Comparative table:  
[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1NTXABxzm0b9X7dICArFq5Cx5tbH96pgNahWDHyHY8\\_o/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1NTXABxzm0b9X7dICArFq5Cx5tbH96pgNahWDHyHY8_o/edit)

T Apr 19

### **Islamophobia, Immigration, “White Genocide,” and Antisemitism**

- Ivan Kalmar and Tariq Ramadan, “Antisemitism and Islamophobia: Historical and Contemporary Connections and Parallels,” in Josef Meri, ed., *The Routledge Handbook of Jewish-Muslim Relations* (Routledge, 2016), 351-72 (ER)
- Andrew S. Winston, “‘Jews will not replace us!’ Antisemitism, Interbreeding, and Immigration in Historical Context,” *American Jewish History* 105 (2021): 1-24 (ER)
- Southern Poverty Law Center, “[Analyzing a terrorist's social media manifesto: the Pittsburgh synagogue shooter's posts on Gab](#)”
- Kevin McDonald, *The Culture of Critique*, excerpts (ER)
- David Samuels, “[American Racist](#),” *Tablet*, June 11, 2020

### **Course Expectations and Course Conduct**

You are expected to attend all meetings, to complete all assignments, and to participate in class discussions. I understand that sometimes missing class will be unavoidable and would appreciate if you inform me in advance that you will be absent for a particular class. You should also not attend class if you are experiencing any symptoms of COVID. Whether or not the course thrives will be determined by our collective investment and effort. This means putting in the work. It also means being able to engage in discussion with one another respectfully and thoughtfully. In order to pass the course, you must complete *all* assignments.

### **Laptop Policy**

We will discuss this on the first day of class.

### **Recording Policy**

I do not permit independent audio or visual recording in the classroom. I will be recording all classes and uploading them to Blackboard, so that if you are unable to attend (especially if you are sick) you are able to listen to the lecture you missed.

### **Time Allocation**

This is a 3-credit based seminar course. Students will spend an hour and fifty minutes (110 minutes) per week in class (25 and a third hours for the semester). Out of class work (including reading and assignments) is estimated at around 5 hours per week. The amount of reading *averages* to around 100-150 pages a week. Sometimes it will be less, sometimes it will be more.

### **Academic Integrity**

Plagiarism and cheating will not be tolerated under any circumstances. It is easy to avoid both: Make sure that your work is your own, and when in doubt, cite the arguments and sources you use in your own work. If you are still in doubt, please ask me or make use of the Writing Center staff. Failing to avoid this misconduct will result in zero course credit. See GW's policy here: <https://studentconduct.gwu.edu/code-academic-integrity>.

### **University Policy on Religious Holidays**

In accordance with university policy, students should notify faculty during the first week of the semester of their intention to be absent from class on their day(s) of religious observance. For details and policy, see: [students.gwu.edu/accommodations-religious-holidays](https://students.gwu.edu/accommodations-religious-holidays).

### **Mental Health Services**

The university's mental health services offers 24/7 assistance and referral to address students' personal, social, career, and study skills problems. Services for students include: crisis and emergency mental health consultations, confidential assessment, counseling services (individual and small group), and referrals. For addition information see: [counselingcenter.gwu.edu/](https://counselingcenter.gwu.edu/)

### **Student Office Hours**



I encourage you to come see me in office hours—you do not need a “reason” to visit as I am happy to chat about course content, current events, or whatever you might be pondering at that particular moment. I look forward to getting to know you. NB: you may opt to attend office hours either in person or virtually, by logging onto Blackboard and entering my personal room on Zoom. I will explain this further on the first day of class.

### **Accommodations**

If you require accommodations related to a disability please register with Disability Support Services as soon as possible. You do not need to disclose anything to me—I will be sure to work directly with DSS to accommodate you as best as possible while still meeting the aims of the course. You can access services here, independently of any conversation with me:

<https://disabilitysupport.gwu.edu/>.

### **Writing Center**

I encourage you to make use of the Writing Center well before writing assignments are due. Work always benefits from another set of eyes, especially trained ones. You can find more information about the Writing Center services here: <https://writingcenter.gwu.edu>.

### **Grade Scale**

The following is the grade scale I will use to translate number grades into letter grades:

93-100: A

90-92: A-

87-89: B+

83-86: B

80-82: B-

77-79: C+

73-76: C

70-72: C-

60-69: D

Anything below: F

## **Emergency Preparedness and Response at The George Washington University**

### **Syllabus Information for Your Students**

#### **To Report an Emergency or Suspicious Activity**

**Call the University Police Department at 202-994-6111 (Foggy Bottom) or 202-242-6111 (Mount Vernon).**

### **Shelter in Place**

Although it is unlikely that we will ever need to shelter in place, it is helpful to know what to do just in case. No matter where you are, the basic steps of shelter in place will generally remain the same.

- If you are inside, stay where you are unless the building you are in is affected. If it is affected, you should evacuate. If you are outdoors, proceed into the closest building or follow instructions from emergency personnel on the scene.
- Locate an interior room to shelter inside. If possible, it should be above ground level and have the fewest number of windows. If sheltering in a room with windows, move away from the windows. If there is a large group of people inside a particular building, several rooms may be necessary.
- Shut and lock all windows (tighter seal) and close exterior doors.
- Turn off air conditioners, heaters, and fans. Close vents to ventilation systems as you are able. (University staff will turn off ventilation as quickly as possible).
- Make a list of the people with you and ask someone to call the list in to UPD so they know where you are sheltering. If only students are present, one of the students should call in the list.
- Await further instructions. If possible, visit Campus Advisories for incident updates (<http://CampusAdvisories.gwu.edu>) or call the GW Information Line 202-994-5050.
- Make yourself comfortable and look after one other. You will get word as soon as it is safe to come out.

### **Evacuation**

An evacuation will be considered if the building we are in is affected or we must move to a location of greater safety. We will always evacuate if the fire alarm sounds. In the event of an evacuation, please gather your personal belongings quickly (purse, keys, GWorld card, etc.) and proceed to the nearest exit. (INSERT TWO WAYS OUT OF THE BUILDING HERE). Do not use the elevator. Once you have evacuated the building, proceed to our primary rendezvous location (INSERT PRIMARY INDOOR RENDEZVOUS LOCATION HERE). In the event that this location is unavailable, we will meet at (INSERT SECONDARY INDOOR RENDEZVOUS LOCATION HERE).