



**NONE SHALL
BE AFRAID**
FIGHTING ANTI-SEMITISM

Anti-Semitism Online

While social media and the internet have become useful tools in bringing the world closer together, they have also increasingly been used as tools for spreading hate, intolerance and anti-Semitism. Social media enables anti-Semitic beliefs, policies and caricatures to be widely disseminated, incites hatred and violence, and emboldens anti-Semites as these beliefs become increasingly visible in mainstream politics. From major networking platforms to deep channels of the dark web, misinformation and hate speech on the internet provide a medium for harassment against Jews that can manifest in physical, psychological and political harm toward Jewish communities.

Anti-Semitic Online Content and Global Responses

Extremist groups and individuals use the internet to organize anti-Semitic activity and share anti-Semitic content. In 2020 social media giants Twitter and Reddit scrutinized anti-Semitic activity on their platforms, investigating and removing hate speech and banning users in some instances. This was the case with former Ku Klux Klan Grand Wizard David Duke. But, all too often, anti-Semitic content is easily shared without much attention. More troubling still, far-right message forums such as 4/chan, 8/chan and the Daily Stormer routinely share content that advocates for the killing of Jews and a second Holocaust. The activities on these websites have real effects on Jewish communities beyond online harassment: Both the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, synagogue and Christchurch, New Zealand mosque mass-shooters were inspired by and contributed to the anti-Semitic content on these websites.

The internet and social media have also been mediums for the proliferation of anti-Semitic misinformation and conspiracy theories. “Memes” have often been shared, sometimes unintentionally, that display prominent anti-Semitic tropes and conspiracy theories surrounding Jewish power, greed and Holocaust denial. A prominent example is that of Jewish billionaire George Soros as a controller of global politics and the economy.

Anti-Zionist content that demonizes Israel and contains offensive and false information about Israel and Zionism is also widely shared and is credited with inspiring and magnifying left-wing anti-Semitism. A study by the Israeli government found that over 34% of anti-Semitism online pertained to attacks on Zionism and the State of Israel. Anti-Semitic voices are further amplified and reinforced via social media, which easily enables other users to “like” and “share” such posts, as was the case when comedian Chelsea Handler tweeted an anti-Semitic video of Louis Farrakhan, leader of the Nation of Islam, which was then retweeted by a number of other influential figures and celebrities. After some time, she finally addressed this incident and eventually apologized.



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The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic has also been accompanied by an uptick in anti-Semitic hate. The pivot to remote work provided an opportunity for Neo-Nazis and others affiliated with far-right extremist organizations to crash (known as “Zoombombing”) virtual Zoom meetings of Jewish organizations to harass and taunt Jews. The first major case of this occurred during a Jewish Community Center (JCC) meeting on March 24th, 2020, where an online class was infiltrated by a Neo-Nazi who launched into an anti-Semitic rant and removed his shirt to display a swastika tattoo.

As an illustration of how resilient and how adaptable anti-Semitism is, conspiracy theories have emerged that suggest coronavirus is part of a Jewish global conspiracy. It claims Jews caused the virus and simultaneously asserts the Israeli government knew about coronavirus in advance and was seeking to profit by developing a vaccine first, as seen in a since-deleted tweet by actress Rosanna Arquette.

While certain societal trends such as “Cancel Culture” have sought to rectify and condemn hate speech on a mass scale, this scrutiny by the public is not always applied to anti-Semitism, as evidenced by the response to an anti-Semitic post by DeSean Jackson, wide receiver for the NFL’s Philadelphia Eagles. While many condemned Jackson, there was a considerable lack of public outrage and calls for reproach when compared to other public figures expressing insensitive hate speech toward other minority groups. The summer 2020 resignation and statement of New York Times columnist Bari Weiss, where she described how colleagues who made anti-Semitic statements got off without consequence, also illustrates how “Cancel Culture” does not apply to anti-Semitism.

Sadly, a study by the Israeli government found it could take 10 months for flagged anti-Semitic content and videos on popular social media sites to be taken down, and posts flagged for inciting violence against Jews are the least likely form of hate speech to be removed.



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