

SCAPEGOATING:

Blaming Jews for Society's Problems



FOR NEARLY TWO MILLENNIA, hatred of Jews has caused many societies to scapegoat Jewish people, falsely accusing them collectively of responsibility for various social and even physical ills. Jews have been blamed for political tensions, military defeats, economic instability, starting wars, causing revolutions, defiling the white race, and even deliberately causing disease. Antisemitic libels have been, and still are, used to justify anti-Jewish discrimination, massacres, expulsions, and genocides. To defeat this form of antisemitism, we must understand how scapegoating works as a key strategy deployed by Jew-haters to achieve various political, social, or religious goals.

What Is Scapegoating?

"Scapegoat theory refers to the tendency to blame someone else for one's own problems, a process that often results in feelings of prejudice toward the person or group that one is blaming."¹ This phenomenon is common across all human groups and societies.

The term is derived from an ancient Israelite ritual (Leviticus 16:1–34) in which a goat would be symbolically burdened with the sins of the people and then driven away into the wilderness, carrying off their misdeeds.

In modern terms the scapegoated group is not punished for its own faults but is held responsible for the tensions and troubles experienced by society. Often a politician or political movement, offering simple solutions to complex problems, targets a specific group as a scapegoat. This is done by deflecting attention away from a given society's anxieties, guilt, aggression, failings, hostility, and frustrations.



One of the primary features of scapegoating is the projection of one's own flaws or failures onto someone else. Using a scapegoat is a way to avoid reflection and self-criticism when one lacks the resources or the will to fix one's own problems. It also allows people to point the finger at others, rather than accepting the consequences of their own (individual or collective) actions.

¹"Scapegoat Theory," *Psychology*, www.psychology.iresearchnet.com/social-psychology/social-psychology-theories/scapegoat-theory

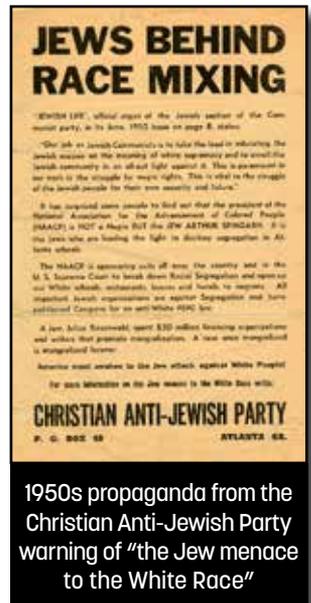
Scapegoating can be conscious or (more commonly) subconscious and occurs in various social contexts. Historical examples include blaming women for the behaviors of men or blaming immigrants for difficult economic times. Often the fears of the empowered majority, which finds itself *feeling* powerless, are projected onto those who actually *are* powerless.

The projection of failures usually centers around one or more of the following:

1 Guilt/Sin Finding a scapegoat allows for the projection of one's guilt or low self-esteem onto the scapegoat. This projection provides the scapegoater with an opportunity for a feeling of redemptive salvation. This "guilt and sin" scapegoat has its origins in antiquity. For instance, the ancient Jewish practice of animal sacrifice in the Jerusalem Temple ("sin offerings") and the foundation of the Christian faith – the crucifixion of Jesus – were required for the forgiveness of the sins of humanity.

2 Thoughts and Feelings Unwanted feelings, thoughts, and desires that cause anxiety and self-contempt are projected onto the scapegoat. This is particularly prevalent in groups that maintain inflexible moral ideals or dogmatic ideologies, such as religious extremists or totalitarian secular ideologies like Communism and Nazism. A scapegoat is chosen to relieve the moral panic triggered by natural human flaws that result in social or political failures. A "community of the good" is self-defined, and a scapegoat is found to serve as a threat to that community.

3 Ingroup Tension In moments of social upheaval, social tensions grow to threaten societal cohesion and the integrity of the socio-political order. Such tensions could be the result of brutal competition between different individuals or sub-groups in times of prolonged distress. As the tensions reach a breaking point, society collectively chooses a scapegoat to blame as the cause of the problem (for example, blaming Jews for racial inequality or Israel for police brutality against people of color in the U.S.). The scapegoat is then either banished or killed, allowing the group to declare that order has been restored.



1950s propaganda from the Christian Anti-Jewish Party warning of "the Jew menace to the White Race"

Scapegoating Jews

Anti-Jewish scapegoating is largely based on conspiracy theories developed over the centuries that paint “the Jews” as a powerful, evil force. Antisemites imagine Jews to be inherently dishonest people who pursue power at the expense of the society they live in. Antisemites see themselves as “punching up” against a powerful and mortal foe.

For thousands of years, Jews have served as the scapegoat of choice for many of the societies in which they lived. Being a small minority that didn’t share the majority’s religion



or culture, Jews were seen as outsiders, foreign, and a target for both conscious and subconscious scapegoating. The history of the Jews, both medieval and modern, in Europe and in Muslim lands, is a record of constant scapegoating. Jews were and continue to be blamed for social, economic, and security problems and anxieties in many Western and Arab countries.



The film *Der ewige Jude* was directed with input from German Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels.

God Killers

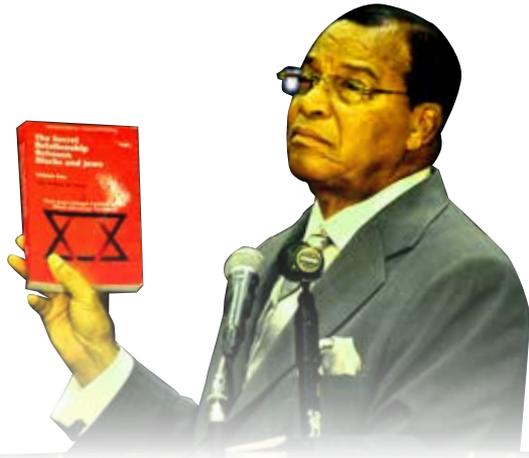
In the West, the most powerful scapegoating happened in early Christian history, as “the Jews” were collectively blamed for murdering Jesus, the Christian Messiah. Jews were labeled the “decide people” by early church fathers. The

idea that Jews killed the divine, along with goodness and morality, led to centuries of European antisemitism. This spread to American society and elsewhere, as Europeans conquered and settled various regions around the world. This type of scapegoating was particularly beneficial to maintain group cohesion, especially during times of great theological schisms in early church history.



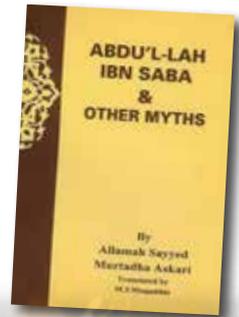
Slavery

In the U.S., Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan blames “the Jews” collectively for the atrocities of the transatlantic slave trade. In 1991, his group published the book *The Secret Relationship Between Blacks and Jews: Jews Selling Blacks*. The book falsely claims that “the Jews” financed the European slave trade. Although these claims have been thoroughly refuted by major scholars, they persist as antisemitic propaganda.



Sunni–Shia Schism

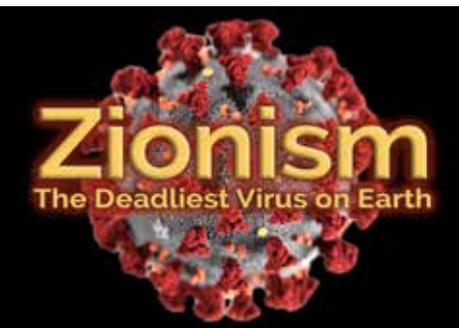
Like Christian scapegoating during times of great conflict, so too did some Muslims utilize this tactic in early Islamic history. Following the great Sunni–Shia schism and devastating civil wars among early Muslims, Islamic scholars blamed the divide on a Jewish conspirator by the name of Abdullah Ibn Saba’, who falsely converted to Islam in order to instigate strife and discord among Muslims. In modern times, many Muslim and non-Muslim scholars have concluded that the character of Ibn Saba’ is a myth with no historical basis.





Black Plague

In the 14th century, an estimated 80–200 million people in Eurasia died of the Black Plague caused by the bacterium *Yersinia pestis*. This was centuries before modern science discovered germs as the cause of disease. Many Christians held Jews responsible for the calamity, accusing them of poisoning the drinking wells. The alleged “evidence” against the Jews was a perceived near immunity of Jewish communities to the disease. There was some truth to that, as Jews were forced to live in walled ghettos, isolating them from general society, and Jewish ritual cleanliness – such as washing hands before meals and after using the bathroom – lowered Jewish mortality rates. Christian mobs destroyed over 500 Jewish communities and massacred thousands of Jews in the unfounded belief that this would save Christians from the plague.



Today, Jews and Israel have been accused of creating the coronavirus that causes COVID-19. During the height of the AIDS epidemic, Jewish doctors were accused of deliberately introducing AIDS into various societies. The Jewish State of Israel is frequently called a “cancer” or “bacillus” by various Middle Eastern regimes.

ISRAEL MAKES THE DESERT BLOOM



Cartoon in the Michigan-based *Muslim Observer*, 2010

Blood Libel

The blood libel is the medieval antisemitic myth that Jews kidnap Christian children in order to use their blood in Passover rituals. This libel was used to persecute and murder Jews across Europe whenever a Christian child disappeared. Punishing the supposed Jewish perpetrators allowed the “threatened” community to resume its life peacefully and return to a sense of harmony.

Today, a modern blood libel has been introduced in the Middle East that accuses Israel of “harvesting” the organs of young Palestinians to sell on the black market. The blood libel accusing Jews of kidnapping and murdering Muslim children is also promoted in various Arab and Islamic media outlets, including through a multi-part TV series.

Another antisemitic accusation is that Jews promote immorality, debauchery, and decadence to undermine a given society. Some examples include promoting

homosexuality, prostitution, drugs, sorcery, and slavery. These accusations can be found in the antisemitic forgery *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

Today, these themes are promoted by radical Islamists, white supremacists, and black supremacists. Such scapegoating allows a group to feel morally relieved as its members believe they haven’t betrayed their own moral values, claiming instead that any immoral failures or thoughts were deceitfully brought into their midst by “the Satanic Jew.”



Nazi newspaper accusing “the Jews” of ritually murdering Christian children and taking their blood (1934)



Antisemitic fliers were found in the city of Newton, MA, in 2018.

Communism in a Capitalist/Feudal Society

In the early 20th century, major social pressures, tensions, and significant ideological confrontations resulted from the popularity of socialist and communist ideologies. Jews were falsely identified as the source of this social instability. In pre-Communist Russia, Jews were accused of being the masters behind revolutionary socialist ideas. Antisemitic publications such as *The Jewish Bolshevism* and *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* were forged as scapegoating tools to divert popular attention away from the failings of the Tsarist regime. Jews were blamed for creating “godless communism” to undermine the “natural order” of monarchies and church.



Anti-Communist propaganda depicting Leon Trotsky as a Jewish devil during the Russian Civil War (1917-1923)



Nazi propaganda poster depicting “the Jew” as a global parasite threatening Aryan civilization by controlling both capitalist and communist societies

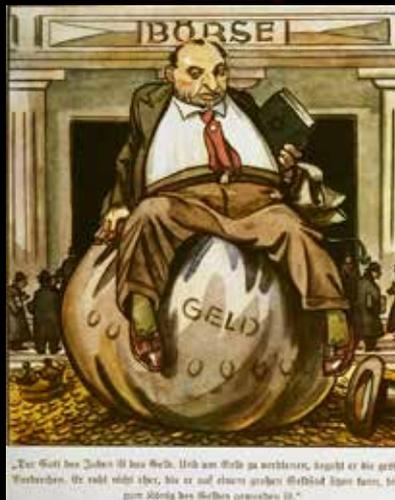
Nazi Antisemitism: Jews as the “Anti-Race”

The Nazi state, built on white supremacy, viewed human existence as a perpetual life-and-death conflict between the races. The Nazis believed in a racial hierarchy, with white Germanic Europeans (the Aryans) at the top. Other “races,” such as Slavs, Africans, and the Roma, were categorized as inferior Untermenschen (sub-human races) in this hierarchy.

Soviet Union



Nazi Germany



Capitalism in a Communist Society

Paradoxically, just as Jews were scapegoated as the socialist fifth column in capitalist/feudal societies, they were scapegoated as the menace behind capitalism in socialist societies.

The cartoon (above, left) is from the Soviet publication *Vechernaya Moskva* (1973). It uses the antisemitic imagery of the “rich Jew” who, for love of money, will betray his country. (For comparison, see the antisemitic cartoon on the right from the Nazi children’s book *Der Giftpilz* [*The Poisonous Mushroom*] published in 1938.)

Jews were put in a separate racial category altogether and scapegoated as *Gegenrasse* (German for “Anti-race”), the Aryans’ most bitter and eternal enemy. Nazi ideology visualized “the Jew” as a dehumanized disease-carrying parasite contaminating the essence of a healthy world. Jews were thus portrayed as a mortal threat to the “Aryans” and to humanity as a whole.²

Scapegoating “the Jew” for contaminating the white population with their inherently inferior and evil characteristics was an initial step leading to the Holocaust. It led the Nazis to believe Germany’s redemption, and that of the entire world, required nothing less than the complete destruction of “the Jewish parasite.”

² Yehuda Bauer, *A History of the Holocaust* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1982)

With this redemptive antisemitism,³ Hitler saw himself as the white race's "savior." He declared, "Hence today I believe that I am acting in accordance with the will of the Almighty Creator: *by defending myself against the Jew, I am fighting for the work of the Lord.*"⁴

Military Defeats and Scapegoating

Since the rise of the modern nation-state, Jews have been accused of disloyalty, plotting with their countries' enemies.

In 1894, the Dreyfus Affair served as a model for modern antisemitic scapegoating. After the birth of the French republic in 1789, French society went through a century of deep political, religious, economic, and social tensions, including several revolutions. At the end of the 19th century, France was still recovering from its humiliating defeat in the 1870 Franco-Prussian war. During this period, German espionage proved to be superior to France's, causing deep anxiety in the French military. Seeking a scapegoat, senior French officers accused and convicted Captain Alfred Dreyfus, who was Jewish, of high treason

and selling military secrets to Germany. Dreyfus was sentenced to life imprisonment on the infamous Devil's Island penal colony.

The trial sparked a deep undercurrent of antisemitism in France. After evidence emerged in 1896 that Dreyfus was framed and the actual spy was another French officer, a growing movement came to Dreyfus' defense, dividing French society for over a decade. Antisemitism grew substantially, with crowds marching in the streets chanting, "Death to the Jews!" In 1906, Dreyfus was acquitted of these charges.



The Traitor: Degradation of Alfred Dreyfus
(Henri Meyer—Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1895)

³ Saul Friedlander, Chapter 3, "Redemptive Antisemitism," in *Nazi Germany and the Jews 1933-1939: The Years of Persecution* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997), 73-112.

⁴ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Ralph Mannheim, translator (New York: The Houghton Mifflin Company, 1971), 65.



Illustration of the “stab-in-the-back” myth from an Austrian postcard

The “Stab in the Back” Accusation Another significant example of scapegoating the Jews for military defeats occurred in Germany in 1918 after that nation’s catastrophic and humiliating defeat in the First World War. This is known as *Dolchstoßlegende*, or the stab-in-the-back myth. The German General Staff sought to deflect blame for the defeat away from themselves by accusing German Jews of undermining the war effort. They found support among writers, newspapers, and politicians who amplified this accusation. They claimed the loss of the war was not due to military failure but Jewish conspiracies.

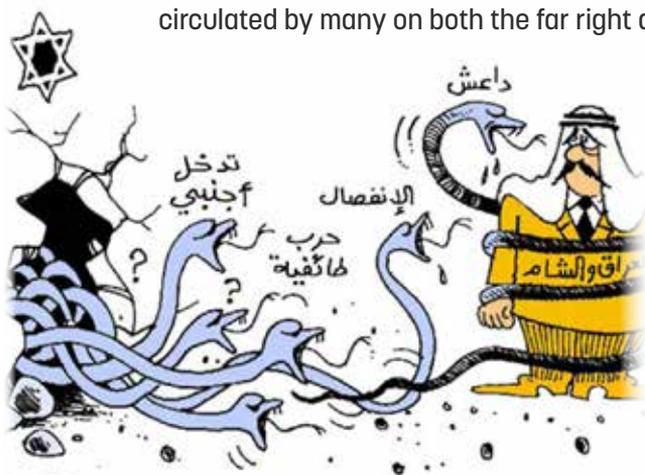
As Germany’s post-war economy collapsed under harsh reparations imposed by the French and British, this antisemitic rhetoric intensified and was adopted by a former German army corporal, Adolf Hitler, and his Nazi Party. In his book, *Mein Kampf*, Hitler blamed an “international Jewish conspiracy” for Germany’s plight while offering a racial theory that imagined Jews as the “eternal” enemy of white German civilization. Under the cover of World War Two, Nazi Germany implemented the “Final Solution to the Jewish Question,” a transcontinental genocide that systematically murdered six million Jews over six years.

Scapegoating Israel

Israel has been described as “the nation of the Jews having become the Jew among the nations,” because anti-Israel rhetoric frequently descends into antisemitism. Just as Jews serve as a scapegoat for social issues, the Jewish State of Israel has been made a scapegoat for both regional and international problems. This allows nations in the Middle East (and elsewhere) to blame Israel for a variety of local and global problems.

Middle Eastern Instability The most common anti-Israel scapegoating is the claim that Israel is the reason for the Middle East’s chronic instability. This false claim ignores the civil wars, tyranny, human rights violations, corruption, terrorism, religious fundamentalism, and ideological struggles in the region that have nothing to do with Israel. Although the overwhelming majority of casualties and refugees from the Middle East are the result of intra-Arab and intra-Muslim conflicts, this scapegoating has been used since Israel’s founding in 1948.

Islamist Terrorism Israel is blamed for instigating, and even orchestrating, Islamist terrorism. After the 9/11 attacks on the U.S. by Al Qaeda terrorists, rumors began circulating in the Middle East that Israel carried out the attack and warned all Jewish workers in the World Trade Center not to come to work that day, resulting in no Jewish deaths. These falsehoods were then picked up and circulated by many on both the far right and far left in the U.S.



Cartoon published in Middle East media, 2017:
The figure represents Iraq and Syria, while the snakes emerging from the burrow marked by a Star of David represent ISIS, civil strife, and foreign intervention.

More recently, some Arab media outlets have claimed that the terror group ISIS was created and funded by Israel to destabilize the region. Similar claims are often made by leaders of the far left, such as Jeremy Corbyn, the former head of the British Labour Party, who hinted in a 2012 interview on Iran’s official PressTV propaganda outlet that Israel was responsible for Islamist terrorist attacks in the Sinai Peninsula.



An antisemitic cartoon posted on Fatah's Information and Culture Commission website on August 1, 2016, uses Nazi-like anti-Jewish imagery blaming Israel for causing disunity in the Muslim world. Fatah is the ruling party of the Palestinian Authority.

Arab and Muslim Disunity? Blame the Jews

Since the founding of the State of Israel in 1948, it has been convenient for various Arab governments to blame Israel for the inability of Arab and Muslim states to achieve unity. Military conflicts among these countries, such as the current major confrontation between Sunni countries and Iran, were common throughout Middle Eastern history, predating the modern State of Israel. Nevertheless, because self-critical analysis is in short supply in the autocratic regimes of the region, Israel is scapegoated as the cause of the civil wars, economic failures, and internal divisions that plague the region.



Arab newspaper cartoon, 2017: A feeble-looking Israeli soldier running away from an elderly Muslim man brandishing a staff, a young Palestinian holding a rock, a Muslim woman waving a broom, and a Palestinian child carrying a slingshot

The Old Pattern Continues

During these times of fear and uncertainty, Jews are again scapegoated and often targeted for violence.

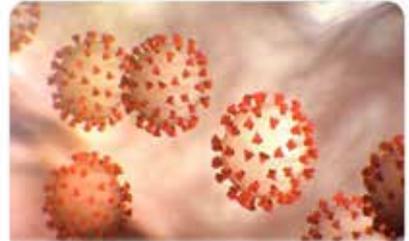
As the COVID-19 pandemic has shown, the urge to find a scapegoat is just as strong as ever. White supremacist David Duke, Hamas in Gaza, and some on the far left have all circulated the antisemitic theory of the pandemic being a Jewish (or “Zionist”) plot to wreck economies and gain financially.

A healthy society is self-critical and equipped to examine the complex causes of a given problem, hold an open debate, and plan and implement solutions.

In sharp contrast, failing and fearful societies favor demagogues who offer simplistic solutions to complex problems and shift blame onto a vulnerable scapegoat. The problem is misdiagnosed and ineffective, and destructive “solutions” are offered but matters are usually made much worse.

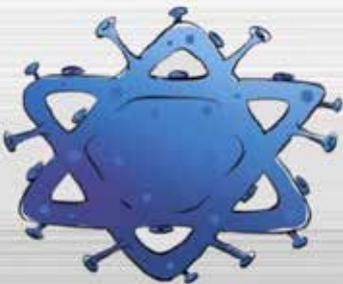


David Duke @DrDavidDuke · 4d
Does president Donald Trump have coronavirus? Are Israel and the Global Zionist elite up to their old tricks?
davidduke.com/thursday200312/



Tweet by white supremacist David Duke

■ الفيروس الأخطر على البشرية ..



“The Most Dangerous Virus To Humanity” – cartoon in a Palestinian Gazan newspaper

Scapegoating – the blaming of others for the problems a society faces – is never productive, and is often just as dangerous to the victimizer as it is to the victim. The 20th century saw many societies that substituted scapegoating for rational and fearless discourse. One example is Nazi Germany, which in its never-ending search for enemies (Jews, Roma, Slavs, LGBTQ, and many others) unleashed a global war that ultimately left Germany in ashes.

***“The search for a scapegoat
is the easiest of all
hunting expeditions.”***

DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER
34th President of the United States



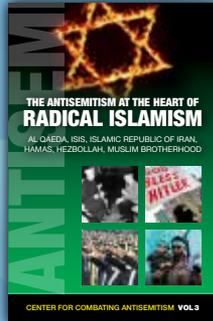
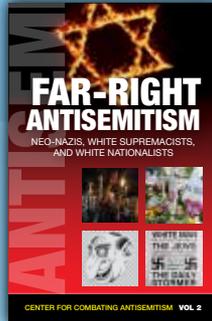
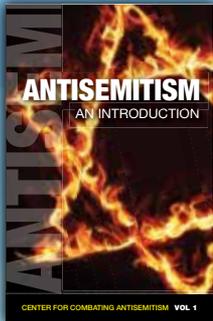
Have we as a species learned the lessons of that most bloody of centuries? Can we overcome the dangerous narratives that threaten not only Jews but the entirety of humanity?

What is needed is a dedicated commitment to civic education that undergirds open and free societies. This can go a long way in ensuring the kind of social immunity necessary to counter the pathogen of antisemitism and all other bigotries. This is what guides our mission at the Center for Combating Antisemitism. Our goal is to participate in the strengthening of our public institutions so as to build a strong society free of hatred, bigotry, and discrimination.



StandWithUs' Center for Combating Antisemitism takes a proactive approach through education.

For more in-depth reading on this complex subject, the StandWithUs Center for Combating Antisemitism has published dozens of booklets, including a four-part introduction to antisemitism in all its permutations:



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