DISCUSSING ANTI-SEMITISM

A Guide for Reflection and Conversation

Introduction

In 2018, the United States witnessed the deadliest anti-Semitic attack in its history when a white supremacist entered the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh and opened fire, killing 11 congregants and wounding two more. The shooter allegedly later told police that he wanted to kill Jews, and in his online social media posts reportedly railed against Jews for bringing immigrants into the country. This incident did not happen in a vacuum; the number of anti-Semitic occurrences had been climbing, and increased levels of prejudice along with it. A history of anti-Semitism in the United States and around the world built a foundation for this event to occur. The anti-Semitic myths and tropes used today echo the same myths and tropes used for the past thousand years or more.

Anti-Semitism is prejudice and/or discrimination against Jews, often based on stereotypes and myths that target the Jews as people or their religious practices and beliefs.

The threat of anti-Semitism is not only about defaming and attacking the Jewish community; it’s a symptom of a larger issue. Those that hold ideologies of hatred against the Jewish people generally also hold ideologies of hatred against other marginalized peoples and communities. According to the FBI, in 2017 (the most recent data available) hate crimes increased 17% nationwide, including a 37% increase in the number of crimes against Jews and Jews institutions, but also overall increases in the number of crimes directed against individuals on the basis of race, religion, sexual orientation, gender, and disability.

ADL has been tracking anti-Semitic incidents in the United States since 1979. The Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents accounts for assaults, vandalism and harassment, but we know that there are many unreported incidents of anti-Semitism, from jokes to microaggressions to insensitive comments that normalize anti-Semitic rhetoric. In 2018, ADL logged 1,879 anti-Semitic incidents in 46 states and the District of Columbia. The 2018 total number of incidents was the third highest number recorded since ADL started tracking this data four decades ago. Total incidents in 2018 decreased by 5% from the 1,986 incidents ADL recorded in 2017. However, the 2018 total is 48% higher than the number of incidents in 2016 and 99% higher than in 2015.

In order to better understand and unpack ADL’s audit on anti-Semitism, this discussion guide provides a way to initiate conversation with your peers, colleagues, family and community about how anti-Semitism impacts both the Jewish community and the United States at large, and what we can do about it.

Setting the Stage:

• Prepare yourself by reading through the ADL’s 2018 Audit and reviewing some general facilitation tips. (Check out Repair the World’s Guide to Respectful Conversations for some great suggestions)

• Review relevant definitions (target, ally, aggressor, bystander, prejudice and discrimination)

• Assemble some additional learning resources for your participants before and/or after your discussion

Note: Some who have learned about the Holocaust--either in school or in an informal learning environment, such as a museum--may assume that anti-Semitism ended with the fall of the Third Reich. ADL’s reports invite the public to broaden their understanding of anti-Semitism as a more complex and enduring ideology that did not begin or end with the Holocaust.

To read ADL’s Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents in 2018, please visit: www.adl.org/audit2018
Discussion Questions:

Warming up:

- What have you seen or heard on the news or online about anti-Semitism?
- Are you having conversations about anti-Semitism or other forms of hate with your peers? What are these conversations like?

Looking into the Data:

Review some of the data points in the audit and executive summary – then answer the questions below:

- What do these numbers tell you about the trends in anti-Semitism today?
- What points in the data set did you find most surprising, interesting, or helpful in understanding anti-Semitic trends?

Diving in:

- Who is targeted by anti-Semitism? Who do you think are the aggressors in anti-Semitic incidents?
- What concerns do you have about anti-Semitism or other forms of hate in our country and community?
- Have you seen or heard any anti-Semitic remarks or symbols in your community? What about online?
- How do you respond and/or how would be best to respond?
- How might anti-Semitism be connected to other forms of hate and prejudice?
- What questions are you still sitting with about anti-Semitism?
- In preventing and responding to anti-Semitism, what do you expect from... Elected local, state, and federal officials? Teachers and Community Leaders? Technology and Social Media companies? Your friends, peers, and co-workers? Yourself?
- What is important to consider in crafting responses and prevention plans to anti-Semitism that are inclusive of our full multi-racial, multi-ethnic Jewish community?
Opportunities for Follow-up & Extended Engagement:

- Continue to educate yourself on anti-Semitism, white supremacy, and other forms of prejudice
- Read: Antisemitism in the US by ADL and additional resources on extremism
- Read: Skin In the Game: How Anti-Semitism Animates White Nationalism by Eric Ward
- Watch: Hate Thy Neighbor (short) | Extended Version by VICE
- Watch: Antisemitism by Yad Vashem
- Familiarize yourself with ADL’s H.E.A.T. Map – an interactive online tool that allows users to geographically chart anti-Semitic incidents and extremist activity nationally and regionally.
- Learn how to identify hate symbols by reviewing the Hate Symbol Database
- Review the FBI’s annual Hate Crime Statistics Act report – one of only three annual national crime reports compiled by the FBI.
- Visit a historical or cultural institution that educates about anti-Semitism and other forms of bias, including racism, sexism, heterosexism, Islamophobia and anti-immigrant bias
- Speak out against anti-Semitism and all forms of hate, prejudice, and discrimination
- Host Table Talk conversations with young people in your life to regularly discuss current events
- Host a Friday night or Shabbat dinner with OneTable and invite your friends to engage in discussion
- Encourage your elected officials to hold hearings on the increase in hate crimes and rise of extremist groups, and to improve their procedures for responding to and reporting hate crimes
- Call on social media and technology companies to improve their openness and responsiveness to issues of hate and extremism on their platforms and advocate for stronger laws against perpetrators of online hate and harassment
- Promote anti-bias, bullying prevention, and civics education programs in K-12 schools
- If you work with, or are raising/mentoring children, read books together that tackle anti-Semitism or other forms of hate
- Volunteer and serve in your local community
- Encourage participation in interfaith and other intergroup events in your community
- Model examining media with a critical eye and using strategies for civil dialogue