ANTISEMITISM

ANNE FRANK HOUSE | HANS WALLAGE

Antisemitism

Myths, Masks and Misconceptions

Boom anne frank house

Revised and updated edition of *Fifty Questions on Antisemitism*, and *Antisemitism: Past & Present*, Anne Frank House (Jaap Tanja); Boom edition | Anne Frank House, 2005/2016

Text and image editing: Anne Frank House (Hans Wallage)
Project management: Anne Frank House (Eugenie Martens and Willem Wagenaar)
Editing and production: Boom uitgevers
Design cover: Bart Rouwhorst
Design interior: Bas Reijnen
Translation: Vertaalbureau Noorderlicht (Caby Slootweg)
Editing: Vertaalbureau Noorderlicht (Orla Clancy)

ISBN 9789058757883
NUR 680, 320

www.boom.nl
www.annefrank.org

Image on page 2: An antisemitic scene from the Middle Ages. The stained-glass windows of the St. Michael's Cathedral in Brussels depict the desecration of the host by Jews. Jews are shown piercing the consecrated hosts, causing them to bleed. The small Jewish community in Brussels that was accused of desecration of the host in 1370 was persecuted and did not survive.

Contents


Google: ↙
Jews control
the USA!

Foreword

> 'Asking questions is an essential act in order to live a full life – even if the answers are not obvious.'
>
> Elie Wiesel

Antisemitism is by no means a thing of the past. It is a phenomenon that transcends time and constantly adapts to current events. Old stereotypes and conspiracy theories keep resurfacing, in new forms and reinforced by modern media. What has been believed about Jews for centuries – as murderers, usurers, conspirators or scapegoats for social crises – still echoes today in tweets, memes and digital conspiracies that spread at lightning speed. Without knowledge of this past, the present of antisemitism cannot be understood, let alone recognised. It is precisely this continuity that makes antisemitism so persistent: it is both old and new, both familiar and unknown.

Over the centuries, Jews have been held responsible for a wide variety of wars, problems, catastrophes and social tensions. They have been accused of murdering Christ, of being usurers, infiltrators, of seekers of world domination, or of being the driving force behind both capitalism and communism. These delusions have not disappeared – they keep returning, in ever-changing contexts: in the Netherlands, elsewhere in Europe, in the Middle East or within digital networks worldwide.

Convinced of a Jewish conspiracy. New York, 11 September 2011, ten years after the attack on the WTC.

Antisemitism can be simply described as 'hatred of Jews', but behind that seemingly straightforward definition lies a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that is difficult to capture in a single formula. This book aims to offer insight into that long history, as well as into its contemporary dynamics: from classical stereotypes to digital hate cultures. This is done not only with knowledge, but also with practical tools to recognise and challenge prejudices and misconceptions. How do we define the boundary between a careless joke and a harmful stereotype? When does criticism of Israel turn into antisemitism? And how does antisemitism work in a digital culture where memes, conspiracies and algorithms can amplify hatred?

This revised edition, which builds to a large extent on earlier versions by Jaap Tanja, comes at a time when the need for an up-to-date overview of this subject is greater than ever. Since the first edition in 2005 (*Fifty Questions on Antisemitism*) and the second edition in 2016 (*Antisemitism: Past and Present*), the world has changed profoundly. Social media, international conflicts (such as the war in Gaza) and the hardening of public debate have brought new forms of antisemitism to the surface, while reinforcing old myths. That is why crucial points of the text have been rewritten and expanded, with greater attention to digitalisation, the blurring lines between antisemitism, anti-Zionism and criticism of Israel, and the social and political context of today.

The Anne Frank House receives hundreds of thousands of visitors every year and is much more than a historical museum. The Anne Frank House develops educational programmes that connect Anne Frank's life story with reflections on antisemitism, racism and discrimination, as well as the values of freedom, equal rights and democracy. This book ties in directly with that mission.

Our goal with *Antisemitism: Myths, Masks and Misconceptions* is clear: providing an accessible and nuanced guide that increases knowledge, breaks through stereotypes and invites reflection and

dialogue. Only through insight, education and dialogue can we build a society that is resistant to both the old and new manifestations of antisemitism.

Ronald Leopold
Managing Director, Anne Frank House

· 1 ·

Jews and Judaism

WHO IS JEWISH?

The question 'Who is Jewish?' runs largely parallel to the question 'What is Judaism?' Judaism is an ancient religion. But Judaism – like Christianity and Islam – is also a civilisation, a tradition and certainly also a way of thinking and living. Many Jews see themselves and other Jews as members of ta people: the Jewish people. The seemingly simple question 'Who is Jewish?' is therefore more complex than it appears. It is a question with several answers. According to the Orthodox religious tradition within Judaism, every child of a Jewish mother is Jewish, plus anyone who has converted to Judaism in accordance with a set of established rules and rituals. Remarkably, however, faith itself is of secondary importance. Someone with a Jewish mother is and remains Jewish, regardless of what they do or believe. So, you can be Jewish and a non-believer at the same time. Non-religious Jews are referred to as secular Jews. Many well-known Jews, such as Albert Einstein or Woody Allen, are non-believers and therefore secular. In the Netherlands, most Jews are secular, while in the state of Israel too, a large proportion of the Jewish population is non-religious.

Within the Jewish religious tradition, there are several denominations. In addition to Orthodoxy, the Liberal movement is the best-known today. In the United States, for example, around one third of American Jews consider themselves to be *Reform Jews*, belonging to a Liberal stream of Judaism. Liberals and Orthodox Jews give different answers to the question 'Who is Jewish?'. According to the Liberal tradition, a child of a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother can also be considered Jewish, provided that the parents

THE TORAH AND THE BIBLE

The Jewish and Christian religions are based on the same scriptures, but there are also differences. A central part of the Jewish Bible is the Torah, the first five 'books' of the Old Testament, also called scrolls or, nowadays, usually referred to as chapters. Within Orthodox Judaism, the Torah is considered to be the word of God, given to Moses on Mount Sinai, and thus sacred and inviolable. The Jewish Bible also includes several other 'books': the Prophets (21 Biblical books) and the Writings (13 Biblical books). Jews refer to their Bible as the Tanakh.

For Christians, the Tanakh is the Old Testament. Christianity originated from ancient Judaism. Christians believe Jesus Christ to be the Son of God. For Christians, his life, suffering, death, and resurrection represent the fulfilment of Jewish revelation. Jews do not consider the New Testament, in which the stories of the life of Jesus Christ are central, to be part of their Bible.

make it known that they want to raise the child Jewish. This is then strictly monitored by a rabbi. In this context, such individuals are sometimes referred to as 'patrilineal Jews'.

Another difference between Liberal and Orthodox Jews concerns conversion to Judaism. In the Orthodox tradition, the rules are stricter and the threshold is higher. If you want to become a Jew according to the Orthodox rules, you must go through a lengthy and complex procedure, with a number of exams, whereby you also must organise your own way of life according to the *halacha*, the Jewish religious laws (including circumcision for men).

The question of who is Jewish and who is not also has practical implications. According to Israeli law, every Jew has the right to obtain Israeli citizenship. In Israel, Orthodox rules apply.

THE WORD 'JEW'

The word 'Jew' is derived from Judah, one of the twelve sons of Jacob, and from the southern kingdom of Judah/Judea. Jacob himself was later given the name Israel, after his struggle with the Jabbok (cf. Gen. 32:28; reaffirmed in Gen. 35:10). In Gen. 33:20, Jacob also names an altar 'El-Elohe-Israel', thereby marking his new name in a liturgical context. After the death of King Solomon (tenth century BCE), the empire split into two kingdoms: northern Israel (consisting of ten tribes most of the time) and southern Judah (Judah and Benjamin, with Jerusalem). The inhabitants of Judah became known as Judeans, from which the term 'Jew' is derived.

In the seventh century BCE, the Assyrians conquered the kingdom of Israel and deported its population. This marked the beginning of the diaspora, the dispersal or migration of the Jewish people. The Babylonians conquered the kingdom of Judea in the fifth century BCE. The descendants of Judah called themselves – and were also referred to by others as – *Yehudim*, Jews. In the Tanakh, the Old Testament, the term 'Jews' is only used in the later books; earlier texts refer instead to the 'children of Israel'.

HOW MANY JEWS ARE THERE IN THE WORLD?

How many Jews there are in the world depends on who is considered Jewish and who is included in the count. Demographers in Israel estimate that there are around sixteen million Jews worldwide (figure from 2023), but there are also counts or estimates that arrive at numbers exceeding twenty million. Depending on the criteria used, the country with the largest Jewish population is Israel (approximately 7.5 million). The United States follows with approximately 7.4 million Jews.

Together, Israel and the United States account for almost ninety percent of the Jewish population worldwide. In Europe, the continent where most Jews lived before the war, only about 1.3 million Jews remain today. However, this latter figure is controversial,

MORE FIGURES

France is the country with the largest Jewish community in Western Europe (440,000, 2023 figure), but this number is steadily declining. Germany, by contrast, has a smaller Jewish population (125,000), but this minority has grown relatively strongly in the last twenty or thirty years, mainly because of immigration from Eastern Europe. After the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, many Jews from the former Soviet Union were granted visas to Germany (almost 220,000 between 1991 and 2004). However, only a portion of them joined a Jewish community; others travelled on to the United States or Israel.

because the estimates vary widely, ranging from around 250,000 to more than twice that number, particularly in the countries of the former Soviet Union (Russia, Ukraine, Belarus). In Eastern European countries such as Poland, Hungary, Romania and the Baltic states, the numbers continue to decline. About 4.7 million Jews lived here before World War II (1939), now there are only 70,000. In the Netherlands, there are between 30,000 and 40,000 Jews.

Israeli demographers are concerned about a number of long-term developments. Since World War II, the number of Jews around the world has increased by five million, and over the past thirty years, the Jewish community worldwide has grown by twenty per cent, compared to a forty per cent growth in the world population as a whole. The moderate growth is not only related to a low birth rate, but especially to changing marriage patterns. In the United States and in Europe especially, the proportion of mixed marriages and other forms of partnerships has risen sharply. For example, more than fifty percent of all American and Dutch Jews marry someone from outside the Jewish community. Before World War II, only seven per cent of American Jews married non-Jews. This trend can also be observed in many other countries. Children from mixed marriages are often raised non-Jewish. From these developments, it can be concluded that the long-term continuity of Jewish communities in many countries outside Israel (and the United States) has become uncertain.

DO JEWS CONSTITUTE A PEOPLE?

The question of whether a group constitutes a people is primarily answered by the members of that group themselves. For centuries, many Jews from different countries have felt connected to their fellow believers from other countries. Within the Jewish tradition, the idea of a Jewish people has existed for a very long time. Being Jewish has a religious as well as a historical-cultural component but being Jewish is not a nationality. Jews live in almost every country in the world and the vast majority of them have the nationality of the country in which they live. Less than half of all Jews worldwide live in the state of Israel and have Israeli citizenship. If a 'people' is defined as 'a group of people united by traditions, language, culture, religion and history', then perhaps it would be better to speak of Jewish communities rather than of *the* Jewish people. Jews in the Netherlands speak a different language and have a different history and in part also different cultural and religious traditions compared to Jews in, for example, Morocco or Turkey. In the past, in the seventeenth century, many Jews and non-Jews in the Netherlands referred to the Jewish community as 'the Jewish nation'. At that time, the Jewish community more or less governed itself, with its own legal system and its own care for the poor. Religion and descent were also still inextricably linked.

IS THERE SUCH THING AS A JEWISH RACE?

No. Jews do not constitute a race, because human races do not exist. Nor do Jews form an 'ethnic' group, in the sense that they are 'ethnically' or biologically related to each other. It is therefore incorrect to speak of 'ethnic Jews'. From a biological perspective, there is only one race: the human race. The idea that Jews are a separate race played a decisive role in the run-up to the Holocaust, the murder of six million Jews during World War II. The idea assumes that Jews all over the world would share some 'racial characteristics'; traits thought to be biologically or geneti-

cally determined and therefore unchangeable. This assumption is dangerous nonsense.

Racial theory and racial thinking emerged in the eighteenth century, following classifications developed for plants, animals and humans by Swedish biologist Carl Linnaeus, who lived from 1707 to 1778. Based on external characteristics, for example skin colour, hair structure or shape of the nose, all kinds of classifications circulated, some more elaborate than others. The division into 'the white race', 'the yellow race', 'the black race' and 'the red race' formed the recurring basis. All kinds of character traits were attributed to the supposedly distinct races. Before long, the phenomenon of inequality also emerged: influential European scientists tried to prove the superiority of their own race, the white race. Racial thinking was particularly popular in Europe in the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. Almost everyone – rich and poor, conservative and socialist, Christian and Jew – spoke of groups of people in terms of race. Sometimes the word 'race' had a relatively neutral connotation and meant little more than 'kind', 'tribe' or 'blood relationship'.

Nevertheless, racial thinking has had a major influence on pseudoscientists. Linking personality traits to race has led to numerous bizarre and dangerous ideas. The Jews were seen by many as a 'pure' race, as Jews had existed as a distinct group, a separate 'nation' for centuries. Racial thinking became highly controversial when the Nazis started to distinguish between what was called an Aryan race and what was called a Semitic race in the 1930s. After World War II, science has conclusively demonstrated that racial classifications are unfounded. There is no Jewish gene; you cannot distinguish a 'real' Jew by looking at his genes.

CAN YOU HAVE JEWISH BLOOD?

No, Jewish blood does not exist. The idea that someone's blood somehow determines his or her character is utter nonsense. Yet this idea has very deep roots in European history. Today we

RACE

'Is there a scientific basis for distinguishing between different human races? The answer is: no! Thanks to molecular biology, since the early 1980s we have been able to map the genetic relatedness of all life on earth. Comparative research between different populations on earth has shown that about eighty-five percent of all genetic variation is found within a single group of people, i.e. within the same population. Only five percent of the variation corresponds to differences between populations on the same continent, and about ten percent can be attributed to differences between populations on different continents; moreover, these differences are even smaller than the average in border regions. There are therefore no sharp genetic boundaries according to which humanity can be divided. [...] So, there is no genetic basis for classifying people by race. In the course of evolution, we have not been programmed to approach other people on the basis of racial characteristics. Racial discrimination is therefore nothing more than a bad habit that we can unlearn.'

*

Prof. dr. H.A. Verbrugh, Professor of Medical Microbiology, Head of Department of Medical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases, Erasmus University Medical Centre, Rotterdam.

know better: every human being's character and personality are determined by hereditary predisposition, in combination with upbringing and the culture in which one grows up – not by the blood that flows through one's veins. At least twice in history, the search for 'Jewish blood' has led to the expulsion and murder of Jews on a large scale. In fifteenth-century Spain, the doctrine of the 'purity of blood' (*limpieza de sangre*) was a powerful weapon against the *conversos*, the Jews converted to Christianity, the so-called 'new' Christians. They too, Christians with 'Jewish blood' in their veins, were at risk of being persecuted by the Inquisition (see box p. 62). The Jews who remained faithful to Judaism had

'ETHNIC' JEWS?

The terms 'ethnic' and 'ethnicity' are widely used, but they are poorly defined. Not infrequently, the term 'ethnicity' or 'ethnic group' is used as a euphemism for the loaded word 'race', but it is sometimes also used much more broadly, as a name for a group of people who share a real or imaginary past (language, history, culture, etc.). Partly because of this unclear definition, there is a strong case for not viewing or describing Jews as an ethnic group and not referring to them as 'ethnic Jews', even when the concept of ethnicity is interpreted in a broad sense. Of course, many Jews identify with other Jews through a shared sense of heritage, but that does not make them an ethnic group. The cultural, national, linguistic and religious differences between Jews are far too great for that. Besides, who decides whether or not someone should be considered a member of such an ethnicity?

to leave Spain in 1492, and later Portugal as well. Four hundred and fifty years later, the National Socialists in Germany were similarly convinced that everyone with 'Jewish blood' posed a danger to society.

One of the ways to determine whether someone supposedly had Jewish blood was through the infamous blood tests conducted at the Institut für Rassenforschung (Institute for Racial Research) in Berlin. Remarkably enough, research by this institution showed that the degree of relatedness between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans was far greater than between German Jews and French Jews. However, this did not prevent the persecution of either German or French Jews in any way.

ARE JEWS SEMITES?

The fact that hatred of Jews is called antisemitism (see chapter 2 and beyond) does not mean that Jews are Semites. The question is not so much 'Are Jews Semites?' as 'Do Semites actually exist?'