

WHO WE'RE TALKING ABOUT

A diverse ethno-religious group with ancestry in Judea (now Israel). Jews share an ethnic and racial heritage, language, as well as sacred spiritual texts and rituals. Jews range in their practices, observances, and interpretations of their religion, and have many different cultural traditions, ethnic and racial backgrounds, owing in part to their long diaspora history since being exiled from Israel.

HERE'S WHY AUTHENTICITY MATTERS

[Hollywood's depictions of Jewish people](#) often otherizes/demonizes Orthodox Jews – or exclusively depicts secular Ashkanazi Jews, erasing the full scope of Jewish ethnicities, culture, religion, and peoplehood. In addition, persistent onscreen characterizations of Jews, based on ancient tropes, as scheming, rich, powerful, bloodthirsty, and white have dangerous consequences. These kinds of portrayals contribute to [antisemitic beliefs](#), the denial of antisemitism, [discrimination around hiring](#), Jewish indigeneity to Israel, and the Holocaust. They also increase violence around the world. While Jews are ~2% of the American population, starting in October 2023, they now receive the most hate crimes of any minority group according to the FBI Hate Crimes calculator. In the two-week period following the Oct 7, 2023 Hamas attacks on Israel, the ADL reported a 387.5% increase in antisemitic incidents in the US from the same period a year prior, and Jews across the world experienced a surge in antisemitic hate. Additionally, approximately 50% of Jews live in Israel, which further underscores the need to showcase authentic, humanizing portrayals of Jews beyond the headlines of politics and conflict in the Middle East.

OVERREPRESENTED STORIES AND HARMFUL STEREOTYPES

ANCIENT TROPES:

Controlling great wealth and power in finance, politics, military, governments, media; money-grubbing, manipulative, unscrupulous, devils, horned, big-nosed, vectors of disease, blood libels mostly directed at Israel (false accusations of bloodthirsty baby-killing, genocide, apartheid, chemical warfare, rape, pedophilia, organ harvesting, "Christ killers"), mythical creatures as stand-ins for this.

TIPS FOR ACCURATE REPRESENTATION

APPROPRIATION, DENIAL, OR MINIMIZATION OF THE HOLOCAUST:

Denial, or Minimization of Holocaust: Calling Israelis Nazis; swastikas blended with Jewish stars; mocking, denying, distorting, downplaying the horrors of the Holocaust and other atrocities against Jews

BUTT OF JOKES:

Characters used as punchlines for antisemitic jokes (e.g. Yiddish accents and words used to otherize); being antisemitic for "comedy" (e.g. making fun of Jewish traditions)

MYTH THAT JEWS ARE NOT A MINORITY:

Stories of Jews with great power and wealth, ignoring millennia-long persecution, intergenerational trauma and modern day attacks. Whitewashing Jews, tied with the myth that Jews are "colonizers" or "oppressors" and Khazar theory that Jews originate in Europe.

SEXIST DEPICTIONS:

Men as weak, cheap, neurotic, nerdy, perverts, undesirable for not fitting into Eurocentric beauty ideals; women as overbearing mothers, or wealthy, vain, high maintenance. Orthodox men as sexist, homophobic, close-minded. Fetishized Orthodox women who are "pure" and need to be seduced.

IDENTITY CRISIS:

Judaism as something to "flee" (e.g. the self-hating Jew, or going "unorthodox"), these stories exacerbate the simplistic narrative that Jews don't enjoy their heritage and seek a "superior" gentile life.

ORTHODOX OTHER:

Orthodox Jews who are unrelatable, defined by their restrictions; judgmental, extremist, ignorant, hypocritical, leeches on society, refusing medical care (required by Jewish law).

JEWISH SHAME, PAIN AND SUFFERING:

Expressing shame in their culture or people; Orthodox Jewish lives filled with great pain, sadness, glumness, lack of agency, until and unless someone else (usually a gentile) brings joy and rescue; over-focus on Holocaust stories.

INAUTHENTIC IDENTITY & MISUSE OF CODE-SWITCHING:

Nonspecific or inaccurate identities and traditions (e.g. Haredi man wearing wedding band and knit yarmulke); relying too heavily on code-switching to identify Jewish people (fluctuating between Hebrew, Yiddish and English) resulting in caricatures.

THINGS WE'D LIKE TO SEE MORE OF

JEWISH JOY AND PRIDE:

Joy and pride in rituals, holidays, Torah study, Israel; religious characters who are upbeat and funny; Jews who are comfortable in their Judaism and Zionism, lives are impacted for the good by their heritage.

JEWISH WOMEN BEING LOVED:

Jewish men loving Jewish women as opposed to passing them up for the "preferable" non-Jewish woman; Orthodox women dating with autonomy and in equitable marriages where there is romantic love.

THREE-DIMENSIONALITY AND REFRAMED POV:

Stories centered on things other than Jewishness; Jewishness is the tapestry, not the conflict, Jewish heroes, desirable romantic leads, Jews becoming more observant, coming of age stories where they stay observant.

DEBUNKING THE MYTHS:

Stories/characters that counter the falsehoods Jews aren't a minority, are only a religious group, that Zionists are bloodthirsty or racist by nature. Orthodox Jews acting with compassion, nuance, staying firmly religious but making room for non-Jews, non-religious, LGBTQ, different races. Israelis desiring peace, first responders to worldwide crises, promoting a democratic society tolerant of all religions, races, and sexual identities.

EMPOWERMENT:

Strong Jewish men; Orthodox Jewish women with strong voices and opinions, successful careers, living self-actualized lives, including Torah scholars.

DIVERSE PERSECUTION:

Jew haters from across the political spectrum, religions and races, Mizrahi expulsion from MENA, segregation and redlining affecting US Jews, Spanish Inquisition and other non-Holocaust period pieces, Orthodox Jews and Zionists facing discrimination in school, work and world.

CULTURAL/ETHNIC SPECIFICITY:

Diverse races, ethnicities, cultures, denominations, Orthodox communities, families, customs, food (e.g. Sephardic, Mizrahi, Modern Orthodox, Reform, Chabad); detailed and specific and not painted with vague brush (e.g., matza balls, hats, beards).

PERSON NEXT DOOR:

Orthodox Jews and Israelis in mainstream professions; not only as rabbis and Mossad agents.

GLOSSARY

Jewface: Coined during vaudeville minstrels in the 1800's, originating in Shakespearean times, with Stage Jew, where a non-Jewish actor dons a nose, bushy eyebrows, curly hair, Jewish affect, and/or Jewish clothing. Jews can also partake in Jewface. Frequently used to refer to casting non-Jew to play Jewish parts

Zionism: The desire for self-determination in the Jewish homeland of Israel, often based on the religious and historical ties the Jewish people have to the land of Israel. "Zionism" or "Israel" is often used in place of "Jews" as cover for antisemitism and/or in contexts unrelated to discussing the political nature of the conflict in the Middle East (ie "The Zionist lobby controls the media.")

Yarmulke/Kippah: Traditional round head covering worn by Jewish males.

Kosher: The Hebrew word "kosher" literally means "fit." The laws of kosher define the foods that are fit for consumption for a Jew.

Shabbos/Shabbat: The divinely-ordained day of rest on the seventh day of the week. It begins on Friday at sunset and ends on the following evening after nightfall.

Ashkenazi (sometimes Ashkenaz/Ashkenazic/Ashkenazim):

- Refers to Jews and their descendants who were exiled and migrated to Central and Eastern Europe. Customs vary among Ashkenazi Jews based on the specific countries in which their ancestors lived. The majority of American Jews are of Ashkenazi descent.

Sephardi (sometimes Sephard/Sephardic/Sephardim):

- Refers to Jews and their descendants who were exiled and migrated to Spain and Portugal. Many of these Jews migrated to North Africa/the Middle East after the expulsion from the Iberian Peninsula in the 15th century. Customs vary among Sephardi Jews based on the specific countries in which their ancestors lived.

Mizrahi:

- Refers to Jews who remained in Israel since biblical times or were exiled to Northern Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia. Customs vary among Mizrahi Jews based on the specific countries in which their ancestors lived,

and are often similar to Sephardic customs due to centuries of commingling. The majority of Israeli Jews are Mizrahi.

Orthodox:

- There are several subcategories of Orthodox Jews, including Ultra-Orthodox (often called "Hareidi" in Israel), Hasidic (which has numerous subcategories in and of itself), Yeshivish/Black Hat, and Modern Orthodox.
- This movement is united by the belief in the divine origin of the Torah and adherence to rabbinic laws as part of that divine origin. There are major distinctions between each Orthodox group.

Conservative/Masorti:

- Conservative Jews vary in their level of practice. This movement is ambiguous about the divine origins of the Torah, and accepts that Jewish practice has evolved over time, often due to external influences.
- While many Conservative Jews, and rabbis especially, adhere to religious laws, the movement's Committee on Jewish Law and Standards and Va'ad HaMasorti engages with how to adapt ancient laws to modernity.

Reform:

- Reform Jews vary in their level of practice. This movement embraces modernity, and believes the Torah is a man-made, God-inspired document.
- This is the largest Jewish movement in America.
- The movement focuses less on adherence to religious laws, and more on social justice (tikkun olam), community building, and modernizing tradition.

Reconstructionist:

- Reconstructionist Jews vary in their level of practice and theologies. This movement focuses on Judaism as a progressively evolving civilization.
- Religious law is not viewed as binding, but rather as the basic foundation that can continually be reinterpreted for new eras by the population living in that time.

Humanistic:

- This is Judaism's newest movement (founded in the 1960s), and one of the smallest, though many "unaffiliated" Jews identify with its founding principles, if not in name.
- This movement prioritizes Judaism as a historic culture and is largely non-theistic. Unaffiliated

- Unaffiliated Jews refer to Jews who are not actively affiliated with any of the aforementioned movements (either by self-identification or by lack of membership to a synagogue housed under a movement's umbrella organization).

- Unaffiliated Jews may practice, be culturally invested in their Jewish heritage, or not

ONLINE RESOURCES AND REFERENCES

• Norman Lear Center Study in collaboration with JITC: "[Jews on Screen](#)"

• Brandeis University: "[US Jewish Population Estimates 2020](#)"

• Creative Community for Peace: "[The Tevye Test](#)"

• European Network Against Racism: "[Debunking Myths About Jews](#)"

• Hollywood's Orthodox Jew Problem: A JITC Documentary

• Center for Scholars and Storytellers: "[The Marginalized Group Inclusion Spaces Forgot to Include](#)"

• Jew in the City Hollywood Bureau: "[The Josephs Test](#)"

• Jewish Virtual Library: "[Anti-Semitism in the United States: Statistics on Religious Hate Crimes](#)"

• ABC <https://abc7ny.com/on-the-red-carpet-storytellers-spotlight-jewish-american-heritage-month-race/13251525/>

• The Guardian <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2022/jan/12/helen-mirren-golda-meir-maureen-lipman-david-baddiel-row-jews-bojack-horseman>

• Newsweek <https://www.newsweek.com/netflix-you-people-branded-horribly-damaging-jewish-people-antisemitism-1778298>

• Tablet <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/arts-letters/articles/you-people-antisemitism>

• The Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law: "[Fact Sheet on the Anti-Semitic Discourse](#)"

• Variety: "[Too Jewish For Hollywood: As Antisemitism Soars, Hollywood Should Address Its Enduring Hypocrisy in Hyperbolic Caricatures of Jews](#)"

• The Washington Post: "[Science Fiction's Anti-Semitism Problem](#)."

• The ADL: <https://www.adl.org/resources/report/antisemitic-attitudes-america-2024>

• <https://www.adl.org/resources/report/jewish-and-israeli-americans-face-discrimination-job-market>