

FAQ: What to Know About Efforts to Re-define Antisemitism to Silence Criticism of Israel

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Antisemitism – hatred, violence, intimidation or discrimination targeting Jews because of their ethnic and religious identity – is a serious phenomenon that must be meaningfully addressed and opposed. Like other forms of racism and oppression, antisemitism is deeply harmful to its victims, and remains a scourge on our society as a whole. Fighting antisemitism must go hand in hand with fighting white supremacy and oppression in all forms.

In recent years, some Israel advocates and lobby groups, including Kenneth Marcus, founder of the Brandeis Center and President Trump's choice to enforce Civil Rights at the U.S. Department of Education, have lobbied for rules and policies aimed at shielding Israel from criticism and accountability for abusing Palestinian rights. Their efforts include pushing governmental actors and private institutions in the U.S., including colleges and universities, to adopt a widely-criticized and overbroad re-definition of antisemitism that classifies virtually all speech supportive of Palestinian rights as antisemitic. This re-definition is sometimes referred to by Israel advocates in the U.S. as the "State Department Definition" because a version of it appears on a State Department webpage (see below for more information).

Misclassifying a broad range of criticism of Israel as inherently antisemitic threatens important political speech activities, often in violation of the First Amendment. Even the lead author of this overbroad definition of antisemitism, Kenneth Stern, opposes its use on college campuses in the U.S., acknowledging that it conflicts with the First Amendment and it undermines free speech principles necessary for critical thinking about both Israeli policy and antisemitism. In a 2016 New York Times Op-Ed, Stern wrote, "[t]he definition was intended for data collectors writing reports about anti-Semitism in Europe. It was never supposed to curtail speech on campus."

What is the "State Department Definition" of Antisemitism"?

The "State Department definition" of antisemitism is the most recent manifestation of a political project attempting to expand the traditional definition of antisemitism to include criticism of Israel. As described below, the definition is sometimes referred to as the "European Union Monitoring Centre definition" or the "3 D's."

The "State Department definition," so-called because it is listed on a U.S. Department of State webpage, has three parts. First, the definition begins with a general and uncontroversial description of how hatred of Jews is manifested. Second, it lists several contemporary examples, which are also uncontroversial because they align with a traditional understanding of antisemitism. These examples include calling for violence against Jews, making allegations about Jews as a collective, and holding Jews as a group responsible for wrongdoing committed by a single person, or the State of Israel. In its third section, the "State Department definition" radically departs from the traditional understanding of antisemitism by listing the "3 D's" of "Anti-Semitism

¹ Kenneth Stern, Will Campus Criticism of Israel Violate Federal Law?, New York Times, Dec. 12, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/12/opinion/will-campus-criticism-of-israel-violate-federal-law.html.



Related to Israel." The 3 D's refer to "demonizing Israel," "applying a double-standard to Israel" and "delegitimizing Israel."

In early 2018, the U.S. State Department website was edited to remove the 3 D's language, replacing it with the substantially similar definition of antisemitism that appeared in a 2016 press release by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), as described in further detail below.²

What is wrong with the "3 D's"?

The 3 D's portion of the re-definition brands critics of Israel and advocates for Palestinian rights as antisemitic by blurring the important distinctions between criticism of Israel as a nation-state and antisemitism.³ In fact, many Jews and many anti-racist activists understand that Jewish people and the Israeli state are not one and the same. Many believe that the unquestioned assumption that the Israeli government represents Jewish people worldwide is itself antisemitic because it necessarily attributes Israeli government policies and practices to all Jews.⁴ Many Israelis – Jewish or otherwise – are critical of the state's policies and practices in ways that could easily be deemed "demonizing" or "delegitimizing."

Many experts believe that efforts to re-define antisemitism to include criticism of Israel and Israeli policies impede important efforts to combat the rising threat of antisemitism. In his testimony at a 2017 Congressional Hearing on antisemitism, Barry Trachtenberg, Chair of Jewish History at Wake Forest University, said, "[a]t a time when genuine antisemitism is threatening Jews in the United States and in many parts of the world, it is a dangerous distraction to redefine antisemitism so as to include critical discussions of Israel."

The British journalist Owen Jones has similarly written that "to defeat all forms of antisemitism—including those that masquerade as solidarity with oppressed Palestinians—we need to be able to identify them. That becomes impossible when the very meaning of the word is abused and lost."

⁵ See Hearing: Examining Anti-Semitism on College Campuses, House of Representatives Judiciary Committee, Nov. 7, 2017, https://judiciary.house.gov/hearing/examining-anti-semitism-college-campuses. For further reading on this important perspective, see Blogpost, Prominent Jewish Studies Scholars File Amicus in Support of SFSU and Dr. Abdulhadi, Palestine Legal, Nov. 9, 2017, https://palestinelegal.org/news/2017/11/7/jewish-studies-scholars-file-amicus.

² See US State Department, *Defining Anti-Semitism*, https://www.state.gov/s/rga/resources/267538.htm (the previous language is available at https://www.state.gov/s/rga/resources/267538.htm (the previous language is available at https://www.state.gov/s/rga/resources/267538.htm (the previous language is available at https://web.archive.org/web/20180117193205/https://www.state.gov/s/rga/resources/267538.htm).

³ For further reading on this distinction, see Jewish Voice for Peace, On Antisemitism: Solidarity and the Struggle for Justice (2017), Haymarket Books, http://onantisemitism.com; See also Neve Gordon, The 'New Anti-Semitism,' London Review of Books, Jan 4, 2018, https://www.lrb.co.uk/v40/n01/neve-gordon/the-new-anti-semitism; See also Saree Makdisi and Judith Butler, Suppressing criticism of Zionism on campus is catastrophic censorship, LA Times, March 23, 2016, http://www.latimes.com/opinion/oped/la-oe-makdisibutler-uc-antisemitism-report-20160323-story.html; See also Judith Butler, No, it's not anti-semitic; See also Edward C. Corrigan, Is Anti-Zionism Anti-Semitic? Jewish Critics Speak, Middle East Policy Council, https://www.mepc.org/anti-zionism-anti-semitic-jewish-critics-speak.

⁴ Id

⁶ Owen Jones, "Anti-Jewish Hatred Is Rising—We Must See It for What It Is," *Guardian*, August 11, 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/aug/11/anti-jewish-hatred-rising-antisemitism-meaning.



Why is the re-definition legally problematic?

The effect of blurring antisemitism with criticism of Israel is to censor political speech. The redefinition of antisemitism is so broadly drawn—and its examples so vague—that any speech critical of Israel or supportive of Palestinian rights could conceivably fall within it. For example, a human rights supporter who speaks out for Palestinian rights, citing reports by such bodies as the United Nations or Amnesty International regarding Israeli human rights abuses, could be labeled antisemitic for applying a double standard by requiring of Israel behavior not expected or demanded of others.

If U.S. government entities adopt and apply this overbroad re-definition of antisemitism to censor political viewpoints critical of Israel, they would likely violate the First Amendment. The U.S. Constitution protects political speech activities from government interference in order to ensure that even those who protest government policies can speak their mind without fear of retribution. The Supreme Court has declared that, "[S]peech on public issues occupies the highest rung of the hierarchy of First Amendment values, and is entitled to special protection. When the government targets a particular viewpoint, the First Amendment violation is all the more blatant. Speech critical of Israeli policies or supportive of Palestinian rights cannot constitute the basis for government – including public university - regulation.

Courts and government agencies have recognized that criticism of Israel is protected political speech, ¹⁰ not unlawful harassment or discrimination based on religion or national origin, as some Israel advocacy groups have claimed. The United States Department of Education's (DOE) Office for Civil Rights has emphatically affirmed that criticism of Israel is protected speech on campus. In August 2013, the DOE dismissed three complaints against the University of California Berkeley, Irvine, and Santa Cruz, which had alleged that criticism of Israel created an antisemitic environment. ¹¹ The DOE also dismissed a complaint against Rutgers University in 2014. ¹² The complaints were made under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

DOE rejected these complaints because the speech activities at issue "constitute[] expression on matters of public concern directed to the University community. In the university environment, exposure to such robust and discordant expressions, even when personally offensive and hurtful, is a circumstance that a reasonable student in higher education may experience. In this context, the events that the complainants described do not constitute actionable harassment."¹³

⁷ Police Dept. of Chicago v. Mosley, 408 U.S. 92, 96 (1972).

⁸ Connick v. Myers, 461 U.S. 138, 145 (1983).

⁹ See R.A.V. v. St. Paul, 505 U.S. 377, 391 (1992).

¹⁰ For example, in 2018, a federal judge blocked Kansas from enforcing an anti-boycott law aimed at punishing individuals and companies that support boycotts for Palestinian rights. In issuing a preliminary injunction, the judge wrote, "the conduct the [law] aims to regulate is inherently expressive. It is easy enough to associate plaintiff's conduct with the message that the boycotters believe Israel should improve its treatment of Palestinians. And boycotts—like parades—have an expressive quality. Forcing plaintiff to disown her boycott is akin to forcing plaintiff to accommodate Kansas's message of support for Israel." See Koontz v. Watson, 2018 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 14260.

¹¹ DOE's determination letters in these three cases, explaining its legal findings, can be downloaded at the following URLs: UC Berkeley (http://bit.ly/doeucb); UC Santa Cruz (http://bit.ly/doeucsc); UC Irvine (http://bit.ly/doeucirvine).

¹² A summary of the complaint filed against Rutgers University, and it subsequent dismissal by DOE, is available at https://palestinelegal.org/the-palestine-exception-appendix#rutgers2.

¹³ See UC Santa Cruz and UC Berkeley determination letters, supra note 11.



In 2017, the Lawfare Project, a right-wing anti-Palestinian legal organization, sued San Francisco State University (SFSU) professor Rabab Abdulhadi and SFSU for tolerating advocacy for Palestinian rights. The Lawfare Project's suit relied explicitly on the 3-D's definition of antisemitism. In response, a group of Jewish studies scholars submitted an amicus brief objecting to the use of this definition, calling it "a misleading and dangerous redefinition of partisan origins that fails to comport with the overwhelming consensus of scholars on the subject of anti-Jewish hate." In 2018, a court dismissed the lawsuit, including claims that speech critical of Israeli policies violated Jewish students' First Amendment rights, their right to equal protection, and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. 15

Where does the re-definition of Antisemitism come from?

The effort to re-define antisemitism to include common criticism of Israel originated over a decade ago when the idea of a Tel Aviv University professor, Dina Porat, was championed by the American Jewish Committee and other U.S.-based Israel advocacy groups.¹⁶ The 3-Ds test was popularized around the same time by a Jewish leader and current chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel, Natan Sharansky.

Lobbying efforts by pro-Israel groups culminated in the European Union Monitoring Centre ("EUMC") posting a very similar version of the re-definition to its website in 2005. Thus, it has often been referred to as the "EUMC Working Definition." But the definition, which was meant only as a "guide for data collection," was never formally adopted by the EUMC and, in fact, was subsequently discarded by the EUMC's successor body, the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), due to heavy criticism arising out of free expression concerns. Indeed, in 2013, the FRA removed the definition from its website because, according to an agency spokesperson, the FRA had never viewed the document as a valid definition. In the document was pulled offline "together with other non-official documents," to the consternation of Israeli officials and U.S.-based Israel advocacy groups including the AJC and the Simon Wiesenthal Center, which called on the agency to restore the working definition to its website.²⁰

 $\underline{https://static1.squarespace.com/static/548748b1e4b083fc03ebf70e/t/5aa74a4e9140b783c1c2ed3d/1520912977347/motion+to+file+amicus+brief+original.pdf.}$

¹⁴ The amicus brief is available online at

¹⁵ An overview of the case, including legal filings, is available at https://palestinelegal.org/case-studies/2017/11/3/years-long-suppression-campaign-sfsu.

¹⁶ Dina Porat, "The International Working Definition of Antisemitism and Its Detractors," *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs*, 93, 94, VOL. 3 (2011), http://www.kantorcenter.tau.ac.il/sites/default/files/DinaPorat5%209_0.pdf.

¹⁷ See Fact Sheet, The IRHA Working Definition of Antisemitism, European Coordination of Committees and Associations for Palestine, Dec. 7, 2017, http://www.eccpalestine.org/the-ihra-working-definition-of-antisemitism-fact-sheet-and-recommendations-issued-by-eccp-and-free-speech-on-israel; see also Seth Berkman, "Anti-Semitism Fight Hinges On Definition," https://enward.com/articles/163105/anti-semitism-fight-hinges-on-definition.

¹⁸ See JTA, "EU anti-racism agency unable to define anti-Semitism, official says," Dec. 4, 2013,

https://www.jta.org/2013/12/04/news-opinion/world/eu-anti-racism-agency-unable-to-define-anti-semitism-official-says.

19 JTA, "EU drops its 'working definition' of anti-Semitism," *The Times of Israel*, http://www.timesofisrael.com/eu-drops-its-working-definition-of-anti-semitism/#ixzz37q[RBu]L

²⁰ See Simon Wiesenthal Center, "SWC to EU Baroness Ashton: Return Anti-Semitism Definition Document to EU Fundamental Rights Agency Website," Wiesenthal.com,

http://www.wiesenthal.com/site/apps/nlnet/content.aspx?c=lsKWLbPJLnF&b=8776547&ct=13381863; see also American Jewish Committee, AJC Urges EU to Act on Findings of Anti-Semitism Report, http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/ajc-urges-eu-to-act-on-findings-of-anti-semitism-report-231178991.html.



In 2016, the Plenary of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) adopted a non-binding working definition of antisemitism:

"Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews." Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities."²¹

In a press release announcing the adoption of the working definition, the IHRA included examples of antisemitism "to guide IHRA in its work." The examples mirror the 3-D's language that had been removed from the EUMC/FRA website. Importantly, the "examples" portion of the IHRA press release were not formally approved by the plenary of IHRA member states as the working definition itself was. The IHRA subsequently confirmed that the working definition of antisemitism adopted by IHRA in 2016 is not legally binding, and that the guiding examples listed in the 2016 press release had not been adopted by the body.²³

In June 2017, the EU Parliament endorsed the IHRA working definition, calling on member states and EU institutions and agencies to apply the working definition.²⁴ The resolution endorsed only the IHRA working definition and not the guiding examples of antisemitism listed in the IHRA's 2016 press release.²⁵ Some EU member states, including the UK, have adopted the working definition. It has been reported that some municipalities in the UK have adopted the working definition as well as the list of examples.²⁶

Does the U.S. State Department use the re-definition within the U.S.?

At most, the U.S. State Department uses the re-definition of antisemitism for the limited purpose of identifying antisemitism abroad, for example, in country reports on global antisemitism. In the State Department's 2008 report "Contemporary Global Anti-Semitism" the following text appears: "The [2004] EUMC's working definition provides a useful framework for identifying and understanding the problem [of anti-Semitism, and its persistence and is adopted for the purposes of this report."

Importantly, the 2008 report contains this caveat: "While the report describes many measures that foreign governments have adopted to combat anti-Semitism, it does not endorse any such measures that prohibit conduct that would be protected under the US Constitution."²⁷ This caveat is necessary because if a government body were to apply the proposed re-definition to restrict speech in the U.S., it would violate the First Amendment.

²¹ See Press Release, Antisemitism, International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, May 26, 2016, https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/sites/default/files/press_release_document_antisemitism.pdf. ²² Id.

²³ See Fact Sheet, supra note 17.

²⁴ See JTA, European Parliament approves resolution to adopt working definition of anti-Semitism, June 1, 2017, https://www.jta.org/2017/06/01/news-opinion/world/european-parliament-approves-resolution-to-adopt-working-definition-ofanti-semitism.

²⁵ The text of the EU Parliament resolution on combating anti-Semitism, 2017/2692(RSP) is available at http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=MOTION&reference=B8-2017-0383&language=EN# part1 def4. ²⁶ See Gordon, supra note 3.

²⁷ See US State Department, 2008 Contemporary Global Anti-Semitism Report, 2 (Washington, D.C.: US State Department, 2008), http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/102301.pdf. Also, in 2010, the State Department issued its 2010 Compendium of Global Anti-Semitism which reprints in one of its appendices the dated 2004 EUMC anti-Semitism definition and repeats the "purposes of this report" and constitutional caveats.



Where else has the re-definition appeared in the U.S.?

A comparable definition was endorsed by the California legislature in a non-binding resolution in 2012, House Resolution No. 35. This resolution encouraged suppression of political speech critical of Israel on California college campuses, and defined antisemitism to include "language or behavior [that] demonizes and delegitimizes Israel" and "student- and faculty-sponsored boycott, divestment, and sanction campaigns against Israel." The non-binding resolution suggested that the University of California deny use of "public resources ... for anti-Semitic or any intolerant agitation." If implemented, this recommendation would result in a blatant violation of the U.S. Constitution; a public university cannot discriminate in funding or other resources because it dislikes a particular viewpoint.²⁹

In 2015, the University of California Regents did, in fact, consider adopting the re-definition of antisemitism. After considerable pushback by free speech and Palestinian rights advocates, the University dropped consideration of the re-definition, instead adopting a resolution condemning "anti-Semitic forms of anti-Zionism." Across the country, some university student governments, including at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, have adopted the re-definition through non-binding resolutions, often under pressure from outside Israel advocacy organizations like the Brandeis Center. In 2017, the student government at Kent State University rejected an effort to adopt the re-definition of antisemitism after First Amendment concerns were raised.³²

Several other attempts to codify the re-definition in law have failed, at the federal and state level. In 2016, at the behest of the Anti-Defamation League and other Israel advocacy organizations, Congress introduced the Anti-Semitism Awareness Act (ASAA), which would require the DOE to use the re-definition when investigating instances of alleged antisemitism on college campuses. The ASAA failed to pass the U.S. House of Representatives³³ due to First Amendment concerns after civil liberties and civil rights groups, including

³⁰ See Palestine Legal, UC Drops Consideration of State Department Anti-Semitism Definition, July 22, 2015, http://palestinelegal.org/news/2015/7/22/uc-drops-consideration-of-state-department-anti-semitism-definition.

²⁸ California State Assembly, House Resolution No. 35, adopted August 28, 2012. The bill, available at http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201120120HR35, purports to provide evidence of anti-Semitism on campus, but the examples provided were replete with false information, exaggerations, and assumptions that criticism of Israeli policy is anti-Semitic. Particularly outrageous were the citations to real instances of anti-Semitism (such as swastika graffiti), which had no documented relationship to Palestine advocacy but were presented as if perpetrated by critics of Israeli policy or the result of such criticism.

²⁹ Rosenberger v. Rector, 515 U.S. 819 (1995).

³¹ See Pat Schneider, UW-Madison Student Council adopts anti-Semitism resolution, code of conduct, Sept. 8, 2017, <a href="http://host.madison.com/ct/news/local/education/university/uw-madison-student-council-adopts-anti-semitism-resolution-code-of/article_1dca4d79-f9b7-5d8f-bdd8-def837fc123e.html; Palestine Legal sent UW-Madison a legal letter warning that implementation of the re-definition would likely invite First Amendment legal challenges. See Palestine Legal, University of Wisconsin-Madison Students of Color Targeted for Organizing Against White Supremacy and Zionism, Nov. 6, 2017, https://palestinelegal.org/news/2017/11/6/wisconsin-students-of-color-targeted.

³² See Mitch Felan, USG passes anti-Semitism denunciation resolution after initial BDS Movement controversy, Kent Wired March 8, 2017, http://www.kentwired.com/article 5e99ba80-0471-11e7-9fd3-4bd95b192f17.html.

³³ See Palestine Legal, Bill aimed at censoring Palestine advocacy on campuses fails to pass U.S. House, Dec. 12, 2016, http://palestinelegal.org/news/2016/12/12/bill-aimed-at-censoring-palestine-advocacy-on-campuses-fails-to-pass-us-house; see also Palestine Legal, Media Spotlight: "Anti-Semitism Awareness Act" Draws criticism in the Media, Dec. 15, 2016, https://palestinelegal.org/news/2016/12/14/media-spotlight-anti-semitism-awareness-act-draws-criticism.



Palestine Legal,³⁴ the ACLU³⁵, the Center for Constitutional Rights, National Lawyers Guild, Foundation for Individual Rights in Education,³⁶ Jewish Voice for Peace, ADC, and others publicly opposed the bill. As noted above, Kenneth Stern, the re-definition's original author, also opposed the bill.³⁷ Copy-cat bills were introduced – and defeated – in South Carolina,³⁸ Virginia,³⁹ and Tennessee⁴⁰ in 2017. In April 2018, the South Carolina legislature took steps to enact its version of the ASAA by attaching it to the state budget after it stalled in the state senate as a stand-alone bill due to free speech concerns.⁴¹

In December 2017, Bal Harbour, FL passed an ordinance authorizing local law enforcement to use the "State Department Definition" of antisemitism to investigate alleged incidents of antisemitic hate crimes.⁴² If enforced to punish First Amendment protected speech critical of Israeli government policy, this ordinance could expose local law enforcement to legal liability.

What should I do if my Palestinian rights advocacy is censored or suppressed?

The First Amendment protects your right to speak out in support of Palestinian freedom and to advocate for Palestinian rights. Any effort by a government actor, including a public university, to censor or suppress your political speech or to punish you for engaging in First Amendment-protected activity likely violates your constitutional rights. This includes efforts to misclassify speech critical of Israeli government policy as antisemitic harassment. If you encounter any legal obstacles or threats due to your advocacy for Palestinian rights, please report it to Palestine Legal at https://palestinelegal.org/intake.

³⁴ A letter to Members of Congress opposing the Anti-Semitism Awareness Act, signed by Palestine Legal, the Center for Constitutional Rights, National Lawyers Guild, Jewish Voice for Peace, Friends Committee on National Legislation, U.S. Campaign for Palestinian Rights, Defending Rights and Dissent, American Muslims for Palestine, and ADC is available

at: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/548748b1e4b083fc03ebf70e/t/584eca8ee6f2e17fd89fa3ca/1481558672194/AntiSemitism+Awareness+Act+Opposition+Letter+final.pdf.

³⁵ Blogpost, Oppose H.R. 6421/S.10, The Anti-Semitism Awareness Act of 2016, ACLU, Dec. 5,

^{2016,} https://www.aclu.org/letter/oppose-hr-6421s-10-anti-semitism-awareness-act-2016.

³⁶ Joe Cohn, Problematic Campus Anti-Semitism Bill Clears Senate, Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, Dec. 2, 2016, https://www.thefire.org/problematic-campus-anti-semitism-bill-clears-senate.

³⁷ See Stern, supra note 1.

³⁸ See Palestine Legal, Victory! Unconstitutional South Carolina bill aimed at censoring Palestine advocacy defeated, March 2, 2017, http://palestinelegal.org/news/2017/3/2/south-carolina-lawmakers-considering-unconstitutional-bill-aimed-at-censoring-palestine-advocacy.

³⁹ See Palestine Legal, Victory! Unconstitutional bill defeated in Virginia, Jan. 30, 2017, http://palestinelegal.org/news/2017/1/30/virginia-lawmakers-considering-unconstitutional-bill-aimed-at-censoring-palestine-advocacy-1

⁴⁰ In April 2017, the Tennessee bill was "Deferred for Summer Study," http://wapp.capitol.tn.gov/apps/Billinfo/default.aspx?BillNumber=SB0581&ga=110.

⁴¹ See Andrew Brown and Seanna Adcox, Antisemitism and 'sanctuary cities' bill inserted into South Carolina state budget, The Post and Courier, April 12, 2018, https://www.postandcourier.com/news/antisemitism-and-sanctuary-cities-bill-inserted-into-south-carolina-state/article_0bc622c0-3e87-11e8-99e3-df93acd6be75.html.

⁴² See Elizabeth Koh, Is anti-semitism a hate crime? This town is giving police more power to find out, Miami Herald, Dec. 14, 2017, http://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/community/miami-dade/article189723404.html.