

HOW  
TO FIGHT  
ANTISEMITISM

**SAFETY  
THROUGH  
SOLIDARITY**

by Ben Lorber and Shane Burley

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This is a reprint of a Vashti Media piece by Ben Lorber and Shane Burley, *How to fight antisemitism—and win*, and an excerpt from an interview Ben and Shane did with Strangers in a Tangled Wilderness about their new book, *Safety Through Solidarity: A Radical Guide to Fighting Antisemitism*.



It would be fair to assume that as Jewish writers who have spent much of our careers actively highlighting the growing danger of antisemitism, we would be delighted that it is currently one of the biggest news stories around the world. But despite the mountains of headlines, Anti-Defamation League data audits, pending anti-free speech legislation and an all-out street war on college activists, what does not seem to be on offer is a grounded conversation about what antisemitism actually is and what we can do about it.

Instead, accusations of antisemitism are lobbed by the right as a Hail Mary pass against progressives; the issue is injected into conversations that have little to do with the historic ideology that has plagued Jews for centuries; and we are still failing to address the rapid mainstreaming of antisemitism across the authoritarian right, as it continues to advance its anti-democratic agenda. We want a fight against antisemitism – just not the fight we've been handed.

Instead of replaying the technocratic games of power that have misled us to outsource the fight against antisemitism to police, prisons, provosts, presidents and prime ministers, it is time we mobilised cross-community movements to uproot antisemitism at its foundations. Informed by the lessons we lay out in our new book, *Safety Through Solidarity: A Radical Guide to Fighting Antisemitism*, here is our 10-point guide to tackling this form of oppression at its source.

## **Step One: Fight for a more equal society**

We cannot ultimately defeat antisemitism without a revolution. Antisemitism thrives within the economic and social system of racial capitalism, where wealth, power and privilege accrue to a select few, leaving most people exploited and disempowered. Under this unjust system, authoritarian leaders spread conspiracy theories that an all-powerful Jewish cabal is responsible for society's oppressive hierarchies: a false narrative that protects those who benefit from these hierarchies by confusing and dividing everyone else, misdirecting popular rage away from the root causes of oppression.

As long as masses of people are suffering, alienated and eager to find someone to blame, antisemitism will remain a powerful meta-explanation for reactionary leaders to draw upon to divert popular anger onto a false target. Only by creating a more just and equal society, where people are empowered to lead lives of true meaning, can we undercut the alienation that motivates people to look for scapegoats.

While that may feel like a distant goal, however, there is plenty we can do in the short and medium term to help us get there.

## **Step Two: Resist the authoritarian right**

We must build the broadest possible social movement to defeat the resurgent, white Christian nationalist right – an exclusionary, authoritarian movement that is the primary ideology driving antisemitism and all other forms of oppression in today's world.

In the short and medium term, blocking the advance of the authoritarian right means defending and expanding multiracial democracy, imperfect and flawed as its institutions often are, while also building parallel institutions that

embody and prefigure the better world we are building. It means growing the capacity to counter far-right mobilisations in the streets, the classrooms, the courtrooms, the synagogues and all other sites of contestation.

It also means developing practices of mutual aid and accountability to keep each other safe, and building our tactics and strategies on a deep foundation of care and solidarity. And it means making our movements for racial, economic and gender justice expansive enough to welcome as many people as possible from diverse constituencies, while remaining grounded in core principles.

## **Step Three: Build multiracial coalitions**

To defeat the authoritarian right, we must build strong coalitions of partnership between different identities and communities targeted by a shared threat. Anti-Blackness, transphobia, anti-migrant xenophobia and other forms of oppression have largely the same source as antisemitism: white Christian supremacy, capitalism, colonialism and male supremacy.

Our coalitions have to use intersectional analysis, understanding how different forms of oppression interlock, uphold and mutually reinforce each other,



to get at the root of it all, together. We must build resilient, radical cultures and communities, founded on durable relationships that can resist the right's attempts to divide us along lines of difference.

## **Step Four: Understand our differences**

This means we have to actively respect the right to difference in our communities and relationships. We can trace commonalities and intersections between different forms of oppression, but this does not mean that these kinds of oppression manifest in the same way, or that the experiences of those targeted by different forms of oppression are identical.

Antisemitism may have a common source as other forms of marginalisation, but it does not work in exactly the same way. The tools we use to understand its history and present-day manifestations, and the strategies we use to combat it, may be familiar in some ways and distinct in others. Within and between communities, we must remain attentive to the specific experiences of different individuals and groups, and learn and grow from these differences rather than trying to subsume them into a higher sameness.

This also means that Jews and all other marginalised groups deserve to have their uniqueness and particularities protected within a pluralistic society. Jews can resist assimilation by reclaiming bold, proud Jewish identities, while non-Jews can support us by holding space for our self-organisation, and bearing witness to our histories, identities and trauma.

Antisemitism is an attack on the Jewish right to remain Jewish, to hold Jewish particularism, ritual, tradition and community across the centuries, and just as all targeted groups have the right to reclaim their ancestral legacies, Jewish resistance to antisemitism must recognise Jewish distinctiveness. This means fostering the full flourishing of Jewish identities and experience, and protecting the rights of all Jewish communities to fully practise their embodied traditions.

## **Step Five: Combat conspiracism**

We must create a united front against conspiracy theories, which are largely built on an antisemitic framework. They are foundational to the false narratives of the ascendant far right, and on the left they undermine any viable fight for real change by keeping us confused about the root causes of oppression, chasing imaginary cabals instead of transforming concrete systems of power.

We can fight conspiracy theories with in-depth political education in social movement spaces, tracing the real actors and structures that stand in the way of change. We can also work to combat misinformation in broader society through measures like increasing media literacy, holding social and mainstream media outlets accountable, and implementing journalistic practices that combat blatant falsehoods and fearmongering.

Without a fundamental transformation of systemic inequities in our society, however, these will be half-measures at best. Conspiracy theories thrive in a world where people feel alienated, isolated, disempowered and eager for someone to blame. Only by building a world where people are meaningfully empowered to shape the conditions of their lives can we combat conspiracy thinking at its root.

## **Step Six: Avoid hyperbole**

We must avoid hyperbole when discussing antisemitism, rejecting any notion that it is an “eternal hatred” irredeemably plaguing our society or a “natural” component of the gentile world, or that any rise in antisemitism means another

er Holocaust is right around the corner. Rather, antisemitism can be understood, unlearned and defeated, like any other form of oppression.

We can do this by understanding it in its historical, social and political context, and engaging in mass movement building. We can also work to understand and heal from the inherited, intergenerational trauma in Jewish communities that helps these fear-based narratives stick. And we can resist the various actors within and beyond our community that foment and amplify fear in order to mobilize support for their reactionary and divisive agendas, such as pro-Israel groups in the diaspora and right-wing Israeli or Christian nationalist leaders.

## **Step Seven: Stop weaponising antisemitism against Palestinian liberation**

We need to scale up the global uprising in support of Palestinian rights and an end to settler colonialism in Palestine (and everywhere else), and immediately halt politicised accusations of antisemitism that are too often wielded by the right as a cudgel against progressive movements. These smokescreen accusa-

tions have become a primary tool used by the right to demonise and delegitimise one of the largest mass solidarity movements in recent history, and many institutional forces are using these accusations to pass repressive legislation, target activists, and shred the rights of free speech and political activity that have historically kept Jews and other minorities safe.

Most of those wielding such accusations aren't really trying to keep Jews safe. Israel's defenders are trying instead to distract from the growing awareness of Israel's oppression of Palestinians, while white Christian nationalists are trying to divert attention from rising antisemitism on the right by cynically portraying themselves as the best friends of Jews.

We must clarify the difference between antisemitism and principled criticism of Israel's deepening oppression of Palestinians, and emphatically affirm that the right, not the left, is the primary source of antisemitism and the biggest threat to Jews today. We must also learn to distinguish between feeling unsafe and being unsafe, and between discomfort and danger, so that we are less susceptible to right-wing fearmongering campaigns that don't have our best interests at heart.

Alongside this, we need to recognize that militarist, ethnocratic politics in Israel have done little to keep global Jewry safe. Instead, they have created a status quo of radical instability and danger in the Holy Land, and put large parts of the Jewish community into a toxic alliance with the antisemitic global far right – all while waging war on the indigenous inhabitants of historic Palestine.

## **Step Eight: Recognise antisemitism in our movements**

While more deeply ingrained in the political right, antisemitism can show up on the left as well, just like any other form of oppression in our society. Because antisemitism presents itself as a way to “speak truth to power”, it can appeal to social movements or marginalised communities looking to understand and counter systems of unjust power – leading these movements and communities down a dead-end road of conspiracism and scapegoating. But unlike the right, where antisemitism is a core driver of authoritarianism, antisemitism in movement spaces can be unlearned with commitment and dedication, just like other forms of oppression.

We can fight antisemitism on the left through fostering in-depth political education; avoiding conspiracy theories (whether around capitalism, Israel-Palestine or anything else); strengthening relationships of mutual trust, care and accountability between communities; and cultivating greater sensitivity to Jewish history, identity and trauma. We can fight for Jews to be fully included in the left's circle of care through the stories the left tells about who is deemed worthy of solidarity and liberation. By vocalising its commitment to fighting antisemitism and including Jews in its "story of 'we'", the left can more fully embody its commitment to collective liberation across the board.

## **Step Nine: Uplift marginalised Jewish voices**

We have to uplift the voices and leadership of Jews of colour, Sephardi and Mizrahi Jews, working-class Jews and marginalised Jews of other identities. Because marginalised Jews sit at multiple axes of identity, they are uniquely positioned to speak to the intersections of oppression that must be addressed when constructing any viable program to fight antisemitism, and to build relationships of solidarity across communities.

Black Jews, for example, can be especially well-positioned to unpack the intersections of antisemitism and anti-Blackness, and to help catalyse a politics of solidarity within and across these overlapping and distinct communities. Without this leadership, we are liable to replicate ineffective and harmful organising models that tend to separate antisemitism from other forms of oppression, foster complicity with racist state violence and other oppressive forces, and elevate dominant expressions of Jewishness over others.

## **Step Ten: Mobilise non-Jews in our shared struggle**

Non-Jews must join the fight against antisemitism. Especially in progressive and radical movements, it is too often only Jews who show interest in understanding and fighting antisemitism – but antisemitism is first and foremost a problem of the gentile world.

We not only need non-Jews to support Jews who are threatened by rapidly deepening antisemitism, we need non-Jews to see it as their own fight. Antisemitism is a conspiracy theory that harms both Jews and other marginalised groups, and undermines our collective ability to fight for change; for that reason, it is in everyone's interest to defeat it.



Strangers in a Tangled Wilderness members Margaret Killjoy and Casandra Johns interviewed Ben and Shane about *Safety Through Solidarity*. Here's an excerpt from our discussion, which you can find in full on Live Like the World is Dying, episodes #128–129, and the Strangers podcast, episode #34.

*How do we build a radically different fight against antisemitism, one built on finding safety in solidarity?*

**Shane Burley:** Part of the issue is that you can't talk about building a new future on the question about antisemitism without talking about the Zionist erasure of Jewish history, identity, and leftist organizing. Ours is not the first book to point out that there was very foundational antisemitism in the Zionist movement itself. Zionism often portrayed Jews as weak, needing to be redeemed by a nation state. Zionism likewise erased different strands of Jewishness as it tried to create a unified, and singular, national identity built largely on white Ashkenazi experiences, formalizing one Jewish language while essentially disappearing others. And then, of course, the heavy presence of Christian

Zionists, who have a fundamentally antisemitic theology that demands Jews convert or die during the apocalypse.

So to talk about what the alternative is, we have to sort of establish what we are moving away from. Right now, Israel is often presented as the ultimate institution of Jewish safety. Instead, we see pluralism and multiculturalism as the foundations that have always kept Jews safe. When I look at Israel, a settler colonial national project, I don't think to myself "what a tremendously bunch of safe Jews." That's because it is largely a falsehood: nationalism, imperialism, and statecraft have never been what keeps Jews safe.

The lessons we chronicle in our book actually show us that what protects Jewish lives and particularism is a situation where their difference is respected and then shared with neighbors who often have different traditions and customs themselves. There is a whole thread of "diasporism" that a lot of people on the Jewish left, and some Jewish mystical traditions, are reviving. This perspective sees the idea of "Jewishness," the qualities we celebrate of the Jewish experience, were forged not in Israel, but in the Jewish diaspora where Jews necessarily lived alongside non-Jews. Or, to say it another way, we become Jews when we enter community with non-Jews. Our identity was forged in

conversation and kinship with others, and in doing so we set up a partnership in a kind of shared circumstances and struggle. Trauma and violence has fostered a culture of suspicion, the notion that antisemitism is somehow implicit in the Gentile world, and therefore nationalism and borders can only possibly keep Jews safe. This is an ahistorical conclusion, the result of decades of recuperation, assimilation, and collaboration with rulers, and which ultimately severs the lifeline Jews have always had: their relationship with others who are likewise marginalized by those in power.

And this is, ultimately, what we mean by “safety in solidarity”: it is finding the answer to Jewish safety by building a community that crosses lines of identity so we can fight our shared sources of oppression. Because, ultimately, what we are talking about are social systems, and if we take words like “oppression” seriously then we have to acknowledge that there is a center of power that doesn’t just perpetuate that oppression, but benefits from it. Those in power are able to sustain their power by instigating the working class people to arguing each other for their very real experiences of alienation and strife, rather than the rich who control the wealth. Antisemitism is a false story about liberation, one that points in the direction of a conspiratorial Jewish cabal rather

than those who actually sit on the boards of banks, run transnational corporations, and hold office in the halls of power.

It needs all of us, across lines of identity, to support each other through mutual aid if we are going to have a strategy strong enough to push a revolutionary change in society. And that is what we are talking about, revolution. We believe that like all forms of oppression, antisemitism is baked into the structures of modern society, and it is going to require tearing out the roots of inequality if we want to ultimately defeat it. And with that revolutionary spirit is a kind of utopian impulse: we know we can.

And maybe that is where Judaism returns to this conversation. From the idea that Jews are here to participate in the project of healing the world, tikkun olam, and that the culmination of that work will be the creation of another type of world. A new world is possible.

But it can only happen by envisioning a future where our safety is placed into the trusted hands of our neighbors rather than assuming that police and prisons, militaries and occupying armies are going to do anything other than protect those in power.

**Ben Lorber:** It starts with relationships. It's about staying close with each other and continuing to show up. In our book we quote a movement leader named Dove Kent who says it well— "Solidarity is not easy. It is difficult, it is trying, it is facing disappointments in each other over and over again—and reaching for each other over and over again. It's not walking away." It can be really scary, when you hear your comrades say something antisemitic, when you don't feel the trust— it's easy to want to walk away. Staying in relationship is hard, but it's the only way forward. I think the way to fight antisemitism on the left, and to fight all kinds of oppression is through building and strengthening those relationships— without those, everything else is literally impossible. And that looks like Jews showing up for other people's struggles, it looks like other people showing up for Jews. It looks like developing those horizontal relationships that are the opposite of the vertical alliance with power promised by Zionism. That's the surefire way to really keep us all safe. And that goes for every kind of oppression. Jews are hardly the first or only group on the Left to look around and think 'wait a minute, my comrades don't actually get what I'm going through and don't know how to fight for me...' But we get there by trying.

That's the foundation, and beyond that, we need to connect the fight against antisemitism with the fight against capitalism, against racism, patriarchy, nationalism and all other forms of oppression. Too often, Zionism and the 'lachrymose' theory of Jewish history present antisemitism as this singularly unique form of oppression, in a category all its own, a kind of mystical essence detached from history, context and understanding. I think trauma plays a role, too, in fostering that understanding, especially within the Jewish community. But actually, at every historical moment including our own, antisemitism comes bound up with practically every other form of oppression operative in our society. This was true over centuries in Christian Europe, when demonization of Jews was part of the same Christian supremacist ideology that resulted in the forced conversion and cultural destruction of millions; the expropriation and plunder of continents; and the development of ideologies like anti-blackness, Islamophobia and settler-colonial genocide. It's true today, when the Right uses conspiracy theories of Jewish power to fuel attacks on immigrants, trans folks, Black folks and Muslims. This gives not just Jews, but everyone a stake in fighting antisemitism. Ultimately I don't want my non-Jewish comrades to fight antisemitism just because they want to show up for Jews- I need them to

know it's in their self-interest too. None of us are truly free until we can rip out the roots of these supremacist systems together.

A safety-through-solidarity analysis means we have to be clear about where the greatest threat comes from, and where we can find our allies. The foundational source of antisemitism, yesterday and today, is the authoritarian fascist Right and the ideology of white Christian nationalism which animates it. This doesn't mean that, like any other oppression, it can't show up on the Left too—of course it can. We need to root out conspiracy theories and all other kinds of antisemitism in our own movements. But we can't get confused—antisemitism is a core fuel of the Right's agenda of division, exclusion and fear. At this moment in Turtle Island and around the world, rising fascism puts Jews and all other marginalized groups in danger. We fight it by building horizontal power, networks of mutual aid, community defense, and other grassroots strategies. And we can also fight it by building broad coalitions for broad campaigns of racial, economic and gender justice across our society. We also have to call out the fascist Right's cynical usage of bad-faith antisemitism accusations to slander, smear and demonize our movements. We need to be clear on the differences between anti-Zionism and antisemitism, and be clear where our allies

are. We can't let them divide us– we know we are stronger together. Fighting antisemitism means fighting fascism in all its forms, and building a better world in its place– there is no other way.



# About the Authors

Ben Lorber is Senior Research Analyst at Political Research Associates, a social movement think tank, where he studies and publishes on antisemitism and white nationalism. He previously worked as national campus organizer with Jewish Voice for Peace, supporting justice-driven young Jewish communities across the country, and has written extensively on antisemitism, Israel/Palestine and Jewish identity.

Shane Burley is known for his work on the far-right and left-wing social movements. He is the author of *Fascism Today: What It Is and How to End It* (AK Press, 2017) and *Why We Fight: Essays on Fascism, Resistance, and Surviving the Apocalypse* (AK Press, 2021), and editor of the anthology *¡No pasarán!: Readings on Antifascism* (AK Press, 2022).

# More From Strangers

We release audio versions of each of these featured zines, as well as interviews and other behind the scenes content, through our podcast Strangers in a Tangled Wilderness, so we hope you'll check it out! Strangers in a Tangled Wilderness is a collectively run anarchist publisher. We put out books, zines, and podcasts, which you can find at [tangledwilderness.org](http://tangledwilderness.org). Our podcasts include: **Live Like the World is Dying**, your podcast for what feels like the end times; **The Spectacle**, for people who love movies and hate cops; and **Strangers in a Tangled Wilderness**. Thanks for reading!





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