

Definitions of Antisemitism and Their Impact on Historians

Prepared by Members of the American Historical Association Council

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The American Historical Association offers this white paper as a touchpoint for those seeking to understand the recent history of official efforts to define antisemitism, and why the misuse of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s Working Definition on Antisemitism has become a threat to open historical inquiry.

In the last decade, three major definitions of antisemitism have emerged in higher education discourse: the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance Working Definition on Antisemitism (2016), the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism (2021), and the Nexus Document (2021). Each owes much to the specific institutional context from which it emerged. This document considers the history and intended use of each of these definitions, followed by their impact on the historical discipline.

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance Working Definition on Antisemitism

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (hereafter, IHRA) is an intergovernmental organization (IGO) founded in 1998 with the mission to promote education, research, and remembrance about the Holocaust, as outlined in their founding document, the “Stockholm Declaration,” signed in 2000. Spearheaded by Sweden’s then–Prime Minister Göran Persson and initially called the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research (ITF), IHRA was formed in response to reports of rising antisemitism and Holocaust denial in Europe, concerns over education and awareness about the Judeocide, and the opening of Soviet-era archives for international researchers after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.¹

IHRA is comprised of 35 Member Countries (including 25 member states of the European Union, Argentina, Australia, Canada, North Macedonia, Serbia, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States); one Liaison Country (Cyprus); and seven Observer Countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Malta, Moldova, Monaco, New Zealand, and Uruguay). The presidency of IHRA, and its associated chair, rotates annually among the member countries. Argentina holds the presidency for a yearlong term beginning March 18, 2026, with Marcelo Mindlin serving as the current chair.

In 2020, IHRA members approved a “[Ministerial Declaration](#)” that reaffirmed the alliance’s support for its founding Stockholm Declaration and updated its mission to remember and promote research into the genocide of Roma and Sinti, and to combat contemporary antiziganism alongside antisemitism. The 2020 Ministerial Declaration also included “[commitments](#)” specific to historians and historical research. According to this document, historians should:

¹ The task force adopted the name “International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance” in 2012. “About IHRA,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Romania, n.d, accessed September 28, 2026, <https://mae.ro/en/node/36166>; “Declarations of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research,” US Department of State Archive, December 3, 1998, https://1997-2001.state.gov/regions/eur/981203_heac_decl.html.

8. Lead efforts to promote education, remembrance and research on the Holocaust and the genocide of the Roma to counter the influence of historical distortion, hate speech and incitement to violence and hatred.
9. Safeguard the historical record of the Holocaust, the genocide of the Roma, and the persecution of other victims by Nazi Germany and those fascist and extreme nationalist partners and other collaborators who participated in these crimes.
10. Underline the importance of identifying, preserving, and making available archival material, testimonies and authentic sites for educational purposes, commemoration and research.
11. Encourage all countries and societies to address their respective pasts by dealing openly and accurately with the historical record.
12. Commend efforts by governments and civil society to commemorate the Holocaust and share good practices.
13. Recognize that understanding the unprecedented nature of the Holocaust is essential to the prevention of genocide and mass atrocity crimes. IHRA expertise is relevant to historically informed policymaking and addressing contemporary challenges.

The European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia Working Definition of Antisemitism

In 2016, IHRA adopted a March 2005 “working definition of antisemitism” (hereafter, WDA) that had been written for the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC), with the only notable differences being changes in the sequencing of the text.² The WDA included 11 examples, seven that relate to the state of Israel.

An agency of the European Union created in 1997, the EUMC’s mission was to provide EU member states with “objective, reliable and comparable data at European level on racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism in order to help them when they took measures or formulated courses of action within their respective spheres of competence.”³ The EUMC’s primary role, therefore, was to collect and disseminate reliable data to facilitate regional cooperation on combating racism, xenophobia, and antisemitism.

In 2002, as part of its official mandate and concerned by a reported rise in antisemitism in Europe surrounding the Second Intifada (2000–2005), the EUMC directed its national partners (known as “National Focal Points”) to collect data on antisemitism. Based on this data, the EUMC produced a report titled “Manifestations of Antisemitism in the EU 2002–2003.”⁴ Finding that differences in national standards and understandings of antisemitism hampered the

² Dina Porat, “Definition of Anti-Semitism Is a Threat to No One but Anti-Semites,” Brandeis Center, originally published in *Haaretz*, December 20, 2016, <https://brandeiscenter.com/tag/eumc-working-definition-of-antisemitism/>; “‘Working Definition’ of Anti-Semitism,” Fact Sheet, Office to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism, US Department of State, February 8, 2007, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/g/drl/rls/56589.htm>.

³ “European Monitoring Centre for Racism and Xenophobia,” EUR-Lex, accessed September 20, 2026, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM%3Ac10411>.

⁴ “Manifestations of Antisemitism in the EU 2002–2003,” European Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia, accessed September 17, 2026, https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/184-AS-Main-report.pdf. Find a press summary of the report at https://www.europarl.europa.eu/studies/eumc_report/eumc_press_summary_en.pdf.

collection of reliable, comparable data on antisemitism, the EUMC report recommended the formulation and adoption of a common definition of antisemitism to enable data collection, assessment, and social scientific research.

To craft a common definition of antisemitism, the EUMC worked together with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the European Jewish Congress, the American Jewish Committee (AJC), and other unidentified NGOs, experts on antisemitism, civil society groups, and academics.⁵ American attorney and author Kenneth Stern, who served as director of the division on antisemitism, hate studies, and extremism for the AJC between 1989 and 2014, identified himself publicly as a “lead drafter” of the EUMC WDA (and therefore, of the IHRA WDA).⁶ Historians involved in the process of drafting the EUMC WDA were Yehuda Bauer (Hebrew Univ. of Jerusalem), Dina Porat (Yad Vashem), and Robert Wistrich (Hebrew Univ. of Jerusalem).⁷

In the United States, the EUMC WDA definition first found traction during the George W. Bush administration when it was adopted for the US Commission on Civil Rights’ Campus Anti-Semitism Initiative in 2006.⁸ Next, it was published by the US Department of State in 2007 as an “adequate initial guide by which anti-Semitism can eventually both be defined and combated” and “as a starting point in the fight against anti-Semitism.”⁹ The State Department clarified that it did not, however, adopt or accept that definition as US policy. In 2010, under the Barack Obama administration, the EUMC WDA, with examples, was used by the State Department’s office of the Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism.¹⁰

The EUMC definition drew criticism, even prior to its adoption by IHRA, for broadly equating criticism of the State of Israel with antisemitism and for its lack of procedural and methodological transparency.¹¹ In 2007, the EUMC was formally replaced by the European Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA). The FRA removed the EUMC WDA from its digitally

⁵ François Dubuisson, “The Definition of Anti-Semitism by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC): Towards a Criminalisation of Criticism of Israeli Policy?,” European Coordination of Committees and Associations for Palestine, January 5, 2018, <https://www.eccpalestine.org/the-definition-of-anti-semitism-by-the-european-monitoring-centre-on-racism-and-xenophobia-eumc-towards-a-criminalisation-of-criticism-of-israeli-policy/>.

⁶ Kenneth Stern, “I Drafted the Definition of Antisemitism. Rightwing Jews Are Weaponizing It,” *Guardian*, December 13, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/dec/13/antisemitism-executive-order-trump-chilling-effect>; Kenneth Stern, “A Bad Deal: By Adopting the IHRA Definition of Antisemitism, Universities Are Sacrificing Academic Freedom,” Knight First Amendment Institute, September 5, 2025, <https://knightcolumbia.org/content/a-bad-deal-why-using-the-ihra-definition-of-antisemitism-on-campus-is-incompatible-with-academic-freedom-and-students-right-to-open-inquiry>.

⁷ Kenneth L. Marcus, “The Legally Binding Character of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance Working Definition of Anti-Semitism,” *Lewis & Clark Law Review* 27, no. 4 (2024): 1265–91, <https://lawcommons.lclark.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1037&context=lclr>.

⁸ Marcus, “The Legally Binding Character of the IHRA WDA,” 1271.

⁹ “‘Working Definition’ of Antisemitism,” US Department of State Archive.

¹⁰ “Defining Anti-Semitism,” Fact Sheet, Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism, US Department of State, June 8, 2010, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/j/drl/rls/fs/2010/122352.htm>.

¹¹ Dubuisson, “The Definition of Anti-Semitism by the EUMC.”

published materials, citing a “clear-out of non-official documents,” with public statements denying the EUMC WDA's adoption as EU and FRA policy.¹²

From EUMC WDA to IHRA WDA: Institutionalizing Definitions of Antisemitism

The adoption of the EUMC WDA by IHRA's member states in 2016 inaugurated a new phase of intergovernmental and nongovernmental efforts to advance a formal definition of antisemitism, marked by the increasing institutionalization of the WDA and attempts to give this “working definition” legal teeth.

In 2016, US Senators Bob Casey (D-PA) and Tim Scott (R-SC) introduced the Anti-Semitism Awareness Act (AAA). The bill passed unanimously in the Senate, before the legislative process stalled in the House of Representatives. The act directed the Department of Education to use the IHRA WDA when evaluating alleged on-campus violations of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that “prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, colour, or national origin in programs and activities receiving federal financial assistance.”¹³ The AAA was reintroduced in 2019 and 2025.¹⁴ It has, thus far, failed to receive the full assent of Congress.

On December 11, 2019, under the first Trump administration, the White House published Executive Order (EO) 13899 titled “Executive Order on Combating Anti-Semitism.” The EO stated that “all executive departments and agencies charged with enforcing Title VI” of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 “shall consider” the IHRA WDA, though it also reiterated that the definition was “non-legally binding.”¹⁵ In 2025, the second Trump administration issued EO 14188, “Additional Measures to Combat Anti-Semitism,” which reaffirmed the 2019 EO and directed the head of all executive agencies to compile a report of “all pending administrative complaints . . . against or involving institutions of higher education alleging civil-rights violations related to or arising from post-October 7, 2023, campus anti-Semitism.”¹⁶

In February 2021, Kentucky became the first US state to adopt the IHRA definition. Since then, at least 38 others have followed, including Florida, Massachusetts, New Mexico, and Texas.¹⁷

¹² “SWC to EU Baroness Ashton: ‘Return Anti-Semitism Definition Document to EU Fundamental Rights Agency Website,’” Simon Wiesenthal Centre, November 6, 2013, archived March 1, 2016, at <https://web.archive.org/web/20160301080434/http://www.wiesenthal.com/site/apps/nlnet/content.aspx?c=lsKWLbPJLnF&b=8776547&ct=13381863>; Seth Berkman, “Anti-Semitism Fight Hinges on Definition,” *Forward*, September 25, 2012, <https://forward.com/israel/163105/anti-semitism-fight-hinges-on-definition/>.

¹³ “S.10—114th Congress (2015–2016): Anti-Semitism Awareness Act of 2016.” December 22, 2016, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/senate-bill/10>.

¹⁴ “H.R.4009—116th Congress (2019–2020): Anti-Semitism Awareness Act of 2019.” August 28, 2019, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/4009>; “S.558—119th Congress (2025–2026): Antisemitism Awareness Act of 2025.” April 30, 2025, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/senate-bill/558>.

¹⁵ Exec. Order No. 13899, 84 Fed. Reg. 68779 (December 11, 2019), <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-combating-anti-semitism/>.

¹⁶ Exec. Order No. 14188, 90 Fed. Reg. 8847 (February 3, 2025), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/additional-measures-to-combat-anti-semitism/>.

¹⁷ “States Adopt IHRA Definition of Anti-Semitism,” Jewish Virtual Library, 2024, accessed September 28, 2026, <https://jewishvirtuallibrary.org/states-adopt-ihra-definition-of-anti-semitism>; “Use of the Working Definition in the U.S.,” American Jewish Committee, accessed October 9, 2026, <https://www.ajc.org/use-of-the-working-definition-in-the-us>.

Local governments, municipalities, university administrations, and student governments have also adopted the EUMC/IHRA WDA.¹⁸ Since 2016, universities in the UK have been required to adopt the IHRA WDA, and by 2024, 25 EU members had “adopted or endorsed” it as well.¹⁹

Criticisms

The primary criticism leveled against the IHRA WDA is that it curtails free speech and thought by regulating the boundaries of expression relating to the actions of the state of Israel. Although it specifies that “criticism of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic,” seven of the 11 guiding examples relate to conduct and speech in relation to Israel. The IHRA WDA has, thus, generated backlash for conflating antisemitism with criticism of Israeli policy, to the neglect of other antisemitic expressions.²⁰

The imprecise wording of the examples is faulted for allowing the definition to be misused to impinge on first amendment rights and academic freedom on topics including, but not limited to, Israel, Palestine, the Middle East, Jewish studies, Holocaust studies, and German studies.²¹ Significantly, Columbia University’s adoption of the IHRA WDA has been cited in a March 2026 opinion from the US District Court of the Southern District of New York as having possibly occurred under pressure from executive agencies in the Trump administration.²² Considering Columbia University’s adoption of the IHRA WDA, historian Rashid Khalidi cancelled a planned course titled History of the Modern Middle East.²³ Anecdotal evidence suggests more far-reaching changes in curricula and discussions, as the definition makes difficult historical inquiry into topics as disparate as the ancient Near East, 19th- and 20th-century forms of Jewish thought, and the history of the Ottoman Empire and its successor states. In these and other contexts, the misapplication of contemporary definitions distorts and confines the careful, contextual explication of the past.

¹⁸ Kevin Deutsch, “Parkland Unanimously Adopts IHRA Antisemitism Definition into City Law amid National Surge in Anti-Jewish Hate,” Parkland Talk, February 21, 2026, <https://parklandtalk.com/parkland-unanimously-adopts-antisemitism-52467/>; Dion J. Pierre, “Chicago Adopts IHRA Definition of Antisemitism,” *Algemeiner*, January 28, 2026, <https://www.algemeiner.com/2026/01/28/chicago-adopts-ihra-definition-antisemitism/>. For an uncomprehensive list of universities and student governments that have adopted the IHRA WDA, see data from the American Jewish Committee, <https://www.ajc.org/us-campus-adoption-of-the-working-definition>. The list is uncomprehensive because although it asserts the adoption of IHRA or related definitions of antisemitism, it does not specify whether the action was taken by the university’s administration, student government, or an alternate entity.

¹⁹ Marcus, “The Legally Binding Character of the IHRA WDA,” 1277–78.

²⁰ Jan Deckers and Jonathan Coulter, “What Is Wrong with the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s Definition of Antisemitism?” *Res Publica* 28, no. 4 (2022): 733–52, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11158-022-09553-4>; “Issue Brief: Threats to Free Speech and Palestinian Civil Rights: The IHRA Definition of Antisemitism,” *Rutgers Law School, Center for Security, Race, and Rights*, 2025, <https://csrr.rutgers.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/final-csrr-ihra-issue-brief.pdf>; Neve Gordon, “Antisemitism and Zionism: The Internal Operations of the IHRA Definition,” *Middle East Critique* 33, no. 3 (2024): 345–60, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19436149.2024.2330821>.

²¹ See “The Redefinition Is Routinely Deployed to Chill Campus Speech,” in “Backgrounder on Redefinition,” Palestine Legal, January 2020, <https://palestinelegal.org/redefinition-efforts>.

²² Opinion and Order, *Khalil v. Trustees of Columbia University*, No. 1:25-cv-02079-AS (SDNY, Mar. 19, 2026), ECF No. 175, <https://www.courtlistener.com/docket/69733020/175/khalil-v-the-trustees-of-columbia-university-in-the-city-of-new-york/>.

²³ Rashid Khalidi, “I spent decades at Columbia. I’m withdrawing my fall course due to its deal with Trump,” *Guardian*, August 1, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/aug/01/columbia-historian-rashid-khalidi-open-letter>.

The “adoption” of the definition by different government and administrative actors also lacks uniformity in meaning and effect. Where some have *endorsed* the definition, others have *adopted* it as a guideline. In some instances, only the definition without examples has been endorsed. In others, the definition has more concrete legal form.

The Nexus Document

The Nexus Project is an American Jewish nonprofit with a mission to “make American Jews safer and American democracy stronger by providing the resources and expertise to effectively combat antisemitism and authoritarianism and prevent legitimate Jewish fears from being used to attack civil liberties and democratic institutions.”²⁴ The organization works to provide an expert-driven approach, with its professional staff and experts supported by an “academic task force” composed of “scholars, writers, and thought leaders.”²⁵ The Nexus Project has created a separate Nexus Center for Antisemitism Research to conduct and promote research on antisemitism. The project also provides resources for Congress, in addition to those aimed at the public.

In 2020, the then-members of the Nexus Task Force published a draft version of the Nexus White Paper, intending for it to be a “living document.”²⁶ The paper was published as a guide for “policymakers and community leaders,” rather than for legal use. The paper formed the basis of the (much) shorter Nexus Document, published in 2021, that mirrored its predecessor’s intended uses.

The Nexus Document comprises a definition of antisemitism, followed by examples of “what is antisemitic” and “what is not antisemitic.” The examples of what is and is not antisemitic predominantly relate to the Israeli state and to Zionism. As an explicitly American Jewish organization, the document is rooted in American political and social debates over Israel and Palestine and the relationship between antisemitism and Zionism.

Historians involved in the drafting of the white paper upon which the Nexus Document is based included Steven Beller (independent scholar), Eric Greene (Yale Univ.), Norman Rosenberg (Macalester Coll.), and Joshua Shanes (Univ. of California, Davis).

The Biden administration’s May 2023 plan and report “The US National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism” acknowledged the United States’ “embrace” of the IHRA WDA but further noted that it “welcomes and appreciates the Nexus Document and notes other such efforts.”²⁷ On September 29, 2026, the New York City’s Mayor’s Office to Combat Antisemitism, established by the Mamdani administration, announced the city’s first municipal strategy to combat

²⁴ “What We Do: Fact-Based Analysis and Antisemitism Advocacy,” Nexus Project, accessed September 27, 2026, <https://nexusproject.us/what-we-do/>.

²⁵ “What We Do,” Nexus Project.

²⁶ “Nexus White Paper,” Nexus Project, April 1, 2021, updated 2024, accessed September 17, 2026, <https://nexusproject.us/nexus-resources/nexus-white-paper/>.

²⁷ “The US National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism,” White House, May 25, 2023, 13, <https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/U.S.-National-Strategy-to-Counter-Antisemitism.pdf>.

antisemitism, which lists the Nexus Document alongside the IHRA WDA and Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism as “three of the most prominent” definitions of antisemitism.²⁸

The Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism

The Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism (JDA) emerged in direct response to criticisms of the IHRA WDA. The definition was developed in 2020 in Jerusalem at the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute by scholars in a diversity of fields including, but not limited to, antisemitism studies, Jewish studies, Holocaust studies, and Middle East studies. The primary “coordinators” of the JDA include numerous historians such as Seth Anziska (Univ. Coll. London), Alon Confino (Univ. of Massachusetts Amherst), David Feldman (Birkbeck Coll., Univ. of London), Amos Goldberg (Hebrew Univ. of Jerusalem) and Stefanie Schüler Springorum (Center for Research on Antisemitism, TU Berlin). Many prominent historians have lent their name to the JDA as “signatories” both prior to and following its launch, including Taner Akçam (Clark Univ.), Leora Auslander (Univ. of Chicago), Omer Bartov (Brown Univ.), Annette Becker (Cornell Univ.), Doris Bergen (Univ. of Toronto), Frank Biess (Univ. of California, San Diego), Sebastian Conrad (Freie Univ. Berlin), Arie Dubnow (George Washington Univ.) Ute Frevert (Max Planck Institute for Human Development), Atina Grossman (Cooper Union), Peter Hayes (Northwestern Univ.), Dagmar Herzog (Graduate Center, City Univ. of New York), Claudia Koonz (Duke Univ.), Samuel Moyn (Harvard Univ.), Derek Penslar (Harvard Univ.), Mark Roseman (Indiana Univ.), Miri Rubin (Queen Mary Univ. of London), Barry Trachtenberg (Wake Forest Univ.), Yair Wallach (SOAS Univ. of London), and Tara Zahra (Univ. of Chicago).²⁹

In proposing the JDA, its authors had two central goals: “(1) to strengthen the fight against antisemitism by clarifying what it is and how it is manifested, (2) to protect a space for an open debate about the vexed question of the future of Israel/Palestine.”³⁰ In advancing the JDA as an alternative to the IHRA WDA, its authors critiqued the latter for being vague and thus open to speculation, controversy, and misuse as a “hate speech code,” for being insufficiently historically informed; for placing “undue emphasis” on the State of Israel; and for disconnecting the fight against antisemitism from “the overall fight against all forms of racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, and gender discrimination.”³¹ Ultimately, the JDA’s authors argued that the imprecision and particularism of the IHRA WDA “weaken” efforts to combat antisemitism.

The JDA comprises a preamble, definition, and 15 guidelines that are intended to be read together and “always with a view to context.”³² Ten of the examples concern Israel and Palestine, in order to provide nuanced guidance on when speech regarding the State of Israel and Zionism ought to be protected versus when it “cross[es] the line into antisemitism.”³³

²⁸ “Tackling Hate: The Mamdani Administration’s Strategy to Combat Antisemitism,” New York City Office of the Mayor, September 29, 2026, 14, <https://www.nyc.gov/content/dam/nycgov/mayors-office/downloads/pdf/press-releases/2026/2026-09-25-moca-report-interactive-5.pdf>.

²⁹ A comprehensive list of coordinators and signatories is available at “Signatories,” Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism, March 25, 2021, accessed October 9, 2026, <https://jerusalemdeclaration.org/#signatories>.

³⁰ “Preamble,” Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism, <https://jerusalemdeclaration.org/#preamble>.

³¹ “Preamble,” Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism.

³² “Preamble,” Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism.

³³ “FAQ: Then does the JDA suggest that anti-Zionism is never antisemitic?,” Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism, accessed September 20, 2026, <https://jerusalemdeclaration.org/#faq>.

Criticisms

The JDA has been faulted for its length, making it an ineffective corrective as a guiding tool for policymakers.³⁴ The JDA has also drawn debate over its own guidelines regarding conduct and speech relating to Israel and Palestine, leading some to fault it for not going far enough in countering the perceived overreaches of the IHRA definition.³⁵ The JDA has been criticized for not including Palestinian perspectives and those of Jewish community and advocacy organizations.³⁶

Proponents of the JDA promote its value as a “depoliticized” tool that enables understanding antisemitism both in its historic and contemporary contexts, and in relation to other forms of discrimination.³⁷

Impact on Historians

The IHRA WDA, Nexus Document, and JDA in many ways represent the political, corporate, and scholarly approaches to defining antisemitism, respectively. As the Nexus Document and JDA were developed as critiques of IHRA’s definition, the three documents share many similarities in structure and intent. They all offer not just definitions of antisemitism, but examples to guide identification of antisemitism in alignment with the authors’ intended meaning. In doing so, the definitions themselves are meaningless if read independently of both text and context. All three also declare their ability to be used as tools to combat antisemitism and, in doing so, to strengthen democracy. And all three attempt to define the boundaries between antisemitism and criticism of the State of Israel.

Of the three definitions, however, the IHRA WDA has had the broadest impact on historians in practical terms because of its institutionalization and misuse. Kenneth Stern, one of the lead drafters of the original EUMC working definition of antisemitism, has on multiple occasions since 2019 disavowed the definition’s use as a “de facto speech code” by governments—national and international, federal, state, and local—university administrations, or even private

³⁴ Dave Rich, “The Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism: a flawed definition that risks setting back efforts to tackle antisemitism,” *CST: Protecting the Jewish Community*, April 1, 2021, <https://cst.org.uk/news/blog/2021/04/01/the-jerusalem-declaration-on-antisemitism-a-flawed-definition-that-risks-setting-back-efforts-to-tackle-antisemitism>.

³⁵ Anonymous, “A Palestinian Civil Society Critique of the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism,” *BDS: Freedom Justice Equality*, March 24, 2021, accessed September 20, 2026, <https://bdsmovement.net/A-Palestinian-Civil-Society-Critique-JDA>; Walter L. Hixson, “Critiquing the Jerusalem Declaration on Anti-Semitism,” *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, March 19, 2023, <https://www.wrmea.org/israel-palestine/critiquing-the-jerusalem-declaration-on-anti-semitism.html>; Muhammad Ayyash, “The Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism is an orientalist text,” *Al Jazeera*, April 21, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/4/21/the-jerusalem-declaration-on-antisemitism-is-an-orientalist-text>.

³⁶ Rich, “The JDA: A flawed definition;” Anonymous, “A Palestinian Civil Society Critique of the JDA.”

³⁷ Brian Klug, “Defining Antisemitism: What Is the Point?” in David Feldman and Marc Volovici (eds.), *Antisemitism, Islamophobia and the Politics of Definition*, Palgrave Critical Studies of Antisemitism and Racism (Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-16266-4_9.

organizations.³⁸ Stern has criticized the institutional adoption of the IHRA WDA as being “bad policy,” with the potential to “constitute illegal viewpoint discrimination.”³⁹ A recently published bipartisan report from the US Commission on Civil Rights titled “The Federal Response to Antisemitism on American College Campuses” cites expert testimony that critiques the codification of IHRA for setting antisemitism apart in law from other forms of discrimination and hatred.⁴⁰ Civil and human rights advocacy groups like the Center for Constitutional Rights, National Lawyers Guild, Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, and the American Civil Liberties Union have opposed the definition’s adoption, as have human rights groups such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.⁴¹

At the same time, the IHRA WDA has found vigorous support from numerous international and American Jewish advocacy groups, including the American Jewish Committee, B’nai B’rith International, Hadassah, the Anti-Defamation League, and the Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law. In advancing the IHRA WDA its proponents highlight the law’s unique potential to circumscribe antisemitism by providing standards by which to identify it.

The strong representation of historians among the over 400 signatories of the JDA represent one disciplinary mode of response to the perceived and actual impositions of the IHRA WDA. Ongoing scholarly debates among historians and their institutions over the efficacy of the definitions demonstrate, however, that contemporary definitions can never capture the complexity and diversity of ideas and realities experienced by people in the past.⁴² In accordance with principles of academic freedom and the AHA’s own *Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct*, historians must remain free to conduct research and teaching without feeling obliged to judge historical events and ideas according to definitions of antisemitism generated in the present, for present-day needs, or according to present-day assertions of group identity.

³⁸ Kenneth Stern, “Academic Freedom, Boycotts, Definitions, and Democracy,” *University of the Pacific Law Review* 54, no. 4 (2023): 716–20, <https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/uoplalawreview/vol54/iss4/11>; Stern, “A Bad Deal.”

³⁹ Stern, “A Bad Deal.”

⁴⁰ “The Federal Response to Antisemitism on American College Campuses,” US Commission on Civil Rights, September 28, 2026, 18–19, <https://www.usccr.gov/files/2026-09/antisemitism-report.pdf>.

⁴¹ “Oppose the Antisemitism Awareness Act in Congress,” FIRE, accessed October 9, 2026, <https://www.fire.org/get-involved/take-action/oppose-antisemitism-awareness-act-congress>; “Human Rights and Other Civil Society Groups Urge United Nations to Respect Human Rights in the Fight Against Antisemitism,” Human Rights Watch, April 20, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/04/04/human-rights-and-other-civil-society-groups-urge-united-nations-respect-human>; Christopher Anders and Jenna Leventoff, “Reject Definitions of Antisemitism That Encompass Protected Speech,” to Miguel Cardona, Secretary of Education, Department of Education, with American Civil Liberties Union, June 2, 2024, <https://www.aclu.org/documents/reject-definitions-of-anti-semitism-that-encompass-protected-speech>; Sofia Lopez, “Groups Across Ideological Spectrum Unite in Opposing Antisemitism Awareness Act,” FIRE, July 12, 2024, <https://www.fire.org/news/groups-across-ideological-spectrum-unite-opposing-antisemitism-awareness-act>.

⁴² For historical scholarship on antisemitism, the following texts offer just a recent sample: Albert S. Lindemann, and Richard S. Levy (eds.), *Antisemitism: A History* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2010); Mark Weitzman, Robert J. Williams, and James Wald (eds.), *The Routledge History of Antisemitism* (Taylor & Francis, 2023); Scott Ury and Guy Miron (eds.), *Antisemitism and the Politics of History* (Brandeis Univ. Press, 2023), <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/114090>; Mark Mazower, *On Antisemitism: A Word in History* (Penguin, 2025); Flora Cassen, *Stained Glass: A Reflective History of Antisemitism* (Univ. of Toronto Press, 2026).

The AHA encourages researchers, teachers, policymakers, and others to seek nuanced, expert- and context-driven approaches in our collective efforts to combat rising antisemitism. Finally, we reaffirm that historical teaching and research are best served by environments that facilitate open inquiry, careful contextualization, and scholarly disagreement.