

Spotting & Countering Tropes

Myth vs Fact

Common Anti-Jewish Tropes

DEICIDE TROPE: It is a common misconception that Jews, as a collective group, were responsible for the death of Jesus of Nazareth, who is considered to be God the Son by most Christians.

FACT: Jesus, along with his followers, were Jewish, and the Romans were primarily responsible for his execution. It's important to note that most Christian denominations condemn antisemitism.

DISLOYAL TROPE: Jews are often suspected of only being loyal to their fellow Jews and their own agenda. This perception can lead to a sense of mistrust towards Jewish neighbors and citizens, where they are viewed as being inherently disloyal or having dual loyalties.

FACT: This is a common strategy playing up on fears of the "Other," such as accusing American Jews as being more loyal to Israel than the USA. This has been used for other religions, such as accusing JFK of supposedly being more loyal to the Vatican than the USA because he was a Roman Catholic.

BLOOD-LIBEL TROPE: myth that has been perpetuated since the Middle Ages is that Jews would allegedly murder non-Jews, especially non-Jewish children, in order to use their blood to perform religious rituals.

FACT: The act of labeling another religion as inhumane is a frequent form of attack used against different religious groups (for example, the Roman Empire's false accusations of human sacrifice against various religions).

GREED TROPE: A persistent myth is that Jews supposedly are greedy and avaricious, hoping to make themselves rich by any means.

FACT: During the Middle Ages, Jews were forced into moneylending professions, which gave rise to this myth. Today wealth accrued by Christians is frequently viewed as "divine reward for hard work," while wealth acquired by Jews was often labeled as "greed."

MONOLITHIC TROPE: It is a common misconception that all Jews are similar, even belonging to the same "Semitic race."

FACT: Jewish people are a diverse group, consisting of many different racial and ethnic backgrounds.

WORLD DOMINATION TROPE: There is a widespread belief that Jews are striving for complete global domination, and already hold sway over areas such as the media, banking, industry, government, and even the weather.

FACT: The myth has its roots in a fabricated early 20th-century document that was created by the Russian secret police as part of a government-led antisemitic campaign. The document made use of typical conspiratorial themes to target minorities and make them a scapegoat.

What's the problem with tropes?

Tropes about religion perpetuate bigotry through false information. They "flatten" and ultimately dehumanize people by creating an "Us vs Them" mentality where "They" are presented as "all the same" (monolithic mentality). Such false divisions get in the way of understanding real similarities and differences between various religious groups, as well as understanding the rich diversity of individual expressions within a single religion.

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Common Anti-Muslim Tropes

MONOLITHIC TROPE: Supposedly, all Muslims have a unified perspective

FACT: The myth fails to acknowledge the extensive diversity among the 1.8 billion individuals who identify as Muslim.

“NOT A RELIGION” TROPE: The false claim that Islam is a “political ideology, not a religion”.

FACT: The First Pillar of Islam is "There is no god but God, and Muhammad is his messenger." Interestingly, American Founding Fathers such as Thomas Jefferson included Islam as a religion protected by the First Amendment.

FOREIGN TROPE: Islam is somehow foreign to the West and Western concepts of freedom, such as Islam allegedly doesn't tolerate other religions and forces conversion.

FACT: This trope ignores Islam's early presence in the USA, such as when Thomas Jefferson hosted an iftar in the White House. It also ignores mainstream Islamic teachings as well as interfaith coexistence both historically and today. Quran 2:256: "There is no coercion in religion"

RIVAL TROPE: Islam is seen as a “rival” to the West and Christianity, with claims that Muslims allegedly “are using non-violent stealth jihad with the goal of implementing sharia law”.

FACT: Constitutional laws within the United States prevent foreign laws from having jurisdiction in US courts. Similarly, Sharia laws focus on religious regulations that concern Muslims, much like the Catholic Church's annulment process.

INFERIOR TROPE: Islam is somehow inferior to the West, such as in its alleged sexism and/or violence by Muslim men towards Muslim women- who therefore supposedly need “saved.”

FACT: Many Muslim-majority nations have elected women as heads of state. In the United States, Muslim women have a higher percentage of higher education degrees than Christian women. It is crucial to acknowledge that violence and sexism against women are prevalent throughout the world and are not specific to any particular religion.

VIOLENT TROPE: Islam is somehow allegedly more inherently violent (than Christianity for example).

FACT: The vast majority of violence and terrorism within the USA is committed by Christians, yet Christianity is not seen as monolithically violent.

Further Reading

- American Jewish Committee's "Translate Hate Glossary: How to Spot Antisemitism" (<https://www.ajc.org/translatehateglossary>)
- Anti-Defamation League's "Antisemitism Uncovered: A Guide to Old Myths in a New Era" (<https://antisemitism.adl.org/>)
- Bridge Initiative Team, "Factsheet: Common Anti-Muslim Tropes" (<https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-common-anti-muslim-tropes-2/>)
- Todd H. Green, *The Fear of Islam: An Introduction to Islamophobia in the West* (Second Edition). Minneapolis: Fortree Press, 2019.