

Coronavirus

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Coronavirus

What are antisemitic Coronavirus conspiracies?

With the COVID-19 Coronavirus pandemic profoundly affecting all aspects of life across the globe, many extremists and conspiracy theorists are looking for someone, or a group, to blame. Unfortunately, antisemitic scapegoating for the pandemic has spread far and wide, particularly on the internet. The Jewish community has not been the only one targeted because of the pandemic, anti-Chinese racism has surfaced across the globe.¹ Discrimination and racism caused by Coronavirus conspiracies can be found all over the world, and Jews are frequently the target.

How do antisemitic Coronavirus conspiracies manifest?

Antisemitic Coronavirus conspiracies surface and manifest in a number of ways, from general theories to violent calls to infect Jews with the virus. Often found online, memes and other posts have been shared thousands of times on mainstream social media platforms such as Twitter, as well as on so-called free-speech platforms including 4Chan and 8Chan. However, Coronavirus antisemitism has quickly spread offline, with numerous public figures around the world alluding to Jews being the cause of the pandemic.

Have Jews been blamed for pandemics before?

Unfortunately yes - there is a long history of Jews being scapegoated for outbreaks of diseases. During the Black Death in the mid-14th Century, where between 10-15 million people in Europe died of the Bubonic Plague, Jews were blamed for poisoning wells and therefore causing the disease.²



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1. <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/04/10/us/sinophobic-racism-rise-coronavirus-research-trnd/index.html>

2. <https://www.bh.org.il/blog-items/700-years-before-coronavirus-jewish-life-during-the-black-death-plague/>

Arrests, confessions under torture and the burning of Jews took place, despite Pope Clement VI stating Jews were not to blame. It is thought that 100,000 Jews were burned alive for this and other antisemitic accusations in the period.³

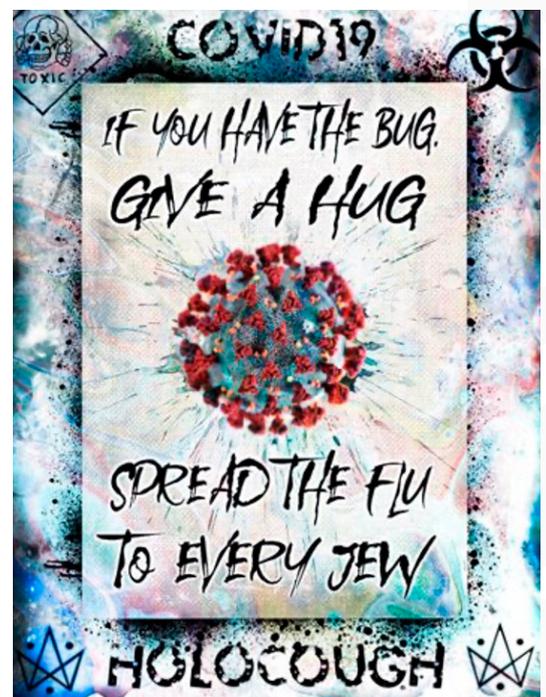
In the 19th century, Jewish and Italian immigrants in New York City were blamed for the infectious disease tuberculosis, which was branded 'the Jewish disease'.⁴ In the 20th century, Jews were blamed for typhus by the Nazis.⁵ Then in 2019, Jews were blamed for a measles outbreak in New York City.⁶

What are some examples of the conspiracies connecting Jews and the Coronavirus?

One popular online conspiracy theory alleges that Jewish people created the Coronavirus in order to ruin society and expand their supposed global influence and profit. This theory often blames Jewish individuals, such as Jewish philanthropist George Soros. A similar albeit inverted theory claims that the virus is a fake and that the pandemic is a myth, allowing Jews to undermine societies around the world for their own profit. In both scenarios, the claim is that Jews have engineered this global situation for their own gain.

One historical antisemitic trope that has been updated for the pandemic, involves calling Jews the real virus and the primary spreaders of the disease. As noted, throughout history Jews have been compared to cancer, tuberculosis, syphilis and other diseases; something that must be eradicated. Adolf Hitler and the Nazis called Jews a virus threatening Germany.⁷

One of the most violent and extreme forms of Coronavirus-linked antisemitism is the call to spread the flu to the Jews and kill them. This call is often shared by neo-Nazis and White Supremacists who encourage their followers to go to synagogues and places where Jews may gather, in order to infect them.⁸



3. <https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/documents/assets/pdf/education-outreach/Brief-History-on-Anti-Semitism-A.pdf>

4. Cohn, Samuel K. "Pandemics: waves of disease, waves of hate from the Plague of Athens to A.I.D.S." *Historical journal* (Cambridge, England) vol. 85,230 (2012): 535-555

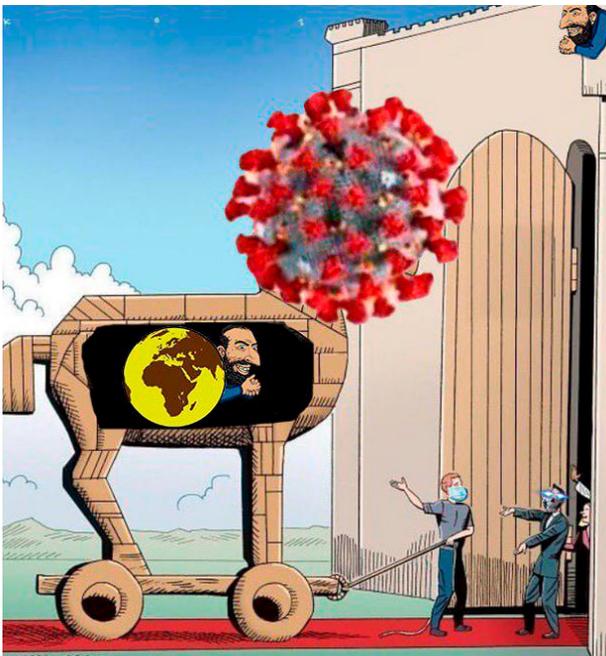
5. *ibid*

6. <https://www.jweekly.com/2020/03/19/how-jews-have-fared-during-times-of-pandemic/>

7. Cohn, Samuel K. "Pandemics: waves of disease, waves of hate from the Plague of Athens to A.I.D.S." *Historical journal* (Cambridge, England) vol. 85,230 (2012): 535-555.

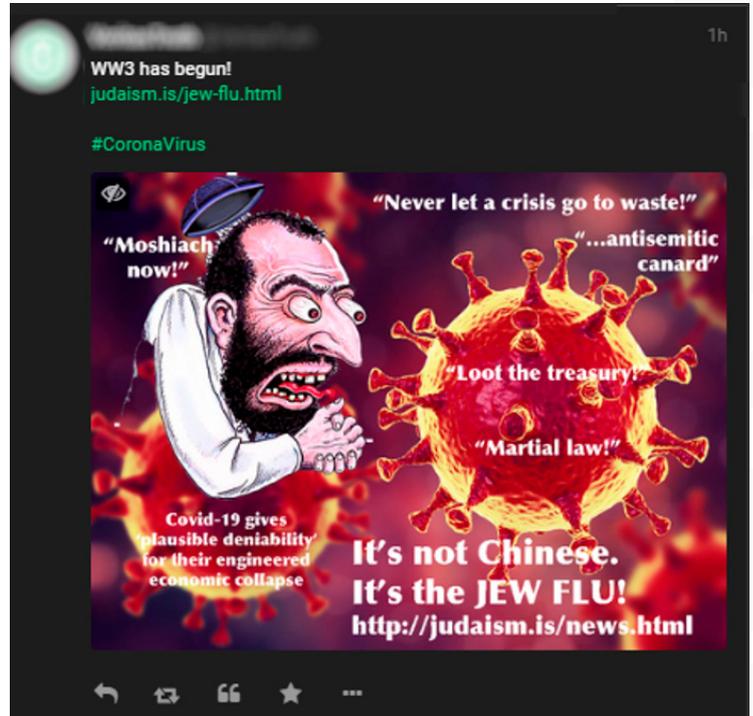
8. <https://www.thejc.com/news/us/white-supremacists-encourage-spreading-virus-to-jews-1.498371>

Are antisemitic Coronavirus conspiracies just an online trend?



A number of studies have shown that hate and conspiracies that begin online aren't confined to the internet for very long.⁹ COVID-19 conspiracies entered the public discourse. US Republican Congressional candidate, Joanna Wright, suggested the virus was linked to Bill Gates and Jewish philanthropist George Soros.¹⁰ David Duke, the longtime Ku Klux Klan leader, asked whether "Israel and the Global Zionist elite" were "up to their old tricks".¹¹ Bafta award-winning actress Rosana Arquette posted a tweet alleging that Israel knew about the virus for a year and put "lives at risk for profit".¹² She later apologised.

The global nature of the internet has given rise to the spread of these theories across the world. In France, a caricature of the former French health minister, who is Jewish, depicted him pouring poison into a well. It was shared on social media thousands of times. Iranian state-owned Press TB claimed that "Zionists" were to blame for Coronavirus, quoting an article which said "America's Jews drive America's wars". Predictably, online discourse has spread offline too, including, for example, one case of a visibly religious Jewish man refused an appointment



⁹ <http://www.open-access.bcu.ac.uk/510/>

¹⁰ <https://besacenter.org/perspectives-papers/coronavirus-conspiracy-theories-jews/>

¹¹ <https://www.ajc.org/news/global-trends-in-conspiracy-theories-linking-jews-with-coronavirus>

¹² <https://jewishjournal.com/news/united-states/312350/rosanna-arquette-apologizes-for-israel-coronavirus-tweet/>

in a car shop in New York and ordered to leave, accused of spreading the virus.¹³

How have **Jews really been responding** to the Coronavirus pandemic?

Far from what antisemitic Coronavirus conspiracies suggest, Jewish communities across the globe have been contributing to the fight against Coronavirus. In the United States, half of all plasma donors volunteering blood to help treat Covid-19 patients at one point, were Orthodox Jews from New York.¹⁴ In the United Kingdom, members of the Jewish community have been volunteering to help vulnerable people, cook food for NHS and care workers and creating safety visors for frontline workers.¹⁵

¹³ <https://www.algemeiner.com/2020/03/25/new-york-local-da-announces-discrimination-inquiry-into-car-dealership-where-hasidic-man-was-told-youre-spreading-the-virus/>

¹⁴ <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8312765/New-York-Orthodox-Jews-make-HALF-plasma-donors-giving-blood-treat-COVID-19-patients.html>

¹⁵ <https://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/meet-our-covid-19-community-heroes/>

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