



UNLEARN ANTISEMITISM

A LEARNING GUIDE FOR UNLEARN IT





PART 2: UNPACKING JEWISH IDENTITY

Who are the Jews and What is Jewish Identity?

“The consequence of the single story is this: It robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult.”

[Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *The Danger of a Single Story* TED Talk](#)

Think about some of the commonly held “single stories” of Jewish people. (You do not need to share them, but think about them for yourself).

This video begins by saying that “Jewish identity is multifaceted and complex.” How has this video helped to expand the *single stories* that are held about Jewish people? In what ways is Jewish identity more multifaceted and complex than we may have previously known?

Slow down to consider Jess Burke’s comments:

1. “Before we discuss anti-Jewish oppression, discrimination or antisemitism, we should first know who Jewish people are, where they come from, and what forms their Jewish identity.” Consider the connection between this statement and the following quote from [Dr. Doris Bergen](#), the Chancellor Rose and Ray Wolfe Professor of Holocaust Studies at the University of Toronto:

"...Prejudices always reveal more about the people who hold them than they do about those at whom they are directed. You will not learn much useful information about Judaism or Jews by studying antisemitism, but you can learn quite a lot about antisemites, their insecurities and their fears [...]

"Prejudices are habits of thought; they are not reasoned responses to objective realities. When you read descriptions of common prejudices [...] keep in mind that these attitudes were based on imaginings about people rather than on who those people really were."

Dr. Doris L. Bergen, *The Holocaust: A Concise History*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. 2009.

2. What other reasons come to mind for why it is important to begin this course with an examination of the diversity of Jewish people and the multifaceted ways in which Jews connect with their Jewish identities?

*"A comprehensive academic study, *Survey of Jews in Canada*, conducted in 2018, published a final report indicating that Jewish Canadians viewed themselves as: 22% mainly a matter of culture, 15% mainly a matter of ancestry / descent, 12% mainly a matter of religion, and 33% believing that all three are equally as important."*

3. Are these findings surprising to you?
4. How does it connect with what Jess said earlier in this segment, "Today Jews are often reduced to only a religious or "faith" group, but really, these concepts and words used to define us are thousands of years newer than our actual identities. Today, Jews are usually considered an ethnoreligious group, which, simply put, means that Jews are unified by both a common ethnic background and a common religious background."
5. Do you see a disconnect in who Jewish people tell us they are, versus who society tells us Jews are? Take a moment to reflect on the data about Canadian Jewish self-identification and the ways in which we have seen Jewish people referenced, represented, and depicted in the media, in our communities, and elsewhere.

Additional Resources:

- [2018 Survey of Jews in Canada - Final Report](#) (Environics Institute for Survey Research, University of Toronto, York University)
- [The Science of Race](#) (Facing History & Ourselves)
- [Periphery](#) (No Silence on Race, Ontario Jewish Archives) is an evocative photographic and film project that bears witness to ethnic diversity in the Jewish community. Sharing narratives from individuals of multiracial and multiethnic backgrounds. *Periphery* creates space to look, listen, and learn from participants as they share their experiences and explore ideas of representation, intersectionality, ethnicity, race, and sexuality.