

## MYTH #5: JEWS ARE A RACE, NOT A RELIGION

### Where does it come from?

The idea that Jews are not only a religious group, but also a racial group, was a centerpiece of Nazi policy, and was the justification for killing any Jewish person who came under Nazi occupation — regardless of whether he or she practiced Judaism. In fact, even the children and the grandchildren of Jews who had converted to Christianity were murdered as members of the Jewish “race” during the Holocaust.

The whole concept of “racial science,” and therefore the notion of the Jewish “race,” took root in Western Europe during the 19th century. In response to the decline of the influence of traditional Christianity, as well as the rise of Jewish assimilation and social mobility, anti-Semites adopted racial arguments as a new rationalization for their hatred of Jews. The argument can be summarized this way: Jews are different from non-Jews not because of their beliefs, but because of their physical nature; their “Jewishness” is not taught or acquired, but is inherited through their blood.

### What are the facts?

It is important to recognize that the theories of Jewish “racial” difference were developed long before the modern sciences of physiology and genetics. Although today there is a scholarly debate over whether or not the term “race” has any scientific meaning, all reputable scientists are in agreement that, while physical traits — skin color, susceptibility to certain diseases — are inherited, there is no ethnic or racial predisposition to emotions, intellect, or morals. Therefore, the idea that Jews (or any other ethnic group) are predisposed to bad or undesirable behavior because of their genetic makeup is wholly unscientific.

A definition of Judaism based on physical or genetic traits is also misleading because Jews appear throughout the world. Generally, Jews resemble their non-Jewish neighbors in the countries from which they originate. Through centuries of intermarriage and conversion, Jews from Eastern Europe tend to look like Eastern Europeans; Jews from Ethiopia tend to look like Ethiopians; Jews from Turkey tend to look like Turks; Jews from India tend to look like Indians.

What unites Jews as a people, whether they come from Europe, Asia, Africa, or the Americas, is a common culture, rooted in a common religion. Jews throughout the world are joined by a religious and cultural heritage rather than a racial sameness.

**How can we respond?**

If someone tells you that the Jewish people are a race, ask them what they mean by the term “race”; most anti-Semites who parrot pseudo-scientific ideas have no clear definition of the term. Ask these people what a Jew “should” look like. Can a Black person be a Jew? Can an East Asian or Indian person be a Jew? Can someone be born a Christian and become Jewish? The answer to each of these questions is yes — and together they refute the idea of a Jewish race as anything other than a figment of the anti-Semitic imagination.