

To OUR BELOVED COMMUNITY:

THE ADL IS NOT AN ALLY.

*Why communities say NO to
the Anti-Defamation League in
our schools, coalitions, and
movements.*

#DropTheADL

TO OUR BELOVED COMMUNITY: THE ADL IS NOT AN ALLY

The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) has branded itself as a civil rights organization in ways that conceal and legitimize its right-wing activities undermining the rights of Black, immigrant, queer, Muslim, Arab, and other marginalized communities.

Many progressive individuals and organizations partner with the ADL not knowing its ongoing legacy of supporting racist policing, surveillance, colonialism, and the silencing of social justice activism. Misinformation about the ADL's work, and its credibility in progressive circles, are what allows the ADL to continue harming social justice movements.

The following primer was compiled by organizations across the US working in coalition for freedom, justice, and equality. We hope it can be helpful in strengthening all of our social justice movements in resisting repression and advancing a vision of liberation for all. Many conflicts between the ADL and our movements are not covered in this primer. Community efforts to resist the ADL are also not covered here. For additional information and updates, visit DropTheADL.org.

THIS PRIMER WAS PUT TOGETHER BY THE DROP THE ADL WORKING GROUP WITH CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THE FOLLOWING ORGANIZATIONS:

American Friends Service Committee, American Muslims for Palestine, Arab Resource and Organizing Center, #DropTheADL, Friends of Sabeel - North America, International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network, Jewish Voice for Peace Deadly Exchange Campaign, Jews Against Anti-Muslim Racism, Network Against Islamophobia. Palestine Legal, Queers Against Israeli Apartheid, St. Louis Jewish Voice for Peace, US Campaign for Palestinian Rights, US Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel.

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History of Targeting and Surveilling Progressive Movements.	5
Support for Racist, Militarized Policing	9
Repressing Palestinian Rights, Smearing Critics of Colonialism as “Anti-Semites”	13
Support for Actual Anti-Semites, Donald Trump, and Other Right-Wing, Racist Influencers	16
Islamophobia / Anti-Muslim Racism & Anti-Arab Racism.	19
Campus Repression	22
Trampling Anti-Racist, Immigrant, Queer, and Other Justice Movements	25
Implications	29
Endnotes and Image Credits.	30



#DropTheADL

HISTORY OF TARGETING AND SURVEILLING PROGRESSIVE MOVEMENTS

In August 2017, following the white supremacist rallies in Charlottesville, the ADL issued a “primer for law enforcement” advising cops to film and plant undercover agents¹ among anti-racist protesters in order to use surveillance footage to prosecute them. The ADL advised police to search protesters before confining them in “assembly zones.” When news of the ADL memo surfaced, the ADL took it down² and said they deferred to law enforcement to make the right choices when it comes to decisions around infiltrating and filming protesters.

The ADL’s actions in Charlottesville are part of a long history of surveillance of social justice movements, including civil rights, anti-Apartheid, immigrant, farmworker, queer, Palestinian rights, and labor movements.

An extensive report³ by the International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network (IJAN) outlining attacks on social justice movements worldwide contains more than 40 mentions of the ADL. The IJAN report touches on the ADL’s longtime surveilling of progressive movements as a proxy for the US and Apartheid South Africa governments [p.23]:⁴

...as early as the 1930s, supported by strong elite-provoked anti-communist sentiment... the ADL began by carrying out surveillance against movement organizations like the National Lawyers Guild, reporting their activities to the House Committee on Un-American Activities. They ramped up their activities during the McCarthy era, as the ADL became a proxy for the US government, working as a private spy agency, feeding



#DropTheADL

information to the FBI. The ADL's monitoring of popular organizations continued after the McCarthy period, showing the continuities in its use as a tool of US government repression. That surveillance has included spying on the Black freedom movement, including Martin Luther King, Jr., anti-apartheid activists, and organizers for Palestinian rights.

In 1993, the San Francisco District Attorney investigated the ADL for collecting confidential information on nearly 10,000 activists and at least 700 organizations. The investigation showed that the **ADL had directly surveilled and infiltrated social justice and human rights organizations**⁵ in at least **seven cities**⁶, and its agents had received stolen police files from a surveillance program deemed illegal. The ADL had collected information on groups opposing South African apartheid and US racism, including the United Farm Workers, the Vanguard Public Foundation, the San Francisco Labor Council/AFL-CIO, NAACP, MADRE, Greenpeace, and the Center for Constitutional Rights. It also heavily targeted surveillance at Arab groups, keeping files on 4,500 members of the **American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee**⁷ (ADC), and **Jewish peace groups**.⁸ Furthermore, the ADL's agents supplied confidential information to foreign governments, including Israel and South Africa. Over a 40-year period, that private investigator hired by the Jewish Defense League also independently received money from a South African intelligence agent to provide information on South African exiles and anti-Apartheid activists to the white South African Apartheid government.

The ADL's surveillance **mapped closely**⁹ to acts of violence against Arab-American and South African activists. The ADL's infiltrator, Roy Bullock, was a regular volunteer at the San Francisco ADC and often worked on security at the time that Alex Odeh, the office's director, was murdered by a bomb planted at the office door. Bullock had reported to the South African government on the California visit of activist Chris Hani just before he returned to South Africa and was killed.

The targets of ADL surveillance also included American Friends Service Committee, particularly staff working to end South African Apartheid; American Civil Liberties Union; AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP); African National Congress; American Indian Movement; Arab Lesbian Network; Asian Law Caucus; Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador; Copwatch; Democratic Socialists of America (DSA); Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR); International Jewish Peace Union; National Conference

#DropTheADL

of Black Lawyers; National Rainbow Coalition; Network of Arab American Students; Pershing Plowshares; Philippines Human Rights Lobby; Shell Boycott Committee.¹⁰

Throughout the ADL's history, it has used the terms "extremist" and "fascist" to describe communists, Black liberationists, white supremacists, guerillas from Central America to Asia, Palestinian popular resistance movements, and US supporters of boycotting Israel – all of whom the ADL has opposed under the banner of championing civil rights. The ADL's opposition to the left framed its work. ADL research director Irwin Suall asserted in the early 1990s, "It's the American left that's the biggest threat to American Jews."¹¹



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SUPPORT FOR RACIST, MILITARIZED POLICING

Today, the ADL is the **single largest non-governmental police trainer**¹² in the country. The ADL 2016 annual report **boasted**¹³ that 100% of major US metropolitan police departments have sent participants to Israel and the ADL's Advanced Training School in Extremist and Terrorist Threats.

These trainings deepen the **militarized, racialized policing of US neighborhoods**,¹⁴ treating low-income neighborhoods and communities of color as counterinsurgent **"human terrain"**,¹⁵ just as Israeli forces view the Palestinian communities they occupy. Shared counterinsurgency tactics include the use of "less-lethal" munitions for crowd control — meaning weapons that "only" maim and can be used by police against local populations.

The ADL is the subject of a **national Deadly Exchange campaign**¹⁶ to end these police exchanges, which are organized by the ADL along with neoconservative groups like the Jewish Institute for National Security of America (JINSA).¹⁷ Through these exchanges, US police chiefs, ICE officers, campus security, and other high-ranking law enforcement officials travel to Israel — which, like the US, has an **extensive record of state oppression**¹⁸ — to trade practices with Israeli police, military and intelligence **agencies**.¹⁹ US and Israeli officials **trade surveillance and suppression tactics and technology**²⁰ honed through both countries' legacies of state violence against Black, brown, and native communities.

Ferguson, MO offers just one example of how closely the ADL's Israeli training program relates to racist policing in the US. Police Chief Timothy Fitch of the St. Louis County Police Department — the department that besieged **Ferguson**²¹ following the police killing of Michael Brown, Jr. — had received an ADL-funded trip to train with the Israeli military and meet Israeli counterinsurgency specialists. Black and Palestinian activists **have pointed to**²² the parallels in tactics and shared weapons used to suppress uprisings in Ferguson and Palestine.



SUPPORT FOR RACIST, MILITARIZED POLICING

#DropTheADL

Less than a year after Michael Brown, Jr. was killed, as St. Louis City and County police continued to suppress popular protests, the **St. Louis ADL formally honored the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department**.²³ When questioned about the celebration, St. Louis ADL Director **Karen Aroesty**²⁴ claimed that it is police who are being shot in the streets.

IJAN's report quotes the ADL's responses in the aftermath of the police murders of Michael Brown, Jr. and Eric Garner [p.77]:²⁵

Following the grand jury decision not to indict the Ferguson police officer who murdered Michael Brown, the ADL sided with the lack of indictment and categorized popular resistance as uncalled for violence, saying that they [the ADL] "**respect the grand jury's integrity**"²⁶ and their commitment to meeting the heavy responsibility thrust upon them. Friends of the Brown family, members of his community, and people across the nation may disagree with the outcome, and that is their right. But disagreement is never an excuse for violence." Similarly, following the grand jury decision not to indict the NYPD officers who murdered Eric Garner, the **ADL reaffirmed their support for the NYPD**²⁷ (who have themselves **received ADL-sponsored Israeli training**).²⁸ "We welcome the strong statements by Mayor Bill DeBlasio and the NYPD expressing their commitment to rebuild public trust and work together for justice in order to build the kind of city – and nation – we need to be. We are committed to that task and stand ready to work with our partners." When **Black football player Reggie Bush**²⁹ publically connected the struggle of Black communities in Ferguson with the struggle of Palestinians, the ADL slammed Bush, condescendingly stating that "Reggie Bush demonstrates a severe lack of understanding of both issues. He should stick to football."

A simple internet search of ADL awardees produces an extensive roster of notorious law enforcement officers, To name a few, the ADL has honored:

1. **Ray Kelly**,³⁰ NYPD police commissioner who introduced the notorious policies of Stop & Frisk policing. Kelly traveled on an ADL-sponsored police exchange program to Israel and returned to introduce the infamous NYPD Intelligence Unit responsible for massive, covert, unconstitutional surveillance of Muslims — a program "**modeled in part on how Israeli authorities operate in the West Bank**,"³¹

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2. **Thomas Galati**,³² NYPD chief of intelligence who attended police trainings in Israel and oversaw NYPD's spying on Muslim communities.
3. NYPD and LAPD former commissioner **William Bratton**,³³ the man **behind**³⁴ "**broken windows policing**,"³⁵ disproportionately targeting people of color and those suffering from addiction and mental illness, incarcerating people for small things like being homeless and sitting on the sidewalk seen as gateway activities to serious criminal activity. Stop-and-frisk practices from the arsenal of **Broken Windows**³⁶ policing **were also used by Israel**³⁷ to expand explicit racial profiling, searches, and detention of Palestinians, while LAPD **modeled**³⁸ increased racial profiling policies on Israel's airport practices.

The ADL has hired George Selim as their director of anti-bias education programs as well as security programs. Selim is the architect of DHS' **Countering Violent Extremism**³⁹ (CVE) program. CVE targets entire Arab and Muslim communities as potential future terrorists, and asks community members to monitor each other. (See the "Islamophobia/Anti-Muslim racism" section below.)



REPRESSING PALESTINIAN RIGHTS, SMEARING CRITICS OF COLONIALISM AS “ANTI-SEMITES”

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REPRESSING PALESTINIAN RIGHTS, SMEARING CRITICS OF COLONIALISM AS “ANTI-SEMITES”

While presenting itself as “the premier civil rights group” in the United States, the ADL has built a **major, less-publicized role**⁴⁰ in advancing pro-Israel US foreign policy and repressing the movement for Palestinian rights. Since the 1950s, the ADL has leveraged its strong media operation and its relationships with lawmakers both to quash Arab American community efforts to participate in US politics, and to defend Israel from widespread criticism of its system of **segregation**⁴¹ and **apartheid**,⁴² mass incarceration, racial profiling, torture (including of children), political repression, and war crimes.

Israel controls Palestinians’ **land and water**;⁴³ whether they can access employment, **universities**,⁴⁴ or **medical treatment**,⁴⁵ and **whom they can marry**;⁴⁶ to name but a few examples of its system that South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu and other anti-Apartheid icons have called “**worse than apartheid**.”⁴⁷ Israel’s regime has been condemned by more than 60 United Nations resolutions (**example**⁴⁸), the **International Court of Justice**,⁴⁹ **Amnesty International**,⁵⁰ **Human Rights Watch**⁵¹, and hundreds of others. Israel uses Palestinian **areas as a lab**⁵² for field-testing “innovative” policing methods and weaponry before exporting them to other security forces.

The ADL effectively blacklists organizations criticizing Israel’s separate and unequal system, particularly those **linking oppression in the US and Palestine**.⁵³ It has targeted Black, Muslim, and Arab organizers as anti-

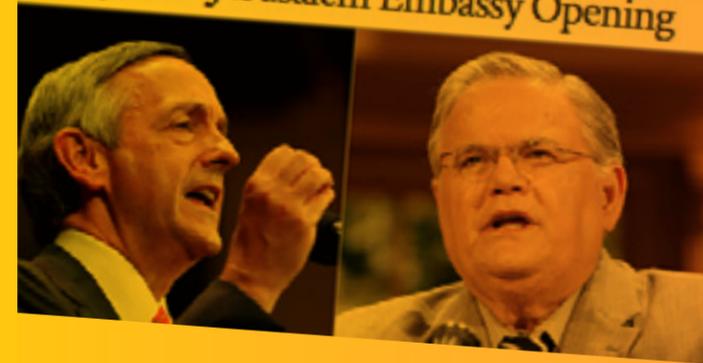
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Semites, suggesting that their links to anti-racist, anti-colonial movements (which have long challenged Israel) are **links to “hate.”**⁵⁴ It also specifically smears Jewish organizers who **contest the ADL’s claim**⁵⁵ to represent Jewish interests and safety. In smearing activists, the ADL calls “anti-Semitic” any discussion of the influence of Zionist institutions in US politics; of links between US political donors and Israel’s lucrative military and tech sectors; and of the well-documented sympathies between US and Israeli racial supremacist forces. The ADL uses its platform as an advocate for “rights” to demonize the “Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions” (**BDS**)⁵⁶ movement to end international complicity in the abuse of Palestinian rights by boycotting institutions that normalize or support Israel’s subjugation of Palestinians. BDS is a campaign that aims to achieve freedom, justice, and equality through popular, nonviolent tactics used to achieve social change in South Africa and throughout history.

The ADL’s **abuse of the term anti-Semitism**⁵⁷ not only muzzles legitimate criticism of injustices perpetrated by Israel, but it communicates a dangerous message that all Jews share the same views — a central tenet of traditional anti-Semitism — and implies that there is something Jewish about military occupation (and by extension, that boycotting occupation is boycotting Jews). Furthermore, it detracts from naming and fighting the very real and present acts of anti-Semitism.

SUPPORT FOR ACTUAL ANTI-SEMITES, DONALD TRUMP, AND OTHER RIGHT-WING, RACIST INFLUENCERS

Anti-LGBT, Anti-Semitic Pastors Deliver Prayers at Jerusalem Embassy Opening



New York – Former Police Commissioner Ray Kelly Receives ADL Americanism Award



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SUPPORT FOR ACTUAL ANTI-SEMITES, DONALD TRUMP, AND OTHER RIGHT-WING, RACIST INFLUENCERS

While the ADL attacks progressive human rights activists with false charges of anti-Semitism, it celebrates actual anti-Semites and bigots. The ADL continues to support the Israeli government's work to partner with and legitimize the openly anti-Semitic Trump Administration; a partnership grounded in racism as **President Donald Trump**⁵⁸ and **Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu**⁵⁹ celebrate both countries' exclusionary walls, and white supremacist Trump supporters cite Israel as an example of the legitimacy of **ethnonationalism**.⁶⁰ In December 2017, the ADL **celebrated President Trump's decision**⁶¹ to unilaterally declare Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, which implicitly endorsed Israel's removal of Palestinian Christian and Muslim residents and razing of their neighborhoods so that the city holy to many can be further "Judaized."

On the campaign trail, speaking to a Jewish Republican audience, Trump used **anti-Semitic stereotypes**⁶² about Jews and money. **The ADL defended him**,⁶³ saying, "Mr. Trump's presentation was completely supportive of Israel and the Jewish community."

The 2017 AJ+ video "**Why Anti-Semites Love Israel**"⁶⁴ describes the rise of Zionists aligned with anti-Semites like Fox Corporation's Rupert Murdoch and Trump.

Support for Actual Anti-Semites, Donald Trump, and Other Right-Wing, Racist Influencers

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The ADL regularly honors right-wing figures, often for their work on "keeping us safe" or supporting Israel. Because of the ADL's reputation as a civil rights organization, these awards confer a badge of good works on figures who have often been complicit in or directly responsible for state violence. Some of these include:

1. **Rupert Murdoch**⁶⁵ of **Fox News**⁶⁶
2. **Michael Chertoff**,⁶⁷ a main **proponent of the US/Mexico border wall**⁶⁸ who threatened to prosecute sanctuary cities. Chertoff represents a lobbying firm pushing for increased full body scanning/data collection and **co-authored the Patriot Act**.⁶⁹ He served as Secretary of Homeland Security during Hurricane Katrina and was **partially responsible**⁷⁰ for the **catastrophic neglect**⁷¹ of the federal response. (The ADL also **appointed Chertoff**⁷² to co-chair a task force "to enhance the safety, security and resiliency" of Jewish communities.)
3. **Silvio Berlusconi**,⁷³ the notoriously corrupt, sexist, Islamophobic Italian prime minister who secured political power through alliances with anti-immigrant populist parties — and who called Mussolini's dictatorship "mild", claimed that he "sent people on holiday to internal exile," and denied his role in the Nazi holocaust. (When Italian Jewish communities objected, the ADL did not respond.)
4. **Cardinal Bernard Law**,⁷⁴ an anti-woman, anti-gay zealot who opposed AIDS treatment and protected priests who sexually abused children. The ADL honored him during the AIDS crisis over the protests of gay activists, then expressed ongoing **"reverence"**⁷⁵ for him two decades later, shortly after he resigned over his role in enabling sexual abuse.

Historically, the ADL has also sided with the political right, in many cases against Jewish activists. For instance, the **ADL joined**⁷⁶ the McCarthy anti-Communist witch-hunts. It adamantly refuted Jewish communists' concerns that anti-Semitism was a factor in the state's zeal to prosecute them, and supported the execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg.

ISLAMOPHOBIA / ANTI-MUSLIM RACISM AND ANTI-ARAB RACISM

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ISLAMOPHOBIA / ANTI-MUSLIM RACISM & ANTI-ARAB RACISM

Across the ADL's efforts to undermine leftist/progressive movements and critiques of Israel as a racialized geopolitical force, it has consistently worked to make Islamophobia (also described as anti-Muslim racism) a liberal value in the United States. The ADL has vilified Arab people and communities, particularly when they have organized as a US constituency and/or an anti-colonial voice in global politics.

Virtually all of the ADL's projects have contributed to normalizing Islamophobia/anti-Muslim racism & anti-Arab racism.

- The ADL has consistently worked to **shut down Arab American and Muslim community organizing**⁷⁷ and distance those communities from their elected representatives. This has included a long history of **portraying Arab Americans as agents of various foreign agendas**⁷⁸ rather than an American constituency.
- The ADL has built a role as a prominent voice on civil rights, and used that position to portray Israel and Zionism as “Jews’ civil rights struggle.” That equation makes Jewish rights seem tied to Israeli colonial conquest, and rationalizes Israel’s anti-Palestinian, anti-Arab, and anti-Muslim racism as a “civil rights” position. (In one such effort, the ADL set out to **school legal scholar Michelle Alexander on civil rights.**)⁷⁹
- At the same time, the **ADL has promoted blatantly false information**⁸⁰ about Islam, Muslims in the Middle East, and the **aims of Palestinian rights movements.**⁸¹ Such disinformation provocatively suggests that Islamophobia is necessary for Jewish safety. It suggests that only irrational, “hateful” people (lumped together as “Muslims” or “Arabs”) object to Israeli colonialism — erasing the objections to violence, colonization, and racism that keep Palestine a core part of global human rights efforts.

- The ADL has been a strong partner in the Islamophobic “**Countering Violent Extremism**”⁸² strategy, calling for its **funding and expansion**.⁸³ Despite the ADL’s more public reputation of monitoring white supremacists, CVE is perhaps most infamous for its increased **surveillance of Muslim communities**.⁸⁴ In its calls to expand CVE, the ADL also **cites Black nationalism as a threat**,⁸⁵ referencing the Black Panthers, in effect lumping together white supremacists with Muslim communities and Black liberation movements.
- The ADL claims it *opposes* Islamophobia, even offering anti-Islamophobia training as part of its anti-bias education programming. But when the targets of US and Israeli Islamophobia and state violence **speak for themselves**,⁸⁶ the **ADL attacks them**.⁸⁷ (The same is true of anti-Black racism: the ADL says it opposes it, but **polices Black organizers**,⁸⁸ attacking when it decides that they “**misunderstand**”⁸⁹ racism or have been “**distracted**”⁹⁰ by intersectional organizing with Arabs, Muslims, or Palestinians.)
- The ADL has supported and driven a neoconservative **US-Israeli policy for colonization of the Middle East**,⁹¹ **rationalized by Islamophobia**⁹² and fear of Arab and Middle Eastern people’s self-determination. Domestically, the ADL has supported the Islamophobic “War on Terror,” including **police surveillance of Muslims**,⁹³ a **secretive program**⁹⁴ that significantly harmed Muslim communities and **never produced a single case**.⁹⁵ In US foreign policy, the ADL advocates policies that aid Israel and demonize its enemies as threats in the War on Terror.

The ADL doesn’t undertake this work alone: it plays a key role in supporting “**the Islamophobia network**”⁹⁶ of institutions and people who bring a wide range of resources to the project of making Islamophobia a centerpiece of US politics. While the network operates from the far-right/neoconservative idea that Islam and the West are engaged in a “clash of civilizations,” the ADL promotes the idea of the “**good Muslim**”⁹⁷ who is an exception to that clash — reinforcing both the idea of an existential conflict between Muslims and the West, and its own credentials as a promoter of “tolerance.”

Many of the ADL’s **funders**⁹⁸ are right-wing foundations that invest in Islamophobia, US and Israeli militarism, and opposing progressive movements. While accepting this dirty money, the ADL also runs “Walk Against Hate” brand-building fundraisers in which it enlists local, small-budget — and often progressive — community groups that need funds urgently to raise money toward the ADL’s \$50+ million annual budget (and \$75 million endowment).

CAMPUS REPRESSION

CAMPUS REPRESSION

The ADL’s repressive practices have also targeted **student organizations**⁹⁹ and faculty members who teach, write, or advocate on Palestine. The ADL often works on the same campaigns and attacked the same community groups and individuals as overtly right-wing organizations like **Campus Watch**¹⁰⁰ and **AMCHA**.¹⁰¹ In some cases, the ADL’s advocacy has been successful in shutting down discussion of Palestinian rights by falsely portraying it as a violation of Jewish students’ rights. In others, it has validated groups orchestrating vicious, online smear campaigns like Canary Mission that impose **high, career-long costs**¹⁰² on students and faculty talking and teaching about Palestine, preventing students from getting jobs in the future and threatening academics’ entire careers. The combined impact of these campaigns is to **dramatically chill**¹⁰³ academic freedom and speech on campus, and the effects are felt particularly by students and faculty from marginalized communities.

The ADL has sought to **prevent students and faculty from studying**¹⁰⁴ Palestinian perspectives and legal analysis of Israeli policies, labeling such study “anti-Semitic” and seeking to characterize it as outside the bounds of academic freedom. For instance, in 2009, the ADL targeted a University of California at Santa Barbara professor who assigned readings critical of Israel’s occupation of the West Bank and military assaults on Gaza. The ADL met with university officials to press them to open an investigation into the professor and helped two students craft complaints that he had “assigned anti-Semitic material unrelated to the course.” The university eventually dismissed the case, though it consumed many resources and sent a warning to other academics about what they might face if they raised the topic in their classrooms.

In another instance, the ADL and other groups pressured University of California at Hastings Law School to cancel a 2011 conference on legal avenues for pursuing Palestinian rights. They organized alumni to threaten to pull future donations if the university did not comply. The university ultimately withdrew funding for the conference, over the objections of nearly all of its tenured faculty.

The ADL’s repression of students’ political activities has often targeted Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP), a group with hundreds of chapters nationwide led predominantly by students of color. For example, in 2013 the **ADL campaigned to punish students**¹⁰⁵ at Florida Atlantic University. There, one student interrupted a talk by Israeli Colonel Bentzi Gruber, who has been accused of war crimes, while the other students silently walked out of the room. After the ADL intervened to demand the university take action against the protesters, two students were placed on indefinite probation and **required to attend a diversity training facilitated by the ADL itself**.¹⁰⁶ Although the students expressed that **it was degrading and even abusive [p.107]**¹⁰⁷ to be forced to attend a training on tolerance from an organization repressing their political protest, they were told that if they did not attend the ADL’s tolerance training, they would be suspended or expelled.

At the high school level, the ADL worked with the San Francisco Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC), and for three years blocked the Arab Resource and Organizing Center (AROC) — an established community-based organization with a long history of social justice and coalition work — from providing culturally-relevant education (CRE) and weekly Arab youth programming to San Francisco Bay Area students because of AROC’s “**position on Israel**.”¹⁰⁸ The ADL and JCRC also pressured San Francisco Unified School District to halt AROC’s successful campaign to implement a resolution for an **Arabic language pathway**¹⁰⁹ in K-12 schools, causing a three-year delay in its roll-out. ADL sought to smear AROC’s director as “anti-Semitic” for **making links**¹¹⁰ between anti-war activism and Israeli military policy, and voicing Bay Area Arab communities’ concern with Israel’s human rights violations.

The ADL’s impact on campuses is enabled by its larger public role as a “rights advocate.” When the ADL asserts that discussing the state of Israel or Palestinians makes Jewish students unsafe and is exempt from academic freedom, universities take the ADL’s claims as authoritative. Most students and faculty targeted by the ADL’s campaigns are not supported by any equivalent organization.



TRAMPLING ANTI-RACIST, IMMIGRANT, QUEER, AND OTHER JUSTICE MOVEMENTS

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TRAMPLING ANTI-RACIST, IMMIGRANT, QUEER, AND OTHER JUSTICE MOVEMENTS

The ADL regularly bullies the communities whose rights it supposedly protects, in its efforts to limit **what counts as legitimate demands for civil rights**,¹¹¹ and to protect Israel. These attacks run throughout the ADL’s history on **anti-bias education**,¹¹² **hate crimes advocacy**,¹¹³ and **immigrant rights work**.¹¹⁴ Because of the credibility it has banked, the ADL is also given the authority to police others’ access to public platforms. It **vets content for YouTube/Google**,¹¹⁵ where videos about **the ADL’s police training exchanges**¹¹⁶ with Israel have been censored as “hate speech.” The ADL is also working behind the scenes to **identify and filter speech for Twitter, Facebook, and Microsoft**,¹¹⁷ without input from — and often **in conflict with**¹¹⁸ — the communities it claims to protect against hate.

Often, the ADL’s attacks have focused on Black leaders with long histories of supporting marginalized communities.

The ADL attacked the Movement for Black Lives, a coalition of 50+ Black-led organizations that in 2016 released a **visionary platform**¹¹⁹ to address structural racism and create just solutions. The ADL, **along with a crew of right-wing groups**,¹²⁰ blasted the Movement for Black Lives in **racist, patronizing terms**¹²¹ for discussing Israel’s treatment of Palestinians as a form of genocide. The ADL sought to discredit Black leadership on anti-racism, declaring that it “has not endorsed the Black Lives Matter Movement” and has “no official relationship” with its activists, whom it accused of being **bigoted**¹²² and **anti-Semitic**¹²³ (again equating anti-colonialism with anti-Semitism.)

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The ADL has led¹²⁴ smear campaigns against leaders of the women’s march, including **Black community organizer Tamika Mallory**¹²⁵ and **Muslim community organizer Linda Sarsour**.¹²⁶ These takedown campaigns sought to prevent the Women’s March from including Islamophobia, Palestine, and US war and colonialism in the Middle East in its emerging conception of racial justice. The ADL also led attacks¹²⁷ on academic and CNN commentator Professor Marc Lamont Hill, accusing him of anti-Semitism when he expressed support for Palestinians. CNN then fired Hill.

In 2019, the ADL led efforts to smear¹²⁸ US Congresswoman Ilhan Omar as “anti-Semitic” because of her insistence on including Palestine as part of a larger progressive agenda and identifying the role of Israel advocates in US politics. The ADL championed this campaign to **take action against Rep. Omar**¹²⁹ — the second Muslim ever elected to Congress and a crucial Black and immigrant community voice **who is overwhelmingly supported**¹³⁰ by US progressive and anti-racist movements — regardless of the potential impact it could have on her ability to advance transformational progressive policies in support of liberation struggles across the board. The ADL’s conflicts with Black leadership on civil rights dates back to the **Civil Rights era**¹³¹ when the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) stood in solidarity with the Palestinian freedom struggle and lost political and financial support from Zionist Jewish groups. The ADL **denounced SNCC**¹³² as “racist” and attacked it for citing Palestinian sources. ADL leaders have periodically acknowledged that **they view the anti-racist left as “a bigger threat to Jewish interests”**¹³³ than white supremacists and the right.

The ADL has not hesitated to work to **take down any progressive organization**¹³⁴ or leader of color — no matter what their track record of support for marginalized communities or present-day efforts to fight for justice — if they cross the ADL’s line of what constitutes legitimate discussion on Israel.

In January 2018, the ADL mobilized an **aggressive campaign**¹³⁵ to undo the work of a coalition of more than 20 organizations in New Orleans to **end city contracts**¹³⁶ with, and investments in, violations of human rights, civil rights, and labor rights. **The coalition**¹³⁷ included organizations led by immigrants, Black Lives Matter organizers, LGBTQ activists, clergy, Jews, Muslims, and formerly incarcerated people. It gained support from **No Dakota Access Pipeline Solidarity**,¹³⁸ **National Prison Divestment Campaign convener Enlace**,¹³⁹ **Jewish Voice for Peace’s Rabbinical Council**,¹⁴⁰ **Black for Palestine**,¹⁴¹ **Amnesty International**,¹⁴² and **other legal and civil rights groups**.¹⁴³ The City Council resolution backed by the coalition passed unanimously, but the New Orleans ADL and Jewish Federation quickly mobilized their bases to call on the council to reverse its

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decision. To oppose the resolution, they joined forces with extreme right-wing Louisiana Senator **Bill Cassidy**,¹⁴⁴ a strong Trump supporter who helped repeal the Affordable Care Act and opposes gun control and energy regulation. Following speeches by four local white Zionist leaders organized by the ADL and Federation, the resolution was **unanimously rescinded**¹⁴⁵ at the following City Council meeting — to the horror of more than 100 local residents who had come to celebrate the civil rights resolution.

The ADL has worked to silence queer liberation and anti-racist/anti-colonial movements. At the height of the AIDS epidemic, the ADL spied on the **AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP)**¹⁴⁶ and fought to keep homophobia and AIDS-phobia out of its anti-bias curriculum. Today, ADL attacks the growing queer movement to stop **pinkwashing**¹⁴⁷ and to support **Palestinian queer groups’ calls**¹⁴⁸ to end Israeli apartheid as a necessary precondition for queer/gender self-determination. In addition to its attacks on queer-led Black Lives Matter groups, the ADL has **attacked as “anti-Semitic” groups like the Chicago Dyke March**¹⁴⁹ that set out to build spaces inclusive of Middle Eastern/North African, Muslim, and anti-colonial Jewish queers. It has also inserted itself into queer community conversations, pushing for the **cancellation of queer dialogues**¹⁵⁰ on pinkwashing and encouraging mainstream queer institutions like the National LGBTQ Task Force to **exclude queer activism**¹⁵¹ against apartheid.

Finally, the ADL has actively undermined Jewish anti-racist work. It has **condemned Jewish Voice for Peace**,¹⁵² the fastest growing Jewish organization in the country, which plays a major role in US Jewish life, as a fringe group. It has attacked Jewish public figures who speak out against apartheid — and against the ADL’s own tactics — as “anti-Semitic.”

One tool that the ADL uses in this work is its Annual Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents, a resource widely used by media and government to assess both white supremacy and Jewish vulnerability. The ADL has long been criticized for **publishing skewed, unsupported data**¹⁵³ in this report, distorting and undermining genuine efforts to understand and combat real anti-Semitism. Critics charge that the ADL uses these largely-unsourced annual findings of constantly-increasing anti-Semitism to push liberals to support Israel as a Jewish protector, and to ensure the ADL’s role as an “important voice against hate.”

In short, the ADL has sought to portray itself as the authority on rights and justice — at the great expense of Black, immigrant, queer, Arab, Muslim, Jewish, and many other communities.

IMPLICATIONS

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IMPLICATIONS

This final question may be at the heart of the matter for progressives currently working with, or invited to work with, the ADL: How does one relate to an organization that supposedly helps police to be less biased and actively helps police refine their existing practices of racial profiling and suppression of popular resistance? An organization that may sometimes oppose real anti-Semitism but also weaponizes the label to muzzle human rights defenders? A white-led organization that claims a role as civil rights leader, but shouts down communities of color advocating for their own rights, and recommends infiltrating and filming protests? An organization that sometimes lifts up Black civil rights activists and organizations but is willing to discard them when they support Palestinian rights? Is this a partial friend, or no friend at all?

For many progressives, the answer is clearly the latter: The ADL is not an ally. We cannot lift up or partner with the ADL on progressive causes, because the ADL's credibility as a social justice organization is precisely what allows it to undermine the rights of marginalized communities, shielding it from criticism and accountability while boosting its legitimacy and resources. We cannot collaborate with the ADL without betraying our movements.

Internally, the ADL is a large and varied organization. Within it there are progressive people who use their positions to do the best work possible. Some individual anti-bias trainers of the ADL are appreciated as skilled facilitators who are committed to their work. Some ADL clubs in schools may offer good guidance to students thinking through implicit bias. At the same time, the ADL as a larger institution converts that good will into a tool to legitimize and deflect attention away from its repressive practices. We who are committed to a vision of collective liberation cannot aid the ADL in projecting a false badge of progressivism that helps advance a racist agenda.



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