

## What is the ADL?

The ADL was launched about 100 years ago to counteract anti-Semitism in US media and culture, and soon became known for monitoring white supremacist groups. The ADL selectively supported Black civil rights demands in the 1960s, and became a national player in “tolerance education” and hate crimes legislation. The ADL now weighs in on a wider set of issues, including free speech, religious freedom, refugee rights, and LGBTQ rights. It calls itself “our nation’s premier civil rights/human relations organization” and is widely considered an authority on anti-Semitism. For these reasons, the ADL is accorded respect (and a measure of fear) by elected officials and the media.

Unfortunately, the ADL’s work on rights has been filtered through its conservative views, including staunch Cold War anti-Communism, fear that social justice movements threaten the US state, support for the Israeli state and its violence, and Islamophobic “security” concerns. This has led the ADL to consistently undermine the work of people of color: opposing affirmative action; spying on anti-racist, anti-apartheid, LGBTQ, labor, and other groups; supporting Muslim surveillance; coming out against the Movement 4 Black Lives; and smearing those who call for Palestinian rights—and who challenge the ADL’s policies—as “anti-Semites.”



## What’s wrong with trying to find common ground with the ADL?

Working with the ADL as an ally paradoxically increases the ADL’s ability to attack anti-racist and social justice movements. It helps the ADL claim to be a leader on civil rights, which is a powerful position to hold in US politics. The ADL uses that role to narrowly define rights in corridors of power where grassroots groups are not invited, and to say whose voices calling for rights should be heard.

In practice, the ADL uses its respected position to undermine work to end racist policing and Islamophobic “security” policies and wars. It undermines efforts to separate anti-Semitism from criticism of Israel, making it more difficult to address actual anti-Semitism. It displaces the voices and ideas of affected communities, replacing it with mostly white, privileged, straight and male leaders working hand in hand with police and the state. It especially undercuts the cross-movement work that makes links between different forms of racialized, gendered state violence.

## How is the ADL in my community?

*The ADL has a central national office that does international and US political and media work. It runs local programming, media work, and relationships with schools and community groups through 27 regional offices.*

### Tolerance Education

The ADL is a major provider of anti-bias education in settings like schools, public agencies, and workplaces. Their programming is usually called “No Place for Hate” or “A World of Difference” (or “A Classroom/Campus/Community of Difference”).

#### What’s wrong with ADL tolerance education?

The ADL’s anti-bias education has long been criticized for failing to address systemic racism, for focusing on the Nazi holocaust to the exclusion of other genocides, and for displacing the voices of communities of color speaking for themselves. The ADL’s distortions of anti-Semitism, support of Islamophobia, and attacks on anti-racist and LGBT movements, make it ill-suited to teaching tolerance. Using ADL education programming conveys to Muslim, Black, and non-Israel-supporting families particularly that schools are not a safe and inclusive place for them.

### Hate Crimes

The ADL has been a main player in hate crimes laws and tracking certain kinds of bias crimes, so other anti-bias groups often work with them, like the National LGBTQ Task Force. The ADL also works closely with police departments and federal authorities, sharing information on groups it deems threatening.

#### What’s wrong with ADL hate crimes work?

Many anti-racist and LGBTQ movements criticize hate crimes laws because they elevate police as a source of safety, increase police powers of surveillance and violence, and are more often used to prosecute marginalized people than to protect them. The ADL is an avid supporter of police powers, and worse, it focuses on hate crimes and bias at the expense of opposing systemic racism and violence. The ADL also uses unscientific and non-transparent data collection: for example, documenting protests supporting Palestinian rights as “anti-Semitic incidents.” In raising the alarm about hate crimes, the ADL often equates

anti-Semitic speech (real or mislabeled) with material violence more commonly inflicted on Black, Muslim, and other people of color.

### Police Training: “Deadly Exchange”

Every year the ADL sends U.S. police, ICE, border patrol, and FBI to Israel for an exchange of worst practices with Israeli military and police forces through a program called the National Counter-Terrorism Seminar. Participants in the programs visit checkpoints, settlements, prisons, and other sites of Israel’s worst human rights violations against Palestinians, all under the guise of “learning from Israel’s counter-terrorism expertise.”

#### What’s wrong with ADL police exchange?

In these programs, tactics, and ideologies are shared that amplify discriminatory, repressive policing practices that already exist in both countries, including extrajudicial executions, shoot-to-kill policies, police murders, racial profiling, massive spying and surveillance, deportation and detention, and attacks on human rights defenders. They reinforce policing that approaches whole populations—including Arab, Muslim, Black, immigrant, low-income, and other communities—as inherently threatening, views neighborhoods as enemy turf, and makes policing a key tool for gentrification.

### LGBTQ Rights

The ADL includes LGBTQ issues in its tolerance education, has weighed in on rights and hate crime legislation, and maintains relationships with some LGBTQ groups including the National LGBTQ Task Force. It also advances the idea of Israel as a “safe haven” for LGBTQ people in the Middle East, *pinkwashing* Israeli state violence that targets Palestinians and others in the region regardless of LGBTQ identity.

#### What’s wrong with ADL LGBTQ rights work?

As LGBTQ communities attempt to work through hard questions of racism, Islamopho-

bia, and homonationalism that complicate US gay rights, the ADL has regularly weighed in as an outside voice *against* LGBTQ Muslim, Jewish non-Zionist, and people of color. The ADL has succeeded in creating media and funding pressure on some LGBTQ organizations, moving them to act against LGBTQ communities working to stop violence, and to shut down conversations about race and power. The ADL is especially dogged about undermining LGBTQ

opposition to pinkwashing, smearing LGBTQ activist groups as anti-Semitic, and attempting to manage LGBTQ community discussions from outside.

### Fundraising

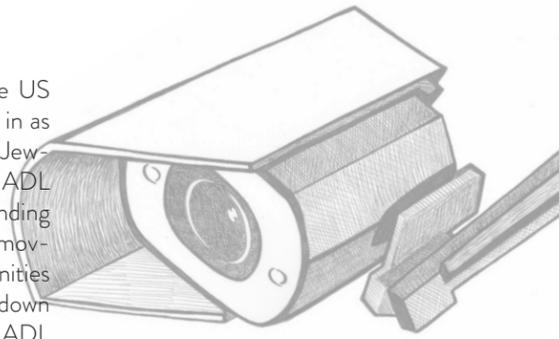
The ADL raises money from communities through the “Walk Against Hate” in San Diego, Las Vegas, and Philly. The ADL recruits schools (including schools that use its tolerance education), workplaces, and hundreds of individual donors to gather pledges for the ADL, meeting higher money goals each year.

#### What’s wrong with ADL fundraising?

The ADL is technically a non-profit, but in 2016 it raised \$2.5 million more than it spent, paid its director \$545K, and reported \$81 million in assets which included a \$6.7 million increase in one year. The ADL’s funding sources include wealthy mega-donors, endowments, and other financial instruments. The ADL also gets paid for programming by schools and other agencies. Its brand-building “Walks Against Hate” don’t raise much of the ADL’s budget, but they pull money and time from local organizations that need funding much more urgently.

### Providing resources and political muscle to smaller local groups

The ADL has made itself seem indispensable to local groups working on issues like free speech, religious freedom, and refugee rights. Many small local groups use the ADL’s printed materials, are in coalitions that are made more “legit” by having the ADL as a member, and



seek the ADL’s help to move policy by weighing in with politicians.

#### What’s wrong with the ADL’s support?

The ADL’s outsized role means it gets to define “rights” from a white-led, conservative perspective—often to the detriment of the communities who need support to exercise their rights. For instance, the ADL uses its role as a “free speech advocate” to fight students’ right to speak against Israeli policies on their campuses, saying their speech isn’t protected. The ADL supports some Muslim causes, but then uses its position as a “religious freedom advocate” to claim that US counterterrorism policies that profile Muslims based on religion, and that inappropriately surveil Muslim communities aren’t Islamophobic: just good security. On some issues, like refugee rights, the ADL may actually support good policy. But it takes any credit for doing good work and uses it *against* other communities.

### Guiding politicians and press

The ADL is the authoritative, go-to source for politicians and media to check whether an incident, policy, or person is anti-Semitic. Also, the ADL pushes out information when it wants to flag something anti-Semitic.

#### What’s wrong with ADL guidance?

The ADL uses its authoritative role to undercut anti-racist organizing that challenges its Israel-focused, anti-Muslim, and pro-police positions. It uses the powerful charge of anti-Semitism to smear whole movements, and to distract from the problem of an overwhelmingly white, privileged organization setting the terms for discussion of racism.

[www.DropTheADL.org](http://www.DropTheADL.org)

## What's hard about opposing the ADL?

The ADL is a large national organization with a huge presence in politics, media, and advocacy. It has the public relations capacity to define how stories play out in media, as per its mission. It freely labels any opponents “anti-Semites,” creating a difficult distraction that groups must stop and respond to.

Groups that challenge the ADL may also worry about losing funding they get through political channels. The ADL has the ear of many officials, and also the capacity to brand officials as anti-Semites. Like any advocacy group, the ADL works informally through political relationships to protect itself and fence out opponents, and this may include attacks on community funding.

Since the ADL's brand as a protector of marginalized people is so strong, and it uses familiar language about rights and standing up for others, it can be hard to explain among allies why the ADL isn't welcome.

### For more information:

#### www.DropTheADL.org

Download this flyer, check its sources, and read further.

“The Ferguson/Palestine Connection” by Kristian Davis Bailey, Ebony Magazine : [tinyurl.com/FergusonPalestineADL](http://tinyurl.com/FergusonPalestineADL)

“Starbucks' epic fail after an epic fail” by Susan Abulhawa, Al Jazeera [tinyurl.com/starbucksADLfail](http://tinyurl.com/starbucksADLfail)

“Anti-Defamation League: Stop Pretending to Be a Civil Rights Organization” by Lesley Williams, Truth-Out : [tinyurl.com/WilliamsTruthout](http://tinyurl.com/WilliamsTruthout)

“Faking rights: Why anti-racists detest the ADL” by Emmaia Gelman, Medium.com : [tinyurl.com/fakingrights](http://tinyurl.com/fakingrights)

“How the ADL fuels Islamophobia” by Elly Bulkin & Donna Nevel, Alternet [tinyurl.com/ADLIslamophobia](http://tinyurl.com/ADLIslamophobia)

“The Kings of Garbage” by Mark Ames, Pacific Standard [tinyurl.com/ADLspying](http://tinyurl.com/ADLspying)

DeadlyExchange.org (Jewish Voice for Peace)

Twitter: #DropTheADL

## Why are communities opposing the ADL?

*The ADL's work for rights and tolerance is matched with work against them. When communities work with the ADL, it lends credibility to its right-wing projects, and makes community spaces unsafe and unwelcoming to those the ADL targets. Given the ADL's role in racial police violence, its opposition to emerging civil rights movements, and its promotion of Islamophobia, its presence in school systems and in social justice coalitions is untenable.*

### Undermining and displacing communities of color in civil rights struggle:

The ADL has a troubled history of undermining anti-racist groups in the US, from affirmative action to anti-apartheid struggle to the War on Terror to the Movement for Black Lives, and more. It's a white-led organization—that doesn't even recognize the vast diversity among US Jews—with a history of displacing the voices of communities of color, immigrants, LGBTQ people, and others in civil rights conversations.

### Attacking our movements and our intersectional organizing:

In the past few years, the ADL has ramped up attacks on movements of people of color, LGBTQ people, and Jewish anti-racists and anti-Zionists. The ADL regularly labels its challengers as “anti-Semites,” “hate groups,” or “extremists” in public conversation. Their targets include the Movement 4 Black Lives, the Women's March, Jewish Voice for Peace, Muslim student groups, LGBTQ groups that oppose pinkwashing, and many others. In each case, it has attacked those who connect US racism, Islamophobia, and militarized policing with Israeli violence against Palestinians.



### Promoting Islamophobia as “security policy”:

Despite its claims to support religious freedom, the ADL partners with the federal government as a security and counterterrorism expert, explicitly and tacitly supporting Islamophobic policies in the War on Terror. The ADL is also a major voice driving US backing for the Israeli government, falsely equating support for Israel with support for Jews.

### Holding back multiracial work to address anti-Semitism:

The ADL regularly attacks Jewish groups that call for Palestinian rights, work across

anti-racist movements, and challenge uses of the Nazi holocaust to justify racial violence against others, equate Israel with Jewish safety, and erase non-European Jews. It minimizes historical and current Jewish action for social change, instead promoting its own support for US and Israeli governments as “the Jewish view” and its opponents, including Jewish ones, as anti-Semites. Given these attacks, it's particularly egregious that the ADL counts Jewish and other groups' protests against Israeli policy as “anti-Semitic incidents” in its reports on national hate activity. The ADL's tactics dangerously dilute the meaning of anti-Semitism in a moment when real anti-Semitism needs critical attention.

### Deadly exchange of police strategies:

The ADL's connections to racist, militarized policing in the US have also become clearer in the past several years. The “Deadly Exchange” of policing strategies between the US and Israel is increasingly grievous as both US and Israeli police/military violence against communities becomes more visible and in some cases more intense.

### ...and other controversies:

There are many communities who have longstanding objections to the ADL's work. Some battles are ongoing. On some issues, like the Armenian Genocide, the ADL has adjusted its positions to adapt to criticism without addressing core issues. Some have had immediate and disastrous results for anti-racist activists, like the ADL's intelligence-gathering on groups challenging the South African apartheid regime. For more history, visit [www.DropTheADL.org](http://www.DropTheADL.org).

### This community education flyer is endorsed by:

*Adalah-NY . BYP100 NYC . Jews Say NO! . Jewish Voice for Peace-Chicago . Jewish Voice for Peace-NYC . Jewish Voice for Peace-Triangle NC . Queer Detainee Empowerment Project . Queers Against Israeli Apartheid NYC Movement to End Racism and Islamophobia (MERI) . List in formation.*

Why communities

say **NO**

to the

**Anti-Defamation**

**League (ADL)**

in our schools,

coalitions,

and movements