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1

2

3

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Elon Musk's Legal Threats Aside, The ADL Doesn't Speak For Jews

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It has no moral standing to dictate appropriate speech.



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Elon Musk has threatened to sue the Anti-Defamation League for some \$22 billion over its slandering of him as an antisemite, which he alleges has tanked X's advertising revenue. "Based on what we've heard from advertisers, ADL seems to be responsible for most of our revenue loss," Musk says.

Judging from my own feed, there are *plenty* of real-life antisemites who have taken to X, formerly Twitter, to participate in the #BanTheADL movement over this kerfuffle. It's unsurprising that more open discourse brings out more bigots. That's an unfortunate price of free speech. Clearly, those who campaign to "ban" accounts don't care about an open platform, anyway. Nothing stops us from calling them out.

That said, though, Musk's criticism of the ADL isn't antisemitic. Perhaps he has a case, perhaps not, but neither Musk nor anyone else has a responsibility to let a mob of online nuts dictate their reactions to the ADL's activism.

For another thing, the ADL isn't a "Jewish" organization in any genuine ethnic or theological sense. Its primary mission is no longer to stop the defamation of Jews. The ADL's CEO, Jonathan Greenblatt, a former Barack Obama appointee who often appears on MSNBC to chat it up with anti-Semite Al Sharpton, has created a partisan leftist social justice outfit. And its primary goal these days is cynically using the organization's historical position to advance often illiberal, completely irreligious, leftist ideas.

One of the ways it does this is by dishonestly framing an endorsement of free expression as an endorsement of the things people say using free expression, including antisemitism. That's what it has done with Musk. So it would be no surprise if the ADL were leading a politically motivated boycott effort.

Musk, for example, contends that the ADL wants him to ban the Libs of TikTok, a popular account run by an orthodox Jew, Chaya Raichik, who gained fame by reposting real leftists saying real things. It's certainly plausible, considering the ADL already has an entry for Raichik in its "glossary of terms." Now, I'm not a big fan of nutpicking, but I haven't seen anything in her feed that could be rationally construed as antisemitic. And that speaks to the problem of who gets to decide what "hate speech" entails.

For Greenblatt, who worked to get Tucker Carlson fired but can barely muster a word of disapproval for Jew-baiters like Rashida Tlaib or any other elected progressive, hate speech is a finely tuned political weapon. The ADL has spent years exaggerating the threat of antisemitism on the right, finding offense not only in demonstrably ugly speech, but also in an endless number of dog whistles (including criticisms of leftist megadonor George Soros). At the same time, it gives perfunctory attention (but mostly ignores) the threat and normalization of anti-Jewish sentiment among leftists on college campuses, within activist movements, and in the government.

Don't think of it as a double standard. Think of the ADL as a run-of-the-mill activist shop — something akin to the SPLC — and it all makes complete sense.

You only need to look at the organization's educational recommendations to understand that its worldview is detached from any traditional understanding of Judaism. One strongly doubts the founders of the ADL could have foreseen their organization endorsing the idea that Jews were among the racial oppressors of American society.

Yet the ADL's school curricula and readings on race and racism are littered with identarian tracts like *How To Be An Antiracist* by Ibram X. Kendi, a fan of a number of brazen antisemites, and *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo. How can the ADL claim to fight against the defamation of the Jewish people and recommend authors who insinuate, or worse, that Jews represent a disproportionate amount of power in the United States — one of the most enduring tropes of antisemitism? The ADL also recommends the pseudohistorical 1619 Project and the podcast "The Urgency of Intersectionality" by Kimberle Crenshaw, a leading "scholar of critical race theory," the teachings of which are also inherently anti-Jewish.

I'm not saying that many, maybe most, American Jews don't agree with the ideological outlook of the ADL. But many do not. Nothing in Judaism teaches that our immutable appearances predetermine our societal role, actions, or worth. Why is a group claiming to fight Jewish defamation spreading trendy ideological puffery? Because it is not what it says it is.

Now, the ADL, self-anointed arbiter of antisemitism, is certainly useful in providing lazy journalists with quotes confirming preexisting notions about antisemitism being largely a right-wing phenomenon. And risk-averse

corporations might use them for guidance. But it has no moral standing to dictate appropriate speech. Certainly not in the name of Jews.



David Harsanyi is a senior editor at [The Federalist](#), a nationally syndicated columnist, a [Happy Warrior](#) columnist at [National Review](#), and author of five books—the most recent, [Eurotrash: Why America Must Reject the Failed Ideas of a Dying Continent](#). Follow him on Twitter, [@davidharsanyi](#).

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