

A MOMENT SPECIAL REPORT

**JEW S &
TIKTOK**



STORIES BY JENNIFER BARDI, TRICIA CRIMMINS
AND ANDREW MICHAELS



THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE ALGORITHM

NAVIGATING ANTISEMITISM ON TIKTOK

BY JENNIFER BARDI

HUNDREDS of teenage girls put on headscarves and makeup to look like bruised and emaciated Holocaust victims and invent fictional accounts of dying in Nazi concentration camps, overlaid in some instances with the Bruno Mars pop hit “Locked Out of Heaven.” Two Minnesota high school students dance in a boxcar and appear to skip into Auschwitz to “Tell Everybody I’m on my Way” from the Disney movie *Brother Bear*. Footage of dancing Orthodox Jews is shared with the caption, “Jews getting lit, knowing they basically own the media.” These are just a few examples of the discordant and disturbing playfulness that can animate antisemitic content on the wildly popular video-sharing app TikTok. To be sure, there are plenty of other types of antisemitism on TikTok, some more nefarious, as well as content that attempts to counteract it.

TikTok is a behemoth in the social media and entertainment world, having doubled in the last year to more than a billion users worldwide, the majority of them Gen Z (those 25 and under). “Our mission is to capture and present the world’s creativity, knowledge, and moments that matter in everyday life,” says the company’s website. “TikTok empowers everyone to be a creator directly from their smartphones and is committed to building a community.” The company is also looking to ex-

pand beyond video into gaming, music streaming and e-commerce. While all this is giving investors the tingles, TikTok, part of the larger Chinese tech company ByteDance, is giving others, including the U.S. government, the shivers. (In December 2022, Congress voted unanimously to ban TikTok on federal devices.) Data privacy is a top concern, as is the fear that the Chinese government could use the app’s powerful algorithm for influence campaigns.

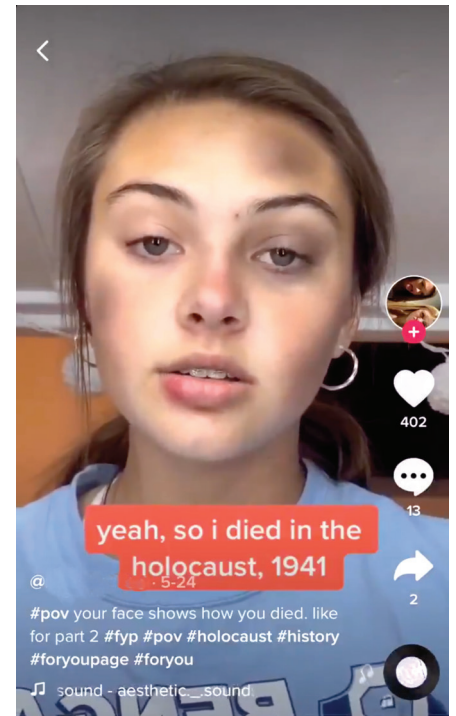
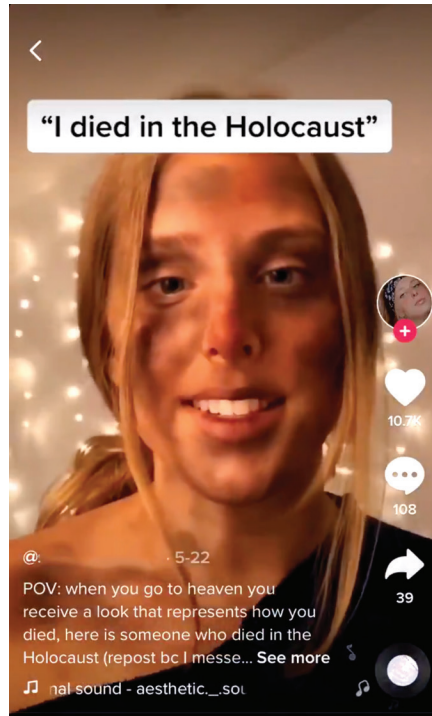
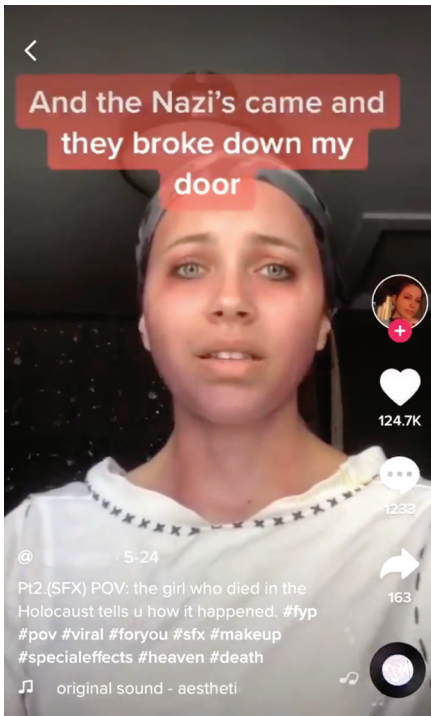
THE ALGORITHM IS SPOKEN OF AS SOMETHING CLOSE TO SENTIENT—ITS POWER TO READ YOU AND FEED YOU REACHING NEAR-MYTHOLOGICAL STATUS.

As with all forms of social media, users thrive on how others interact with what they post, tweet or share: a keen political jab via Twitter, a vacation photo shared on Facebook or, in the case of TikTok, short bursts of video or pictorial memes featuring anything under the sun, typically combined with music, video effects, filters, emojis and more. And while there’s no shortage of light-hearted, informational and boldly creative content on TikTok, creators’ and consumers’ darker impulses are on display too.

As detailed in a 2021 report from the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD),

a UK-based think tank dedicated to combating extremism and polarization, hateful messaging on TikTok is fueled by features unique to the platform and by its innovative, even revolutionary, recommendation algorithm, which quickly learns users’ interests and generates an endless stream of suggestions. This AI algorithm is spoken of as something close to sentient—its power to read you and feed you reaching near-mythological status. As people use TikTok, the algorithm assesses not only their tastes in videos, but those of people they follow, and, based on data including likes, follows and comments, it pushes certain content to what’s known as a user’s “For You” page (FYP). Whenever a user opens the app, the FYP appears, and the stream of videos begins.

When TikTok debuted in 2016, videos were just 15 seconds long. The maximum duration was extended to 60 seconds in 2017, to three minutes in 2021 and to 10 minutes in 2022. A *Wired* magazine article published last year reported that the most popular TikTok videos were 21-34 seconds in length and that the average user opened the app 17 times a day, spending a total of one hour and 25 minutes watching videos. (To clarify terms, TikTok is both the app and a platform, and people refer to an individual video as a TikTok. To make matters even more confusing, some people refer to their



A few of the TikTok creators who have dressed up as Holocaust victims.

TikTok account as their TikTok. So, you can open up TikTok to post a TikTok to your TikTok.)

Whatever the terminology, it's addictive. Research into how this kind of rapid-fire visual stream affects the user—what researchers from the College of Journalism and Communication at Wuhan Sports University in China call the “anesthesia mechanism”—describes an experience where curiosity met with pleasure keeps people passively consuming without always realizing what they're ingesting and promoting. Gabriel Weimann of the University of Haifa and Natalie Masri of Reichman University, both in Israel, have conducted several studies on TikTok. In “TikTok's Spiral of Antisemitism,” published in *Journalism and Media* in November 2021, they characterize the app's algorithm as “a disconcerting feature” that pushes content to users who may unwittingly boost a video's popularity if they stay on it too long, click through to comments, or mistakenly “like” it, which can happen easily if you accidentally double-click on the video.

Whether it's playful or not, other antisemitic content one might encounter on TikTok includes stereotypes, conspiracy myths (including that Jews somehow caused COVID-19 or control vaccines), neo-Nazi propaganda and hatred directed at Jewish people over Israeli policy. Holocaust denial or distortion is the most explicit form of antisemitism on the app, says analyst Ciarán O'Connor, who authored the ISD report, titled “Hatescape: An In-Depth Analysis of Extremism and Hate Speech on TikTok.” Doubt that six million Jews died, for example, is coded into videos such as “Homemade Pizza Recipe,” about the challenge of making six million pizzas using four ovens: “We could say we made the pizzas,” the cartoon video begins, “but we'll also need to make organizations to enforce the fact that we made the pizzas...and we should also make it a crime to even question if we made the pizzas and we'll also need some TV channels and constant Hollywood films to remind everyone we made the pizzas.” In this same vein, Weimann and Masri describe a

TikTok featuring white supremacist Nick Fuentes. In a clip from an episode of his podcast “America First,” Fuentes makes a joke about cookies and how much time it would take to bake six million. “I think my math is wrong,” he says smugly. The user who shared this on TikTok added the caption: “6 billion? 6 trillion?”

This brings up the unique way TikTok allows creators to co-opt excerpts of previously posted videos and overlay them with their own audio and captions in what is known as a “stitch.” Original creators can enable the Stitch function when uploading a video, which allows others to use up to five seconds of it. Examples cited in an October *Rolling Stone* article on how Kanye West's antisemitic rants had been used on the platform included footage of the rapper performing in concert juxtaposed with a recording of Joseph Goebbels speaking at a Nazi rally in 1933. Another TikTok stitches a slow-motion shot of West raising his arm with audio of someone shouting “Sieg Heil!”

Other TikTok functions include the



FROM ZERO TO HATE IN JUST A TIK AND A TOK: A JOURNEY DOWN THE “ALT-RIGHT PIPELINE”

LAST MONTH, I decided to embark on an experiment. I created a new TikTok account with the specific goal of funneling a hypothetical teenage boy down the TikTok rabbit hole, otherwise known as the “alt-right pipeline.” The result was shocking.

But first, methodology: I only watched content from my “For You” page, and I did not use TikTok’s search function, so all videos in this experiment were suggested to me by the algorithm.

If I saw a video that I thought would take me further down the rabbit hole, I would “like” it. If I was very confident that it would, I would also follow the creator or I would comment on the video.

After skipping through dog videos and recipes, I found my starting point: a comedy video made by an Asian-American user and based on the stereotype of strict Asian parents who speak with exaggerated Chinese accents. From there, the algorithm recommended a “Karen” video. (Karen is a term used to describe white, usually middle-aged women who are exceptionally rude and act entitled.) Videos of alleged “Karen freakouts” are popular on TikTok; they’ve also been controversial, with many arguing that the stereotype is used to attack women rather than call out bad behavior.

I decided that a dash of misogyny would help this experiment, and gave that video a like. The next video I liked was posted by Barstool Sports, a site focused on “bro humor” and that Media Matters has called “a cesspool of misogyny and bigotry.” Their page was an obvious follow.

In the early stages of this experiment, most TikToks masked their bigotry with humor. But some of the jokes grew more

bigoted, and even violent. One video featured a man screaming racial stereotypes at a shooting-range target. In another, a man threw his girlfriend into a snowbank. Transphobic humor became frequent, and jokes began to raise the question of who was supposed to be laughing. My feed also began to populate with male fitness content. Most of these videos are not political but play to the insecurities of teenage boys, making them vulnerable to influence.

My feed then took a bizarre turn. I began to see videos from the “pedophile hunter” movement, which features creators disguising themselves as children to confront alleged pedophiles in public, à la the reality TV series *To Catch a Predator*. At first glance, these videos don’t seem hateful (who amongst us is not opposed to molesting children?) but they do not exist in a vacuum. With charges that LGBTQ+ people are “groomers” becoming commonplace on the far right, and a broader obsession with pedophilic conspiracy theories in movements like QAnon, these videos can play to an audience with ulterior motives.

Next, I came across perhaps the most pivotal person in this journey: Andrew Tate. Over the last few years, Tate, who in December was arrested on suspicions of human trafficking in Romania, has become a folk hero to the far right. He’s a retired kickboxer prone to flaunting his wealth and bragging about his physical prowess and willingness to fight. And while adults may not be impressed by this bravado, many insecure teens find Tate cool, even someone to emulate. His videos became representative of my feed’s rightward shift: What started with a video

mocking skydivers for holding hands led to one in which Tate warns men that women will leave them at the first sign of cowardice. And just three likes later, I reached a video where Tate says that the devil is an active force in the world and, in a seeming dig at trans people, that boys are “cutting their dicks off from a psyop [psychological operation] from Disney”—a long way from skydiving.

Tate was banned from TikTok and most other social media platforms in 2022, although his Twitter account was reinstated after Elon Musk took over of that platform. But that hasn’t stopped Tate’s content from proliferating: his fans post and repost his clips more rapidly than TikTok can remove them.

My feed’s rightward push soon went into hyperdrive. At first it was videos in support of Kanye West’s antisemitic ravings, which quickly gave way to videos making coded claims about small groups of “elites” controlling society. From there, it was just a few swipes to a video of David Icke, best known for his conspiracy theory that the world is controlled by an elite race of reptilian “lizard people.” In the one I saw, he claimed that Israel’s intelligence agency, the Mossad, along with several other intelligence agencies, control people in power by filming them sexually abusing children. I had reached my destination—an outright antisemitic conspiracy theory.

I checked my app’s usage time. I had been on TikTok for 3 hours and 21 minutes—less than three days of usage for teens who spend an average of 99 minutes on the app each day.

As difficult as these videos were to watch, I learned a few things from this experiment. The first is that the bigotries promoted on the platform are connected: misogyny, racism, homophobia, transphobia and xenophobia were necessary traveling companions in my journey down the rabbit hole. It also became clear that irony is an essential tool to the early stages of radicalization. The content started out with jokes, but by the time I got to David Icke, comedy night was over.

BY ANDREW MICHAELS

Duet feature, whereby users can create a split-screen to react to another video. In their research, Weimann and Masri describe a “duet” of a young man opening an oven door and pointing inside placed alongside a Jewish creator’s video about Passover customs. Comments then followed such as, “You have to put a trail of coins for them to follow,” or, “I myself have been gassed over 6,000,000 times!!!” Another function is the Green Screen effect, which allows creators to superimpose themselves over a scene. An example of the Green Screen effect, included in the ISD report, appears to show two young men eerily facing each other in a concentration camp barracks, playacting as a Nazi guard and prisoner but in contemporary street clothes and affecting casual postures. One wears a grimacing skull mask; the caption over the other’s head reads, “Where is my family?”

These are not the only ways antisemitism manifests on TikTok. There are people who convey it in usernames such as @holocaustwasgood, @evilJews and so on. A less overt method of conveying antisemitism is through emojis (the oft-used nose, as well as shower and gas-pump emojis referencing Nazi gas chambers) and coded messages employed in captions and in comments to other videos. Often those pushing antisemitism on TikTok use something termed “algspeak,” misspellings or neologisms used to get around automated content moderation. “Jews” becomes “juice,” for example, and “Hitler,” “HH” or “88” appear as stand-ins for “Hitler” and “Heil Hitler” (‘H’ being the 8th letter of the alphabet). References to “1488” combine the double-eight with a 14-word slogan said to have originated with American white supremacist David Eden Lane, known for saying, “We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children.”

Ironically, coded language is sometimes necessary to call out antisemitism on TikTok, too. “Jewish creators are

constantly having to adopt algspeak,” says Raven Schwam-Curtis, a doctoral candidate in African American Studies at Northwestern University who uses they/them pronouns and makes TikToks about their experiences as a Black, queer, femme Jewish person. “You can’t even talk about antisemitism without adjusting the word in captions and text to look more like ‘ant!sem!t!sm.’ It’s kind of tough to combat hate when you can’t freely use the language necessary to address it.” Schwam-Curtis says their comments section is regularly rife with antisemitism as well as anti-Blackness, and that while TikTok did remove two especially hateful stitches, the majority of the reports they’ve filed with the platform haven’t resulted in anything actionable.

“YOU CAN’T EVEN TALK ABOUT ANTISEMITISM WITHOUT ADJUSTING THE WORD TO LOOK MORE LIKE ‘ANT!SEM!T!SM.’ IT’S TOUGH TO COMBAT HATE WHEN YOU CAN’T EVEN USE LANGUAGE NECESSARY TO ADDRESS IT.”

“Typically, if I want a situation to be resolved I have to take matters into my own hands,” says Schwam-Curtis. For example, they’ve taken advantage of TikTok’s comment filter feature. “Some of the words I’ve filtered out are ‘mutt,’ ‘half-breed’ and ‘bitch.’” They’ve also been called the n-word, the k-word, gorilla, rat, “and probably more that I’ve just blocked out for self-preservation.”

Writer/comedian Eitan Levine amassed a large following on TikTok doing humorous videos but says he’s backed off, not so much due to hateful reactions to his content but because the app would too often flag anything Jewish as antisemitic and remove it, or people who were anti-Jewish would report Jewish content for removal. Of the antisemitic comments to his videos

that got around content moderation, the direct insults or swastikas weren’t the worst of them. “I’d leave those up,” says Levine. It was when he’d post silly comedy bits and people would write “FREE PALESTINE” in comments or post a Palestinian flag that really bothered him. “Come on, it’s a bagel video!” he says. “They’re co-opting an actual issue just to be straight-up antisemitic.”

Efforts to estimate the extent of antisemitism on TikTok are in the early stages. In a 2022 study, “New Antisemitism on TikTok,” Weimann and Masri measured the growth of antisemitic content on the app over a four-month period in 2020 and again in 2021. Their data suggests that while antisemitism wasn’t rampant on the app during these periods, the growth rate was notable. For example, they identified 41 antisemitic comments to posts in the four-month period in 2020, which increased to 415 antisemitic comments a year later. The ISD “Hatescape” report analyzed 1,030 videos from 491 TikTok accounts associated with extremism and hateful content and identified 153 that were antisemitic. While some of the videos had fewer than 100 views, several had in the hundreds of thousands, and one, featuring footage of a video game set at Auschwitz, had close to 2 million views.

Considering the rapid overall growth of TikTok and the recent spotlight on celebrity antisemitism, it seems inevitable that hostility and prejudice toward Jews would metastasize on the platform. On the question of how teenagers viewing jokes about Jewish people, antisemitic tropes or Holocaust denial might encounter messaging from organized white nationalist or neo-Nazi groups, Weimann says the algorithm can “flood an innocent kid with more extremist offerings,” calling it a vicious cycle whereby TikTok amplifies hateful messages that originate on fringe corners of the internet, including the dark web (a hid-

den collection of sites that require a specialized web browser). “The fusion of hate,” he says, is in “postings that channel hate to various target groups,” including Jews, LGBTQ and Black individuals, liberals and women.

Researchers agree TikTok isn’t doing enough to remove hateful, extremist material, nor does it make it easy for researchers to study hateful content on the platform. In July, TikTok announced it would provide select researchers with more transparency about the platform and its moderation system. ISD analyst O’Connor says this hasn’t happened, elaborating that TikTok has yet to offer an application programming interface (API) that academics might use to conduct research at scale, and so it remains difficult and labor-intensive to study user behavior and content. “They have stated that an API is on the way but

RESEARCHERS AGREE TIKTOK ISN’T DOING ENOUGH TO REMOVE HATEFUL, EXTREMIST MATERIAL, NOR DOES IT MAKE IT EASY FOR RESEARCHERS TO STUDY HATEFUL CONTENT ON THE PLATFORM.

have yet to offer firm details on when or how it will function,” he says. “Data access and algorithmic or engagement transparency are still sorely lacking on TikTok.” Weimann points out another factor that makes it hard for researchers to track hateful content on TikTok: Since antisemitic content is often visual/pictorial and not accompanied by keywords or hashtags that would flag it as such, it’s hard to quantify exactly how much antisemitic content is on the platform.

In its “Community Guidelines and Enforcement” report issued in September, TikTok notes that the platform relies on “automated moderation when our systems have a high degree of confidence that content is violative so that we can expeditiously remove violations of our policies. As a result, our overall protective detection efforts have improved.” According to that report, 113 million videos, most of a sexual nature, were removed from TikTok during the period of April to June in 2022. How much problematic content made it through the automated system is an open question, considering that 113 million is less than 1 percent of the total number of videos published during that period.

Despite the algorithm and the staggering amount of TikTok content overall, there are ways to counter the

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THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT GOES TIKTOK

ALONG WITH ITS OTHER USES,

TikTok is rapidly becoming a format where anger against Israel is expressed by young Palestinians in the West Bank. As described by *New York Times* columnist Thomas L. Friedman in December in “What in the World is Happening in Israel?” videos of Israeli soldiers harassing or attacking Palestinians are posted and shared by young Palestinians (ages 15 to 25) who spend much of their time on social media. Friedman reports that other young Palestinians who watch these videos then go out alone or in groups and record themselves attacking individual Israelis. According to Khalil Shikaki, a Palestinian political scientist and director of the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, armed groups, particularly in the Nablus area, have used TikTok effectively to reach other young Palestinians. “Their videos were attractive because they filmed their own armed confrontations with the Israeli army during the latter’s incursions in the Nablus area,” he notes. Friedman writes, “This conflict porn is new, it’s pervasive and it is incredibly effective at instilling hate in 15-second bites that keep everyone in a permanent state of fear and rage.”



Young Palestinians use the app to fuel anti-Israel fervor.



TEN JEWISH TIKTOKERS

THEIR SCHTICKS INCLUDE FASHION, YIDDISH, TALMUD AND MORE

BY TRICIA CRIMMINS

AS ON OTHER SOCIAL MEDIA APPS,

there are plenty of prominent Jewish TikTokers who have built platforms for themselves on the ever-growing app. The subjects they create content about mirror those discussed in real-life Jewish communities, and whether it is conscious or not, they take on the challenge many Jews do: showing the world that how Jews look, act and engage with their faith is different for each individual. *Moment* spoke with ten Jewish TikTokers who have more than 20,000 followers (in some cases in the hundreds of thousands) about how they got started on the app, how much of their Judaism they bring to their videos, and what it's like to be openly Jewish on TikTok.



Sam Barsky
@sambarsky
215.8K Followers
7.9M Likes

penguin sweater for years and that he plans to wear it to the zoo when the weather gets cooler.

Barsky is an expert knitter, creating sweaters with elaborate designs he showcases on his TikTok account: the Rubik's Cube sweater, the alpaca sweater, the Philadelphia sweater, a handful of Hanukkah sweaters and many more.

He's been knitting since 1999 and began posting on TikTok 20 years into his knitting career. Barsky teaches others to knit through in-person classes, a practice he recently resumed two years into the pandemic. And for him, teaching is connected to his Jewish identity.

"I feel like it's an obligation I have as a Jew," he says. "I remember learning as a child, if you have a special skill, it's a mitzvah to teach it to others."

While Barsky describes his TikTok presence as secular, he has enjoyed connecting with other Jewish people and knitting Jewish-themed sweaters to show his followers via his TikTok videos. Barsky also sells printed T-shirt replicas of his sweaters on his website.

Barsky underscores that he doesn't just knit to make videos about his sweaters or sell T-shirts. In fact, TikTok hasn't affected the amount of knitting he does. "It's just another avenue to share [my knitting] with the world."



Zara Zahavah
@zarazahavah
206.4K Followers
16M Likes

Comedic takes on dorm life & kosher pop culture

Revealing she was Jewish was a very conscious decision for Zara Zahavah, a teacher and TikToker with more than 200,000 followers on the app. Zahavah first went viral after telling a funny story in a video she posted during her first week on TikTok in 2020. In it, Zahavah described being a resident adviser and hearing college students on her floor discussing making a slip-and-slide in the hallway using personal lubricant.

From that story, Zahavah gained 4,000 followers, but it wasn't until she had 50,000 that she decided she would tell her viewers she was Jewish. "It was very much an active choice that I was not talking about that part of my life," she explains. "Because I know that being open about it opens you up to so

COURTESY OF SAM BARSKY / COURTESY OF ZARA ZAHAVAH

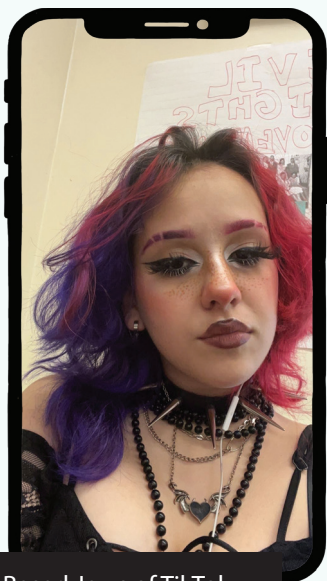
much antisemitism,” especially on an app like TikTok, where one’s video can spontaneously get 500,000 (or more) views overnight.

Zahavah doesn’t remember much else about the first video in which she mentioned being Jewish—but she remembers being nervous to post it.

Though she got a few negative comments, Zahavah says that video received an “overwhelmingly positive response.” Now, up to 75 percent of her TikToks are about Judaism, and they range from serious to silly; some are about her choice not to keep Shabbat, and in others she explains that not all of the animals featured in the Marvel Cinematic Universe are kosher.

Her content has become popular because of Zahavah’s comedic take on ordinary things. In a series of recent TikToks, she rated—and roasted—all of the dresses she wore to bar and bat mitzvahs when she was in middle school.

“I truly do love making videos, talking about these things, and getting to create this TikTok community.”



Based Jews of TikTok
@basedjewsoftiktok
24.7K Followers
2.4M Likes

Teens tackling antisemitism together

The Based Jews of TikTok is a labor

of love and teamwork. Started by Ari, a Jewish high schooler, the account is run by more than 15 Jewish middle and high school students in the United States and elsewhere. “Based” is a slang term that has positive connotations—it can mean cool, great, or be used to identify something or someone as generally good.

Ari started the TikTok account, which now has more than 20,000 followers, to help young Jewish people come together and to show the world what Jewish teens are like. Videos on the account include casual humor about being Jewish, spreading awareness about antisemitism that the teens face, and education about Jewish themes and cultural references.

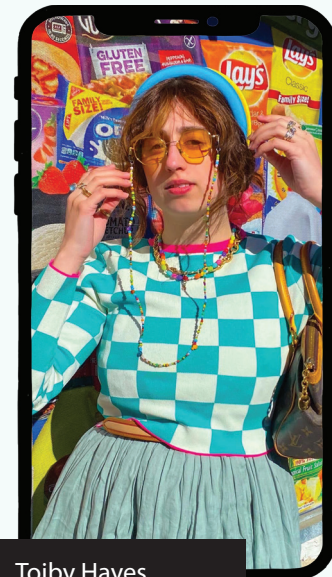
“I wanted to educate people on TikTok that we’re not all the same,” Ari said in an interview with four of the other teens who run the account. “We’re all different.”

Based Jews of TikTok’s first video that amassed thousands of views was posted by Eden, another member. The video was about how the group was upset that Anne Frank’s memory has been disrespected by the general public—both on and off TikTok. But not all of their videos are as serious. Many of Based Jews of TikTok’s videos are very short and show members of the group simply being teens (lip-synching, showing off their outfits and talking about events that happened that day at school) while referencing baseline Jewish cultural staples such as challah, matzo ball soup and Shabbat.

Even though they receive a lot of antisemitic comments on the platform, members of the group make light of negative depictions of Jews. For example, a recent video shows a seance-type scene with the caption: “What some people think being Jewish is.”

Many of the members say they’ve enjoyed the sense of community the account has created and what that sort of belonging has done for them personally.

“The account has made me connect with my Jewish identity much more than I ever have before,” says Elliot, another member. “I’ve also made a lot of friends who I can confide in.”



Toiby Hayes
@toibycontinued
57.1K Followers
1.3M Likes

Modest Orthodox fashionista

Toiby Hayes grew up Orthodox. After years of trial and error, she found a balance between dressing modestly and maintaining her personal style. Now, Hayes posts on TikTok to help other women in modest cultures express themselves through their clothes.

“I’m a Jewish girl. I’m dressed modestly. Here’s what I do,” Hayes remembers saying in one of her first videos on the app. And then she showed photos of her outfits. She got many of her current followers (she has almost 60,000) from that first video.

Hayes now works as a stylist, and in a recent TikTok post she took viewers on her journey to pick an outfit to wear while on a photo shoot. The final verdict? A yellow short-sleeved T-shirt, a long, ruffled, green-and-black polka-dot skirt, colorful New Balance sneakers with blue mid-rise socks and a white bandana tied around her hair to cover it.

Not all of Hayes’s followers or viewers are Jewish or familiar with Orthodoxy. She says that she receives questions about her lifestyle and culture—and gets some unwelcome comments about how she should feel oppressed by having to dress modestly.

COURTESY OF BASED JEWS OF TIKTOK / COURTESY OF TOIBY HAYES



“I was like, I don’t feel oppressed. I’m okay. I made this choice for myself,” she explains, adding that she enjoys dispelling myths and misconceptions from followers. “It feels really nice to be a positive representation [of an Orthodox Jewish woman].”

Hayes is just one of many modest-style TikTokers: Some are Jewish, some Muslim or Mormon. The modest fashion community on TikTok has been a way for people to reach out across faiths to solve common dilemmas, such as finding tops with sleeves that will absorb sweat during hotter months.

In addition to being a content creator and stylist, Hayes has a jewelry brand. She says that TikTok has made the fashion industry feel much more accessible to her, and that it has boosted her confidence about her own styling skills.

“It’s not about the money. It’s about the craft,” she says of her TikTok account and the opportunities it’s brought.



Miriam Anzovin
@miriamanzovin
25K Followers
169.5K Likes

From daily Daf Yomi postings to artist in residence

Miriam Anzovin, who each day posts her reactions to Daf Yomi, a daily regimen of Talmud learning, watched TikToks for almost two years before she started post-

ing in December 2021.

Anzovin first turned to TikTok for community, a sense of connection and a little escapism during 2020. Around the same time, she had been considering starting Daf Yomi, the practice of reading a page of the Talmud daily along with the broader Daf Yomi community in a cycle that takes seven and a half years. It was an effort to connect with her Jewish roots and community—Anzovin was raised Modern Orthodox but is now an atheist.

So, she combined TikTok with Daf Yomi to create an outlet for her new Jewish learning. Her Daf Yomi reactions summarize the day’s portion and she then contextualizes what she’s learned that day by noting themes and patterns. Every video starts with Anzovin’s cheery, “Shalom, friends!”

“So what if I’m not observing at the moment? There are other ways for me to engage and put myself in our community of people through scholarship,” Anzovin says. “And that’s what I decided to do.”

Anzovin’s videos aren’t immune from controversy: Her colloquial and, at times, expletive-filled commentary on Daf Yomi (in a recent video, Anzovin talked about the Talmud’s suggestions for “how many times a couple is supposed to bang” per week) has received criticism for being provocative and crude in Jewish and Israeli media.

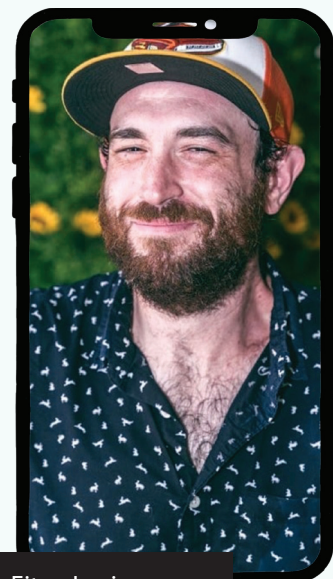
In response, Anzovin turns negative comments into comedic videos “to flip the script and lampoon something meant to bring [her] down.”

But Anzovin has more good days than bad on the video-sharing app. When her TikTok account reached a sizable number of followers, Anzovin took a big leap, deciding to leave her job at a Jewish nonprofit because she felt hers was a unique voice on the app. The day she did, she was contacted by Moishe House, another Jewish nonprofit, one that serves the young adult Jewish community, and asked to be the organization’s artist in residence.

Anzovin says her TikTok presence has expanded her world exponentially—through the comments that she’s received about her videos, the connections she’s

made with other users on the app, and the opportunities that have come from Jewish organizations seeing her TikTok videos and asking her to work with them. In the coming months, Anzovin has plans to tour congregations to talk about Jewish literacy. “I’ve gotten to engage with so many Jews around the world from all different walks of life and all different backgrounds and identities. I’ve gotten to speak to some of my own Jewish heroes on social media,” she says. “It’s truly been a life-changing experience.”

Anzovin is only about two and a half years into the Daf Yomi cycle and plans to continue posting her reactions to the readings. “If people want to listen to me talk about Daf Yomi for the next five years,” she says, “I’m honored.”



Eitan Levine
@eitanthegoalie
112.2K Followers
4.9M Likes

Jewish man-on-the-street

“This is a game called ‘Jewish or Antisemitic?’” says Eitan Levine, microphone in hand as he stands next to a man on a New York street in one of his most popular TikToks. The game is a false dichotomy employed to entertain, and his subjects realize it’s just for fun. Levine asks the man if Flo, the enthusiastic auto insurance saleswoman from Progressive commercials, is Jewish or

antisemitic. The man says the latter. As for the GEICO gecko? The pair enthusiastically agree that the reptile is Jewish. Levine has made dozens of his “Jewish or Antisemitic?” videos, many of which have garnered more than 100,000 views and have brought him to TikTok prominence.

Levine, who makes a variety of man-on-the-street-style videos about Judaism, recently surpassed 112,000 followers. He’s been performing and writing comedy since he was 15, and he sees his TikTok fame as a natural progression from his other professional experiences, including working as a journalist and video producer in the 2010s while performing comedy.

From his countless TikTok interviews, Levine says he’s learned that Adam Sandler is the most popular Jew, that non-Jews love the kosher yellow-capped Coca-Cola sold around Passover and that non-Jews have fond memories of the Jews they grew up with because they got to experience Jewish meals and celebrations.

“We’ve done a good job inviting non-Jews to fun Jewish stuff,” says Levine. “They like challah and appreciate a good seder.”

Levine says he didn’t necessarily set out to make videos about Judaism, but that TikTok’s powerful algorithm pushed him into a corner; his videos about being Jewish get more views on the app. That said, Levine feels that all his comedy—whether he’s joking specifically about being Jewish or not—comes from a Jewish mindset and Jewish background.

“You can’t escape it,” he says.

Besides his fast-growing TikTok popularity, Levine is also working on television and film projects. “I don’t even know what my life will look like in six months,” he says.



Cameron Bernstein
@c.o.bernstein
42.9K Followers
1.8M Likes

Yiddish for the masses

During her senior year at the University of Chicago, Cameron Bernstein realized that she needed to register for one more class to complete her full course schedule. Bernstein saw that the university offered a Yiddish language class and, given her affinity for learning new languages, she enrolled. After graduating in the summer of 2020, Bernstein started to make TikToks about her newfound passion for the Yiddish language as a way to flex her linguistic muscles. Little did she know that her Yiddish skills would soon bring her TikTok fame.

Now with more than 40,000 followers, Bernstein makes TikTok videos in which she speaks in Yiddish, translates English into Yiddish and talks about Yiddish culture. In recent videos, she’s conjugated the word “zoom,” showed how she can command her dog to come to her (*kum kum, kum tsi mir*), and translated a well-known German counting song into Yiddish.

There aren’t many Yiddish speakers on TikTok, says Bernstein, noting that the comments she gets on her videos from viewers range from nostalgic—“I haven’t heard Yiddish since my zaidie died!”—to curious—“Wait, you can learn Yiddish?”

Bernstein is delighted to share her knowledge. Because she was able to learn Yiddish in a classroom setting, she sees being a resource for Yiddish on TikTok as a way to “democratize her learning.”

For Bernstein, Yiddish is a way to engage with her Judaism in a manner separate from leading services and participating in Jewish community groups, both of which she’s done. As a half-Filipina Jewish woman of color, Bernstein has faced prejudice from within the Jewish community. She says that she feels her knowledge of Yiddish “legitimizes” her in the eyes of some Jews who might not see her as fully Jewish.

Bernstein started medical school last fall. But she plans to continue making Yiddish-focused TikToks as a way to model being a continuing Yiddish learner for her followers.



Nechama Birnbaum
@theredheadofauschwitz
67.5K Followers
2.1M Likes

Honoring Grandmother Rosie

Nechama Birnbaum runs a TikTok account called @theredheadofauschwitz, which is all about her late grandmother, Rosie Greenstein. She has always been inspired by her grandmother, who survived Auschwitz, which is why she wanted to share Rosie’s story with the world—but it didn’t start with TikTok.





Birnbaum first wrote a book detailing her grandmother’s life story. Titled *The Redhead of Auschwitz*, it was published in November 2021. In advance of its publication, she created Instagram and TikTok accounts to market the book. (The accounts now have more than 105,000 and 67,500 followers, respectively.)

Before her grandmother’s death in May, Birnbaum posted videos of Rosie telling stories or speaking out against hate and political division in the world on @theredheadofauschwitz Instagram and TikTok accounts—named for Rosie’s red hair.

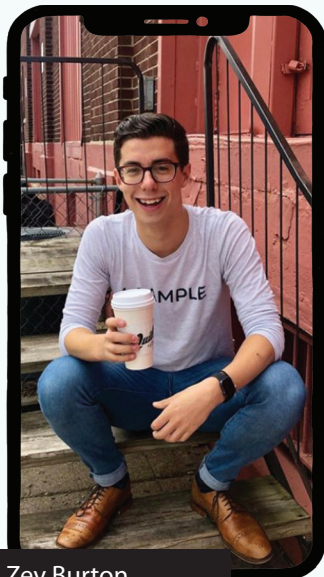
One day, Birnbaum posted a video of Rosie telling followers that she had actually been in the gas chambers at Auschwitz and escaped by being recruited at the last minute for a work detail. At the end of the video, Rosie said, “Please bring unity, in a good world, for everybody.”

The video got 8.9 million views on Instagram; other videos that Birnbaum has posted about Rosie on TikTok have garnered 5.6 million views.

“Rosie was amazing. She really was someone who had such unconditional love for everyone,” says Birnbaum. “She loved living,” and she really loved being filmed for TikToks. Birnbaum says that Rosie thought she was on TV.

After losing her, Birnbaum found that running social media accounts and posting videos of Rosie was difficult. Instead, she started posting about her grief and received a lot of support from her followers. “But then,” Birnbaum recalls, “I had an outpouring of people saying: ‘[Rosie’s videos are] the first thing I look at in the morning,’ ‘She gives me so much hope’ and ‘Please don’t stop posting videos of her.’”

So for the time being, @theredhead-ofauschwitz accounts will continue to post the videos she made with Rosie.



Zev Burton
@zevulous
244.9K Followers
24M Likes

Politics, Jewfros and everything in between

Zev Burton’s first few TikToks had absolutely nothing to do with his being Jewish. In fact, the reason he began posting on the app consistently was because of the January 6 insurrection. A Georgetown graduate student, he saw police cars outside his window rushing to the Capitol that day.

“My undergrad [major] was in international security with a focus on domestic terrorism,” he says. Because he had learned about domestic terrorism, he decided to start making videos about the topic on TikTok.

After his video went viral in a matter of hours, Burton knew he wanted to keep posting on TikTok. Now he posts two or three times a day. From the inception of his TikTok account, Burton’s videos have always focused on politics, his life as a graduate student with a full-time job, and current events. Recent videos have poked fun at conservative Republican congresswoman Lauren Boebert of Colorado, Republican members of the House Judiciary Committee and Texas Republican Senator Ted Cruz.

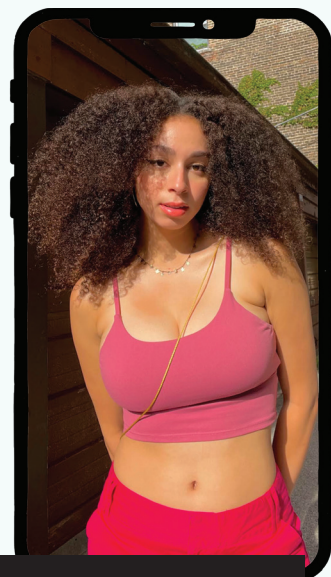
Today, about half of his varied TikTok content revolves around his cultural Ju-

daism, which includes jokes about Jewish geography, his “Jewfro,” and guessing if someone is Jewish based on their “vibes.”

For Burton, part of being openly Jewish on TikTok is about breaking down stereotypes that some viewers might have about Jewish people. And he’s making an impact: Burton has almost 245,000 followers.

“One of my goals is [to communicate] ‘We’re just like you,’” he says, recognizing that it’s no secret he’s Jewish. “With a name like Zev, you can’t really go around saying, ‘Oh, I’m Mormon.’”

Burton says he makes an effort to read many of the comments he gets about his videos, some of which are antisemitic. And if there’s an opportunity to reply with a joke—even to a hateful comment—he’ll take it.



Raven Schwam-Curtis
@ravenreveals
90K Followers
8.8M Likes

Celebrating their truth, challenging norms

As a Black, Jewish, queer, femme (feminine presenting) person, Raven Schwam-Curtis receives a myriad of hate from their TikTok videos. Schwam-Curtis, who uses they/them pronouns, says that it’s scary to be transparent about who they are online.

“Pick your poison. There’re so many





A HUGE PART OF THEIR TIKTOK PRESENCE IS BREAKING DOWN “ASHKENORMATIVITY,” OR THE IDEA THAT ALL JEWS LOOK AND PRACTICE JUDAISM IN STEREOTYPICALLY ASHKENAZI WAYS.

reasons that people can choose to dislike me,” Schwam-Curtis jokes. “But if I let people like that stop me from speaking my truth, then I’m not doing the work that I’m here to do.”

And that work for Schwam-Curtis is being the representation they needed to see when they were younger. A huge part of their TikTok presence is breaking down “Ashkenormativity,” or the idea that all Jews look and practice Judaism in stereotypically Ashkenazi ways.

In their TikTok videos, Schwam-Curtis discusses their experiences as a Black Jew, sings Jewish songs, shares facts about Judaism and antisemitism in society, and posts about their everyday life as an African American Studies grad student. In sharing their life and thoughts on TikTok, they hope to uplift and celebrate all types of Jews—and people.

They began posting on TikTok in November 2021 and the first video that went viral was Schwam-Curtis talking about their biracial identity. Soon after, a video of them dancing to a Hanukkah song went viral as well. Their caption? “This is your annual reminder that Black Jews exist.”

“I just want people to feel seen,” says Schwam-Curtis. “I want people to deeply love and appreciate their roots.”

They say that many Black Jews have reached out to express appreciation for their public celebration of Black Jewishness. And that makes Schwam-Curtis feel validated in their identity, too.

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negative messaging people consume on the app. Users who are proactive about whom they follow and whom those creators associate with can push more positive content. This means searching hashtags and keywords related to specific topics of interest, such as Passover recipes, following those creators and commenting on their videos, which boosts their visibility. When encountering problematic content, it’s possible to do what’s called a “long-press” on the video, holding your finger down until a “Not Interested” button appears. TikTok’s support pages say that taking this step will discourage the algorithm from showing similar content. Notably, if you simply double-click a video, it gets marked as “Liked,” which turns the white heart symbol red and has the opposite effect. (Users who mistakenly like something can quickly reverse that action by tapping the heart to turn it white again.) In September the company also rolled out a “dislike” button for comments to videos. Dislikes aren’t visible to the creator or the public but provide TikTok with data to weed out extreme, hateful or otherwise offensive content.

Another way to combat the perpetuation of antisemitism on TikTok is to post content that uses the app’s enticing features and then leads young users to meaningful educational content elsewhere. This is what social media researcher Tom Divon of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem’s Department of Communications and Journalism has done. When the notorious TikTok “Holocaust Challenge” was trending in 2020, leading teenage girls to pretend to be Holocaust victims, he decided to investigate. Before TikTok took the videos down, he and a colleague were able to save some 300 and interview some of the girls about what motivated them to pose as Holocaust victims. What they found was that many of those they spoke to had approached it from a position of curiosity and naïveté.

This led Divon to meet with the CEO of TikTok Germany and to design a series of classes for German

schools and museums on how to increase views of their content to counteract ignorance of the Holocaust. Museums at Dachau and Bergen-Belsen concentration camps participated in the seminar, along with the Jewish Museum in Berlin and others. The key, he told educators and curators, is to communicate with Gen Z through the language of TikTok. He described this language in an interview with *Haaretz* in February: “To talk about the Holocaust, but in a way that’s a little more playful—not in a disparaging or disrespectful sense, but in the interactive sense. That means being colorful, rhythmic, filled with special features and movement in a way that ignites curiosity, that prompts viewers to ask questions, pushes them to visit the institution’s profile page and maybe—and this is the ultimate goal—to visit the institutions themselves.” The results have been encouraging: Growing numbers of views of their content speaks to the power of forging courageously onto TikTok.

For creator Schwam-Curtis, combating antisemitism and other forms of hate on TikTok was exhausting when they first started posting videos to the platform. “I wanted to focus my energy on creating and educating, but constantly found myself redirecting my time to addressing hateful comments. I think Toni Morrison put it best when she said, ‘The very serious function of racism [and I would say, antisemitism] is distraction. It keeps you from doing your work. It keeps you explaining over and over again your reason for being.’”

However, Schwam-Curtis says the hate has decreased, in part because they’ve cultivated a genuine audience that appreciates their content. “I’m algorithmically more likely to land on those people’s pages,” they explain. And in addition to building relationships with followers, Schwam-Curtis says that together they’ve curated community norms. “Our community has a strong moral orientation, and when people come into our space who don’t respect that, my followers educate them!”