

II - A HISTORY OF ANTI-SEMITISM AND THE ANATOMY OF THE HOLOCAUST

Anti-semitism may be defined as any activity that tends to force into or to hold Jews in an inferior position and to limit their economic, political and social rights.

Modern anti-semitism had its beginning in early Christian Europe. It was a time when people believed that there was only one way to think. Christianity had swept over Europe and the Jews refused to give up the differences in their religion. Perhaps because Christianity grew out of Judaism, there was even more reason for passionate Christians to be angry at Jews, since they felt their beliefs were being rejected by the Jews. In 313 A.D. Christianity became the official religion of Rome. By the 5th century full citizenship rights became dependent upon religion.

The Jewish people mostly lived in Israel (although there was a small diaspora before that) until the Romans finally conquered Israel in 70 A.D. They brought many Jews to Europe as slaves. Many Jews left voluntarily, while others left because the Romans outlawed Jerusalem and the Temple from the Jews.

From that time until the Holocaust, the majority of Jews were in Europe. There were times when the Jews became convenient to the rulers as bankers and traders. It was forbidden for Christians to charge interest, and because many occupations, such as trade and craft unions and agriculture (no Jew could own land), were forbidden to Jews, it became convenient for Jews to become bankers.

But anti-Jewish feeling was strong and there was official anti-semitic literature as part of the church liturgy. The Jews became a convenient scapegoat, so when there was a plague -- and there were many -- Jews would be blamed and it would be an excuse to murder them.

The Jews were often forced to convert in mass numbers. When this wasn't successful, they were expelled. For instance, after hundreds of years in Spain and Portugal, the Jews, who had participated in every aspect of life in Spain and Portugal, were forced to leave because of the dominance of fanatic church leadership. That is a well known expulsion but there were similar expulsions from Wales and England in 1290, from France in 1306 and from Germany numerous times. Usually the Jews went east to Poland or the Ottoman Empire or south to Italy. There were the Crusades, where in the name of Glory, the knights, on their way to the Holy Land, would swoop down on a Jewish village and massacre all the Jews.

When conversion, expulsion and massacre did not work, the Jews were often ghettoized. The largest ghetto was in the Pale of Settlement. The Jews of Europe had been moving towards this area as they were expelled from other areas. Laws were passed in 1795 and 1835, which confined Jews to this area. By 1885, there were over four million Jews living in the Pale.

In 1791, the National Assembly of France declared that all Jews were full-fledged citizens. The American Revolution and the French Revolution had a profound effect on the political thinking of Europe. The Enlightenment took place. Western Europe, for the first time in its history, gave Jews civil rights. By 1870, almost all legal barriers were removed. For the first time, Jews were allowed to own land, and actually be citizens of the countries where they lived. Are there similar events in United States history? There was one profound problem: Jews were told that they could become like other citizens, study in universities, participate in society; and while they would not be forced to convert to Christianity, they should try and give up those peculiar Jewish ways! So Jews, while they had civil rights for the first time, did not have group rights.

However, as individuals they did succeed. Their pent-up energy burst open and they became doctors, lawyers, professors, musicians, politicians, artists -- everything that had been forbidden to them in the past. Life in Western Europe became better for the individual. In Eastern Europe, however, life became almost unbearable.

In the late 1800s, the Czar of Russia, faced with growing unrest among his people, decided to use the Jews as scapegoats. (Have the students define scapegoat.) He decided that he would convert a third of the Jews, force out another third and kill the rest. Conscription in the army began for boys of 12 years old, to serve for 25 years. They were to be converted, and many were. This is the time when 2½ million Jews immigrated to America and Palestine. It is also the time of the great pogroms (have the students define pogrom). The Cossacks, on order from the Czar, would swoop down on the Jewish villages and kill and maim everyone in sight. Many Jews in America have some relative who has experienced a pogrom.

In Western Europe, a new kind of anti-semitism was developing. Jews were not forced to convert, but were encouraged to stop being Jews. In Germany, political anti-semitism became commonplace, so that right-wing political parties actually had anti-semitic sections as part of their platforms. The new liberal ways, and the industrial revolution caused conflicts, tensions and insecurities and anti-semitism had a resurgence. Jews were part of all phases of the new ways which gave support to traditionalists.

This was the kind of atmosphere that Hitler was born into. He obviously did not invent anti-semitism. He aligned himself with a political philosophy that had at its core that Jews were the cause of all Germany's problems. This anti-semitism

had as part of its dogma the racial inferiority of Jews. This is the first time the "inferiority" theory became part of anti-semitism -- why is this an even more dangerous concept?

This philosophy, combined with the real problems of poverty and inflation that Germany was experiencing after the first World War, made it possible for Hitler to come to power.

What good does it do for a political leader to instigate passionate hatred?

What political people gained power by these methods in our country?

Would it work today?

When he came to power, he quickly began to isolate Jews from all walks of life. At first, the S.A. organized a boycott of Jewish shops, goods, doctors and lawyers. Jewish lawyers were forbidden to practice, Jewish doctors were forbidden to work in hospitals and then Jewish civil servants were dismissed. Jews again were forbidden to inherit land. By 1935, Jews were forbidden to enter swimming pools, sports fields and public parks.

Then, in September of 1935, the Nuremberg laws were passed:

"1. The Reich Citizenship Law

'Only a national of German or similar blood, who proves by his behavior that he is willing and able loyally to serve the German people and Reich is a citizen of the Reich.'

'A Jew may not be a citizen of the Reich. He has no vote ... He may not fill public office.'

2. 'Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor

'Marriages between Jews and nationals of German or similar blood are forbidden.'

'Jews are forbidden to hoist the Reich and national flags, and to show the Reich colours. They are on the other hand allowed to show the Jewish colours.'"

In November of 1938, "Crystal Night" took place, in which the SS instigated the burning of synagogues and the wrecking of Jewish homes and businesses.

From then on, the Jews were isolated, so their fellow Germans could not see them. When they were ghettoized, hardly anyone noticed.

By 1941, half of the German Jews had already left. Those without the foresight or who were too poor to leave kept getting shoved to the East. At first, Hitler believed that, by shoving Jews into small ghettos, disease and starvation would kill them. Many, of course, died in this manner -- but not enough for Hitler. Then soldiers would take busloads of Jews into the countryside and shoot them. But this was "too demoralizing" for the soldiers. It was at this point that the Final Solution was put into effect.

As Hitler moved into Poland and Russia, more and more masses of Jews came into Hitler's control. By 1939, with the fall of Poland, the Jews of Europe were trapped with only one certain future.

A once great culture, with institutions, learning centers, education systems, philanthropic institutions, was totally destroyed.