# Antisemitism

Hatred of Jews as a people or of "the Jew" as a concept. The term "antisemitism" was first coined in the late 1870s, subsequently it is used with reference to all types of Jew-hatred - both historical and contemporary. The word itself comes from the idea that Hebrew belongs to the Semitic language family, and thus Jews must be "Semites." Many other languages also belong to the Semitic language family, such as Arabic and Amharic, and therefore other cultures could also be called "Semites." However, there is no such thing as "Semitism" and no other groups have ever been included in the hatred and prejudice denoted by antisemitism. The word itself is a good example of how, during the late nineteenth century, Jew-haters pretended that their hatred had its basis in scholarly and scientific ideas.

Jew-hatred is not a modern phenomenon—it may be traced back to ancient times. Traditional antisemitism is based on religious discrimination against Jews by Christians. Christian doctrine was ingrained with the idea that Jews were responsible for the death of Jesus, and thus deserved to be punished (this is known as the Deicide, or Killing of God, Myth). Another concept that provoked hatred of Jews amongst Christians was the Supercession Myth, claiming that Christianity had replaced Judaism, due to the Jewish People's failure in their role as the Chosen People of God—and thus deserving punishment, specifically by the Christian world. Over the centuries various stereotypes about Jews developed. Individual Jews were not judged based on their personal achievements or merits, but rather were seen on the whole as greedy, devilish, standoffish, lazy, money-grubbing, and over-sexed. At some points, Jews were even falsely accused of using the blood of Christian children as part of the Passover holiday ritual (known as the Blood Libel).

The nineteenth century gave the world the "Enlightenment"—a philosophical movement that based its ideas on reason rather than traditional, religious dogma, and was accompanied by social, humanitarian and political progress. However, antisemitism did not disappear during the Enlightenment, it simply morphed. At that time, Jews were awarded equal rights in many European

countries, and many people expressed Jew-hatred in their questioning of whether Jews could ever be truly loyal to the newly emerging nation states. Additionally, people who did not approve of the modernization and political changes being made accused the Jews of concocting the changes.

During the 1870s, the new political antisemitism was compounded with "racial" antisemitism. Based on the new ideas on evolution, posited by the English naturalist Charles Darwin—who himself never meant them to leave the realm of science—Jew haters began declaring that Jews were an inferior "race" on the evolutionary scale. Since their problem was physical or genetic, it could never be changed, despite assimilation. Included in this new form of antisemitism, was the idea that Jews were responsible for the world's troubles because of their race and genetic composition.

In Germany, this type of thinking found expression in a political, nationalist movement called the *Voelkisch* movement. This group's representatives opposed the industrialization and secularism which accompanied modernization, as they believed these concepts would destroy traditional German culture. Voelkisch blamed the Jews for undermining the Germans' traditional way of life, and stated that German Jews were not really part of the German people. At the end of the nineteenth century many antisemitic political parties sprung up in Germany, which were further rejuvenated after Germany's loss in World War I.

In France, antisemitism was illuminated in the 1890s during the Dreyfus Affair, in which a Jewish army officer was falsely accused of treason by Jew haters. In Russia, throughout the reign of the Czars, antisemitism became official government policy. Jewish movement was restricted to certain areas, and pogroms were encouraged by the ruling class. Only after the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, in which many Jews played important roles, were Jews in Russia granted equal rights. This gave antisemites throughout Europe another excuse to hate Jews—because Jews were now associated with the hated Communist enemy.

The Nazi Party, which was created in 1919 and rose to national power in Germany in 1933, was one of the first political movements that was fundamentally based on racist antisemitism. The Nazis discriminated against

the Jews from the very beginning of their regime. Initially by instituting racial laws separating Jews from the rest of society, and later exterminating members of the "inferior" race. In the countries which collaborated with or were occupied by the Nazis, the local manifestations of antisemitism—whether traditional, political, or racial—helped determine the Jews' fate. Even in the countries that opposed Hitler and the Nazis, antisemitism still existed to some degree, and some experts believe that those antisemitic attitudes inhibited those nations from doing more to rescue Jews from the clutches of the Nazis.

After World War II, when the West realized what had happened in Europe, antisemitism was greatly weakened. Many churches admitted their huge mistake in cultivating traditional Christian antisemitism, (Pope John Paul II termed antisemitism a sin), and some governments no longer allowed the enactment of antisemitic policies. However, antisemitism was revitalized in the Soviet Union just a few years after the war's end, when Joseph Stalin became paranoid about his country's Jews and began persecuting them.

In addition, over the years, antisemites (especially Muslims who opposed the existence of the State of Israel) began camouflaging their Jew-hatred in "anti-Zionism." The United Nations even showed its approval of such antisemitic sentiment in 1975 when it passed a resolution stating that "Zionism is racism." This resolution was finally annulled in 1994. Holocaust denial and Neo-Nazism are other forms of antisemitism in the modern world, in that they seek to absolve Nazism of its crimes or to glorify Nazism and Jew-hatred as it existed in the past. (see also Holocaust, Denial of the.)