A History of anti-Semitism

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A Croatian Jewish man (left) and a Jewish woman wear the symbol that all Jews in Germany and countries conquered or allied with Germany had to display at all times: a badge made of yellow cloth with the Star of David on it. AP Photo

Anti-Semites do not like Jews and treat them badly as a group. Anti-Semitism is a kind of racism. Semites are people from southwestern Asia, and includes both Jews and Arabs. Anti-Semitism usually refers only to prejudice against Jews.

Origins of Christian anti-Semitism

In the ancient world, anti-Semitism started because of religious differences. Jesus and his followers were Jews. However, Judaism and Christianity became rivals soon after Jesus was killed. Christianity began competing for followers and wanted to replace Judaism.

Christians blamed Jews for the death of Jesus.

By the 300s, Christians saw Jews as an alien people. Jews did not accept Jesus Christ as the Messiah.

Anti-Semitism during the Middle Ages

The Middle Ages took place between the 400s and 1400s. During this time, Jews had no rights in much of Europe. They were not allowed to be citizens or have jobs in the government. In some places, Jews were forced to wear special clothing, such as a yellow star. At times they were attacked and killed. Towns and cities began forcing Jews to live in separate areas. These were called ghettos. This segregation, or separation, lasted until the 1800s and early 1900s in large parts of Europe.

In the Middle Ages, many countries expelled, or forced out, the Jews. These countries included England, France, Germany, Spain and Portugal.

But where they were needed, Jews were allowed or even encouraged to stay. Christianity at the time did not let people lend money. For this reason, Jews became moneylenders. Jews generally were not allowed to own land so they became traders, often moving from place to place buying and selling goods.

Anti-Semitism in modern Europe

Even in modern Europe, there was still much anti-Semitism and Jews continued to be seen as outsiders.

In 1882, Russia took away land owned by Jews and forced them to live in certain towns and cities. The government passed anti-Semitic laws. In addition, violent mobs attacked Jews. These were called pogroms. Over the next 40 years, more than a million Jews left the Russian Empire, mainly for the United States.

In the 1800s, a new form of anti-Semitism appeared. People claimed that Jews belonged to a different race that was inferior to white people.

Nazi anti-Semitism and the Holocaust

Adolf Hitler was the leader of Germany from 1933 to 1945. Under him, anti-Semitism became an official part of the government and was taught to children in schools. The Nazis killed and imprisoned millions of Jews—men, women, and children -- and tried to destroy the Jewish people.

Anti-Semitism since the Holocaust and outside Europe

The Nazis were defeated in 1945. After that, anti-Semitism was not acceptable in Western Europe and the United States. In the years after the war, American Jews became part of the culture and society of the United States. Violence against Jews became much less, but still occasionally happened. Recently in Europe, some Jewish schools, stores and synagogues have been attacked. Some Jews, including children, have been killed.

In the late 1900s, the Roman Catholic Church and other Christian churches changed their teachings about Jews. They said that Jews did not kill Jesus and condemned anti-Semitism. Nevertheless, anti-Semitism still exists in many parts of the world.

For hundreds of years, Muslim countries treated Jews much like other non-Muslims. Islam is one of the world's main religions. Its followers are called Muslims. There are many different kinds of Islam, just like there are different kinds of Christianity. During the Middle Ages in Spain, Jews were philosophers, doctors, poets, and writers. They took part in cultural life with Muslims and Christians.

State of Israel created in 1948

In 1948, the State of Israel was created in Palestine as a homeland for the Jews. Israel is in the Middle East. Many Muslims lived in the area where Israel was created. Also, places that are important to Muslims were on the land that is now Israel. The Muslim world felt anger

toward Jews, and Jews were attacked through the Middle East. In response, most of the Jews of those countries went to Israel. Today, there is still much anger toward Israel, and this often is expressed as anti-Semitism toward Jews as a group.

Quiz

1   Which two of the following are MAIN ideas of the article?

> 1. *Anti-Semitism began shortly after Jesus was killed.*
> 2. *Jews became moneylenders during the Middle Ages.*
> 3. *Adolf Hitler was the leader of Germany from 1933-1945.*
> 4. *Today, many Muslims in the Middle East are angry with the Jews because of Israel.*

(A)   1 and 2

(B)   2 and 3

(C)   3 and 4

(D)   1 and 4

2   Which sentence from the article is MOST important to include in its summary?

(A)   The Middle Ages took place between the 400s and 1400s.

(B)   Christianity at the time did not let people lend money.

(C)   In 1882, Russia took away land owned by Jews and forced them to live in certain towns and cities.

(D)   During the Middle Ages in Spain, Jews were philosophers, doctors, poets, and writers.

3   Read the selection from the section "Anti-Semitism in modern Europe."

> *In addition, violent mobs attacked Jews. These were called pogroms. Over the next 40 years, more than a million Jews left the Russian Empire, mainly for the United States.*

Which phrase from the selection helps you understand the meaning of "pogroms"?

(A)   violent mobs attacked

(B)   the next 40 years

(C)   more than a million

(D)   left the Russian Empire

4   Read the paragraph from the section "Anti-Semitism in modern Europe."

In the 1800s, a new form of anti-Semitism appeared. People claimed that Jews belonged to a different race that was inferior to white people.

What does the author mean by "inferior"?

(A)   smaller

(B)   larger

(C)   lower

(D)   finer