

STUDENT READING: ANTISEMITISM & NAZI RACISM

In illustration from an antisemitic children's book. The sign reads "Jews are not wanted here." Germany, 1936. - USHMM



Antisemitism means prejudice against or hatred of **Jews**. Intolerance for the Jewish religion developed in the early Christian era and continued over the centuries. Riots against Jewish populations were often sparked by false rumours that Jews used the blood of Christian children for religious rituals. At times, Jews were also blamed for everything from economic conditions to epidemics to natural disasters.

During the Industrial Revolution of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Jews became more integrated into societies throughout Western Europe. At the same time, however, nationalist movements began to denounce Jews as disloyal citizens. In Germany, the "voelkisch movement" (folk or people's movement) claimed that Jews were "un-German."

The Nazi party, which was founded in 1919 by Adolf Hitler, argued for the removal of all Jews from Germany. **Nazism** gained popularity, in part, by blaming Jews for Germany's loss in the First World War and for the country's economic problems. This false accusation against Jews is particularly striking because Jews composed less than 1% of the German population when Hitler came to power in 1933 and were very integrated into German society.

STUDENT READING: ANTISEMITISM & NAZI RACISM (CONTINUED)

Unlike Christian antisemitism, which was hatred of Jews based primarily on religion, Nazi antisemitism defined Jews as an undesirable “race.” Drawing on **eugenics**, the Nazi party defined Jews as an “inferior” racial group, rather than a religious one, that threatened the purity of the “Aryan” race.

The Holocaust, the state-sponsored persecution and murder of European Jews by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945, is considered to be history’s most extreme example of antisemitism. Prior to the Second World War, Jews were stripped of their German citizenship and discriminated against through antisemitic laws.

The Nazis also discriminated against other “inferior races,” such as **Roma and Sinti** as well as against mentally and physically disabled people. Nazi propaganda used eugenic research and economic statistics to argue that members of these “unfit” groups were a financial burden for Germany and endangered the well-being of the “Aryan master race.”

Between 1934 and 1945, the Nazis forcefully sterilized more than 300,000 Roma, Sinti and disabled people in Germany. Thousands died as a result of the operation. After the Second World War broke out in 1939, over 200,000 disabled Germans, many of whom were children, were murdered as part of a euthanasia program. Meanwhile, Jews and other “inferior” people, such as Sinti and Roma, Slavs, and homosexuals, were worked to death and murdered in concentration and death camps.

Antisemitism: Discrimination towards, persecution of or hatred of Jews.

Boycott: A form of activism involving the act of abstaining from using, buying, or interacting with a person, organization or country as an expression of protest, usually for political reasons.

Concentration and death camps: The Nazis established concentration camps shortly after assuming power in 1933 to imprison and isolate political opponents and those considered to be racially undesirable, such as Jews, and Sinti and Roma. Most of the approximately 1,800 camps were transit or labour camps. After the occupation of Poland, death or extermination camps were established for the purpose of systematic mass murder at Auschwitz-Birkenau, Treblinka, Sobibor, Belzec, Chelmno and Majdanek.

Eugenics: A racial theory that was popular in many Western nations at the time. According to eugenics, observation, family genealogies and intelligence tests could be used to define which groups had “superior” or “inferior” qualities.

Jew: Someone of the Hebrew or Jewish people. Someone who is either born into or converts to Judaism, the religion, philosophy and way of life of the Jewish people.

Nazism: The ideology of the Nazi party, which stressed nationalism, imperialism, anti-communism, militarism, racism and antisemitism.

Roma and Sinti: Roma (Gypsies) originated in the Punjab region of northern India as a nomadic people and entered Europe between the eighth and tenth centuries. They were called “Gypsies” because Europeans mistakenly believed they came from Egypt. This minority is made up of distinct groups called “tribes” or “nations.” Most of the Roma in Germany and the countries occupied by Germany during World War II belonged to the Sinti and Roma family groupings. Both groups spoke dialects of a common language called Romani, based on Sanskrit (the classical language of India). Some Roma are Christian and some are Muslim, having converted during the course of their migrations through Persia, Asia Minor, and the Balkans.

Slavs: Ethnic group of peoples inhabiting mainly eastern, southeastern and east central Europe, including Russians, Poles and Czechs, among others. Nazis considered Slavs to be an inferior race that was only suited for enslavement.

Yiddish: A dialect of High German that has Hebrew and Slavic words. Spoken by European Jews.