The Psychological Story of Anti-Semitism

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Prejudice against a subjugated minority is common in the history of the world, though the quality, quantity, and extent of it can vary. Anti-Semitism (hatred of Jews, not all Semites) is unique in the world's history. In late 19th century Germany, Wilhelm Marr, a political agitator and publicist, coined the term "anti-Semite" to classify his hatred of Jews. This distinction, which is based upon a confusion of the Semitic linguistics with a nonexistent racial group, was to keep Jews separate from the rest of German society. Marr was far from the first to hate the Jewish people.

The many cultural and scientific advances that the Jews had given to the Egyptians were denied by Mantheo, an Egyptian priest (300 BCE). He published a diatribe against the earlier Semitics as well as the Jews. The Romans would later participate eagerly in denying their debt to Semites, including Jews. On one hand, the Romans' admiration for the Jews' health, intelligence, and beauty drove them to try to obtain this "magic" for themselves. Yet, they disparaged the Jews as fools for allowing their slaves to be automatically freed after seven years' servitude.

There are several unique historical facts regarding Jews and anti-Semitism, which are: Jews have been the object of unreasonable hatred for 2,000 years; despite oppression, Jews have made major scientific and cultural contributions to every society in which they have lived as a minority, thus provoking envy; Christianity, after failing to convert the majority of Jews, became the center and organizer of the most vicious and disruptive anti-Semitism; and Jews do not have to exist in the community for them to be objects of ha-

tred.

Prior to World War One, Jews and Christians lived in many parts of the Islamic world, classified as "unbelievers" who were considered monotheistic brothers since Abraham was the father of both religious groups. For centuries Jews fled Christian Europe to the Islamic world before and after the Spanish Inquisition. Consequently, under Islam Jews lived as second class subjects with much less oppression than in Christian Europe. They were called "a people of the book." It was only during periods of fundamentalist uprisings that they were targeted as scapegoats. Under the Ottoman Empire (1299-1922), many of them rose to positions of prominence in and out of the government.

However, with the weakening of the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century and its collapse at the end of World War I, Christian nations were created in southeastern Europe. In this area of Europe, anti-Semitism flourished, partly due to a Christian middle-class seeking to displace Jews from their niche in society. Things also changed in areas formerly ruled by the Ottoman Empire where anti-Jewish feeling increased with the development of modern Zionism and markedly intensified following the creation of Israel in 1948.

Identification with the aggressor is an important phenomenon in prejudice. In Africa during the period of the sub-Saharan slave trade, slaves began to identify with their slavers, the Muslim Arabs. As a result they became Muslims themselves. Something similar occurred in East Asia. With the dominance of Christian cultural political power in Asia, the Japanese developed many anti-Semitic attitudes without even the presence of Jews.

Howard Stein, a Jewish psychoanalytical anthropologist writing in the *Journal of Psychohistory* in 1977 and 1978 has seen Jews as participating in creating anti-Semitism by being anti-Christian. But even when Jews converted to

Christianity, they were not safe, as occurred in Spain when they were forced to choose conversion or expulsion in 1492. Despite conversion, they and their descendants were killed to prevent the "contamination" of pure Christian blood. However, all the nations on the Mediterranean are part of a closely connected genetic pool, so their fear (not surprisingly) was without any foundation.

In an attempt to understand the psychological underpinnings of anti-Semitism, a well-known and highly respected psychoanalyst, Mortimer Ostow, gathered a number of other colleagues in a special study group. They worked for several years to understand the psychopathology of anti-Semitism. Their conclusions dealt with the primitive magical thinking and sadistic behavior that did—and still does—characterize much of Western Christian civilization. Other psychoanalysts also worked on the subject: Sigmund Freud gave an Oedipal explanation of anti-Semitism that focused on circumcision as it is connected to castration anxiety, while Otto Fenichel declared anti-Semitism is based on scapegoating and projection. Rudolph Lowenstein found that Jews represented the hated child rebelling against the parent. Nathan Ackerman gave a long list of psychological mechanisms behind this hatred, but they in no way specifically pinpointed 2,000 years of this wide-ranging hostility. Psychohistorian Lloyd deMause, not an analyst, referred to the Jews as a receptacle for society's uncomfortable feelings, particularly anger toward their flawed parents.

While there are many other explanations, none can answer the question, "Why the Jews?" No doubt, extensive psychopathology has existed in every corner of the globe, historically and up to the present. One set of facts stands out clearly: Christianity is necessary. Historically, the peculiar and unique presence of Christian culture and thinking from at least 200 CE has created a fundamentally pervasive, vicious, and destructive anti-Semitism. It has invited all Christians to

discriminate against Jews. It is only in the last 70 years that there has been a significant modification of this irrational anti-Semitism.

The requirements for anti-Semitism include Christian culture and power with a doctrine of anti-Semitism; a majority of the population having pre-Oedipal psychopathology; chronic stress in the population, such as the plague; and leadership that utilizes anti-Semitism for political purposes. Therefore, the resolution of the "diseases of anti-Semitism" requires that three things happen. First, all Christian churches need to put in writing an acknowledgment of the error in past documents related to Jews and anti-Semitism. This information should be widely disseminated in various currently used church documents. Second, since the pre-Oedipal psychopathology experienced as self-hatred is developed in the first three years of life, directing society's attention to resolving that problem is vital. Finally, security in the integrity and stability of the leaders in a democracy is essential. Removing or reducing such stressors will reduce the likelihood of anti-Semitism, and for that matter, other pathological behavior, such as war.

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