Origin of Jews

"The Nazis did not discard the past, they built on it. They did not begin a development. They completed it."

- Raul Hilberg, Holocaust historian

In ancient times, the Jewish people established themselves as a distinct and separate people by their belief in one God (monotheism) and by their refusal to accept the dominant religion. Jews often became the scapegoat, a people to blame for the hardships of mankind, real and imagined. The history of anti-Semitism, or hatred of the Jews, is part and parcel of western civilization.

In 63 B.C., the Romans conquered Jerusalem, center of the Jewish homeland. The first religious groups persecuted by the Romans were the Christians, charged with being heretics (or believers in a false religion). Initially, the Romans allowed the Jews to practice their religion freely, but this did not last. The Jews were ordered to worship Roman gods, Jews resisted, but division among Jews followed, one side insisting on orthodoxy, the other side (including Jesus) arguing that Jews must be willing to adapt. After the death of Christ, his followers renounced Judaism and established Christianity.

In 72 A.D., the Romans expelled the Jews from Palestine. The Jews settled in North Africa, Spain, and eastern and western Europe. For the Jewish people, life outside of Palestine was called the Diaspora. At the start of each Jewish New Year, Jews in the Diaspora would toast one another and promise, "Next year in Jerusalem." It appeared a forlorn hope.

In the early fourth century, Constantine the Great made Christianity the state religion of the Roman Empire. Anti-Semitism became a threat to Jewish existence.

THE CRUSADES

Christian soldiers left Europe on the first crusade to win control of the Holy Land in 1096. The purpose of the crusade was to expel the Muslims from the birthplace of Christ. They were the "infidels," those who did not believe in God. Before leaving Europe, the slaughter got off to an early start against the "infidels" at home: the Jews. During an intense reign of blood-letting, from January to July 1096, twelve thousand Jews, between one third and one fourth of the Jewish population in Germany and France, were massacred by the crusaders. Entire communities were forced to choose between baptism or death.

Jews fled to Central and Eastern Europe, where they suffered pogroms (or outbursts of violence) at the hands of Cossacks in 1648 and '49 and where they were ultimately annihilated by the Nazis beginning in 1939.

NATIONALISM

In the age of nationalism, when the people of Europe began to view themselves as belonging to separate nations, the identification of Jews as "aliens" entered a new chapter. The litmus test for loyalty to the state was loyalty to Christianity. Hence, the Jews were disqualified from citizenship. They were expelled from England in 1290, France in 1306 and again in 1394, and parts of Germany in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Jews were not allowed to live legally in England until the sixteenth century. In Russia, the tsar (emperor) banished all Jews to the so-called Pale of Settlement, the area comprising Ukraine, Byelorussia, and eastern Poland. Jews were not allowed to live legally in France until the French Revolution. The Emancipation Decree issued by Napoleon in 1791 gave full citizenship rights to the Jews of France. Where Napoleon's armies traveled in
Europe, the Jews were liberated from the confines of the ghetto. By royal decrees, the Jews of Prussia and Bavaria, two provinces in the German lands, became full citizens in the early 1800's.

**INDUSTRIALISM**

The 19th century was a time of vast economic change. Economic life became fiercely competitive. In the words of historian William Jenks, "The modern state was overcast with storm clouds, and it was easiest to blame the unpredictable weather upon the Jew." The Jews now came to be seen as the ones who controlled big business, the banks, the shop on the corner, the economy in general. Indeed, the Jews were at the forefront of change. Feudalism had collapsed, the inherent restrictions placed on economic activity were no more, merit alone sufficed. Change was unpleasant for many. The old way of life had its comforts, namely, predictability and a measure of security. The estate owner now had to compete with foreign products in his once closed market. Free trade was bemoaned as a "Jewish invention." The merchant had to accustom himself to the challenges of the new times.

**SOCIAL DARWINISM**

In the late 19th century, the debate on the Jewish question entered a new chapter. Hitherto, the Jews had been viewed as different and unacceptable because of their religion. In 1873, with the publication of the book The Victory of Judaism over Germanism by Wilhelm Marr, the Jewish question became one of race. The Jews, it was argued, were different because of who they were, not what they thought. They were different because of birth. They were different because of blood. An "alien" people, the Jews could never be Germans. It was in this book that the term anti-Semitism first appeared. This so-called scientific basis of anti-Semitism excluded any possibility of Jews being assimilated into German culture. Once defined as such in the popular mind, a major obstacle to Jewish destruction, the common bond in humanity, was overcome.

Social Darwinism took root. This was the belief that people of different races were in competition with one another, and only the strongest of the races would ultimately survive.

Treitschke, the German philosopher, noted, "The Jews are our misfortune." The expression captured the spirit of the age.
VIENNA

One of the most rabid hot-beds of anti-Semitic agitation at the turn of the 20th century was Vienna, the imperial capital of the Habsburg dynasty that comprised much of the lands of Central and Eastern Europe, lands heavily populated with Jews, many of whom sought to immigrate to the capital. In 1885, students at the University of Vienna formed a union based on anti-Semitism, bewailing the increasing percentage of Jewish students at the University and, in general, the number of Jewish lawyers, journalists, artists, doctors, and professors. Prior to the First World War, the percentage of Jewish students at the University of Vienna reached 28%. Jewish students in medical school comprised almost 29%; in law and politics, 20%. In 1887, the Austro-Hungarian government passed a law prohibiting the migration or settlement of foreign Jews in Austria. It was based on the Chinese Exclusion Act of the United States, with the word "Jew" substituted for "Chinese."

The young Adolf Hitler, born in the Austrian town of Braunau in 1889, spent six bitter years in Vienna living on failed dreams in a succession of rented rooms, flop houses, and one modern and comfortable mens' hostel (built, incidentally, by the Jewish philanthropist Epstein). Though he lived comfortably on an orphan's pension for some time, Hitler wrote in his autobiography, "For me this was the time of the greatest spiritual upheaval I have ever had to go through. I had ceased to be a weak-kneed cosmopolitan and became an anti-Semite."

The years Hitler spent in Vienna, between 1907 and 1913, represented a time of political radicalism, economic pressure, and intense anti-Semitism in the imperial capital. The mayor of Vienna, Karl Luegar, unashamedly used anti-Semitism to win votes, blaming life's problems on the Jews. Of course, Luegar had a Jewish secretary, which he explained by saying, "I decide who is a Jew." Jewish people constituted 10% of the Viennese population. Part of the Jewish population of the city was unusually successful by European standards. They spoke German perfectly, dressed in the fashion of the day, and viewed the splendor of Vienna with the pride and arrogance of the native born. They were doctors, lawyers, journalists, writers, and store owners. It was said that three of the four major bankers in Vienna were Jews, the fourth a Greek.

Poor Jews also lived in Vienna. They were mostly Orthodox Jews from the empire's rural provinces. Dressed in black coats and black hats and with their earlocks and long beards, the so-called "ost-Juden" (or eastern Jew) became the object of intense loathing by the Christian population of Vienna (as well as by some Viennese Jews, themselves poor immigrants from the provinces but one generation before). In the popular mind, the eastern Jew was dirty in appearance, unscrupulous in business, aggressive in the market, spoke bad German, reeked of onion and garlic, and worshiped a foreign God. He was also probably a socialist or a communist, a "red" in any event, though this was a thought not quickly reconciled with the image of the observant Jew rushing to synagogue.
A Viennese Jew named Theodor Herzl began a movement among Europe's Jews to establish a Jewish state (based on the commune) in Palestine. It was called Zionism, and offered hope to the impoverished, scorned Jewish masses that they might one day live in peace in their own land.

In sum, the gentile population of Vienna very much feared being physically overwhelmed by a populace they viewed as foreign and repulsive: namely, the poor Jews from the provinces who came to the city in the effort to find work and survive. It was precisely this fear that so heightened the virulent anti-Semitism that was a Viennese speciality, and that would erupt on the streets of the former imperial capital when the Nazis took over in March 1938.
WORLD WAR I

On August 1, 1914, the First World War began when the German armies attacked France by way of Belgium. In the exultant first days of that August, twenty-five year old Adolf Hitler joined a Bavarian regiment in his new home of Munich. He reached the front lines in October 1914 and immediately went into combat. Hitler served as a messenger and displayed notable bravery for which he was rewarded with the prestigious Iron Cross (first class). The award gave Hitler de facto German citizenship, which he lacked, being an Austrian.

During four long years, war raged across the European landscape, laying waste to much of northern France and Belgium as well as to virtually all of Poland. In the end, when the German high command surrendered on November 11, 1918, communist revolutions broke out in Germany. Communism was indelibly identified with the Jews. In Poland they called it "zydokommunism," or "Jew-communism." The revolutions, most notably in Munich and Berlin, were crushed by German soldiers thoroughly brutalized by four years at the front. These were the so-called Freikorps who would later comprise the ranks of Hitler's storm-troopers, the SA or Brownshirts. The Weimar Republic, based on a liberal constitution and despised by conservative forces and founded in the city of Weimar, was established on shaky ground indeed. After they came to power in 1933, as if to mock the liberal association with Weimar, the Nazis constructed one of the concentration camps a few miles outside of it. It was named Buchenwald.

Embittered by war and disillusioned by peace, the German people faced an uncertain future. Twice within four years the economy collapsed. For a people who strove for order, there was none. How did this dramatic turn of events occur? The answer was simple: Germany lost the war because she had been "stabbed in the back" by the Jews.

So began the twenty-one year hiatus between the First and the Second World Wars. The Jews were blamed for World War I. The Jews were blamed for the Treaty of Versailles. The Jews were blamed for the Soviet takeover in Russia. The Jews were blamed for the economic depression. The Jews were blamed for the black market. The Jews were blamed for the unpredictable weather. The Jews prospered while the good Germans suffered. Hard feelings had always existed towards Jews, and hard feelings intensified with the deep insecurity of the post-war period. In Munich, Hitler began giving speeches that explained the difficult circumstances. It was the fault of the Jews, he repeated ad nauseam. This point always elicited a strong approval from the audience. Hitler later said that if he did not have the Jews to blame everything on, and to unify the masses in the common bond of hatred, then he would have had to invent them. Yet Hitler took anti-Semitism a step further. Life was based on racial struggle, he stressed. Conversion or expulsion of the Jews was no longer viable. The way to get rid of the problem was murder. In Mein Kampf, referring to the First World War, the future Reichschancellor wrote:

"If at the beginning of the War and during the War, twelve or fifteen thousand of these Hebrew corrupters of the people had been held under poison gas, as happened to hundreds of thousands of our very best German workers in the field, the sacrifice of millions at the front would not have been in vain."
In the end Hitler would keep only one promise. It was his promise to murder the Jewish people of Europe.

Dreyfus affair

Dreyfus affair, political crisis, beginning in 1894 and continuing through 1906, in France during the Third Republic. The controversy centred on the question of the guilt or innocence of army captain Alfred Dreyfus, who had been convicted of treason for allegedly selling military secrets to the Germans in December 1894. At first the public supported the conviction; it was willing to believe in the guilt of Dreyfus, who was Jewish. Much of the early publicity surrounding the case came from anti-Semitic groups (especially the newspaper La Libre Parole, edited by Édouard Drumont), to whom Dreyfus symbolized the supposed disloyalty of French Jews.

The effort to reverse the sentence was at first limited to members of the Dreyfus family, but, as evidence pointing to the guilt of another French officer, Ferdinand Walsin-Esterhazy, came to light from 1896, the pro-Dreyfus side slowly gained adherents (among them journalists Joseph Reinach and Georges Clemenceau—the future World War I premier—and a senator, Auguste Scheurer-Kestner). The accusations against Esterhazy resulted in a court-martial that acquitted him of treason (January 1898). To protest against the verdict, the novelist Émile Zola wrote a letter titled “J’accuse,” published in Clemenceau’s newspaper L’Aurore. In it he attacked the army for covering up its mistaken conviction of Dreyfus, an action for which Zola was found guilty of libel.

By the time of the Zola letter, the Dreyfus case had attracted widespread public attention and had split France into two opposing camps. The anti-Dreyfusards (those against reopening the case) viewed the controversy as an attempt by the nation’s enemies to discredit the army and weaken France. The Dreyfusards (those seeking exoneration of Captain Dreyfus) saw the issue as the principle of the freedom of the individual subordinated to that of national security. They wanted to republicanize the army and put it under parliamentary control.

From 1898 to 1899 the Dreyfusard cause gained in strength. In August 1898 an important document implicating Dreyfus was found to be a forgery. After Maj. Hubert-Joseph Henry of the intelligence section confessed to fabricating the document in order to strengthen the army’s position, revision was made almost certain. At the same time, the affair was becoming a question of vital concern to politicians. The republican parties in the Chamber of Deputies recognized that the increasingly vocal nationalist right posed a threat to the parliamentary regime. Led by the Radicals, a left-wing coalition was formed. In response to continuing disorders and demonstrations, a cabinet headed by the Radical René Waldeck-Rousseau was set up in June 1899 with the express purpose of defending the republic and with the hope of settling the judicial side of the Dreyfus case as soon as possible. When a new court-martial, held at Rennes, found Dreyfus guilty in September 1899, the president of the republic, in order to resolve the issue, pardoned him. In July 1906 a civilian court of appeals (the Cour d’Appel) set aside the judgment of the Rennes court and rehabilitated Dreyfus. The army, however, did not publicly declare his innocence until 1995.

With the Dreyfusards in the ascendant, the affair marked the start of a new phase in the history of the Third Republic, a phase in which a series of Radical-led governments pursued an anticlerical policy that culminated in the formal separation of church and state (1905). By intensifying antagonisms between right and left and by forcing individuals to choose sides, the case made a lasting impact on the consciousness of the French nation.
NUREMBERG LAWS

In September of each year, the Nazis held their annual party congress in Nuremberg, a medieval city in southern Germany. SA, SS, Hitler Youth, and German Maiden groups from around the country descended on Nuremberg for a week of parades, rallies, and endless speeches, the most important of course being the one by the loquacious fuehrer.

At the party congress in September 1935, Hitler instituted a set of anti-Jewish laws titled "Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor" but known more simply as the Nuremberg Laws. The laws were drafted at the last minute by an official from the Interior Ministry, Dr. Barnhard Loessner, a career civil servant who had no experience in Jewish matters. Hitler's decision to create the new racial laws was so sudden that Loesener was completely unprepared for it; he ran out of paper while writing the citizenship law and requisitioned some old menu cards to finish the assignment. The Nuremberg Laws, as they became known, represented an immensely foreboding step against the German Jews: to destroy a people, the people first had to be defined. That was not an easy task. Intermarriage and conversion complicated the matter. The Nuremberg Laws simplified it, and defined who was a Jew: anyone with a Jewish parent or grandparent.

Every German had to submit seven documents to the authorities: his or her own birth or baptismal certificates, the same of both parents and all four grandparents. The documents came from the Christian churches, which, as Holocaust historian Raul Hilberg has written, were "drawn into the administration of very first measure of the destruction process."

The purity of blood became a legal category. In addition, Jews were stripped of German citizenship. They were deprived of legal rights. Marriage and extramarital relations between Germans and German Jews were forbidden. German woman under forty-five were forbidden to work as domestics for Jewish households. Hitler said that "blood sin and desecration of the race are the original sins in this world and the end of a humanity which surrenders to it."

Kristallnacht, (German: “Crystal Night”), also called Night of Broken Glass or November Pogroms, the night of November 9–10, 1938, when German Nazis attacked Jewish persons and property. The name Kristallnacht refers ironically to the litter of broken glass left in the streets after these pogroms. The violence continued during the day of November 10, and in some places acts of violence continued for several more days.

The pretext for the pogroms was the shooting in Paris on November 7 of the German diplomat Ernst vom Rath by a Polish-Jewish student, Herschel Grynszpan. News of Rath’s death on November 9 reached Adolf Hitler in Munich, Germany, where he was celebrating the anniversary of the abortive 1923 Beer Hall Putsch. There, Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels, after conferring with Hitler, harangued a gathering of old storm troopers, urging violent reprisals staged to appear as “spontaneous demonstrations.” Telephone orders from Munich triggered pogroms throughout Germany, which then included Austria.

Just before midnight on November 9, Gestapo chief Heinrich Müller sent a telegram to all police units informing them that “in shortest order, actions against Jews and especially their synagogues will take place in all of Germany. These are not to be interfered with.” Rather, the police were to arrest the victims. Fire companies stood by synagogues in flames with explicit instructions to let the buildings burn. They were to intervene only if a fire threatened adjacent “Aryan” properties.

In two days and nights, more than 1,000 synagogues were burned or otherwise damaged. Rioters ransacked and looted about 7,500 Jewish businesses, killed at least 91 Jews, and vandalized Jewish hospitals, homes, schools, and cemeteries. The attackers were often neighbours. Some 30,000 Jewish males aged 16 to 60 were arrested. To
accommodate so many new prisoners, the concentration camps at Dachau, Buchenwald, and Sachsenhausen were expanded.

After the pogrom ended, it was given an oddly poetic name: Kristallnacht—meaning “crystal night” or “night of broken glass.” This name symbolized the final shattering of Jewish existence in Germany. After Kristallnacht, the Nazi regime made Jewish survival in Germany impossible.