

Anti-Semitism

Vocabulary - Anti-Semitism: hatred of Jewish people

Conspiracy theory: fear of a secret plot

Persecution: unfairly punishing people

Contradictory: two things that can't both be true

Europe has a long history of **anti-Semitism**:

- During the Crusades, Jews in Europe were massacred.
- All Jews and Muslims were driven out of Spain in 1492.
- The Tsar of Russia organised pogroms (large-scale attacks) against Jews.
- In France, anti-Semitism led to the Dreyfus Affair (1864-1906), when a Jewish officer was falsely accused of selling secrets to the Germans.
- Henry Ford, the US car manufacturer, published anti-Semitic newspapers and books.

After the Russian Revolution, there was a **conspiracy theory** that claimed communism was a “Jewish plot”. But the same anti-Semites also believed that Jewish people controlled all the banks and corporations. So anti-Semites blamed Jewish people for two **contradictory** things.

In reality, the millions of Jewish people in Europe were workers, professionals, small business owners, etc, just like anyone else. Some were socialist, some liberal, some conservative, just like anyone else.

So why were Jewish people singled out?

- Many white people at the time thought that they were a “superior race”, better than all others, including Jewish people. Today, this unscientific rubbish is called **racism**.
- Jewish people have different religion and traditions. They were treated as “outsiders” everywhere. Many Christians hated Jews just because they had a different religion.
- Many Jewish people (such as Trotsky) became socialists and communists because these movements opposed racism and anti-Semitism. People who were opposed to socialism then promoted anti-Semitism to make people suspicious of socialist parties.
- People in the early 20th century faced many new and complicated problems. Blaming Jewish people for everything was **an easy answer**.

Hitler's anti-Semitism:

Hitler did not invent anti-Semitic ideas; he just accepted the racism and conspiracy theories of his time. But he made them more extreme. He believed that Germany should **conquer a huge empire** and, in the process, **murder or kick out the Jewish people**. As soon as he gained power, he began persecuting Jews. During World War 2, he carried out the mass murder of millions of Jews: **the Holocaust**. In this way, anti-Semitism led directly to one of the most terrible crimes in human history.