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The following images illustrate three types of historical antisemitism: religious, racial, and political.

Religious Antisemitism

In the first millennium of the Christian era, leaders in the European Christian (Catholic) hierarchy developed or solidified as doctrine the idea that all Jews were responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus. They also taught that the destruction of the Temple by the Romans and the scattering of the Jewish people was punishment both for past transgressions and for continued failure to abandon their faith for Christianity.

In the 10th and 11th centuries, these doctrines about Jews were hardened and unified in part because of threats to the Church hierarchy from the split between Roman Catholicism and Greek Orthodoxy (1054); successive waves of Muslim conquest; end of

millennium fervor; successes in converting the heathen ethnic groups of northern Europe; and military-spiritual zeal spurred by the Crusades.

Among the myths about Jews that took hold in this period was the “blood libel,” an allegation that Jews used the blood of Christian children for ritual purposes. Other myths included the idea that Jewish failure to convert to Christianity was a sign both of service to the anti-Christ and of innate disloyalty to European (read Christian) civilization. The conversion of individual Jews was perceived as insincere and as having materialistic motives.



A Jewish couple with an obligatory Jewish badge in yellow ring form on their clothes. Worms, Germany, 16th century. *Worms, Stadtarchiv.*

Medieval Church leaders dictated that Jews in all Christian lands should be publicly differentiated from the rest of the population and thereby stigmatized. Implementation varied in Western European countries in both the form of the badge and the date of its application.



Satan Binds the Eyes of the Jews, from *Le Breviari D'Amor* by Matfre Ermengald of Béziers. France, 14th century. *Bridgeman, Berlin.*

The image shows Satan blinding Jews from seeing the truth of Jesus and Christianity. Images such as this one emerged when Jews retained their own religious traditions despite pressure to convert to Christianity.

Racial Antisemitism

With the development during the last third of the 19th century of new scientific knowledge—especially about human biology, psychology, and evolution—some intellectuals and politicians developed a racist perception of Jews. This form of antisemitism developed within a broader racist view of the world based on notions of “inequality of races” and the alleged “superiority” of the “white race” over other “races.”

Belief in the superiority of the “white race” was both inspired and reinforced by the contact of European colonist-conquerors with native populations in the Americas, Asia, and Africa and was buttressed as pseudoscience by a perversion of evolutionary theory known as “social Darwinism.” Social Darwinism postulated that human beings were not one species but divided into several different “races” that were biologically driven to struggle against one another for living space to ensure their survival. Only those “races” with superior qualities could win this eternal struggle, which was carried out by force and warfare. Social Darwinism has always been the product of bogus science; despite a century and a half of efforts by racists to find it, there is no scientific evidence to support social Darwinist theory.



A German woman accused of having sexual relations with a Jew (a crime in Nazi Germany) is marched through the streets by Nazi storm troopers. Around her neck is a sign that reads, “I am a German girl and allowed myself to be defiled by a Jew.” Norden, Germany, July 1935. *Niedersächsisches Landesarchiv-Staatsarchiv Aurich*

These new “antisemites,” as they called themselves, drew upon older stereotypes to maintain that Jews behaved the way they did—and would not change—because of innate racial qualities inherited from the dawn of time. Drawing as well upon the pseudoscience of racial eugenics, they argued that Jews weakened nations in Central Europe not only by political, economic, and media methods, but also literally by “polluting” so-called pure Aryan blood via intermarriage and sexual relations with non-Jews. They argued that Jews did this deliberately in order to sap the will and ability of Germans or Frenchmen or Hungarians to resist a biologically determined “Jewish drive” for world domination.

Though secular racists drew upon religious imagery and stereotypes to define hereditary Jewish “behavior,” they insisted that alleged Jewish “traits” were handed down from generation to generation. According to this thinking, since Jews did not form a religious group but a “race,” the conversion of an individual Jew to Christianity did not change his racial “Jewishness” and was therefore an insincere conversion.



Portrait of two young boys wearing Jewish badges in the Kovno ghetto. The reintroduction of the medieval Jewish badge by German authorities had a number of purposes, including the stigmatization and humiliation of Jews, their segregation from the rest of the population, the ability to control their movements, and as part of preparation for deportation. Lithuania, February 1944. *US Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Sbraga Wainer*



Hair samples used for the classification of hair color in pseudoscientific research to define racial differences. 1920–1939. *US Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Naturhistorisches Museum, Vienna*

Political Antisemitism

In the modern era, antisemites added a political dimension to their ideology of hatred. In the last third of the 19th century, antisemitic political parties were formed in Germany, France, and Austria. Publications such as the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* generated or provided support for fraudulent theories of an international Jewish conspiracy. A potent component of political antisemitism was nationalism, whose adherents often falsely denounced Jews as disloyal citizens.

As religious confession became subsumed in European political culture by national identity and nationalist sentiment, a new series of falsehoods that reinforced and was reinforced by older prejudices fueled antisemitic politics: 1) although they enjoyed the benefits of citizenship, Jews were nevertheless secretly disloyal—their conversion was only for material gain; 2) Jews displaced non-Jews in traditionally “noble” professions and

activities (land ownership, the officer corps, the civil service, the teaching profession, the universities) and blocked the entry of non-Jews into professions that they controlled and that represented the future prosperity of the nation (for example, industry, trade, finance, and the entertainment industry); 3) Jews used their supposedly disproportionate control of the media to mislead the “nation” about its true interests and welfare; and 4) Jews had assumed the leadership of the Social Democratic, and later Communist, movements in order to destroy middle-class values of nation, religion, and private property.

That these prejudices bore little relationship to political, social, and economic realities in any European country did not matter to those attracted to their political expression.



In France in 1894, Captain Alfred Dreyfus, the only Jewish member of the French Army’s general staff, was convicted of passing military secrets to Germany. Later, proof of forgery confirmed his innocence, but Dreyfus remained the victim of a cover-up to divert attention from army corruption. Image ca. 1898. *Bildarchiv Foto Marburg*



The cover of *Los Protocolos de los Sabios de Sión*. Mexico City, Mexico, 2005. *US Holocaust Memorial Museum*

The Protocols of the Elders of Zion is the most notorious and widely distributed antisemitic publication of modern times. Its lies about Jews, which have been repeatedly discredited, continue to circulate today, especially on the Internet.



Antisemitic cartoon by Seppla (Josef Plank). Germany, ca. 1938. *US Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Library of Congress*

Jews are depicted as a sinister octopus dominating and controlling the world.