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Anti-Semitism

Anti-Semitism is the hostility toward or the discrimination directed against Jews because of their religion, race, and ethnicity (Merriam Webster). Historically, anti-Semitism started as a conflict over religious beliefs, however, it has developed into attempts of fully degrading Jews politically, economically, and socially. Anti-Semitism is demonstrated by acts of hatred that target Jewish people, their religious practices, and the Jewish state of Israel. Throughout history, Jews have been brutally persecuted and this hatred has resulted in the death of many innocent lives. Even after the most brutal Anti-Semitic genocide, the Holocaust, the world still has not ceased to remove the disturbing presence of anti-Semitism. Today anti-Semitism is not only driven by religious and racial factors, but also ideological and political. This stands as threat to humanity, and it is unfortunate that the world has yet to learn from the atrocities that have occurred. The brutal history that Jews have faced demonstrates the hostility of anti-Semitism and indicates the danger it poses to people all around the globe. There is a crucial need to promote universal religious tolerance; anti-Semitism in the past has affected world peace and it is still prevalent worldwide.

Jews have dealt with harsh persecution way before the term anti-Semitism was developed. Starting in biblical times, the Hebrew people in the Ancient Near East were persecuted simply for refusing to worship idols. They were exiled from Babylonia and

had their temple destroyed (Murray 103). Eventually, when Christianity was established, it became the exclusive religion of the Roman Empire and Jews were seen as a threat. Romans forced Jews to choose between converting to Christianity, exile, or death (116). Many Christians also blamed the Jews for killing Christ. Throughout the middle ages, Jews were excluded politically, socially, and economically. Jews were prohibited from marrying Christians, excluded from holding governmental positions, and forbidden from reading the Bible in Hebrew (116). They were also excluded from public places, forced to wear distinguishable clothing, and forced to live in ghettos. Jews were not allowed to own land, and ultimately had no opportunities to make money. Eventually, the crusades began and Christians attempted to gain control of the Holy Land. In the process, twelve thousand Jews were massacred (Fletcher 175). In the mid 14th century, the Bubonic Plague struck, and many people blamed the Jews and used them as a scapegoat and blamed for the epidemic. Thousands of Jews were slaughtered and burned to death. During the Protestant Reformation in the 16th Century, Martin Luther created a disquisition and preached sermons that encouraged Christians to kill Jews (186). Christians believed it was okay to destroy Jewish synagogues, prayer books, and homes. Ultimately, for many centuries Jews were persecuted against and isolated solely because of their religious beliefs.

In the 19th century, Jews were finally given the opportunity to prosper and immerse into European culture and society, until the Jewish Question arose. The Jewish Question was an argument that disputed the status and treatment of Jews because of their race (Murray 134). Prior to this question, Jews were persecuted because of what they believed, but now a racial factor was introduced, as they were also being mistreated

because of who they biologically were. In a time of nationalism and racism, the term “anti-Semitism” arose in 1873, when a German Protestant claimed that Jews were scheming against the rest of the world. Politicians throughout Europe began to oppose Jews to bring disparate social groups together, and portrayed Jews as racial aliens in propaganda (134). Ultimately, the central difference between anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism is the racial dimension, but altogether Jews have been long mistreated and blamed simply because they are different.

Overall, Jews experienced a long history of being blamed. Unfortunately, anti-Semitic behavior evolved into genocides. For instance, in the early 1900s, the Russian Revolution ended, and about 60,000 Jewish people were murdered (136). However, of all the atrocities Jews have experienced, the most horrifying took place between 1933 and 1945 under Adolf Hitler’s rule. This genocide is known as the Holocaust, and six million Jews were brutally killed (136). Essentially, Hitler blamed the Jews for Germany’s loss of World War I. He believed that Jews conspired to destroy the Aryan race, which Hitler claimed to be supreme over Semitics. His plan was to publicize Jews as a threat to Aryans, and then eliminate the threat. Starting in 1933, Jews were deprived of their freedom and excluded from public life. At the start of persecution, some Jews fled Germany while they could, but those that remained were discriminated against and publicly humiliated. In 1935, the Nuremberg Laws were introduced, which revoked Jews of their citizenships in Germany and stripped them of legal and economic rights (137). Aryan’s began to take over all Jewish businesses, and synagogues were burned. Specifically, on November 9th 1938, over a thousand synagogues were destroyed and burned, ninety-one Jews were killed, and around 26,000 were sent to concentration

camps (137). This horrifying night of riots is known as Kristallnacht, the Night of Broken Glass, and catalyzed the extreme, violent atrocities that the Jews experienced during the Holocaust. Shortly after, thousands of Jews fled Germany, however most of the refugees were sent back to Europe and were eventually killed. World War II started in 1939, and as it heightened, Jews were increasingly killed and sent to concentration camps. In order to expedite the “final solution to the Jewish problem,” Nazis created death camps that held Jews prisoners (137). Jews were brutally killed in gas camps, shot to death, and sent on death marches from camp to camp.

Due to the horrors of the Holocaust, the United Nations created a Jewish State in Palestine. However, this impacted the Arabs, and when the Jewish State of Israel was established in 1948, it was attacked the next day by Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Iraq (139). The negotiation of the boundaries has caused a disruption of peace between Jews and Arabs, and has caused great tension and violence that still exists today. According to Bat Ye’or, “This new antisemitism appears to be triggered by the jihadist ideology, which intends to destroy Israel and unfolds according to jihadist strategy and legislation” (Contemporary Antisemitism).

Despite the fact that the Holocaust ended more than seventy years ago, unfortunately anti-Semitism has not. Shortly after the world witnessed the brutality of the Holocaust, anti-Semitism became shameful. The affects of anti-Semitism were so disturbing and ruthless, that it became less common and less accepted. In the 1960’s the Catholic Church even apologized and discharged the claim they made about Jews killing Christ. Essentially, the expression of anti-Semitism faded shortly after the Holocaust; however, it did not completely die out. It took the death of six million Jews for people to

stop expressing their hatred, and this only lasted a short period of time. In the 21st century, anti-Semitism has resurfaced and it imposes risks to the safety of the world. According to Alvin H. Rosenfeld, “Resurgent over the past decade, it is once again a disturbing presence on the European continent, in many Arab and Muslim countries, and elsewhere” (1). In 2004, the U.S. Congress passed the Global Anti-Semitism Review Act, which documents all global acts of anti-Semitism. This offers direct evidence and confirmation that anti-Semitism is rising annually around the world. According to Denis MacShane, The author of *Globalizing Hatred: The New Antisemitism*: “Neo-antisemitism is a twenty-first century global ideology, with its own thinkers, organizers, spokespersons, state sponsors and millions of adherents . . . The new anti-Semitism threatens all of humanity” (2). Ultimately, the safety of Jewish people is at risk, but so is the safety of those surrounded by Jews. The improvement of technology and weapons in the 21st century along with hostility of anti-Semites today poses extreme threats. Rosenfeld mentions the unease anti-Semitism has caused, and many Jews have felt compelled to hire extreme security at events, synagogues, and even on Jewish Campuses. According to a report by researchers at Tel Aviv University in Israel, in 2013 there were 554 recorded incidents against Jewish people, and it increased to 766 incidents in 2014 (Hjelmgaard). The study also stated:

The overall feeling among many Jewish people is one of living in an intensifying anti-Jewish environment that has become not only insulting and threatening, but outright dangerous, and that they are facing an explosion of hatred towards them as individuals, their communities, and Israel, as a Jewish state. (Hjelmgaard)

The increase of attacks are for many reasons, including the rise of Islamic State militants in Syria and Iraq, as well as increased tension regarding the status of Israel and who the land belongs to.

From the graffiti displays of hate on synagogues to buses being bombed, incidents of anti-Semitism are on the rise and pose threats to the safety of not only Jewish people, but also the world. For some reason, many people ignore anti-Semitism, or are unaware that it still exists. Factually, anti-Semitism is on the rise. People cannot be afraid to accept that evil and hatred exists. Many people are not noticing that anti-Semitism is increasing; because the media is not portraying the daily hate crimes occurring throughout Europe and the world. This is a serious problem, because the more we ignore anti-Semitism, the more it will escalate. History repeats itself, and what has happened to past generations can likely happen to future generation. The world needs to use history as a striking reminder that we need to speak up against anti-Semitism, and cannot stay silent while injustice is occurring globally.

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