

Racism

Philosophy that attributes a person or group's character, abilities, appearance, intelligence, and behavior to their race - usually defined as a population with traits in common. Racists divide the world into "superior" and "inferior" races, and believe that, by nature and fate, the superior peoples have the right to dominate the inferior. Before World War II racism began to exert great influence on the policies of political movements in Europe, especially those of the Nazi Party in Germany. The persecution of specific racial groups during the Holocaust, particularly the Jews, was a product of the Nazi racial view of the world.

In the mid-1850s Comte Arthur de Gobineau published his "Essay on the Inequality of Human Races." Before Gobineau, racism was mostly a subject for scientists. He turned racism into a cultural and political issue, by saying that the deterioration of the modern age resulted from the mixing of superior and inferior races. He divided humanity into the black, yellow, and white races, and claimed that only the pure white, or Aryan, race was and could be truly noble.

Antisemites used racist theory to prove the morality of their hatred of Jews. Houston Stewart Chamberlain pitted Germans against Jews in his writings. Germans were seen as the highest cultural achievers and the saviors of humanity; Jews were a "bastard race" of greedy, inferior foreigners who lived in the midst of Europe, but behaved differently than their neighbors. Both groups had entered history at the same time, and thus had to compete to the bitter end for domination. In fact, all of human history was a struggle between the races, and the Germans were fated to destroy the Jews. Other antisemites blamed Jews as the middle class that devoured money and kept others in poverty.

The Nazis sharpened political racist philosophy for their own purposes and turned theory into practice in their attempt to destroy all of European Jewry. Racism was a major element in Nazi ideology; the Nazis were able to "justify" their horrible actions by making the Jews seem less human. Thus, by the time physical attacks were initiated against the Jews, it seemed they even

deserved what was coming to them. Dietrich Eckart, one of Hitler's early political advisors, said that no one would have left the Jews alive throughout history had they known what their true nature really was, and what their evil plans for the world were. Hitler truly believed these ideas; he said that an inferior race, like the Jews, had more in common with the apes than with superior human races. Heinrich Himmler motivated his soldiers to carry out his murderous orders by dehumanizing the Jews completely. He claimed that the Jews were similar to fleas and mice - disgusting lower forms of life that deserved to be exterminated. The Nazis tried to convince the German people of the truth of their claims by creating propaganda films that visually proved racist theory.

Another way the Nazis made racism look honorable was to propagate it, not through obvious violence, but through the cooperation of government agencies. Hitler gradually promoted racism through "legitimate" laws that his government made, chief among them the Nuremberg LAWS of 1935. These laws legally called for the separation of Jews from Christians, and also defined for the first time who was to be considered a Jew, and who was to be considered an Aryan. A Jew, according to this legislation, was someone with at least three Jewish grandparents. An Aryan was a person whose four grandparents all belonged to the Aryan race. In order to become a member of the elite SS troops, however, a person had to prove that his ancestors were pure Aryans in the period before 1800 (at which time the Jews were given greater freedoms and thus had more of a chance to mix with Aryans, thereby polluting the gene pool). Someone with only two Jewish grandparents was defined as a *Mischling*, meaning a person of mixed heritage. *Mischlinge* were not allowed to have sexual relations with either Jews or Aryans, so they were doomed to have no children and die out. Thus, these laws brought racism legally out into the open.

As the Germans occupied different European countries during World War II and expected collaboration toward the reordering of society in accordance with their racial views, they put European racism to the test. Many of those countries' leaders, especially those who were politically conservative, were ambivalent about Hitler's demand to hand over their Jews. Marshal Ion

Antonescu of Romania originally agreed to deport and exterminate his country's Jews. He later changed his mind when he saw where the war was heading. In Hungary, Admiral Miklos Horthy did not succumb to Nazi pressure until they occupied his country. Marshal Philippe Petain of France agreed to give up the non-French Jews who had sought refuge there, but tried to save his country's native Jews. In Italy, racism was never successfully spread to the masses.

The countries allied against Germany during the war, namely the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union, loudly condemned racism and used it as a motivation to win the war and destroy the Nazi regime; this despite their racist activities at home against blacks, colonial populations, and Jews, respectively.

Today, the Holocaust is used as the prime warning against the advancement of racism. However, racism still continues to exist. The internet has provided a free forum for expression of racist ideas, and less-educated groups use stereotypes as the foundations of their beliefs. Some people still fear those who are different, and some countries still utilize the racist myths of the past to shape their modern policy. (see also Propaganda, Nazi.)