

Teaching *the* Holocaust

AND OTHER GENOCIDES

Created in collaboration with the Holocaust & Human Rights Education Center, New York State Education Department, and the New York State Archives Partnership Trust.

Adolf Hitler's Letter to Adolf Gemlich

Hitler's "*Gemlich Letter*," written on September 16, 1919, is considered his first major written statement on antisemitism. It was addressed to Adolf Gemlich, a German army soldier who had requested clarification on the "Jewish question" while Hitler was working as an army propaganda officer in Munich.

If the danger represented by the Jews today finds expression in the undeniable dislike of them felt by a large section of our people, the cause of this dislike is on the whole not to be found in the clear recognition of the corrupting activity of the Jews generally among our people, whether conscious or unconscious; it originates mainly through personal relationship, and from the impression left behind him by the individual Jew which is almost invariably unfavorable. Antisemitism thereby acquires only too easily the character of being a manifestation of emotion. But this is wrong. Antisemitism as a political movement must not be, cannot be, determined by emotional criteria, but only through the recognition of facts. The facts are as follows: First, the Jews are definitely a race and not a religious community. The Jew himself never calls himself a Jewish German, a Jewish Pole, a Jewish American, but only a German, a Polish, an American Jew. From the foreign nations in whose midst he lives the Jew has adopted very little more than their language. A German who is compelled to use French in France, Italian in Italy, Chinese in China, does not thereby become a Frenchman, an Italian, or a Chinese; similarly a Jew who happens to live among us and is thereby compelled to use the German language cannot be called a German. Even the Mosaic faith, however important for the maintenance of this race, cannot be considered as absolutely decisive in the question of whether or not someone is a Jew. There is hardly a single race whose members belong exclusively to one particular religion.

Through a thousand years of inbreeding, often practiced within a very narrow circle, the Jew has in general preserved his race and character much more rigorously than many of the peoples among whom he lives. And as a result, there is living amongst us a non-German, foreign race, unwilling and unable to sacrifice its racial characteristics, to deny its own feeling, thinking and striving, and which none the less possesses all the political rights that we ourselves have. The feelings of the Jew are concerned with purely material things; his thoughts and desires even more so. The dance round the golden calf becomes a ruthless struggle for all those goods which, according to our innermost feelings, should not be the highest and most desirable things on this earth.

The value of the individual is no longer determined by his character, by the importance of his achievements for all, but solely by the amount of his possessions, by his money.

The value of the nation is no longer to be measured in terms of the sum of its moral and spiritual forces, but solely on the basis of the wealth of its material goods.

From this feeling emerges that concern and striving for money and for the power which can protect it which makes the Jew unscrupulous in his choice of means, ruthless in his use of them to achieve this aim.

In an autocratically governed state he whines for the favor of the 'Majesty' of the prince and abuses it to batten on his subjects like a leech. In a democracy he courts the favor of the masses, crawls before the 'majesty of the people' and yet knows only the majesty of money.

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He destroys the character of the prince with byzantine flattery, and national pride, which is the strength of a nation, with mockery and shameless training in vice. His weapon is that public opinion which is never given utterance by the press, but is always led by it and falsified by it. His power is the power of money which in the form of interest effortlessly and interminably multiplies itself in his hands and forces upon nations that most dangerous of yokes, the sad consequences of which are so difficult to perceive because of the initial gleam of gold. Everything which makes men strive for higher things, whether religion, socialism or democracy, is for him only a means to an end, to the satisfaction of a lust for money and domination. His activities produce a racial tuberculosis among nations.

And this has the following result: Antisemitism stemming from purely emotive reasons will always find its expression in the form of pogroms. But antisemitism based on reason must lead to the systematic legal combating and removal of the rights of the Jew, which he alone of the foreigners living among us possesses (legislation to make them aliens). Its final aim, however, must be the uncompromising removal of the Jews altogether. Both are possible only under a government of national strength, never under a government of national impotence.

The Republic in Germany owes its birth not to the united national will of our people but to the cunning exploitation of a series of circumstances which combined to produce a deep general discontent. But these circumstances were independent of the form of the State, and are still active today; more active, indeed, today than before. And a large section of our people is aware that no mere change in the form of the State as such can alter or improve our position, but only the rebirth of the moral and spiritual energies of the nation.

This rebirth will be set in motion not by the political leadership of irresponsible majorities under the influence of party dogmas or of an irresponsible press, nor by catchwords and slogans of international coinage, but only through the ruthless action of personalities with a capacity for national leadership and an inner sense of responsibility.

But this fact robs the Republic of the internal support of the spiritual forces of the nation which are so necessary. And so the present leaders of the State are compelled to seek support from those who alone benefited from the changed situation in Germany and do so now, and who for this reason have been the driving forces of the revolution, namely, the Jews. Taking no account of the Jewish peril, which has certainly been recognized by present-day leaders—proof of this is the various statements of present leading figures—they are compelled to accept the support readily offered by the Jews for their own benefit, and therefore to pay the required price. And this price consists not only in giving the Jews every possible encouragement, but above all in hampering the struggle of the duped nation against their brother Jews—in the neutralizing of the antisemitic movement.

Noakes, J., & Pridham, G. (1983). *Nazism, 1919-1945: The rise to power, 1919-1934*.

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Excerpts from *Mein Kampf* by Adolf Hitler

For Adolf Hitler, antisemitism was an unalterable creed, something which permeated his thinking and the thinking of the Nazi leadership. The Jew was Hitler's personal enemy, from his days in Vienna to his dying day in Berlin, where he called once more for the destruction of "the prisoner of all peoples: international Jewry." In *Mein Kampf*, written in 1925, Hitler displayed a violent antisemitism with roots in traditional and racial anti-Jewish attitudes.

- "The personification of the devil as the symbol of all evil assumes the living shape of the Jew . . . "
- "I believe that I am acting in accordance with the will of the almighty creator. By defending myself against the Jew, I am fighting for the work of the Lord . . ."
- "With satanic joy in his face, the black-haired Jewish youth lurks in wait for the unsuspecting girl whom he defiles with his blood, thus stealing her from her people With every means he tries to destroy the racial foundations of the people he has set out to subjugate. . . ."
- "In the course of the centuries their outward appearance had become Europeanized and had taken on a human look; in fact, I even took them for Germans . . ."
- "Wherever I went, I began to see Jews, and the more I saw, the more sharply they became distinguished in my eyes from the rest of humanity . . ."
- "The Jew was never in possession of a culture of his own, the foundations of his intellectual work was always provided by others . . ."
- "Culturally, he contaminates art, literature, the theater, makes a mockery of natural feeling, overthrows all concepts of beauty and sublimity, of the noble and the good, and instead drags men down into the sphere of his own base nature."
- "For a racially pure people which is conscious of its blood can never be enslaved by the Jew. In this world he will forever be master over bastards and bastards alone. And so he tries systematically to lower the racial level by a continuous poisoning of individuals."
- "The Jew is always a parasite in the body of other people. . . . He is and remains the typical parasite, a sponger who like a noxious bacillus keeps spreading as soon as a favorable medium invites him. And the effect of his existence is also like that of spongers; wherever he appears, the host people dies out after a shorter or longer period . . ."

Adolf Hitler, & Manheim, R. (1969). *Mein Kampf*. With an introduction by D.C. Watt, translated by Ralph Manheim. Hutchinson.

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Questions:

1. What arguments does Hitler present in his letter to justify his antisemitic views, and how do these arguments reflect his broader ideological beliefs that would later shape Nazi policies?
2. How does Hitler differentiate between “emotional” and “rational” anti-Semitism in his letter, and what does this distinction reveal about his approach to propaganda and political strategy?
3. In what ways does Hitler’s letter to Gemlich foreshadow the racial policies and actions of the Nazi regime during his rule?
4. What role does Hitler attribute to Jews in German society, and how does he propose to address what he perceives as the 'Jewish problem'?
5. How does Hitler’s portrayal of Jews in *Mein Kampf* reflect both traditional religious antisemitism and modern racial antisemitism, and how does he intertwine these perspectives to justify his ideology?
6. What rhetorical strategies does Hitler use to dehumanize Jewish people in his writing, and how might these strategies have influenced the perceptions and attitudes of his readers at the time?
7. How does Hitler’s depiction of Jews as both powerful manipulators and parasitic destroyers reveal contradictions within his ideological framework?
8. To what extent does Hitler’s claim of acting according to divine will serve as a means to legitimize his violent intentions, and how does this reflect his use of religious rhetoric for political purposes?
9. How did Hitler’s perception of Jews as a threat to racial purity shape Nazi policies regarding racial hygiene and the pursuit of a “racially pure” Aryan state?
10. How does the tone and language used in the letter compare to Hitler’s later public speeches and writings, such as *Mein Kampf*? What does this suggest about the evolution of his rhetoric?