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The Positive and Negative Reactions to the Jewish Question

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For the Jews, their lack of equality and social control in European countries has led to an array of movements and political stances demanding their rights as equal citizens. What is interesting is the mixture and chain reactions to different events throughout history related to the Jewish Question. There are two such responses to this issue that have marked their place in history as both positive and negative towards the Jews to reflect the main argument of the Jewish Question. One response is the Jewish Emancipation, with the addition of religious Zionism, which signifies a want for equal citizenship among the European cultures the Jews resided during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Jewish Emancipation triggered movements that operated under the notion of total citizenship and later a desire for an independent Jewish state which resulted in Zionism. These movements are centered on the hopeful and positive outcomes from the Jewish perspective. The second response is the Final Solution which resonated throughout Europe, initially instilled by the German Nazi Regime, against the Jews, during World War 2. This period in history created a negative response to the Jewish Question based on the Nazi Party's non-Jewish perspective. Both said responses help to paint a better picture of opposing perspectives in relation to the Jews and the overall Jewish Question throughout Europe.

With the Jewish Question as an overarching theme throughout the history of the Jews the Jewish Emancipation was a period in which the Jews put power behind their desire to be considered equal among their societies; Zionism is an example of this power. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries this "process of Jewish emancipation...ruptured Jewish continuity...and modernity brought diversity."¹ With any great movements towards the betterment of humans there needed to be an installation of power, psychological hold, as well as social opportunity to strike the interest in the Jewish people among different countries. As a background basis to the Jewish Emancipation, the Enlightenment helped create this installation of rooted interest in the civic equality which stressed the following, "...deprivation would be a contradiction of the principle of 'natural rights' of man..."² With this in mind great leaders behind the Jewish Emancipation came forth to deliver meaningful hope. One leader was Gabriel Riesser,

who during the mid1800's was a pioneer for the Jewish Emancipation in Germany. For the greater goal of emancipation, Riesser tried to diffuse a meaningful message to Jews who wanted an end to their inequality. Riesser believed that "...in order to obtain full civil rights...the Jews must fight for their own rights, and for that purpose they must organize themselves in special associations..."³ The help of a leader was important for the Jews to find that common goal and unity to bring about change. Riesser is a good example of this strong power and effort that was put forth to help the Jewish people. Leaders like Riesser were also the building blocks that kept Jews so enthusiastic and optimistic during the emancipation. This is similar to other emancipations that take place in come centuries to come, such as the Civil Rights Movement in the United States during the 1950s, 60s, and 70s.

Jewish identity and nationality became the leading grounds for change. The Jews understood that there is security among one another due to strong cultural and faith based normality's. With this in mind, the rise of Zionism began to take place as the underlying goal for the Jews concerning independence away from their countries and cultures of Europe. Since history seemed to repeat itself for the Jews in Europe, the time came for a new identity to emerge among the Jews. Zionism grew as a breakaway of Jewish emancipation, and introduced pioneers like Theodore Herzl and Rabbi Kook. Zionism is a hefty example because of the overall goal of independence away from persecution and the eventual adjustments of the Jews themselves; this movement was exactly what was needed to inflict change for the Jews. Zionism, which was introduced by Theodore Herzl was essentially an attempt at the Jewish Question from the Jewish perspective. Advances in positive Jewish perspectives are what underlined the Jews in their faith to change and encourage a nationality that they had longed for. In terms of the religious Zionism the political side must be mentioned first. Theodore Herzl began his writing of *Der Judenstaat* or *The Jewish State* as a strictly political take on Jewish equality after the unrest of the Dreyfus Affair in France that took place in 1864. The Dreyfus Affair was followed upon the anti-Semitic events that took place in a so-called "enlightened" country which allowed equal rights to its Jewish citizens.⁴ Herzl's *The Jewish State* argues "that Jews could never be at home in Europe...the answer was an independent Jewish homeland..."⁵ Religious Zionism would be a return to a nation that was for the Jews themselves. A land that could be uniquely theirs, where they could be full citizens with rights and could be free to practice their faith; instead of becoming merged into societies and cultures that were anti-Semitic. There became a desire to be free as a "Society of Jews"⁶ and the Jewish State would be separated from Europe and geographically be nowhere near Europe. There were plans to begin a Jewish Society in Palestine or Argentina during this time. Herzl believed that the unity of European Jews was rooted in "their common ancestry, their history, and their rejection by the society surrounding them."⁷ It seems that the road to emancipation was not working, even if European cultures did embrace and welcome the Jews there was still the underlying view of the Jews as alien.

With the help of the positive, Jewish perspective and leadership of Theodore Herzl the branch of religious Zionism took hold. Religious Zionists began as supporters of the Jewish State as mentioned by Herzl while going along "theological and practical ground."⁸ Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook was an Ashkenazi chief rabbi in 1921 who influenced the theological foundation for the "return to Zion" as mentioned in the Bible. Many Jews thought that by returning to Zion on their own was a mistake to do without God's help. Kook explained that it was God's will to make them the "agents of change" and that the Jews are not going against God's will; a justification that was widely encouraged throughout European Jews. The quote by Michael Satlow does well to understand Kook's basis for religious Zionism, "...the Jewish state in the land of Israel was a

move toward redemption. Because Zionism was created by God, these thinkers (Kook) cleverly (but somewhat illogically) argued, it too must be good and part of God's plan."⁹ Satlow also mentions that this "view of progress, in which humans were seen as moving along a straight line toward 'redemption' and 'perfection.'"¹⁰ With this in mind, religious Zionists positively pressed forward for the establishment of the Jewish State in Palestine and was considered the "ingathering of the exiles", which was seen as the first of God's promised redemption. It is interesting to note the common ground of positive religious thought from a Jewish perspective which then ties into the overall Jewish question. The positive approach and following to Zionism was immense throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century's and a true sign of broadening the rights of the Jews which was the overall goal. The positives of the Jewish Emancipation unfortunately led to the negatives of the great Final Solution chosen to rid the Jews of Europe by the Nazi Regime. The two are total opposites concerning the Jewish Question based on the Jewish and non-Jewish perspectives.

The Final Solution was the anti-Semitic and negative viewpoint of the German Nazi Party and their plans to exterminate the Jews of Europe. The Final Solution was also the anti-Jewish response to the Jewish Question. The non-Jewish perspective became the ruling majority over the fight for equal rights among the Jews. The majority was ruled by Adolf Hitler who with the control of the Nazi Regime planned to rid the Jews of Europe as the solution to save the ethnic German race. Deprivation of economic and professional lives among the Jews was the beginning of the radical plan and therefore installed fear among the European Jews. The Nazis were answering the Jewish Question by depriving them of their hard work of integrating into European societies. The Nazis viewed the Jews as a separate and degenerate race that did not belong in the demographics of Germany or Europe. There was to be no more assimilation or integration into German life. The quote by Albert Einstein reads, "Should my theory (relativity) be proven untrue, France will say that I am German and Germany will declare that I am a Jew."¹¹ The fact that the beginning stages were the tamest is to say that the final stages were much worse, by inflicting physical harm among a large population of European Jews. The Final Solution covers this last plan and the decision-making process for the Nazi leaders. The racial underpinning of the Jews was the mind-set of the Nazi's and they were to rid any person in Germany who was not ethnically pure and of German descent. A recharge of the German population was to be fulfilled, that was essentially the ethnic cleansing of the Germans to sustain the road to "national recovery."¹² To do this the Jews and other people the Nazis saw as degenerate were exterminated by mass murder. Ghettos, work camps, and death camps were a part of the Nazis overall Final Solution of the Jewish Question. However, it can be debated whether or not the Final Solution and the planning of mass extermination was the initial plan for the Jew's demise or it could have been the moving and resettlement of the Jews before the brutal horrors of the Holocaust. Large-scale population resettlement which was coined the "Madagascar Plan" seemed to be the Nazi's initial plan to rid the Jews of Germany and resettle them on the island of Madagascar. Instead the Final Solution changed the course of history for the Jews as becoming a larger mass murdering of the Jews, not resettlement. The persecution of the Jews which had plagued them throughout their history once again had to push through the negative to get to the positive. The Jews had created resistance groups that, like emancipation, shed some hope for the Jews as they lived with the Holocaust throughout Europe.

Throughout history the Jews have been persecuted and treated as outcasts. Their one goal was to be integrated into society while still being able to practice their faith. Stemming from this problem came the Jewish question which had many reactions both positive and negative from

Jews and non-Jews. The desire for integration led to the Jewish Emancipation with the help of religious Zionism acting as the positive Jewish nationalism while the negative acted as a barrier towards their final goal. The Final Solution and the Jewish Emancipation are opposites, there are, however, considerable parallels within the two periods of history that shed light on the positivist thought of freedom and life without persecution. Unfortunately though, the Nazis and the Final Solution became the terrible backlash of the Jewish Emancipation that seemed to set the Jews further back in their plans to be equal citizens among European cultures.

The two responses engagements of the acts of the Jews in their struggles, but it should be recognized that the two responses are indeed combined to create a bigger picture of the Jewish Question. The Jewish situation had always been burdened with persecution and other issues surrounding the faith based group but the Jews always had a seemingly large amount of hope through all circumstances. For them, this was the biggest impact of positive thinking, hope for better days amidst all the horror. The Jewish Question has many responses but the Jewish Emancipation, with the optimistic future of becoming equals, and the Final Solution to rid the Jews of Europe were both Jewish and non-Jewish perspectives towards the Jews and those themes have coextending throughout the history of the Jewish people.

¹ Satlow, Michael L. *Creating Judaism: History, Tradition, Practice*. (New York: Columbia UP, 2006), 68

² Three Periods in the History of Jewish Emancipation, 376

³ "Encyclopedia Judaica." *Encyclopedia Judaica*. (N.p., n.d. Web. 06 Apr. 2013.), 295

⁴ Satlow, 271

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Brenner, Michael, *A Short History of the Jews*. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2010), 262

⁷ *Ibid.*, 263

⁸ Satlow, 63

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Brenner, 323

¹² Encyclopedia Judaica, 21