

# Dehumanization: An Early Warning Sign of Future Political Violence

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## **Introduction**

When taking a quick scroll on social media or tuning in to the daily news, it is easy to get lost in the sea of information and horrific atrocities occurring around the world at any given moment. Especially when the political structures in place on local, national, and international levels do not seem to be able to enforce the policies they publish or lead nations to prioritize their people and human life. One of these issues, the occurrence of political violence on multiple levels and scales, is one that this paper seeks to address which actually has a feasible solution.

Dehumanization. It is the tool for assessing the occurrence of future political violence and taking action with the goal of preventing and ceasing the escalation of such violence, rather than focusing on attempting to get a sovereign nation-state to listen to the demands of international organizations that cannot enforce their mandates without support of the nation-state and others which may be allies of the first. By identifying what dehumanization is, how it has appeared in history through case studies of colonization, the Holocaust, and the current violence between Israel and Palestine, and what it indicates for the future including the future of the United States when it comes to political violence, prevention may become possible.

## **Literature Review Overview**

Dehumanization of minority groups being a component which then perpetuates the rise of political violence and facilitates its execution has been explored in previous literature and research. This has been conducted from various perspectives, including neuroscience, history, and political theory. Each review of the topic has been constructed with different goals and arguments, and forms the foundation of the work done on this subject matter, to which this paper will add a contemporary point of view rooted in lessons taught by the past.

### **Dehumanization's Definition**

In terms of defining what dehumanization is, Haslam argues that it is essential to begin by clearly explaining what being human entails. According to Haslam, there are two classifications of being human and therefore two types of dehumanization which occur when the classifications which make someone human are removed from them. The classifications of what it means to be human are named human nature and uniquely human (Haslam). With human nature, it is understood that that definition of humanity stems from attributes that are the key and essential components of being human (Haslam). On the other hand, the categorization of uniquely human is based on paying attention to what makes humans different from other living creatures (Haslam).

Human nature as a classification defines the natural aspects of being human that are present in all humans, even when considering different backgrounds, experiences, and beliefs (Haslam). These natural aspects as presented by Haslam are “cognitive openness”, “depth”, “emotional responsiveness”, “agency, individuality”, and “interpersonal warmth”. As naturally occurring qualities in all humans, these characteristics are indicative of perceiving someone else as a whole human (Haslam). Thus, when these aspects of natural humanity are stripped away from the perception of another person, their humanity as a whole is lost; the act of

dehumanization has taken place (Haslam). In the place of natural human qualities, the dehumanized person is instead seen as a machine for having the perceived characteristics of “rigidity”, “superfacility”, “inertness”, “passivity, fungibility”, and “coldness” (Haslam). Now lacking natural human characteristics in the eyes of others, those who have been dehumanized in a mechanistic way are no longer going to be treated as equals nor individuals with rights, as they are no longer seen in this manner (Haslam).

In terms of uniquely human attributes, Haslam believes that these components of the definition of humanity stand on the foundation of the separation between humans and animals. The consensus as to what differentiates a human being from an animal is that it lies in humans having “refinement”, “maturity”, “moral sensibility”, “civility”, and “rationality, logic” (Haslam). When people are seen as having these unique human qualities, they are subsequently treated with the respect of other human beings. However, when animalistic dehumanization occurs, people who experience such dehumanization are restricted in the sense that they are not given the opportunity to be perceived as a human, for they are stripped perceptually of their unique qualities and seen instead as being equal to an animal (Haslam). Therefore, instead of possessing the prior unique characteristics of a human, those who have been dehumanized are considered to exemplify “coarseness”, “childlikeness”, “amorality, lack of self-restraint”, “lack of culture”, “and “irrationality, instinct” (Haslam). Those who are likened to that of animals become the opposite of what it means to be uniquely human.

### **Morality As An Element Of Dehumanization**

From a lens of morality, dehumanization can also be examined. An application of morality as it relates to social and political groups is to clearly define one group from another and people from each other (Pacilli et al.). From the perspective of a particular group, they are in

the right morally and are considered the ingroup, while opposing groups are outgroups that have fundamental beliefs on morality that may conflict with and challenge the views of the ingroup (Pacilli et al.). This facilitates the idea of competition and othering those who are members of groups outside of one's own social or ideological tier. It begins the process of viewing people as being either an equal who shares in one's humanity and in turn in one's morality who is part of one's ingroup, or as the other who is not on the same level in terms of their perceived humanity nor morality and is part of the outgroup.

As explained by Pacilli et al., individuals who are considered moral are also considered to be human, and the reverse is also true; individuals who are thought of as being immoral are no longer considered nor treated as human beings. Instead, they may be dehumanized in an animalistic manner, being seen as immoral animals in the wrong rather than equal human beings, which can come in the form of dehumanization through language or images which make this association (Pacilli et al.). Once this dehumanization occurs, it becomes increasingly acceptable for those who are seen as animals to become the targets of political violence, and for these forceful acts to be excused as morally just, as the perpetrators of such violence do not see their action as violence upon another human such as themselves (Pacilli et al.). Once this occurs, outgroups are far more than groups of people with differing beliefs or backgrounds, they become legitimate threats in the eyes of the ingroup members (Pacilli et al.). This is incredibly dangerous, as it allows for the legitimization of political violence on the basis of one group's perception of another.

In their own set of two studies with participants in Italy, Pacilli and the paper's additional authors explored the correlation between differentiation of morality between groups and dehumanization of the outgroup. With the first study, Pacilli along with the additional authors

surveyed a sample of Italians and asked them to rate the level of differentiation in values, including truthfulness and genuineness, on a numerical scale between their own political group and the opposing outgroup. In addition, the participants rated various examples of dehumanization on a numerical scale in terms of whether they were in consensus with the statement that was presented to them (Pacilli et al.). The conclusion reached was that there is a definitive forceful correlation between the degree that an ingroup member's identity is tied to the group as a whole and the ability to dehumanize the outgroup animalistically (Pacilli et al.). The more that an ingroup member believes that they as individuals and as the ingroup are correct ideologically and politically and thus morally, the more that they view outgroups as being threats to their ideology and to the presence of morality overall. Since the ingroup sees themselves as moral, the same cannot be true in their eyes for an outgroup that holds the opposite values compared to them as the ingroup, which leads to the perception that the outgroup in its entirety cannot be moral, which further justifies any political violence inflicted upon the outgroup by the ingroup or others.

The second study focused on the same question of the correlation between close association within the ingroup by members of the group and dehumanization of outgroups (Pacilli et al.). However, this time Pacilli et al. added the variable of reminding participants of the political designation in terms of prompting them to respond to ratings as a member of the political association the participants had previously identified as being members (Pacilli et al.). This actually increased the previous influence of an ingroup member's ties to the ingroup and the ability to dehumanize and accept the dehumanization of the outgroups (Pacilli et al.). This work reveals that perceived morality of a particular group in society, whether it be political, social, or

militaristic, is a factor in the act of dehumanizing the other and legitimizing such political violence.

### **The Psychological Examination Of Dehumanization**

From a scientific and psychological perspective, dehumanization can be seen occurring physically in one's brain in a manner that shows an inability to empathize with or care for minority groups. In the brain, there are certain regions, such as the medial prefrontal cortex, which are active when someone displays empathy, which is a demonstration of recognizing another person as a human who needs to be cared for and understood (Guillard & Harris). There are also other regions of the brain such as the amygdala, which are responsible for sending a message to recognize a source of fear (Guillard & Harris). As well as the insula, which is an area of the brain that identifies feelings of revulsion (Guillard & Harris).

In a study analyzed by Guillard and Harris, brain activity in the medial prefrontal cortex indicated the presence of empathy and the ability to see another person as deserving of empathy and therefore human. At the same time, brain activity in the amygdala and insula indicated a response rooted in fear and revulsion, which was linked with an inability to empathize with and see another person as an equal human being (Guillard & Harris). When individuals participating in the study were shown pictures of minority groups which represented groups in a stereotypical manner, the regions of their brains which demonstrated heightened activity were the amygdala and insula (Guillard & Harris). There was a lack of activity in the medial prefrontal cortex when being shown these photographs (Guillard & Harris). Due to this additional activity in areas of the brain which are associated with fear and revulsion when looking at minority groups, Guillard and Harris concluded that the act of dehumanizing another group occurs quickly and easily on a subconscious level.

The research and study presented by Guillard and Harris demonstrates that there is a connection between the perception and the subsequent othering of a minority group. When minorities were seen as their stereotypes rather than as individual human beings, the associated stereotypes became the perception of the people, resulting in the fear center and disgust center in the brain being activated when looking at these images of minorities. The study participants were looking at images of people through a dehumanized lens, and subsequently their brains reacted to the people in the images as outside threats. This shows that dehumanization leads people to perceive minority groups as separate entities from themselves who they may not empathize with, due to not perceiving the humanity within them.

Another psychological manner of analyzing dehumanization is through studying the way in which humans perceive faces (Fincher, Tetlock, et al.). The psychological tools which allow humans to see, evaluate, and recognize other faces are connected to a person's social perception of others and whether or not they perceive those around them to be equal human beings (Fincher, Tetlock, et al.). When a person utilizes the psychological ability they have to see a face as a person rather than as simply physical features that perhaps compose a stereotype within the mind of the viewer, they are able to employ the configural recognition tool which is utilized by a distinct part of one's brain (Fincher, Tetlock, et al.). In a similar sense, when someone does not employ configural recognition psychologically, they are only perceiving a face physically rather than an individual human, and this is in fact the same psychological and physical method used to perceive non-living items that are not humans (Fincher, Tetlock, et al.). When configural recognition is in use, a user is able to see beyond the physical and utilize facial expressions to attempt to understand another person's thoughts, emotions, background, and whole personhood

rather than making an assumption or slapping a stereotype onto a face in their mind and moving on (Fincher, Tetlock, et al.).

When people fail to utilize configural recognition when looking at another person, they are looking at them psychologically the same way that someone would look at an inanimate object (Fincher, Tetlock, et al.). This dehumanizes the person they are looking at, because they do not psychologically see them as a human being, but as someone lower than a human simply taking up space in a moment (Fincher, Tetlock, et al.). In this situation, the viewer does not feel empathy or a connection towards the other person and this makes it so that they may be willing to harm others if they feel that they are in danger whether or not the danger is actually imminent (Fincher, Tetlock, et al.). On the other hand, when configural recognition is in use, people feel emotionally connected to the other person they perceive and this allows them to care about the other person and their perspective, overall making way for a sense of unity and willingness to act with the purpose of supporting the other person before themselves (Fincher, Tetlock, et al.).

Through studying and conducting research on configural recognition of faces, Fincher, Tetlock, and Morris, were able to find a correlation between the physical perception of individuals and dehumanization. The authors conducted research to determine when individuals tend to utilize configural recognition and when they fail to do so, particularly focused on the effect of the dehumanizing behavior of psychologically refraining from using configural recognition on a person's willingness to inflict punishment or harm on those they perceive (Fincher, Tetlock, et al.). To test this, Fincher, Tetlock, and Morris presented study participants with images of a person's face. The first image was a control image, as it was the unaltered image of a person's face (Fincher, Tetlock, et al.). The second image was modified by flipping it upside down, which makes it difficult for individuals to utilize configural recognition to perceive



the person's face (Fincher, Tetlock, et al.). When presented with both of these images and a crime the people had supposedly committed, and then asked to determine how much jail time each person should receive, study participants sentenced the flipped face, which had been dehumanized through impairing the ability of viewers to utilize configural recognition, to more jail time than the face that had not been flipped and subsequently had not been dehumanized (Fincher, Tetlock, et al.).

Study participants were also presented with the same control image of a face, along with a slightly blurred image of that same face, a modification to the image that engages the use of configural recognition, as the facial features that are predominantly focused on when configural recognition is not in use cannot be clearly seen when the image is blurred slightly (Fincher, Tetlock, et al.). As the use of configural recognition was prompted through this change to the photo, the second image became humanized rather than dehumanized (Fincher, Tetlock, et al.). The effect of this was seen in the participants' response to the same activity when they sentenced the second face, which called for the psychological use of the tool to perceive the humanity within another person, to less jail time than the non-blurred face (Fincher, Tetlock, et al.). This reveals that the psychological ability to either perceive a person as a complete human being with configural recognition or as a series of facial features in a manner that likens a person to an inanimate item by failing to employ configural recognition, is an indicator of whether or not someone is being dehumanized (Fincher, Tetlock, et al.). In turn, this perception of another person's humanity or lack thereof influences the manner in which viewers treat the people they perceive and are willing to inflict harm or punishment (Fincher, Tetlock, et al.).

Facial recognition plays a role in dehumanization on a psychological level and reaffirms the integral role of dehumanization in the carrying out of violence towards minority groups as

well. When perceiving some minority groups, including people of other races, economic classes, or outgroups in general, it has been found that configural recognition is not typically in use (Fincher, Tetlock, et al.). This indicates that when perceiving minorities or those of different societal groups than oneself, people have a tendency to dehumanize the other. This is dangerous, as with dehumanization comes an increased legitimization and willingness to support or inflict harm on others (Fincher, Tetlock, et al.). In turn, these minority and outsider groups that are often the victims of being dehumanized through a lack of utilizing configural recognition by those who perceive them, also more frequently found to suffer from violence (Fincher, Tetlock, et al.). This also supports the work of Pacilli et al. in demonstrating the way in which ingroups dehumanize outgroups, by providing psychological work from a separate angle that comes to a conclusion on the same theoretical foundation.

### **Dehumanization Legitimizes Political Violence**

From a perspective of political violence and war, dehumanization allows violence to be legitimized, whether it be organized military action, guerilla fighting, or intentional targeting of minority groups. By dehumanizing the person or group on the receiving end of violence, it creates a sense of moral justification, as the person or group is presented and treated as a threat that must be extinguished at all costs (Ścigaj). This is true whether or not the group is a minority ethnic community or a recognized criminal organization. Dehumanization is used on both ends of the spectrum of political violence, and is an integral element to carrying out acts of harm. In an analysis and exploration into dehumanization, Ścigaj explains the different avenues that have been used to perpetuate political violence through dehumanization.

In a military context, dehumanization is used towards both the target of a military attack and the soldiers carrying out the action (Ścigaj). Soldiers as individuals and the military as a

systemic approach, dehumanize the people on the other end of a military attack by using words including “target” or “objective” and employing the use of technology to carry out killing (Ścigaj). This legitimizes the violence of the military by changing the way those on the receiving end are perceived from human beings to criminals who deserve to be killed. At the same time, the action of killing in war is legitimized by viewing it as a necessary act for protection of the whole, rather than the organized killing of human life. When killing is viewed as the rightful act of serving one’s country it is more acceptable to kill if one can label the other as a threat. It can also be dehumanizing to the soldiers themselves as some may dissociate or distance themselves from their physical selves (Ścigaj). One must also consider that the military is an organized system designed to go to war, and the individual soldiers of a military regime are required to wear the same uniforms and a rigorous training process which teaches them to prioritize the value of their nation and military goals above their own lives.

When it comes to dehumanization of minority groups, Ścigaj draws attention to so-called “savage wars” and the role of dehumanization in legitimizing this type of political violence. Historically, “savage wars” were identified as fighting between or with an uncivilized population, including indigenous tribes and guerrilla fighters (Ścigaj). However, Ścigaj defines “savage wars” with a more objective perspective, explaining that it is a conflict between actors which are not organized or utilizing the norms of military fighting tactics, essentially non-state actors (Ścigaj). Typically, these “savage wars” result in much more dehumanized tactics of fighting and less discriminate attacks, which lead to more civilian deaths, as the actors at play do not subscribe to the traditional norms and international agreements on carrying out a just war (Ścigaj).

In a sense, the term “savage wars” also dehumanizes the victims of attacks, as it does not give the violence they face the same legitimization as a war conducted by actors who are considered to be recognized states. At the same time, the perpetrators of such political violence are also dehumanized, as these actors are seen as uncivilized sub-humans for not adhering to international policies. Calling a period of extreme violence a “savage war” undermines the suffering of victims and isolates a conflict as being outside the civil sphere, removing the perception of humanity and allowing for the involvement of additional states and international organizations with the presented goal of restoring civility and humanity. All the while, stripping the victims and perpetrators of such wars from the ability to retain humanity or be viewed as a whole human being on their own.

### **Dehumanization’s Role In Subtypes of Violence**

While there is a consensus historically throughout the literature on dehumanization that it is a factor in political violence, Rai along with additional authors believes that there is a difference in terms of what subtypes of violence are influenced by dehumanization. Rai and the additional authors of the paper “Dehumanization increases instrumental violence, but not moral violence” identify two subtypes of violence. One of these subtypes is moral violence, which is thought to be actions that are just in their purpose for carrying out harm, due to the victims of moral violence being the perpetrators of previous acts of harm who are viewed as deserving of experiencing harsh punishment (Rai et al.). The other subtype is instrumental violence, which is described as obligatory actions that must be taken regardless of what is morally correct, in order to achieve the desired outcome of those perpetrating such violence (Rai et al.). The authors argue that dehumanization does not play a factor in moral violence, while it does make a difference when it comes to instrumental violence (Rai et al.).

To support their claim, Rai and the paper's additional authors defined dehumanization as the ability to feel human emotions and carried out a series of experiments to determine the extent to which dehumanization is a factor for each subtype of violence. In choosing the manner in which having humanity would be defined and tested for their experiments, Rai along with the additional authors deviated from Haslam's definition, which was based on characteristics of human nature and qualities which are uniquely human, and instead focused on the ability to think critically and feel an array of specific emotions to be the definition of having humanity. As a result, the definition of dehumanization also differed from Haslam's definition, which was the stripping away of being perceived of having human nature and uniquely human aspects, resulting in Rai et al.'s definition of dehumanization becoming the inability to think critically and experience a variety of distinct emotions.

In applying this new definition of humanity, and in turn, of dehumanization, the influence that dehumanization has on both moral violence and instrumental violence differs from previous work done on the influence of dehumanization on political violence (Rai et al.). To determine the extent to which dehumanization affects each of these subtypes of violence, Rai along with the additional authors gathered a sample of participants from the United States of America and asked them to rate their inclination to harm a hypothetical person in a hypothetical situation. For each of the five experiments that were conducted, certain variables were modified (Rai et al.).

The first experiment, for example, detailed asking some study participants to rate their inclination to support the execution of the death penalty for combatant opponents and killers (Rai et al.). This was used as a method of testing the extent to which a so-called moral act of violence towards killers, who by definition are human due to having the ability to think critically and feel distinct emotions, was supported by the public (Rai et al.). At the same time, other study

participants rated their inclination to endorse consuming products made in exploitative working conditions (Rai et al.). This was an attempt to determine how willing participants were to support an act of violence that was considered by Rai and the additional authors to be instrumental, considering that the workers were dehumanized as people unable to make their own thought-out decisions. Subsequent experiments changed factors including giving a so-called humanized description of a hypothetical perpetrator and giving a simple title of “man” as a dehumanized description of the same hypothetical criminal (Rai et al.). Each perpetrator was being presented to the sample of participants as having committed different crimes in terms of severity, while assessing study participants’ inclination to harm each of them with consideration that the crime and perpetrator pairings were changed for study participants among the sample (Rai et al.).

With this new definition and application of dehumanization, the results of the first experiment and the subsequent experiments showed that study participants were more inclined to harm a criminal who has been humanized, in the sense that they were actively considered to be capable of critical thinking and experiencing distinct emotions, as a method of executing moral violence that is considered to be just (Rai et al.). At the same time, study participants were also inclined to harm victims of instrumental violence that were dehumanized, meaning that they were not viewed as being able to have critical thinking skills or feel a range of specific emotions (Rai et al.).

The method of defining and viewing the influence of dehumanization on political violence presented by Rai along with additional authors, is one that has been contested. In their paper responding to Rai with additional authors, Fincher, Kteily, and Bruneau dispute the definition of dehumanization that is integral to the conclusions drawn by Rai, Valdesolo, and Graham. According to Fincher, Kteily et al., the definition of dehumanization by Rai et al. which

rests on the perceived ability for the person in question to think critically and feel a wide range of specific emotions, is far too narrow of a definition. It actively excludes other qualities that differentiate humans from other species, along with establishing the notion that someone who is perceived to be mentally and emotionally sound cannot be dehumanized, which is a false narrative (Fincher, Kteily et al.). In addition, this definition does not consider the factor of hatred towards a specific, often minority, group of people (Fincher, Kteily et al.). This strong dislike of another group that holds different beliefs and values to the ingroup is an influential element in the path towards dehumanization when looking back throughout human history (Fincher, Kteily et al.).

While there may be differences between moral violence and instrumental violence, the narrow definition of dehumanization as a whole by Rai et al. does not accurately illustrate the scope of moral violence and the role of dehumanization within this subtype of violence (Fincher, Kteily et al.). It is possible for moral violence, in the form of violence carried out on the basis of an outgroup with opposing values being deemed threatening, to occur with the dehumanization being the way in which the outgroup is stripped of their morality (Fincher, Kteily et al.). That is to say that moral violence and the presence of dehumanization within this subgroup does not always rest on the perceived ability of the outgroup to think critically nor to feel emotion (Fincher, Kteily et al.). In addition, the outgroup can be seen as the causation of crime and have blame placed upon them due to stereotypes, and this process of desiring the suffering of perceived perpetrators is a method of carrying out dehumanization in the sphere of moral violence (Fincher, Kteily et al.). This is true despite Rai et al.'s argument that the desire for perpetrators to receive harsh punishment for their actions necessitated the acknowledgement of the ability for such perpetrators to feel emotion and think critically in order to truly face

repercussions, humanizing the perpetrators rather than dehumanizing them. Clearly, this shows the errors in the definition of dehumanization and humanization as well as the application of these definitions on interpreting the influence they have on moral and instrumental violence.

This paper is in agreement with Fincher, Kteily et al. and in disagreement with the definitions and interpretations of the connection between dehumanization and varying forms of violence presented by Rai et al. The oversight by the definitions of both humanization and dehumanization by Fincher, Kteily et al. to not consider additional characteristics which define and differentiate humans and their humanity, such as those presented by Haslam, also affected the manner in which the experiments were carried out by Rai et al. As a result of using a definition for humanness based on the ability of a person to hold critical thoughts in their mind and feel identifiable emotions, Rai et al. modified the variable of whether a hypothetical person in a scenario presented to experiment participants was perceived as human or inhuman by presenting the hypothetical person with thoughts and feelings or simplifying calling them “a man”. This manner of changing the variables in the experiment does not accurately represent the process of dehumanization of an outgroup, especially not of a minority group that is seen as a threat for their different values or culture.

In addition, the process of experimentation along with the results procured at the culmination of the study, as the participants in the experiment were unknowingly responding to scenario questions devised to see dehumanization from one narrow lens. In addition, by calling hypothetical individuals in sections of their studies that were intended to test experiment participants’ response to a scenario of moral violence that did not initially consider dehumanization until a second round of questions, “murderers” and “enemy soldiers”, the results of the study would be tainted with the dehumanization of the hypothetical people within the



question (Rai et al.). Perhaps unknowingly, the respondents were being given dehumanized examples that were described in the paper as being examples were “dehumanization should be unrelated”, all the while it was not considered to be dehumanization from the definition presented by Rai et al. Dehumanization is more than stripping away the perception of a person as a critical thinker or emotional feeler, and failing to include the broad elements which make up what it means to be human and consequently the implications of dehumanizing another person, is an oversight that affects the ability of conclusions to be applicable on a large scale to all.

### **Dehumanization As A Stage of Genocide**

In his overview of genocide and its ten stages, Gregory Stanton includes dehumanization as the fourth of ten integral stages of genocide. As explained in his paper, when ingroups and outgroups have been identified through the first stage of classification, these groups are associated with specific stereotypes and distinct characteristics in the stage of symbolization, the outgroup is treated differently and denied the same rights and privileges as the ingroup during the stage of discrimination, dehumanization follows as the next step in the process of genocide as people in the outgroup are no longer treated as humans but are perceived as inferior to humans themselves (Stanton). A common method for removing the humanity from an outgroup minority is by equating them to animals or bugs, living beings who are easily trampled and have little value to humans (Stanton). This creates distance morally between the ingroup and outgroup and allows for the ingroup to utilize methods of dehumanization and moral superiority to justify harming members of the minority and outgroup, whether it be harm on an individual or systemic level.

Continuing the process of dehumanization, further pushes distance between the ingroup and minority outgroup, moving along the process of genocide (Stanton). As this distance grows,

the outgroup of a minority group is labeled and presented to the rest of the ingroup (Stanton). This can be done through forms of publicity such as language and images in newspapers or digital media (Stanton). This propaganda can be directed towards the ingroup as a different social sphere, a political party, or nation as a whole, as a dangerous threat. Dangerous due to the distinct differences between the two groups, the notion of the outgroup being dirty wild animals that will infest society, or even due to general dislike for the outgroup that is molded into a fear of the destruction to the life and environment known to the ingroup. By pinning the title of the enemy onto the outgroup, it becomes even more legitimate and even necessary in the eyes of the ingroup to take violent action to curb the potential growth and influence of the outgroup (Stanton).

In response to the usage of language as a primary vessel for dehumanization, Stanton offers guidance on how nations should act in the presence of such genocidal and violent uses of speech. Firstly, Stanton quickly and clearly explains that language which strips a group of people of their humanity and likens them to animals while perceiving them as inherent threats to society is genocidal speech, which is not considered to be included in the speech covered by some nations' constitutions which protect the right to have the freedom to speak and express oneself. In terms of nations without such protections as well as countries that do make an effort to allow for speaking freely, Stanton strongly directs national figures to limit the sharing of such speech. This can be done by refusing to allow media organizations which publish such forms of dehumanizing speech to operate, placing sanctions on public and political figures who partake in genocidal language, as well as having strict and explicit repercussions for individuals along with groups that contribute to this type of violent language (Stanton). It is also especially helpful to create social norms within a particular group, organization, or nation which deem dehumanizing

language or actions to be unallowable in terms of not being supported by society if one decides to speak in a dehumanizing manner (Stanton). These are some of the tangible ways that dehumanization can be curbed before it has a chance to develop and add fuel to the fire of genocide.

A specific method and perspective for analyzing dehumanization as it relates to being a leading factor in the process of genocide is presented by Savage in a paper that explicitly defines, explains and applies dehumanization to political violence. As with any analysis of a topic, Savage begins by presenting the broad definition of dehumanization that is utilized within the article. Dehumanization, in the perspective of Savage, is refusing to see another group of people as equal in their humanity to one's own group. Therefore, restricting the acceptance of the moral standard of the majority ingroup (Savage). This is applicable regardless of what explanations and qualities are used to define what it means to be a human in the first place (Savage). An integral component of this definition is that the members of the outgroup must be deeply connected to the group itself so that the perception of one is the perception of all, which allows for dehumanization to occur on a blanket stereotypical foundation (Savage). It also denies the individuality of each member of an outgroup, further dehumanizing each person as they are only seen for the group they belong to, and that outgroup is viewed as being unequal to the ingroup in terms of humanity (Savage).

Legitimization of political violence can be analyzed from looking at the effect of state-sponsored violence in the current age of modernity (Savage). For the most part, states do not allow regular citizens to act in violence, while there are exceptions for those who have specific jobs particularly in areas of protection or the risk of death as an outcome of a profession, such as extreme sports athletes or the armed forces (Savage). However, in times of political

violence and unchecked power by the state, violence endorsed by the government has occurred (Savage). In these situations, historically, either residents of the state have to decide whether to act against, act with, or not act at all towards the efforts of the state (Savage).

Despite living under similar circumstances and conditions, people will respond differently in terms of their propensity to act with violence (Savage). This demonstrates that the reason for harming another person may vary from one situation to another, and for every person it might also change depending on their perception and opinion on the action being taken (Savage). Playing a key role in the execution of violence such as genocide is dehumanization, as it legitimizes the violence by changing the way in which actors see the violence they enforce along with the people they are harming (Savage). However, this does not mean that the violence itself is humane at all or morally just (Savage). It indicates that in the process of the execution of genocidal violence, the violence and the outgroup experiencing harm are dehumanized to fall within the ingroup's own standard of justification so that the ingroup can feel that it is still maintaining its morality, ironically (Savage).

The way in which dehumanization works is as a tool that molds to different situations, purposes, and people (Savage). It has the same effect on the outgroup which it is being used on, however, its usage as a method to legitimize violence can be experienced differently for each person, depending on what personal and societal state barriers to violence need to be satisfied psychologically for the harm to be executed (Savage). The influence and role of dehumanization is distinct when it comes to modernity, or the current time of sovereign states of nations (Savage). With most countries having their own armed forces which fought with and against the forces of other nations, with the emergence of modernity came the legitimization of mass killing first as legitimizing the killing of enemy soldiers in large numbers (Savage). Dehumanization did

play and continues to play a role here in the military arena, as labeling and treating people in the military as soldiers, allies, enemies, and making a clear distinction between duty members and civilians is a form of dehumanization. It creates a separate class of people, leading to the loss of individual identity from an outside point of view, as the armed forces of other nations are viewed as one large collected entity and each individual soldier is not seen as an individual human but rather as the country and military relationship with other countries that the military has come to represent.

With modernity also came the feasibility of actually organizing and carrying out a genocide that has been made legitimate in the eyes of the state through dehumanization (Savage). The ideas of survival of the fittest and realism emerged as well, developing the norm of states making decisions and taking actions based on what is perceived to be the best for the survival and prosperity of the state in the long term (Savage). When a particular outgroup, perhaps a religious or ethnic minority, is perceived as a threat to the longevity of a nation, the state may believe that the best course of action would be to eliminate the threat by organizing a systemic mass wiping out of the outgroup population within the state (Savage). Perceiving the outgroup as a threat rather than as people who happen to have different values or cultural practices diminishes the humanity of the outgroup in the perception of the outgroup, and provides legitimization for the ingroup to take violent actions against them, on the basis that it is for the greater good of the nation (Savage).

#### Assessment: Historical Case Studies

##### **Historical Case Study 1: Colonization**

In the conquest and subsequent colonization of what is now the American continents, dehumanization was an integral part of the reason for continued exploratory quests to the

Americas, violent mass killing of native peoples, and colonization of a land that did not belong to Europeans in the first place. One of the first exploratory expeditions to the Americas was conducted by Christopher Columbus in 1492 with funds from the Spanish monarchy (Golay & Bowman). It is widely recognized that Christopher Columbus was not the first person from Europe or other continents to land in the Americas, whether accidentally or intentionally (Golay & Bowman). Other known explorers include the Norse, who are thought to have left a colony at the location of L'Anse aux Meadows, however, the small town seemed to have not existed for very long, as it is only recorded as a place of ruins (Golay & Bowman). There are other accounts and theories of Asians, Africans, and other Europeans landing in the Americas before Christopher Columbus (Golay & Bowman). This section on colonization through dehumanization and political violence will focus on the words and actions of conquerors in present-day Latin America, particularly in Mexico. Some of the Spanish colonizers include Hernan Cortes and Juan Gines de Sepulveda, whose exploration, conquest, and exploitation of the Caribbean and the repercussions of their actions would set a precedent for dehumanization as a tool for the mass killing of religious and ethnic outgroups.

Hernan Cortes was one of the conquerors of Mexico who brought about the fall of the Aztec empire in Tenochtitlan (Levy). One of Cortes' goals was to convert the Aztecs who worshiped multiple gods in their own indigenous religion, to Catholicism, at the cost of lives lost in the violence utilized to colonize and civilize the Aztecs in the mind of Cortes and other European colonizers (Levy). This was only the start to a dehumanizing moral divide between the ingroup of self-perceived educated as well as civilized European Catholics and the outwardly perceived subhuman Aztecs who were inferior for having what was seen as incorrect religious beliefs.

The religious practices of the Aztecs were, in the mind of Cortes and other European colonizers, inhumane and uncivilized; demonstrating a dehumanizing manner of viewing the Aztec people. As part of their manner for worshiping multiple gods, the Aztecs killed animals and even humans to sacrifice them as a presentation to the gods (Levy). While this was a perfectly normal and necessary action in the eyes of the Aztecs, to conquerors like Cortes it was a barbaric and uncivilized action that should not have been occurring. It seemed completely unacceptable and horrific that people would be killed by the Aztecs to offer as a sacrifice in a practice for a religion that Cortes deemed incorrect. This violence that was legitimate to the Aztecs, was not logical nor worthwhile in the eyes of the colonizers. With the knowledge that the Aztecs regularly killed people and animals for their religious practice, Cortes viewed the Aztecs as being savage and brutal threats to civilization as a whole. The perception of an outgroup of people as a dangerous threat that Cortes can mitigate is a first indication of dehumanization emerging prior to subsequent political violence and mass killing that some have argued is genocidal. It also allows Cortes to legitimize any violence he carried out on the Aztec people in Tenochtitlan, including the killing of two hundred thousand Aztecs in a harsh and unrelenting siege in the year 1519, because in Cortes' mind, he is saving civilization from the barbaric savages who kill humans for a religion that is illegitimate (Levy). The Aztecs are stripped of their humanity as they are not perceived as being equal in humanity in comparison to Europeans for Cortes, and their religious practices are not afforded the same moral recognition as Catholicism.

In addition, this moral divide on the basis of religion included a sense of moral superiority for Cortes and his fellow conquerors, as they saw themselves as heroes who would save the Aztecs from themselves and the world around them. Thus, viewing the Aztecs and other

indigenous populations as threats to their own eternal future and the society at large. This is a clear example of dehumanization legitimizing extreme violence and mass killing. Cortes and other colonizers saw themselves as carrying out the work of God by working to convert indigenous populations to Catholicism (Levy). They also believed themselves to be righteous in their purpose as well as morally superior to the extent of having the notion that they knew what was best for the Aztecs. This moral distance from the ingroup and the outgroup as well as the notion that the Aztecs were a threat to themselves and others for their actions which were perceived to be barbaric worshiping of idols, demonstrates the presence of dehumanization in Hernan Cortes' conquest of Tenochtitlan.

Back in Spain between the time of 1550 and 1551, a debate known as the Valladolid Debate took place to determine whether or not Spain should continue with the goal of colonizing the Americas (Castilla Urbano). This was primarily a debate between Juan Gines de Sepulveda and Bartolome de Las Casas (Castilla Urbano). Sepulveda, who was victorious in receiving support and agreement from the state as a result of this debate, argued that Spain should continue to conquer and colonize, with dehumanization forming the foundation of his argument and the defending legitimacy of the conquests. At the same time, Las Casas asserted that an end to colonization was necessary. The question of whether or not to continue colonizing the Americas was known as "the Indian problem", a term itself which is dehumanizing (Santana). The very topic of the debate sees the indigenous population as an issue that needs to be resolved. This removes from native groups the ability to be seen as human beings in the first place, and it does not set the tone for a debate where the actions of the Spaniards will be called into question. Instead, indigenous populations are treated in the title of this debate as having little to no value as individuals, only seen as a collective outgroup for their indigenous qualities of differences in



culture and religion which in the mind of colonizers, makes them barbaric threats to the future of civilization and legitimizes the violence of colonization. The unwillingness to recognize humanity in the title of the debate is a warning sign for subsequent dehumanization within the debate itself.

The argument presented during the Valladolid Debate by Sepulveda rests on the claim that it is acceptable to conquer indigenous outgroups and colonize them because they are not human beings. Sepulveda declared that war could be conducted, in the form of the conquest of the Americas, as long as the war abided by the norms of carrying out a legitimate war in the natural world (Santana). There is a bit of a loophole, as these norms which outline the qualities of a justifiable military operation, are defined as having the purpose of protecting human beings and applicable to rational actors (Santana). It has already been established that the indigenous populations such as the Aztecs were not viewed by colonizers such as Sepulveda as being equal human beings, let alone being actors who made decisions and took action in a rational manner. Thus, the dehumanization that has occurred psychologically within the minds of the colonizers spreads and contaminates arguments in a legal and societal setting as well. It is one of the first layers to the arguments presented by Sepulveda and forms the foundation for the manner in which indigenous groups are discussed and later harmed.

Not only did Sepulveda fail to apply a doctrine of waging war legitimately in a humane manner towards the native people of the Americas, but he also explicitly utilized dehumanization as one of his primary arguments for continuing the execution of colonization. Utilizing the ideological theory that control of society should justly be in the hands of those who are greater in terms of morality and personhood rather than those who are inferior, that was first published by Aristotle, Sepulveda presents the idea that the indigenous groups of the Americas are natural

slaves (Santana). Sepulveda believes that the Spaniards are superior and overall better people than the indigenous populations, who he calls “barbarians by nature, uneducated and inhumane” (Santana). In his words, it is clear that Sepulveda thinks that the native people are not human, as he directly calls them “inhumane” (Santana).

In addition, Sepulveda states that indigenous populations are intrinsically and irrevocably inferior on a moral level due to their horrific way of life (Santana). It is due to being dehumanized and perceived as subhuman that, according to Sepulveda, indigenous people do not have the right to govern themselves and instead need to be saved and controlled by human beings who are moral, and from a European perspective those who should have this authority and power are Europeans themselves (Santana). This is a dangerous slippery slope, because once Sepulveda and other colonizers see themselves as the rightful leaders in control of native people, for the betterment of the native population, they can use the same process of dehumanization to legitimize violent actions and forcibly colonize the Americas under the condescending and ironically inhumane guise that the Europeans are only doing what is truly best for the indigenous outgroup in the long term by European standards.

It is evident that dehumanization played a crucial role in legitimizing and indicating the subsequent political violence targeted at the outgroup of indigenous populations in the Americas that occurred through colonization. This is true from both a direct carrying out of violence in the form of the mass killing of native people by colonizers including Hernan Cortes, and the ideological harm of holding a debate on the continuation of colonization which was held with dehumanized views on these native tribes which legitimized the violence of conquering and colonizing. Dehumanization was present in the form of moral distance between the ingroup of colonizers and the outgroup of native people on the basis of seemingly threatening religious

practices. From a European perspective, the practice of providing sacrifices that have been killed to multiple gods was inhumane. This led to the indigenous populations who took part in these practices as a collective culture also subhuman, a perspective that was further demonstrated through Sepulveda's argument that called native people intrinsically inferior barbarians. This manner of viewing the indigenous population was a result of the refusal to extend an equal perception of humanity due to moral distance between the ingroup and outgroup within colonization.

When looking back at the historical example of colonization, one is able to pinpoint first signs of dehumanization that served as warning signs for the atrocious violence of colonization that would follow. In the case of Hernan Cortes' role in conquering the Aztec stronghold in Tenochtitlan, the view of the native people's religious practices as inhumane and desiring to convert them to Catholicism was one of the first indications of dehumanization and warning signs of political violence. By declaring that an outgroup's method of taking part in religion is on a subhuman level of action demonstrates that colonizers like Cortes perceive there to be a lack of morality in the actions of the native group, and moral distance between an ingroup and outgroup that forms the foundation to whether or not a group of people is considered human, is one of the essential factors of dehumanization (Pacilli et al.). In addition, by actively attempting to solve the perceived problem of barbarism through changing the religion of the outgroup and their cultural traditions shows that the ingroup of Europeans believed themselves to be superior and have the moral authority to oversee the civilization of native people. Which is yet another characteristic of dehumanization, as the colonizers like Sepulveda did not see the native population as rational actors who could govern themselves (Santana). Since dehumanization in different forms was present prior to later mass political violence carried out on indigenous people, it served as a

consistent and trustworthy warning sign of increased political violence. How would history be written today if leaders, individuals, and nations in the past were willing to listen and take action upon the appearance of dehumanization to prevent the further escalation of violence?

### **Historical Case Study 2: The Holocaust**

One of the first signs of later political violence directed at Jewish populations in Europe in what would become known as the Holocaust was dehumanization of Jewish people in a moral, animalistic, and political sense. In the aftermath of World War One, German leadership, particularly Adolf Hitler used Jewish people as scapegoats; they were blamed for the military and economic fall of the nation, which some authors theorize may have been linked to dehumanization on the basis of antisemitism in addition to other forms of dehumanization (Snyder; Bartov & Censer). In actuality, the Jewish population were not to blame in the least, and tying them to the struggle of daily life and perceiving them to be a threat to the prosperity of the nation is a clear indication of dehumanization. It denies Jewish people the ability to be perceived as individuals as they are instead seen through a stereotypical lens associated with the outgroup as a whole and are defined primarily by characteristics that have been negatively attributed to them, which are then brought to the attention of the general public in an effort to label them as enemies and threats to the state at large. It strips a Jewish person of their humanity in a moral sense as well. For they are seen as acting against the interests of their country, essentially acting immorally, which places them on a level of inferiority on the basis of morality, which is in of itself another way that dehumanization can be displayed (Pacilli et al.). At the same time, in the mind of the ingroup of many Germans, this provides them with assurance that they are morally superior, which then psychologically allows them to justify their stereotypical views of Jewish people as threats, along with legitimizing the use of future political violence.

It is also important to note that this warning sign of future political and social violence occurred far before the onset of Jewish ghettos or declarations of war. This does not necessarily mean that it is definite that the whole of the Holocaust could have been prevented entirely, not that it is not a possibility, however, when warning signs of future violence in the form of dehumanization as those signs are prevalent far before physical violence occurs, it is an indication that dehumanization is a valid and consistent form of identifying the potential for political violence. Perhaps the severity or even the occurrence of such violence can be lessened and prevented by paying heed to dehumanization as individuals, leaders, and fellow nations.

In addition to labeling Jewish people as the cause for the fall of Germany and in turn perceiving them as threats to society at large, as time went on and the Nazi regime took power, they began implementing more language and animalistic dehumanization tactics. Through propaganda in the form of newspaper cartoons, public speeches, and media images, the Nazis used dehumanizing language and images to equate the value and life of a Jewish person to that of a contagious and contaminating virus or a dirty animal (Landry et al.). This propaganda became a constant presence in the lives of people living in Germany, even having materials specifically made for different age groups (Landry et al.). This illustrates how the Nazi party desired to spread the fear of Jewish people and the notion that they were a national enemy on the foundation of who they were as defined by the false stereotypes and animalistic equating that was organized by the Nazi regime as part of a continuous and deliberately harsh methodology to exterminate Jewish people (Landry et al.).

Notice the use of the word exterminate, a word most commonly used as the most logical means for fending off an infestation when discussing insects or rodents, being used to legitimize and dehumanize the act of killing millions of human beings (Kren). This was a widespread

dehumanized perception of the Jewish population that was ingrained systematically into German society at the time, from the creation of youth Hitler groups, control over school curriculum across the country, and a number of policies targeted at further the dehumanization of Jewish people in a legal sense, dehumanization ran rampant in the time prior to physical violence taking place. This was not a time period considered to be a lack of violence, but rather a preparation for violence, by first spending the time to dehumanize Jewish people in the eyes of the public in addition to the eyes of the Nazi party. Subsequently, this made way for the grounds of legitimization for future violence to be laid.

On a legal level, Nazi Germany put into effect a number of policies and then actions which separated Jewish people on a so-called scientific level from others in German society on the basis of the notion that Jewish people, according to Nazis and some scientists at the time, were biologically different and impure compared to Aryan Germans (Kren). The notion of the Jewish identity being its own race with its own physical characteristics and ethnic blood emerged from the merging of the notion of whiteness as a perfect race and Jewish people being part of their own distinct race as well (Kren). This first theory on the pureness of white, specifically Nordic blood came from Arthur de Gobineau (Kren). He believed that the perfect race was the Nordic white race and that the mixing of any race with another can only have a diluting effect, losing the purity of the white Nordic blood when it is combined with any other race (Kren). A key feature to distinct races as identified by Gobineau was also the factor of cultural development and imagination, which he believed was a quality that essentially made a race to be pure (Kren). When this theory on the pureness of the unsullied, by that meaning unmixed, race of Nordic whiteness met the likes of Germans who believed Jewish people to be their own distinct race of inferior people, the so-called scientific theory of Jewish people carrying dirty and impure

blood that at all costs must not be mixed with the white blood of Germans which is more pure, as to protect the future of the nation state and its citizens, emerged (Kren).

In a more visual sense, Nazi Germany also developed methods, that were considered to be scientific by the regime, to supposedly be able to identify a Jewish person by their outward appearance. The standard for what was defined as a pure white appearance and what was not originated from the work of a biologist who focused working on the field of immunology and the genetic attributes associated with people from the area around the Atlantic Ocean as opposed to the physical appearance of individuals from the Eastern part of the world (Mazumdar). Nazi Germany applied this concept that was considered scientific by presenting and assessing individuals based on the notion that pure Germans, or Aryans had fair skin, blue eyes, and light colored hair. At the same time, Jewish people were considered to have brown eyes, dark hair, and a prominent nose.

Since these features were believed to be tied to whether an individual had pure Aryan blood or sullied inhuman Jewish blood, genetics and a person's lineage also played a role in whether or not they were considered to be purely German (Mazumdar). If someone could prove that they came from a lineage of Aryan ancestors, which they were often required to demonstrate in order to be treated as an equal human and be able to retail the perception of themselves as morally human under the rule of Hitler, they would be considered to be Aryan themselves (Mazumdar). These tests and questions of validating the racial pureness of individuals were conducted as requirements for children and adults in order for them to be active participants in the society of Germany during the reign of the Nazis (Mazumdar). This could mean that in order to work or attend school, individuals would be required to submit to what was considered to be health and scientific examinations in order to determine whether they were able to partake in the

activity alongside Aryan Germans without spreading so-called unclean blood. Without a doubt, this is dehumanizing, as it labels the ingroup of Aryan individuals as naturally genetically and physically superior and undoubtedly human, while pinpointing the outgroup Jewish population as, in the perspective of Nazi Germany, clearly subhuman on an internal level.

These features were not only present in the supposed scientific fields of Nazi Germany, but also a common element woven into political propaganda as a form of dehumanization throughout the nations the Nazis took control over during the second world war. As the Nazis expanded their dehumanizing efforts and the horrific atrocities of the Holocaust came to be experienced by more states within Europe, Poland was one of the nations that experienced the expansion of the dehumanization of Jewish people through visual means including posters and political films (Grabowski). One such example was a short film that was viewed by Polish audiences prior to watching a movie showing at a local theater which focused on presenting the Nazis as the heroes who saved the Polish people from the dangerous threat of Jewish people (Grabowski). This specific film was called “Jews, Lice, Typhus”, and essentially dehumanized Jewish people by equating them to both insects and disease (Grabowski). By adding Jewish people to this list, the Nazi regime is sending the message that the Jewish population is so subhuman to the extent that they are only welcome among the ranks of lice and typhus (Grabowski). To add to the already inhuman depiction that comes with seeing a human being in this dehumanizing manner, lice and typhus are both contagious threats to the health and safety of people, and humans are taught to avoid people with these two threatening conditions because they spread from person to person. This further draws the line between viral threats that cannot even be in proximity to humans in order to keep the general population safe and the perceived threat of the Jewish people, presented by the Nazi regime, that is also treated as a contagion that



must be contained in concentration camps and ghettos before being fully extinguished (Grabowski).

The goal of these films was to dehumanize the Jewish population within them in order to spread the perception of Jewish people as dangerous inhuman animal-like threats who will contaminate Europe with their impurity if they are not exterminated (Grabowski). It was overall an effective technique, in the sense that the Nazis accomplished their goal of spreading antisemitism and the dehumanizing narrative of Jewish people. Especially when it is taken into consideration that a portion of the Polish population were not carrying with them a great deal of experience in education, making the use of visual elements for sending a devastatingly powerful message in support for the Nazi regime an accessible form of information for many individuals (Grabowski). Even for those who were more educated, the Nazis made an effort to ensure that their dehumanizing propaganda would be trusted as the truth (Grabowski). They did not allow people in the nations they gained control over to have their own forms of getting information, which included personal radios, local independent newspapers, and local bookstores (Grabowski). By attempting to control the origin of information that the public received, the Nazis were employing the theory of constructivism and constructing the reality that they perceived behind their glasses tinted with dehumanization to be the perceived reality for all the people they gained control over during the second world war (Grabowski). This was a strategy to continue the process of legitimizing the discrimination of Jewish people that was already taking place. As well as setting the stage to defend, logically in the minds of the Nazis, the necessity for violence and the continuance of the process of genocide, with dehumanization having been one of the first signs of the possibility of this future of violent actions towards Jewish people becoming reality.

Since the so-called problem present in Germany was Jewish people being present and contaminating the clean, pure Aryan race, the logical solution, as presented by the Nazi regime, was a “Final Solution” of mass killing to rid Germany of the dehumanized Jewish population (Bartov & Censer). With the dehumanization that Jews in Germany had been experiencing for years before physical action was taken against them, Hitler and the Nazis were paving the way ideologically to make it seem that genocide was not only a legitimate method for addressing the problem faced by the nation, but the only method that would guarantee a success long-term (Bartov & Censer). This is furthered by dehumanization through biological standards, because when an outgroup such as the Jewish people are seen as innately inhuman on a biological level, there is no method of fixing or restoring their humanity that would, in following with this theory, be an adequate solution (Kren). Thus, Nazi Germany strategically dehumanized the Jewish population using multiple methods throughout society to get to the point where they could, in their eyes, rationally legitimize executing a genocide on the Jewish people (Kren). Jewish people, who were considered at the end from the perspective of Nazi Germany, to be no more of a person than a common insect, virus, or bothersome problem.

When violent actions were organized and executed against the Jewish population in the nations under the control of the Nazi regime, the tactics used in the process of genocide such as forcing Jewish people into concentration camps and systematically killing them in masses, further dehumanized them, even in the ways that they were brutally killed. To transport Jewish people into concentration camps, the Nazis used cattle cars and did not let the Jewish people know where they were being taken (Gigliotti). Effectively treated as animals, the Jewish individuals who were transported in the cattle cars barely had any room, as each cattle car was packed tightly with many people (Gigliotti). A survivor of the Holocaust shared that the issue

was the conditions within the cattle car being worse than what is acceptable to transport animals themselves (Gigliotti). It is not generally common or healthy for even cattle to be transported in cramped conditions for long periods of time without sustenance or a private place to use the restroom in the way in which the Jewish people were transported to the concentration camps (Gigliotti). The dehumanization orchestrated by the Nazi regime went so far as to treat human beings with less consideration than one would treat an actual cow or animal (Gigliotti). This demonstrates that the dehumanization of Jewish people at the time of the usage of concentration camps across Europe for sites of forced labor and mass killing, had extended into the action that had been warned with the first signs of dehumanization: the genocide of an outgroup of a minority religious and ethnic group. Even in the way that they died, the Jewish people were dehumanized and treated in accordance with the way in which they were perceived by the Nazi regime in Europe.

Upon entering a concentration camp, the dehumanization and political violence faced by the Jewish people only escalated. Jewish people were barely given any food or water, and what was given to them was not nourishing (Shostak). Some people believe that Jewish prisoners of the concentration camps were only given enough food to allow them to be physically able to participate in the slave labor that was mandatory in the camps (Shostak). The people who were not chosen for slave labor on arrival to the camps were killed in masses by the gas chambers (Shostak). The people who could still serve some sort of purpose, which in the mind of the Nazis was the purpose of working as a slave for the future of Germany, were not immediately killed (Shostak). Although many people did die as a result of working on physical tasks without proper nutrition, becoming ill, being punished physically, or being executed in the camps (Shostak).

This demonstrates that throughout the process of genocide in the Holocaust, dehumanization was a constant factor that only became more extreme and the violence legitimized through dehumanization only became more horrific as the genocide went on. Overall, over six million Jews were killed in the Holocaust, and that number does not include the political prisoners and other religious and ethnic minorities who were imprisoned in concentration camps and killed by the Nazi regime (Shostak). From the very beginning of utilizing a perceived moral distance between the ingroup of non-Jewish Germans and the outgroup of Jewish people living within Germany to dehumanize the Jewish population on the basis of them being the supposed reason for the fall of Germany during the first World War, the path to taking action with the legitimization that is offered by dehumanization was being constructed. As time went on, dehumanization only intensified with so-called scientific and genetic reasoning to support dehumanization on the basis of racial purity and the perceived protection of the Aryan state. Afterwards came political films and posters which used the dehumanization method of equating Jewish people to vermin and diseases, the inhuman forced imprisonment of Jewish people in concentration camps, and the horrific dehumanizing killing of Jewish individuals in gas chambers. Dehumanization was there all along, from the very beginning, it must not be overlooked as a first sign of potential political violence which can develop into genocide in the future.

### **Historical Case Study 3: Israel and Palestine**

In the present day, dehumanization is occurring in Gaza as Israel targets the strip in a horrific situation of dehumanization through language, animalistic methods, and violent actions that is taking place after decades of attacks and political conflict between Israel and Palestine. In order to analyze the current dehumanization and violence taking place, one must start by taking a

look at how this present day came to be. Historically, Israel first became a recognized nation-state after the culmination of World War Two, specifically in May of 1948 on the fourteenth of that month (Mock et al.). Prior to the creation of the Israeli state by the United Nations, which gave Israel land that previously made up the state of Palestine, Jewish people had been migrating to Palestine for hundreds of years to escape persecution (Mock et al.). They were Jewish individuals living within the Arab state of Palestine, who did create some political structures of their own, which included an unofficial group of armed forces, and advocacy groups (Mock et al.). Palestine had become a sanctuary for Jewish people in the land that according to the Christian Bible and Jewish Torah, has been promised to the people of Israel by God as their inheritance (Mock et al.).

When the United Nations was faced with making a decision as to how to create a plan for Palestine, which had been previously under the control of the British government prior to the end of World War Two, it decided to divide the land for there to be the formation of the nation of Israel along with the nation of Palestine (Mock et al.). At this point in time, there were approximately a little over one million Arab Palestinians living in the state of Palestine and approximately six hundred thousand Jewish people living in the area (Mock et al.). When coming to the conclusion on how to distribute the land where Palestine once stood to both nation-states, The United Nations decided to name Jerusalem as well as the surrounding area and cities of which Bethlehem was included, as international locations (Mock et al.). This way, neither state had sovereignty over the area that includes Jerusalem, which is the holy land for Christians, Jews, and Muslims (Mock et al.). The two states had their borders drawn up by the United Nations, with each having around four areas of land at different points and locations within what was previously the borders of Palestine (“United Nations”).

When this United Nations plan for the future of Israel and Palestine was presented to the two states' official advocacy groups, to which Palestine's advocacy organization known as the "Arab Higher Committee" did not accept the proposal, while Israel's advocacy group called "The Jewish Agency" did accept it (Mock et al.). As a result of this decisive outcome between the two, the implementation of this proposal was put up for a vote within the United Nations, where it did pass and was enacted (Mock et al.). Immediately after the approval of the resolution, the militaries of Israel and Palestine began to attack each other due to the partition plan, with other Arab states in the Middle East joining in to support Palestine (Mock et al.). Ultimately, Israel was victorious and acquired more of the land of what was previously Palestine with this victory (Mock et al.).

The distribution of land in the aftermath of this military fighting is more similar to what a map of Israel and Palestine look like today; Palestine is composed of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, while Israel has control and sovereignty over the rest of the land that previously was known as Palestine (Mock et al.). A result of this fighting in addition to the geographical changes to the borders, has been differences in the legality around migration in and out of the Israel and Palestine borders (Mock et al.). Many Palestinians left what land remained of Palestine, some becoming refugees in other Middle Eastern countries (Mock et al.). Yet, others were thought to have been forced out of their land by Israel in consideration that a political subgroup in Israel did kill more than a hundred Palestinians and it is theorized that Israel may have been attempting to move Palestinians out of significant cities, particularly those that are central to the religious beliefs of the Jewish people (Mock et al.). As the number of Palestinians living in Palestine and Israel decreased, Israel took over the property and items left behind and gave them to Jewish people instead, at the same time making it legal for a Jewish person to go to Israel from another

nation and be granted legal citizenship on the foundation of being a Jewish person; this encouraged other Jewish individuals around the world to migrate to Israel (Mock et al.). Another legal policy that was put into place denied Palestinians their citizenship and the ability to return to the land they previously lived in, after having left as refugees seeking safety in other countries in the region (Mock et al.). Simplifying the circumstances greatly, due to limited space for expansion, Israel and Palestine have continued to be at war with each other since the formation of the state of Israel, with different countries around the world recognizing or choosing not to recognize Israel as a nation, with the United States as one of the country's closest allies historically.

Recently, what was previously labeled as a conflict between two states has become a dialogue about genocide for both Palestine and Israel, depending on what source or person is providing the information. It is in this current-day context that dehumanization, particularly the dehumanization of language and the potential for being a warning sign for political violence, will be analyzed in this section of the paper. On October 7, 2023, what is recognized internationally as a terrorist organization, Hamas was declared war on by Israel; essentially a nation-state declaring war on a non-state actor, after Israeli citizens were killed at an outdoor event and others were taken as hostages (Shaw). However, the perception of this day and what occurs varies greatly (Shaw). Especially when it is considered that the bombs which killed the Israeli people were actually dropped by Israel (Shaw). At the same time, it has been argued that the perceived attack by Hamas was in actuality a legitimate act of resistance to the hundreds of years of oppression the Palestinian people are believed to have suffered under the control of Israel. All the while, there are also those who argue that the attack on October 7, 2023 by Hamas was planned out with the goal of eliciting a strong and violent reaction from Israel, which implies that

Hamas has ulterior motives and desires to see Israel be addressed by the international community for acting in a violent manner towards Palestine. Each new piece of information or new perspective pieces together the puzzle slightly while also flipping the angle at which the puzzle is worked on and viewed, distorting the elements and overall end design.

When it comes to the influence of dehumanization, by labeling Hamas as a terrorist organization, whether or not it is one in reality, is an act of dehumanization because it removes the identity of each individual in the group and associates each member with a perception of the group as a valid and growing threat to Israel and Jewish people that must be stopped for the sake of the future of the nation. This is not to say that Hamas is not a terrorist organization or to say that it is, it is an analysis into the effect of placing labels which are a form of dehumanizing language onto an outgroup in a political setting. In addition, the form of warfare exhibited by dropping bombs on unsuspecting civilians is also a form of dehumanization in warfare by technology which creates a degree of separation between the person who makes the decision to drop a bomb on a group of civilians and the person who actually uses an aircraft, whether they are physically inside that aircraft or guiding it from afar as with drone strikes, with there also being another layer of separation between these two perpetrators of violence and the people who have a bomb dropped in their vicinity. By utilizing a method of warfare that is much more indirect, as with many of the technological advances to military weapons, the little humanity present in fighting a war and attempting to do so justly must be consciously fought for in order for it to be maintained. The loss of human life can be dehumanized by the tactical strategies, dehumanizing words such as “target” and “enemy”, and the use of numbers to weigh the cost and possible outcomes of an act of war.



Since there is the argument that Israel is correctly utilizing its right to defend itself from threats to the nation in the form of its response to the attack on October 7, 2024 by Hamas, the question of whether the violence carried out by Israel is justifiably proportionate to the so-called incitement of violence is significant (Shaw). At this very moment in time, Israel has been bombing the Gaza Strip for at least five months now and there have been restrictions on accessing food, water, and medical aid for Palestinian civilians who are trapped inside of Gaza. Israel has been bombing civilian areas, including churches, schools, and hospitals and the reasoning for this is that Israel believes that in each of the places they have bombed, there may be Hamas militants hiding in those locations. To current knowledge, this has not yet been proven.

These military actions are dehumanizing, as Palestinian civilians, including children and women, have not been able to access basic human necessities for survival. It treats the Palestinians as animals who must rely on their owner to allow them to have access to food and water, reducing them to desperate hungry people who are not seen as human beings, but as animalistic threats. Since Hamas is an organization and not a nation-state, they do not abide by the norms of war and of waging a just war, so they could in reality be anywhere in Palestine. However, the reasoning that because there is the belief that Hamas might be at a location that is known in times of war to be a safe place for the wounded and the sick, Israel is justified in attacking medical centers and places of worship, is a logic for legitimization on the basis of dehumanization. The lives of regular Palestinian civilians are dehumanized and a moral distance is created between the life of a civilian who is Israeli and one who is Palestinian. Israel has been willing to kill hundreds of Palestinian civilians in order to save the lives of Israeli hostages because Israel does not appear to perceive Palestinians to be equal in morality but instead

perceiving even children as subhuman criminals whose lives are worth the cost of Israeli lives, in the eyes of the Israeli government.

In terms of the language used by the government of Israel, it appears to be very dehumanizing in both an animalistic sense and in the possibility of laying the groundwork for legitimizing increased violence in the days and perhaps months to come. The specific language reported to be used by Israel in terms of perceiving and discussing Palestinians was presented to the International Criminal Court in a trial bringing the charge of genocide against Israel (Goldenberg). This included phrases such as “erasing the Gaza Strip from the face of the Earth” and “fighting human animals” (Goldenberg). Both of these examples are depictions of dehumanization which has historically been shown to possibly lead to political violence. By stating that one of the two areas of land left to Palestinians may be erased shows a disregard for the lives of Palestinians, especially the civilians who are still at this moment living in the Gaza strip (Goldenberg). In addition, it dehumanizes these individuals by demonstrating that the protection of the nation of Israel from the threat of Hamas hiding within the Palestinian population in Gaza is enough to legitimize the entire eradication of the strip as a whole. By equating Palestinians to animals, even with the word “human” thrown into that statement, is dehumanizing as it equates human beings to animals on a moral and intrinsic level. This implies that Palestinians are inherently inhuman and inferior to Israelis, which can be used to legitimate further violence against the people of Palestine. In the case of Israel and Palestine, political violence has already been taking place for many months and it seems to be escalating.

### **Applications To The Present Day United States**

The world as a whole, including the United States is intensely and extremely polarized, not just politically but also within society. It is immensely important to be aware of

dehumanization as a warning sign for political violence within the United States as well. This does not indicate that a war or genocide is imminent, but rather that dehumanization can occur on many different levels while its methodology and the techniques that it reveals itself in remain largely consistent. Thus, effort must be made to pay attention to indications of dehumanization before political violence develops and if it does, in order to address such violence before it escalates further.

Dehumanization as a warning sign for future political violence within the United States can be seen from the campaign trail to everyday conversations about daily life between Americans. When Donald Trump was campaigning for what would become his first term in office, he consistently used harsh dehumanizing language against minority groups in America, including women, people of color, and immigrants. This language created the notion of a common enemy that America needed to be protected against, when in reality it was Americans turning on fellow Americans who contribute to their country in knowledge, service, and finances. It also fueled fear of these minorities and fear within these minority groups, creating a moral divide between different groups of Americans, which is in of itself another form of dehumanization. The repercussions of the dehumanization of the Trump campaign and administration are far-reaching, from the insurrection at the Capitol on January 6, 2021 to Supreme Court Justices who have been appointed for life after gaining the approval of Trump, and policies along with legal precedent that was set in the four years of the Trump administration. These are all ramifications from dehumanization and different forms of political violence, from physically storming the building where elected officials serve the nation to violence to the nation's social and political systems which are still reeling on the edge even after four years after the administration. Of course, Trump is not the first or the only President of the

United States to have employed methods of dehumanization, and that makes it even more important to be conscious of dehumanization and its implications for political violence; it could strike at any time while having the ability to escalate over time if it is not prevented or halted in its development, and its effects are long lasting as evident in America today.

## **Conclusion**

Dehumanization is one of the first warning signs of potential political violence. It is a warning sign that can be identified through its formation of a moral divide between an ingroup and outgroup, along with language that equates human beings to animals or inanimate items (Pacilli et al.). As dehumanization, which is also one of the steps in the process of genocide as presented by Stanton, continues to occur and grow it takes on new methods of being enacted and is used as a method for justifying harm towards an outgroup, typically of minorities (Ścigaj). With the ability to defend political violence from harm to a political system to the mass killing of an ethnic or religious group through genocide on a seemingly logical level, dehumanization is a powerful and dangerous tool.

Throughout history dehumanization has been used to execute and simultaneously legitimize various forms of political violence. This has included the dehumanization of native people in the present-day American continents by colonizers who viewed them as naturally subhuman on a moral basis while simultaneously legitimizing their mistreatment of native populations by viewing themselves as the heroes who saved native people from being uncivilized. Along with the progression of dehumanization and systemic political violence targeted towards the Jewish people during the regime of Nazi Germany, that stripped Jewish individuals of their humanity in a moral, scientific, animalistic, and physical manner. Also demonstrating that dehumanization is present consistently throughout the process of political

violence, including genocide, and it is a realistic and tangible identifying warning sign for future political violence, in whatever form that violence may emerge. Dehumanization is ever present in political society today with the ongoing violence between Israel and Palestine. Israel's response to Hamas's attack displayed the use of dehumanization on both sides, from dehumanization tactics to waging war to dehumanizing methods of indicating the value of human life on a moral basis. Of course, dehumanization has also been present throughout the history of America, from the very way it was founded to the political edge of a cliff the nation often finds itself standing on, like many nations.

As a concrete yet flexible warning sign of future political violence, including a wide range of violent forms as violence varies, dehumanization is a tool that must be utilized for the prevention and curtailment of political violence. It is much more effective to be aware of the indicators of dehumanization and subsequently of future political violence and to take preventative measures, than to attempt to call on international actors and intergovernmental actors to step in when a genocide is already underway or in the aftermath of tragedy, especially since every country has their own interests and allies that are considered when making a decision. While the United Nations is a wonderful organization for setting international norms and a sense of allyship between nations, it does not have the tools to actually take action to end genocide once it has begun if the country perpetuating the violence does not agree to abide by the rulings of the United Nations and cease their violent actions, which usually does not happen. Thus, identifying the issue of dehumanization is the first step towards recognizing the future potential for political violence, which allows for early addressing of such violence against outgroup minorities, and is essential to the prevention of political violence in the first place.

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