



LESSON PLAN: Prewar Jewish Life and Nazi Antisemitism

- 1** Begin this lesson by showing students the map **Jewish Communities in Europe before the Nazis Rise to Power**¹. Provide time for students to share their observations and to consider the importance of demographic data when studying historical events; how can such data help us address questions or be integrated into a coherent understanding of an event?
- 2** Direct students' attention to Germany and note the Jewish population as well as the percentage of the total population that Jews represented. Ask students if they have any knowledge regarding Jewish life in Germany prior to the Holocaust and if so, what they have learned. Follow by asking students to consider what life might have been like for Jews in Germany prior to Hitler's rise to power.
- 3** Tell students that they will now hear from individuals who experienced life in Germany prior to the rise of the Nazi Party. Introduce students to **John Graham (bio)**, **H. Henry Sinason (bio)**, and **Margaret Lambert (bio)**, and show the three clips of testimony.
- 4** After students have listened to the testimony, ask them if they heard anything in the testimony that supported or differed from what they imagined life was like for Jews in Germany before 1933. Additional questions for discussion might include:
 - In his testimony, how does John Graham describe his feelings toward Germany before the war?
 - H. Henry Sinason mentions that his father considered himself German first and Jewish second. What does this lead you to believe about how many Jews might have identified with their country during this time period?
 - After listening to Margaret Lambert's testimony, how does she describe the relationship between Jews and non-Jews before the war?
- 5** Before showing the next clips of testimony, ask students if they are familiar with the terms "stereotype" and "antisemitism" and to share their understanding of what the terms mean. Continue by asking them if based on what they know or have heard about the Holocaust, whether the attitudes and actions against Jews and the laws legislated against them in Nazi Germany were a new phenomenon or part of a continuum of antisemitism throughout history.

¹The numbers on this map are based on official censuses of the population and, within it, the Jewish population, in each and every country before the war. They are based on research done by Sergio Della Pergola, a recognized expert in the field of Jewish demographics. It is important to note that the numbers are not exact because the map is not static. While these are the populations of "prewar" Jewish communities, there is no precise year given because the sizes of these communities were constantly in flux through 1939 due to emigration, territorial expansions, and modifications and other prewar factors.

6 Tell students that they will now be introduced to **H. Henry Sinason (bio)**, **Henry Laurant (bio)**, and **Judith Becker (bio)** and watch their testimonies. Follow with a discussion using the questions below.

- Describe how H. Henry Sinason says that his friends have changed. Who does he believe is responsible for their change in attitude and behavior?
- Henry Laurant makes it a point to discuss his father's occupation and position in the community. What did the vandalism signal for Henry's father? How does Henry's testimony add to your understanding of what was happening in Germany during this time period?
- In her testimony, Judith Becker speaks about a course on racism that was taught in schools. What was the irony that Judith describes? Why do you think the Nazis wanted to target young people with their racial ideology?
- From listening to these testimonies, what do you learn about how the atmosphere in Germany was changing?

7 Review important information about stereotypes with students: A stereotype is an oversimplified generalization about a person or group of people without regard for individual differences. Even seemingly positive stereotypes that link a person or group to a specific positive trait (e.g., Asian Americans are good in math) can have negative consequences because they ignore an individual's interests and abilities. While all stereotypes are hurtful because they group people into one category, some stereotypes are particularly dangerous because they express very negative things about a group of people (e.g., violent, greedy). Such stereotypes perpetuate hateful attitudes and hurt individuals and entire communities. There is also the danger that targets of such stereotypes may begin to believe they are true.

8 Elicit from students examples of how a group to which they belong is stereotyped. Have students discuss why they think people believe and perpetuate stereotypes and why stereotypes are dangerous.

9 Display or distribute the **Definition of Antisemitism** handout; read and discuss together.

10 Prepare students for reading the **Summary of Antisemitism** handout by reviewing key terms and phrases as necessary. Distribute the text and have students study it as a whole group, in small groups, or individually. Instruct students to identify and underline or highlight examples of stereotypes or accusations made against Jews in the selection.

11 After reading the handout, conduct a class discussion based on some or all of the questions below.

- What examples of stereotypes or accusations against Jews were discussed in the text? [Optional: Chart responses on the board or on chart paper.]
- In what way did Nazi ideology create a new form of antisemitism?
- What does the term "scapegoat" mean?
- What are some situations when people may be likely to scapegoat a group of people?

- Can you name groups of people in the United States who have been unfairly blamed for circumstances or events? (e.g., immigrants blamed for unemployment, Japanese Americans blamed for bombing of Pearl Harbor)
- Why do you think many people didn't question or protest what they were being told about Jews?
- How is antisemitism similar to or different from scapegoating?

12 Ask students to consider whether antisemitism was only a problem of the past or if it remains an area of concern today. Have them support their thinking and, if possible, give contemporary examples of antisemitism at the local, national, or international level. Share with students that ADL (adl.org) identifies both criminal and non-criminal acts of harassment and intimidation, including distribution of hate propaganda, threats, and slurs and compiles the information into annual reports. Updates and information about antisemitism—both nationally and internationally—are also posted regularly on the website.

13 Provide students with the **Not in Our Town**² handout and review together. Follow with a discussion using some or all of the questions below.

- What is a hate group?
- Why do you think some people choose to join hate groups?
- How do you think people are recruited to join hate groups?
- How, if at all, is the ideology of hate groups today similar to Nazi racial ideology?
- What is meant by the term “ally”?
- What specifically did the people of Billings, Montana do to show that they were allies to those who had become targets of antisemitism and other forms of bigotry?
- What risks did the people of Billings take when they decided to take action against what was happening in their community?
- What are some of the possible risks that a person takes when he or she decides to become an ally?

² The 1995 broadcast of the film *Not in Our Town*, which told the story about the events in Billings, Montana, sparked many other communities to join the Not in Our Town campaign. The campaign niot.org, which continues today, includes such events as public statements by community leaders promising that the community will stand together against prejudice and hate toward any group or individual, educational programs, workshops and conferences, contests, and online programs.

14. Distribute a sticky note to each student. Have each student write a response to one of the following questions which have been posted on the board and “post” the response under the appropriate question prior to leaving class:

- What specifically did you learn about antisemitism that you didn’t know before studying the topic in class?
- Which of the testimonies that you watched today do you think you will remember and why?
- Why do you think the story of what happened in Billings, Montana still resonates for people more than twenty years later?

ESTIMATED COMPLETION TIME: 60-90 MINUTES