



## LESSON PLAN: Holocaust Denial

**1** Have students consider the meaning of the word “denial” and “revisionism” and then discuss the meaning of “Holocaust denial.” [Optional: Have students look up “Holocaust denial” and “revisionism” in the **Glossary**.]

**2** Introduce students to **Brigitte Altman (bio)** and show her testimony. Discuss the following questions:

- What does Brigitte Altman say is the goal of Holocaust revisionists?
- How does Brigitte respond to those who say the Holocaust never happened?

**3** The issue of Holocaust denial is a difficult and complex topic<sup>1</sup>. It may be approached by asking the students if they think that it is possible, based upon the evidence that they have studied, to question that the Holocaust really occurred. Explain that some antisemitic groups and individuals have stated that the Holocaust did not really happen. These deniers make the following claims:

- a. The number of Jews murdered (six million) is a gross exaggeration.
- b. There was no Nazi program to exterminate Europe’s Jews.
- c. Mass killings in gas chambers did not occur.
- d. Jews were one of many groups who suffered during World War II and were not singled out for persecution.

**4** Individually or in small groups, have students research the topic of Holocaust denial with emphasis on the questions below. Encourage students to consult the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (**ushmm.org**) and Southern Poverty Law Center (**splcenter.org**) websites while conducting their research. Have students share their findings in a whole-group discussion.

- Who are the individuals and groups who have promoted Holocaust denial? Describe their political agendas.
- What arguments do they use to back up their claims?

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to denial of the Holocaust, there are several related phenomena in public discourse today: trivializing the Holocaust, diminishing the place of the Holocaust in history, and relativizing the Holocaust by drawing superficial parallels between it and other events. In some places around the world, Holocaust denial is a mainstream idea (e.g., the 2006 government-sponsored Holocaust denial conference in Iran), whereas in other countries, denial is very much on the margins. In yet other places, it is the related phenomena that are in or near the mainstream of discussion about the Holocaust. Additional information about Holocaust denial is available in the Contemporary Antisemitism unit.

- What arguments can you use to counter their claims?
- What court cases have centered on the issue of Holocaust denial?

**5** Tell students that one way that those who deny the Holocaust have spread their propaganda in the past has been by purchasing scholarly sounding ads in college and community newspapers. Today much of their activity is through the Internet and social media, where there is a tremendous amount of material that promotes the denial and distortion of the Holocaust. Among other central ideas, they frequently call for an “open debate on the Holocaust,” and claim that while Nazi antisemitism did exist, this hatred did not result in an organized killing program. They also question the authenticity of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC and other major museums and archives around the world. In Canada and Western Europe, Holocaust deniers have been successfully prosecuted under racial defamation or hate crimes laws. In the United States, however, the First Amendment guarantees the right of free speech, regardless of political content. While the First Amendment guarantees Holocaust deniers the right to produce and distribute their propaganda, it in no way obligates social media, Internet service providers, and other media outlets to provide them with a forum for their views.

**6** Explain to students that they will now assume the role of a college newspaper staff. Following an intensive campaign to secure new ads to financially support their print and/or online school paper, they have been approached about publishing a Holocaust denial ad. The group is divided on the issue—half the “newspaper staff” believes that a Holocaust denial ad should be allowed to be published in the school newspaper and the other half believes it should not be permitted. Have students either self-select their side of the argument or randomly assign half the class to the argument in favor of printing the ad and half the class to the argument against printing the ad. Have groups develop their arguments and conduct a debate on the topic.

**7** Have a closing discussion that asks students to consider some or all of the following questions:

- Do you think that Holocaust denial is a contemporary form of antisemitism? On what do you base your response?
- If you believe Holocaust denial is a form of antisemitism<sup>2</sup>, why has this expression of hatred been so slow to disappear from society?
- Why is Holocaust denial dangerous?
- Why is it important to be aware of Holocaust denial?
- What is the role of individuals in the face of this phenomenon?

**ESTIMATED COMPLETION TIME: 150-180 MINUTES**

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<sup>2</sup> Consider expanding the discussion to other forms of bigotry (e.g., racism, heterosexism, sexism) and have students share their thinking on why these expressions of hatred are also slow to disappear from society.