

Lesson 5: History of Antisemitism

2 Class Periods

Reading Skills: Building Schema

Students often ask questions like “Why did Hitler hate the Jews?” It is important for them to understand that Hitler and the Nazi party could not have murdered 6 million Jewish people if antisemitism had not been hard-wired into European culture over thousands of years of time. Hitler believed that Jews were an inferior race, but many others in his society also held that belief. I do not mean in any way to absolve Hitler of the evil he committed; I simply think it is ridiculous to blame one man alone for the murders of millions of people. Hitler could not have done what he did without the help of many willing perpetrators and the lack of opposition from many bystanders. I also think it is important for them to understand that antisemitism was not unique to Europe; it was also rampant in the United States. Antisemitic attitudes among the leaders of the U.S. State Department caused officials to deny the full quota of visas allowed under immigration laws in effect at a time when Jews were desperate to escape Nazi-controlled countries.

Antisemitism is a difficult concept to teach because it is complex and spans an immense amount of time and many locations. It is very hard to avoid over-simplifications and generalizations in the process of explaining it to students. Over the years, I have tried several ways to succinctly teach the history of antisemitism and have not yet found the perfect method. During this unit, I tried to teach it using the chapter on antisemitism in *Tell Them We Remember*. This did not work very well. I think the chapter is too abstract for my reading students to grasp the concepts.

I fell back upon a tried and true cloze reading that I created when I first began teaching the Holocaust and have revised several times since. There are several reasons why I like to use this reading. First, it helped me feel that I was sharing accurate information with my students when I wasn't very confident about my own mastery of the content. It also helped keep me on track; I didn't have to worry about forgetting an important point I wanted to make. Second, it helped make a lecture-style lesson more interactive. It was a way to hold students accountable for listening carefully without overburdening them with note-taking. Third, it prevented the inaccuracies that sometimes happen when students take notes. I wanted them to have something that they could keep and refer to in the future. I will include this cloze reading with the materials for this lesson so that you may use it too. However, as I've already stated, I am not convinced this is the very best way to teach antisemitism. I encourage you to try other methods of teaching this content, and please share with me what worked for you!

Materials Needed:

One copy of “The Roots of Antisemitism” for each student

A transparency copy of “The Roots of Antisemitism”

Overhead markers

An overhead projector

Process:

As you read through “The Roots of Antisemitism,” fill in the blanks on the transparency as you go and ask students to do the same on their copies. I have found it most effective to allow questions as we go. I also feel free to stop and elaborate at any points where I feel it would be helpful. Usually I can complete the cloze reading in two class periods.

Background Reading:

I used three sources of information as I wrote this cloze reading; these are referenced on the last page. I recommend that you refer to Barbara Rogasky’s book *Smoke and Ashes* first because it is the easiest to read of the three. Also, it is available in many school and public libraries as well as at the MCHE Resource Center.

Another good synopsis of the history of antisemitism can be found in Lesson 3 of *Life Unworthy of Life: A Holocaust Curriculum*. You can check this out from the MCHE Resource Center. Look in the large ring binder; it has a black and white photograph of a camp uniform on the cover. The article is titled, “Brief History of Antisemitism.”

I would also recommend that you read pages 10-16 of *The World Must Know*.

A Brief History of Antisemitism

[Patton – revised 2/2005]

Christianity and Judaism are often seen as different faiths, but ironically, the first Christians were observant _____ who believed that Jesus was the Messiah for whom the Jews had been waiting. In fact, the word “Christian” means _____. These early Christians were a small sect of the larger body of Judaism; it was possible to be both _____ and _____ at the same time.

It was not until a Jewish man named Saul of Tarsus experienced a life-changing vision that a separation began to form between Jews and Christians. Saul, who came to be known as _____ of the New Testament, was a very successful missionary. In the years before Jesus lived, there were two categories of religious belief in the world. Pagan cultures, such as the ancient Greeks and Romans, worshipped _____ and were known as _____. The Hebrew, or Jewish, people believed in only one God and were waiting for Him to fulfill a promise to send a _____, a redeemer who would create an earthly paradise. Paul felt that there should be one universal, or _____, church that believed in Jesus as the Messiah. He worked to convert both Gentiles and Jews to the belief that Jesus was not just a great Jewish prophet, but God’s own son who would give them access to a heavenly paradise rather than an earthly paradise. Paul was a very

good missionary. As he converted followers to Christianity, he widened the gap between Jews and Christians; eventually they came to be seen as separate faiths.

As the Christian church grew, it became more powerful. During the _____, the decrees of the church influenced all aspects of life and were obeyed by both common men and kings. The simple faith of Jesus became complicated and rigid. The Christian church believed that it knew the only _____ and any differences in religious thought were seen as destructive. Because they refused to _____, life for Jews in Europe during the Middle Ages was miserable. They became _____ for every sort of problem. Jews were blamed for the death of the _____; this crime was so horrible that people believed Jews were capable of committing any type of evil act. They were accused of _____ and causing the _____ that killed millions of people. It was also believed that Jews murdered _____ in order to use their blood during religious ceremonies; this was known as the _____.

Many laws were created to prevent contact between Christians and Jews. For example, Jews could not _____ or hold public office. They were not allowed to practice _____ nor _____. They could not marry Christians and were forced to wear _____ in public to

identify themselves. In addition, Jews were forced to live in

_____, designated areas separate from Christians.

Periodically, Jews became the target of violent acts. Jews were often expelled from countries, among them _____, _____, Spain, Portugal, Italy, and _____. Some Jewish children were kidnapped and raised as Christians. Some Jews were _____ because they would not convert to Christianity. Sometimes entire Jewish communities were destroyed.

Although he was sympathetic to Jews in his earlier years,

_____, the founder of Protestantism, became violently anti-

Jewish later in his career. In 1542 he wrote, “Their synagogues should be

_____ ... Their homes should be likewise broken down and destroyed. ... Let us drive them out of the country for all time.”

While Jews were hated, they were also _____ by the Christian community. Christians believed that it was a sin to

_____. Therefore, Jews filled an important need in the society by loaning money to non-Jews who needed this service.

Jews also were used by those in power to _____. This is probably the historical basis for myths such as “All Jews are rich” and “Jews are stingy with money.” Jews valued education and created schools within their own communities.

In a time when most people were illiterate, most Jewish men

could _____ Yiddish, a derivation of the Hebrew language.

Because of their ability to communicate in a common language with Jews in many European countries, some Jews _____ and conducted _____ for the nobility. They became middlemen who sent and received information throughout Europe.

In the mid-1700's, Europe moved out of the Middle Ages in to the Age of _____. Then, in _____ the French Revolution began. Napoleon's conquest over Germany and other parts of Europe exported the French ideals of freedom, _____, and brotherhood. "Wherever French guns boomed..., _____ walls fell; wherever members of Napoleon's family assumed the thrones vacated by fleeing rulers, Jews emerged from centuries of _____" (Botwinick). Following Napoleon's defeat, the movement toward a more liberal society was reversed, and Jews once again faced familiar restrictions and oppression.

When Napoleon conquered _____, the people were particularly outraged that _____ was extended to Jews. They strove to redefine themselves and restore a sense of _____ and _____ that Napoleon had robbed from them. Under the leadership of men like Johann Fichte, Friedrich Jahn, and the composer Richard Wagner, the Germans began to create a sentimental, mystical concept of German-ness. They believed that "true" Germans – the " _____ " – were simple people

descended from the Teutons, the pagan people who originally inhabited Germany. The proponents of German _____ believed that being truly German was not just a matter of citizenship. They felt that German people had a unique quality and that _____ could never be truly German.

The word _____ was first used in 1873 in the book, The Triumph of Jewry Over Germanism, by Wilhelm Marr. This marked an important change in how Jews were perceived. Before then, Jews were thought to be dangerous because of their _____. However, it was thought possible for them to change for the better; they could choose not to be Jews. But after Marr's book, Jews were thought of as a _____. If Jews were a race by birth, then they could not change and they were fundamentally different from everyone else. A book titled Foundations of the Nineteenth Century, published in 1899, claimed that all of the good in civilization came from the _____. The best examples of this blond and blue-eyed master race were the _____. The book also promoted the idea that the bad in society came from the Jews, or _____. (These terms were misused; the words Aryan or Semite identify language groups – not races.) Combined with a swelling sense of nationalism that excluded Jews, these racist ideas about Jews laid the foundation for antisemitism to become a _____ force.

In Germany during the late 1800's and early 1900's, many political parties were competing for controlling power. Politicians learned that supporting antisemitic policies was a good way to gain _____. Anti-Jewish speeches and books became common, and antisemitic politicians were elected to the _____, the German legislative body.

_____ was born in Austria in 1889 and moved to Germany in 1913. Obviously he was influenced by antisemitic attitudes of the society in which he lived.

After Germany lost World War I, the country was in turmoil. They were embarrassed in the world community, their government was ineffective, the economy was suffering from a terrible _____. People were out of work, poor, and hungry. Many new political parties claimed to be the answer to Germany's problems. Most of these parties were extremely _____, _____, anti-government, and _____. Hitler joined one of these political parties that eventually came to be known as the National Socialist German Worker's Party, the _____. Hitler helped the party grow because of his magnetic personality and ability as a _____.

During the mid-1920's, Hitler, and the Nazi party tried to _____, but they failed. Hitler was sentenced to _____ years in prison, but served only _____ months. During this time he wrote his book,

_____ , which became the bible of the Nazi movement. It is very dull and difficult to read, but it spells out the theories and plans for the future that the Nazi's put into effect when they took power. Hitler was obsessed with the idea of _____. He felt that the _____ race was superior to all others and that the _____ race was the most inferior. Hitler called the Jews names such as _____, _____, _____ and _____. He wrote, "World War I might not have been lost if some twelve or fifteen thousand of the Hebrew corrupters of the people had been _____ before or during the war" (Rogasky). The Holocaust stands as evidence that he meant every word he said. However, it is important to remember that Hitler could not have murdered millions of Jewish people alone. He had to have many accomplices and many bystanders who were as antisemitic as he was.

REFERENCES:

Botwinick, Rita Steinhardt. A History of the Holocaust: From Ideology to Annihilation. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1996.

Dawidowicz, Lucy S. The War Against the Jews, 1933-1945. New York: Bantam Books, 1975.

Rogasky, Barbara. Smoke and Ashes: The Story of the Holocaust. New York: Holiday House, 1988.

A Brief History of Antisemitism (Key)

[Patton – revised 2/2005]

Christianity and Judaism are often seen as different faiths, but ironically, the first Christians were observant **Jews** who believed that Jesus was the Messiah for whom the Jews had been waiting. In fact, the word “Christian” means **follower of the Messiah**. These early Christians were a small sect of the larger body of Judaism; it was possible to be both **Jewish** and **Christian** at the same time.

It was not until a Jewish man named Saul of Tarsus experienced a life-changing vision that a separation began to form between Jews and Christians. Saul, who came to be known as **Paul** of the New Testament, was a very successful missionary. In the years before Jesus lived, there were two categories of religious belief in the world. Pagan cultures, such as the ancient Greeks and Romans, worshipped **multiple gods** and were known as **Gentiles**. The Hebrew, or Jewish, people believed in only one God and were waiting for Him to fulfill a promise to send a **Messiah**, a redeemer who would create an earthly paradise. Paul felt that there should be one universal, or **catholic**, church that believed in Jesus as the Messiah. He worked to convert both Gentiles and Jews to the belief that Jesus was not just a great Jewish prophet, but God’s own son who would give them access to a heavenly paradise rather than an earthly paradise. Paul was a very good missionary. As he converted followers to Christianity, he widened the gap between Jews and Christians; eventually they came to be seen as separate faiths.

As the Christian church grew, it became more powerful. During the **Middle Ages**, the decrees of the church influenced all aspects of life and were obeyed by both common men and kings. The simple faith of Jesus became complicated and rigid. The Christian church believed that it knew the only **truth** and any differences in religious thought were seen as destructive. Because they refused to **convert to Christianity**, life for Jews in Europe during the Middle Ages was miserable. They became **scapegoats** for every sort of problem. Jews were blamed for the death of the **Jesus**; this crime was so horrible that people believed Jews were capable of committing any type of evil act. They were accused of **poisoning wells** and causing the **plague** that killed millions of people. It was also believed that Jews murdered **children** in order to use their blood during religious ceremonies; this was known as the **blood libel**.

Many laws were created to prevent contact between Christians and Jews. For example, Jews could not **own land** or hold public office. They were not allowed to practice **law** nor **medicine**. They could not marry Christians and were forced to wear **cloth badges** in public to identify themselves. In addition, Jews were forced to live in **ghettos**, designated areas separate from Christians.

Periodically, Jews became the target of violent acts. Jews were often expelled from countries, among them **England, France, Spain, Portugal, Italy, and Germany**. Some Jewish children were kidnapped and raised as Christians. Sometimes Jews were **burned at the stake** because they would not convert to Christianity. Sometimes entire Jewish communities were destroyed. Although he was sympathetic to Jews in his earlier years,

Martin Luther, the founder of Protestantism, became violently anti-Jewish later in his career. In 1542 he wrote, “Their synagogues should be **set on fire** ... Their homes should be likewise broken down and destroyed. ... Let us drive them out of the country for all time.”

While Jews were hated, they were also **needed** by the Christian community. Christians believed that it was a sin to **loan money and charge interest (usury)**. Therefore, Jews filled an important need in the society by loaning money to non-Jews who needed this service. Jews also were used by those in power to **collect taxes and other fees**. This is probably the historical basis for myths such as “All Jews are rich” and “Jews are stingy with money.” Jews valued education and created schools within their own communities. In a time when most people were illiterate, most Jewish men could **read and write** Yiddish, a derivation of the Hebrew language. Because of their ability to communicate in a common language with Jews in many European countries, some Jews **managed businesses** and conducted **trade** for the nobility. They became middlemen who sent and received information throughout Europe.

In the mid-1700’s, Europe moved out of the Middle Ages in to the Age of **Enlightenment**. Then, in **1789** the French Revolution began. Napoleon’s conquest over Germany and other parts of Europe exported the French ideals of freedom, **equality**, and brotherhood. “Wherever French guns boomed..., **ghetto** walls fell; wherever members of Napoleon’s family assumed the thrones vacated by fleeing rulers, Jews emerged from centuries of **humiliation**.” (Botwinick). Following Napoleon’s defeat, the movement

toward a more liberal society was reversed, and Jews once again faced familiar restrictions and oppression.

When Napoleon conquered **Germany**, the people were particularly outraged that **equality under the law** was extended to Jews. They strove to redefine themselves and restore a sense of **pride** and **self-esteem** that Napoleon had robbed from them. Under the leadership of men like Johann Fichte, Friedrich Jahn, and the composer Richard Wagner, the Germans began to create a sentimental, mystical concept of German-ness. They believed that “true” Germans – the “**volk**” – were simple people descended from the Teutons, the pagan people who originally inhabited Germany. The proponents of German **nationalism** believed that being truly German was not just a matter of citizenship. They felt that German people had a unique quality and that **Jews** could never be truly German.

The word **antisemitism** was first used in 1873 in the book, The Triumph of Jewry Over Germanism, by Wilhelm Marr. This marked an important change in how Jews were perceived. Before then, Jews were thought to be dangerous because of their **religious beliefs**. However, it was thought possible for them to change for the better; they could choose not to be Jews. But after Marr’s book, Jews were thought of as a **race**. If Jews were a race by birth, then they could not change and they were fundamentally different from everyone else. A book titled Foundations of the Nineteenth Century, published in 1899, claimed that all of the good in civilization came from the **Aryans**. The best examples of this blond and blue-eyed master race were the **Germans**. The book also

promoted the idea that the bad in society came from the Jews, or **Semites**. (These terms were misused; the words Aryan or Semite identify language groups – not races.) Combined with a swelling sense of nationalism that excluded Jews, these racist ideas about Jews laid the foundation for antisemitism to become a **political** force.

In Germany during the late 1800's and early 1900's, many political parties were competing for controlling power. Politicians learned that supporting antisemitic policies was a good way to gain **votes**. Anti-Jewish speeches and books became common, and antisemitic politicians were elected to the **Reichstag**, the German legislative body. **Adolf Hitler** was born in Austria in 1889 and moved to Germany in 1913. Obviously he was influenced by antisemitic attitudes of the society in which he lived.

After Germany lost World War I, the country was in turmoil. They were embarrassed in the world community, their government was ineffective, the economy was suffering from a terrible **depression**. People were out of work, poor, and hungry. Many new political parties claimed to be the answer to Germany's problems. Most of these parties were extremely **patriotic**, **anti-democratic**, anti-government, and **antisemitic**. Hitler joined one of these political parties that eventually came to be known as the National Socialist German Worker's Party, the **Nazis**. Hitler helped the party grow because of this magnetic personality and ability as a **public speaker**.

During the mid-1920's, Hitler, and the Nazi party tried to **take over the government**, but they failed. Hitler was sentenced to **five** years in prison, but served only **nine** months.

During this time he wrote his book, **Mein Kampf (My Struggle)**, which became the bible of the Nazi movement. It is very dull and difficult to read, but it spells out the theories and plans for the future that the Nazi's put into effect when they took power. Hitler was obsessed with the idea of **race and racial purity**. He felt that the **Aryan** race was superior to all others and that the **Semitic (Jewish)** race was the most inferior. Hitler called the Jews names such as **parasite, maggot, vermin, and snake**. He wrote, "World War I might not have been lost if some twelve or fifteen thousand of the Hebrew corrupters of the people had been **poisoned by gas** before or during the war" (Rogasky). The Holocaust stands as evidence that he meant every word he said. However, it is important to remember that Hitler could not have murdered millions of Jewish people alone. He had to have many accomplices and many bystanders who were as antisemitic as he was.

REFERENCES:

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Rogasky, Barbara. Smoke and Ashes: The Story of the Holocaust. New York: Holiday House, 1988.

Raul Hillberg's Three Types of Antisemitism

“You may not live among us as Jews.”

(Religious Anti-Judaism)

- Emphasis on the conversion of Jews to Christianity
- After conversion, Jews accepted as full members of society
- Canon law dictates the persecution of Jews
- Jews viewed as deniers of and killers of Christ

“You may not live among us.”

(Secular Antisemitism)

- Jews segregated from the majority population, often in ghettos
- Belief that Jews have inherent biological characteristics and will not change
- Shift toward racial antisemitism supported by scientific advances and the pseudo-sciences of Social Darwinism and eugenics in the 18th century
- Resentment of Jewish participation in economic and social life of Europe following the Enlightenment and the 18th century revolutions

“You may not live.”

(Racial Antisemitism)

- Racial antisemitism firmly entrenched and supported by pseudo-sciences
- Judaism now perceived as a biological race – Jews who convert to Christianity or do not practice their religion are still considered Jews
- Patterns of persecution already well established – Nazi propaganda amplifies and manipulated patterns already in place
- Culminated in Nazi plans to kill all European Jews

Without the long-standing Christian mistrust of Jews, the Holocaust could probably not have happened. Antisemitism had been “hard-wired” into the consciousness of European culture for thousands of years. Hatred of Jews did not start with Hitler.

- The progression of antisemitism according to Raul Hillberg. *Destruction of the European Jews*. New York: Holmes and Meier, 1985.
- Additional notes from Jessica Rockhold at MCHE and Laura Patton

