



MOSAIC – VICTIMS OF NAZI PERSECUTION GUIDANCE NOTES

INTRODUCTION

During the years 1933 to 1945, the Nazis and their collaborators were responsible for the persecution of millions of people from a variety of ethnic, religious, social and political backgrounds. Discrimination took a variety of forms and was conducted for a plethora of reasons but all of these policies were rooted in Nazi ideology.

This resource, produced in association with the National Union of Teachers, is designed to help students explore the diverse experiences of the many groups of people persecuted during the era of the Third Reich. It is intended for use with students aged 13 years and above, and can be employed in a range of different subjects. In the notes that follow, teachers can find further guidance on the content and usage of the resource together with advice on the pedagogical challenges and conceptual issues it raises.

CONTENT AND USAGE

This resource consists of sets of materials for nine different groups targeted by the Nazis and their collaborators. In some cases (Hungarian Jews, trade unionists, and – to some extent – Poles), the specific communities chosen are representative of a wider victim group. The groups are:

Black people

Disabled people

Gay men

Hungarian Jews (representing the Jews of Europe)

Jehovah's Witnesses

Poles (representing eastern European civilians)

Sinti and Roma ('gypsies')

Soviet prisoners of war

Trade unionists (representing political opponents)

Each set of materials consists of three components – a poster, a biographical case study, and a leaflet containing a historical overview – which cumulatively enable students to examine the experiences of any one victim group.

The poster bears an image relevant to the group in question, together with three accompanying questions. These questions are sufficiently general in nature to be accessible to all abilities and do not require any prior knowledge or understanding. Their function – like that of the poster in toto – is to generate students' interest and prompt discussion. Because of this, the posters lend themselves to a variety of purposes including classroom or departmental display, as well as use in stimuli activities. Since the themes of the poster relate to the other materials, they can also be used in conjunction with each other. If using the posters as part of a classroom activity, teachers will find the further information section at the end of this document useful for contextualisation.

The biographical case study recounts the story of a member of the victim group. Each case study contains a picture of the person together with a description of their fate during the period. Students are thereby provided with a point of access which re-humanises the historical events and makes the more intelligible. As such, the case studies can be used for display purposes, as starter or main class activities, and as a basis for further group or independent research.

The historical overview provides students with a summary of why members of the victim group being studied were persecuted and what happened to them. In this manner, the overview serves to contextualise the poster and the biographical case study and encourage the development of historical knowledge and understanding. Whilst it is intended that the overview be used in this way, it is also possible for it to be used as a stand-alone resource separate from the other two components.

PEDAGOGICAL AND CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING

Victims and victimhood

As with many aspects of Holocaust education, teaching the differing experiences of those who were subjected to persecution poses distinct pedagogical challenges. One of these is the importance of ensuring that students do not come away thinking about groups of people solely as victims, devoid of any humanity. It is therefore crucial that students do not end up seeing these individuals as merely passive objects which were acted upon, for this serves to further dehumanise them and misrepresent the diverse ways in which people responded to persecution. It is for this reason that a key element of this resource is the biographical case studies, which serve to re-individualise history and allow students to consider the human impact that various policies had.

Another challenge faced by educators is to ensure that students do not fall into the trap of seeing victimhood in competitive terms. Comparing the suffering of different individuals and groups is pernicious. Educators should instead encourage students to understand the specific experiences of each group whilst also highlighting the benefits that an integrated approach to the various victims of Nazism can have on our understanding of the particularities of the Holocaust and other crimes committed by the Nazis and their collaborators. It is with this in mind that this resource contains material on an array of different victim groups so as to avoid implying a hierarchy of suffering.

Concepts and definitions

Teachers should also be attentive to certain conceptual issues which may arise in their classrooms when broaching the subject of the victim groups of Nazism. Foremost among these is the importance of ensuring clear and concise definitions of key concepts which students will

encounter and refer to during the course of their learning. Whilst words such as Holocaust, persecution, discrimination and prejudice are important here, students should also have secure understanding of other frequently cited yet sometimes misused terms like Nazi, perpetrator, bystander, and collaborator. It is recommended that before using any of these for the first time the teacher seeks to establish students' existing conceptualisations and correct these accordingly.

An additional set of concepts which teachers should be aware of in their teaching relate more specifically to the Nazi 'racial state' – a country where thinking about 'race' and 'racism' was a central feature of culture, society and politics. Accordingly, a core concern was Germany's racial 'health' in the light of what the Nazis saw as the inherent struggle for survival between people and nations. In this view, the well-being of Germany was directly linked to blood and, since aptitudes and characteristics were all understood to be transmitted through inheritance, it was therefore seen as imperative that the purity of German blood be protected and improved. This was all the more important since the Nazis believed that the Aryan race (of which Germany was a part of and was supposedly superior to all others) was under serious threat by so-called 'inferior' races and asocial elements within the Third Reich.

'Race' and the 'Racial State'

Before beginning to approach interpretations of 'race' and 'racism' by the Nazi regime it is strongly suggested that teachers establish students' understandings of these terms. With these in place teachers can move students towards examining the content of Nazi racial thinking, and its place within Nazism's ideological worldview. This is no easy task; the Nazis themselves found that notions of 'race' elided precise definition, and this was in no small part due to the flawed foundations of ideas of race. Despite Nazism's attempt to legitimise its views by appealing to modern scientific advances, it could not overcome the fact that empirical proof to validate these claims was forever unobtainable.

Whilst this generally reflected how much of the 'science' invoked by the Nazis had more in common with irrationality than with rationality, it more specifically spoke to the fundamental fallacy at the core of Nazi racial thinking: namely, that there is no such thing as 'race' in biological terms. In this respect it is crucial that students recognise that "*the Third Reich was a racial state, but one based more on race mysticism than on racial science*".¹

So that students are able to appreciate how Nazi ideology and policy both mirrored and diverted from transnational trends, it is also crucial that students can place the way in which racial thinking was institutionalised in Germany in a broader context of developments elsewhere, given that eugenic theories were popular across the Western world from the late nineteenth century right up until the outbreak of the Second World War. Indeed, notions of racial improvement found favour at both ends of the political spectrum in an array of different countries, and led to a number of governments implementing 'positive' and 'negative' eugenic policies. With this in mind, accounting for why the 'racial state' developed in the murderous manner that it did in Germany becomes all the more pressing.

The concept of the 'racial state' is thus an important if complex one for students to grasp. However, they must also be aware that this notion alone cannot adequately account for all of the victim groups created by Nazism. Political opponents, for example, were subjected to discrimination and violence by the regime not on account of their 'race' so much as their 'political crimes'; similarly, Jehovah's Witnesses were persecuted for their spiritual refusal to accept the regime and their perceived 'anti-Nazi' behaviour. Although both of these groups were seen to threaten the *Volksgemeinschaft* – the idealised 'national community' of racially pure Germans – they were not regarded as posing the same biological danger as others.

1 – Dan Stone, *Histories of the Holocaust* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 200.

GLOSSARY

Anschluss

The union of Germany and Austria in March 1938. A few weeks later, in April, a plebiscite was held to secure public endorsement. The results of this vote were interfered with to ultimately indicate 99% of the population approved of the union.

Antisemitism

Prejudice towards or hatred of Jewish people. The history of anti-Jewish sentiment stretches so far back in time – to the early Christian era – that it has been termed the ‘longest hatred’. In the nineteenth century, traditional anti-Jewish prejudice fused with new ideas and trends to produce modern antisemitism: the notion that Jews were different and inferior on account of their race.

‘Aryan’

Term originally applied to speakers of Indo-European languages. The Nazis and other racists used it to describe people of white European origin, especially northern Europeans who were believed to have been responsible for the great achievements of European civilization and thus superior to all other ‘races’. Such ideas were not introduced by the Nazis but rather originated in the late nineteenth century.

Ashkenazi

Term originally applied to the Jews of Germany. Following the migration of German Jews to countries such as Poland in the Middle Ages, the majority of Ashkenazim lived in eastern Europe.

Auschwitz-Birkenau

Concentration and extermination camp in the Polish town of Oświęcim. Created as a concentration camp for Polish political prisoners in 1940, it became an extermination camp in early 1942. Eventually, it consisted of three main sections: Auschwitz I, the concentration camp; Auschwitz II (Birkenau), an extermination and slave labour camp; Auschwitz III (Monowitz), a slave labour camp. Auschwitz also had numerous sub-camps. More than 1.1 million people lost their lives in Auschwitz-Birkenau, including approximately 1 million Jews, 75,000 Poles, 21,000 Sinti and Roma, and 15,000 Soviet prisoners of war.

Concentration camp

Prison camp in which inmates were forced to undertake hard labour. The first Nazi concentration camps, with the exception of Dachau (created March 1933), were generally small and temporary. From 1936 onwards larger camps such as Sachsenhausen, Buchenwald and Mauthausen were established, usually linked to economic enterprises run by the SS. Most inmates were political opponents of the Nazis or so-called ‘asocials’ (such as gay men, beggars and habitual criminals). Although more than 30,000 Jews were held in camps after Kristallnacht in 1938, the camps in Germany and Austria (unlike those in Poland) had a limited role in the Holocaust until late 1944 when they began to receive tens of thousands of prisoners evacuated from the East, causing catastrophic conditions in which huge numbers of Jews and others died.

Eugenics

Term derived from ancient Greek (meaning 'good birth'), first coined by the British scientist Francis Galton. As an idea, eugenics was influenced by other trends in social and scientific thought in the late nineteenth century, including Social Darwinism, which applied Darwin's idea of 'survival of the fittest' to the human world. In order to combat 'degeneration', eugenicists aimed to improve the health and well-being of the population through 'positive' measures, such as providing financial incentives to couples seen to be of 'good' racial stock, and, often, 'negative' policies like sterilization. Eugenics became an international movement (for example, University College London had a chair in eugenics) which acquired different characteristics from country to country. In Germany, eugenics developed into *Rassenhygiene* – 'racial hygiene'.

Euthanasia

Term normally used to describe a painless, voluntary death for the terminally ill. The Nazis used the term for the programme of state-sponsored murder of around 200,000 people with mental and physical disabilities in Germany and Austria. The Nazis also murdered an unknown number of disabled people in Poland during the war.

Extermination camp

Nazi camp for the mass murder of Jews, primarily by poison gas. Four camps were created in Poland in 1941-42 which existed solely for the murder of Jews: Belżec, Chelmo, Sobibór and Treblinka. Almost every person brought to these camps was murdered immediately: only a small number of Jews from each transport were selected to work in the camp (e.g. sorting the property of victims, disposing of the bodies) and most of them were soon murdered. In addition, the already existing Auschwitz-Birkenau camp became an extermination camp in spring 1942. Because Birkenau was also a slave labour camp, larger numbers of Jews were selected to work, giving them a slightly higher chance of survival. A number of other camps, notably Majdanek, have sometimes also been described as extermination camps.

General Government

Political unit, essentially a German colony, created in 1939 by the Nazis from those areas of Poland which were not directly incorporated into Germany or the Soviet Union. It included many of Poland's major Jewish communities such as Warsaw, Kraków and Lublin.

Genocide

Term first coined in World War II by the Polish-Jewish lawyer Raphael Lemkin to describe the deliberate and systematic destruction of a religious, racial, national or cultural group. In 1948 the United Nations introduced the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. This established genocide as a crime which members were obliged to act against.

'Germanisation'

Policy pursued by the Nazis in occupied Poland and, to some extent, the Soviet Union and the Czech lands which sought to make these territories ethnically German. This took the form of the expulsion of many local inhabitants and the settling of ethnic Germans as well as the 'reclaiming' (i.e. abduction from their families) of children considered to potentially have German blood (e.g. those with German surnames or blonde hair).

Ghetto

Section of a town or city where Jews were forced to live. Ghettos had existed in many parts of Europe in the Medieval and the Early Modern periods. They were revived by the Germans following the invasion of Poland: the first Nazi ghetto was created in Piotrków Trybunalski in October 1939. More ghettos were established in 1940 although widespread ghettoisation only began in 1941. Ghettos were also created in the Soviet Union from late 1941 onwards, usually for Jews of working age who had survived the Einsatzgruppen massacres. Many, though not all, ghettos were 'closed', i.e. surrounded by walls with exit forbidden. Ghettos were characterised by overcrowding, hunger, disease and exploitation for slave labour. All were eventually liquidated with the Jews deported to extermination camps or shot.

'Gypsies'

Commonly used term, often considered pejorative, to describe the Romani people, an ethnic group who trace their origins to northern India. Although Romani are stereotypically seen as nomadic, many 'Gypsies' lived in settled communities. The principal Romani groups were Roma and Sinti. The Nazis regarded 'Gypsies' as racially inferior and a danger to 'Aryan' society. Although policy varied from country to country, around 220,000 Roma and Sinti were murdered.

Holocaust

Literally 'completely burnt sacrifice' (Greek). Term most commonly used to describe the mass murder of approximately 6 million Jews by the Nazis and their collaborators. Although other groups were victims of Nazi persecution and genocide, only Jews were targeted for complete destruction. Thus, when used by historians, the term refers specifically to the murder of Europe's Jews rather than to Nazi persecution in general.

Nuremberg Laws

Two anti-Jewish laws enacted in September 1935 during the Nazi Party conference in Nuremberg which provided the basis for removing Jews from all spheres of German life. The Reich Citizenship Law effectively deprived Jews of German citizenship and associated rights. The Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honour outlawed marriage and sexual relations between Jews and non-Jews as well as prohibiting Jews from employing non-Jewish female servants of childbearing age and displaying the German flag. Supplementary laws defined who was a Jew, with a range of categories created for Germans of mixed ancestry. The laws were also applied to German Sinti and Roma.

Operation Barbarossa

Code name for the German invasion of the Soviet Union which began on 22nd June 1941.

Persecution

The oppression, harassment or maltreatment of a person or group.

Porrajmos

Also spelled 'Porajmos'. A Romani term meaning 'devouring' used by 'gypsies' to describe the murder of Roma and Sinti during the Second World War.

'Racial science'

A phrase generally used to refer to the fusion of racial thought and supposed scientific rationality or practice. The term could be used to refer to thinking about race in a wide range of different disciplinary contexts – from anthropology and biology to sociology and psychology.

Sephardi

Term used to describe Jews of Spanish and Portuguese origin. Following their expulsion from Spain in 1492, Jews mainly settled in the Ottoman empire at the invitation of the Sultan.

Shoah

Literally 'catastrophe' (Hebrew). A term for the Holocaust preferred by many Jews.

Shtetl (plural: shtetlach)

A Yiddish word typically used to describe a small town in eastern Europe with a majority Jewish population. Before 1939 there were thousands of shtetlach across Poland, the Baltic States, the western Soviet Union, and Transylvania.

SS

Nazi Party organisation which was originally created as Hitler's bodyguard. Under the leadership of Himmler, the SS grew to become a 'state within a state' which controlled the concentration camps and racial policy, ran its own businesses and had its own armed forces.

Star of David

A traditional symbol of the Jewish people, used by the Nazis and others as a method of identifying and discriminating against Jews, beginning with Poland in 1939. Depending on the country, it took the form of an armband or a badge.

T4

Code name for the operation (approved by Hitler in October 1939) in which 70,000 German and Austrian adults with disabilities were murdered in gas chambers at six killing centres, mostly former hospitals, between 1939 and 1941. Officially ended in August 1941, partly because of public protests, although killings of disabled people continued by other means to the end of the war. Many T4 staff were transferred to Poland to run the Aktion Reinhard extermination camps.

THE POSTERS – FURTHER INFORMATION

Disabled People and the Euthanasia Programme

This modern photograph shows Hartheim castle in Austria, which became a hospital for the physically and mentally disabled in 1898. It was converted into a T4 killing centre in early 1940 when gas chambers were fitted. After T4 ended in 1941, it was used to murder weakened concentration camp inmates until 1944. Approximately 30,000 people were murdered, including Theresia Karas, whose story is retold in the accompanying postcard.



Jews in Hungary

This image shows members of the Jewish community of Sighet (today Sighetu Marmației in Romania). These people are shown in front of a wooden synagogue, similar to those found in small towns throughout eastern Europe prior to the Holocaust. Sighet was the home of Elie Wiesel, whose story is relayed in the accompanying postcard.



Nazi Persecution of Black People

The girl (name unknown) in the centre of this image was the mixed race child of a German woman from the Rhineland and a French colonial soldier. The photograph has survived because it was used as a slide in a lecture on genetics at the State Academy for Race and Health in Dresden in the late 1930s.



Persecution of Gay Men

Little is known about this photograph other than that it was taken in Berlin in 1926, evidently in a photographic studio. Nonetheless, as with the case of Richard Grune on the postcard, it hints at the relative tolerance of the German capital in the 1920s where, despite the existence of punitive laws, at least some gay men felt that they did not have to hide their sexuality.



Persecution of Gypsies and the Porrajmos

This poster shows a soldier by the name of Kurt Winterstein. Kurt was one of Adolf Hitler's personal drivers, but when the Nazis discovered that his mother was a "Gypsy" Kurt was removed from the army and forcibly sterilized. Kurt is a relative of Rita Prigmore, whose story is relayed in the accompanying postcard.



Persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses

This photograph shows the home of the Kusserow family in the small German town of Bad Lippspringe. The accompanying card on Magdalena Kusserow relates the fate of the family. As the card explains, this house was a centre for Bible study classes whilst the family used the car to travel to nearby towns to distribute Witness literature.



Persecution of Poles

This image, taken in the autumn of 1939 by a German photographer following the invasion of Poland, shows a group of boys leaving their school in Warsaw. Together with the questions, it hints at two effects of the German occupation on Poland: the closure of most schools and the abduction of children for ‘Germanisation’.



Persecution of Trade Unionists

This photograph of a picket was taken in Berlin in February 1931. It depicts print workers who had called a wildcat strike following a decision by the Ministry of Labour to reduce their wages by 6 per cent. It illustrates the growing industrial unrest of the last years of Weimar Republic which the Nazis exploited to spread fears of socialist revolution.



Soviet Prisoners of War

This photograph shows Soviet POWs held in Stalag 307, a fortress in Dęblin in Poland. More than 100,000 POWs were interned in the camp, meaning that thousands were left in the open in temperatures which fell as low as -25°C . The camp had only one well to supply water. It is estimated that 80 per cent of the prisoners died over the winter of 1941-42.



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