



Teaching about Anti-Semitism through Holocaust Education

*Teaching
Aid*

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Teaching about Anti-Semitism through Holocaust Education

Holocaust Education is teaching and learning about the genocide of the Jewish people, alongside the persecution and murder of other groups, by Nazi Germany and its collaborators during World War II. Holocaust education is taught intensively within the school curricula in many countries.¹ This is a welcome and important development, but it is not an adequate substitute for education about anti-Semitism. If anti-Semitism is exclusively addressed through Holocaust education, students might conclude that anti-Semitism is not an issue today or misconceive its contemporary forms. Teachers must keep in mind that education about the Holocaust cannot ensure the prevention of contemporary anti-Semitism,

which may be based on different ideological assumptions and manifest itself in different contexts.

At the same time, it is appropriate and necessary to incorporate lessons about anti-Semitism into teaching about the Holocaust because it is fundamental to understanding the context in which discrimination, exclusion and, ultimately, the destruction of European Jews took place. Stereotypes that fed ideologies that culminated in the Holocaust still exist today. Teaching this topic can also serve as an entry point to consider contemporary anti-Semitism, racism and other human rights issues. Traditional Holocaust education can

inadvertently fuel anti-Semitism, so care is needed in planning these lessons.

This teaching aid will provide guidance on how to confront contemporary anti-Semitism through Holocaust education. With the help of this aid, teachers will be able to:

- Understand how a racist and anti-Semitic ideology informed the development of the Holocaust; and
- Recognize anti-Semitism and other forms of hatred in today's world.

¹ ODIHR regularly surveys and collects existing practices for Holocaust remembrance across the OSCE. See “Holocaust Memorial Days: An overview of remembrance and education in the OSCE region”, ODIHR, 27 January 2018, <<https://www.osce.org/odihr/hmd2018>>. See also Peter Carrier, Fuchs, Eckhardt, Fuchs and Torben Messinger, *The International Status of Education about the Holocaust. A Global Mapping of Textbooks and Curricula*. Summary (Paris: UNESCO, 2015).

Background

Anti-Semitism was not invented by the Nazis, and it did not end with them. The racial ideology that characterized the Nazi philosophy emerged decades earlier in the late nineteenth century, drawing on previous forms of Christian anti-Jewish sentiment while incorporating new elements. The term “anti-Semitism” was popularized in the 1870’s by Wilhelm Marr, a German political agitator and journalist, at a time when pseudo-scientific theories of racial superiority and inferiority emerged. The term was created specifically to define the hatred of Jews as a “race”, as opposed to a religion.²

Many of the stereotypes and myths about Jews employed by the Nazis in the lead up to

the Holocaust to promote support for their “Final Solution” were recycled from the medieval period, and myths from both the medieval and modern periods still resonate today in contemporary anti-Semitic propaganda.³ For a description of the most common anti-Semitic myths and stereotypes, see ODIHR teaching aid no. 3, “Addressing Anti-Semitic Stereotypes and Prejudice.”⁴

Some of these same myths are recycled again now. Examples include the myth of blood libel, which emerged in the Middle Ages and is still visible today in images found in churches throughout Europe.⁵ Such imagery was frequently recreated in Nazi pamphlets, and is

Blood Libel

For generations, Jews have been falsely accused of killing non-Jews for ritual purposes and purported to be in league with the devil. In medieval Europe, beginning in the 12th century, this was often accompanied by accusations that Jews used their victims’ blood to bake *matzah* for the Jewish holiday of Passover. Historically, these false allegations have frequently been followed by anti-Semitic riots and mass murder. Echoes of this blood libel can still be heard in discourse today.

evident in modern-day forms of anti-Semitic propaganda.

The myth of Jewish world domination is another recurring theme in contemporary anti-Semitism and can be traced back decades before the Holocaust. This myth is interconnected with others, such as those claiming that Jewish people

² The etymology of the term “anti-Semitism” itself has led to misunderstandings about whether it encompasses bias against other groups who are also described as “Semitic”. Anti-Semitism does not refer to hatred of speakers of Semitic languages. Common usage of the term anti-Semitism has referred only to a negative perception of the Jewish people, actions motivated by bias or hatred and ideologies that sustain it.

³ The “Final Solution” refers to the Nazi plan to bring about the mass extermination of Jews in Europe. For more information, see: Holocaust Encyclopaedia, “Final Solution: Overview”, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, <<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/final-solution-overview>>.

⁴ For more information on anti-Semitic tropes and memes, see *Addressing Anti-Semitism through Education – Guidelines for policymakers*, (Warsaw: OSCE/ODIHR, 2018), Annex 2 (“Examples of Anti-Semitic Tropes or Memes”) and Annex 3 (“Examples of Anti-Semitic Symbols”), <<https://www.osce.org/odihr/383089?download=true>>

⁵ See Heinz Schreckenberg, *The Jews in Christian Art: An Illustrated History* (New York: Continuum, 1997).

World Domination

The pinnacle of the myth of Jews as conspirers is the idea that they are plotting to take over the world for their own gain. The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, which to this day remains popular in re-emerging editions in dozens of languages throughout the world, is perhaps the clearest and best-known example of this theory. Contemporary examples include the “The Goyim Know” meme, used online and in social media to perpetuate this myth, as are memes and articles about lizard people, the Illuminati and the New World Order (See also: <https://www.adl.org/education/references/hate-symbols/the-goyim-knowshut-it-down>).

control the banks, the media and politics

Images can be effective in demonstrating how anti-Semitic myths manifest both in the past and in the present.

However, they are not necessarily recommended for the classroom. Supervision and support must be provided to students asked to engage in independent research to find contemporary examples of old myths, since they risk encountering very dangerous websites that may well reinforce old stereotypes.

At the same time, educational policy and practice needs to allow space for teachers to address contemporary manifestations of anti-Semitism in the classroom. According to a study on anti-Semitism in Germany, commissioned by the German Parliament, Holocaust education is inadvertently fuelling anti-Semitism in Germany. The study warns that stereotypes can be conveyed by one-sided presentations of Jews as victims and accounts of Nazi propaganda that are not presented carefully.⁶ Similarly, despite the fact that Holocaust education is a mandatory part of the official school curriculum,⁷ France

has been the location of several violent anti-Semitic attacks since 2012,⁸ while a 2015 survey found that 59 per cent of French people think that members of the Jewish community are at least partially responsible for anti-Semitism.⁹

Education about the Holocaust should be an opportunity to sensitize students to the dangers of stereotypes and prejudice and to confront learners with the possible consequences of anti-Semitism, intolerance and racism. It can also highlight difficult moral questions and the consequences of choices made by individuals in the face of discrimination

⁶ See: Dan Fleshler, “Does Education Fuel Anti-Semitism”, *Forward*, 17 February 2012. See also the results of the 2017 report by the Independent Expert Group, as summarized in an official press release by the German Bundestag (Parliament): “Press Release”, *Deutscher Bundestag*, 24 April 2017, <https://www.bundestag.de/blob/503232/e551c26a4eb8bb46f2de1721a7f417e6/antisemitismusbericht_press_release-data.pdf>

⁷ “Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research in France”, *International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance*, <<https://2015.holocaustremembrance.com/member-countries/holocaust-education-remembrance-and-research-france>>.

⁸ For more information on violent anti-Semitic incidents in France, see: “Handout 2: The context of anti-Semitic hate crimes in France” in *Customization Report for France on implementing ODIHR’s publication on Understanding Anti-Semitic Hate Crimes and Addressing the Security Needs of Jewish Communities: A Practical Guide*, OSCE ODIHR, (10 March 2018), p. 4-10, <<https://www.osce.org/odihr/399785?download=true>>

⁹ “Perceptions et attentes de la population juive: le rapport à l’autre et aux minorités [Perceptions and expectations of the Jewish population: The relationship to others and minorities]”, *IPSOS*, 31 January 2016, <<https://www.ipsos.com/fr-fr/complement-perceptions-et-attentes-de-la-population-juive-le-rapport-lautre-et-aux-minorites>>.



An anti-Semitic fresco depicting a supposed blood libel in St Paul's Church in Sandomierz, Poland. Photo Credit: Jarosław Kubalski / Agencja Gazeta

and persecution in an environment of war. Educating students about how these stereotypes were weaponized into the murder of six million Jews in the Holocaust can encourage learners to speak out and overcome indifference in situations where Jews and others face discrimination today.

Education about the Holocaust is highly relevant in the context of efforts to promote and uphold human rights in general. For example, teaching and learning about the Holocaust:

- demonstrates the fragility of all societies and of the institutions set up to protect the security and rights of everyone, and shows how these institutions can be turned against one segment of society;
- highlights aspects of human behaviour that affect all societies, such as susceptibility to scapegoating and the role of fear, peer pressure, greed and resentment in social and political relations;
- demonstrates the danger of prejudice, discrimination and dehumanization;
- deepens reflections on the power of extremist ideologies, propaganda and hate speech; and
- draws attention to international institutions and norms that were developed in reaction to crimes perpetrated during World War II.¹⁰

¹⁰ Detailed learning objectives pertaining to education about the Holocaust can be found in *Education about the Holocaust and preventing genocide: A policy guide* (Paris: UNESCO, 2017), <<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000248071>>.

Classroom Strategies for Initiating Difficult Conversations, Including about Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust

Activity:

Glossary board

Explain to the class that for each lesson a glossary will be developed to help students explore complex topics. Starting with four key terms, guide the class to come up with their own words to describe how to conduct the discussion. The following are some sample words with target answers:

- Respectful: feeling or showing deference;
- Attentive: paying close attention to something;
- Honest: free of deceit and untruthfulness; sincere; and
- Perspective: a particular attitude toward or way of regarding something; a point of view.

Rules of engagement

Underscore that, because the class will be discussing difficult subjects, it is important that everyone's opinion is heard. To make this happen, it is necessary to set up rules of engagement to support and protect students as they navigate thorny issues during their discussions.

Write "Rules of Engagement" on the board and ask students to come up with the rules. Ask them to consider how they would like to be heard by their classmates, and how they would like to be spoken to. Start by writing several examples on the board and then invite students to add to the list.

Target answers: student responses should include or be similar to the following:

- Be a respectful and attentive listener;
- Use respectful speech;
- Give each discussion participant equal time to speak ("mic sharing");
- Be honest and have honest intentions;
- Allow others to keep or change their perspectives; and
- Have the intention to create trust and learn from each other, rather than discredit others.

Keep the rules of engagement posted and visually accessible throughout the discussion.

SOURCE: "Module One", Generation Human Rights, <<http://www.generationhumanrights.org/module-one-lesson-1>>.

DISCUSS PATTERNS OF STEREOTYPING BEFORE DISCUSSING SPECIFIC STEREOTYPES

Teachers should hold discussions about general patterns of stereotyping as an entry point for raising awareness about specific stereotypes, including anti-Semitism. This may involve using examples of types of stereotypes and related patterns to

guide students to understanding the negative impact of stereotyping and the (often attractive) simplified approach to complex issues that it encourages and enables, as typified by the Holocaust.¹¹

What to do if ...?

...a student says, “Why are you always speaking about the Jews? Why not speak about

the Rwandan genocide, slavery, persecution of the Roma, the Gulag, etc.?”?

The educational opportunity presented by the Holocaust to teach about anti-Semitism can be utilized most effectively by being proactive rather than reactive. In approaching the topic in class, consider your students’ interests, strengths and weaknesses, and individual backgrounds. This will increase the effectiveness of the lesson in driving home the dangers of anti-Semitism, and preempt resistance from students to engaging in the topic of Jews and the Holocaust.

Explain the magnitude of the Holocaust with reference to its impact on international human rights law. Highlight that it led to the adoption of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide – a cornerstone of international law concerning human rights and genocide. This may be a good time to review or learn about the

Caution! Use stereotypical images carefully

Teachers must exercise caution if they choose to use anti-Semitic images and pictures in Holocaust education, and more broadly. They must be aware that brains process images differently from words, and that the images are likely to become imprinted in the students’ minds, particularly if the students were previously unfamiliar with the images.

When using images, choose material with care, following a recommended methodology, such as provided by the Teaching Tolerance project, to enable students to understand how images can distort reality.

Learn more about the Teaching Tolerance project of the Southern Poverty Law Center here: <<https://www.splcenter.org/teaching-tolerance>> and <<https://www.tolerance.org/>>.

¹¹ Taken from *Addressing Anti-Semitism through Education: Guidelines for Policymakers* (Warsaw: OSCE/ODIHR, 2018), p. 43, <<https://www.osce.org/odihr/383089>>.

Convention and to discuss other genocides such as the Rwandan or Cambodian genocides.¹²

For example, students may first need to see that a subject that is of personal significance to them, their identity or heritage (such as genocide, colonization, slavery or discrimination) is recognized within the classroom as a topic worthy of memory transmission, before being open to focusing on anti-Semitism as a phenomenon deserving specific attention. There are many different entry points that a teacher can take to introduce the Holocaust and to assist students in understanding how anti-Semitism operated before and during this period. For example, a teacher can do the following:

- Give students the space to speak about historical events that they personally find important. Even if these events are not connected to World War II or the Holocaust, this will give them a chance to feel

Primary sources are first-hand accounts of an event, and can be used to help drive home the reality of the Holocaust. Primary sources include photographs, interviews and personal narratives. In a multicultural classroom, it can be useful to introduce historical documents that refer to the countries of origin of students' families. Nazi Germany's reach extended quite far, and stories of resistance and righteousness could inspire students with positive values. Search by country in the Yad Vashem database of Righteous Among the Nations for role models of all backgrounds: <<https://www.yadvashem.org/righteous.html>>.

recognized and perhaps to find parallels with the early stages of Nazi anti-Jewish policy.

- Review some key terms to secure students' understanding of the conceptual framework, including words like "scapegoat," "stereotyping," "prejudice" and "discrimination." Invite students to discuss these in small groups and to either formulate a definition of each term or to transcribe their ideas onto a mind-map. Next, explore these ideas as a class. Finally, encourage students to provide concrete

examples from the past and the present that help to illustrate these terms. As a class, evaluate how valid the examples are in capturing what the terms mean and what they refer to. Be sure to include some examples of contemporary anti-Semitism in case the students do not offer any themselves, such as a recent hate crime in which Jewish property or people were attacked.¹³

- If you have undergone training on the Holocaust, consider developing a lesson on one of the pillars of the Nazi's racist

¹² For the full text of the Convention, see: UN General Assembly, Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, 9 December 1948, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 78, <<https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crimeofgenocide.aspx>>

¹³ For examples of recent hate crimes committed in your country or region, refer to the OSCE/ODIHR Hate Crime Reporting website: <<http://hatecrime.osce.org/>>.

Bias refers to an “inclination or prejudice for or against one person or group, especially in a way considered to be unfair.” Discrimination is the “unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people”.

SOURCE: *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, ninth edition

Stereotype refers to an “over-simplified image of a certain group of people.”

Prejudice is “a feeling about a group of people or an individual within a group that is based on a stereotype.”

SOURCE: *Addressing Anti-Semitism Through Education: Guidelines for Policymakers*, p. 41.

Scapegoat is “a person who is blamed for the wrongdoings, or faults of others, especially for reasons of expediency.”

SOURCE: Oxford English Dictionary Online

For teaching resources on pre-war Jewish communities in Europe, see the following syllabus prepared by Yad Vashem: <<https://www.yadvashem.org/education/online-courses/prewar.html>>.

A resource pack created by the United Kingdom’s Holocaust Education Trust that includes photographs for classroom lessons is available for download here: <<https://www.tes.com/en-ie/teaching-resource/pre-war-jewish-life-6163128>>.

ideology, such as National Socialism, eugenics or Social Darwinism. This should be approached not as a lesson on Jewish victimhood, but as a lesson in how a racist ideology can serve a political aim. This should help students become more receptive to empathizing with the Jewish people for the anti-Semitism they faced before, during and after the Holocaust. Keep in mind that focusing on the perpetrators can detach students from the victims and their experience. It is important to humanize victims taking a victim-centred approach.

...a student asks, “Why can’t the Jews just get over it and move on? They are using the Holocaust to hide the real power they have today.”?

It can be difficult for those who have never been victimized to appreciate the long-term impact that the Holocaust has had on Jewish families and communities, their demographics and their collective psyche. For students, the Holocaust can feel

very far back in history, but for the Jewish people, it is still a significant part of the living memory of survivors’ families, their children and grandchildren. It can be helpful to explore the presence and contributions of Jewish communities in your country/region prior to the Holocaust, with an emphasis on humanizing their experiences, to help students appreciate what was lost in their decimation.

The ODIHR teaching aid no. 1, “Increasing Knowledge About Jews and Judaism” provides a complementary resource to help teachers lead students to a better understanding of Jewish communities around the world and their diversity. It is also worthwhile considering a visit to the local Jewish museum for a guided tour that highlights Jewish life as an integral part of your town’s history, or to read, listen or watch testimonials of Holocaust survivors.

The second part of the statement above is likely rooted in stereotypes about the Jewish people (see ODIHR teaching aid

A resource pack to teach about Jewish resistance is available for download from Echoes and Reflections: <<http://echoesandreflections.org/unit-6/>> and the United Kingdom’s Holocaust Education Trust: <<https://www.tes.com/en-ie/teaching-resource/jewish-resistance-during-the-holocaust-6329876>>.

To provide contemporary relevance to the topic of human rights alongside examples from World War II, see the teaching resources at Teach Human Rights: <<http://www.teachhumanrights.com/genocide.html>> and the RFK Human Rights’ Defenders Curriculum: <<https://rfkhumanrights.org/work/teaching-human-rights>>.

Teaching resources on Nazi and contemporary propaganda are available at:

- United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: <<https://www.ushmm.org/educators/lesson-plans/redefining-how-we-teach-propaganda>>
- Mind over Media: <<https://propaganda.mediaeducationlab.com/teachers/>>
- Echoes and Reflections: <<http://echoesandreflections.org/unit-2-antisemitism/>>
- Berlin Museum of Film and Television: <<https://www.deutsche-kinemathek.de/en>>

no. 3, “Addressing Anti-Semitic Stereotypes and Prejudice”) and could be questioned further to uncover the source of the idea. It could be interesting to explain that “powerful” was

a stereotype actively promoted in Nazi propaganda to stir up hostility against the Jewish people. In hindsight, this stereotype was clearly a falsehood.

...a student says, “The Germans must have been stupid to just do what Hitler told them!” ?

Explore with students the concept of propaganda:¹⁴

- How can it be defined?
- How does it function?
- Why are people vulnerable to it?
- In what ways does propaganda function in the world today?
- How can we spot it and be critical of it?
- What effect does propaganda have on our societies?



Der Stürmer Pamphlet from the 1930s. Credit: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Collection, Gift of the Katz Family Main text reads: “So he came to Germany! So they all looked, as if they came to Germany from the East. They had nothing to call their own, absolutely nothing. But that soon changed. They put their crooked noses into everything; they were nesting everywhere and it took just a short time, since they were the rulers. Their ultimate goal is the establishment of Jewish world domination. It is therefore an absolute necessity, that every German learns the true face of all the Jews, so that they understand, how much danger there still is, that threatens our people from this Race.”

The Nazis were particularly skilled in generating and spreading anti-Semitic and other types

¹⁴ For more information, see Media and Information Literacy: Curriculum for Teachers: Module 2: Understanding The News, Media And Information Ethics (Unit 1: Journalism And Society), p. 77-80, (Paris: UNESCO, 2011), <<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/resources/publications-and-communication-materials/publications/full-list/media-and-information-literacy-curriculum-for-teachers/>>

Facing History and Ourselves: <<https://www.facinghistory.org/topics/antisemitism-religious-intolerance>> provides teachers with detailed lessons on addressing anti-Semitism through and within education. There is a specific unit on the different forms of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust that may be useful to explain the variation of Jewish experiences in this time:

“Resistance during the Holocaust: An Exploration of the Jewish Partisans”, Facing History, <<https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/resistance-during-holocaust>>.

“Music, Memory, and Resistance during the Holocaust”, Facing History, <<https://www.facinghistory.org/music-memory-and-resistance-during-holocaust>>.

of propaganda. The newspaper *Der Stürmer* was at the heart of their propaganda machine, operating from 1923 to 1945. Choose some examples from the newspapers of the time, from Germany or another country, and analyse them with students, one by one, taking care to avoid perpetuating stereotypes.

- What is the message saying?
- What is its purpose?
- What stereotypes does it apply?

- How is this propaganda dangerous?
- Can these types of messages still be found today?
- What kinds of groups or individuals are promoting such messages and for what purpose?

Neither anti-Semitism nor the history of the Jews can be reduced to the Holocaust. In addition to exploring the vitality of Jewish communities across Europe before National

Socialism took hold, it is also useful to provide a more empowering narrative of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust. This can help counter the idea that Jewish people are profiting from their victimhood and, therefore, not “getting over it”. Students might not have considered Jews as human rights defenders or civic activists, either during World War II or in the present day, and Jewish individuals or groups can be included alongside examples of human rights defenders from other countries and struggles in the world.

See the teaching resource on “Dilemmas, Choices and Responses during the Holocaust” from the United Kingdom’s Holocaust Education Trust: <<https://www.tes.com/member/HolocaustEducationalTrust>>. Complement this by providing examples of the dilemmas people experience when faced with prejudice and discrimination today, being sure to include anti-Semitic scenarios alongside other forms of intolerance.

In addition to the question of resistance, students can also explore the different roles that people play in situations that compromise human rights, including leaders, bystanders, victims and perpetrators. What were and are the dilemmas that different actors faced, the choices available to them and the considerations they made when deciding whether or not to take a stand?

Resources and Materials for Further Reading

Primary source materials on the Holocaust can be found in the Yad Vashem database of the Righteous Among the Nations, see:

<https://righteous.yadvashem.org/index.html>.

For advice on using video testimony as a primary source in the classroom, see: “Survivors and Witnesses”, Facing History,

<https://www.facinghistory.org/survivors-and-witnesses>.

A teaching resource pack for lessons on “Pre-war Jewish Life” can be downloaded here:

www.tes.com/en-ie/teaching-resource/pre-war-jewish-life-6163128.

The online portal *Virtual Shtetl* documents the history of Jewish communities, Jewish social life, religion, tradition, education, economy and culture in Eastern and Central Europe, with information on over 1,900 cities, towns and villages, spanning the territories of today’s Poland, Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, Latvia, Estonia, Russia and Moldova: www.shtetl.org.pl

For an online multimedia guide to the Polish capital as seen through the history of its Jewish residents:

<http://warsze.polin.pl/en>

For a teaching resource pack on “Dilemmas, Choices and Responses” to the Holocaust, see:

<https://www.tes.com/teaching-resource/dilemmas-choices-and-responses-to-the-holocaust-6164874>.

For resource packs on Jewish resistance, see:

- “Jewish Resistance”, Echoes and Reflections, <http://echoesandreflections.org/unit-6>.
- “Jewish Resistance during the Holocaust”, TES, www.tes.com/en-ie/teaching-resource/jewish-resistance-during-the-holocaust-6329876.

Teaching resources on Nazi and contemporary propaganda are available at:

- “Redefining how we teach propaganda”, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, www.ushmm.org/educators/lesson-plans/redefining-how-we-teach-propaganda.

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- “Why Propaganda Education Matters”, Mind Over Media, <https://propaganda.mediaeducationlab.com/teachers>.
 - “Antisemitism”, Echoes and Reflections, <http://echoesandreflections.org/unit-2-antisemitism>.
 - Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights organization gives information about human rights and its work, here: <https://rfkhumanrights.org/work>.
 - “A World Made New: Human Rights After the Holocaust”, Facing History, www.facinghistory.org/universal-declaration-human-rights/world-made-new-human-rights-after-holocaust.

Resources for teaching on the contemporary relevance of human rights:

- “To Repair the World: Becoming a Human Rights Defender”, AFT Human Rights Resources, www.teachhumanrights.com/genocide.html.
- For more advice on teaching about human behaviour during the Holocaust, see: “Holocaust and Human Behavior”, Facing History, www.facinghistory.org/holocaust-and-human-behavior.

