The National Socialists and How They Ostracized an Entire Population

In US high school history classrooms, the discussion of the Holocaust often lack nuance. Teachers tend to take a functionalist approach of describing the Holocaust, saying that while the National Socialists always targeted Jews, they did not truly begin to systematically murder millions of Jews until 1941. This way of teaching the Holocaust is supported by multiple scholars including Christopher R. Browning. Browning asserts that, “The ‘Final Solution to the Jewish Question’ was a ‘problem of the future’ that Hitler thought through to the end in the particular and contingent circumstances of late spring to early autumn 1941.”

While Browning’s argument that the systematic planning of the Holocaust did not begin until 1941 has some merit among historians, he places less weight on primary sources that discuss the “final solution” as early as 1939 and how the National Socialists’ began to specifically target German Jews. By examining laws passed by the Reichstag, the organization of the ghettos and the camps, the German education system, correspondence between top National Socialist leaders, and speeches given by Adolf Hitler and other leaders, the systematic murder of millions of Jewish people can be seen as an intentional process that was at the forefront of the National Socialists policy decisions that began with the exclusion of German Jews well before 1941.

When the National Socialists came to power in 1933, they began to propose legislation that furthered their political program that stated their party’s goals. After the death of President von Hindenburg, when Hitler merged the chancellorship with the presidency, the National Socialists’ control over Germany increased exponentially. In 1935, a year after the death of

Hindenburg, the National Socialists passed the Nuremberg Laws, which limited the rights of citizenship. The law stated that, “A Jew cannot be a citizen of the Reich. He has no right to vote in political affairs, he cannot occupy a public office.”\(^2\) The law goes on to clearly define what a Jewish person is and what pathways are now closed to those people. In a section before stating that a Jewish person is no longer considered a citizen, the law also states that, “Only the citizen of the Reich enjoys full political rights in accordance with the provision of the law.”\(^3\) This section makes it clear that since the Jewish people are no longer considered citizens that they are not guaranteed any of the political rights a citizen expects. By stating the Jewish people are no longer citizens and saying that only citizens will be guaranteed political rights, the National Socialists began to effectively create the idea of an “other” in their country. The creation of an “other” is the first step that the National Socialists take to implement their final solution. By legally making the Jewish people second class subjects, they are not even citizens, this opens up the rest of the German citizens to also treat the Jewish people as less than human. Once a population is excluded and is mistreated by the general population, the government can take steps to further the ostracization and that is what the National Socialists did.

Even before the National Socialists created the Reich Citizenship Law, they found ways to exclude the Jews. In 1933 the National Socialists promoted to the general population a boycott of all Jewish owned stores and businesses. On March 21\(^{st}\) the day before the boycott was to begin Victor Klemperer a Dresden writer and philologist wrote in his diary, “Ever more hopeless. The boycott begins tomorrow. Yellow placards, men on guard… No one dares make a move… The


\(^3\) Ibid.
future is quite uncertain.”⁴ Klemperer was aware of the precarious situation that he and his family were in due to the mounting ostracization by the Reich and soon to be the general population when the boycott began. Among their steps toward exclusion the use of the cloth triangles that the prisoners of concentration camps wore as early as 1935. The triangles had different colors and shapes based upon what type of prisoner they were.⁵ These symbols boiled down an entire person to only four parts of their identity and sometimes the identity given to them by the National Socialists would not have been an identity that they would have chosen for themselves. By only focusing on one part of a person’s identity the rest of the person’s identity is erased in the eyes of that person and others like the National Socialists. This is a form of violence to the person’s mental state, because once a person begins to see themselves as only one thing, it can be difficult to alter that perception. The National Socialists began the steps towards their final solution by creating laws and identifying symbols to ostracize the Jewish people and others that did not fit into their ideology.

While the National Socialists enacted laws and different policies to begin ostracizing the Jews, they did not only spread their rhetoric to adults, in all public schools anti-Semitism and German nationalism was bolstered throughout all content areas, such as math, German grammar, history, and science. Targeting school aged children was not a revolutionary tactic for the National Socialists. Ernst Bloch, a German Marxist philosopher wrote an article in the Das Tagebuch, an independent weekly magazine, describing the danger that Hitler and National Socialism posed for Germany by focusing on the amount of youth that had joined their ranks.

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⁵ “Table of Colored Classification Symbols for Prisoners in Concentration Camps (1936-1944),” GHDI http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_image.cfm?image_id=3761 (See Appendix A).
following the failed Beer Hall Putsch in 1924. Bloch wrote, “Hitler, Hitlerism, fascism is the ecstasy of the bourgeoise youth: this contradiction between strength and bourgeoise, between ecstasy and the most lifeless nationalism makes them into a spectre.”  


The German youth were drawn to the lifestyle that the National Socialists promoted, one that let them live in the in between of being bourgeoise and a proletariat. When the National Socialists came to power in 1933, they began to make changes to the education system of Germany, changes that reflected their beliefs. At a conference held in Kassel at the Horst Wessel School, which was named after a National Socialist leader who became a martyr for National Socialists after his death, the minutes contain the different policy changes that school makes throughout the years.

On August 12th, 1933 the minutes stated, “The Nazi salute will be introduced as a form of greeting at this school. Jewish students will be excluded from instruction on Saturdays.”


This new policy perpetrates the ostracization of Jewish students by excluding them from certain activities that would they have been used to being able to participate in. Schools are often a location where students are taught culturally accepted values, usually about being respectful and kind to others and not bullying peers. However, by beginning to systematically exclude one specific group based on a school-wide policy, that behavior will likely be thought of by the students as acceptable and will likely begin to emulate that behavior in their everyday interaction with Jewish students. The ostracization at the Horst Wessel school continued in 1934 when on October 19th the school instituted a policy that prohibited “non-Aryan” students from
participating in certain school activities. Again by increasing the ostracization towards Jewish students, non-Jewish students learned that this type of behavior was condoned by the school and the government.

These school-wide policies also affected the content that was taught to the students. When students were taught how to use active voice, the exercises the students did described what Germany was like before Hitler came to power, using examples like people attacked others on the street or that falsified news reports were common. Through teaching students grammar by way of glorifying Hitler, students learn that Hitler saved them from any problems they might have faced, like attacks in the street and the glorification of Hitler becomes normalized and consistent. The more consistent and normalized this type of glorifying becomes the more likely that students will begin to accept and push those ideals that were forced onto them. Even when the content taught at schools does not focus on glorifying Hitler and the National Socialists, it taught students that Jews were inherently inferior. In a textbook about biology that was meant to for high schoolers it discussed the biology of a Jew and said,

That’s why the Jew is the “world public enemy” and why he is pitted against National Socialist Germany in particular, because National Socialist Germany is what called to life the potent racial forces of the Nordic peoples so that they became manifest in their successful achievements.

8 Ibid.
The National Socialists gave their racial claims merit since they appeared in academic textbooks, which students are likely to believe as fact without bias. The National Socialists realized and used to their advantage how easy it is to teach and get children to accept horrible rhetoric as fact. That realization was made abundantly clear in reports on the youth in Germany. These reports said, “It is easier to influence the opinions and sentiments of youth than it is of adults.” 11 The National Socialists knew that their most devoted base were children and the youth, so by specifically targeting them through education and activities outside of school, like the Hitler Youth, they built up a strong and young base that grew up believing in the rhetoric and policy espoused by the National Socialists.

While the National Socialists began to create a state where Jewish people were no longer welcomed and were ostracized, they were also in the planning stages of how they would solve the “Jewish Question.” Hermann Göring, the second in command to Hitler, sent a short note to Reinhard Heydrich on July 31st, 1941, the notes said,

Complementing the task that was assigned to you on 24 January 1939, which dealt with the carrying out of emigration and evacuation, a solution of the Jewish problem, as advantageous as possible, I hereby charge you with making all necessary preparations in regard to…bringing about a total solution of the Jewish question the German sphere of influence in Europe. 12

While Göring’s order did not come until 1941, three years after the task was originally assigned to Heydrich, it does still mean that the National Socialists for three years had a plan for what

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1 Sopade, “Reports on German Youth,” *The Third Reich Sourcebook* Kindle Edition.
they wanted to happen to the Jews. The planning of the final solution is seen when in 1939 Heydrich sends out the policy and operations concerning Jews in the occupied territory.

Heydrich wrote,

I refer to the conference held in Berlin today, and again point out that the planned total measures are to be kept strictly secret. Distinction must be made between: 1. The final aim (which will require extended periods of time) and 2. The stages leading to the fulfillment of this final aim (which will be carried out in short periods).¹³

Heydrich was aware that three months prior to this correspondence he was tasked with providing a solution to the “Jewish Question” and in this document he reminds the officers who will receive it that the final aim is to be kept a secret. Heydrich also concedes that the final aim will take a long time, but he says that the stages leading up to the final aim will be done in shorter an amount of time. These smaller stages include actions such as revoking the Jewish people’s citizenship, by not allowing them to serve in public office. The National Socialists began to plan for the final solution by slowly implementing new policies that would ostracize Jews and limit their ability to flee.

Leaders of the National Socialist party were not subtle when they discussed their plans for the Jews to the German people. While in their correspondence they used vague terms to talk about their final solution they were not vague in their speeches. In a speech given to the Reichstag in January 1939, Hitler addressed the “Jewish Question” saying,

Today I will again be a prophet and say, if international finance in Jewry in and outside Europe succeeds in plunging nations into another world war, then the end result will not be the Bolshevization of the planet and thus a victory for the Jews— it will be the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe.\textsuperscript{14}

To the entire German government Hitler announces that if another world war happens then the Jewish people will be annihilated, he announces this plan eight months before he invades Poland. By this time the National Socialists have already begun to plan for the Final Solution, considering that the Heydrich’s task of coming up with a solution to the “Jewish Question” was given to him on January 24\textsuperscript{th}, 1939, which is six days before Hitler gives this speech.

While it may appear that the German citizens were immediately supporting the ostracization of Jews and the anti-Semitic rhetoric, at the beginning of the National Socialist’s regime German citizens did question National Socialist policies. When the National Socialists had their boycott of Jewish stores and businesses in 1933, not everyone supported it. In Klemperer’s diary entry he talks about how some people still wanted to shop at Jewish businesses. He wrote,

\begin{quote}
Conversation during an Alsberg advertisement. He: "One really shouldn't go to a Jew to shop." She: "But it's so terribly cheap." He: "Then it's bad and doesn't last." She, reflective, quite matter-of-fact, without the least pathos: "No, really, it's just as good and lasts just as long, really just like in Christian shops—and so much cheaper." He falls silent.\textsuperscript{15}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{14} Adolf Hitler, “Speech to the Great German Reichstag,” \textit{The Third Reich Sourcebook} Kindle Edition.

\textsuperscript{15} “Victor Klemperer’s Diary Entry,” GHDI.
Even in advertisements about the boycott the National Socialists could not escape people questioning their decisions and rhetoric. In 1938, following Kristallnacht a report was issued that described the general public’s reaction to the event. The report said,

The brutal measures taken against the Jews have elicited outrage in the populace. People are rather open about it, and many Aryans have been arrested as a result. But the effect of these measures has been to intimidate large sectors of the population. [ . . . ] People are no longer willing to speak as openly. One thing has become utterly apparent: the Nazis have the power to do whatever they choose.16

While some parts of the population did not agree with the policies created by the regime they became unlikely to speak out due to feeling intimidated and fearful of backlash. By intimidating the general population, the National Socialists made it easier for them to control the public and to continue on with their plan for the Jews, because if the public is too afraid to speak out then nothing will prevent them continuing with their plan.

The National Socialists created an intricate plan to annihilate the Jews from Europe. Their policy decisions were related to their final aim, by beginning in small stages to first revoke citizenship and then to alienate the Jews. The National Socialists understood that in order to fulfill their final aim, they had to complete it slowly, if they had immediately begun to murder Jews there most likely would have been a loud outcry and when there was public outcry they had to find a way to prevent action being taken by the public. By slowly ostracizing the Jews, the German people were more likely to follow along in the process. The systematic murder of millions of Jews was an intentional process that was begun early in the National Socialist regime.

The education that the German children received during the Third Reich is the reason that the Holocaust and National Socialist rhetoric must be taught in schools. Our education system is what teaches students their values and teaches them how to question information that they are receiving at home, on the news, or even at school. As a future teacher, it is my job and duty to help my students learn how to question the actions of people in power and how to make their voice heard, because when they become silent and afraid that is when atrocities like the Holocaust occur.

Having learned about how the National Socialists intentionally fostered hatred and exclusion as an educator I intend to teach my students how to use critical thinking skills and how to use their voice to fight against a powerful group, who is creating policies that directly impact minorities and those without power. In regards for I will teach my students about the Holocaust, I will spend a large amount of time, discussing how the National Socialists created the environment that lead to the Holocaust. As a class we will also analyze documents written by Holocaust victims and survivors to demonstrate how even in the face of adversity the victims and survivors found ways to cling on to hope, we will also discuss ways for the students themselves to push for change and to stand up for people with little to no power. This will then transition to students being tasked with coming up for an idea for a memorial to honor the victims, which will allow the students to forge a connection to the Holocaust and let them decide what is most important that they remember about the Holocaust. Attached is a lesson plan that I did with a group of 6th graders at Bettendorf Middle School and some of their responses. One group decided that even though I would no longer be working with them the following term that they wanted to continue on display the memorial that they designed. These students are our future, if educators are able to reach these students and teach them how to notice policy makers and people
who try to foster hate and what skills that they can use to fight against these people then the possibility of not repeating the Holocaust can occur. Our children are the future, but the only way to improve our future and our society is to first look at the past and notice patterns so that when those patterns start to become familiar in our everyday lives, we can end the pattern and write a new ending.
Appendix A

Table of Colored Classification Symbols for Prisoners in Concentration Camps (1936-1944)
The Environment:

1. My choice of primary sources will help the students understand the gravity of the event and help them explore the reasons for why this event occurred.

Performance objective:

Students will be able to describe the actions the Nazis took to ostracize and kill the Jews between the years of 1935-1944.

Students will be able to design a memorial for the victims of the Holocaust. They will create this memorial so that they can forge a connection between the content and themselves, by creating their own memorial they are also able to decide what they think is important to remember about the Holocaust.

Rationale:

Illinois Mandate to teach the Holocaust 105 ILCS 5/27-20.3
SS.IS.8.6-8.MC. Apply a range of deliberative and democratic procedures to make decisions and take action in schools and community contexts.

By having the students engage in a large group discussion about the different the steps the National Socialists took to ostracize the Jews and students will be able to identify how a powerful group can try to eradicate a minority. When students create the memorial, it will allow them to create a personal connection to the victims of the Holocaust because the students have the freedom to create something that reflects their own learning so that they do not have to do the same memorial as others.
**Assessment Strategy:** The students will be assessed informally based on their responses during the discussion and the subsequent memorial that they create.

**Rubric for Memorial:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mastery Understanding</th>
<th>Proficient Understanding</th>
<th>Approaching Understanding</th>
<th>Concern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clear Relation to the Holocaust</td>
<td>Clearly about the Holocaust</td>
<td>Somewhat about the Holocaust</td>
<td>Is not about the Holocaust</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relating Content to Previous Learned Content/ Knowledge</td>
<td>Exemplary use of previous learned content/knowledge</td>
<td>Adequate use of previous learned content/knowledge</td>
<td>Occasional use of previously learned content/knowledge</td>
<td>Does not use previously learned content or knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artistic Element</td>
<td>Memorial is very creative and original</td>
<td>Memorial is creative but not original</td>
<td>Memorial lacks creativity or originality</td>
<td>Did not complete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing of Work within Group (Applies for pairs or group)</td>
<td>Work is equally shared no one does less than other members</td>
<td>Work is somewhat shared, everyone did their part, but the quality of work is not equal</td>
<td>Work is not shared equally, one person did all of the work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Accommodation:** For students who read below their grade level I will read aloud the Citizenship Law and intermediate pause to explain the different clause. For the Colored Classification Symbols, I will go through each symbol and color so that all students will understand their meanings.

**Grouping Strategy:** The students and I will discuss the primary source together as a small group. Students will have the choice to create the memorial alone, with a partner, or as a group.

**Materials:**

1. 3 primary sources
a. The Third Reich Citizenship Law (1935)
b. The Color Classification Symbols (1936-1944)
c. Photo of a piles of shoes from Lublin-Majdanek (1944)

2. Art supplies for the memorial
3. Writing utensil

**Enactment:**

**Hook:** (5 minutes)

To begin the lesson, I will remind students that we had previously looked at primary sources that involved President von Hindenburg and Hitler in a political poster and that because of their interest in that poster we will be going depth about the Holocaust and Hitler. Following that introduction, I will ask them the following questions.

Questions:

- What can any of you tell me about the Holocaust?
- Where did you learn about that information?

**Student Aim:** 1 minute

Once the students have told me about what they know about the Holocaust I will tell them that as a large group we will be having a discussion by looking at different primary sources.

**Development:** (45 minutes)

The first source that we will read as a group is the Reich Citizenship Law, as I read the laws, I will pause and explain the different points and words. After I have finished reading the laws, I will ask the students if they have any questions or comments about what we read. After I have
answered any questions or addressed any comments, we will move on to try to answer the following question.

**Third Reich Citizenship Law:**

How does clearly defining what a Jew is help the Nazis create an “other”?

(To help explain the concept of an “other” I will posit a situation of where one of their teachers favors one group of students over another based on hair color or something else, and how that might make the favored students treat the non-favored students and how the non-favored students will feel)

Following the discussion of the laws, I will transition to talking about the Color Classification Symbols from the camps, which I would assume the students will have a cursory knowledge of. After I explain the colors and symbols I will again ask if they have any comments or questions. Once those have been addressed, we will as a group try to answer the following questions.

**Color Classification Symbols:**

How would being identified as only one part of yourself affect how you view yourself? Would it take away your humanity?

After we have discussed the question and the symbols, I will transition to the next photograph that we will discuss. I will not tell the students what the photo is when I show them, instead I will ask them to analyze the photo and try to figure out what the objects in the photo are. Once they have figured it out or if they don’t, I will tell them, then we will try to answer the following question.
The Pile of Shoes:

Why do you think the Nazis went from claiming that Jews weren’t citizens to killing millions?

**Culmination:** (5-8 minutes)

After we have discussed the last question, I will then start to get them to think about the Holocaust’s importance to today by asking the following questions, which will also help prime them for their next activity.

**Questions:**

Why should we remember the Holocaust?

What can learning about the Holocaust do to help us?

How should we remember the victims?

**Leap:** (5 minutes)

After the students have started to come up with answers to the last question, I will introduce their next activity which is to create a memorial for the victims of the Holocaust. I will give them different examples of museums, public art pieces, and music. After that I will let them create their memorial alone, in pairs, or a group. (This part will take 2 class meetings, for them to fully complete their memorial)

Ex: Holocaust Museum, 6 Million Paperclips, Berlin Holocaust Memorial, music

Backup Questions: (Used in case I have extra time)

How should I be teaching you about the Holocaust? Appropriate or Inappropriate?

**Explanation of Student Memorials:**
Student 1: The man in the prison uniform tearing a National Socialist flag. The student wanted to create a symbol of resistance towards the National Socialists to put the power back in the hands of the Holocaust victims.

Student 2: The wishing tree. This student had been reading a book called *The Wishing Tree* where when you wrote a wish on put it on the tree, it came true. So, for this image the Holocaust victim is wishing to be free.

Student 3: Triangle badges. To this student they were most struck by the triangle symbols and wanted to create something to remember those symbols.

Students 4–8: These students worked together to create a memorial that they wanted to put up in their school. Their idea was to have a row of prisoners wearing the striped uniforms on a wall with chicken wire in front of them to look like barbed wire. Then across the top they would have the badges like a rainbow with names of the survivors/victims.

**Documents**

I. The Reich Citizenship Law of September 15, 1935

The Reichstag has unanimously adopted the following law, which is herewith promulgated. § 1. (1) A subject of the State is a person who belongs to the protective union of the German Reich, and who therefore has particular obligations towards the Reich. (2) The status of subject is acquired in accordance with the provisions of the Reich and State Law of Citizenship. § 2. (1) A citizen of the Reich is only that subject who is of German or kindred blood and who, through his conduct, shows that he is both willing and able to faithfully serve the German people and Reich. (2) The right to citizenship is acquired by the granting of Reich citizenship papers. (3) Only the citizen of the Reich enjoys full
political rights in accordance with the provision of the law. 2 § 3. The Reich Minister of the Interior in conjunction with the Deputy of the Führer will issue the necessary legal and administrative decrees for implementing and supplementing this law. Nuremberg, September 15, 1935 The Führer and Reich Chancellor Adolf Hitler The Reich Minister of the Interior Frick II. First Regulation to the Reich Citizenship Law of November 14, 1935 On the basis of § 3, Reich Citizenship Law, of September 15, 1935 (RGBl [Reich Law Gazette] I, page 1146) the following is ordered: § 1. (1) Until further regulations regarding citizenship papers are issued, all subjects of German or kindred blood who possessed the right to vote in Reichstag elections at the time the Citizenship Law came into effect shall, for the time being, possess the rights of Reich citizens. The same shall be true of those to whom the Reich Minister of the Interior, in conjunction with the Deputy of the Führer, has given preliminary citizenship. (2) The Reich Minister of the Interior, in conjunction with the Deputy of the Führer, can withdraw preliminary citizenship. § 2. (1) The regulations in § I are also valid for Reich subjects of mixed Jewish blood [Mischlinge]. (2) An individual of mixed Jewish blood is one who is descended from one or two grandparents who were fully Jewish by race, insofar as he or she does not count as a Jew according to § 5, Paragraph 2. One grandparent shall be considered as full-blooded if he or she belonged to the Jewish religious community. § 3. Only the Reich citizen, as bearer of full political rights, exercises the right to vote in political affairs or can hold public office. The Reich Minister of the Interior, or any agency empowered by him, can make exceptions during the transition period, with regard to occupying public offices. The affairs of religious organizations will not be affected. 3 § 4. (1) A Jew cannot be a citizen of the Reich. He has no right to vote in political affairs, he cannot occupy a public office. (2) Jewish civil servants will retire as of 31. December 1935. If these civil servants served at the front in the World War, either for Germany or her
allies, they will receive in full, until they reach the age limit, full pension to which they were
entitled according to the last salary they received; they will, however, not advance in seniority.
After reaching the age limit, their pensions will be calculated anew, according to the last salary
they received, on the basis of which their pension was calculated. (3) The affairs of religious
organizations will not be affected. (4) The employment status of teachers in Jewish public
schools remains unchanged until new regulations for the Jewish school systems are issued. § 5.
(1) A Jew is anyone who descended from at least three grandparents who were fully Jewish by
race. § 2, par. 2, second sentence will apply. (2) A Jew is also anyone who descended from two
fully Jewish grandparents, if: (a) he belonged to the Jewish religious community at the time this
law was issued or joined the community later; (b) he was married to a Jewish person at the time
the law was issued or married one subsequently; (c) he is the offspring from a marriage with a
Jew, in the sense of Section 1, which was contracted after the Law for the Protection of German
Blood and German Honor became effective (RGBl. [Reich Law Gazette] I, page 1146 of
September 15, 1935); (d) he is the offspring of an extramarital relationship with a Jew, according
to Section 1, and will be born out of wedlock after July 31, 1936. § 6. (1) In case Reich laws or
orders by the NSDAP and its organizations make demands for racial pureness that exceed § 5,
they will not be affected. (2) Any other demands for pureness of blood that exceed § 5 can only
be made with permission from the Reich Minister of the Interior and the Deputy of the Führer. If
any such demands have been made, they will be void as of January 1, 1936, if they have not been
requested from the Reich Minister of the Interior in agreement with the Deputy of the Führer.
These requests must be made to the Reich Minister of the Interior. § 7. The Führer and Reich
Chancellor can grant exemptions from the regulations laid down in the law. Berlin, November
14, 1935 4 The Führer and Reich Chancellor Adolf Hitler The Reich Minister of the Interior

Frick The Deputy of the Führer R. Hess (Reich Minister without Portfolio)