



Lesson 2

Before 1933

Stereotyping
and Prejudice

Stereotyping and Prejudice

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KEY VOCABULARY

anti-Judaism
anti-Semitism
Aryan
Auschwitz
master race
pogrom
prejudice
race
religion
scapegoat
stereotyping
synagogue
usury
Zionism

OBJECTIVE

Students will understand that anti-Semitism has had a long history and was one of several contributing factors in Hitler's rise to power.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

How did stereotyping and prejudice set the stage for the Holocaust?

How did the social, economic, and political conditions after World War I contribute to the rise of Nazism?

LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson students will recognize the development of the concept of anti-Semitism as it evolved from anti-Judaism in the Middle Ages to a pseudo-scientific theory of racism during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

This lesson will illustrate how the historic foundation of anti-Semitism and the social, political, and economic conditions in Germany after World War I contributed to the development of Nazism and Hitler's rise to power.

INSTRUCTIONAL PLAN AND ACTIVITIES

Activity 1

- Review the homework reading: "The Ball" and *A Frost in the Night*.
- Select from the following activities to lead students to establish and clarify their understanding of stereotyping and prejudice.
 - Review homework questions.
 - Elicit a brief synopsis of the stories orally or in writing.
 - Ask students to identify what words came to mind as they read the stories.
 - Define "stereotyping" and "prejudice."

Activity 2

- Distribute the historical documents (#1–6) related to the rise of anti-Judaism in Europe.
- Lead students to recognize its long history. Ask students to establish a chronology on the development of anti-Judaism in Europe.

Activity 3

- Distribute and read the historical documents (#7–10) related to Hitler's rise to power. Provide students with an opportunity to answer and discuss the questions at the end of each document. Lead students to identify the factors that contributed to the rise of Nazism. Identify the specific causes of Hitler's rise to power.

RESOURCES

- 1A** Reading: “Who Is a Jew?”
- 1B** Reading: “Jewish Life in Europe”
- 2A** Reading: Anti-Semitism during the Crusades
- 2B** Reading: Lateran Council, 1215: Canon 68
- 3** Woodblock Print: The Burning of Jews During the Black Death
- 4** Reading: Excerpts from Martin Luther’s *Concerning the Jews and Their Lies*
- 5** Reading: Wilhelm Marr’s Theory of Anti-Semitism
- 6** Reading: *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*
- 7** Reading: Adolf Hitler’s Letter to Adolf Gemlich
- 8** Reading: The Treaty of Versailles, June 28, 1919
- 9A** Reading: Economic Conditions in Weimar Germany
- 9B** Graph: German Unemployment 1928–1933
- 10** Reading: Excerpts from Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*

Concluding Questions

- 1 How did the history of anti-Judaism contribute to Hitler’s rise to power?
- 2 Could Hitler have risen to power without the long history of anti-Semitism? Why or why not?
- 3 Does history make the man or does the man make history? Explain.

Contemporary Connection

Cite present-day examples of stereotyping and prejudice.

Homework

Read “The Tightening Noose” from *Parallel Journeys* by Eleanor Ayer. Write a response to the following question: If you had been Helen, describe how you would have felt during three important occasions described in the story.

QUOTATION

“Why teach the Holocaust”

If children can be taught to fear and despise others simply because they are “others”—which is how children learn prejudice by being so taught—then we can also teach children to accept and respect the fundamental value and rights of others simply because they are human. This is the relevant lesson of the Holocaust for today, and it is our imperative duty and responsibility that we teach it, and that we teach it well.

Dr. Sheldon Grebstein
*Former Director of Education
Holocaust and Human Rights Education Center*

DOCUMENT 1A

“Who Is a Jew?”

As early as 1919, Adolf Hitler defined Jews as “a racial and not a religious group.” His judgment was wrong and deadly.

Not all Jews practice Judaism, but any person can become Jewish through religious conversion. Traditionally, anyone whose mother is Jewish has been identified as Jewish, but that condition is not necessary for Jewish identity, either. Presently, many Jews are citizens of the modern state of Israel, but a majority of the world’s Jews do not fit that description. Who is a Jew? It’s a complex question.

Jews trace their origins to the biblical patriarch Abraham, who lived almost 4000 years ago. Judaism, a distinctively monotheistic religion, is rooted in the exodus of the ancient Hebrew people from Egyptian slavery and in experiences they shared under Moses’ leadership at Mount Sinai. The early Jews’ ritual laws and ethical rules distinguished them from other groups.

Eventually occupying the Mediterranean coastal land of Canaan, the Jews established the kingdom of Israel. Unable to sustain the unity and autonomy it enjoyed from about 1000 to 922 b.c.e., the kingdom was split by internal divisions, besieged, and occupied by a variety of conquerors. In 70 c.e., the Romans ruthlessly put down a sustained Jewish rebellion. Most of the surviving Jews were dispersed to various parts of the Roman Empire. Exiled Jews have lived in European lands for more than 2000 years.

Whether their outlooks are secular or religious, their homes in Israel, Europe, the United States, or anywhere else in the world, Jews are not a race but a people unified by memory and history, culture, tradition, and religious observances that are widely, if not identically, shared.

Hogan, David and David Aretha, eds., *The Holocaust Chronicle: A History in Words and Pictures*. (Lincolnwood, IL: Publications International, 2000), 60. Reprinted by permission.

Keep this historical information in mind as you examine the documents illustrating anti-Semitism throughout history.

DOCUMENT 1B

“Jewish Life in Europe”

Some of the oldest Jewish communities in Europe were in Greece: they had been in existence for more than two thousand years, since the flourishing of Ancient Greece, at a time when there was still a Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. In the late nineteenth century, and during the inter-war years, the Jews of Salonika played a central part in the life of the port, as dock-workers and stevedores as well as merchants.

Jews had lived in Italy for more than two thousand years. They had been an integral part of the life of the Roman Empire, at a time when the Temple was destroyed by Rome and the city of Jerusalem reduced to rubble. Jews had spread with the Romans to every corner of the Roman world, benefiting from the law and order, relative tolerance and social peace of Roman rule.

Jews were to be found living in scattered communities throughout the Roman

provinces that later became France, Hungary and Roumania. Indeed, large Jewish communities existed in every European country many hundreds of years before the founding of the national States of which they were later to be a part.

The Jews of Germany had already been living continuously in different parts of Germany for more than 1,500 years when the German Empire was established in 1870.

The contribution of Jewish life to the new Germany was appreciated. Bismarck, the architect of German unity, had been present at the opening of the Oranienburger Strasse synagogue in Berlin in 1866. It was a triumphal moment for him, as Prussian troops were even then on their way back to Berlin, having defeated the Austrian army and paved the way for a united Germany. Berlin Jews welcomed this unification, and were as patriotic as any Germans in

their national fervour. Their service in the Prussian army in the war against France in 1812 had led to an edict that gave them equality within the Prussian domains.

Jews fought as national patriots in all the armies of the First World War. They were to be found in the opposing trenches on both the western and eastern fronts. Jewish soldiers died on the battlefield fighting in the ranks of the Entente armies (Britain, France, Italy and Russia) and as a part of the forces of the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary and Turkey). In each of these armies, Jews won the highest awards for bravery. In the German army, 12,000 Jewish soldiers were killed in action on the battlefields.

Jewish life, with its own inner religious and cultural experience and links, was also intertwined with the life of the nations among whom the Jews lived.

Martin Gilbert, *Never Again: A History of the Holocaust* (New York: Universe Publishing, 2000), 10. Reprinted by permission.

QUESTION

Give three examples of how Jewish life was also intertwined with the life of the nations among whom the Jews lived.

DOCUMENT 2A

Anti-Semitism During the Crusades

This account is from Albert of Aix, an eyewitness of the First Crusade, in 1096.

There assembled . . . a large and innumerable host of Christians from diverse kingdoms and lands; namely, from the realms of France, England, Flanders and Lorraine. . . . They rose in a spirit of cruelty against the Jewish people scattered throughout these cities and slaughtered them without mercy, especially in the Kingdom of Lorraine, asserting it to be the beginning of their expedition and their duty against the enemies of the Christian faith. This slaughter of Jews was done first by citizens of Cologne. These suddenly fell upon a small band of Jews and severely wounded and killed many; they destroyed the houses and synagogues of the Jews and divided among themselves a very large amount of money. When the Jews saw this cruelty, about two hundred in the silence of the night began flight by boat to Neuss. The pilgrims and crusaders discovered them, and after taking away all their possessions, inflicted on them similar slaughter, leaving not even one alive.

www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/1096jews.html

QUESTION

What motivated the Crusaders to attack Jewish settlements in Europe?

DOCUMENT 2B

Lateran Council, 1215: Canon 68

In some provinces a difference in dress distinguishes the Jews . . . from the Christians, but in certain others such confusion has grown up that they cannot be distinguished by any difference. Thus it happens at times that through error Christians have relations with the women of Jews . . . and Jews . . . with Christian women. Therefore, that they may not, under pretext of error of this sort, excuse themselves in the future for the excesses of such prohibited intercourse, we decree that such Jews . . . of both sexes in every Christian province and at all times shall be marked off in the eyes of the public from other peoples through the character of their dress.

Moreover, during the last three days before Easter and especially on Good Friday, they shall not go forth in public at all, for the reason that some of them on these very days, as we hear, do not blush to go forth better dressed and are not afraid to mock the Christians who maintain the memory of the most holy Passion by wearing signs of mourning.

www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/lat4-c68.html

QUESTION

Why did the church feel a need to identify Jews? Once they were identified, what possible consequences lay ahead?

DOCUMENT 3

Woodblock Print: The Burning of Jews During the Black Death



This engraving from the *Nuremberg Chronicles*, published in 1493, depicts the burning of Jews during the Black Death (an epidemic of Bubonic plague). In the late 1300s and early 1400s, the Black Death was responsible for the death of approximately one-third of Europe's population.

Linda Jacobs Altman, *Holocaust: Forever Outsiders: Jews and History From Ancient Times to August 1935* (Woodbridge, CT: Blackbirch Press, 1998), 25. Reprinted by permission.

QUESTION

What does this woodblock print suggest about the relationship between Jews and the Black Death?

DOCUMENT 4

Excerpts from Martin Luther's *Concerning the Jews and Their Lies*

Martin Luther was the founder of the Lutheran Church, which was the first Protestant sect in Europe. He wrote *Concerning the Jews and Their Lies* in 1542.

“First, their synagogues or churches should be set on fire . . .

Secondly, their homes should likewise be broken down and destroyed. They ought to be put under one roof or in a stable, like Gypsies, in order that they may realize that they are not masters in our land, as they boast, but miserable captives . . .

Thirdly, they should be deprived of their prayer books and Talmuds in which such idolatry, lies, cursing, and blasphemy are wrought.

Fourthly, their rabbis must be forbidden under threat of death to teach any more . . .

Fifthly, passport and traveling privileges should be absolutely forbidden the Jews.

Sixthly, they ought to be stopped from usury. All their cash and valuables of silver and gold ought to be taken from them and put aside for safekeeping. For this reason, as said before, everything that they possess they stole and robbed from us through their usury, for they have no other means of support . . .

Seventhly, let the young and strong Jews and Jewesses be given the flail, the ax, the hoe, the spade, the distaff, and spindle . . .”

www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/luther-jews.html

VOCABULARY

Talmud
Blasphemy
Usury
Distaff

QUESTIONS

1. What is Martin Luther's attitude toward Jews?
2. How did he think that they should be treated?

DOCUMENT 5

Wilhelm Marr's Theory of Anti-Semitism

Known as the father of modern anti-Semitism, Wilhelm Marr (1819-1904) led the fight to overturn Jewish emancipation in Germany. His conception of anti-Semitism focused on the supposed racial, as opposed to religious, characteristics of the Jews. His organization, the League of Anti-Semites, introduced the word “anti-Semite” into the political lexicon and established the first popular political movement based entirely on anti-Jewish beliefs. This account of Marr is taken from Milton Meltzer’s book *Never to Forget: The Jews of the Holocaust*.

The Germans built hatred of the Jews into what they considered to be an unchallengeable scientific system. A “theory” of anti-Semitism was created to lend scientific justification to their prejudice. Wilhelm Marr based his theory of anti-Semitism on racial identity. He said that Jews, or Semites, had an inborn character that made them a “slave race,” while the Germans, or Aryans, were the “master race.” The Jews couldn’t help being morally and physically inferior because Nature had predetermined that. The lucky Aryans (he meant the Teutonic or Nordic peoples, such as the Germans, Austrians, Scandinavians, Dutch, English, and French) were by the same token born to be superior. The Aryans were the jewel of the world. Everything great and good was said to be the creation of this “master race.”

Milton Meltzer, *Never to Forget: The Jews of the Holocaust* (New York: Harper Collins, 1976), 7. Used by permission of Harper Collins Publishers.

QUESTIONS

1. What was Wilhelm Marr’s theory about Jews?
2. What was Wilhelm Marr’s theory about Germans?

DOCUMENT 6

The Protocols of the Elders of Zion

“In the late 1800s, European anti-Semites depicted the Jew as an alien and corrupting element within society. The published inflammatory literature reviled Jews, depicting them as plotting to undermine Western Christian civilization in order to take over the world.

By the turn of the century, anti-Semites firmly believed that Jews were collectively scheming to achieve world domination. One of the most influential writings fueling this belief was a widely read publication entitled *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. This document was, however, actually a carefully crafted forgery fabricated by the secret police of czarist Russia to justify that government’s persecution of Jews. *The Protocols* offered “proof” of a widespread international Jewish conspiracy. It featured a fictional account of minutes of an alleged secret meeting of subversive Zionist leaders in Basel, Switzerland, in 1897. It even outlined technical plans for a Jewish world state.

Exiles from Bolshevik Russia brought copies of *The Protocols* with them. Alfred Rosenberg, a Nazi Party ideologue, published his own “edited” version in 1923. Adolf Hitler, like many other avowed anti-Semites, was utterly convinced that *the Protocols*—and the Jewish conspiracy—were real.”

David Hogan and David Aretha, eds., *The Holocaust Chronicle: A History in Words and Pictures* (Lincolnwood, IL: Publications International, 2000), Reprinted by permission.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the basic premise behind the *Protocols*?
2. How does this fabrication reinforce a stereotypical image of Jews?

DOCUMENT 7

Adolf Hitler's Letter to Adolf Gemlich

Hitler wrote this letter to Adolf Gemlich, a World War I veteran, on September 16, 1919.

Anti-Semitism as a political movement should not and cannot be determined by factors of sentiment, but only by the recognition of the facts. These are the facts:

To begin with, Jewry is unqualifiedly a racial association and not a religious association. . . . Its influence will bring about the racial tuberculosis of the people.

Hence it follows: Anti-Semitism on purely emotional grounds will find its ultimate expression in the form of pogroms. Rational anti-Semitism, however, must lead to a systematic legal opposition and elimination of the special privileges which Jews hold, in contrast to the other aliens living among us (aliens' legislation). Its final objective must unswervingly be the removal of the Jews altogether. Only a government of national vitality is capable of doing both, and never a government of national impotence.

www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/Hitler_on_Jews.html

QUESTIONS

1. What is the connection between the ideas in *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and the ideas in Hitler's letter?
2. What does Hitler suggest should happen to the Jews?

DOCUMENT 8

The Treaty of Versailles, June 28, 1919

Part IV, Section I, Article 119

Germany surrenders all her rights and titles over her overseas countries.

Part IV, Section I, Article 159

The German military forces shall be demobilized and reduced, not to exceed 100,000 men.

Part V, Section II, Article 181

The German navy must not exceed 6 battleships, 6 light cruisers, 12 destroyers, and 12 torpedo boats. No submarines are to be included.

Part V, Section II, Article 198

The Armed Forces of Germany must not include any military or naval air forces.

Part VIII, Section I, Article 231

Germany and her Allies accept the responsibility for causing all the loss and damage to the Allied Powers.

Part VIII, Section I, Article 233

Germany will pay for all the damages done to the civilian population and property of the Allied Governments. [The figure was later set at \$33 billion.]

Part XIV, Section I, Article 428

To guarantee the execution of the Treaty, the German territory situated west of the Rhine will be occupied by Allied troops for fifteen years.

Part XIV, Section I, Article 431

The occupation forces will be withdrawn as soon as Germany complies with the Treaty.

www.yale.edu/lawweb/valon/imt/mena.html

QUESTIONS

1. What specific restrictions did the Treaty of Versailles impose on Germany?
2. What feelings did these restrictions generate in the German people?

DOCUMENT 9A

Economic Conditions in Weimar Germany (1918–1933)

In 1918, a loaf of bread cost just over half a mark.

By 1922, the cost had risen to 163 marks for a loaf of bread.

By November of 1923, a loaf of bread cost 201,000,000,000 marks.

Millions of people faced starvation as a result of the hyperinflation. People such as pensioners who were living on fixed incomes found that prices rose so much faster than their earnings. Even if they could afford to buy food they could not afford the gas to cook it.

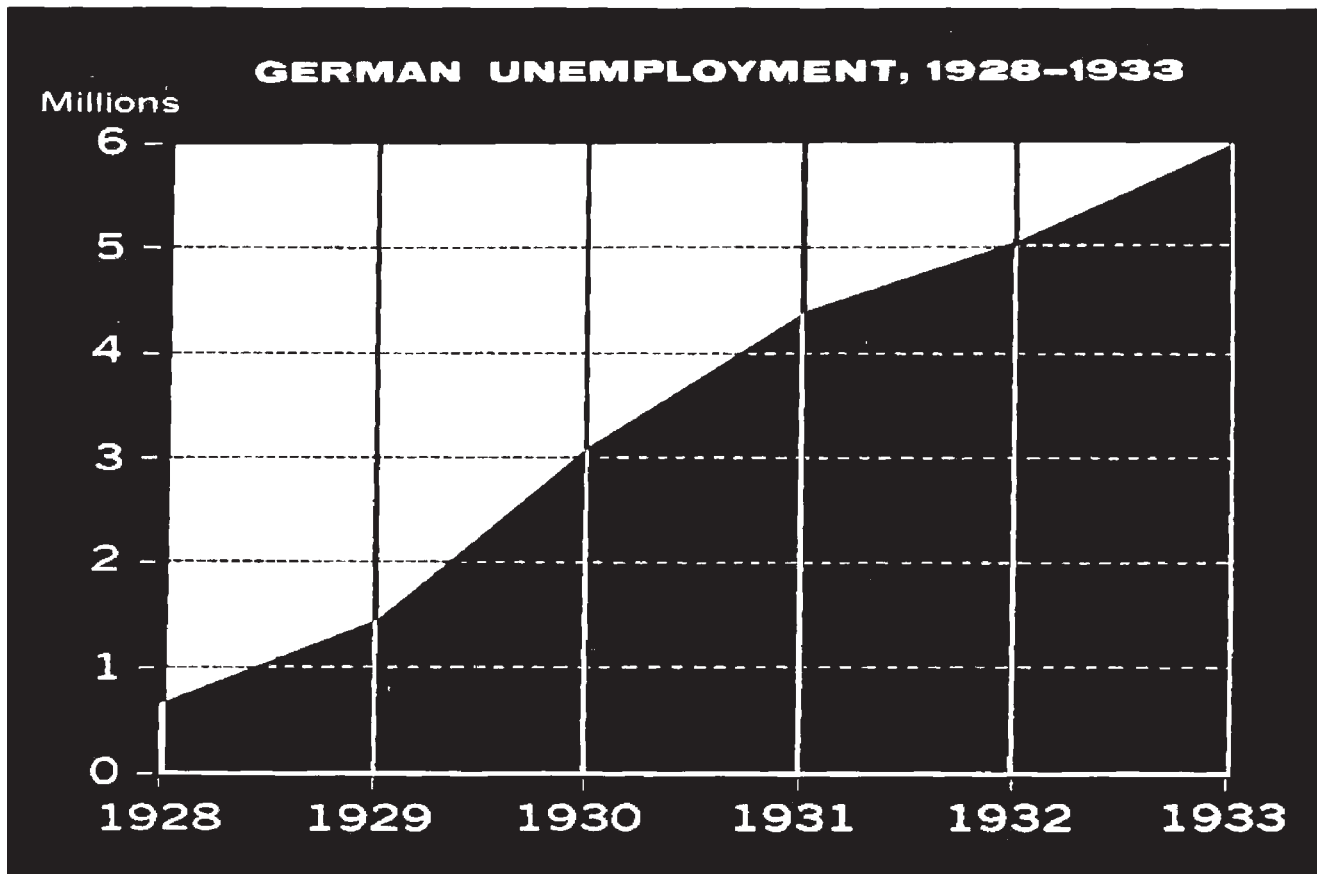
Faced with the same turbulence as the rest of German society, the Jews maintained a remarkable stability, economic resiliency and a strong social structure. They stood out from the rest, a fact that made it all the easier to justify attacking them.

Josh Brooman, *Weimar Germany 1918–1933*. Longman 20th Century Series (New York: Addison Wesley Longman Limited, 1985), 72. Used by permission—Pearson Education Limited.

DOCUMENT 9B

German Unemployment 1928–1933

GERMAN UNEMPLOYMENT 1928-1933



Taken from Edwin Fersten, John M. Good, Linda W. Rosenzweig, George M. Gregory. *Teacher's Guide for Shaping Western History*. (New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winsten, 1974). P. 163

Reprinted by permission.

QUESTION

Refer to documents 9A and 9B and give two reasons why Hitler blamed the Jews for the economic problems in Germany.

DOCUMENT 10

Excerpts from Hitler's *Mein Kampf*

For Adolf Hitler, anti-Semitism was an unalterable creed, something which permeated his thinking and the thinking of the Nazi leadership. The Jew was Hitler's personal enemy, from his days in Vienna to his dying day in Berlin, where he called once more for the destruction of "the prisoner of all peoples: international Jewry."

In *Mein Kampf*, written in 1925, Hitler displayed a violent anti-Semitism with roots in traditional and racial anti-Jewish attitudes.

- A. "The personification of the devil as the symbol of all evil assumes the living shape of the Jew . . ."
- B. "I believe that I am acting in accordance with the will of the almighty creator. By defending myself against the Jew, I am fighting for the work of the Lord . . ."
- C. "With satanic joy in his face, the black-haired Jewish youth lurks in wait for the unsuspecting girl whom he defiles with his blood, thus stealing her from her people . . ."
- D. "In the course of the centuries their outward appearance had become Europeanized and had taken on a human look; in fact, I even took them for Germans . . ."
- E. "Wherever I went, I began to see Jews, and the more I saw, the more sharply they became distinguished in my eyes from the rest of humanity . . ."
- F. "The Jew was never in possession of a culture of his own, the foundations of his intellectual work was always provided by others . . ."
- G. "I learned to look for the Jew in all branches of cultural and artistic life . . ."
- H. "The Jew is always a parasite in the body of other people. . . . He is and remains the typical parasite, a sponger who like a noxious bacillus keeps spreading as soon as a favorable medium invites him. And the effect of his existence is also like that of spongers; wherever he appears, the host people dies out after a shorter or longer period . . ."

Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*. Translated by Ralph Manheim (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971), .

QUESTIONS

1. Take one of Hitler's reasons for hating the Jews and refute it.
2. Why was the climate in Germany in the late 1920s and early 1930s ripe for blaming Jews and scapegoats?

HOMEWORK READING

“The Tightening Noose”

Eleanor Ayer’s book *Parallel Journeys* contains the true accounts of Helen Waterford’s life as a Jewish girl in Nazi Germany and Alfons Heck’s experiences as a member of the Hitler Youth. Told in alternating voices, the book reveals their parallel, but markedly different journeys. While Helen is bound for Auschwitz in a cattle car, Alfons is commanding frontline troops as a teenager. The chapter titled “The Tightening Noose” sets the scene by describing the increasing restrictions faced by Helen’s parents and by Helen and her husband in their early years together.

Everybody knew the Nazis were anti-Semites—they hated Jews. But the idea of mass murder in our modern twentieth century seemed outrageous! Many Jews, my parents included, tried to wait it out. It is so difficult to leave your home for an unknown country. Soon, they told themselves, this will be over.

The Nazis did not invent anti-Semitism. This hatred of Jews had been alive for many centuries. Jews had been targets of attack all over the world. But one of the areas where the hatred was especially strong was in central and eastern Europe, from Germany to Poland and Russia. Here Jews had been forced from their homes, their business, even their countries, many times before Adolf Hitler came to power.

Jews were accused of killing Christ. They were hated because some were successful in business and had become wealthy. They were blamed for many of the evils in the world when there was no one else to blame. Sometimes they were hated simply for having been born Jewish.

Some of the strongest anti-Semites were also “good” Christians. Martin Luther, the sixteenth-century German who started the Protestant religion, called Jews “the Christian’s most vicious enemy.” Luther urged his followers to destroy

Jewish homes and synagogues. “Let us drive them out of the country for all time,” he said in a speech. Still, many Jews continued to put their country ahead of their religion. They thought of themselves as Russians or Poles or Germans first, and as Jews second.

Helen was a young Jewish girl living in Frankfurt, Germany, in the early 1900s. Her mother was German. Her father came from Lithuania, on the Baltic Sea.

Mother’s relatives had lived in small villages in southern Germany for many centuries. Since there were few Jewish families in these towns, it was hard for young Jews to find marriage partners. So, as her older sister had done, my mother came to Frankfurt.

Father had arrived here at the age of nine when his parents and sisters fled their home in Lithuania. Like hundreds of thousands of people, they were escaping the pogroms—killings of Jews—that were then going on in western Russia.

After Mother and Father met, it took five years for her to say “yes” to marriage. At that time, German Jews considered themselves better than Eastern European Jews. Mother worried that marriage to a Lithuanian might not be the right decision.

HOMWORK READING (continued)

“The Tightening Noose”

Because Father was a foreigner, without German citizenship papers, they could not be married in Germany. So although it was not proper for an unmarried couple to travel together, Mother and Father set out for London. There they were legally married. Immediately, they returned to Germany, and nine months later I was born.

Frankfurt in the early 1900s was a vibrant, exciting German city. It lay east of Alfons’ hometown of Wittlich about sixty miles, across the Mosel and Rhine Rivers, toward the center of the country. Helen spent her entire childhood here along the River Main. Offenbach was the city of her birth, and across the river was Frankfurt, an important harbor, birthplace of the famous poet Goethe, for whom the city’s great University was named. It was a European center for books, business, and banking.

Germany was Helen’s homeland; Frankfurt offered the city life that she loved. There was so much to do—go to concerts and plays, share good books with friends, hike and picnic in the forests nearby.

I was a happy teenager like my girl friends, with one exception. After high school I went on to the university, something my mother never understood. She wanted me to get married as early as possible. My future husband, she said, must be German-Jewish and RICH. One summer, Mother found “the perfect choice for me.” He was thirty-two; I was sixteen and absolutely not interested in this old man, so I behaved in an obnoxious manner.

I did not want to get married—then or later. I wanted to study and maybe to teach. I wanted to spend the evenings with friends. We liked to discuss politics, go to horse races, and irritate our parents by wearing very unattractive clothing.

A few years later, after she had been working and saved some money, Helen took a vacation trip to the North Sea. There, on her own, she finally found a young man who seemed right. But the idea of marriage raised problems with Siegfried Wohlfarth’s parents. He was from a strict Jewish family, much more religious than Helen’s. His parents did not like the fact that her father was Lithuanian.

Worse yet, it looked like Siegfried would soon lose his job, which meant he could not support a wife. In April of 1933, the Nazis had announced a boycott of Jewish shops. No good Aryan German could buy at a store owned or run by Jews. No good German could see a Jewish doctor or lawyer. Jews, Hitler proclaimed, would no longer be allowed to teach in public schools or to work in government jobs.

Before we could make definite marriage plans Siegfried—under the new laws—lost his job. And after three and one-half years at the university, I had to quit my studies. There were now no Jewish teachers. Siegfried’s mother could not understand why, under these conditions, we would want to get married. She called it a most unwise decision and told us she could not give her permission.

Yet against the advice of his parents, we continued our plans. Convinced that I

HOMEWORK READING (continued)

“The Tightening Noose”

would impress them if we talked in person, Siegfried arranged a meeting. I was invited to the family home one evening. After serving tea and pastries, Siegfried left me alone with his mother while we talked. I was polite but firm. Finally, I told her, “I am sorry you cannot agree with us. But remember, Mrs. Wohlfarth, that whether you want it or not, I will carry your name until the end of my life.” As it turned out, this was not to be.

Helen and Siegfried decided on a June wedding in the Romerberg, Frankfurt’s centuries-old city hall. But when Helen’s father learned that the Wohlfarths were against the marriage, he was furious. “Whoever does not want my daughter, for whatever reason,” he announced, “does not have to eat my food.” And with that he cut Siegfried’s parents from the guest list of a dinner party he had planned for the young couple. Immediately after the ceremony, Helen and Siegfried began making plans to leave Germany.

Conditions for the Jews were getting worse every day. Siegfried had a friend, A.G., who was going to start his own metal business and wanted Siegfried to help him. Since A.G. was also Jewish, he planned to open his company in the Netherlands, where Jews were still treated decently and could own their own businesses. For a country that wanted to be rid of Jews, the Nazis certainly made it hard for us to leave. We had to fill out a huge number of forms. There were legal papers, tax records, bank accounts, and endless lists of furniture, books, clothing,

and household goods. We were allowed to take only a small amount of money, so we decided to spend it before we left. How we splurged, buying things like a refrigerator and vacuum cleaner that we didn’t really need!

Moving day finally came in June, one year after our wedding. While we finished packing, two guards watched over us constantly. They were checking to see what went into our large wooden boxes. Another guard went through every book.

Everything about the move was very difficult. But the hardest part was saying goodbye to our families. There were our parents, my fourteen-year-old brother, Siegfried’s younger brother, and all our friends from childhood. When, if ever, would we see them again?

The Nazi noose was tightening. On September 15, 1935, Hitler’s government made the swastika an official part of the German flag. But another, darker event also took place that day. It was an event that brought to an end all hope of fair treatment for the Jews in Germany. The Nuremberg Racial Laws were passed. These laws made it very clear who was a Jew. Immediately, all Jews lost their citizenship. They could no longer fly the German flag. German citizens of the Third Reich were forbidden to marry Jews. Many towns in Germany announced a new goal—to be *judenrein*—clean of Jews.

The answer for many German Jews was to do what Helen and Siegfried had done—leave. During Hitler’s first two years in power, more than 100,000 Jews fled the country. Very likely

HOMEWORK READING (continued)

“The Tightening Noose”

more would have gone, but few countries would accept them. Britain said it did not have enough room. The United States agreed to take 25,957 Germans a year. But it made such strict rules for entering the country that fewer than half that number actually came. The United States was just emerging from the Great Depression. Many Americans were still out of work. They didn't want refugees from other countries looking for jobs in the United States while they themselves were still employed. The feeling was similar elsewhere in the world. And yet two of the smaller countries of Europe, which already had more than their share of refugees, continued to keep their doors open to immigrants from Nazi Germany. One was Denmark; the other was Holland.

We moved to a small, modern apartment in Amsterdam. Both of us were eager to learn about our new country. But there was a great difference in the way we adjusted. Siegfried still had a deep love for Germany. He never got over his resentment that the Nazis had changed everything about his homeland.

I, on the other hand, felt no roots. My home had been Germany, but it wasn't any more. Where was my home? I couldn't say. Looking back, I think that my happiest—but also my saddest—years were spent in Holland.

Eleanor Ayer, *Parallel Journeys* (New York: Atheneum Books, 1995), 10–15.

QUESTIONS

1. Give four or more examples from “The Tightening Noose” to demonstrate the long-standing presence of anti-Semitism in central and eastern Europe.
2. Why did Helen's mother travel to Frankfurt from her small village? Why is this knowledge important?
3. What are pogroms and how did they affect Helen's family?
4. Why were Helen's parents married outside of Germany? Why do you think citizenship was an issue in this matter?
5. Describe Helen's homeland and teenage years spent in Frankfurt, Germany.
6. How did the boycott of April 1933 threaten Helen and Siegfried's marriage plans?
7. How did the Nuremberg racial laws affect the lives of the Jews?
8. If you had been Helen, describe how you would have felt if you had been in Helen's situations.

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