

Lesson Activity

Lesson Overview

This lesson includes a selection of Nazi propaganda images, both “positive” and “negative.” It focuses on posters that Germans would have seen in newspapers like *Der Stürmer* and passed in the streets, in workplaces, and in schools. Some of these posters were advertisements for traveling exhibits—on topics like “*The Eternal Jew*” or the evils of communism—that were themselves examples of propaganda.

STEPS

1. Introduce the Concept of Propaganda

- You will examine the Nazis’ efforts to shape the German “*people's community*” according to their racial ideals. This meant privileging “Aryans” and discriminating against those of so-called inferior races, such as Jews. The Nazis used laws and propaganda to accomplish this goal. The Nazis used propaganda—through radio, the press, feature films and newsreels, theatre, music, art exhibits, books, the school curriculum, sports, and more—to influence the beliefs, feelings, and actions of individuals to help further this goal.

- Reflect on the power of media to persuade. Respond to the following questions:
- Do you think people are generally skeptical? Or are they too willing to believe what they learn, see, or hear? How do you decide whether or not to believe what you see and hear?

2. Analyze “The Eternal Jew” Poster

- View the linked image [The Eternal Jew](#) which is a poster representing a museum exhibit in Germany in 1937 and 1938 that was titled “*The Eternal Jew*.”
- Take a few moments to simply observe the image. Work with the image by using the cropping tool (click [HERE](#) to learn how to create your cropping tool) to respond to the prompts below, and explain the detail you chose to focus on in the image. Move through the prompts one at a time. Try to allow for an array of ideas to be contributed. The prompts are as follows:
 - Identify a part of the image that first caught your eye.
 - Identify a part of the image that raises a question for you.
 - Identify a part of the image that is designed to make you feel rather than think.
 - Identify a part of the image that is designed to make certain individuals feel included in or excluded from the German “*people's community*.”

3. “The Eternal Jew” Discussion

- Remember that propagandists meticulously pervaded all aspects of German society and used a wide range of forms of propaganda to serve particular purposes and convey specific messages. We should assume that every detail has a purpose. You will finish this activity by discussing the following questions:
 - What is the message the creator of this image is sending?

- What does the creator of this image want the viewer to feel?
- What does the creator of this image want the viewer to do?
- View the poster again to make a short list of strategies that the creator(s) of the image used to convey an intended message.

4. Analyze Additional Nazi Propaganda Images

- There are three additional examples of Nazi propaganda images to examine in this activity using the cropping tool strategy. Click [HERE](#) to view the three images. By analyzing the image collection it becomes evident that the Nazis created some propaganda that denigrated Jews and other so-called inferior races, while they created other propaganda that glorified “Aryans.” The goal of both approaches was to influence the beliefs, feelings, and actions of individuals in Germany about who should be included and excluded from the “*people’s community*.”
- After analyzing all of the images, describe the picture that this collection of propaganda paints of the “*people’s community*” the Nazis wished to create. Consider drawing from the following questions:
 - Do you notice any themes or patterns in this group of propaganda images?
 - Based on the images you have analyzed in this lesson, how do you think the Nazis used propaganda to define the identities of individuals and groups?
 - Based on the images you have analyzed and what you have learned thus far about the rise of the Nazi Party, what can you conclude about the ideal “*people’s community*” the Nazis aimed to foster? How did they use propaganda to further their goal of creating this ideal “*people’s community*”?

5. Consider the Impact of Propaganda

- Now that several examples of Nazi propaganda have been analyzed, think about the impact these forms of media might have had on the beliefs, feelings, and actions of the people who were exposed to them. It is common for students to conclude after studying propaganda that the Nazis succeeded at brainwashing the German population, but it is important to think carefully about this idea. The quotations in the reading *The Impact of Propaganda* can help to complicate the idea of a brainwashed populace.
- Read *The Impact of Propaganda* in the box below, and in particular Marion Pritchard’s reflection on viewing a film at the museum exhibit “*The Eternal Jew*” and respond to the questions. Then read scholar Daniel Goldhagen’s ideas about the limits of the power of propaganda and respond to the questions.

READING – *The Impact of Propaganda*

1. The museum exhibit *Der ewige Jude* (The Eternal Jew), represented by the poster you analyzed, also included a film. Filled with blatant antisemitic lies, the film was presented as a documentary but was in fact propaganda. Marion Pritchard, then a graduate student in the Netherlands, recalled seeing the film:

We went to see this movie and sat and made smart remarks all the way through and laughed at it because it was so outrageous. And yet when we came out of the movie, one of my Gentile [non-Jewish] friends said to me, “I wish I hadn’t

seen it. I know that it was all ridiculous and propaganda, but for the first time in my life I have a sense of them and us—Jews and Gentiles. I'm going to do everything I can to help them, but I wish I didn't have this feeling."

What did Marion Pritchard's friend mean when she said, "I know that it was all ridiculous propaganda, but for the first time in my life I have a sense of them and us—Jews and Gentiles"? How do you explain her statement? What does her statement suggest about the way that propaganda can affect people?

2. Some scholars caution that there are limits to the power of propaganda; they think it succeeds not because it persuades the public to believe an entirely new set of ideas but because it validates beliefs people already hold. Scholar Daniel Goldhagen writes:

No man, [no] Hitler, no matter how powerful he is, can move people against their hopes and desires. Hitler, as powerful a figure as he was, as charismatic as he was, could never have accomplished this [the Holocaust] had there not been tens of thousands, indeed hundreds of thousands of ordinary Germans who were willing to help him.

Do you agree or disagree with Goldhagen's ideas about the power of propaganda? Would people have rejected Nazi propaganda if they did not already share, to some extent, the beliefs it communicated? How do Goldhagen's ideas help you understand Marion Pritchard's friend's reaction to the exhibit's film in a new, different, or deeper way?

6. 3-2-1 Reflection

Reflect using the 3-2-1 strategy format. Address the following prompts:

- Write down **3** things you learned about how the Nazis used propaganda to influence the way Germans defined their universe of obligation.
- Write down **2** questions you have about Nazi propaganda or propaganda and brainwashing.
- Write down **1** thing you learned that supported or challenged your thinking about the way media can influence our beliefs and actions.

NOTE — Universe of Obligation means: *How the members of a group, a nation, or a community define who belongs and who does not has a lot to do with how they define their universe of obligation. Sociologist Helen Fein coined this phrase to describe the group of individuals within a society "toward whom obligations are owed, to whom rules apply, and whose injuries call for amends." In other words, a society's universe of obligation includes those people who that society believes deserve respect and whose rights it believes are worthy of protection.*

ADAPTED from *Facing History and Ourselves* <<https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-holocaust-and-human-behavior/power-propaganda>>.