



Franklin D. Roosevelt
Presidential Library and Museum

CURRICULUM GUIDE

Investigating the Holocaust *Nuremberg: Its Lesson for Today*

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Holocaust
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SECTION II

The Lead Up

This section consists of four film segments and five documents related to the Nazis rise to power.

Film Segment 1

Mein Kampf (Running Time 4:19)

Adolf Hitler's 1925 manifesto, *Mein Kampf*, or *My Struggle*, evidences the origins of Nazi Party ideology and ultimately the Holocaust. In his writings, Hitler spouted anti-Semitic and militaristic rhetoric forming the basis for his vision of Germany. The idea of German superiority, the master race, justified the enslavement and extermination of those deemed inferior. Hitler himself embodied these ideas, and the *Führerprinzip*, or Führer principle, recognized his absolute power.

Film Segment 2

The Reichstag Fire – Hitler Consolidates Power (Running Time 4:18)

On February 27th, 1933, the Reichstag, or German parliament building, burned. The Nazi Party blamed the fire on a Communist plot, though Nazi Party members may have played a role in the arson. Hitler used it as a pretext for imprisoning political opponents and abolishing citizen rights, such as freedom of the press and speech. Further emboldened by the blaze, the Nazis accelerated rearmament plans and expansion of the armed forces, part of Hitler's broader effort to rebuild German military might.

Film Segment 3

Lebensraum – Nazi Germany Annexes Austria (Running Time 4:56)

The Nazis used the nationalist concept of *Lebensraum*, or living space, to justify German expansion in Europe. Hitler's goals included uniting ethnic Germans in Central Europe and providing new territories for colonization and exploitation, especially in Eastern Europe. Hitler first set his sights on neighboring Austria. Through coercion and force, he bullied the Austrian government into submission. In March 1938, Germany invaded Austria to complete the *Anschluss*, or joining, of the two nations. Austria ceased to exist as an independent country.

Film Segment 4

Czechoslovakia – German Aggression Continues (Running Time 3:53)

Hitler next turned to Czechoslovakia. Having approved a campaign to subjugate the nation through disinformation and violence, Hitler prepared for war. England and France, however, had no appetite for a European conflict. They agreed to Germany's territorial demands in September 1938. Further emboldened, Hitler set his sights on Poland.

The Lead Up

Vocabulary

Anschluss – means union, is used especially in reference to the forcible uniting of Germany and Austria in 1938.

Anti-Semitic – feeling or showing hostility toward or discrimination against Jews as a cultural, racial, or ethnic group.

Appeasement –to give into demands or requests, the state of being satisfied.

Compulsory Military Service – sometimes referred to as a draft, mandatory enrollment for service in a country's armed forces.

Conspiracy – an agreement to do an unlawful or wrongful act or an act that becomes unlawful as a result of the secret agreement.

Coup – officially referred to as a *Coup d'etat*, a sudden illegal, often violent taking of power, especially by part of an army or military organization.

Crimes Against Humanity – a category of crimes against international law which includes the most egregious violations of human dignity, especially against civilian populations.

Crimes Against the Peace – namely, planning, preparation, initiation, or waging of a war of aggression, or a war in violation of international treaties, agreements or assurances, or participation in a common plan or conspiracy for the accomplishment of crimes against the peace.

Expurgated – to cleanse of something morally harmful, offensive, or erroneous.

Führerprinzip – Hitler's organization and leadership style where ultimate authority rested with Hitler and extended downward. At each level, the superior was to give the orders and the subordinate was to follow them to the letter.

Kristallnacht – German meaning Crystal Night, also called Night of the Broken Glass, November 9-10, 1938, when German Nazis attacked Jewish people and property. The term refers to litter of broken glass left on the streets after the attacks.

Lebensraum – territory believed especially by Nazis to be necessary for national existence or economic self-sufficiency.

Manifest Destiny – an ostensibly benevolent or necessary policy of imperialistic expansion. Closely associated with the American mid-19th century expansion to the Pacific ocean.

Master Race – a group of people held to be racially preeminent and hence fitted to rule or enslave other peoples.

Mein Kampf – German phrase meaning "my struggle" it was a political manifesto written by Adolph Hitler in the early 1920s. It became the bible of the Nazi movement in Germany's Third Reich.

Misinformation – incorrect or misleading information often for the purposes of tricking or misleading others.

The Lead Up

Plebiscite – a vote by the people of an entire country or district to decide some major issue such as a choice of a ruler or government, option for independence or annexation by another power, or question of national policy.

Pretext – a made up or pretend reason for doing something so as to hide the true reason.

Propaganda – spreading of ideas, information, or rumor or misinformation for the purpose of helping or injuring an institution, a cause, or a person.

Rhineland – an area lying in Western Germany along both banks of the middle Rhine River east of Germany's border with France, Luxembourg, Belgium, and the Netherlands.

Subjugate – to bring under control and governance as a subject usually by force or threat of force.

War Crimes – the idea that individuals can be held accountable for crimes such as genocide or maltreatment of prisoners committed during, or in connection with, war.

Questions

Essential Questions for the Lead Up

- 1) What right does anyone have to declare one race “superior” to another?
- 2) Why did the people of Germany accept the concept of *Führerprinzip*, and not question, Hitler's fraudulent, deceitful, intimidating, and coercive actions in his climb to power?
- 3) Why weren't the institutional organizations that would traditionally act as a check against such extremism able to prevent Hitler's rise?
- 4) Hitler called war “noble and necessary.” Is war ever noble and necessary?
- 5) How might events in Central Europe have turned out differently if England and France had not given in to Hitler in 1938?
- 6) What factors need to be taken into consideration when deciding whether to give in to aggression?
- 7) Can/should laws like the one regarding the immigration quotas be suspended in the face of national or international crisis?

Documents

Document II-A – Flyleaf FDR's Copy of *Mein Kampf*

In 1933, FDR received an English translation of Hitler's treatise, *Mein Kampf* (*My Struggle*) published by Houghton Mifflin. The editor stripped out much of Hitler's anti-Semitic rantings and kept chapters on Nazi ideas of a restored German militaristic economy and society. The edited version outraged the American Jewish community. Roosevelt, who spoke and read German, was also appalled by the book.

The Lead Up

Document II-B – FDR’s March 25, 1938 Press Conference

On March 12, 1938, German troops marched into neighboring Austria, bringing more than 200,000 Jewish Austrians under Nazi control. Because a bill to increase immigration quotas could not pass congress, FDR took executive action. He combined Austria’s immigration quota with Germany’s thus increasing the number of Germans who could be considered for U.S. visas.

Document II-C – Letter to Myron Taylor on the Evian Conference

Following the German *Anschluss* with Austria, FDR proposed an international conference to facilitate and finance “political refugee” emigration to other countries. In this letter, Roosevelt appoints Myron C. Taylor, a moderate Republican businessman, to represent the United States at the July, 1938, Evian Conference. At the conference, Taylor announced that the U.S. would admit its full German/Austrian quota of 27,370 per year over the next five years – a number far lower than the 300,000 applicants on waiting lists for U.S. visas. The conference also established a new Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees to negotiate with Germany on refugee matters. Ultimately, though, the Evian Conference was a failure because no country – including the United States – was willing to take in the large numbers of European Jews seeking safe haven.

Documents II-D and II-E – Presidents Roosevelt’s response to the Klein Letter

The events of *Kristallnacht* were widely reported in the press. But public opinion on admitting additional refugees into the United States remained divided. Mail came into the White House both calling for action and demanding restraint in dealing with Germany and the Jewish crisis. This divide in public opinion placed enormous constraints on FDR’s ability to steer Congress towards more liberal immigration policies. Shortly after *Kristallnacht*, Ernest L. Klein from Chicago wrote this letter to the President urging him “to take such steps as may be deemed advisable to curb this madness.” FDR responded a few days later and advised Klein of efforts by the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees to negotiate with Germany for the orderly emigration of “the unfortunate victims” to other countries.

Document Based Questions

Document II-A – Flyleaf FDR’s Copy of *Mein Kampf*

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Document Based Questions

- 1) When does it appear that FDR read this version of the book?
- 2) How do you suppose FDR knew that there was a more severe version printed earlier?
- 3) What is the tone expressed in FDR’s reaction to the English language edition of *Mein Kampf*?
- 4) What does FDR’s note suggest about his understanding of the differences between Hitler’s public and non-public intentions?

The Lead Up

Document II-A Extension Questions

- 1) Why do you suppose the publisher choose to edit out the sections about Hitler's anti-Semitic views? Is this a form of censorship?
- 2) What is the significance of FDR's early read and understanding about Hitler's intentions?
- 3) If Roosevelt understood as early as 1933 that Hitler was so opposed to the Jews, why did it take him so long to take more definitive action?

Document II-B – FDR's March 25, 1938 Press Conference

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Document Based Questions

- 1) Why do you suppose FDR is so quick to point out that the group of political refugees also contains, "a great number of Christian, too, a very large number"?
- 2) How does the President respond when asked if legislation would be required to raise the number of refugees?
- 3) How does FDR suggest that the annexation of Austria to Germany affects the number of refugees that can be accepted from the combined area?
- 4) What historic precedents does FDR use as justification for allowing the refugees into the United States?
- 5) FDR refers to "private money" being used to make it possible for the refugees to enter the host countries. What does he mean by private money? How/why would using private money make a difference?

Document II-B Extension Questions

- 1) Why are people from around the world drawn to the United States?
- 2) Why do governments set quotas on the number of people coming in from various countries?
- 3) Should religion play a role in who is and who isn't allowed to enter the country?
- 4) How have American views toward refugees and immigrants changed over the years?
- 5) How does the current situation along our southern boarder compare to the events President Roosevelt is addressing in his press conference?
- 6) How would you have responded to the reporters' questions if they had been asked of you?

The Lead Up

Document II-C – *Letter to Myron Taylor on the Evian Conference*

Following the German *Anschluss* with Austria, FDR proposed an international conference to facilitate and finance “political refugee” emigration to other countries. In this letter, Roosevelt appoints Myron C. Taylor, a moderate Republican businessman, to represent the United States at the July, 1938, Evian Conference. At the conference, Taylor announced that the U.S. would admit its full German/Austrian quota of 27,370 per year over the next five years – a number far lower than the 300,000 applicants on waiting lists for U.S. visas. The conference also established a new Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees to negotiate with Germany on refugee matters. Ultimately, though, the Evian Conference was a failure because no country – including the United States – was willing to take in the large numbers of European Jews seeking safe haven.

Document Based Questions

- 1) What action is President Roosevelt proposing in his letter?
- 2) What “persecution” are the “so many thousands” of individuals “suffering”?
- 3) What are the “two countries” FDR is talking about?
- 4) In paragraph three, FDR lays out the problem as he sees it. In your own words, describe the problem more simply.
- 5) Why do you suppose FDR is “hoping” that private organizations and individuals will take the lead on “extending effective assistance”?
- 6) FDR proposes setting up an American and international committee to coordinate the works of the private organizations and individuals. Why do you suppose he is not asking the government to take a more active role?
- 7) What makes FDR think the other countries will accept American leadership in this endeavor?

Document II-C Extension Questions

- 1) Is FDR doing enough by setting up this committee, or should he be doing more?
- 2) If you believe he could be doing more, what would you suggest he do?
- 3) What factors, forces or actors do you suppose are keeping him from doing more?
- 4) What difference does it make whether the money is “private” or not?

Document II-D – *Klein Letter*

The events of *Kristallnacht* were widely reported in the press. But public opinion on admitting additional refugees into the United States remained divided. Mail came into the White House both calling for action and demanding restraint in dealing with Germany and the Jewish crisis. This divide in public opinion placed enormous constraints on FDR’s ability to steer Congress towards more liberal immigration policies. Shortly after *Kristallnacht*, Ernest L. Klein from Chicago wrote this letter to the President urging him “to take such steps as may be deemed advisable to curb this madness.” FDR responded a few days later and advised Klein of efforts by the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees to negotiate with Germany for the orderly emigration of “the unfortunate victims” to other countries.

The Lead Up

Document Based Questions

- 1) Why do you suppose Mr. Klein lists his work with the Work Progress Administration and his associations with James W. Gerard, Col. Edward M. House, and Louis McHenry Howe?
- 2) Where does Mr. Klein say he is getting his information regarding matters in Germany?
- 3) What reasons does Mr. Klein give as the German reason for the “extermination of human beings”?
- 4) What precedents for presidential action does Mr. Klein cite in his letter?
- 5) What uniquely American symbols and events does Mr. Klein suggest the “oppressed and persecuted people see” as signs for hope or action?
- 6) How does Mr. Klein describe “the cause” for which he is advocating the President to take action?

Document II-D Extension Questions

- 1) Who were James W. Gerard, Col. Edward M. House, and Louis McHenry Howe?
- 2) What were conditions like in the medieval age that Mr. Klein refers to?
- 3) Mr. Klein mentions the “American Spirit.” What does he mean by that?
- 4) Explain what democratic principles and ideals you think Mr. Klein is talking about.
- 5) Mr. Klein says he is mindful of his “responsibilities, obligations, and privileges” as an American. What are our responsibilities, obligations and privileges as Americans?
- 6) Do the American symbols Mr. Klein cites as signs for hope still ring true today?

Document II-E – President Roosevelt’s response to the Klein Letter

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Document Based Questions

- 1) What does President Roosevelt say he is doing to “ameliorate” the suffering Mr. Klein is describing?

The Lead Up

- 2) When Roosevelt says, "...emigration and to develop opportunities for permanent settlement in other countries," why do you suppose he stops short of offering the United States as one of those countries?
- 3) If Roosevelt is so actively supportive of this committee, would it make more sense to have it based in Washington as opposed to London?

Document II-E Extension Questions

- 1) President Roosevelt says the "technical difficulties" involved in solving the problem "are very great." What do you suppose some of these difficulties might be?
- 2) Give some examples in the world today where there are humanitarian problems.
 - a) Where are they?
 - b) What caused them?
 - c) What are governments doing about them?
 - d) Who are these governments?
 - e) What "technical difficulties" need to be overcome to render help and assistance?

Video Questions

- 1) When war occurs, how do we determine the difference between a death that is a "crime" and a death that results from the nature of war?
- 2) Why did the people of 1920s/1930s Germany allow themselves to accept/go along with what the Nazis were doing?
- 3) How was Hitler able to use the Reichstag fire to his political advantage?
- 4) How was Hitler able to use the fire as a pretext to solidify power?
- 5) What motive would the Communists have for starting the fire?
- 6) What motives would the Nazis have for starting the fire?
- 7) What role did *Lebensraum* play in the rise of the Nazis?
- 8) How was *Lebensraum* used to justify the Nazi territorial expansion?
- 9) What is the difference between *Lebensraum* and manifest destiny?
- 10) Why was the "absorption" of Czechoslovakia so critical to Hitler's plans for conquest?
- 11) Why did Hitler feel he needed to create an "incident" requiring German military intervention?