

LESSON: Racial “Science” and Law in Nazi Germany and the United States: Timeline Extension

GRADE LEVEL: Adaptable for grades 9–12

SUBJECT: History

TIME REQUIRED: Approximately 200 minutes.

This is a *thematic* lesson that builds on fundamental knowledge and provides in-depth exploration of a topic.

This lesson is an extension of the [Timeline Activity Lesson](#), which must be completed prior to this work.

RATIONALE

Nazism emerged in Germany during the era of “Jim Crow” in the United States (a period after the Civil War in which segregation was legal throughout the country). Nazi leaders, including Adolf Hitler, wrote admiringly of American racist practices.

Racist ideas were treated as “scientific” during this time: biology linked to physical appearance supposedly determined what people were capable of and what limited them, while “selective breeding” was promoted as a way to eliminate physical and mental disabilities in the population. The pseudoscience called eugenics emerged in the late 19th century and became a global movement, providing a veneer of respectability to ideas about “racial purity.” By the 1930s this pseudoscientific approach had found its way into laws in the United States and Europe.

While eugenics and racism were present in many countries, this lesson is a case study examining Nazi Germany and the United States during the 1930s. While racism and racist laws existed in both societies, these histories are presented within their own national and historical contexts.

OVERVIEW

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What is historical context and why is it important?
- What are primary and secondary sources?
- What role did eugenics play in racist laws and practices in Nazi Germany and the United States?
- How were racist laws and practices in the Third Reich different from racist laws and practices in the United States? How are they similar? How did these distinctions affect the people the law targeted?

EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

At the end of this lesson, students understand:

- How to analyze a primary source
- The importance of historical context when analyzing events and sources

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- The influence of the global eugenics movement in United States and German law and policy
- The role racism played in Nazi Germany and the United States in the 1930s, creating awareness of how to recognize racism today

TEACHER PREPARATION

- **Prerequisite: Timeline lesson**
 - This lesson is an **EXTENSION** to the USHMM foundational [Timeline Activity Lesson](#) and it must be completed before starting this extension or the lesson will lack necessary context for student understanding. The timeline cards from this lesson should still be posted in the classroom or available virtually.
- The following lessons are additional **prerequisites** for optimal student understanding:
 - [History of Antisemitism and the Holocaust](#)
 - [Nazi Racism](#)
- Review terminology and be prepared to help students with definitions.
- Review ALL of the new timeline cards, especially the [US history context cards](#). They are color coded to match the original timeline cards (blue = events; orange = laws/decrees) and some cards are green for an activity during the lesson. **NOTE:** your students may need additional time to complete the lesson based on their familiarity with the US history events.
- Add the date cards for 1500-1800, 1800s, 1910-1919, 1920-1933, and 1945-1965 to the existing timeline
- Review video clips in packets Group A and Group B, [powerpoint presentation](#), [analyzing primary sources worksheet](#), and [student interactive](#).

MODIFICATIONS

- Provide additional time for students to research the US history cards
- Activities are intentionally flexible for in person and remote instruction
- Sharing a google document with students can assist with remote collaboration

LEARNER VARIABILITY MODIFICATIONS

- Cards can be duplicated for student annotation and analysis
- [Frayer model](#) for definitions
- National Archives offers additional document analysis sheets for different ability levels
- Defining primary and secondary sources can be more comprehensive
- Document analysis can be completed as a whole class project

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PART ONE: HISTORICAL CONTEXT OVERVIEW

1. Show the class this [photograph](#). Do not share the caption or provide any context. Ask students their impressions: describe the people in the photo--what’s going on in the photo? Record answers.



Members of the SS Helferinnen (female auxiliaries) and SS officer Karl Hoecker invert their empty bowls to show they have eaten all their blueberries. US Holocaust Memorial Museum

2. Now provide the caption and the context below. Share the definition of **historical context**: ask how this information informs how they view the photo.

Members of the SS Helferinnen [pronounced Hell-fur-rinnen, female auxiliaries] and SS officer Karl Hoecker [pronounced Hock-er] invert their empty bowls to show they have eaten all their blueberries.

The photo is from the **Hoecker Album**: 116 photographs taken during the last six months of Auschwitz, between May 1944 and January 1945. The album was compiled by Obersturmfuehrer Karl Hoecker, the adjutant, or chief of staff, to the last commandant of the Auschwitz concentration camp. The album shows the day-to-day life of the Nazi SS who worked at Auschwitz during its most lethal period, coinciding with the murder of 400,000 Hungarian Jews.

This photo is from a day trip for SS Helferinnen (young SS women who worked as communications specialists at Auschwitz) on July 22, 1944.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

- being aware of the important events at the time that influenced the creation of the **source**
- how events surrounding a source impacts your understanding of it

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ASK STUDENTS:

- How does this information change how you view the photograph? How does historical context now inform your understanding?

3. Students now review the [timeline activity cards](#) from the original, foundational Timeline Activity Lesson, stressing that the cards provide **historical context** for 1933-1945. The cards from this lesson should still be posted in the classroom or online. Students can complete a gallery walk, or as a class review each event together, or **ideally, this lesson can be sequenced to occur immediately after the initial timeline activity lesson concludes.**

NOTE: the context provided in the original timeline lesson is essential for accomplishing student learning outcomes.

4. After reviewing the timeline from the original [Timeline Activity](#) Lesson, tell students they will now review additional timeline cards that provide **historical context** specifically for an examination of racially motivated laws and events in the United States and Nazi Germany.
5. Distribute the [33 blue cards to students](#). Explain that the cards are **summaries** of key historical events in the United States and Germany and are considered **secondary source** material

SUMMARY	Three basic characteristics: Conciseness, accuracy, objectivity
PRIMARY SOURCES	First-hand accounts, often created close to an event, from people who had a direct connection to the event.
SECONDARY SOURCES	One step removed from primary sources, though they often quote or use them. They can cover the same topic but add a layer of interpretation and analysis

6. Working in pairs or groups, students read and discuss the card they have been given, noting references to any primary sources they see on their cards and noting and discussing as a class any words or phrases that need clarification.
7. Students post the blue cards to create a timeline beneath the original timeline.

NOTE: some of the cards are duplicates of the original timeline but have additional information on them. The German cards should be posted in a line beneath the existing timeline and the US history

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cards should be posted in a line beneath the new German cards. Cards prior to 1933 and after 1945 should go under the date cards provided.

8. Distribute the [student interactive](#). Students complete a gallery walk of the posted timeline and write down questions they have about the posted events and engage in a think/pair/share activity about their observations.
9. Students record answers from the think/pair/share on a Padlet board.

PART TWO: EUGENICS AND LAW

1. With students working in the same pairs or groups, distribute the [11 orange and 8 green cards to the students](#). Explain that the cards are summaries of laws, decrees, or court cases in the United States and Germany.
2. Working in pairs or groups, students read and discuss the card they have been given, noting references to any primary sources they see on their cards and noting and discussing as a class any words or phrases that need clarification.
3. Students post the orange and green cards on the timeline on the wall.
4. Students complete a gallery walk of the posted timeline, and using the student interactive record their observations of their laws/decreed card in the context of the timeline, answering these questions:

ASK STUDENTS

- Who did their law/decreed/court case target? When and how?
 - Are there historical events on the timeline that provide historical context for your card?
5. Next, working in groups or pairs (depending on class size) students examine two primary sources and complete an [Analyzing Primary Sources Worksheet](#) (modeled after [these worksheets](#) from the National Archives) for each source:
 - Group A [Sources](#)
 - i. [1.02 minute clip](#) (or reads transcript) of Edward Adler describing his denunciation in Germany in 1935 for dating an “Aryan” (non-Jewish) woman.
 - ii. [Nazi racial chart](#) created in 1935 to explain the new Nuremberg laws to Germans.
 - Group B [Sources](#)

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- i. [3:06 minute clip](#) of Dr. Leon Bass describing his experience as a Black 18-year-old volunteering to join the US Army in 1943. Dr. Bass later witnessed the Buchenwald concentration camp after liberation.
 - ii. [Poster](#) from the United States in 1929.
6. Model how to use the [primary source analysis](#) sheet.

MODELING DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

- Anticipate
- Meet the source
- Try to make sense of it
- Use it as historical evidence

7. Students can begin the analysis in class and complete it as homework, if necessary.
8. As a class, discuss the Edward Adler and Leon Bass clips.

ASK STUDENTS

- What did you learn from the analysis?
 - Look at the four primary sources in relation to the timeline. What’s going on in each country in relation to the event you analyzed?
9. Place the white timeline cards for the four primary sources they analyzed on the timeline.
10. Next, students remove their law/decreed cards (orange and green) from the timeline and place them in two columns under the header cards provided: one for US laws and the other for German laws.

LAWS AND DECREES CHART 1

US LAWS/DECREE/COURT CASES	GERMAN LAWS/DECREE
<p>1865-1870: 13-15th Amendments to Constitution</p> <p>1865-1866: First Black Codes Passed</p> <p>October 15, 1883: Supreme Court Overturns 1865 Civil Rights Act</p> <p>May 18, 1896: US Supreme Court Rule on Separate but Equal</p>	<p>April 7, 1933: Civil Service Law</p> <p>April 25, 1933: Education Law</p> <p>July 14, 1933: Sterilization Law</p> <p>September 15, 1935: Reich Citizenship Law</p> <p>September 15, 1935: Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor</p> <p>November 14, 1935: Racial Definitions Explained</p>

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<p>March 20, 1924: Racial Integrity Act</p> <p>May 26, 1924: Immigration Law of 1924</p> <p>May 2, 1927: Forced Sterilization Legalized</p> <p>January 5, 1934: Anti-Lynching Bill Proposed</p> <p>July 26, 1948: US Army Desegregated</p> <p>May 17, 1954: Brown vs Board</p> <p>July 2, 1964: Civil Rights Act of 1964</p> <p>August 6, 1965: Voting Rights Act of 1965</p>	<p>November 26, 1935: Nuremberg Laws Extended</p>
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ASK STUDENTS

- Where do you see connections between the purpose of US and German laws?
- Who did the laws in each country target?
- Are there blue historical event cards that directly relate to a law/decree card?

11. After discussing and recording the class discussion of the questions, return the oranges cards to the timeline, leaving the green cards in the two columns:

LAWS AND DECREES CHART 2

US LAWS/DECREEES	GERMAN LAWS/DECREEES
<p>March 20, 1924: Racial Integrity Act</p> <p>May 26, 1924: Immigration Act of 1924</p> <p>May 2, 1927: Forced Sterilization legalized:</p>	<p>July 14, 1933: Sterilization Law</p> <p>September 15, 1935: Reich Citizenship law</p> <p>September 15, 1935: Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor</p> <p>November 14, 1935: Racial Definitions Explained</p> <p>November 26, 1935: Nuremberg Laws Extended</p>

12. Explain that students are going to examine these specific cards for their direct connection to **eugenics**.

NOTE: It is important to stress to students that **eugenics** is now completely discredited because it is unscientific and racially biased

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13. In order to understand what role eugenics played in racist and discriminatory laws and practices in Nazi Germany and the United States, as a class, or in groups, share this [powerpoint](#). Students should also read the [Holocaust Encyclopedia article: Eugenics](#) to provide context. Students take notes on the student interactive.

ASK STUDENTS

- What role did eugenics play in racist laws and practices in Nazi Germany and the United States?
- What were the goals of eugenics laws? In Nazi Germany? In the United States?
- Who were the targets of eugenic policies? What was the intention of the law?

14. Now, return the green cards to the posted timeline. Look at the blue historical event cards near the green cards: what are some of the differences students see in the historical context in the US and in Germany surrounding these highlighted laws and decrees? **Remind students that even though eugenics has characteristic features in both societies, it is the result of specific historical processes and must therefore be understood and discussed in the respective historical contexts.**

ASK STUDENTS AND PLACE ANSWERS ON A [VENN DIAGRAM](#)

- Look at the historical event cards near the green cards: what are some of the differences students see in the historical context surrounding these highlighted laws and decrees?
- Describe the historical context in the United States and in Germany. What is similar? Different?
 - Differences include the type of government (a representative democracy in the United States; a fascist dictatorship in Nazi Germany); how the decisions were implemented (by state law and in the court system in the US; by decree in Nazi Germany); the length of time for implementation (it happened much more quickly in Nazi Germany than in the United States); what it took for these decisions to cease (a long time involving courts and activism in the United States; defeat in World War II in Nazi Germany); and the result of the laws (genocide in Nazi Germany; segregation, racial terror, and forced sterilization in the United States)
 - Similarities include: the laws and decisions were put in place in the 1920s and 1930s; people were targeted for “racial” reasons; both involved laws about sterilization and preventing interracial relationships; both saw racial hierarchies promoted by the national government

PART THREE: EXAMINING HISTORICAL INTERSECTIONS IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

After students learned about the influence of eugenics on laws in the United States and Germany they will now consider more intersections between the laws and events in each country as represented on the US timeline cards and the German cards.

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- Students will analyze the 11 case studies in the chart below. The case studies are sets of pre-grouped cards. Working individually, in pairs, or in groups, students think critically about the events, and fill out a [venn diagram](#) considering these questions:

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS:

- What are some of the similarities and differences between the events and laws described on your cards?
- Who is advocating for these laws or these actions?
- Who is targeted by these laws or these actions?

Case Studies: each square is a case study

<p>Case study #1: 1619-1860: Black People in the Americas Pre-1933: Antisemitism in Europe</p>	<p>Case study #2: September 10, 1894: United Daughters of the Confederacy Founded 1938: Nazi Racism Taught in Schools</p>
<p>Case study #3: December 24, 1865: Ku Klux Klan Founded 1921: Nazi Paramilitary <i>Sturmabteilung</i> (SA) Founded 1925: Millions Join the Ku Klux Klan</p>	<p>Case study #4: May 18, 1896: Supreme Court Rules on “Separate but Equal” April 7, 1933: Civil Service Law April 25, 1933: Education Law</p>
<p>Case study #5: 1916: <i>The Passing of a Great Race</i> Published July 18, 1925: <i>Mein Kampf</i> Published</p>	<p>Case study #6: February 8, 1915: <i>The Birth of a Nation</i> Premieres September 24, 1940: <i>Jüd Suss</i> Premieres</p>
<p>Case study #7: 1916: Great Migration Begins March 1938: Jewish Refugee Crisis Begins</p>	<p>Case study #8: May 31-June 1, 1921: Tulsa Race Massacre November 9-10, 1938: <i>Kristallnacht</i> Attacks</p>
<p>Case study #9: 1945-1949: Denazification in Europe July 26, 1948: US Army Desegregated May 17, 1954: Supreme Court Orders Desegregation of Schools December 5, 1955-December 20, 1956:</p>	<p>Case study #10: March 20, 1924: Racial Integrity Act Passed September 15, 1935: Reich Citizenship Law September 15, 1935: Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor November 14, 1935: Racial Definitions</p>

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Montgomery Bus Boycott August 28, 1963: March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom July 2, 1964: Civil Rights Act	Explained
Case study #11: May 2, 1927: Forced Sterilization Legalized July 14, 1933: Sterilization Law	

2. Students can present their findings in class, and after the presentations take a final gallery walk of the complete timeline:
 - a. How do the cards added prior to 1933 provide historical context for the original timeline cards? How does this inform understanding of the postwar cards? What more would you like to know?
3. Share this quote from a speech Adolf Hitler gave to the German Medical Federation of April 7, 1933: “The American people were the first to draw the practical political consequences from the inequality in the difference of races. Through immigration laws it barred undesirables from other races. Nor is America ready now to open its doors to Jews (fleeing) from Germany.”

How does historical context inform how you understand this quote? How did it benefit Hitler to use the United States as an example?

CONCLUSION

ASK THE STUDENTS:

- Why is historical context important in making informed comparisons between events in Nazi Germany and events in other countries in different times and places?
- When is it useful or accurate to make comparisons? When is it not? Questions to further critical thinking about comparisons:
 - a. Based on what you read or saw, what is similar or different about these moments in history?
 - b. Based on what you’re feeling, what feels similar? Why might there be similar feelings for different events?
 - c. What do we know about the two events by themselves? What other information is needed to fully understand the comparison?

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ASSESSMENT

Students read and analyze [Henry Banks’s letter to the editor](#) published in the *Maroon Tiger*, the Morehouse College student newspaper on October 1, 1933. What is Banks asserting? What is the reason for his assertion? What evidence does he provide to support his argument? What is the context in which he is writing? What is the historical context that you found helpful in analyzing this piece? Does he convince you? Why or why not? Additionally, student interactive sheets, group work, and class participation can be evaluated for understanding.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [“Why Holocaust Analogies are Dangerous”](#) Article
- Additional information about the [Hoecker Album](#)
- [A History of Eugenics](#) (complete lecture) with transcript
- [One minute clip definition of Eugenics](#) with transcript
- [Hate and Its Impact: Nazi Ideology and Racism in the Jim Crow South](#) (complete program)