

LESSON: History Unfolded: Black Press Newspaper Coverage of the Holocaust

GRADE LEVEL: Adaptable for grades 7–12

SUBJECT: Multidisciplinary

TIME REQUIRED: Approximately 120 minutes (extensions available)

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

RATIONALE

This lesson is valuable in that it will help students hone their historical research and media literacy skills. It addresses how various newspapers which were part of the Black press in the United States reported on the Holocaust. Students will gain a better understanding of the Black press in general and the conditions in the United States that shaped opinion and reporting in the Black press related to Americans' responses to the Holocaust.

OVERVIEW

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- In what ways did the Black press respond to Nazi persecution of Jews in Germany in the 1930s and 40s?
- What factors shape readers' perspectives and reactions to news events?

EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

At the end of this lesson, students understand:

- That context (other events in society at the time) is important when considering how newspapers reported on specific events and how readers reacted to this reporting.
- That reactions to news vary, even within particular groups.

At the end of this lesson, students know:

- A basic history of why and how the Black press began.
- That information about the Nazi persecution of Jews as it was taking place was available in the United States, including in the Black press.
- In the Black press, this information was often framed within the context of the systemic discrimination and persecution Black Americans faced and the connection they felt for what was happening overseas.
- Black Americans had a range of responses to the Nazi threat in this period.

At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Correctly identify the parts of a newspaper.
- Define the Black press and explain why it started.
- Analyze news stories, opinion pieces, and political cartoons.
- Correctly identify some of the concerns Black Americans had in the 1930s and 1940s.

LESSON: History Unfolded: Black Press Newspaper Coverage of the Holocaust

- Evaluate how the Black press addressed both American racism and Nazi racism, as well as factors that influenced reactions to each.

TEACHER PREPARATION

Background Reading

- [Guide to Terminology](#)
- [Dealing and Responding to Jim Crow](#) from National Museum of African American History and Culture

Handouts and Links in lesson

Part One: Overview of Jim Crow America and Nazi Germany

- Racism and Jim Crow laws in the United States
 - Read pages 1 and 2 of the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of American History [Teacher Guide](#) (PDF)
 - Read Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of American History [Selected Jim Crow Laws](#) (PDF)
- Holocaust Encyclopedia [Article Antisemitism](#)

Part Two: History of the Black Press

- [Excerpt](#) from Larry Muhammad’s article “The Black Press: Past and Present” from Nieman Reports
- [Alternative reading](#): “Overview of The Past 182 Years of the Black Press” by Dr. Clint C. Wilson, as found on the National Newspaper Publishers Association website

Part Three: Parts of a Newspaper

- Newspaper Article: [March 1939 issue of the Afro-American Courier](#)
- [Learn the Parts of a Newspaper Worksheet](#)
- [Answer Key: Learn the Parts of a Newspaper](#)

Part Four: Newspaper Analysis Focusing on Americans’ Responses to the Holocaust

- [Primary Sources Packet](#) (includes a transcription of the articles)
- [Primary Source Analysis Worksheet](#)
- [Jigsaw Worksheet](#)

Part Five: Discussion and Conclusion

- [History Unfolded: US Newspapers and the Holocaust](#) website

MODIFICATIONS

This lesson can be conducted using all digital resources or with physical handouts and newspaper copies. The primary source analysis can be completed as a jigsaw activity, as a group activity using all the newspaper articles, or as an independent activity. Students with disabilities and

LESSON: History Unfolded: Black Press Newspaper Coverage of the Holocaust

English language learners may require a read aloud. A transcription of the primary source articles is included in the primary sources packet to assist with readability and read aloud programs.

LEARNER VARIABILITY MODIFICATIONS

- Students can be asked to read a portion or all of the primary and secondary sources according to reading level, class time, and stamina.
- The primary source analysis activity can be differentiated as a group activity according to readiness. For example, the “Strange Interlude” political cartoon may be more challenging to analyze than the “Another Klansman” cartoon.

PART ONE: Overview of Jim Crow America and Nazi Germany

1. Review with students their understanding of racism and Jim Crow era laws in the United States as well as their understanding of the history of antisemitism and persecution of Jews in Germany. If needed, the following articles can be provided for review:
 - a. Racism and Jim Crow laws in the United States
 - i. Read pages 1 and 2 of the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of American History [Teacher Guide](#) (PDF)
 - ii. Read Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of American History [Selected Jim Crow Laws](#) (PDF)
 - b. Holocaust Encyclopedia [Article Antisemitism](#)

PART TWO: History of the Black Press

1. Introduce the following questions to students before they read about the Black press:
 - a. When did the “glory days” of the Black press begin?
 - b. What gap did the Black press fill in news coverage?
 - c. What perspective did stories from the Black press have?
 - d. What are some ways the Black press has influenced politics and society in the United States?

A [KWL Chart](#) (know, want to know or think will learn, learned) may be used to guide student thinking through this exercise.

2. Students read an [excerpt](#) from the “The Black Press: Past and Present” from September 15, 2003,” by Larry Muhammad.

Key vocabulary: **obituaries, crusaded, bylined, circulation, desegregation, sit-ins, Black Power era.**

LESSON: History Unfolded: Black Press Newspaper Coverage of the Holocaust

Key names mentioned in the article: [Lena Horne](#), [Little Richard](#), [Paul Robeson](#), [Richard Wright](#), [Gwendolyn Brooks](#), [Langston Hughes](#), [W.E.B. DuBois](#), [Zora Neale Hurston](#), [Marcus Garvey](#), [Elijah Muhammad](#), [Robert S. Abbot](#), [Robert L. Vann](#), [Franklin D. Roosevelt](#).

Modification: It may be necessary or helpful to define the terms or discuss some of the names above as a pre-reading activity. Students may read the entire article if time or reading level permits. Students with disabilities and English language learners may require a read aloud. Alternatively, students may use [the piece](#) “Overview of The Past 182 Years of the Black Press” by Dr. Clint C. Wilson, as found on the National Newspaper Publishers Association website.

3. Have a class discussion over the questions students considered before the reading:
 - a. When did the “glory days” of the Black press begin?
 - b. What gap did the Black press fill in news coverage?
 - c. What perspective did the stories have?
 - d. What are some ways the Black press has influenced politics and society in the United States?

PART THREE: Parts of a Newspaper

- Students use the [March 1939 issue of the Afro-American Courier](#) and the [Learn the Parts of a Newspaper Worksheet](#) to identify the various parts of a newspaper from the time period.
- Review the [answer key](#) for understanding.

PART FOUR: Newspaper Analysis Focusing on Americans' Responses to the Holocaust

Modifications: jigsaw puzzle, group activity with class discussion summary about jigsaw, independent activity with some or all of the articles. Students with disabilities and English language learners may require a read aloud. Audio text softwares or online programs can be used in conjunction with the provided transcriptions. Rewordify or literacy based programs can help adjust reading level for students as well.

1. In groups or individually, students will read and analyze one of the pieces from a Black press newspaper.
2. It will be helpful to frame students’ primary source analysis with the context of how newspapers outside the Black press generally reported on the Holocaust. You may wish to share with your students the following background information:

LESSON: History Unfolded: Black Press Newspaper Coverage of the Holocaust

Background Information on Newspapers in the United States

-Daily newspapers that subscribed to a wire service organization (such as the Associated Press) and that covered international events were likely to report on the persecution of Jews from 1933 to 1945 to some degree.

-The placement of articles and the prominence given to this reporting varied by newspaper. Generally speaking, newspapers covered an event of the Holocaust for a day or two around the time of the event. Some of these events were front-page news for many newspapers, such as the boycott of Jewish businesses on April 1, 1933, the *Kristallnacht* pogroms in November 1938 and the first public reports of the Final Solution in late November 1942. However, the persecution of Jews was not a consistent, front page story from 1933 to 1945.

-Newspapers published by and/or written for members of particular religious, ethnic, or racial communities were likely to include specific information pertinent and of interest to those groups. For example, Jewish newspapers were likely to have more information about the persecution of Jews in Europe and Catholic newspapers were more likely to report on the persecution of Catholics wherever it was taking place. These newspapers were also more likely to be weeklies and include more editorial commentary on events rather than news stories about all the events over the past week.

-Newspapers outside of the Black press rarely drew parallels between racial intolerance or persecution in Nazi Germany with the persecution of Black Americans in the United States.

3. Students complete their [Primary Source Analysis Worksheet](#) on their piece from the Black press. The sheet asks students to identify the parts of the newspaper piece, other information in the news on that day, and what point the writer of the piece attempts to convey. For Assignment #2 (below), which has two primary sources, it will be necessary to print two copies of the analysis sheet.
4. Either in a jigsaw activity, group presentations, or a class discussion, students complete the [Jigsaw Worksheet](#) that has students present the primary sources, detailing information about the other primary sources and the main point of each of them. The Jigsaw Worksheet also provides students with varying viewpoints and perspectives from the Black press on Holocaust era events.

Below is a list of the primary sources for group or individual primary source analysis. All primary sources can be found in the [Primary Source Packet](#). The packet provides background on each newspaper and topic, a view of the front page of each newspaper issue, a view of the page the primary source appears on, and an up close view of the primary source. Each primary source below is linked to additional background in *History Unfolded* or *Experiencing History: Holocaust Sources in Context*. Your students are also provided with these links in the primary source packet.

1. “Another Klansman” political cartoon, in the *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, April 8, 1933 around the time of the [Nazi boycott of Jewish businesses](#).

LESSON: History Unfolded: Black Press Newspaper Coverage of the Holocaust

- Two letters to the editor on the question of [whether the United States should boycott the 1936 Summer Olympic Games in Berlin](#).
 - “Rebuffing Hitler” letter to *The New York Amsterdam News*, September 21, 1935.
 - “For or Against Nazism” letter to *The Chicago Defender*, June 6, 1936.
- “Strange Interlude” political cartoon in *The Pittsburgh Courier*, April 16, 1938, addressing the worsening immigration crisis following events such as [Germany Annexing Austria](#).
- “What Then, Black Americans?” opinion piece, printed in *The Atlanta Daily World*, November 20, 1938 written following [Kristallnacht](#).
- “Now We Think” collection of reactions about Charles Lindbergh in *The Philadelphia Tribune*, October 18, 1941, a month after [his ‘Un-American’ Speech](#).
- “Should I Sacrifice to Live ‘Half-American?’” letter to *The Pittsburgh Courier*, January 30, 1942, [which inspired the paper to introduce a ‘Double V’ campaign](#).
- “Nazi Butchers” editorial from *The Chicago Defender*, December 26, 1942, in response to the [Allies Denouncing the Nazi Plan to “Exterminate” the Jews](#).

PART FIVE: Discussion and conclusion

Modifications: Before the discussion, teachers may have their students first refer to the [History Unfolded: US Newspapers and the Holocaust](#) website to see how newspapers outside the Black press reported on some of the same topics explored above. Students may use the following links below and further filter results by editorials, opinion pieces, letters, cartoons, and more. Such an exploration will help students discuss the pieces from the Black press in context with other reporting and reactions to similar events outside of the Black press.

- [Nazi boycott Jewish Businesses](#)
- [Whether the United States should boycott the 1936 Summer Olympic Games in Berlin](#).
- [Germany Annexing Austria](#)
- [Kristallnacht](#)
- [Charles Lindbergh’s ‘Un-American’ Speech](#)
- [*History Unfolded* does not include coverage on the ‘Double V’ campaign]
- [Allies Denouncing the Nazi Plan to “Exterminate” the Jews](#)

- As a class, discuss the following questions:
 - What were some of the concerns Black Americans had during the 1930s and 1940s?
 - Possible answers include:** racism against Black Americans in the United States and acts of violence, such as lynchings; antisemitism in Germany; economic insecurity in the United States; threats to democracy (such as fascism and communism).
 - What do public opinion polls from the 1930s and 40s indicate about Americans' antisemitism at the time?

LESSON: History Unfolded: Black Press Newspaper Coverage of the Holocaust

- i. **Possible answers include:** According to a poll in 1938, two thirds of those polled felt that Jews were partly or entirely to blame for their persecution. According to polling data in 1942, nearly half of Americans believed that Jews had “too much power and influence” in the United States.
 - c. What was the immigration policy of the United States in the 1930s and 1940s?
 - i. **Possible answers include:** The Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 set limits (or quotas) on the maximum number of immigrant visas that could be issued per year to people born in each country. These quotas were designed to limit the immigration of people considered “racially undesirable,” including southern and eastern European Jews.
 - d. How did various writers in the Black press respond to the persecution of Jews in Germany?
 - i. **Possible answers include:** Writers often pointed out Nazi persecution of Jews. Of the authors examined here, most were sympathetic to the Jews who were being persecuted. Often, the writers framed the persecution of Jews in Europe in the context of the persecution of Black Americans in the United States. Some writers claimed that the United States was being hypocritical by pointing out foreign persecution of a particular group while continuing to persecute black Americans at home.
 - e. How do the various viewpoints about the Nazi persecution of Jews throughout the period 1933 to 1942 compare with one another? Were there cases in which viewpoints about the Nazi persecution of Jews differed? Cite the articles for evidence. Why might disagreements or different reactions have occurred? What does this say about characterizing reactions by a group in a singular way (for example: the Black community)?
 - i. **Possible answers include:** Some writers believed that defeating Nazism was necessary to protecting American democracy. Some writers argued that the persecution of Jews in Germany was exceeded only by the persecution of Black Americans (primary source assignment 2a). One writer perpetuated antisemitic stereotypes (primary source assignment 4). Reactions to leaders in the United States who made antisemitic statements was varied (primary source assignment 5). Disagreements may have occurred because not all the writers had the same experiences, political beliefs, or access to information. These sources were also written over a period of 12 years. The disagreements shows that Black Americans did not all react the same to the Holocaust. Characterizing reactions by a group in a singular way is often inaccurate and can perpetuate stereotypes.
2. Individually, students write their response to one or more of the lesson essential questions:
- What factors may shape perspectives and reactions to news?
 - How did the Black press respond to the Nazi persecution of Jews in Germany in the 1930s and 1940s?

LESSON: History Unfolded: Black Press Newspaper Coverage of the Holocaust

- [If an analysis of other newspapers was done] How did the pieces analyzed above compare to reporting and reactions outside of the Black press, which Black readers were also aware of?

ASSESSMENT

In addition to the concluding writing assignment on the essential questions, student worksheets, group work, and class participation can be evaluated for understanding. Students may be asked to respond to one or more of the part five discussion questions for a grade. Students may submit video responses, write a poem, draw a political cartoon and explain what it means, or submit a separate reflection on the assignment as a whole.

EXTENSIONS

1. Students can look through local newspaper archives on microfilm or digitized collections to contribute more findings to the [History Unfolded: US Newspapers and the Holocaust](#) database from Black press newspapers. The website has directions about how to conduct this research and share any findings with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.
2. Students can view additional published findings from the Black press already submitted to the *History Unfolded* project by using the advanced search of submitted articles.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [List of newspapers from the Black press in History Unfolded](#)
- [Americans and the Holocaust online exhibition](#)
- [Nazism and the Jim Crow South bibliography](#)