

Innocence in an age of Infamy

Activity 6: **Is Anyone Listening? Warmonger!**

Grades 7-12

Objectives:

- Students will interpret the role public opinion played during World War II.
- Students will evaluate four possible actions that the Allies were criticized for failing to take to stop the Final Solution.

Materials:

- **“Innocence in an Age of Infamy”** video: “Paul and Edith Lavender” excerpt
- Handout 2: What Could Have Been Done?

Procedure for Classroom Activity:

1. Begin the lesson by asking the students what public opinion is and why it is important. Then, share the following quote by Abraham Lincoln: “You can do anything with public opinion, and nothing without it.” What do students think this statement means?
2. Examine the following data from the 1939 Gallup Poll:

65% of Americans favored boycotting Germany
57% of Americans wanted neutrality legislation changed
51% expected war in Europe in 1939
58% thought the U.S. would be drawn into war in Europe
90% said they would fight if the U.S. were invaded
10% said they would fight if the U.S. were not invaded

Ask students to develop generalizations about American public opinion in 1939. Even though Adolf Hitler had announced that his ultimate goal was “die ganze Welt” (the whole world), why do you think the U.S. couldn’t see beyond its own oceans?

3. Review with students the role of Paul Lavender during World War II. Show the “Paul and Edith Lavender” excerpt and discuss how as a Holocaust escapee, Paul tried to warn Americans about the danger posed by the Nazis. Why do students think Paul was criticized for being a warmonger?
4. Distribute **Handout 2: What Could Have Been Done?** Ask the students to read it and get into groups of four to five people to discuss the questions at the bottom. Have each group make a decision about what they think the Allies should have done to stop the murder of the Jews during the Holocaust and then present their conclusions to the rest of the class.
5. Assign each student group to research a contemporary example of discrimination, murder, or “ethnic cleansing” — for example, in Bosnia, Rwanda, Afghanistan, Tibet, the Kurds in Iraq, Chechnya, the Falun Gong in China, etc. What steps have other nations taken, or what steps should they have taken, in these situations to stop this violence? What recommendations can students make about preventing future Holocausts?

Assessment Suggestions:

1. Ask the students to produce a class newspaper about their research conclusions and distribute it to the school. If possible, invite refugees or guest speakers from the countries or ethnic groups that the students researched to visit the class to share their own opinions about what other nations can and should do when discrimination and violence occurs in the worldwide community.

Extension Ideas:

1. Research the life of Charles Lindbergh before, during, and after World War II. Should he be considered a true hero — why or why not?
2. In November 2000, a French judge demanded that Yahoo block French access to an auction Web site that was selling Nazi-related items because he said that it violated French anti-hate laws. Write an editorial on your opinion about this action. Should it be legal for one country to reach across its borders and impose its laws on Web sites based in other nations? What effect might this ruling have on free speech? Should people be allowed to profit from the sale of Nazi memorabilia? What effect does Nazi memorabilia have on victims and

survivors of the Holocaust — and how should that be taken into account when settling this case?

Handout 2

What Could Have Been Done?

Between September 1, 1939 and May 8, 1945, approximately 5,750,000 Jewish people were killed in the “Final Solution.”

Germany	160,000
France	83,000
Luxembourg	700
Belgium	24,387
Holland	106,000
Denmark	77
Norway	728
Finland	11
Estonia	1,000
Latvia	80,000
Lithuania	135,000
Memel	8,000
Free City of Danzig	1,000
Poland	3,000,000
Czechoslovakia	217,000
Austria	65,000
Hungary	200,000
Italy	8,000
Yugoslavia	60,000
Albania	200
Greece	65,000
Crete	260
Kos	120
Rhodes	1,700
Libya	562
Soviet Union	1,000,000
Ruthenia	60,000
N. Transylvania	105,000
Rumania	40,000
Macedonia	7,122
Thrace	4,221
Bessarabia	200,000
Bukovina	124,632

Statistical Source: Martin Gilbert, Never Again, A History of the Holocaust, page 2

All of the steps in the Final Solution that were taken by the Nazis before World War II were reported in the press. After the war began, it was more difficult to get information on anti-Jewish actions. But the first news of a plan for the mass murder of Jews was smuggled out of Poland and reached England in the spring of 1942. The U.S. government confirmed the reports in late November 1942.

But what did the Allies do once they had this information? Very little. On December 17, 1942, the Allies

condemned the Nazi actions against the Jews. Only in January 1944 was the War Refugee Board set up to help save the victims of Nazi persecution.

What might the United States and the Allies have done to stop the Final Solution? Some people believe that they should have:

- Called upon the population of Europe to stop helping the Nazis in their murder of the Jews
- Bombed Auschwitz or the railroad lines leading into the death camp
- Changed their immigration policies to allow Jewish refugees either temporary or permanent asylum in their countries
- Warned Germany publicly that they would be punished severely for their murder of the Jews and other victims of the Final Solution

What were the pros and cons of each of these possible actions at the time?

What do you think the U.S. and the Allies should have done?