

**THE HOLOCAUST:
A TOOL TO TEACH
CHILDREN TO RESPECT
PEOPLE WHO ARE
DIFFERENT**

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A Parent's Guide

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**HOLOCAUST HISTORY: TEACHING CHILDREN TO
RESPECT PEOPLE WHO ARE DIFFERENT
BY
BARRY B FRIEMAN AND WENDY LOWER**

This project is sponsored by the Judith and Edwin Cohen Foundation

GOAL OF THE BOOKLET

This booklet will give you an overview of developments in Europe during the Holocaust. This was a time when hate and lack of respect for difference was allowed to go unchecked. It is important for you to know what happened so you can take positive steps to teach your children so that atrocities of the past will never again happen. To make this a reality your task as a parent is to teach your children to live a life filled with respect for those who are different.

You will learn three things from this booklet:

- a factual account of what happened during the Holocaust;
- how to answer your children's questions in an age-appropriate manner about the Holocaust and other genocides that exist in our world;
- hands-on activities that you can use with your children to teach them respect for differences in people.

WHAT HAPPENED DURING THE HOLOCAUST

What was The Holocaust?

The Holocaust was the state-sponsored, systematic persecution and mass murder of European Jews and other groups carried out by Nazi Germany and its allies between 1933 and 1945. All European Jews were victims of the Holocaust, (two out of every three Jews perished, an estimated 6 million). But not all the victims of the Holocaust were Jews. Other victims of the Holocaust included the mentally and physically disabled (estimated death toll 250,000), homosexuals (10-15,000) gypsies (220,000), Soviet prisoners of war (3 million), as well as thousands of Jehovah's Witnesses and communists, and Polish nationals.

Why did the Germans and their collaborators mistreat and even kill so many Jews and other victims?

Since the time when the Jews first settled in Europe over two thousand years ago, they have been a persecuted minority. In fact, some of the first Jews who arrived in Rome from the Holy Land were brought as slaves. Later the rise of Christianity was accompanied by more systematic and aggressive assaults against the Jews.

Although Judaism and Christianity are both based on the Old Testament, and Jesus was actually a Jewish rabbi, Christianity developed its own fundamentalism centered on teachings, practices, and rituals that were distinct from Judaism. Those Jews who did not believe in the Holy Trinity and chose not to join the emerging Christian movement were deemed heathens, heretics, and traitors to the Christian cause.

Popes, princes and monarchs in Europe Jews deliberately separated Jews from Christians by erecting ghettos, special sections of a city where Jews were forced to live.

These leaders also forced Jews to wear special hats or badges so that they would be recognized as Jews, demanded excessive taxes and arbitrary fines, and restricted them from owning property.

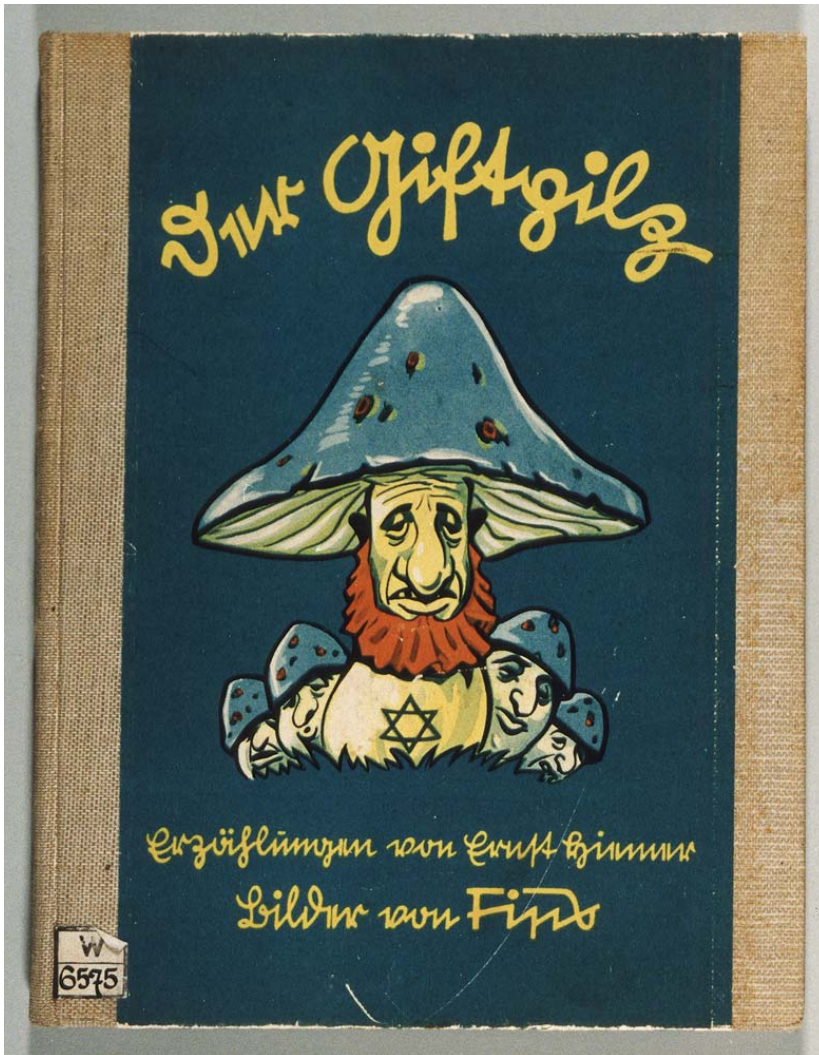
During times of crisis such as the spread of the plague, Jews became convenient scapegoats and suffered popular outbursts of violence, later coined pogroms. Pogrom is a Russian word meaning “thunder” and describes the loud crashing roar of destruction, pillaging, raping and acts of torture that periodically struck Jewish communities.

If Jews were not forced into exile, then typically Jews coped with these waves of violence by fleeing, gaining the favor of individuals in power, or enduring the persecution with the hope that it would subside, and sometimes it did. During the longer periods of relatively peaceful coexistence, orthodox and assimilated Jews developed a rich, literary tradition and made significant contributions toward the increasing prosperity of Europe. Yet despite the progressive emancipation and assimilation of the Jews, which occurred with the secularization of European society, anti-Jewish thought did not disappear. In fact it took on a new, more lethal form when it reappeared as a racial theory called antisemitism (a term coined in the 1870s in Germany).

Using the tools of science, theorists wrongly claimed that the Jews constituted a separate biological category or race. The Semitic race, as it was called, actually included other middle eastern ethnic groups and cultures such as the Arabs, however Europeans focused their attention on the Jews because Jews were the most visible minority in Europe, giving rise to what many Europeans described as a “Jewish problem.”

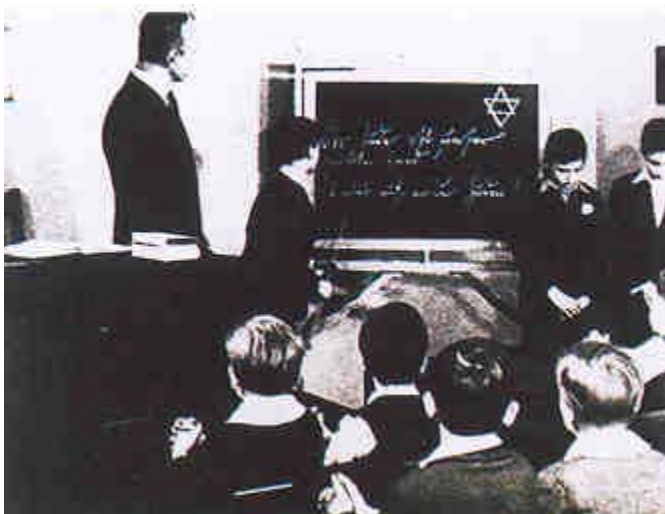
It was not enough to ostracize Jews as an “inferior race.” people also denounced Jews as a threat to the future of Western civilization. The new racial science that became very popular in Europe and the U.S. led to the eugenic policies of forced sterilization, and capital punishment of the mentally and physically disabled. In Nazi Germany, Jews were grouped together with these other so-called genetically inferior types, racially unpure bastards, or “subhumans.” In movies, plays, parade floats, magazine cartoons and other forms of propaganda, Jews appeared as rodents, as a defective pollutant that must be exterminated or excised from German society.

These illustrations from the Nazi period show the type of propaganda that scientists and schools teachers used to spread racial antisemitism. The poster “the Jews as bastard” claimed that Jews were not pure, but hailed from a mixed breed of inferior races, such as “negroes.” The children’s book, “The poisonous mushroom” contained distorted fables about Jewish doctors as pedophiles, among other repugnant depictions.



Most German Jews who considered themselves fully German in appearance and attitude were confused by these new forms of antisemitism that focused on their supposed biological and not religious differences. In Nazi Germany, Jews were forbidden to convert to Christianity. As allegedly a separate, inferior race, they could never belong and were doomed to isolation and persecution.

In this illustration a Jewish school student is forced to stand before his class. The blackboard states "the Jews are our greatest enemy, Watch out for the Jews!"



Forms of Prejudice and Hatred leading to the genocide

For the half a million Jews who lived in Nazi Germany, everyday life was an experience of humiliation, alienation, economic deprivation, and physical abuse.

Prejudice and hatred against Jews flourished. It took on many forms. First the state and private firms forced Jews from their jobs. Jewish lawyers, judges, school teachers, doctors, nurses, shopkeepers found themselves without work, without the means to care

for their families. Most Germans, be they officials in positions of power or neighbors in local communities where Jews resided, tended to look the other way. Perhaps out of fear or hatred, they failed to help Jews who were in need.

In fact in many villages and towns, people supported the Nazi movement by initiating their own anti-Jewish campaigns-- barring Jews from community swimming pools, making Jews feel unwelcome in local gardening clubs, reading societies, festivals, school classrooms, and avoiding them in the marketplace. Nazi racial laws issued in Nuremberg in 1935 criminalized relationships between Jews and Germans. A simple handshake, conversation on the street, or even a glance was grounds for possible arrest, or worse, detention in the notorious concentration camps such as Dachau.

Similar to the experiences of blacks in the U.S., Jews in Nazi Germany faced segregation laws, physical harassment and limited economic opportunities that drove them into financial ruin and personal despair. Since Nazi Germany was an overtly a racist state increasingly determined to remove Jews from German society, public acts of humiliation and even violence were allowed to reach their extreme.

In November 1938 Hitler and his cohorts organized a nationwide pogrom. Synagogues and Jewish shops across Germany were ransacked, burned, and demolished. As many as 20,000 Jewish men were arrested, brought to concentration camps, tortured and placed in labor "chain gangs." Some men were castrated, others were crucified. Many died as a result. German observers who were shocked by the violence and disorder referred to the event as Kristallnacht, the Night of Broken Glass.

Less than a year after this pogrom, Hitler started World War II. Under the cover of the war, Germany and its allies carried out another battle behind the lines, one against the Jews of Europe. First German conquerors massacred Polish and Jewish leaders, and then they forced the Jewish populations into ghettos. Between 1939 and 1941 Jews were forced to live in ghettos crammed into buildings and shacks with little sanitation, running water and meager food supplies. Disease was rampant and 500,000 people died.

As the Nazis expanded their borders farther east into Russia, they started to forgo ghettos and instead opted for killing the Jews, mostly in mass shootings. For those Jews remaining in other parts of Europe including in Poland, the Germans constructed 6 killing centers, such as Treblinka whose primary purpose was the murdering of Jews with poison gas. Millions of Jews and other victims of the Holocaust kept as forced laborers also died from illnesses related to exhaustion and hunger. The largest of these killing centers and slave labor sites was Auschwitz Birkenau where an estimated 1.2 million Jews died.



Entrance to Auschwitz Birkenau Death Camp

A Brief Time line of the History of the Holocaust

1933

National Boycott of Jewish Businesses, Laws passed forcing Jews out of government jobs, and professions of teaching, law and medicine.

1935

Jews who died in the First World War are no longer to be memorialized

Marriage and extramarital relations between Jews and non-Jews prohibited (Nuremberg laws)

Jewish citizenship and civil rights revoked

Jews forbidden to display the German flag

“The Nuremberg Laws” Jews declared a separate race and forbidden to marry Germans

1936

Jews banned from the swimming pools in Dusseldorf, Baden and other cities

1937

Jews in concentration camps can be released only if they show proof that they will leave Germany

1938

Jews required to assume the names “Israel” (male) or “Sarah” (female)

Jews required to turn in passports, which will be stamped with a “J”

Jewish religious institutions placed under government control

Jewish newspapers and journals outlawed

Jewish children expelled from school

Jews prohibited from public spaces (theaters, concerts, museums)

Jewish businesses closed and all Jewish business activity prohibited

November Pogrom, Nazi Party organized attacks against all Jews, synagogues burned, property ransacked, Jewish men forced into camps, such as Buchenwald. Widespread violence and theft

1939

World War II Begins

1940

Gassings of the mentally ill and handicapped begin in Germany

First Nazi Controlled Ghettos formed in Poland

Jews Placed in Forced Labor Battalions

Thousands of Polish priests, political and cultural leaders are killed in mass shootings

1941

Onset of the Mass Murder by shooting in Ukraine, the Baltics, Belorussia

1942-1943

Construction of the Death Camps

Deportations of Polish and other European Jews to Killing Centers such as Auschwitz, Belzec, Treblinka, Sobibor

Jewish Uprisings at Sobibor, Treblinka and in the Warsaw ghetto

1944

The last major Jewish community left in Europe deported to Auschwitz and killed upon arrival, estimate 450,000 Hungarian Jews

1945

Nazi evacuation of Polish camps, death marches of prisoners to Germany.

Allied military victories lead to the liberation of the camps.

Will genocide happen again?

The history of unfettered violence and systematic mass murder of Jews and other ‘unwanted’ minorities in Europe such as the Roma “gypsies” and physically disabled reached such unprecedented and tragic proportions during World War II that the international community, which failed to prevent these criminal human losses, signed a convention against genocide in the United Nations in 1948. Though global leaders and ordinary citizens declared that “Never Again” shall a Holocaust occur, sadly genocides have occurred in places such as Cambodia and Rwanda, and one is happening now in the Darfur region of Sudan.

Why?

So the question remains, why do we allow hatred and prejudice to persist and in some extreme cases lead to mass violence? A famous Holocaust survivor Primo Levi offered one answer. *“In Hitler's Germany a particular code was widespread: Those who knew did not talk; those who did not know did not ask questions; those who did ask questions received no answers.”*

The long, tragic history of anti-Semitism in Europe does not mean that the Holocaust was inevitable, but it does demonstrate what is possible in societies where basic human rights are ignored and respect for differences are absent.

What does this history have to do with me and my family today in the United States?

Hitler and his accomplices were able to carry out their genocidal acts without winning over a majority of the people to their fanatical views. They only needed enough people who were indifferent, accommodating or simply didn't care enough.

In this photograph, Jews from a Ukrainian town are marched along the main street while locals watch. Many non-Jews were anxious to see their Jewish neighbors leave because in the wake of these deportations the local population seized whatever remained



in Jewish homes including dishes, clothing, and bedding.

A famous biographer of Hitler observed, “The road to Auschwitz was built by hate, but paved with indifference.” Though the Germans invented the gassing method of mass murder at Auschwitz, they did not invent the human behavior that gave rise to it. The extreme forms of indifference, intolerance, hate and violence that manifested itself so

cruelly and vividly in Germany during the 1930s remain with us today. This behavior is possible in democracies and dictatorships. It can appear in the formal policies and legislation of respectable state institutions as well as in the informal relationships among colleagues at work, school, or in passing on the street. If we want to strive to be moral citizens and righteous human beings we must teach our children about how and why certain individuals and groups become targets of discrimination, and the destructive course this discrimination can take.

WHAT CAN YOU DO AS A PARENT TO TEACH YOUR CHILDREN TO RESPECT OTHERS?

Your challenge as a parent is to teach your child about the past in a way that he or she can understand and to teach your child to respect all people regardless of differences.

Answering difficult questions from young children

As a parent you know that children can ask difficult questions. They watch what is happening and often ask the question that all adults find impolite to ask. How do you deal with these embarrassing questions? It is important to remember that children think differently than adults. Your strategy for dealing with these tough questions is to first ask yourself, "Specifically what does my child want to know?" Next your task is to craft a reply that answers only the concern that is expressed by your youngster.

After hearing his uncle and dad discuss whether current genocides in Africa paralleled the Holocaust, 6-year old Jimmy approached his father with a question. He asked, "Would bad people take me away from you and Mom?" How would you answer this question if it were posed to you? A hint is to remember that a 6-year old is egocentric in that they see the world from their own point of view. When events happen they are most concerned about how those events will affect them personally.

In this case, a totally honest answer from an adult perspective would be, "Yes, if there were a Holocaust here children would be taken away from parents just as they were in the past." But what this child was really asking was would his parent protect him from harm. An age-appropriate response would be, "You don't have to worry about being taken away from us. I will protect you and you never have to worry about being taken away from your parents."

An honest answer can be one in which collateral facts or projections about the future are left out. To be completely open, a parent would have to reply that he could not control the future and that anything is a possibility – even though a remote one.

How should a parent respond to a young child's questions about the Holocaust?

When Sarah came back from a religious service in which a prayer was said for victims of genocide, she asked her mother why the Holocaust happened. Following our guidelines, you might first figure that the child is worried about what will happen to her if events occur again. Your honest response would be to address these concerns and yet give her an explanation that makes sense to her.

Her father replied,

People were very mean to those people who were different during the Holocaust. We don't let that happen here. We have police officers, parents, and the people who we elect to run our country to make sure that something like that will never happen. You don't have to worry because there are a lot of people who will protect you and make sure that nothing bad ever happens to you.

Notice that Sarah's father did not bother to explain the details of the horrors of the Holocaust. He just picked up on the fact that Sarah was concerned about her own safety. Sarah's father assured her that Sarah would be safe and didn't have to worry.

WHAT YOU CAN DO AS A PARENT TO HELP YOUR CHILD RESPECT AND VALUE DIVERSITY

You are the model

The most important teachers in the life of a young child are their parents. You are the one who will be teaching your child not only by your words, but by your deeds. Your children study you – your body language, your words, your behaviors – and use that information to learn about the world.

Harry made his 3 year-old-daughter an automobile steering wheel mounted on a column of wood. While he worked, his daughter sat next to him and “drove her car.” He heard his daughter say, “Honk, honk, you idiot!” It didn’t take him long to figure out where his daughter learned that response. He made a quick resolve to watch his language when he drove his daughter in the car.

Parents need to be conscious of what they say.

Model neutral language when speaking about people.

Instead of calling a person an “immigrant” say “a person who happens to be new to the country.” Instead of using the term “a deaf child”, use the term “a child who happens to be deaf.” It’s a subtle difference but an important one. Focus on the fact that everyone is a “person” or a “child” and the other descriptors are just attributes of that person. You are teaching your child that we are all people first and foremost and some of us have other characteristics.

Avoid ethnic jokes.

Remember that children take things literally. They cannot distinguish between a remark made “in fun” and a comment made to insult someone. By avoiding ethnic

and racial jokes you give your child the message that it is not right to make fun of someone who is different.

Avoid powerful racial or ethnic derogatory words.

Be aware of the phrases one uses in life. Many terms have been linked to various racial or ethnic groups. Do you want your children to think that all people with a particular characteristic are evil? Terms such as “Jew him down” and “drunk like an Irishman” just serve to confuse children and make them think that they should hate. Of particular concern in today’s world are the lyrics of many rap songs. Even though the music is wonderful, do you want to go around having your young daughter think that it is permissible to refer to women by using insulting terms? Parents must protect their children from harmful and hateful song lyrics by not purchasing these items for their children and controlling the shows that they watch on television.

DISCOVER THE UNIQUENESS OF YOUR FAMILY HISTORY

Even if we have the same skin color, we are all different. To help your children appreciate the difference in others, you can start by discovering the uniqueness of your family.

How we look

Help your children to take a long look at all of the people in your family. You can start by putting your child in front of a mirror and getting him to notice his facial features. What are the color of his eyes and hair? Get some color samples from a paint store and help your child find the one closest to his color. The color will not be called “white” or “black”, but will have some other more descriptive name.

Make a chart entitled, “How my family looks.” Include a place for all family members – immediate and extended. Your child will have a lot of fun collecting the information for this chart. Let him look at as many members of your extended family as possible. This exercise is designed to help children appreciate their differences, but not to imply that any one group is better than any other group as the Nazis did.

Interest inventory

Follow the same process and let him interview both immediate and extended family members to find out their interests. Some questions to be asked and recorded of family members include:

What is your favorite color?

What is your favorite food?

What is your favorite dessert?

What food or foods do you really dislike?

Family history

Take some time to explore your family’s history. Get a map and locate where your ancestors lived before they came to the United States. Take your child to see your older relatives who can share their stories about the older members of the family. Let your child hear what jobs they did and where they lived.

If you have no older relatives in the area, you can take your child to visit a senior center where there are people whose background is similar to yours. Just hang out and ask people to talk about their backgrounds. . Most people enjoy talking about themselves.

Explore differences in your own community

Take your child on field trips around your town to interact with people who are different. You can:

- go to a part of town where people speak a different language;
- go to a restaurant that serves some kind of ethnic food;
- visit a church or place of worship other than your own – not to worship, but to see the building and talk to some of the members of the group;
- visit people who are older and live in a senior center or nursing home;

The goal of these visits is to broaden your child's experiences with people who are different than him/her.

Talk about difference at the dinner table

Go out of your way to tell your children about the people that you come into contact with in your daily life who are different. Present their difference as just an attribute of their life and not their defining characteristic. Be positive in reporting their uniqueness.

Share your experiences with your child. One father noted to his children casually at dinner, "Isn't it neat that the man who sold us the pizza could speak two languages instead of just one." Another comment made by a Mom at the dinner table was, "Ms. Conner who works with me uses a wheel chair because her legs don't work, but she is really smart and helps me whenever I have a question at work."

Talk to your children about the religious holidays of other people. For example, one might say, "Today is Ramadan. If we were Moslems we would be celebrating an important holiday today." It's not important that you give a detailed description of

the holiday to a young child. It is just important to convey the fact that many people celebrate this day. It is also important that you let your child know that people around the world belong to many different religions. They can learn that just as they are learning to respect people with different religious views, those people are learning to respect your religious view.

Ask your child to tell you about something he found out about a person that made that person different than him. Your goal is to make the discussion of difference a routine part of your daily conversations.

Using the media

Books, television shows, music, and movies are a good window into people who are different than you. Go to the library and pick out some books to read to your child about people who are different. Librarians are a great help in guiding you to appropriate books.

Read the book together and discuss its characters. Help your child to pick out things that she shares with the characters in the book – perhaps interests or some physical characteristics. Discuss how her traits are different than the characters in the book.

Watch television shows with your children that depict people who are different. Of course, make sure that the content and subject matter of the show are appropriate for your child. Discuss the show together after viewing it. Have your children talk about how they were like and dislike the characters in the show. Watch a sporting event. After the game, point out to your child that the players spoke many languages,

had different skin colors, and different religions, but all belonged to the same team and worked together to play well.

Be aware of the music that your children listen to by themselves. Listen to the lyrics of the songs with them. Are you comfortable with the ways in which many songs depict women? Do you want your child using that language?

The media is filled with disturbing images of people who are different. You are not going to change what is aired on television or what music is marketed to children, but you can join with your child and experience the media together so you can talk together about what you see and hear. If there are inappropriate images or stereotypes portrayed point them out to your child and let them know that the language used or the images portrayed are not ones that you use in your family.

Dealing with hateful people

It would be nice if everyone in the world was nice and respectful. Try as you might to insulate your child from hateful people, you still have to prepare your child for dealing with uncomfortable events. Of course, remember that your child has been watching you very closely. You have been the model of how to deal with prejudiced people who make unkind remarks.

Give your child some words that he can use to handle hateful speech. Depending upon your family's religious views, you might teach your child to respond to hate by saying, "My God loves all people." Or in a secular tone, "My family respects all people."

Set limits with your relatives and friends in what they can say in the presence of your children. You might say, "Mom, I understand that you have your own feelings

about people who are not Christians, but you cannot say anything negative about people in front of my child. I am raising my child to have a respectful feeling for people who are not Christians.” You can still love and honor your parent, but yet not approve of all of their behavior.

Explaining the conversations of others to your child is important. You will not be able to control what people say in front of your child. You need to teach your child that hateful behavior is wrong. “Grandpa is wrong when he says hateful things about people. He does love you and is kind to us, even though he is wrong about how he speaks of others.

FINAL WORD

If we want to raise our children to be responsible citizens of our democracy and respect people who are different, it is our responsibility to correct behavior that fosters hate and prejudice. We must speak out when we see injustice and persecution of others, especially of vulnerable minorities. We must question our own role in perpetuating prejudice through seemingly casual remarks, jokes, and comments about others.

All of the activities noted in this booklet are designed to teach your children how to respect people who are different. The United States is a great country because of all of the contributions of people of different races, religions, and ethnic heritages. In order to preserve our democracy it is essential that we train our children to react to all people as valuable human beings.

(Illustrations are courtesy of the United States Holocaust Museum.)

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