



## Dehumanization and Incitement

### The challenges of using atrocity photographs and images

The following has been developed in partnership with Tom White, CCHGS; Susan Crane, University of Arizona; and Andreas Weinhold, Media Advisory, North-Rhine WESTPHALIA.

A potential pitfall in teaching about the Holocaust is using Holocaust imagery without ever teaching students how to evaluate and decode those images. As many of our students' encounter with the Holocaust will often be visual (and a visual memory that is shaped by collective memory) it is important to recognize that the majority of images from the Holocaust have been taken and framed by the perpetrator. These images were carefully constructed and passed through censors and/or were shaped by Nazi protocols. They continue to have power to shape the narrative in ways that serve the perpetrator. We must critically evaluate this evidence in the same way that we analyze written or oral material. Be extremely cautious in using photographs because:

- ✓ They are framed by the perpetrator, shaping the context of "a second in time"
- ✓ They reinforce "Jew as victim" and perpetrator as "victor"
- ✓ They allow our students to look with a voyeurism that reinforces their relative, perceived safety

### Decoding Images

1. What is the main subject the photographer wants you to see?
2. What does the photographer want you to feel when viewing the image?
3. What elements of composition do you notice?
4. Where does it take place? When?
5. What caption would you give the photo?

### I. Imagery and Photography

- Photos do not merely capture the past or illustrate the historical past

Try this exercise: Have students describe through observation, what is happening in this photograph. You can prompt them with questions such as, "What time of year is it?" "What are they doing?" "Do they know each other?" "What caption would you give the photo?"



Having discussed this, it is time to add more contexts...

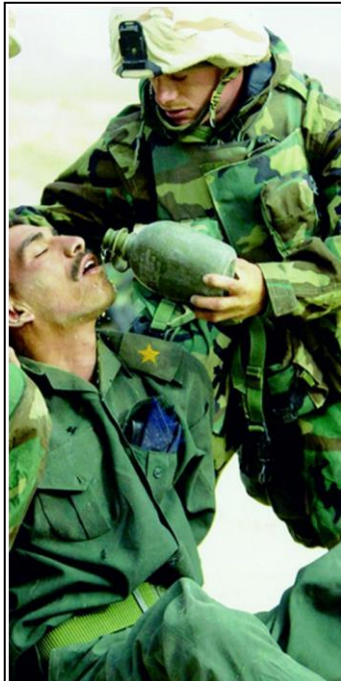


Thomas Hoepker (Magnum Photos) NYC, 9-11-2001

Note how both the enlarged picture and the information about the photographer offer significant clues to what this image is about. Composition and cropping (close up and far away) influence the viewer's interpretation.

- Photos capture the “point of view” of the photographer

Once again, have students describe what they are seeing in this photo. What is the point of view expressed by the photographer?



...or this photo:



And then reveal the complete image:



Students will bring a wide array of interpretations to the previous images that will often reflect their perspective, values, biases, and needs..

From these opening exercises students can conclude that photos do not merely capture or illustrate the historical past, but interpret it. They capture the point of view of the photographer and only show a selected snippet of context.

It is both interesting and significant that the Nazis used the term “weapon” to describe their photographic teams.

### Composition:

How are values and points of view represented?

How does the photographer use light, focus, and composition to shape what you “see” and feel?

What is the intent?

How are attitudes, values, needs, and hopes of the viewer tapped into?

How and where do people receive and encounter an image?

What is omitted?

Is the image true? Accurate?

Close up: makes you feel closer to, part of the action.

Far away: makes you feel more detached, more of an observer.



## How do people encounter the image and receive the message differently?

From: "Reliving the Civil Rights Movement in 55 Powerful Photos", by John Kuroski, (May 16, 2017 & Sept, 27, 2018)



How does the following caption shape the encounter?  
A Nashville policeman grabs a demonstrator and tells him to move from in front of a patrol wagon during a protest on April 27, 1964.

Or this caption?

The young man refused and was subdued by the policemen and thrown into the wagon with other demonstrators just after this photo was taken. Bettmann/Contributor/Getty Images, Library of Congress,



Digital Collections, Civil Rights History Project

How does the cropping of the image (right) influence individual interpretations?

## The camera as "weapon"



The Nazi term for photographer was interchangeable with "weapon". This applies to its propaganda role, but also its physical manifestation. What happens when the "weapon" is pointed at you? Looking at a photograph puts you in the position of the photographer. What if you looked from the photograph? What impact did the cameraman have on German citizens during the April 1, 1933 boycott? Geza Lajos from Budapest (right foreground) arrives in Birkenau in May or June 1944. How would seeing a cameraman influence her comprehension and interpretation of the moment wrought with fear and confusion?



## Constructing Positive Self-Images

It is important to examine how photographs were used to create positive self-images while also creating images of the "enemy". What is the intent? How do these images reinforce attitudes and behaviors? How do they activate strong attitudes and respond to the values, hopes, and dreams of the audience? What elements of composition are utilized – by the professional photographers?



In the age of digital camera phones it may be more difficult to deconstruct the skill needed to create these images. In those days, the

camera's aperture had to be set for proper depth of field (what part of the image was clear and which was blurred?). Light meters had to be set correctly. These were professional photographers trained in photography and composition. It would be interesting for students to find an older camera and attempt to become photographers.



"One of the men who among a million others, expose their life fighting bolshevism for the safety of Europe."

German Troops in Russia

Record group: Record Group 242: National Archives Collection of Foreign Records Seized, 1675 - 1958 (ARC identifier: 569) Series: Photographs taken by Propaganda Units of the German Armed Forces (Wehrmacht) and the Waffen-SS, compiled 1939-1945 (ARC identifier: 540154), NAIL Control Number: NWDNS-242-GAP-286B(4) 242-GAP-286B(4) Source U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Date 1941, Photographer unknown

When placing the photo in the context of the *Signal* Magazine in which it appeared, one can see that it is one of a series of posed images. Note how the image is slightly different on the cover (tree line, angle, clouds). Have students ask where the photographer was when the picture was taken. If this was actual combat, would the photographer be in danger? Note the lack of shadows on the faces and the lack of blur. These were well lit, intentionally staged, and purposefully constructed propaganda photographs.



This image (left) taken by Propaganda Company 691 of Nazi brutality in Ukraine was censored. Unlike the previous image from *Signal* this picture shows the German soldier in an unfavorable light. What parent would want to see this? Use this to ask students, "Is this photo effectively constructed given the previously stated

guidelines?" In contrast, this photograph of Friedrich Gehrmann on motorcycle in Ukraine from July 1941 issue of *Illustrierter Beobachter*, the Nazi weekly publication, made it to the front cover of the July 1941 issue. A teacher could ask students to add a caption that reinforces the narrative. The actual caption was, "Soldier of the propaganda companies on Krad with sidecar is regaled by Soviet women". When exploring composition, notice how it is staged: No mud on the boots or the motorcycle; no movement among the bystanders, and evenly lit. Context is important as well.



PC 691 July 1941, Deutsches Bundesarchiv, Bild 101-137-0203-23

## Constructing the Enemy





Propaganda works by activating emotions utilizing visual disinformation that tapped into to an audience's emotional needs, values, and expectations. Expose these by raising questions of the picture (right): What is the main subject the photographer wants you to see? What elements of composition do you notice? (Hint: note the two bulbs in the mirror in the background.) What does the photographer want you to feel? What is suggested? These questions must be asked in the context of the audience. How would Nazi race education impact their perspective? The Nazis created an image of Jews as sexual predators seeking to undermine the Aryan race. The children's book (below) *Trust No Fox* reinforces that theme.



Captions also help to shape the interpretation of the above photo:

"Poland, Ghetto Warsaw, Jew in night club. Jews when celebrating sitting in a night club at the bar"  
Poland, Warsaw Ghetto. PC 689 DATE May 1941

More context:

This image was placed in a magazine alongside other images telling a broader story. The image on the right says: "One of the innumerable examples of Jewish solidarity: Here in the Warsaw Ghetto, where Jew among Jews lives..."

Jewish suffering is manipulated and the responsibility for it is placed on the targets. Jews "demonstrated" their racial inferiority (thus projecting a positive self-image on Germans) while reinforcing some of the dark myths of antisemitism. This was a construction of self-justifying moral outrage. Photographs cannot kill, but they can justify violence or reveal the shifting moral compass that enables the perpetrator.



**Questions for today:** Do those biases only "make sense" to audiences of the 1930s and 40s?

The QAnon conspiracy fraud and white supremacy taps into similar themes: a secret, satanic, international cabal of sex predators who control the world's finances while seeking to destroy the white race. We have to be very aware of confirmation bias: that the human

mind seeks out patterns and explanations that suggest order and reinforce existing beliefs. These potentially lethal conspiracy theories thrive in times of trauma and confusion. Also note the power of misogyny that justifies mass violence – both in the photograph of Friedrich Gehrman on his motorcycle or in the above construct. Misogyny is always present in crimes of mass atrocity.

**What are the potential risks of using Nazi propaganda in Holocaust education?**

Every time an image is viewed, students should ask two significant questions:

**Who took the photograph and why?**



Speculating about this image raises the question of responsibility. Stephan Lewy a German survivor and liberator, recalls: "One of the youngsters once asked:

'Where does hate come from?' To me, it's a very simple answer; It comes from the breakfast table... that's how it starts." Stephan forces me to consider the ethical role of parents.

Who took this image? A father? Why? Photographs reflect shared experience, hopes, and exclusive membership in a perpetrator's moral universe. How do our environments "frame" or "shape" or opinions? What external influences shape us and how does context shape our interpretation of the photograph?

Potential risks in using Nazi photography:

- Failure to see that the photos are not just documents but *part of the Holocaust*
- Doing the work of/for the perpetrators by reproducing their ideological perspective
- Seeing those photographed as passive objects of victimization only – rather than as individual, acting human beings
- Voyeurism and fascination for images of violence and humiliation

I would like to use an iconic image to illustrate these points.



There are many ways to approach this image. Often when I show it to students and have them reflect upon it, the overwhelming reaction is one of blaming the victims. Looking at a handful of Germans rounding up more numerous Jews, American teenagers often ask, why did the Jews not fight back? This is often reinforced by Nazi boasts that Jews went "like sheep to the slaughter." Some of this reflects ignorance and a contemporary American belief that everyone has the agency to act as they choose. Some comments might even reflect antisemitism. For instance, in a 1938 poll, 60% of Americans agreed that persecution of European Jews was either entirely or partially the fault of the Jews. Blaming a powerless target reflects a variety of needs and motives. Again, the key will be to ask, "Who took the photograph and why?"

Ask students to describe what they are seeing (clothing, setting, expression, background...) What is the narrative? Is the photo accurate? Truthful? What is omitted? Do you have to accept the narrative that is being presented?

We must add context. This is an image of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising of 1943 and was included in the Stroop Report, a report by SS Brigadeführer Jurgen Stroop dealing with the destruction of the Warsaw ghetto. It was commissioned by Friedrich-Wilhelm Krüger, chief of the SS and police in Kraków, and was intended as a souvenir album for Heinrich Himmler.

The photographer wrote the following caption, "Taken from the bunkers by force." It is important to note both the bunkers (Jewish agency) and force. It would be important to give a brief description of the uprising to illustrate that the fighting continued for almost a month. The photographer was most likely an Austrian-born SS Captain Franz Konrad. He joined the SS in 1935 after having been caught stealing from his employer and imprisoned in 1932. He was in charge of looting the ghetto victims. He had three children.

This information begins to shift our interpretation of the photograph. It was taken after weeks of fighting – thus the Jews are not passive. Jewish resistance in the face of forced deportation, isolation, dehumanization and despair took the Nazis somewhat by surprise. Responding to this provocation the photographer deliberately frames the encounter. Jews are presented as passive objects of victimization only – rather than as active individuals bravely resisting. The photograph becomes *part of the Holocaust* – doing the work of the perpetrators by reshaping reality and reproducing their ideological perspective. In the photo, the Nazis are “victors” while the Jews are seen as subdued by a superior Nazi racial power. For teenagers, the projection of perpetrator power is a potentially dangerous and negatively empowering myth. Indeed, that was arguably the initial intention of Konrad who framed the image to reinforce that only a handful of Germans (social-darwinistic superiority) could overpower more numerous Jews.

Use more photos from the Stroop report to show the context of fighting and resistance. The photo (left) was also in the Stroop report (probably taken by photographers from Propaganda Kompanie nr 689). It is important to recognize the photograph of the “little boy in the Warsaw Ghetto” is used as a weapon, to reinforce German power. We must resist the power of the perpetrator to shape the narrative. We must state that the Nazis did not win, and that many of these perpetrators were executed for their crimes.



“Fighting against a resistance pocket”.  
Cannon on Zamenhofa Street shooting  
North at resistance in Gęsia 20 building.

Encountering the photo of the little boy in the Warsaw Ghetto:

1. Ask, “Who took the photograph and why?”
2. Ask students to recognize their physical position while viewing the photo. They are seeing it from the place (and perhaps perspective) of the perpetrator.
3. Expand the frame. Ask students to write about what they “see” or “hear” outside the margins.
4. Add color, sound, and smell. One can easily begin to “see” that outside the frame were other German soldiers. In fact, we know that German soldiers were standing in front photographing the Jewish prisoners. Jews, having resisted and now surrounded, finally

succumb to overwhelming force. It is important to tell the story of the uprising and its heroism. It is also important to point out that Konrad, the photographer, and Stroop, his commander, were executed for war crimes in 1952. Despite the projection of power and victory in the photo, the Nazis did not “win.”

5. Rather than look “at” the photo, shift the perspective. Have students look “from” the photo. What did that little boy see? It is important to use multiple images if possible. How do perspectives change when we “look out”? Here is another image taken that day:

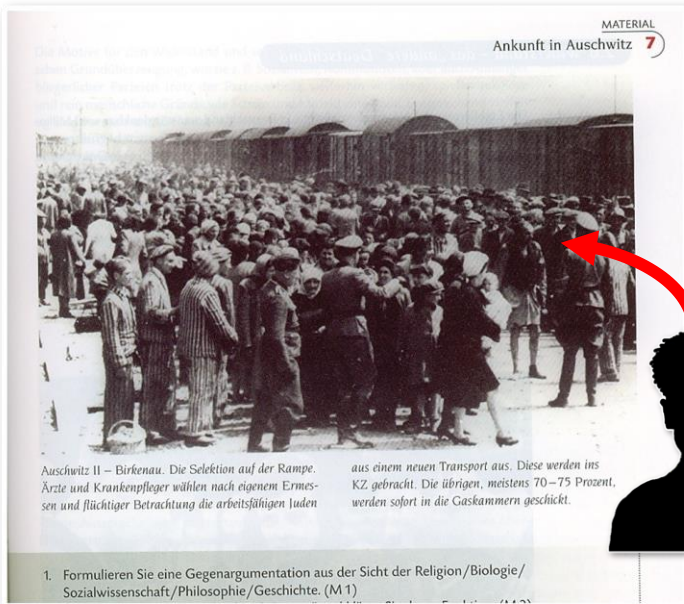


Stroop stands just to the left of center. On the right is SS Corporal Josef Blösche, the policeman known as “Frankenstein” for his brutality. He is the same policeman seen standing with his machine gun just to the right of the “Warsaw Ghetto Boy” in the previous image. He too was tried and executed for war crimes in 1969.



At Nowolipie 64 / Smocza 1 intersection.

It is important to show more than one image and shift the perspective from the target to the perpetrator.



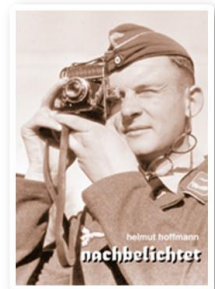
Another illustration of the problem of using Nazi imagery comes from this popular German textbook. Attempting to illustrate the selections at Auschwitz-Birkenau this image, used in isolation without context, merely reinforces German “efficiency” and Jewish “passivity.” Students are often drawn to these images of brutality, violence and humiliation and yet encounter it from a safe distance. It all seems very normal, almost routine. And yet, this is a picture showing the annihilation of families. To me, this is an important moment to teach students how to decode both the construction of the image as well as their own ethical responsibility. It is important to wrestle with how this image is actually depicting Nazi part of the process of dehumanization weapon of Nazi processes within Auschwitz. a weapon, and not simply an illustration. We must ask not only what was going on here and if this is an acceptable use of

imagery, but what was the photographer doing there?

## Developing Core Competencies

Students must deduce the intended iconography (symbolic representation and meaning) attached to an image or images, their function and application. Ask:

1. What is the attitude of the photographer?
2. How is the image linked to Nazi propaganda bureaucracy and other source material? Students can research:
  - Instructions of Goebbels' Ministry of Propaganda
  - The Department for Wehrmacht (Army) propaganda
  - Reports or captions in contemporary media
  - Accompanying documents glued to the back side of the photo
  - Subsequent statements of the photographer



For example, this order was issued to Propaganda Company 612 on January 18, 1940:

A photographic report is not an accidental result of journalistic photography, but requires prior deliberation and thoughtful determination of the picture to be taken. Making certain events happen by giving stage directions may often be necessary in the course of producing a photographic report. Under all circumstances, it has to be considered that vividness is the main condition of a photographic report. Pictures that seem posed and ‘dead’ destroy the journalistic impact of the report.

*Quoted after: Miriam Y. Arani, Wie Feindbilder gemacht wurden. Zur visuellen Konstruktion von „Feinden“ am Beispiel der Fotografien der Propagandakompanien aus Bromberg 1939 und Warschau 1941, in: Rainer Rother, Judith Prokasky (Hg.): Die Kamera als Waffe. Propagandabilder des Zweiten Weltkrieges, Stuttgart 2010. (Translation A.W.)*

## **Photographs as Evidence: The Process of Genocide**

Earlier I wrestled with the use of the photos from Auschwitz-Birkenau. I have never been comfortable with these images believing that they had sanitized the killing and could easily be misread. Visiting Auschwitz in 2014 changed my thinking. Genocide is an unfolding process that feeds upon itself. It is always conceived in moral terms that empower the perpetrator to commit crimes of extraordinary evil by shifting his/her moral compass. The fact that perpetrators are generally very normal people operating within a moral compass is what we need to explore.

On May 1, 1944, a few hundred photographs were taken by the SS at Birkenau by SS-Hauptscharführer Bernhardt Walter, head of the Auschwitz photographic laboratory known as the Erkennungsdienst [Identification Service] and his assistant, SS-Unterscharführer Ernst Hofmann. The rail line in these photos was newly added to the camp to speed the process of the annihilation of the Hungarian Jews. The photos document the process of Nazi dehumanization, humiliation, and, although not shown, the murder of Hungarian Jews, many from the Berehovo Ghetto, who have arrived at the camp. The selection process (to either a slow death in the camp or immediate death in the gas chambers), registration, delousing, and distribution to the barracks is photographed. Why? What do these images, of this specific series of events, tell us?

On the surface, the documentation appears to show a very orderly process of resettlement which does not include killing. However, we must now examine things with a more critical eye and decipher the Nazi process of killing. We must recognize that these were professional photographers working to produce something special, something to be proud of. What do they choose to capture on film?

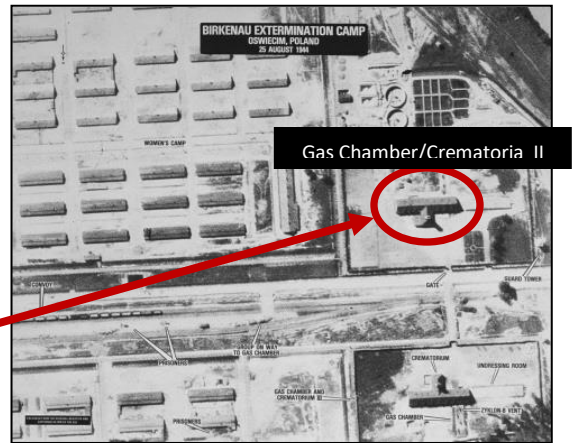
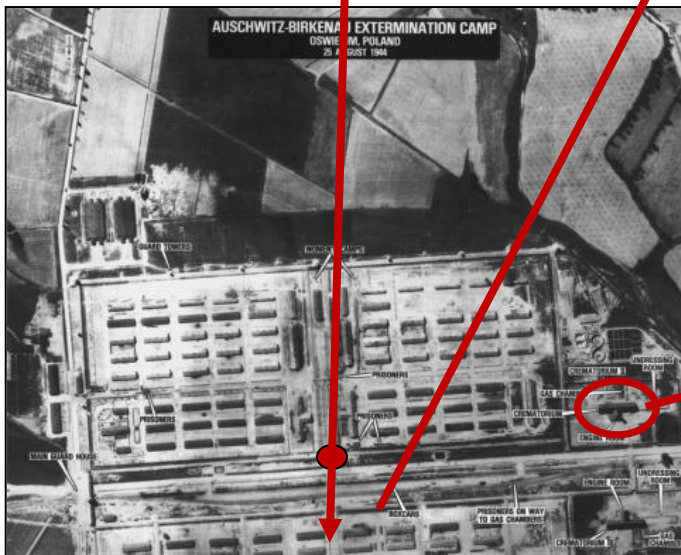
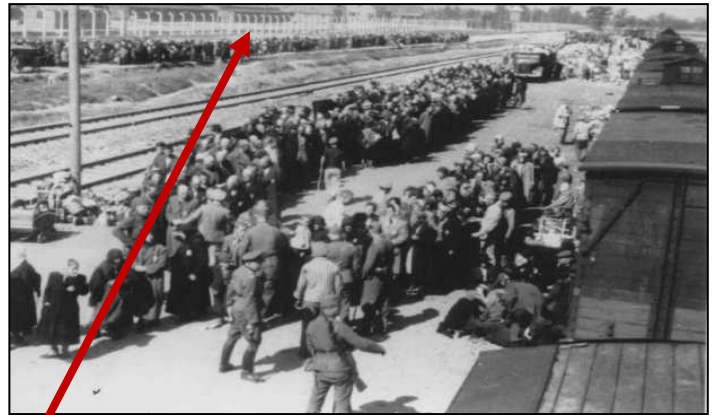
All the processes being photographed were the ones designed to make the annihilation of Jews an easier task for the killers. Deception, of which they are chillingly proud, permeated the atmosphere. The murder of Hungarian Jews was a relatively rapid process. These photos were taken less than two months after the German army occupied Hungary. Arriving in March 1944, the Germans had further radicalized the Hungarian antisemitic measures and forced deportation to ghettos and then to Auschwitz. Upon arrival everything seemed orderly. It was daylight, the guards were friendly and the arrivals had been told to mark their belongings to receive them in the near future. The fact that they carried luggage reveals their lack of knowledge about what was about to happen as they clung to hope. The process of rapid relocation served the Nazi purpose by reinforcing a sense of “resettlement” while simplifying the looting process. Jews, with little time to think, would most likely bring only their most valued possessions with them.

We must also consider the Nazi use of the camera as a weapon of intimidation. In April 1933 during the Nazi boycott of Jewish stores in Germany, signs warned that anyone shopping at boycotted stores would be photographed. When viewing the snapshots taken in Auschwitz consider how the victims’ behaviors may have been influenced by the site of the camera and Nazi cameraman photographing them in these moments of terror and confusion.

Auschwitz II was an enormous site, literally as far as the eyes could see in every direction. Upon arrival at the gas chambers (which were now built underground and in the rear of the camp) they were told that they were to receive a shower, or that the buildings they saw – only at the end of a long walk after the selection – were either a factory or a bakery.

Perhaps these rare images were created as propaganda against the growing knowledge of the brutal functions of the camp or simply as a memory piece for the camp commandant for whom it was produced. Regardless, they serve as a chilling insight into both the brutal destruction process and the mindset of the killers.

In the photo below (right) the selection has taken place and the line at the top of the photo is walking towards gas chamber/crematoria II which is located in the distant upper right part of the photo. The Nazis have created a process of mass atrocity based upon the assumptive world of the victims that “told” them things would be OK.



Using the photos with other historical documentation (just a few, not comprehensive, examples above) will reveal and illustrate the very murder process the Nazis were trying to conceal. This is the beginning of the process of utilizing converging proof from a variety of sources. Even more importantly, perhaps, we will be able to construct the moral universe in which the perpetrator operated. Recognizing and confronting the perpetrator as a “moral” human being will empower us to resist and recognize potential perpetrator attitudes that embrace a belief that others are expendable or that others are a potential “threat” that somehow has to be dealt with. Perpetrators are often people who see diversity as a “problem to be solved” rather than an opportunity.

I am very careful when using images from the Holocaust. Each one must be carefully decoded and deconstructed. Although photographs came to be seen as reliable journalism mostly with the liberation of the camps, there is decreasing believability in the truth-value of a photo (can be doctored, manipulated). We are bombarded with atrocity imagery in the events of the world or through various forms of entertainment. The more we “see” the more we “know” and the more we either dismiss or accept it as something normal. We must make an effort to make certain that our skepticism and critical analysis does not remove us from moral



outrage, responsibility, and action. Ironically, the overuse of photographic evidence may indeed produce apathy. We must be careful while promoting responsibility in our witnessing.

The next photo can only be used in a classroom if we bring our core competencies to bear. Before showing it, students need to be well prepared to not simply “look at” it. Note the framing, the selection of woman and children who are heading to the gas chamber and be certain to expand the frame to include smell, fear, confusion, and sound. Who is the child in the foreground looking at? This question sums it all up. The child looks at the cameraman, another weapon of the Nazis. When we only “look at” the photo, we stand with the perpetrator and see Jews as “props” in our story. Rather than look “at” a picture, we must work at looking “from” the picture. Perhaps most importantly, we must stand as witnesses and allow ourselves to mourn. Within minutes, these people will have died. We need to be aware of that and continually teach our students that they must do something to effect change in the world. Before using Nazi images to tell the story, we must consider Rabbi Irving Greenberg’s shaping principle:



“No statement, theological or otherwise, ought to be made that would not be credible in the presence [face of] of the burning children (of Auschwitz).”

### Using Cropping to Help Illustrate Educational Goals:



Mendel Grossman with his camera in the Lodz Ghetto.

Let us use the same techniques now to teach the lessons we think are important. How do we show the magnitude of the trauma while still humanizing the targets? We must always keep Jews as central to the story, and not “props” in the background to illustrate a point. We must humanize both the perpetrators and the victims. This image is from Mendel Grossman, a graphic artist, photographer, and worker in the Statistical Department of the Litzmannstadt Ghetto. Thus, this is not a perpetrator photo, but rather from someone documenting Jewish life from within. He would die on a death march on 30 April 1945. Here he is photographing the deportations to the Chelmno death camp from the Lodz Ghetto in 1942. This photograph can help students wrestle with the compound nature of the trauma of the Shoah. It was individual (a); familial (b); and communal (c).



a



b



c

### Photography as Historical Tool

In our classrooms we should avoid simple answers or dismissive moral conclusions. Instead we need to examine the politics of memory as gatekeepers. It is more important to allow our students to see complexity and the multiple forces and perspectives that act upon us in order to allow them to make better decisions. Social identity is a key construct to individual choice. By seeking to teach competencies for democratic

citizenship we seek to counterbalance the darkest impulses of human nature that can so easily justify behaviors in the minds of the perpetrators. How can photographs help our students to see complexity and go beyond interpreting photos from our own perspective without context? Remember, photos do not merely capture the historical past, but interpret it.



The series of photos taken by Robert Capa in Chartres, France after liberation in August 1944 can be used as “documentation” of the righteous indignation of post-occupation France. Although uncomfortable, these scenes of public brutality can be seen as a morality play of those in the right against those who decided to collaborate. In Richard Vinen’s *The Unfree French* the author asks us to go beyond this. Chartres provides a context that will help to illustrate the complexities – especially in post war memory – of the German occupation. Chartres was big enough to attract countryside girls to a place occupied by the Germans. Surrounded by rich farmland,

Chartres’ experience during the war was less harsh and food was relatively plentiful. It was easy for young men to avoid working in Germany by either avoiding the city or by working in the countryside. The landscape, bereft of woods or hills, made it difficult for the resistance to operate. Chartres was filled with men who had fled their homes during the occupation, but who had not taken up arms against the Germans.

Postwar condemnation of female collaborators merged with more general condemnations of specific “immoral” behavior. Many French women had daily contact with the Germans in jobs then reserved for less “respectable” women such as waitress, shop assistant, and chambermaid. These women often came from the most underprivileged part of society. Often young and poorly educated some had fled from abusive families. French authorities, concerned with protecting bourgeois girls from being sent to Germany as forced laborers, had no such reservations about ‘non-respectable’ women. Association with Germans in these settings reinforced that these women had made the ‘choice’ to collaborate. In many cases association with the enemy offered a kind of revenge for these women against the families and society that had marginalized them. Targeting these women after liberation was an expression of a variety of motives. They were seen to have escaped (been liberated from?) their natural place in society both in terms of being elevated during the occupation, but also in having escaped their outcast status as undesirable, non-respectable, and immoral. Many of these women had dabbled in prostitution both before and during the war and were thus morally condemned for living debauched lives while living even more debauched lives by sleeping with Germans. Interestingly, the men who took advantage of these women were not seen in the same light. Allied soldiers actually sought out these women with the shaved heads (*tondues*) knowing that they were both exploitable (no one would defend them) while reinforcing their belief that the French were collaborators who deserved what was coming to them. Even fathers (who may have previously been abusive) who shaved their own daughters’ head were acting within proscribed moral codes of conduct. Additionally, as French society had shifted their impression of surrendered French soldiers of 1940 as noble victims to something a bit less masculine after 1943, publicly humiliating these women not only put them back in their place, but it also reasserted masculine authority and national honor. Questions about collaboration or complicity (Vichy France, the French police...) were subsumed by this public morality play. These photos, in context, allow us to go beyond simple condemnation of collaboration.

What do these two photos taken that day help us to consider beyond a simplistic story of vengeance? In some respects these photos are unrepresentative. Seeing a baby is rare. What is not so rare is to see mothers and sisters being targeted together. Is the older woman to the left her mother? It is likely that these women were poor and probably worked as a laundress or waitress. According to witness Charles Wertenbaker, the “patriots” were rounding



up the “younger blowsy” women who either collaborated or had participated in the black market. Interestingly, it was the many of the small shop keepers, and men and women who had benefited most by the black market. Wertenbaker also observed that a woman and a boy were selling red wine by the glass during these events. If we were to expand the frame we would notice that the Catholic cathedral was about 100 meters from the Rue du Cheval Blanc shown here. Again, we are asked to do more than accept the moment captured in a photography.

## Historical Comparisons

We compare history not to find equivalency as much as to contrast differing realities to raise questions. Can photographic comparisons raise questions about perpetrator behavior? Although there is a danger in reducing racism to extreme acts of violence by bad, mean people (and ignore the process, systems, and institutions involved) what would happen if we compare these two photos?



Warsaw Ghetto, 1943.



August 7, 1930. Marion town square, Indiana. 3 black teenagers are lynched after attempting a “hold-up.” Thomas Shipp, 18, and Abram Smith, 19, are publicly killed (having been falsely accused of rape) by a jubilant mob of nearly 15,000 white men, women, and children. James Cameron, 16, survived. Lawrence Beitler, 44, reluctantly photographed.

I have chosen to crop the top of the image of a lynching in Indiana. I chose to do so to not show the two black American teenagers hanging from a tree. All the same contextual interpretation questions should be asked of these photos. Note that the perpetrators are mugging for the camera. They want to be seen. Their actions are “justifiable”. Indeed, that is the point. These actions were not just possible, they are permissible. Why are the Nazis found guilty and the American perpetrators of lynching are not?

How do comparing the following two images of General Eisenhower at the Ohrdruf sub-camp on April 12, 1945 with the Omaha race murders of September 28-29, 1919 raise important questions:





We are seeing similar perpetrator behavior being documented. Both show the victims being burned on railway ties after their murders. For the Omaha picture (right) it is in the context of the “red summer” of 1919 when black Americans were targeted because of their heroism and service in the First World War. They were being “put back in their place”. When General Eisenhower saw the scenes of Ohrdruf (including a lynching post) he reflected, “We are told that the American soldier does not know what he is fighting for. Now, at least, he will know what he is fighting against.” It is important to note that Eisenhower had photographs of camp liberations given out to the troops in theater.

**Competency Expectations** Students should:

- increasingly be capable of asking **questions** regarding the **perspectivity** and **intentionality** of a photo
- increasingly be capable of describing the **context of origin** of a photo (time, place, situation, photographer, orderer, target audience)
- increasingly be capable of describing the **content** of a photo (people, objects, actions, marginal elements/segments of the photo, background, time and place represented in the photo)
- increasingly be capable of defining the **elements of composition** in a photo (genre, perspective, framing, balance, light, shadow, color, contrast, image sharpness, focal length/aperture, symbolic forms such as poses, movement, lines, clothing, relations of people in the photo, photo manipulation)
- increasingly be capable of describing the potential **impact of a photo** (function and application context of photos, impact intended by the photographer/orderer, impact on present day observers, history of reception of a photo)
- increasingly be capable of interpreting and evaluating the relation between a photo and its **social/political context** (ideological point of view of the photographer or the orderer, information about the past included in the photo, analogies between the photo and textual sources)
- increasingly be capable of relating historic photos to **today's application contexts**

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## **Decoding Images: The Use and Abuse of Nazi Photographs and Images**

## Discussion:

How can Holocaust and related images be used responsibly?

1. How have Holocaust images been used/misused in representing the Holocaust and events surrounding it? Do we unwittingly use photographs that strengthen the view of the perpetrators and marginalize the victims?
2. Has the repeated publication and showing of Holocaust images desensitized us to the horrors that these photographs represent?
3. What limits, if any, should be set for the use of Holocaust images?
4. Does the recirculation of certain Holocaust images diminish their value for teaching?
5. Ethically, should we show images of Holocaust survivors or victims without their consent (knowing that for the most part, we can never receive it)? Is this yet another victimization of those who have already been victimized?
6. Can and should Holocaust photographs be viewed as silent testimony? Is this a dangerous move that can lead to misrepresentation?
7. What, in your opinion, are responsible ways of using these photographs for documenting and representing crimes? How great is the danger of misinterpretation without proper commentary?
8. If you have ever used photographs in teaching the Holocaust, how did your students respond, and was it what you expected? How do you know?
9. Does teaching with photographs differ pedagogically from teaching using documents and, if so, how?
10. Are we interpreting the photographs responsibly and properly? What happens if we are not responsible, even accidentally?
11. Are there proper and improper uses of images in students' artistic projects?
12. How does this discussion apply to current media?



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## **Decoding Images\*** The Use and Abuse of Holocaust Photographs and Images

Most images from the Holocaust will have been taken by the perpetrator. We must critically evaluate this evidence as much as we do written or oral material. Be extremely cautious in using photographs because:

- ✓ They are framed by the perpetrator, shaping the context of “a second in time”
- ✓ They reinforce “Jew as victim” and perpetrator as “victor”
- ✓ They allow our students to look with a voyeurism that reinforces their relative, perceived safety

### Imagery and Photography

- Photos do not merely capture the past or illustrate the historical past
  - Photos capture the “point of view” of the photographer
  - Photos only show a selected snippet of context
  - Photos cannot kill, but can justify violence
1. Potential risks in using Nazi photography
    - Failure to see that the photos are not just documents but *part of the Holocaust*
    - Doing the work of the perpetrators by reproducing their ideological perspective
    - Seeing those photographed as passive objects of victimization only – rather than as individual, acting human beings
    - Voyeurism and fascination for images of violence and humiliation
  2. Developing Core Competencies  
Deducing the intended iconography: function and application context
    - What is the attitude of the photographer?
    - How is the image linked to Nazi propaganda bureaucracy and other source material?
  3. Competency Expectations  
Students should:
    - increasingly be capable of asking **questions** regarding the **perspectivity** and **intentionality** of a photo
    - increasingly be capable of describing the **context of origin** of a photo (time, place, situation, photographer, orderer, target audience)
    - increasingly be capable of describing the **content** of a photo (people, objects, actions, marginal elements/segments of the photo, background, time and place represented in the photo)
    - increasingly be capable of defining the **elements of composition** in a photo (genre, perspective, framing, balance, light, shadow, color, contrast, image sharpness, focal length/aperture, symbolic forms such as poses, movement, lines, clothing, relations of people in the photo, photo manipulation)
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    - increasingly be capable of relating historic photos to **today's application contexts**

### To evaluate a photograph, have students:

1. Ask: “Who took the photograph and why?”
2. Expand the photograph (add color, sound, smell, and expand the frame)
3. Turn it around – rather than “look at,” have the students “look out” from it (at the perpetrators?)
4. Describe the silence. What is missing in the reality being framed? Have students write about what they “see” or “hear” outside the margins of the framed image.



## Potential Risks in Using Nazi Propaganda Photographs

- Failure to see that the photos are not just documents but *part of the Holocaust*
- Doing the work of the perpetrators by reproducing their ideological perspective
- Seeing those photographed as passive objects of victimization only – rather than as individual, acting human beings
- Voyeurism and fascination for images of violence and humiliation

## Developing Core Competencies

- Analyze the intended iconography
  - What is the attitude of the photographer?
  - How is the image linked to propaganda instructions; reports and captions in contemporary media; accompanying documents attached to the photograph; subsequent statements by the photographer.
- Analyze Nazi photographs based upon
  - Construction of positive self-images
  - Construction of enemy images
  - Visual disinformation and concealment of facts
  - Photographic techniques employed (depth of field, props, use of light)

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\* Tom White, Cohen Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies; Susan Crane, University of Arizona; and Andreas Weinhold, Media Advisory, North-Rhine Westphalia.

Lesson: <http://www.ushmm.org/education/foreducators/prodev/beli/2003/>