Lessons of the Holocaust in Germany:
Past, Present, Future
by Prof. Harold Marcuse, UCSB
[UC Irvine symposium
“Lessons of the Holocaust,” April 13, 2010]
1. Assessment: What lessons can be learned (and taught)?
2. Actual lessons in Germany, 1945-today
3. What lessons should be taught?

[James Bryan Conant]
Diary as a Harvard Freshman (1910-11)
“Education is what is left after all that has been learnt [in the classroom] is forgotten.”
- Lived 1893-1978 (He was 17 in 1910)
- 1933-1953: president of Harvard
- 1953-55- 57: US High Commissioner & Ambassador to Germany
- [not necessarily man to emulate: Nazis, Hanfstaengl—“mild antisemitism” of time; but Manhattan project]

[Lessons for Whom?—diff for diff. entities]
1. Countries: democratic, authoritarian; rich, poor, …
2. Organizations & Institutions:
   - Governmental (military, police, bureaucracies, …)
   - Professional (doctors, educators, engineers, judges, …)
   - Businesses (manufacturing, finance, information tech., …)
   - NGOs (religious, charitable, issue advocacy, youth, …)
3. Individuals & Groups—teaching takes place at individual level:
   1. Perpetrators (direct murderers—also desktop, beneficiaries)
   2. Bystanders (collaboration, indifference, rescue, resistance)

3 ‘Holocaust’ Commandments
- (a) “Thou shall not be a perpetrator;
   (b) thou shall not be a victim; and
   (c) thou shall never, but never, be a bystander.”
- Most cited lessons of the Holocaust
  - By Prof. Yehuda Bauer
    1998 speech to the German Parliament;
    2000 Stockholm Int’l Forum on the Holocaust;
    2006 speech to the United Nations
  - [(a) no one admits to being a perpetrator
    (b) example Netanyahu (next slide)
    (c) example Obama (following slide)]

[Israeli Prime Min. Netanyahu, 4/11/10:]
“I believe that three of the lessons [of the Holocaust] are: Strengthen yourself, educate for good and fight evil. The first lesson – strengthen yourself – first of all concerns us, the people of Israel who were abandoned and powerless before the waves of murderous hate that broke against us again and again, in every generation. We need to gird our strength for our independence to ensure that the next enemy cannot plot his schemes against us.”
Your Personal Lessons?

• What do you see as the primary (or any) lesson (or lessons) of the Holocaust for yourself? (take a moment to think of some)
  a. Imagine that you were in a classroom in Germany in 1932, with Hitler winning electoral landslide after electoral landslide
  b. Imagine you had a classroom full of world leaders, then or now
  c. Or that you were in a genocidal or pre-genocidal situation today (as a teacher, in a country)

Most Lessons are Content Lessons

USHMM Teaching Guidelines

Teaching about the Holocaust can illustrate:
1. Origins & effects of prejudice, hate & fear
2. Benefits and disadvantages of various values and behaviors
3. Consequences of not getting involved
4. Use of technology for good or evil
5. Role of government (need for checks & balances)

All are taught by the selection of content

Students want to know -- content

USHMM’s Frequently Asked Questions:
[education dept: 5 most-asked questions]
1. Why the Jews?
2. How did Hitler kill millions of people?
3. What did the U.S. know and do?
4. Why didn’t the Jews leave?
5. Why didn’t they fight back?

Let’s turn to Germany in 1945:
• Allied soldiers liberate the concentration camps
  -> Germans who cheered Hitler must learn the consequences of their actions

Death Mills Film, 1945-Jan. 47

Scenes of cheering from Triumph of the Will juxtaposed with...
German Reactions to Lesson

1. We didn’t know -> Myth of Ignorance
2. We were victims too -> Myth of Victimization
3. We resisted when we could -> Myth of Resistance

East Germany: Antifascism Rules

Causes:
- Big Industry
- Junkerdom
- Militarism
- extinguished/in West

[Example: East Germany]

- Heroic, antifascist resistance
- Nothing to learn – just be vigilant (gov’t knows best)
- Since 1948: “culmination of revolutionary German labor movement”; “stronghold of antifascism”
- Big industry, junkerdom & armed forces -> responsible
- Consequence: expropriation of factories & large landowners in 1950s “extinguished” Nazism & “chauvinism”
- “All round educated socialist personality” did not question authority, BUT adapted to existing conditions
- A lesson we (in U.S.) would resist? A big exception to denying personal responsibility ...

Martin Niemöller (1892-1984)

“First they came for the Communists, but I wasn’t a Communist, so I did nothing, …”

Cover of Time, 1940

In Dachau, 1963
[Niem's Jan. 6, 1946 speech]

- We preferred to keep silent. We are certainly not without guilt, and I ask myself again and again, what would have happened if, in the year 1933 or 1934 - there must have been a possibility - 14,000 Protestant pastors and all Protestant communities in Germany had defended the truth until their deaths? If we had said back then, it is not right when Hermann Göring simply puts 100,000 Communists in the concentration camps, in order to let them die. I can imagine that perhaps 30,000 to 40,000 Protestant Christians would have had their heads cut off, but I can also imagine that we would have rescued 30-40,000 million [sic] people, because that is what it is costing us now.
- [Lesson: don't stand idly by. Example Alfons Heck/San Diego—anybody know him?]

[Transition of 1950s: Accusation→Silence]

- "let's forget about it" LESSON: ignore and keep silent
- Revised myths:
  1. Ignorant of renazification
  2. Victimized by Allies
  3. Resistance to learning anything new
- Basically no one in power in mainstream wanted anything to do with past
- What was "Holocaust" in 1950s Germany? (not in common use until 1970s):
  - "most recent past" (jüngste Vergangenheit)
  - "Hitlerzeit"
  - "Third Reich"

1948→50: "Unknown Prisoner"

- [Koelle statues: compare later with 1968 memorial]

Postcards sold in Dachau, 1945-50

Photo posed shortly after liberation

1st Dachau Exhibition: Physical Brutality
They saw a tall crucifix on the roll-call square, and a sign "to the crematory" on the gatehouse. The men were taken in groups of ten into a small wooden barrack, and returned reeling, some with bloody noses. When it was Naumann’s turn he saw on one wall “huge pictures from the KZ, horrible pictures of starving KZ inmates, mountains of corpses, tortured creatures.” The German internees had to stand right in front of the pictures, and a US soldier came by from behind and punched their heads so that their faces smashed against the pictures. → "rubbing noses in excrement"

[July 15, 1952 News Wire article:]

This place that was supposed to stimulate introspection … turned into a site of curiosity and lust for sensations… Additionally, the visitors of the grounds, esp. the conspicuously large number of American soldiers, show not the least trace of piety. They take pictures … And talk as if they were in a zoological garden or in a wax museum, not at a site of remembrance for the suffering and death of innocent people. Thus one has the impression that the gas chamber and the crematory ovens and the two mass graves … were never horrible reality. One leaves KZ Dachau in spite of all of the commemorative plaques … with the feeling that this place that was intended to be a fiery appeal to humanity does not or only poorly fulfills that mission.

1953: exhibition removed

“WIR WOLLEN RAUS aus den KZ BARACKEN in menschenwürdige Wohnungen zu Preisen die wir bezahlen können”

WE WANT OUT of the CONCENTRATION CAMP BARRACKS into decent apartments at prices we can afford

1948-65: "Settlement Dachau-East"

From Barracks to Apartments

Original camp division;
24 apartments/bar.
2200 total res.

Barrack 3: a grocery store
[1955 teaching report]

By German Education Committee
(Dt. Auschuss fuer Erziehungs- und Bildungswesen)
- Emphasized need for political education
- How to deal with “recent past”?
  - “Hitlerism”
    - Suggest that Hitler & inner circle responsible
    - NOT the mass of German people
      [intentionalism lets people off the hook; functionalism blames it on functionaries]

1958: Survivors want content

1960 Germans: “green” memorial

1965: The Clean Memorial Site

1965 Exhibition

Lots of content
1968 International Memorial
[compare with two Koelle statues from 1948]

1950s -> 1960s: Why?

1961 Textbook
Hannah Vogt, The Burden of Guilt … 1914-1945

[Vogt: Chapter titles]
• Did Hitler come to power legally?
• What was life like in the Third Reich?
• Who was responsible for the 2nd World War?
• What happened to our Jewish fellow citizens?
• Was there a right to resist?

Can we learn from the past? (Vogt's lessons)
1. Responsibility or Fate? → it is in our power to change things
2. No freedom w/o citizens will to make sacrifices
3. Press & opposition control power
4. Justice, not violence
5. Change is possible
6. Honor the dead to value life

[Other events around 1960 indicative of change]
1. 1959 wave of antisemitic incidents
2. 1961 Eichmann trial in Israel – on TV for educ.
3. 1961 guidelines: History must include Nazi period
4. 1964 Auschwitz Trial in Frankfurt

1968: A New Generation
2002 New Museum: Lessons?

More Immediate and Authentic
(compare 1945 and 1950 placements)

The Whipping Block

1965

2002

More Authentic?

2002: preserving traces

VERBOTEN=forbidden, prohibited -- but what?

Myth \rightarrow Lesson

1. Ignorance \rightarrow concrete content
2. Everyone was a victim \rightarrow specificity
3. Resistance \rightarrow Engagement

Specific principles:
1. Don't have too much or too abstract info;
   • Show what was—and is—possible
   • People as role models
2. Need to be accurate & authentic
3. Create space for and accept emotions
4. [Use postwar history to lead into the past; ex: Berlin...]

2002 museum: 1946 murals (removed)

Berlin 'Murdered Jews,' 2005