

VIEWING GUIDE: *Americans and the Holocaust*

EXHIBITION: *Americans and the Holocaust*

GRADE LEVEL: Adaptable for grades 7–12

SUBJECT: Multidisciplinary

TIME REQUIRED: Approximately 60–75 minutes (extensions available), which includes time to watch the 39 minute tour

TOUR DETAILS:

- Recorded by C-SPAN/American History TV “American Artifacts” series on July 26, 2018
- Led by Dr. Daniel Greene, historian and exhibition curator
- Tour has been shortened for classroom use. The original longer recordings are available on the [C-SPAN website](#).

RATIONALE

The Holocaust was the systematic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its collaborators. Holocaust history raises important questions about what the international community, including the United States, could have done to stop the rise of Nazism in Germany and its assault on Europe’s Jews. Questions include: What did Americans know? How did Americans respond? What more could have been done?

Americans and the Holocaust exhibition looks closely at America’s role in this history. The United States alone could not have prevented the Holocaust, but more could have been done to save some of the six million Jews that were killed. This exhibition examines the motives, pressures, and fears that shaped Americans’ responses to Nazism, war, and genocide.

INSTRUCTIONS

As you and your students follow along on the tour, consider the reflection questions below. You may choose to stop the tour recording after each segment and discuss these questions as a class.

Fear Itself, 1933–1937 [2:18–11:39]

In the 1930s, Americans across the country could read, see, and hear news about Nazi persecution of Jews.

- What could Americans across the country have known about Nazi antisemitism in the 1930s?
- In what ways did some Americans condemn the actions of the Nazi regime?
- What do public polls and newsreels in the 1930s show about American concerns and priorities?

Desperate Times, Limited Measures, 1938–1941 [11:40–21:06]

Despite a growing refugee crisis, public opinion polls show that most Americans did not want to accept more immigrants into the country.

- What obstacles faced Jewish refugees attempting to immigrate to the United States?
- How did Americans respond to Kristallnacht in November 1938?
- What factors might have contributed to anti-immigrant sentiments in the United States?

Storm Clouds Gather, 1939–1941 [21:07–28:09]

The United States remained neutral during the first two years of World War II. Americans debated whether to join the Allied war effort.

- What factors might have contributed to American isolationism in the 1930s and early 1940s?

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- What do the opposing opinions of Charles Lindergh and Dr. Seuss demonstrate about American debates at the time?
- How did President Franklin Roosevelt use his leadership to sway American public opinion?

America at War, 1942–1945 [28:10–35:55]

The United States and other Allied forces prioritized military victory over humanitarian aid during World War II.

- What does the map show about the Allied military possibilities for mass rescue?
- What kind of information did average Americans have about the Holocaust as it was happening?
- What actions did the United States government take in response to the Holocaust?

Conclusion

Based on the information provided in the tour and personal reflections, address one of the following prompts, either through a written exercise or a discussion:

- Information about the Nazi persecution and murder of Jews was available in the media throughout the United States, but knowledge does not always lead to action. What conditions might motivate people to help each other? What conditions might make people turn away?
- How did Americans' fears shape their opinions, attitudes, debates, and, ultimately, their actions? Did these change over time in response to political, economic, and other factors?
- “All over Europe the Nazis were writing the book of death Let me now tell this story to the American people, to the man in the street, in church, on the porches of their houses and in their kitchens and drawing rooms. I am sure they would understand me.” Do you agree with Raphael Lemkin's belief that Americans would “understand” the Holocaust? Why or why not?

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