

2026 Elie Wiesel Competition

3rd Place Junior Essay

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Wrongful Blame

“To forget would be not only dangerous but offensive; to forget the dead would be akin to killing them a second time,” those are the words of Elie Wiesel. He was a Holocaust survivor of Auschwitz. After World War I ended and the Treaty of Versailles was signed, Germany was furious with the way things turned out. Since Germany had to pay the reparations of WWI, the country fell into an economic depression. Antisemitism was always a belief in Germany. But the German people started evolving this hatred after the *“stab in the back”* myth went viral. Everyone was blaming the Jews for their economic despair, and the rise of the Nazis made it worse. Looking back on the Holocaust, it is easy to see that the dangers of scapegoating through Nazi propaganda and the consequences of unchecked hatred through antisemitism led to disastrous impacts during the holocaust.

First, scapegoating through Nazi propaganda led to disastrous impacts. Adolf Hitler and the German Nazi regime conquered and controlled over half of Europe during the peak of their control. They were able to do this by rearming the German military. The Nazis were able to convert military personnel by using heavy loads of propaganda. The key forms of media they used were radio, films, newspapers, posters, photography, books, art, and events with rallies. In 1934, the Nazis held a rally in Nuremberg, Germany. During this rally, Joseph Goebbels gave a speech. In his speech, he said, *“Propaganda must always be popular, must always be adapted to the level of the least intelligent.”* This idea reveals that the Nazis simplified their propaganda and repeated these hateful messages to influence all of the people around Europe. The Nazi regime realized how important and useful propaganda is and took it to the next level. They started rewriting textbooks in schools to teach the kids obedience to the party. These lessons persuaded the children so much that youth groups started forming. In 1924, Adolf Hitler stated that, *“Propaganda's task is not to make an objective study of the truth, and so far, as it favors the enemy, and then set it before the masses with academic fairness, its task is to serve our own right, always and unflinchingly.”* This speech was given nine years before the Holocaust started. Showing that Adolf Hitler was studying propaganda to use it as effectively as possible. He studied and considered all of propaganda's uses and areas to make sure that his plan would work without fail. He was so good at using his skills of persuasion that he was able to make people believe that the Jewish people were vermin and that they caused Germany's depression. All in all, Hitler and the Nazi regime were able to implement the use of propaganda so well that multitudes believed what they said.

Secondly, the consequences of unchecked hatred through antisemitism led to the Holocaust.

Antisemitism is when people feel prejudiced against Jewish people. This thought had been in Hitler's ideology since 1919. He wrote a letter explaining how he thought the Jewish people were a race and not a religious group. Hitler wrote even more explaining his hatred. When he became chancellor, he wrote

books and then passed the Nuremberg Laws to really drive his agenda. According to the Holocaust Encyclopedia, *"On November 9th - 10th, 1938, the Nazis unleashed a nationwide anti-Jewish riot. During Kristallnacht, Nazis burned more than 1,400 synagogues, vandalized thousands of Jewish own businesses, broke into Jewish people's homes and apartments, and desecrated Jewish religious objects."* This reveals that Hitler influenced the public to believe his antisemitic ways and was able to segregate the Jews. After Kristallnacht, none of the German people were arrested. This night was just the first part of Hitler's *"final solution."* Since the riot was nationwide, Hitler was able to get his idea through to the whole country of Germany. The idea of Kristallnacht was to separate the Jewish socially and legally. After Kristallnacht was over Hitler was able to move to the next part of his plan, concentration camps. *"The Nazis blamed Jews for Germany's defeat in World War I (1914–1918); for communism; and for Germany's economic problems. They claimed that all Jews were a threat to Germany and that they had to be destroyed,"* as referenced by The Holocaust Encyclopedia. This antisemitic response by the Nazis is an example of how they were unable to take accountability of their own actions. They blamed the Jews for all of their downfall.

In conclusion, Nazi propaganda shows how entire nations can be influenced if the message is persistent. Their propaganda reveals how dangerous scapegoating can be when hatred goes unchecked. By spreading lies and blaming the Jewish people for Germany's economic devastation, the Nazis promoted fear, anger, and antisemitism amongst ordinary citizens. Their hatred was not only interpretive through words, but also violence, discrimination, and the mass genocide of 6 million Jews. The disastrous effects of these beliefs suggests that propaganda and prejudice can have deadly consequences. Learning about these major historical events is imperative because today's societies can recognize that scapegoating and stopping hatred can prevent injustice and suffering.