

Henry Ford’s Dishonest Business Practices during the Holocaust: A Two-Day Lesson for High School Business Students

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Abstract

Secondary business education has a unique opportunity to complement social studies education with business-specific teaching about the Holocaust. Opportunities exist to teach students how business leaders such as Henry Ford collaborated with the Nazis to destroy Jews and other minority populations through forced labor hiring practices, manufacturing, and more. This two-day lesson plan provides evidence-based curriculum and links to free resources to equip business education teachers to teach business students what can be learned about dishonest business practices by studying the Holocaust.

Introduction

The United States is experiencing a rise in antisemitism, which is “prejudice against or hatred of Jews” (“Antisemitism”, n.d.). There are gaps in Americans’ knowledge about the Holocaust. About 22% of American Millennials, the largest generational cohort of people born 1981-1996, have not heard, or are not sure if they have heard, of the Holocaust. While teaching the Holocaust is popular, new research about America’s knowledge and awareness of the Holocaust shows that 70% of Americans care less about the Holocaust than they use to even though a majority, 58%, believe something like the Holocaust could happen again. While awareness of the Holocaust is decreasing, almost all American adults, 93%, believe that all students should learn about the Holocaust in school (Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, 2018).

While numerous articles, books, videos, and other resources about the Holocaust exist (Wickam, 2019), many teachers do not know how to access them or how to connect them to business standards and learning targets. It is difficult to know how to use valuable instructional time to teach the Holocaust because it is such a comprehensive and sensitive topic. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum does not recommend one specific Holocaust curriculum, but does advocate fourteen pedagogical needs for teachers at all levels who design curricula about the Holocaust: “define the term Holocaust; avoid comparisons avoid comparisons of pain; avoid simple answers to complex history; just because it happened does not mean it was inevitable; strive for precision of language; make careful distinctions about sources of information; try to avoid stereotypical descriptions; do not romanticize history to engage students’ interest; contextualize the history you are teaching; translate statistics into people; be sensitive to appropriate written and audiovisual content; strive for balance in establishing whose perspective informs your study of the Holocaust; select appropriate learning activities; and reinforce the objectives of your lesson plan” (Ragland & Rosenstein, 2014).

Business education has a unique opportunity to complement social studies learning with business-specific teaching about the Holocaust. Opportunities exist to teach students how business leaders collaborated with the Nazis to destroy Jews and other minority populations through forced labor hiring practices, manufacturing, and more. Facts about the Holocaust can be linked to economics, entrepreneurship, finance, international business, production, business ethics, and other subjects. This two-day lesson plan titled *Henry Ford's Dishonest Business Practices During the Holocaust: A Two-Day Lesson for High School Business Students* provides evidence-based curriculum and access to free materials and digital resources to business education teachers that will equip them to feel more knowledgeable and confident teaching these important concepts.

Learning Targets and National Business Education Association Standards

This two-day lesson contains learning targets that are mapped to National Business Education Association Standards (National Business Education Association, 2013). The lesson also contains an agenda for each day, questions to ask students, vocabulary, readings, direct instruction, video clips, guided practice, closure, and a suggested assessment. The resources are located in the References.

Students will:

1. Explore how and why Henry Ford collaborated with the Nazis during the Holocaust to destroy Jews and other minority populations.
2. Explain the dishonest business practices Henry Ford used during WWII.

NBEA Entrepreneurship C, Level 1: Recognize positive character traits; Discuss examples of honest and dishonest business practices

NBEA Information Technology II, Level 2: Access, exchange, organize, and synthesize information

Vocabulary

There are hundreds of vocabulary terms that are associated with the Holocaust. The most important vocabulary for this two-day lesson are:

Antisemitism: prejudice against or hatred of Jews (“Antisemitism”, n.d.).

Collaboration: “...in the context of war, it is often the act of cooperating traitorously with an enemy that is occupying one’s country” (“Educator Resource: Glossary”, n.d.)

Ford Werke AG: The name of Ford Motor Company’s Cologne, Germany plant.

Forced labor: “...labor performed involuntarily and under duress, usually by relatively large groups of people” (“The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica”, n.d.).

Holocaust: The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum defines the Holocaust as, “the systematic, bureaucratic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of approximately six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its collaborators” (USHMM, n.d.a.).

Wehrmacht: the German military (UHHMM, n.d.b.).

Day One Lesson Plan

The lesson for the first day contains an anticipatory set, direct instruction including vocabulary instruction, and closure.

Anticipatory Set

1. Ask students, what do you remember about the Holocaust from your world history and U.S. history classes? (Write responses where the whole class can see them.)
2. Read students the learning targets for the next two days.
3. Ask students, how many of you drive or have a family member who drives a Ford? What is your favorite kind of Ford? What do you know about Henry Ford? (possible responses: inventor of the Model T Ford; entrepreneur; founder of Ford Motor Company)
4. Show two-minute YouTube titled Henry Ford Auto Pioneer so students can see what Ford looked and sounded like: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rkQcHdW2rAU> and ask students what they notice about Henry Ford in the clip (possible responses: all of the cars were black; all of the business people were men; all of the businessmen wore suits to work).

Direct Instruction

1. Ask students to read *Ford & the Nazi War Efforts* (Karlner, 1998) and while reading, circle what the article says Ford did to help the Nazis during World War II. Then, go over their responses as a whole class. (Responses may include: Ford opened a truck assembly plant in Berlin, Germany, that allegedly produced vehicles for the Wehrmacht). Ask students, why would producing trucks for the Nazi military benefit the German army? (Responses may be: trucks could transport soldiers to various parts of the country; trucks could carry weapons and supplies).
2. Define and discuss the related vocabulary.
3. Ask students if they have ever heard of the term *forced labor* and what they know about forced labor. Then, teach students these facts about Ford and forced labor during the Holocaust.
 - Because millions of people were fighting in World War II, companies faced severe labor shortages. Companies were forced to use forced laborers to meet their production quotas.
 - Ford had a German subsidiary in Cologne, Germany, named Ford Werke AG, and this was one of the companies that faced a labor shortage. Ford Werke AG also used slave laborers (Borger, 1999), prisoners of war, and foreign laborers from Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, France, and Italy (Reich, n.d.). Show students

photos of French forced workers who worked for Ford Werke AG, and a photo of where they lived, at this website: <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/ford-motor-company-nbsp-and-the-third-reich> (Reich, n.d.).

- As an example, in August 1944, 15 prisoners were brought from the Buchenwald concentration camp to Ford Werke AG. These prisoners worked for 12 hours per day and were fed bread and coffee for breakfast, no lunch, and a dinner of spinach and potatoes, or soup made with turnip leaves (Silverstein, 2000).
 - A Ukrainian woman, Elsa Iwanowa, was one of the plaintiffs named in a lawsuit that sued Ford Motor Co. and Ford Werke AG in United States District Court in New Jersey in 1999 for being required to perform forced labor without compensation during WWII (Mulligan, 1998).
 - The lawsuit stated that Elsa Iwanowa was purchased by Ford Werke AG at age 16, and worked there drilling holes into engine blocks. She reported feeling starving and working all the time (Mulligan, 1998).
 - The lawsuit was unsuccessful and dismissed by the judge, because the plaintiffs could not bring suit in U.S. courts against a private corporation for wartime claims for monetary damages. Instead, those claims had to be sought from the governments responsible for the war (Bazyler, 2003).
4. Ask students these recall questions about Ford and forced labor:
 - Why did Ford Werke AG face a labor shortage?
 - What were the dishonest business practices Ford Werke AG's used in response to its labor shortages?
 - What do you think of the working conditions Elsa Iwanowa and others had at Ford Werke AG?
 5. Ford Motor Company has had a positive response to the forced labor people endured during WWII. Ask students to read the article titled *Ford contributes \$13 million to German slave-labor fund* in order to find out Ford's response to forced labor during WWII (likely response: Ford contributed \$13 million to a fund to help survivors of Nazi forced labor during WWII). Discuss with students whether they think this was enough of a response from Ford Motor Company?

Closure

Ask students to think-pair-share responses to these questions, or ask students to write responses on an exit ticket that they give you upon exiting your classroom.

- What are two ways Henry Ford collaborated with the Nazis during the Holocaust?
- What are two reasons why Henry Ford collaborated with the Nazis during the Holocaust?

Day Two Lesson Plan

The lesson for the second day contains an anticipatory set, direct instruction, guided practice, assessment, and closure.

Anticipatory Set

Ask students what they remember about what they learned about Henry Ford's dishonest business practices yesterday.

Direct Instruction

Show students the image titled *Henry Ford Receiving the Grand Cross of the German Eagle from Nazi Officials, 1938*. He received this award on his 75th birthday. Ask students:

- Why do you think Ford received this medal?
- What surprises you about this photo?
- What do you think about the fact that Germany gave Ford, an American, this medal?

Guided Practice

Ford Motor Company was not the only American auto company that allegedly aided the Nazis. Ask students to read *Ford and the fuhrer: New documents reveal the close ties between dearborn and the nazis; material alleges that ford motor co. made equipment for nazi germany, even for a few months after the US entered the war* (Silverstein, 2000). As they read, look for and make a list of other auto companies involved in WWII (responses may be General Motors; BMW; Daimler-Chrysler).

Direct Instruction

When teaching about the Holocaust, it is important to connect the past with the present. There is a lot of good news about Ford Motor Company and Henry Ford. Give students these facts:

- Ford Motor Company has apologized (Black, 2009).
- Henry Ford II, Ford's grandson, has supported many Jewish charities and organizations.
- In 1997, NBC aired the movie *Schindler's List* commercial-free on American television. The reason they were able to do that is because Ford Motor Company sponsored the airing of the movie (Lowry, 1997).
- Mark Fields, an American Jew, was the president and CEO of Ford Motor Company from 2014-2017.

Assessment

Assess the learning targets by having students complete an assessment titled *Email to Henry Ford*. Here are the details of the assessment. Compose an email to Henry Ford. Your email should cover these topics with Mr. Ford: 1) Write what you've learned about how and why Ford collaborated with the Nazis during the Holocaust to destroy Jews and other minority populations; 2) Write your feelings about the dishonest business practices Ford used during WWII; 3) Tell Ford your opinion about whether or not he should have accepted the Grand Cross of the German Eagle award from the Nazis, and why or why not; 4) Ask Ford one question you wish he could answer for you, if he were alive and able to reply to your email.

Closure

Ask students, do Ford's accomplishments outweigh his dishonest business practices? Do you think Ford, an American business owner, should have accepted the Grand Cross of the German Eagle?

Conclusion

High school business education has a unique opportunity to complement social studies education with business-specific teaching about the Holocaust. There were many other American business owners who promoted hatred against Jews during the Holocaust (Black, 2009), but Henry Ford was, arguably, the most famous and influential because of his power, money, influence, and status as founder of Ford Motor Company. Jews fought back to Ford's racism, and the AJC and Anti-defamation League were new organizations founded, in part, to help respond to American Jewish racism (Woeste, 2004). As the two-day lesson plan teaches, Ford Motor Co. officials have apologized for its actions during the Holocaust (Black, 2009). Since Ford's death, his grandson, Henry Ford II, has supported many Jewish charities (Miller, 2019). It is hopeful that this evidence-based curriculum and links to resources will equip business education teachers to teach business students what can be learned about dishonest business practices through the events of the Holocaust.

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