

LESSON: Understanding Nazi Symbols

NAME: _____

WORKSHEET: History of the Swastika

Key Facts

- The swastika was long used as a symbol of well-being in ancient societies, including those in India, China, Africa, America, and Europe.
- Adolf Hitler designed the Nazi flag in 1920. He combined the swastika with the three colors of the German Imperial flag (red, black, and white).
- As a symbol, it became associated with the idea of a racially “pure” state. By the time the Nazis gained control of Germany, the connotations of the swastika had forever changed.
- Nazi symbols, including the swastika flag, are banned in a number of countries today, including Germany.

Questions for group research:

1. The swastika was the official symbol of Nazi Germany, representative of Nazi ideas. What did Nazi Germany stand for?

2. What rights did the Nazis revoke during the Third Reich?

3. How is the swastika connected to Nazi ideas and beliefs? Can it be separated from it?

4. How does learning this historical context change how you view swastikas?

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Transcript for Helen Goldkind clip

Interviewer: You were talking about what sights or sounds or smells trigger your memories of the war and when you see a chimney that brings back memories. Anything else?

Helen: You know, it just depends, it just depends. A swastika. You know, when I see a swastika I feel I'm in danger. Its—it sounds crazy to other people because other people are not affected at all by a swastika. That swastika cannot hurt you. But what [it] represents to me is something else.

Interview with Helen Goldkind, February 21, 2001

Answer the following using evidence from today's discussion. Answers require a clear assertion and reasoning, supported by evidence from today's readings and discussions:

- Why do symbols carry so much power in societies and cultures?
- Why is the history of a symbol important?
- How can we examine modern-day symbols from a critical viewpoint?
- How did the meaning of the swastika change in the 20th century?