Grievance and Scapegoat

How the Nazis used anger over Versailles

SS24.HOS.4a "Analyze the Treaty of Versailles as a causal factor for the rise of the National Socialist German Workers' Party (Nazi Party), and explain how the Nazis appropriated and manipulated antisemitism to their party's advantage.*"

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Read the passage. Underline a treaty term, number three linked statements showing how it became a political opportunity for the Nazis, and circle a false Nazi claim about Jews.

Turning a Peace Treaty into a Campaign Message

1 In June 1919, representatives of Germany's new democratic government signed the Treaty of Versailles after World War I. The treaty required Germany to accept responsibility for war damage, pay reparations, reduce its armed forces, and surrender territory. Many Germans saw these terms as humiliating and feared that payments would strain an already damaged economy. The new government had not started the war, but its leaders had signed the peace. Opponents called them traitors and blamed the young democracy for a settlement it had little power to change. The treaty thus created a grievance that political movements could use.

2 At public meetings in the early 1920s, Nazi speakers turned that grievance into a promise: reject Versailles and restore German power. Nazi leaders portrayed the treaty as proof that democratic politicians were weak. They linked lost territory, limits on the army, and reparations to a story of national betrayal. These claims offered a simple target for public anger, even though Nazi promises could not erase the war's costs. The treaty alone did not bring the Nazis to power. Later, the Great Depression brought mass unemployment, which made the party's sweeping promises more appealing to some voters.

3 The Nazis also exploited antisemitism, prejudice against Jewish people that existed long before their party. They falsely claimed that Jews had betrayed Germany during the war and helped impose the hated peace. Jewish Germans had served in the German military, and Jews as a group did not control the peace negotiations. Nazi speeches and posters repeated these lies, turning a complex defeat into a false story with a scapegoat. By directing anger at Jews, the Nazis sought supporters and diverted blame from the military and political decisions that had actually shaped the war and its aftermath. Their accusations were propaganda, not evidence.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why could signing the treaty make Germany's new democratic leaders a target for political opponents, even though they had not started the war?

2. Choose one treaty term. How did Nazi speakers use anger about it to make their party's promises appealing?

3. How did the Nazis use a false claim about Jews to turn anger over the treaty to their party's advantage?

4. Why would it be misleading to say the treaty alone explains the Nazis' growing support?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a museum displays a Nazi campaign placard that falsely blames Jews for Versailles. Write an 80 to 105 word label that traces a treaty grievance into a political opportunity for the Nazis, evaluates the placard's claim using passage evidence, and names another factor in Nazi support.

ANSWER KEY

Grievance and Scapegoat

HIGH SCHOOL · SS24.HOS.4a

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Read the passage. Underline a treaty term, number three linked statements showing how it became a political opportunity for the Nazis, and circle a false Nazi claim about Jews. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why could signing the treaty make Germany's new democratic leaders a target for political opponents, even though they had not started the war?	**Opponents blamed the leaders who signed the unpopular treaty and called them traitors, even though the government had little power to change its terms.**
2	Choose one treaty term. How did Nazi speakers use anger about it to make their party's promises appealing?	**For example, Nazis linked limits on Germany's army to a claim that democratic leaders were weak, then promised to restore German power.**
3	How did the Nazis use a false claim about Jews to turn anger over the treaty to their party's advantage?	**They falsely blamed Jews for Germany's defeat and the peace, offering a scapegoat that simplified a complex history and could attract supporters.**
4	Why would it be misleading to say the treaty alone explains the Nazis' growing support?	**The Great Depression later brought mass unemployment, which also made Nazi promises more appealing to some voters.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The placard turns a real grievance into a false accusation. Versailles required Germany to pay reparations and reduce its armed forces, terms many Germans resented. Nazi speakers used that anger to portray democratic leaders as weak and promise renewed power. Blaming Jews then supplied a scapegoat and a simple story that might attract supporters. But Jews as a group did not control the peace negotiations, and Jewish Germans had served in the military. The treaty did not make Nazi success inevitable. Mass unemployment during the Great Depression also made the party's promises more appealing to some voters.

Accept any accurate treaty term linked through public anger to a Nazi political appeal. Responses should clearly identify the antisemitic accusation as false and distinguish the treaty's influence from the effects of the Great Depression.