Inventing an Enemy

Trace how inherited prejudice became a tool of Nazi power.

TOT.C.4.3 "Analyze how the Nazi regime utilized and built on historical antisemitism to create a common enemy of the Jews in order to gain power."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline older anti-Jewish prejudices, circle how the Nazis reshaped or spread them, and number the political effects those claims helped produce.

From Prejudice to State Policy

1 Long before the Nazis came to power, antisemitism had deep roots in Europe. For centuries, some Christian leaders falsely portrayed Jews as enemies of their faith. In many places, laws limited where Jews could live or what work they could do. During crises, people sometimes blamed Jews for disasters they had not caused. These false claims did not describe Jewish people or their actions. They supplied a familiar target for anyone seeking someone to blame. By the early twentieth century, legal equality had expanded in Germany, but anti-Jewish stereotypes still circulated in newspapers and political talk.

2 After Germany's defeat in World War I, the Nazi Party claimed, falsely, that Jews had betrayed the nation from within. Nazi speakers also blamed Jews for unemployment and economic hardship during the Great Depression. They combined older religious prejudice with nineteenth-century racial antisemitism, falsely insisting that Jews were a separate, dangerous "race" even if they had converted to Christianity. Posters, speeches, and newspapers repeated these accusations. By linking different problems to one invented enemy, Nazi leaders offered frightened voters a simple explanation and presented their party as Germany's defender. This message helped the party gain support.

3 The Nazis did not gain power from antisemitism alone. Economic crisis, political instability, and fear of communism also helped them attract support. In January 1933, Germany's president appointed Adolf Hitler chancellor. Once in office, Nazi leaders used their claim of a Jewish enemy to rally supporters and justify excluding Jews from public life. They organized a nationwide boycott of Jewish businesses in April 1933. In 1935, the Nuremberg Laws stripped German Jews of citizenship and banned marriage between Jews and people classified as having "German blood." The regime made its propaganda into state policy while crushing political opposition.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did an older prejudice help the Nazis portray Jews as a threat to Germany? Connect one earlier claim to one Nazi claim.

2. How did the Nazi claim about ancestry differ from an accusation based on religious belief? What did that mean for a Jew who converted to Christianity?

3. Why might blaming Jews for both wartime defeat and economic hardship have helped the Nazi Party gain support?

4. How did the Nazis turn their claim of a Jewish enemy into state policy after Hitler became chancellor? Use two actions from the passage.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 70 to 90 word museum label for a display about Nazi-era newspapers. Explain how an older prejudice became a Nazi political tool, naming a propaganda tactic and an effect on support or policy. Make clear that the accusations against Jews were false.

ANSWER KEY

Inventing an Enemy

HIGH SCHOOL · TOT.C.4.3

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline older anti-Jewish prejudices, circle how the Nazis reshaped or spread them, and number the political effects those claims helped produce. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did an older prejudice help the Nazis portray Jews as a threat to Germany? Connect one earlier claim to one Nazi claim.	**Earlier leaders falsely portrayed Jews as enemies of Christianity. The Nazis drew on that familiar image of an enemy when they falsely claimed Jews had betrayed Germany.**
2	How did the Nazi claim about ancestry differ from an accusation based on religious belief? What did that mean for a Jew who converted to Christianity?	**The Nazis claimed Jewish ancestry, rather than religious practice, made a person dangerous. Under that false claim, conversion to Christianity made no difference.**
3	Why might blaming Jews for both wartime defeat and economic hardship have helped the Nazi Party gain support?	**The false accusations gave voters one supposed cause for different problems and let Nazi leaders present their party as Germany's defender.**
4	How did the Nazis turn their claim of a Jewish enemy into state policy after Hitler became chancellor? Use two actions from the passage.	**The regime organized a nationwide boycott of Jewish businesses in 1933. In 1935, it enacted the Nuremberg Laws, which stripped German Jews of citizenship and banned specified marriages.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

A newspaper stand could turn a familiar prejudice into a political message. For centuries, some Europeans had wrongly treated Jews as outsiders and blamed them for crises. Nazi newspapers drew on these lies while claiming, just as falsely, that Jewish ancestry made someone a threat to Germany. Repeating that story during economic hardship let Nazi leaders pose as protectors and draw support. After Hitler became chancellor in 1933, the regime used the invented enemy to justify a boycott of Jewish businesses and, later, laws that excluded German Jews.

Accept other accurate connections between older antisemitism, Nazi propaganda, and the party's support or policies. Do not accept answers that present antisemitic accusations as facts or claim that antisemitism alone brought the Nazis to power.