

Theme of Economic Perception:

(Mis)perceptions of Jewish wealth fueled antisemitism.

Historical Mis-Perception Questions (Before WWII):

How would you describe Germany's economic situation in the early 20th century (pre-1933)?

Student 1: Germany is in a poor economic situation because of WWI. The people are angry and want someone to blame since things are so terribly bad.

Student 4: Germany lost WWI and has to pay reparations, so the economy is weak. She mentions the Weimar Republic (early 30s) and how Germany needs a stronger leader to latch on to after the Republic, which is how Hitler rose to power.

Student 8: After WWI, Germany had to pay reparations because they lost the war. Their economy is very poor and they don't have a military in place. The whole economy is not in good shape.

Student 3: Germany is suppressed economically and due to German nationalism, people are looking for a leader to unify them.

Conclusion:

- Germany is in poor economic condition due to the loss of WWI
- Reparations must be paid as a result of the war
- Weimar Republic results in a German need for a strong leader
- Nationalism leads to a unified Germany

Which professions do you think Jews exercised in early 20th century Europe (pre-1933)? Please list them by order of concentration (from highest to lowest).

Student 8: Jews are probably involved in many different types of professions, but the perception is that they are involved in money lending. Many run businesses and are shop owners that are forced to close when the Nazis rise to power. Jews are then forced into ghettos and concentration camps.

Student 5: Jews are involved in money and banking. They are also doctors.

Student 1: Jews are doctors. She remembers hearing that when the Nazis begin experimenting on people, Jewish doctors are somewhat present. The Nazis use Jewish doctors in their research to validate their work, since they are very prominent at the time.

Student 4: Jews in Eastern Europe are peddlers who buy and sell many types of things. They are also involved economically in money lending. She mentions the Rothschild Family and their plan to invest in Europe. Jews in Europe are also

involved in journalism. They create their own newspapers and become well known professionals and academics.

Student 7: Jews are involved in journalism, but primarily in money lending. The result is that people are jealous towards Jews, and begin to target them for those reasons.

Student 3: Jews are integrated into society and many are wealthy. It is a great shock when they start having to wear yellow stars. Things accelerate for the worse from that point.

Conclusion:

- Jews are primarily in money lending
- Jews are doctors
- They are peddlers, buyers and sellers of many items
- They are journalists and academics
- Jews are integrated into society and many are wealthy

What were people's perception of Jewish wealth and "influence" in early 20th Century Europe (pre-1933)?

Student 4: It depends on the time period and location. For example, in Eastern Europe many are poor and live in shtetls and villages. They do not really integrate into society. However, if you look at Amsterdam and maybe Germany (central and Western Europe), Jews integrate into society and do not live among themselves, even though they face antisemitism. Jews have an average amount of wealth, and live in areas with non-Jews.

Student 7: Even nowadays when people think of Jews they instantly think of money. He admits that even he has this perception and "everybody has that perception." This perception existed at that time too. It was the same thing.

Conclusion:

- Perception was based on time and location
- Eastern European Jews live in shtetls and villages and do not integrate
- Western European Jews are integrated and wealthy
- Perceptions of Jews and money have not changed

What do you know of "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion," which describes a secret Jewish plan to dominate the world?

Teacher: He asks the class whether they know or have heard anything about this book before coming into high school.

Student 8: He has heard of it being talked about but didn't know what it was until our recent class with the Teacher, when he discussed it in great detail.

Student 3: The first he ever heard about this book was through an antisemitic joke. He doesn't know much of it, but is aware of the themes, like Jews hustling and ruling the world.

Student 4: She learned about it in her 8th grade education class, but it's hard to remember everything. She does know that it originated from Russia and was not written as antisemitic propaganda, and it was distributed worldwide. However, because it was read by so many (by Ford), it changed a lot of people's perceptions of Jews. It talked about how there was a select group of Jews that were going to take over the world and control everything, which sounds a lot like the Rothschild conspiracy that Jews control everything like the media and the banks. This seems to be a common trend within antisemitism. She says it's hard to know what the book is about because every time she learns about it, she hears something different.

Conclusion:

- Know of the book, but do not know what it says
- Heard of the book through an antisemitic joke
- Originates in Russia, and initially not written as antisemitic propaganda
- Jews are going to take over the world, a lot like the Rothschild conspiracy
- Jews control the media and banks

Present Mis-Perception Questions:

What are the most common professions Jews have today?

Student 8: He does not want to generalize a common profession for a Jew, but does know that Jews do have many different jobs. He thinks that Jews do not have any pressure to go into a certain profession because they are Jewish. He believes that everyone chooses their profession based on what they like to do.

Student 5: She would say doctors are the most common since most of her family are doctors. She knows a lot of Jewish lawyers as well. She also spoke of young women who went to Stern College in New York, and went into social work.

Student 4: She knows a lot of Jewish doctors and lawyers, but also Jews who are in the film industry as directors, producers and people working in agencies. She also knows a lot of Jewish teachers and real estate agents.

Student 7: He recognizes that each student is answering this question as a Jew. However, if you are to ask this question to non-Jews, they will most likely say that Jewish professions are doctors and lawyers.

Student 3: He was born and raised on the East Coast and spent a lot of time with the Sephardic and Syrian Community, so his perception is a little different than his classmates. He said "it's a lot of hustling and business", and doing whatever "to make money". They create their own businesses and then sell their businesses. He says that this is a bias and view he holds because of where he is from.

Student 1: She agrees with Student 3's point of view since she has family on the East Coast as well. However, she reflects that she and her classmates are answering this question as wealthy observant Jews. She notes that we are all fortunate enough to attend an expensive Jewish private school, but that there are also many Jews, religious and not religious, that do not have the means to send their children to private schools.

Conclusion:

- Jews do not have a general profession
- Professions include doctors and lawyers
- Jews work in the film industry as directors and producers
- Many also work as teachers and real estate agents
- For the Sephardic Community, perception is different: "it's a lot of hustling and business."
- Point of view taken as a wealthy observant Jew

What percentage of Jews would you consider wealthy today?

Student 4 and Student 3 both ask: "What do you consider wealthy?" We all agree that the middle class and up is considered wealthy. We also recognize that every student in our high school is considered wealthy or middle class.

Student 4: She says that she lives in a "bubble community", since she is currently a student at Shalhevet High School and also went to Sinai Middle School. She says that most of us are middle class because we go to private schools.

Student 1: She also adds that we as Jews, living in West Los Angeles, most likely have more opportunities than Jews living in other parts of the world.

Conclusion:

- Students define the meaning of wealthy as middle class and up
- Most of us are middle class because we go to a private high school
- Jews in West Los Angeles have more opportunities than in other parts of the world

The Pew Research Center recently published a study that shows Jews earn more money than other religions. What do you think is the reason for this?

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/10/11/how-income-varies-among-u-s-religious-groups/>

Student 3: He notices, from his own grandparents, a big overarching theme in the Jewish community's prosperity, "working very hard so that your children can have a better life and their children can have a better life and so forth." His grandparents moved from Europe to Israel and worked very hard to learn Hebrew. They moved to the United States, began to learn English and became taxi drivers. Later, they started their own business. His grandparents value education and he believes Jewish Community does the same.

Student 5: She knows that for Holocaust survivors, after they were liberated from the camps, they were forced to start over and rebuild their lives in a new country. She adds that her great-grandparents and grand-parents each went through this, creating a “chain effect.”

Student 4: She says that her great-grandfather came to the U.S. from Russia to escape the horrible pogroms of 1904. Her family had to build and establish their lives from scratch and eventually were able to move from New York to California. She contrasts her grandparents’ experience on her mom’s side, who were from Jerusalem and extremely poor at the time. She recognizes that a lot of Jews had to escape persecution and recreate their own lives and communities. She also sees the same trend in dedication and hard work from her own American Jewish experience.

Student 7: He says that the Jewish Communities are some of the strongest in the world. The Jewish population is not very large, and therefore, all Jews have a “chip on their shoulders.” Their obligation is to work hard and follow family footsteps to continue their legacy.

Student 3: He says that he is very fortunate to be part of a Jewish Community, especially during such a difficult year. He references that when a Jewish family goes through a hard time, the community comes together for them.

Conclusion:

- Overreaching theme to work hard for “a better life for your children”
- Holocaust survivors were forced to rebuild their lives
- Jewish Communities are strongest in the world
- Jewish population is not large
- Jews have a “chip on their shoulders”

The Teacher added a final question and asked students about their perception of Jews in the media.

Student 1: She thinks that many of the Jews involved in the media are not observant and she sees it more like a “side note” to who they are. She says that Jews involved in the media don’t usually talk about their Judaism. Instead, being Jewish is not so much about religion but viewed as an ethnicity.

Student 4: She says that there are a lot of Jews behind the scenes in the film industry. However, the question is: “how much representation do they really have on screen?” She responds “what is odd is that there are so many Jews involved behind the scenes, but there is a general energy that doesn’t allow them to be represented on screen publicly.” She says that Gal Gadot is one of the few Israeli actresses who is successful in the U.S., and that people in the Jewish Community view her as an example and as a role model (because she was the first). She also says that Natalie Portman was born in Israel but “nobody knows that.”

Student 3: He says that he doesn’t really know much about Jewish influence in

the media, but he did see a photo and trend going around where Jewish people in the film industry were photoshopped with their faces in blue. It seemed “very off and antisemitic.”

Student 4: She adds as a final point that when people recognize Jewish success, Jews are immediately pinned as the enemy. For example, since there are many Jews in the film industry, people think “Jews are trying to control the world, we must make sure they don’t influence this industry.” This general attitude is from people who are against Jews and continues from generation to generation; it never goes away.

Conclusion:

- Jews in the media are not observant, being Jewish is more like a “side note”
- How much Jewish representation do film industry people really have?
- Jews are immediately pinned as the enemy for their success and deemed to control the world.
- Antisemitism continues from generation to generation