

THE PINK TRIANGLE

Gays in the Holocaust (World War II)



Before the Nazi era, Berlin had been home to a vibrant gay and lesbian culture. At the conclusion of World War II, the Allies came upon Nazi concentration camps and other sites of atrocity to find thousands upon thousands of people – suffering terribly, emaciated, near death – whom the SS had incarcerated because they were Jewish, Roma or Sinti, dissenting Lutheran and Catholic Clergy, mentally or physically disabled, homosexuals, political dissidents... the list of groups which offended Adolf Hitler was a long one. While great effort was made to repatriate most victims of Nazi brutality, the homosexual survivors were not “liberated.” At the recommendation of British and American lawyers, the men who had been arrested under Germany’s anti-homosexual ‘Paragraph 175’ statute – identified by the pink triangles many were forced to wear – were to be re-imprisoned. The enforcement of anti-homosexuality laws across the U.S. and Europe, meant that many gay survivors of Nazism faced continued persecution, arrest, and detention long after Hitler was defeated. For decades, most of these men were unable to relate the saga of their torture at the hands of the Nazis for fear of outing themselves to a hostile society. No celebrations. No tearful reunions. No commiseration with friends. No community of survivors with which to share their stories. The German government did not recognize or grant reparations to gay survivors of Nazism until 2002, by which time almost all had died. The Pink Triangle was adopted by the modern LGBT Rights Movement in the 1970s and became emblematic of life and death during the 1980s and 90s when the male homosexual population once again faced mass death – this time by AIDS and the judgmental indifference that condemned them to a “deserved” fate. Once a hallmark of Hitler’s cruelty and madness; the Pink Triangle is now both a universal symbol of LGBT Pride and an international declaration of “NEVER AGAIN!”



Lesson Plan

Level 1: Contributions Approach

1. Activate Prior Experience: During World War II, which group(s) did Hitler consider detrimental to his plans for world domination?
2. Read the biography above and explore this link: <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/classification-system-in-nazi-concentration-camps>.
3. Group Discussion: List Hitler’s targeted groups. How did the Nazis identify each group? What happened to the men who wore a Pink Triangle when the Allies liberated the concentration camps?

Level 2: Additive Approach

1. Why were gay men targeted by the Nazi’s? What was the significance of “Paragraph 175”? Read more about the Pink Triangle and testimonial biographies of some victims at <http://www.scott-safier.com/pinktriangle/witness>. How were gay men treated by the Nazi’s? By other types of Nazi prisoners? By the Allies?
2. When was Paragraph 175 repealed? Why do you think it took so long? When did the German government agree to grant reparations to gay survivors of the Nazis?
3. Extend Knowledge: Why was the Pink Triangle adopted by LGBTQ people as an international symbol decades later?

Level 3: Transformational Approach

1. Read <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/rudolf-brazda-last-known-survivor-of-the-pink-triangle-gay-inmates-of-nazi-concentration-camps-2334053.html>. How would you describe the lessons of Rudolf Brazda, the last known gay survivor of Nazi persecution?
2. Read <https://time.com/5295476/gay-pride-pink-triangle-history/>. Describe how the Pink Triangle was repurposed for LGBTQ Pride.
3. Read <https://www.history.com/news/pink-triangle-nazi-concentration-camps>. In what way has the pink triangle morphed from being a symbol of persecution to one of freedom and liberation?

Level 4: Social Action Approach

1. In many places LGBTQ people are still persecuted. Read https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT_rights_by_country_or_territory and <https://www.amnestyusa.org/7-discriminatory-or-deadly-countries-for-lgbt-people/>. Name two countries which currently persecute LGBTQ people. Does it still happen in the United States? Give examples.
2. How can LGBTQ people be protected while also respecting the sincerely held religious beliefs of those who oppose homosexuality? Should they be? Why or why not?