



Dehumanization

*define dehumanization prejudice*

At the core of evil is the process of dehumanization by which certain other people or collectives of them, are depicted as less than human, as non comparable in humanity or personal dignity to those who do the labeling. Prejudice employs negative stereotypes in images or verbally abusive terms to demean and degrade the objects of its narrow view of superiority over these allegedly inferior persons. Discrimination involves the actions taken against those others based on the beliefs and emotions generated by prejudiced perspectives.

Dehumanization is one of the central processes in the transformation of ordinary, normal people into indifferent or even wanton perpetrators of evil. Dehumanization is like a "cortical cataract" that clouds one's thinking and fosters the perception that other people are less than human. It makes some people come to see those others as enemies deserving of torment, torture, and even annihilation.

In this section, we will examine three forms that dehumanization has taken: Nazi Comic Books against the Jews; Faces of the Enemy—world-wide propaganda images of the "enemy," and "trophy photos" of American citizens posing with African Americans who had been lynched or burned alive—and then portrayed in post cards mailed to family and friends.

**Nazi Comic Books**

Hitler's "final solution" of genocide of all European Jews began by shaping the beliefs of school children through the reading of assigned texts in which Jews are portrayed in a series of increasingly negative scenarios. At the end of these lessons in civics or geography, we see the "reasonable" discriminatory actions that Germans should take toward Jews.

This educational propaganda was intentionally designed to create a dehumanized conception of Jews among students by means of providing them with required texts that were colorful and visually told provocative narratives. Students from primary school



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through High School read these books.

The originator of this idea was Julius Streicher, the editor of a weekly newspaper, Das Sturmer, "The Storm Troope," that spread anti-Semitic propaganda to the general public in Germany. The "facts" presented in his newspaper (for adults, parents, and soon-to-be recruited Nazi SS perpetrators of destruction) were carried over into these school books. Streicher sought to create a perception of Jews as a sub-human race that was a threat to the national state of Germany. The idea was for this total indoctrination of these beliefs in the minds of the young and the old to such an extent that they came to have a conviction about the inferiority of Jews and the need to eliminate the threat they posed to the purity and superiority of the Aryan race.



*Streicher  
concepts  
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The use of stereotyped conceptions of Jews as lecherous old men seducing young Aryan women, of dirty Jewish butchers, unscrupulous Jewish lawyers, hard-hearted Jewish landlords, rich Jewish business men and their wives ignoring the poverty around them, all combined to create a hate-filled image of Jews. In one of these comic books, after providing such "evidence" of the despicable nature of Jews, three conclusions are provided: kicking their children out of German schools, prohibiting them from using public facilities, like parks, and then expelling them from the country. Those "reasonable" consequences that Nazis should create for Jews foreshadows the more sinister ones of putting them all in ghettos, then transporting them to concentration camps, and finally enacting the "final solution" of attempting mass genocide of the entire Jewish population.

Other comic books were in the guise of Geography lessons portraying different races of the world in the traditional stereotyped poses, and illustrating the dramatic comparison between handsome, strong Aryan men and weak, ugly fat Jewish men. Other images show Jews as vermin, as insects carried on the back of the devil.

Another aspect of the process of creating dehumanized images of Jews in the minds of the German populace was later in the process of their destruction to show pictures of their naked bodies, gaunt from starvation, sickness, and overwork in such ways that it was easy to dissociate them from the rest of humanity, to make them look sub human in ways that no other peoples have been.

My access to these Nazi comic books was provided by my colleague and friend, Professor John Steiner, who after having survived 3 years in Nazi concentration camps, started a long-term project of interviewing hundreds of his former tormentors.

*more to  
dehumanize  
Jews*

In addition to simply viewing the images and probably listening to their teachers discussing and explaining them, the children were required to copy the text as practice in penmanship. It was yet another form of indoctrination.

### Faces of The Enemy

What does it take for the citizens of one society to hate the citizens of another society to the degree that they want to segregate them, torment them, even to kill them? It requires a 'hostile imagination,' a psychological construction embedded deeply in their minds by propaganda that transforms those others into "The Enemy." That image is a soldier's most powerful motive, one that loads his rifle with ammunition of hate and fear. That image of a dreaded enemy threatening one's personal well-being and the society's national security emboldens mothers and fathers to send sons to war, and empowers governments to rearrange priorities to turn ploughshares into swords of destruction.

hostile imagination

*View Slides:*

- Faces of the Enemy
  - The Enemy as Enemy of God
  - The Enemy as Barbarian
  - The Greedy Enemy
  - The Enemy as Criminal, Committer of Atrocities, Torturer
  - The Enemy as Rapist, Desecrator of Women and Children
  - Sex and War
  - The Enemy as Death
  - The Enemy as Beast, Reptile, Insect
  - The Enemy as Abstraction
  - Heroic Warfare: The Enemy as Worthy Opponent
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It is all done with words and images. To modify an old adage: Sticks and stones may break your bones, but names can sometimes kill you. The process begins with stereotyped conceptions of the other, dehumanized perceptions of the other, the other as worthless, the other as all-powerful, the other as demonic, the other as an abstract monster, the other as a fundamental threat to our cherished values and beliefs. With public fear notched up and enemy threat imminent, reasonable people act irrationally, independent people act in mindless conformity, and peaceful people act as warriors. Dramatic visual images of the enemy on posters, television, magazine covers, movies, and the internet imprint on the recesses of the limbic system, the primitive brain, with the powerful emotions of fear

how hostile enemy is country



and hate.

Social philosopher, Sam Keen, brilliantly depicts how this hostile imagination is created by virtually every nation's propaganda on its path to war, and the transformative powers on the human psyche of these 'images of the enemy.' Justifications for the desire to destroy these threats are really afterthoughts, merely proposed explanations for the official record, but not for critical analysis of the damage to be done, or being done.



Sam Keen (1986/ 2004). *Faces of the enemy: Reflections on the Hostile Imagination* (Enlarged edition). New York: Harper & Row. Also see the powerful companion DVD produced by Bill Jersey and Sam Keen. Further information is available at [www.samkeen.com](http://www.samkeen.com).

### Postcard Photos of Lynchings

For over 100 years, many American citizens took "vigilante" actions against African Americans by lynching them or burning them alive, on various pretexts. It became common practice to record this violence by taking photos of the murdered men and women along with their murderers and observers. I call them "trophy photos" because they are similar in kind to those taken by big game hunters and fishermen, proudly posing with the dead beasts they had conquered. (I also use the same term for the photos of the abuse of the Abu Ghraib prisoners by the Military Police reserve soldiers.) Many of those posing in the photos were smiling young children. Some argue that the post card industry in America was stimulated by widespread sales of these lynching photos.



Click [here](#) to visit Without Sanctuary, a collection of photographs and postcards taken as souvenirs at lynchings throughout America. [Here are a sample](#) [warning: contains graphic violence] of those images.



A recent publication provides the documentation of these destructive dehumanized practices through copies of the actual postcards and photographs. *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* (2004, Sante Fe, New Mexico: Twin Palms Publishers) J. Allen, H. Als, J. Lewis, & L. Litwak, Eds. and commentators. See also *Ralph Ginzberg's 100 Years of Lynching*. (Baltimore, MD: Black Classics Press.)

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