

HOLOCAUST, from page 4

legislation to Hitler and the Nazi party in the Cabinet."

From there, the Nazis began slowly to pass discriminatory laws.

"In 1933, Jews and other unwanted people were expelled from chess clubs, for example," she said. "It didn't start with murder."

One of the most common questions they get at the Oregon Jewish Museum and Center for Holocaust Education is: Why didn't the Jews leave?

It was in part because they were assimilated into German society, Margles said. They were doctors, lawyers and business owners.

"They couldn't believe it could happen to them, because they were German. So it was utter disbelief. It was, 'Oh, it's bad now, but it's only going to get better,'" she said.

"I think another really important lesson that goes right along with that is there were quotas in most countries where people could have emigrated, but they really couldn't – there wasn't

anywhere to go," Slabosheski said.

In June 1939, the U.S. turned away a ship carrying 937 Jewish asylum seekers because President Franklin D. Roosevelt and State Department officials argued that the refugees posed a threat to national security.

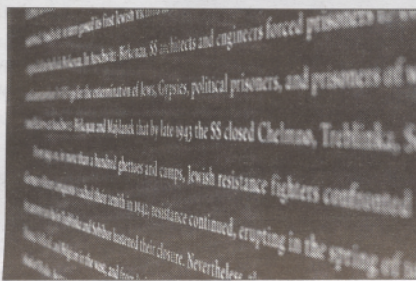


PHOTO BY ARKADY BROWN
The Oregon Holocaust Memorial is inscribed with text about the history of the Holocaust.

The United States has seen a recent rise in reported hate crimes. Was this present in Germany leading up to Hitler's reign?

"You could have the perspective that right now could be the beginning of that, but a lot of other analysis suggests that these groups have been recruiting for 40 years," Slabosheski said. "I think for me personally, we are so in the moment that I don't have the historical distance to say what the comparison is."

Margles pointed out that hate groups have remained present in Oregon since the 1800s.

"I think they've just either been louder or quieter, depending on how loud they think they can be," she said. "If you think back to the '20s, when the Klan was here – the Klan in 1923 was the largest Klan in the country west of the Mississippi, in Oregon."

She said the Neo-Nazi movement quieted down until the 1980s, then got loud again, then retreated back underground and found its home on the web.

"And now, I don't know whether it's more, but it's just a license to use their voices out loud because we have people in high places who are speaking the same rhetoric," she said, referencing a story The New York Times posted earlier that day revealing Trump's earpiece Steve Bannon's affinity for Julius Evola.

Evola is popular among fascists. He was neo-Nazi-associated and a leading proponent of Traditionalism, "a worldview popular in far-right and alternative religious circles that believes progress and equality are poisonous illusions," The Times reported.

Additionally, the omission of Jews from the statement released by the White House on International Holocaust Remembrance

Day was apparently no accident, given that the State Department's statement, which included a reference to Jewish people, was reportedly scrapped by the Trump administration.

Following our interview, Margles was meeting with a Holocaust survivor who had been liberated from the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp.

"She weighed 59 pounds at age 16 when she was liberated. Imagine having that statement released and what she would think," Margles said.

She said her center released a statement in response, calling the omission of Jewish people from the blurb posted by the White House "a grotesque insult to the memory of those who perished and to the survivors amongst us."

Having a propagandist such as Bannon in the White House has raised concerns. He's been credited with turning Breitbart News into an echo chamber for the "alt-right." According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, under Bannon's direction, Breitbart

"aggressively pushed stories against immigrants, and supported linking minorities to terrorism and crime."

Inciting fear of the other is a popular tactic of demagogues and authoritarian regimes.

"The Nazis used propaganda to play on emotions – which was huge – to unite people against a

common enemy, to build up a sense of national pride that people had lost, and to sort of mythologize a historical Germany that didn't really exist," Slabosheski said.

They explained the Nazis glorified Germany of the past through imagery, old German songs and clothing and parades that promoted nationalist pride.

"Make Germany great again," Margles lamented.

But Trump's America has an X factor. "One of the most important things about teaching Holocaust history, especially in this time, is the idea that the Holocaust wasn't inevitable," Slabosheski said. "It required the participation from millions of people who didn't stand up and didn't say no to all of these measures that were being enacted."

Both women agreed: In the years leading up to the Holocaust, Germany didn't see anything that came close to the protests and outcry that Trump's exclusionary measures have wrought from U.S. citizens.

"That thing that happened in Arizona a couple nights ago – they were deporting this woman and people were just – it's just incredible – people came out and just blocked this (Customs) car," Margles said. "People are really protesting right now, and they're not going to be stopped."

She warns, however, that citizens must never normalize Trump's policies.

"The moment we wake up and we say, 'It's starting to feel kind of normal; I guess this is what it is,' we are in big trouble," she said.

She was asked, isn't that what Americans have been doing for decades with other forms of oppression, such as mass



PHOTO BY EMILY GREEN
Judith Margles (left) is the executive director of the Oregon Jewish Museum and Center for Holocaust Education. April Slabosheski is a Holocaust educator for the organization.

incarceration and immigrant detention centers? "You are absolutely right," she replied, "and that's humiliating."

Suddenly, people are concerned about issues they were aware of but did nothing about in the past, she said.

"If he is impeached, are people going to say, 'Phew!?' Are we going to climb back under our tables and do the things we've always done and just let the other indignities, which aren't quite as bad as what we're seeing now, continue?" Margles asked. "Then I think we've done a really terrible disservice."

Slabosheski said she's noticed a difference among students she educates when visiting local schools. She typically ends her lessons by asking the class what kind of a country they are living in, in comparison to what they had just learned. Now, she said, she doesn't have to bring it up because students are already chiming in with comparisons to mass incarceration and other issues they see on the news.

"To say that *this* is about to be the Holocaust, kind of inevitable-izes what's happening now," Slabosheski said. She said she worries thinking that way could result in people feeling helpless, which could lead to less civic engagement.

"That's not why one should study Holocaust history. Because there are all these moments when people could have stepped in, and a lot of people did step in, but not enough," she said.

"This is not a fascist country," Margles said, "but things are odd right now."

Margles said the Oregon Jewish Museum and Center for Holocaust Education has been fielding more calls than usual since the election.

In some cases, primary schools reach out to the center when a swastika shows up on a bathroom wall. When that happens, the center sends a local Holocaust survivor, educator or docent to speak to students.

Usually the center would get about three calls like that a year, but at the time of our interview Feb. 10, the center had received that many calls – all directly in response to a hate-related incident at a school – during the past week alone.

That doesn't necessarily mean incidences are increasing, Margles said. It could just mean the response to such incidents is changing.

"What we're doing matters now more than ever," she said. "If we can help people to better understand, I feel really proud of that."

The White Rose

While most Germans remained silent during the Holocaust, many for fear of death, a professor and a small group of students at the University of Munich formed a resistance group called The White Rose. From June 1942 to February 1943, they anonymously distributed leaflets in the hopes of inciting action and resistance among their fellow Germans. Members of the group's core were all discovered and executed.

This is an excerpt from the second leaflet The White Rose distributed in 1942:

It is impossible to engage in intellectual discourse with National Socialism because it is not an intellectually defensible program. It is false to speak of a National Socialist philosophy, for if there were such an entity, one would have to try by means of analysis and discussion either to prove its validity or to combat it. In actuality, however, we face a totally different situation. At its very inception this movement depended on the deception and betrayal of one's fellow man; even at that time it was inwardly corrupt and could support itself only with constant lies. After all, Hitler states in an early edition of "his" book (a book written in the worst German I have ever read, in spite of the fact it has been elevated to the position of the Bible in this nation of poets and thinkers): "It is unbelievable, to what extent one must betray a people in order to rule it." If at the start of this cancerous growth in the nation was not particularly noticeable, it was only because there were still enough forces at work that operated for the good, so that it was kept under control. As it grew larger, however, and finally in an ultimate spurt of growth broke open, as it were, and infected the whole body. ... If the German does not at last start up out of his stupor, if he does not protest wherever and whenever he can against this clique of criminals, if he shows no sympathy for these hundreds of thousands of victims. He must evidence not only sympathy; no, much more: a sense of complicity in guilt. For through his apathetic behavior he gives these evil men the opportunity to ask as they do; he tolerates this "government" which has taken upon itself such an infinitely great burden of guilt; indeed he himself is to blame for the fact that it came about at all!