In teaching about the Holocaust, we often start with a lecture/discussion of the very terms people have used to describe its events. This is both a useful and a necessary preface to actually teaching about the Holocaust. While many (if not all?) of your students will have heard of the Holocaust, they may or may not have heard the terms, 'Final Solution,' or *Churb'n*. But teaching these terms isn't only about enriching your students' vocabulary. Teaching these terms, focusing your students' attention on the language they use to describe the Holocaust, is one way for them to begin the difficult project of learning to think critically. After all, each of these terms casts the meaning of the Holocaust differently. Certain terms imply 'Jewish' perspectives (*Churb'n*/*Shoah*) or 'Nazi' perspectives ('Final Solution'); other terms have decidedly political consequences (genocide). Even the ways that we write these terms or speak them have political overtones. What does it mean, for example, to capitalize the 'H' in Holocaust vs. writing it with a lower-case 'h'? Is there only one Holocaust, or are there holocausts? Does the distinction matter? In Simone's years of teaching, her 8th grade students were as adept as her college students at discussing the issues and implications involved in using different terms.

When teaching these terms, we usually lecture about their meanings first since we assume that most students don't know their derivations, even when they have heard the terms themselves. We think of teaching in this instance as providing a kind of baseline or platform of understanding that enables everyone to participate in discussions afterwards. We like to teach about each term and then pause to ask the following questions: What does this term imply? What's good about this term? What are the problems this term raises? Who do you think uses this term now, and how? And, how is it different to use this term now than it was when the term first appeared? After we have discussed each term's pros and cons, we ask students to consider which terms are most popular now, why they think that is, and which of the terms they prefer to use and why. We encourage you to make sure that your students know how you'll be using these terms, too, as those decisions will elucidate how you've structured their learning this content. In the following section, Terms for the Event,the names for the Holocaust are listed in approximate chronological order of their appearance, and some implications of each name are included.

The big ideas of this chapter are that:

- There are many terms used to refer to the Holocaust, all of which carry particular moral implications.
- Your students should learn the terms and discuss their implications, which should expose you, as their teacher, to their orientations towards this history and vice versa (expose them to your orientation).

The key terms of this chapter include: 'Final solution', Adolf Hitler, *Wermacht, Einsatzgruppen*, Wannsee Conference, *Churb'n*, genocide, Rafael Lemkin, Auschwitz, Theodore Adorno, Holocaust, *Shoah*, *Gezerot tash-tashah,* and *Poreimas*

Terms for the Event

'Final Solution' (1941): This term was used originally by the upper echelons of the Nazi hierarchy to describe the mass murder of Jews, or, in Nazi terminology, the 'Final Solution' to the so-called 'Jewish Question.' Though it was used within the Nazi

government to mean other, preliminary steps in the process of annihilation, this was the term which ultimately referred to the plan to murder all of European (and eventually all of world) Jewry.

Hermann Goring was one of the original members of Hitler's party, one of the few who supported him even before **Adolf Hitler** was elected to office in 1933. As such, he became an exceedingly important member of Hitler's cabinet, overseeing and coordinating armament agencies. On July 13, 1941, Goring sent out the following order, which referred (only obliquely) to the planned mass murder of Jews:

> I hereby commission you to carry out all necessary preparations with regard to organizational, substantive and financial viewpoints for a total solution of the Jewish question in the German sphere of influence in Europe.
>
> Insofar as the competencies of other central organizations are hereby affected, these are to be involved.
>
> I further commission you to submit to me promptly an overall plan showing the preliminary organizational, substantive, and financial measures for the execution of the intended final solution of the Jewish question.

Although this order was sent to a subordinate of Goring's in July, which one might assume meant that the mass murder of Jews was not yet in place, the opposite is the case. In fact, the plan to murder European Jews as an entire group was already in place by June 22, 1941, when the German army (the ***Wermacht***) advanced into the Soviet Union. Attached to these army units were so-called 'special units,' ***Einsatzgruppen***, whose job it was to round up Jews from the areas overtaken and to shoot them *en masse*. By September of 1941, the Nazis were already experimenting with Zyklon B gas at Auschwitz to see whether it could be used to kill people; in December, they were experimenting with gas vans at Chelmno to establish exactly how. Clearly, the policy of mass murder had already been established.

On January 20, 1942, the top leaders of the **Third *Reich***, the Nazi German government, gathered to decide how best to implement Goring's orders. They met just outside of Berlin at Wannsee, which is why this conference is referred to (in English) as the **Wannsee Conference**. Commonly associated with the origination of the term, 'Final Solution,' the actual 'Final Solution' was already underway.

Some notes on the term: Like the majority of language used in Nazi talk, policy and documentation, the term 'Final Solution' is euphemistic, that is, in doesn't refer directly to what it means, but shrouds its meaning. The very euphemism, however, illuminates Nazi ideology since mass murder of Jews was seen as a 'solution.' A problem of the term is therefore that it doesn't seem to include non-Jewish victims of Nazi genocide (for example Sinti and Roma, who used to be referred to as 'Gypsies.') As a side note, we never allow students to write the term (or other similar Nazi-generated terminology) without using single or double quotation marks around it, if only to reinforce the notion that it is a Nazi term and that it implies that the mass murder of Jews is positive. (Solution is a positively weighted term.)

Churb'n: This Yiddish term for the Holocaust was used by Eastern European Jews even as early as their being ghettoized, which in the case of Poland began in 1939. From the root word, cherev (spelled with the Hebrew letter *chet*), which means sword, the word came to mean warfare. It had been the Yiddish term that Eastern European Jews used to

describe the destruction of the Temple, and before the ghettos were established in Poland in 1939, the Yiddish term was used to describe any great catastrophe.

Some notes on the term: There is something especially appropriate about using a Yiddish term—a term in a language whose embedding culture was wiped out—to describe the destruction of European Jewry. That said, Yiddish doesn't cover all Jews targeted by the Nazis. Greek Jews from the upper classes, for example, sometimes spoke Greek at home, *Ladino* for Jewish celebrations, and learned French and German as academic languages. Moreover, the term implies again a kind of exclusion of non-Jewish victims of the Holocaust, since non-Jews certainly didn't speak Yiddish.

Genocide (1944): **Rafael Lemkin**, a Polish born Jew, lost 49 members of his family in the Holocaust. He invented the term 'genocide' just in time to use it as a lawyer during the Nuremberg Trials. One of the unsung heroes of the fight for universal human rights, Lemkin went on to almost single-handedly draft the proposal, which he presented at the first meeting of the United Nations in San Francisco in 1948. He also almost single-handedly got the member nations to sign on to its terms, a truly historical legacy. The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment for the Crime of Genocide became incorporated into the Geneva Conventions, which meant that nations incurred moral, legal, and military consequences for those instances later deemed to be genocide.

Lemkin invented the term in order to provide an alternative term to 'Final Solution' since he didn't want to use Nazi terminology. He also wanted a term that would be more general than 'Final Solution,' one that would be more general than the specific annihilation of Jews. Lemkin invented the prefix from the Greek root, *gen* from *genus*, which refers to birth. This is the same root found in the words: gentleman, genius, genetics. He combined *gen* with the Latin *cide* from the root *cidera*, which means to cut or kill. This is the same suffix as found in the words: homicide, suicide, deicide.

In regular usage, the term has come to mean "the deliberate extermination of an ethnic or national group" (this according to the Oxford English Dictionary definition). When he termed the phrase, though, Lemkin proposed the following definition:

> Generally speaking, genocide does not necessarily mean the immediate destruction of a nation, except when accomplished by mass killings of all members of a nation. It is intended rather to signify a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves. The objectives of such a plan would be the disintegration of the political and social institutions, of culture, language, national feelings, religion, and the economic existence of national groups, and the destruction of the personal security, liberty, health, dignity, and even the lives of the individuals belonging to such groups. Genocide is directed against the national group as an entity, and the actions involved are directed against individuals, not in their individual capacity but as members of a national group.

Notes on the term: Interestingly, there is no mention of political groups being the potential victims of genocide according to this definition. The Russian emissary to the first U.N. meeting was present when the resolution passed and had wanted to make sure that Stalin could not be considered guilty of genocide. Sadly, as a result of the important moral, legal and economic consequences the term 'genocide' carries with it, governments purposefully avoid using the term in order to avoid intervention. Some people appreciate the 'clinical' or scientific sound of this term, implying as it does a

calculated rationality to mass murder. Others dislike the coldness it conveys, as if the term itself denies the humanity of victims of genocide. As a side note, Lemkin believed that the term ought to be capitalized whenever it was used as a way to further emphasize is horrendousness, no matter what the particulars. We do not capitalize it in this book as a way to recognize its tragic everydayness, the fact that at this point in history, it seems to occur frequently, if not constantly.

Auschwitz (1950s): **Theodore Adorno**, the great German-Jewish philosopher, launched many thousands of essays in response to his famous quotation, "After Auschwitz, to write poetry is barbaric." While Adorno modified his claim somewhat after reading the poetry of Paul Celan, what is important for our purposes is his use of 'Auschwitz' to refer to the Holocaust as a whole. In the 1950s, it was quite common for people to refer to the atrocities in general through reference to the largest concentration and death camp, Auschwitz. Though it's uncommon today to speak about the Holocaust as 'Auschwitz,' the use of the term then highlights how little was known in the immediate aftermath of the events.

Notes on the term: It could be said that Auschwitz has become a symbol for the Holocaust and that using the term Auschwitz to refer to the Holocaust highlights the central symbolic image of the gas chambers and crematoria. One problem with this term, though, is that it tends to overshadow other kinds of experiences Holocaust victims and survivors encountered. It used to be the case, for example, that 'survivor' only referred to a survivor of a concentration camp, whereas now we tend to consider Holocaust survivors as those who spent the war years in hiding, in full view with false papers, in ghettos, forests, labor camps, etc. The term is also a little vague since Auschwitz the camp included the camp Birkenau and many smaller satellite camps, and since the name of the concentration camp was also the name of the town (*Oswiecim* in Polish) in which it was located.

Holocaust (1950's): Elie Wiesel is said to have fathered this term in the same way that Columbus discovered America; in other words, he was credited with its officiation, but was not in fact its inventor. He was, however, one of the first people to use the term in print in the mid-1950's. That said, the term was not widely used until the 1970s, following the airing of a television mini-series of the same name. This term is now the most widely used, the most widely known, and perhaps as a result, the most widely contested term for the atrocities committed under the Nazi regime.

The term comes from the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, which was completed somewhere around 200 BCE. The Hebrew word being translated was *olah*, from Genesis 22: 13: "Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son." The wholly burnt offering here is the *olah*, and the Greek translation of the word was 'holocaust.' The prefix, holo-, came from the Greek root, *holos*, which means whole, total, complete. It's the same prefix as in the words holistic or hologram. The suffix of the word *caust* came from the root word *caustos* which means to burn. This is the same root found in the word cauterize.

According to its etymology, then, the word Holocaust links the victimization of Jews under the Third *Reich* to the almost-sacrifice of Isaac in the Hebrew Bible. Many thinkers have objected to this linkage considering its ramifications. The term itself likens the Jews murdered by Nazis and their collaborators to Isaac, which implies that murders under the 'Third *Reich*' served a divine purpose. After all, God commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. In that analogy, too, the Nazis become God's instruments, since they are likened to Abraham. The implication throughout is that God played a role in the

perpetration of these events, or at least, that God was included in their universe. The term itself, in short, locates these specific atrocities within a theological terrain, which for many people, is unacceptable. The Holocaust, they might argue, despite this term, was not an example of God's inhumanity to man, but of 'man's inhumanity to man,' or, put in non-sexist language, people's capacity for inhumanity.

Notes on the term: Most of the early debates swirling around use of this term concerned its theological underpinnings. Since the term has become so widely used and widely understood, most of the more recent debates concern its vagueness. Does the Holocaust include only Jewish victims of the Nazis or all victimized groups? Is there only one Holocaust (so that it should be capitalized), or are there many examples of holocausts? And, does the Holocaust refer to all of the anti-Jewish activity in Nazi Germany (which would mean it began in 1933), or does it refer only to those activities that were directed towards mass murder (which would mean that most people date it to 1939, the establishment of ghettos, or to 1941, the year the 'Final Solution' became operationalized)? These days, when people write about the Holocaust, they typically define their terminology along these axes in order to orient their readers. In this book, we capitalize the Holocaust to indicate its special status in history, but we consider the Holocaust to have included not only Jewish victims, but all of it victims, Jewish and non-Jewish.

Shoah (1940s): This Hebrew term, like Holocaust, has Biblical origins, but this time, those origins are not connected to the will of God as much as to destruction wrought by human hands. For many, then, the term, *Shoah*, is preferable to the term, Holocaust. The Hebrew word appears in Proverbs 1: 27, "When your fear cometh as desolation (*shoah*), and your destruction comes as a whirlwind." This prophecy references the destruction of the great Jewish Temple, which some have argued is a historic rather than a religious event. The enemies of the Biblical people Israel devastated the great temple; God did not.

Notes on the term: For some, the fact that this term is in Hebrew is positive. That it is in Hebrew implies that the *Shoah*, unlike the Holocaust, is about an event in Jewish history, as opposed to an event in European or world history, and that it concerns Jewish victimization, rather than the victimization of Soviet prisoners of war, Sinti or Roma (previously known as Gypsies), Jehovah's Witnesses, or other persecuted groups.

Gezerot tash–tashah: It used to be the case that in Ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities, the Holocaust was referred to obliquely as "the Decrees of 1939–1945." (*Tash-tashah* refers in shorthand to the years 1939-1945 in the Hebrew calendar.) Stated this way, the 'decrees' allows the period to be thought of as either God's work or humans', though *gezerot* were usually considered human decrees. More recently, however, the ubiquity of the term, Holocaust, has meant that it has seeped into Ultra-Orthodox Jewish usage.

Poreimas: The group that used to be called 'Gypsies' now refer to themselves as the Sinti and Roma peoples. 'Gypsy' was not only a term that had become derogatory, but it was originally applied to this group when they were thought to have originated in Egypt. In fact, the Sinti and Roma originated in Northern India and migrated to Europe during the Middle Ages. The Romani term for the Holocaust is *Poreimas*, which translates roughly as 'the Devouring.' Referring to the specific 'devouring' of the Sinti and Roma during the Holocaust, this term is relatively recent and not many Sinti and Roma use it. Almost directly opposite of Jewish tradition, Roma tradition espouses a kind of forgetting, a dismissal of history in favor of "seizing the day." As the historian, Inga Clendinnen puts

it, "they have chosen not to bother with history at all, because to forget, with a kind of defiant insouciance…is the Gypsy [sic] way of enduring."[1]

Teaching Ideas

1. **Your Preference:** Ask your students to simply write for a few minutes about which term they prefer, why, and what it says about them as people. Some teachers refer to this as a "thinking break," an opportunity for each student to collect their thoughts and form opinions individually before discussing them as a group. To begin the discussion, ask each student to go around the room, share their preference, and give one reason for that preference. Make sure your students know that they are entitled to have different opinions about the matter, and that they need not debate which term is right. How would they go about asking others to use the term they think of as the best one?

2. **Word Bubbling:** After hearing this list of terms and their origins, try having your students freely associate words. What do they associate with one of these terms? Go around the room, and encourage the students, as fast as they can, to mention the next word that pops into their minds. You can do this activity in pairs or as a group. You can also do this activity aloud (which is preferable because it's a quicker form) or in writing (which is preferable because it's more private). If the activity gets to silly words, it's a great opportunity to discuss why; why do you think your mind tends towards funny or lightweight associations rather than dwelling in horror? What can that tell us about the endeavor of studying the Holocaust?

3. **Conceptual Mapping:** After distributing blank pieces of colored paper, scissors and tape, ask your students to "map" these words visually. How do they see the relationships between these terms? Which terms are the larger categories or the smaller categories? Which terms are umbrella terms or tree root terms? After the students have had a chance to think and intellectually map, have them explain aloud why they designed their maps as they did.

   The famous Israeli historian of the Holocaust, Yehuda Bauer, for example, puts genocide and Holocaust on the same continuum, but argues that genocide is less extreme than Holocaust. After all, according to Lemkin's definition, genocide can refer to the moral corruption of victims, or to the appropriation of economic advantage by the perpetrators, both of which are less extreme than mass murder.

4. **Uses of the Term:** If you or your students have access to the web during school hours, it's a fascinating activity to look at some of the uses of the term, Holocaust. At the time of this writing, for example, there is a slide show at the website for **People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals** (PETA), which compares the mass murders of victims, not explicitly Jews, during the Holocaust to the slaughter of animals for mass consumption today. The slide show is entitled "Holocaust on Your Plate," and it contains quotations like: "To animals, all people are Nazis," (attributed to Isaac Bashevis Singer, the writer of Yiddish comedic fiction), and "Our grandchildren will ask us one day, 'Where were you during the Holocaust of the animals?'" The slides are carefully paired to show, on the left-hand side, images of emaciated or tortured people, and on the right, a

[1] Inga Clendinnen, *Reading the Holocaust* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 8.

visually similar image of emaciated or tortured animals. PETA members would like you to consider the paired images as morally equivalent, not only visually similar. Thus the slide show not only elevates the cause of veganism, but denigrates the sanctity of human life.

In addition, there used to be a record store in San Mateo, California, called 'The Vinyl Solution.' And there's a famous episode of the television show, Seinfeld, called the 'Soup Nazi.' These examples and others, which your students can bring to your attention, can catalyze important discussions around questions like these: When should the word, Holocaust be used for an event other than this Holocaust? When should any of these words be used? What happens to these original meanings when they're used for non-historical purposes? Should the term Holocaust be considered sacred in some way? Why or why not? Why is it people refer to the Holocaust in these ways? How do you feel about these uses, and what do you feel it's important to do about them?

5. **Charting Genocide**: An introduction to names for the Holocaust can help your students begin to identify the axes that are important in understanding all genocides. As your students listen to your lecture, have them write a list of factors that seem important. Their lists might include, for example, the intention of the perpetrators (to conquer, exploit or murder), the parts annihilated (culture/economy/people), wartime or peace-time, etc. Brainstorm the list together, have the students then group and sort them. Then, create a chart together that lists the features of all genocides. As your study progresses, you may want students to refer back to this chart, noting how some of these aspects changed. And, when your study of the Holocaust is complete, your students should be able to use these features to compare the Holocaust to other instances of genocide.

Resources for Teaching and Further Learning

Bauer, Yehuda. *A History of the Holocaust.* New York: Scholastic Books, 2001.
A fabulous and thorough textbook. Useful as a reference text.

Clendinnen, Inga. *Reading the Holocaust.* Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
A beautifully written set of reflections on Holocaust scholarship, this book weaves the way through various historiographical dilemmas.

Fonseca, Isabel. *Bury Me Standing: The Gypsies and Their Journey.* New York: Vintage Books, 1996.
Though relatively little of this book deals with the Sinti and Roma's experiences during the Holocaust, the section that does is, like the rest of the book, beautifully written, personal and fascinating.

Novick, Peter. *The Holocaust in American Life.*Boston*:* Houghton Mifflin, 1999.
Crafted by an eminent historian, this book documents public attitudes towards the Holocaust in the U.S.A. in the decades since 1945. Though sometimes his narration is too glib for our taste, the book is excellent. With regards to this chapter's content, it ablydocuments the political uses to which the Holocaust has been put.

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, Website: **http://www.masskilling.com/exhibit.html.**

This website contains a gruesome slide show entitled "Holocaust on Your Plate" in which the term, Holocaust, is applied, graphically, to the slaughter of animals for mass consumption.

Power, Samantha. *"A Problem from Hell": America in the Age of Genocide,* New York: Basic Books, 2002.

A phenomenal study of U.S. involvement (and non-involvement) in the genocides of the 20th century, this book contains chapters on Lemkin, the Holocaust, Iraq, Bosnia, Rwanda and other genocides.

Shandler, Jeffrey. *While America Watches: Televising the Holocaust.* Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1999.

This seminal book examines how the Holocaust was transmitted via popular culture to millions of Americans, and how it became a cultural icon as a result.