Holocaust Memorial Day 2027 Theme
- No Place for Prejudice -

HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY TRUST

Introduction

This theme grounds discussion in historical evidence and lived experience. It recognises multiple persecuted groups while maintaining the specificity of the Holocaust and distinguishes between prejudice and discrimination without collapsing differences. By focusing on systems, impact and responsibility, rather than intent alone, it creates space for thoughtful, informed dialogue.

The theme can be explored in two ways. Firstly, through a historical lens, examining how prejudice shaped and enabled the Holocaust. Secondly, as an urgent moral challenge for today, recognising that prejudice is not only a feature of the past, but a present and growing reality that demands action. Using the theme to recognise where prejudice still operates, including within institutions meant to protect people. Prejudice is not only overt hatred. It includes everyday assumptions, exclusions, hierarchies and silences that normalise discrimination. Understanding the origins of prejudice explains why the Holocaust did not emerge suddenly in 1933. It was rooted in centuries of antisemitism across Europe; ideas about belonging, exclusion, and whose lives mattered.

The theme invites reflection on how prejudice is learned, reinforced, embedded in so many places: in culture, law, religion, education, community life and in social and leisure spaces, and excused as normal or inevitable.

The roots of antisemitism

Antisemitism (anti-Jewish hatred) was embedded in European societies long before Nazi rule. Medieval myths such as blood libel and deicide accusations had isolated Jewish communities for centuries. Nazi ideology did not invent these prejudices; it radicalised and weaponised them. Long-standing anti-Jewish stereotypes made exclusion appear justified, inevitable, or someone else's problem, enabling indifference and complicity.

How prejudice became normalised

Once in power, the Nazi regime translated prejudice into policy through ordinary governance. Institutions that had existed before 1933, such as civil service, police, welfare, education and medicine, implemented racial ideology as routine administration. Bureaucratic language and professional norms created moral distance, disguising persecution as procedure.

Civil servants defined who was Jewish through ancestry records, enforced the Nuremberg Laws, organised property confiscations and compiled deportation lists using census data and transport schedules. Terms such as "resettlement" and "special treatment" masked violence behind administrative neutrality.

Police forces enforced antisemitic laws, conducted raids, guarded ghettos and deportation points, and applied Paragraph 175 against gay men. Uniforms and legal authority framed persecution as "law and order."
Welfare systems and social services excluded Jewish families from benefits and housing, while racial criteria determined who was "eligible" for support. Roma and Sinti communities were registered and labelled "asocial," justifying segregation and eventual deportation.
Medicine and public health played a central role. Doctors promoted racial hygiene, carried out forced sterilisation, and selected people with disabilities for killing under the T4 programme, describing some lives as "life unworthy of life." Murder was framed as treatment, prevention or economic necessity.
Schools and universities normalised racial hierarchy. Textbooks dehumanised Jewish people, Roma and Sinti, and portrayed people with disabilities as "a terrible, heavy burden upon their relatives and society as a whole." Jewish academics were dismissed, and research aligned with racial theory. Prejudice was not only enforced, it was taught and internalised.

The Holocaust demonstrates that prejudice does not remain at society's margins. It can become embedded within trusted institutions, expressed through law, expertise and routine professional practice, and applied across racial, biological and social categories.

The unexpected places where prejudice existed

This theme challenges comforting assumptions.
Respected professions: doctors, teachers and civil servants enacted exclusion as part of their professional duties.
Religious and cultural spaces: some institutions, such as Churches, displayed propaganda posters, reinforced antisemitic teachings or remained silent to protect themselves.
Youth & socialisation: Hitler Youth and the League of German Girls normalised racial hierarchy through games, songs and camps.
Education: In school maths problems, students were calculating the "cost" to the state of providing support to people with disabilities.
Public leisure & social spaces: From 1933, public restrictions were placed on Jewish life. "Jews not wanted" signs were posted in parks and swimming pools as well as segregated benches. Bicycles and radios were confiscated from Jewish people, who additionally were subject to curfews.
Communities: Neighbours denounced Jewish families, seized property or chose indifference.

Impact of prejudice

Prejudice has immediate and lasting consequences for everyday life. It isolates people, marks them as "other," and limits where they can live, work and participate in

society. Under Nazi rule, those targeted by discriminatory laws and policies were gradually excluded from spaces others took for granted; schools, parks, workplaces, shops and social life. Prejudice also affected financial security and access to resources. Jewish people lost jobs and businesses through "Aryanisation," while others targeted by the regime faced restrictions on housing, welfare and employment. These measures disrupted ordinary daily life and pushed communities to the margins. Over time, such exclusions made discrimination appear normal, preparing the ground for more severe persecution.

More recent examples of where prejudice became normalised

The Holocaust took place in a distinct historical context. However, looking at the other communities that are remembered and commemorated on Holocaust Memorial Day shows recurring patterns in how persistent and normalised prejudice can create the conditions in which violence becomes possible.

Rwanda: Before the 1994 genocide, extremist media such as RTLM radio repeatedly described Tutsis as "cockroaches" and enemies within, using dehumanising language that helped turn neighbours into targets of violence.
Cambodia: Under the Khmer Rouge, "new people", urban residents, intellectuals and professionals, were labelled corrupt and dangerous, justifying forced labour, starvation and execution.
Bosnia: Nationalist propaganda portrayed Bosnian Muslims as outsiders and enemies, framing them as a threat and helping justify segregation, forced displacement and violence.
Darfur: In Darfur, racialised language depicted targeted communities as inferior or as outsiders, fuelling division and supporting campaigns of violence and displacement.

In many places, prejudice has continued long after liberation.

Why this theme matters now

Across the UK today, many people experience prejudice not as a distant issue, but as part of everyday life; on the street, online, in workplaces and in education. For some, this creates a constant sense of vulnerability and fear. Incidents of hate can escalate quickly, with visible acts of hostility often triggering wider waves of abuse. However, much prejudice does not meet a criminal threshold. It can appear in everyday comments, assumptions, exclusion or unequal treatment; subtle, persistent and often dismissed, yet deeply harmful in its impact.

Prejudice today often presents itself as 'common sense', 'tradition', 'free speech' or 'security', making it harder to recognise and easier to ignore, yet no less harmful. The Holocaust shows how quickly such justifications can escalate when left unchallenged.

The theme encourages people to ask, and to act:

- Where do I see prejudice being normalised?
- Who benefits from it?
- Who is harmed when it is ignored?
- Would I stand up against prejudice now?

Leaving no place for prejudice means more than rejecting hatred. It requires challenging dehumanising language, questioning unfair policies, and refusing to treat exclusion as normal. Especially when it appears lawful or socially acceptable. History shows that prejudice grows when tolerated and diminishes when individuals and institutions take responsibility.

Examples today of prejudice against individuals, community and faith buildings

Hatzola ambulance arson attack (2026) London.
A volunteer ambulance belonging to the Jewish emergency service Hatzola was deliberately set on fire, with police treating the incident as a hate crime. The attack highlighted how antisemitism can extend beyond individuals to institutions that support and protect communities.

Heaton Park Synagogue attack (2025) Manchester.
A violent attack at a synagogue on Yom Kippur highlighted how antisemitism can escalate rapidly and target people during religious observance.

Mosque Arson attack (2025) Peacehaven, East Sussex.
A mosque and community centre was deliberately set on fire by masked individuals, with police treating the incident as a hate crime.

Attack on gay couple (2022) Missing Bar, Birmingham.
Two men were assaulted physically and with verbal homophobic abuse while leaving a night out at a gay bar, this led to a rise in Police protection for the LGBTQ+ community in this area.

Euros 2020 Racist abuse (2021, ongoing impact) UK-wide.
Black England players were subjected to widespread racist abuse online after the final, demonstrating how racism continues to manifest at scale in digital spaces.

Questions for reflection

As you plan your HMD event, you may wish to consider including reflections:

- Which places do we assume prejudice “doesn’t belong” and why? Are there any places where prejudice is acceptable?
- Why is prejudice harder to see within trusted institutions?
- How do we respond, when challenging prejudice carries social or professional risk?
-What would it mean, in practice, to leave no place for prejudice?

Across history and today, there are always individuals who choose to stand against prejudice, leading by example and showing moral courage in the face of hostility. As Elie Wiesel wrote, 'Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim.'

If prejudice can exist anywhere, then it must be challenged everywhere.

Further Reading, Resources, and Organisations

As well as the links in this paper, the following are recommended:

Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, *hmd.org.uk*
Our range of life stories from people affected by the Holocaust and persecution in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur

Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, *It Began with Words (film)*
It Began with Words explores how the Holocaust began not with violence, but with words, with stereotypes, prejudice and silence.

Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men* (Introduction)
A highly accessible exploration of how ordinary reserve police officers became perpetrators. Strong on conformity, obedience and moral choice.

Deborah Lipstadt, *Antisemitism: Here and Now*
Clear explanation of how antisemitic ideas adapt and reappear.

Richard Plant, *The Pink Triangle*
Accessible history of the persecution of gay men under Nazism.

Stephen Unwin, *Beautiful Lives: How We Got Learning Disabilities So Wrong*
The startling and rarely told history of learning disabilities

Disabled Journalists Association, *Diabolical Plans*
A series looking in-depth at the violence against people with disabilities by the Nazis

Philip Gourevitch, *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families.* *A j*ournalistic account of Rwanda with a strong focus on dehumanising propaganda.

Organisations:

HMD Partnership Group
Anne Frank Trust UK
Community Security Trust (CST)
Holocaust Educational Trust
HOPE not hate
Holocaust Learning UK
Shoah Foundation
Vision Schools Scotland
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
Yad Vashem