



Protective Custody: Prisoner 34042

by Charles Laborde

**A discussion guide for schools
and the community**

“What does this have to do with you?”

When Dr. Susan Cernyak-Spatz presented to students and community groups about her experiences during the Holocaust, she made sure that everyone in the audience walked away with an answer to this question. Her daughter, Jackie Fishman, continues that practice when she shares her mother’s story with young and old.

This guide to Three Bone Theater’s production of *Protective Custody: Prisoner 34042* will help you answer that question. Keep reading to find out how you and your group can unpack the lessons from Susan’s life to better understand your role in creating respectful and supportive communities.

“If we forget the past, our country, the world, are condemned to repeat it. My main mission right now is to influence people of the next generation not to forget.”

Susan Cernyak-Spatz

Before you watch the film

A little background:

Vienna is a city in Austria. Before Hitler invaded Poland, he invaded Austria, an event called the **Anschluss** is a German word meaning “union.” Hitler grew up in Austria and considered the entire country to be part of Germany. When he marched into the country, many Austrians were happy to be “reunited” with their northern neighbor. [Click Here](#) for images and more information.

Prague is a city in Czechoslovakia, a country east of Austria and south of Germany. In September of 1938, Hitler annexed the Sudetenland, a section of Czechoslovakia with a largely German population. In March of 1939, he invaded the rest of the country, which included Prague. All of this was done without any negative response from Britain, France, Italy or the U.S. [Click Here](#) for images and more information.

Anti-Jewish Laws existed in Germany beginning in 1933, the year Hitler came into power. The Nazi Party, led by Hitler, implemented new laws in Germany over the next 4-5 years. The laws excluded Jews from holding certain types of jobs, belonging to social clubs and organizations, joining athletic teams or other state or national groups, owning their own shops and businesses, riding public transportation, owning bicycles, and more. As soon as the Nazi forces occupied a new country, all of these laws went into effect immediately. Jewish people in the newly annexed territories of Austria and Czechoslovakia had no time to prepare for this or to understand what was happening.



Terms to know:

Antisemitism – The belief or behavior hostile toward Jews just because they are Jewish. It may take the form of religious teachings that proclaim the inferiority of Jews, for instance, or political efforts to isolate, oppress, or otherwise injure them. It may also include prejudiced or stereotyped views about Jews.¹

Blitzkrieg – Literally means “lightening war.” Describes the swift and violent attacks carried out by coordinated air and ground forces.

Concentration camp – A Nazi run camp designed to detain political and other prisoners, including Jews, Gypsies and other “undesirables.” Concentration camp prisoners were often used for work, were subject to starvation and disease, and could be killed outright.

Death Camp – A Nazi run camp developed specifically for mass murder.

Crematorium – a facility containing a furnace for reducing dead bodies to ashes by burning.

Death March - Forced marches of concentration camp prisoners over long distances under heavy guard and extremely harsh conditions. During death marches, SS guards brutally mistreated the prisoners and killed many. [Click Here](#) for maps of the major death marches.

Gas chamber – A large room outfitted to *look like* a showering area that was used to murder Jews. Rather than water, the shower heads dispensed poison gas. Heavy doors on each side of the chamber were locked to prevent escape.

Gestapo – The Nazi Party Secret Police who investigated political crimes and opposition activity in order to protect the regime from supposed “enemies of the state.”

Kanada – German spelling of Canada and the name given to the warehouses where the confiscated possessions of new prisoners were stored. Camp inmates sorted through these possessions and valuables were sent back to Germany. Although the origin of the name is not clear, it may have been because Canada was a country that represented wealth, and the warehouses were full of people’s valuables.

Kapo - A concentration camp prisoner selected to oversee other prisoners on labor details. The SS chose the prisoners for these positions.

Nazi – A member of the National Socialist German Workers’ Party, headed by Adolph Hitler.

Nuremberg Laws – A set of laws defining who was Jewish in order to exclude them from citizenship and take away civil rights.

Protective Custody – Legal instrument that permitted Gestapo detectives to take persons suspected of pursuing activities hostile to state interests into custody without warrant or judicial review of any kind.¹

Reich – Term used to *identify* the new “kingdom” Hitler and his collaborators were building.

SS – Abbreviation for German *Schutzstaffel*, literally “protection squad.” Originally created to be bodyguards for Hitler and other high-level Nazis, it eventually took charge of intelligence gathering, the German police, operation of concentration camps, and mass killing of the Jews.



As you watch the film

Reflect:

Susan's story is complex. During the film you see her evolve from a 7-year-old child into a 23-year-old woman who survived one of the most horrific events in human history. Watching the film can elicit emotions and questions for discussion. On a sheet of paper, keep track of the following during the film:

Susan's story makes me feel:

Susan's story makes me wonder:

Group leaders may want to provide pre-printed reflection sheets, if meeting in person.

After the film

Personal Response:

Before discussing the film with others, respond to the following questions. Feel free to respond in any way you like, including prose, images, and fragmented thoughts.

Which parts of Susan's story resonate the most with you?

How is Susan's young life similar or different from yours?

What do you learn about Susan's life after the Holocaust?

Listening to another person's story invites us to step into an experience that is not ours. It has the power to connect us to a larger reality and look at the world around us in a new way.

Group Discussions:

The best part about watching Susan's story is the opportunity to discuss it with others. Whether you discuss with students, book club members, church groups, or others, all groups have one thing in common: there is never enough time! With that in mind, the following format works well. If you are the group facilitator, tell the participants that you know they will want to talk further, but it is your job to keep to the time limit.

Start Small

Start the discussion by breaking participants into groups of 3 or 4. Beginning with smaller discussion groups allows each participant a place to listen and share in a meaningful way. Ask each small group to discuss their personal response answers. The group facilitator will set a time limit (10 minutes works well) and notify the small groups when there is 1 minute left.



Re-group and Share Out

Once the small groups are back together, have each group share one thought that was meaningful to their group. Explain that as each group shares, we will simply listen without comment. Plan to leave 5 minutes for this. If all groups share and you still have time, allow groups to share another thought.

“The more we learn about why and how people behave the way they do, the more likely we are to become involved and find our own solutions.” Student reflection

Present the Universe of Obligation

The online education organization, *Facing History and Ourselves*, created a wonderful tool to help us examine how group dynamics influence behavior, both historically and in our own lives. Start with showing the following to your group:

“How the members of a group, a nation, or a community define who belongs and who does not has a lot to do with how they define their *universe of obligation*. Sociologist Helen Fein coined this phrase to describe the group of individuals within a society “toward whom obligations are owed, to whom rules apply, and whose injuries call for amends.”

In other words, a society’s universe of obligation includes those people who that society believes deserve respect and whose rights it believes are worthy of protection.”²

Make sure the group understands the explanation. Ask the group the following questions to explore Universes of Obligation in Susan’s story:

What did you see that shows who was in Susan’s Universe of Obligation?

Who included Susan in their Universe of Obligation? Did any of these surprise you?

**If meeting in person, the group facilitator may copy the statement and questions and hand out to participants. If meeting virtually, copy and create slides to use.*

Back to Small Groups

Tell participants that they will use the *Facing History and Ourselves* worksheet (included at the end of this guide) to look at their own lives in terms of the Universe of Obligation. Send participants back to their small groups and give them 5-6 minutes to complete the worksheet. This can be done individually, but some participants like to discuss and question as they are filling out the circles.

Final Gathering

After 5 minutes, give small groups the 1-minute warning. Once you re-group, give a moment for people to share what they learned about themselves through this activity. Close the session when you feel everyone has shared or you determine the time is up.



Resources for Educators to Use in the Classroom

For Further Reflection:

In addition to the questions included in the community discussion section, the following help students bring Susan’s story into discussion with their lives as teens:

Susan was very young when she was forced to leave her home, her friends, and the life she lived. What do you think helped her to cope with these losses? What do you have in your life that helps you get through tough times?

In the concentration camps, Susan shares that there were groups of women prisoners who supported one another. Even though these women experienced the same brutal and dehumanizing conditions they still held on to their humanity. Susan was helped and was also a helper. How do you think helping another person through their suffering also helped Susan? How can you help someone who is suffering right now?

Projects to Extend the Lesson:

- Research and write an essay on the literary achievement of an author who has focused on the Holocaust – Elie Wiesel, Primo Levi, Simon Wiesenthal, Art Spiegelman, Nelly Sachs, Ida Fink. Briefly survey several works of the author and focus on the unique qualities of his/her art.
- Read or view documentaries about rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust such as Varian Frye, Charles Carl Lutz, Chiune Sugihara, Feng-Shan Ho, Raoul Wallenberg. Compare and contrast their actions as upstanders.
- Read or view documentaries about the French town of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon and the Greek Island of Zakyntos. Create a short presentation on these towns that explains what they did and what motivated their behaviors.
- Create an art project (music, dance, visual, video, sculpture, etc.) that honors those lost in the Holocaust or any other group of people who were victims of unjust government actions.
- Have students read [“Not in Our Town”](#) from *Facing History and Ourselves*. After reading, students answer the following:
 - -What did you learn from the citizens’ response to the hate crime?
 - -How was their response related to their commitment to democracy?
 - -What legacy did these citizens leave for their children? For other communities?



Footnotes, Resources and Websites for Further Learning

Footnotes:

1. <https://www.adl.org/anti-semitism>
2. <https://www.facinghistory.org/holocaust-and-human-behavior/chapter-2/universe-obligation>

Resources:

[Antisemitic Legislation outlined by year](#)
[Auschwitz Memorial Website](#)

Websites:

<https://www.theholocaustexplained.org/>
<https://www.theholocaustexplained.org/the-camps/ss-concentration-camp-system/arrival-at-camp/>
<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/glossary>
<https://www.yadvashem.org/>
<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-holocaust>



Stan Greenspon Center
for Peace and Social Justice

*Many thanks to Donna Tarney and Jackie Fishman
for creating this guide!
Contact Donna at tarneyd@queens.edu to schedule
a workshop or arrange for Jackie to visit with your group.*



Handout

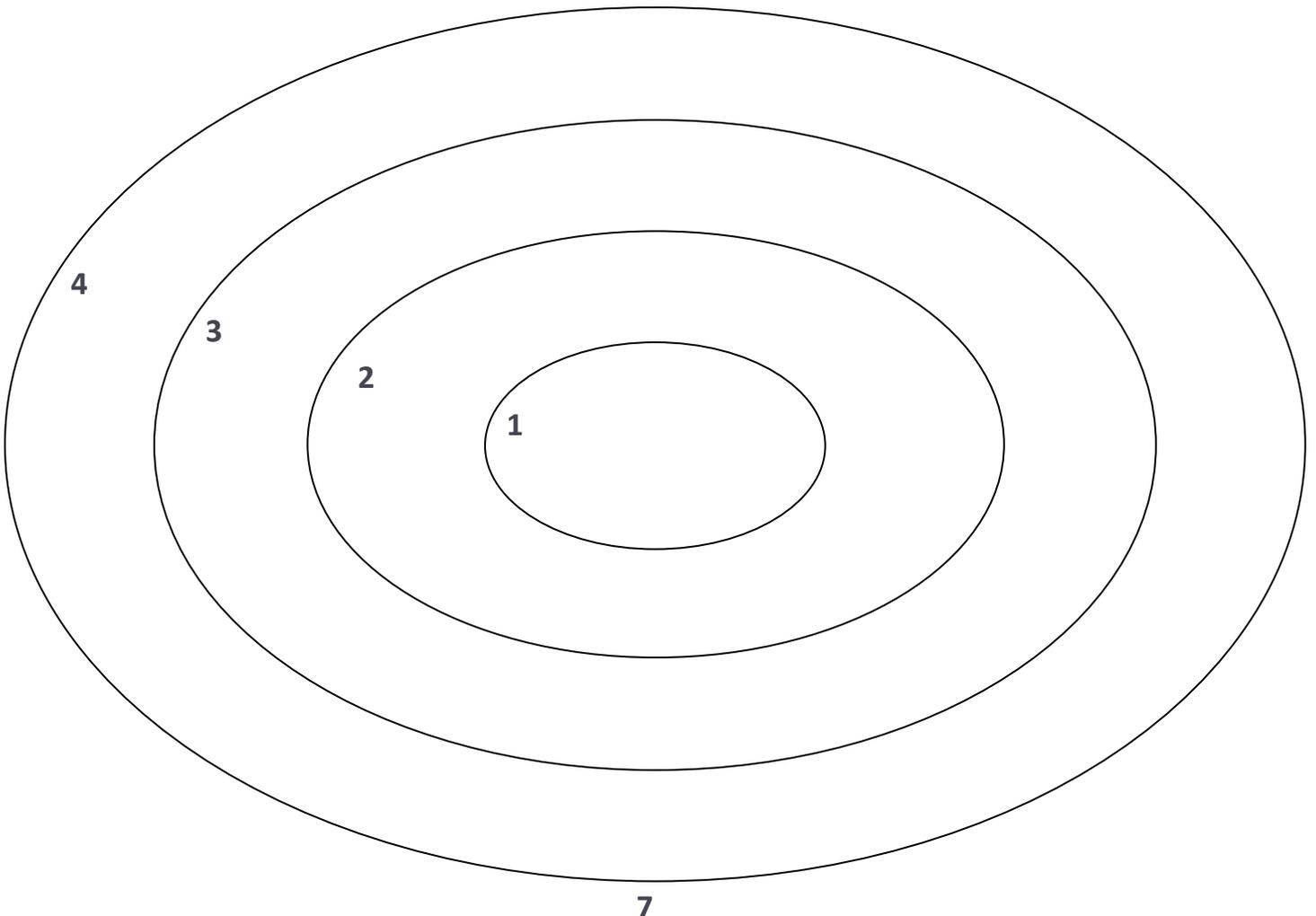
Universe of Obligation

In **Circle 1**, write your name.

In **Circle 2**, write the name of people to whom you feel the greatest obligation – for example, people for whom you’d be willing to take a great risk or put yourself in peril for (you don’t have to write actual names.)

In **Circle 3**, who are the people on the next level? That is people to whom you have some obligation, but not as great as in circle 2.

In **Circle 4**, who are the people on the next level? People to whom you have some obligation, but not as great as in circle 3.



The Nuremberg Laws

First Law:

Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor

September 15, 1935

Entirely convinced that the purity of German blood is essential to the further existence of the German people, and inspired by the uncompromising determination to safeguard the future of the German nation, the Reichstag has unanimously resolved upon the following law, which is promulgated herewith:

Section 1

Marriages between Jews and citizens of German or kindred blood are forbidden. Marriages concluded in defiance of this law are void, even if, for the purpose of evading this law, they were concluded abroad.

Proceedings for annulment may be initiated only by the Public Prosecutor.

Section 2

The laws deprived Jews of German citizenship and forbade marriage or sexual relations between Jews and "citizens of German or cognate blood." Supplementary decrees defined a Jew as a person with at least one Jewish grandparent and declared that Jews could not vote or hold public office

Section 3

Jews will not be permitted to employ female citizens of German or kindred blood as domestic workers under the age of 45.

Section 4

Jews are forbidden to display the Reich and national flag or the national colors.

On the other hand they are permitted to display the Jewish colors. The exercise of this right is protected by the State.

**note the "Jewish colors" referred to in this article were the Blue-and-White Zionist banner which is presently the national flag of Israel.*

Section 5

A person who acts contrary to the prohibition of Section 1 will be punished with hard labour.

A person who acts contrary to the prohibition of Section 2 will be punished with imprisonment or with hard labour.

A person who acts contrary to the provisions of Sections 3 or 4 will be punished with imprisonment up to a year and with a fine, or with one of these penalties.



Section 6

The Reich Minister of the Interior in agreement with the Deputy Fuhrer and the Reich Minister of Justice will issue the legal and administrative regulations required for the enforcement and supplementing of this law.

Section 7

The law will become effective on the day after its promulgation; Section 3, however, not until January 1, 1936.

Second Law:

The Reich Citizenship Law
September 15, 1935

The Reich Citizenship Law stripped Jews of their German citizenship and introduced a new distinction between "Reich citizens" and "nationals." Certificates of Reich citizenship were in fact never introduced, and all Germans other than Jews were provisionally classed as Reich citizens until 1945.

Article 1

1. A subject of the State is a person who belongs to the protective union of the German Reich, and who therefore has particular obligations towards the Reich.
2. The status of subject is acquired in accordance with the provisions of the Reich and State Law of Citizenship.

Article 2

1. A citizen of the Reich is that subject only who is of German or kindred blood and who, through his conduct, shows that he is both desirous and fit to serve the German people and Reich faithfully.
2. The right to citizenship is acquired by the granting of Reich citizenship papers.
3. Only the citizen of the Reich enjoys full political rights in accordance with the provision of the laws.

Article 3

The Reich Minister of the Interior in conjunction with the Deputy of the Führer will issue the necessary legal and administrative decrees for carrying out and supplementing this law.

<http://www.holocaustresearchproject.org/holoprelude/pbgh.html>



The Reich Citizenship Law, passed in September 1935, was followed by a series of supplementary regulations that tried to fix the major outstanding problem of defining a 'Jew.' Nazi Party leaders had pressed for the application of legislation to all half-Jews but the Nuremberg Laws failed to provide a clear answer after Hitler struck out the term 'full Jews' as it involved creating a new classification.

In November 1935, Dr. Bernhard Losener, a high official in the Reich Ministry of the Interior who had assisted in the drafting of the Nuremberg Laws, produced a memorandum that discussed the position of half-Jews and proposed the inclusion of half-Jews who were married to a Jewish person and who adhered to the Jewish religion. Losener's suggestions were included in the first regulation under the Citizenship Law.

First Regulation to the Reich Citizenship Law of November 14, 1935

On the basis of Article 3, Reich Citizenship Law, of September 15, 1935 (RGBl [*Reich Law Gazette*] I, page 1146) the following is ordered:

Article 1.

(1) Until further regulations regarding citizenship papers are issued, all subjects of German or kindred blood who possessed the right to vote in Reichstag elections at the time the Citizenship Law came into effect shall, for the time being, possess the rights of Reich citizens. The same shall be true of those to whom the Reich Minister of the Interior, in conjunction with the Deputy of the Führer, has given preliminary citizenship.

(2) The Reich Minister of the Interior, in conjunction with the Deputy of the Führer, can withdraw preliminary citizenship.

Article 2.

(1) The regulations in Article 1 are also valid for Reich subjects of mixed Jewish blood [*Mischlinge*].

(2) An individual of mixed Jewish blood is one who is descended from one or two grandparents who were fully Jewish by race, insofar as he or she does not count as a Jew according to § 5, Paragraph 2. One grandparent shall be considered as full-blooded if he or she belonged to the Jewish religious community.

Article 3.

Only the Reich citizen, as bearer of full political rights, exercises the right to vote in political affairs or can hold public office. The Reich Minister of the Interior, or any agency empowered by him, can make exceptions during the transition period, with regard to occupying public offices. The affairs of religious organizations will not be affected.



Article 4.

(1) A Jew cannot be a citizen of the Reich. He has no right to vote in political affairs, he cannot occupy a public office.

(2) Jewish civil servants will retire as of 31. December 1935. If these civil servants served at the front in the World War, either for Germany or her allies, they will receive in full, until they reach the age limit, full pension to which they were entitled according to the last salary they received; they will, however, not advance in seniority. After reaching the age limit, their pensions will be calculated anew, according to the last salary they received, on the basis of which their pension was calculated.

(3) The affairs of religious organizations will not be affected.

(4) The employment status of teachers in Jewish public schools remains unchanged until new regulations for the Jewish school systems are issued.

Article 5.

(1) A Jew is anyone who descended from at least three grandparents who were fully Jewish by race. Article 2, par. 2, second sentence will apply.

(2) A Jew is also anyone who descended from two fully Jewish grandparents, if:

(a) he belonged to the Jewish religious community at the time this law was issued or joined the community later;

(b) he was married to a Jewish person at the time the law was issued or married one subsequently;

(c) he is the offspring from a marriage with a Jew, in the sense of Section 1, which was contracted after the Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor became effective (RGBl. [Reich Law Gazette] I, page 1146 of September 15, 1935);

(d) he is the offspring of an extramarital relationship with a Jew, according to Section 1, and will be born out of wedlock after July 31, 1936.

Article 6.

(1) In case Reich laws or orders by the NSDAP and its organizations make demands for racial pureness that exceed § 5, they will not be affected.

(2) Any other demands for pureness of blood that exceed § 5 can only be made with permission from the Reich Minister of the Interior and the Deputy of the Führer. If any such demands have been made, they will be void as of January 1, 1936, if they have not been requested from the Reich Minister of the Interior in agreement with the Deputy of the Führer. These requests must be made to the Reich Minister of the Interior.

Article 7.

The Führer and Reich Chancellor can grant exemptions from the regulations laid down in the law.

<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-reich-citizenship-law-first-regulation>

