

## Discussion Questions

The following questions are excerpted from our *From Swastika to Jim Crow* Discussion Guide.

A complete discussion guide is offered as part of the comprehensive program.

- 1) Discuss and contrast the ways in which Jews were discriminated against and oppressed in Nazi Germany with how Blacks were discriminated against and oppressed in the American South of the 1930s and 1940s.
- 2) In the book *From Swastika to Jim Crow*, the President of Fisk University writes in a letter, "We do not recommend the placement of refugees in [Black Colleges] because of the double handicap it places them under." What do you think he means by "double handicap?" How were the German-Jewish scholars able to balance their role of working in the Black community with living in an often hostile White community? How were the students able to balance their lives of relative freedom at the Black colleges as opposed to their restricted life of segregation and discrimination?
- 3) What factors existed in America of the 1930s and '40s that allowed racism and segregation to flourish? Why do you think the racial policies in America were not condemned? What factors exist today that allow racism to continue? Have these factors changed from the ones that existed in the 1930s and '40s?
- 4) What do you think these refugee scholars thought when they saw a "White Only" water fountain or restaurant, or saw a Black person relegated to the back of a bus? How might they have responded? What would you do if you were placed in a similar situation? How would you respond?
- 5) In Nazi Germany, the Nuremberg laws of 1935 formally defined a Jew based upon the religion of their grandparents. In the South, anyone of ascertainable or strongly suspected Black ancestry was considered a "person of color" according to the Jim Crow laws. What do you think are the ramifications of defining people, not by their actions or beliefs, but by their race?  
(DISCRIMINATION/RACISM)
- 6) Why do you suspect their Black students often saw the refugee scholars as "mentors"? What kinds of lessons do you think the scholars learned from their students? With the emergence of the Black Power movement in the late 1960s, was this relationship still possible? Can this dynamic still exist today? Explain.
- 7) One of the reasons why Germans forced the Jews to wear yellow stars was because their identity was not apparent. Both Jews and Blacks had a common word for this phenomenon, "passing" - the Jew as non-Jew, the Black as White. What else do you think the refugee scholars shared in common with their students that may not have been articulated in the film?
- 8) For some, their understanding of the Black Power Movement was the idea that Blacks should only identify with Blacks. What do you think of this? What are the pros and cons of the members of a group segregating themselves from other members of their community? How was the experience of these professors and their students antithetical to that idea?