



# The Holocaust

## MAIN IDEA

**EMPIRE BUILDING** During the Holocaust, Hitler’s Nazis killed six million Jews and five million other “non-Aryans.”

## WHY IT MATTERS NOW

The violence against Jews during the Holocaust led to the founding of Israel after World War II.

## TERMS & NAMES

- Aryan
- Holocaust
- *Kristallnacht*
- ghetto
- “Final Solution”
- genocide

**SETTING THE STAGE** As part of their vision for Europe, the Nazis proposed a new racial order. They proclaimed that the Germanic peoples, or **Aryans**, were a “master race.” (This was a misuse of the term *Aryan*. The term actually refers to the Indo-European peoples who began to migrate into the Indian subcontinent around 1500 B.C.) The Nazis claimed that all non-Aryan peoples, particularly Jewish people, were inferior. This racist message would eventually lead to the **Holocaust**, the systematic mass slaughter of Jews and other groups judged inferior by the Nazis.

## TAKING NOTES

**Analyzing Bias** Use a web diagram to identify examples of Nazi persecution.



## The Holocaust Begins

To gain support for his racist ideas, Hitler knowingly tapped into a hatred for Jews that had deep roots in European history. For generations, many Germans, along with other Europeans, had targeted Jews as the cause of their failures. Some Germans even blamed Jews for their country’s defeat in World War I and for its economic problems after that war.

In time, the Nazis made the targeting of Jews a government policy. The Nuremberg Laws, passed in 1935, deprived Jews of their rights to German citizenship and forbade marriages between Jews and non-Jews. Laws passed later also limited the kinds of work that Jews could do.

**“Night of Broken Glass”** Worse was yet to come. Early in November 1938, 17-year-old Herschel Grynszpan (GRIHN•shpahn), a Jewish youth from Germany, was visiting an uncle in Paris. While Grynszpan was there, he received a postcard. It said that after living in Germany for 27 years, his father had been deported to Poland. On November 7, wishing to avenge his father’s deportation, Grynszpan shot a German diplomat living in Paris.

When Nazi leaders heard the news, they launched a violent attack on the Jewish community. On November 9, Nazi storm troopers attacked Jewish homes, businesses, and synagogues across Germany and murdered close to 100 Jews. An American in Leipzig wrote, “Jewish shop windows by the hundreds were systematically . . . smashed. . . . The main streets of the city were a positive litter of shattered plate glass.” It is for this reason that the night of November 9 became known as ***Kristallnacht*** (krih•STAHL•NAHKT), or “Night of Broken Glass.” A 14-year-old boy described his memory of that awful night:

## PRIMARY SOURCE

All the things for which my parents had worked for eighteen long years were destroyed in less than ten minutes. Piles of valuable glasses, expensive furniture, linens—in short, everything was destroyed. . . . The Nazis left us, yelling, “Don’t try to leave this house! We’ll soon be back again and take you to a concentration camp to be shot.”

M. I. LIBAU, quoted in *Never to Forget: The Jews of the Holocaust*

*Kristallnacht* marked a major step-up in the Nazi policy of Jewish persecution. The future for Jews in Germany looked truly grim.

**A Flood of Refugees** After *Kristallnacht*, some Jews realized that violence against them was bound to increase. By the end of 1939, a number of German Jews had fled to other countries. Many however, remained in Germany. Later, Hitler conquered territories in which millions more Jews lived.

At first, Hitler favored emigration as a solution to what he called “the Jewish problem.” Getting other countries to continue admitting Germany’s Jews became an issue, however. After admitting tens of thousands of Jewish refugees, such countries as France, Britain, and the United States abruptly closed their doors to further immigration. Germany’s foreign minister observed, “We all want to get rid of our Jews. The difficulty is that no country wishes to receive them.”

**Isolating the Jews** When Hitler found that he could not get rid of Jews through emigration, he put another plan into effect. He ordered Jews in all countries under his control to be moved to designated cities. In those cities, the Nazis herded the Jews into dismal, overcrowded **ghettos**, or segregated Jewish areas. The Nazis then sealed off the ghettos with barbed wire and stone walls. They hoped that the Jews inside would starve to death or die from disease. **A**

Even under these horrible conditions, the Jews hung on. Some, particularly the Jews in Warsaw, Poland, formed resistance organizations within the ghettos. They also struggled to keep their traditions. Ghetto theaters produced plays and concerts. Teachers taught lessons in secret schools. Scholars kept records so that one day people would find out the truth.

## The “Final Solution”

Hitler soon grew impatient waiting for Jews to die from starvation or disease. He decided to take more direct action. His plan was called the “**Final Solution**.” It was actually a program of **genocide**, the systematic killing of an entire people.



▲ After 1941, all Jews in German-controlled areas had to wear a yellow Star of David patch.

▼ German soldiers round up Jews in the Warsaw ghetto.



### MAIN IDEA

#### Recognizing Effects

**A** What steps did Hitler take to rid Germany of Jews?



Hitler believed that his plan of conquest depended on the purity of the Aryan race. To protect racial purity, the Nazis had to eliminate other races, nationalities, or groups they viewed as inferior—as “subhumans.” They included Roma (gypsies), Poles, Russians, homosexuals, the insane, the disabled, and the incurably ill. But the Nazis focused especially on the Jews. **B**

**The Killings Begin** As Nazi troops swept across Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, the killings began. Units from the SS (Hitler’s elite security force) moved from town to town to hunt down Jews. The SS and their collaborators rounded up men, women, children, and even babies and took them to isolated spots. They then shot their prisoners in pits that became the prisoners’ graves.

Jews in communities not reached by the killing squads were rounded up and taken to concentration camps, or slave-labor prisons. These camps were located mainly in Germany and Poland. Hitler hoped that the horrible conditions in the camps would speed the total elimination of the Jews.

The prisoners worked seven days a week as slaves for the SS or for German businesses. Guards severely beat or killed their prisoners for not working fast enough. With meals of thin soup, a scrap of bread, and potato peelings, most prisoners lost 50 pounds in the first few months. Hunger was so intense, recalled one survivor, “that if a bit of soup spilled over, prisoners would . . . dig their spoons into the mud and stuff the mess in their mouths.”

**The Final Stage** Hitler’s war on the Jews turned toward the “Final Solution” in 1942. The Nazis built extermination camps equipped with huge gas chambers that could kill as many as 6,000 human beings in a day. (See the map on page 953.)

When prisoners arrived at Auschwitz (OUSH•vihts), the largest of the extermination camps, they paraded before a committee of SS doctors. With a wave of the hand, these doctors separated the strong—mostly men—from the weak—mostly women, young children, the elderly, and the sick. Those labeled as weak would die that day. They were told to undress for a shower and then led into a chamber with

**MAIN IDEA**

**Analyzing Bias**

**B** How was the “Final Solution” a natural outcome of Nazi racial theory?

## History *in* Depth

### Jewish Resistance

Even in the extermination camps, Jews rose up and fought against the Nazis. At Treblinka in August 1943, and at Sobibor in October 1943, small groups of Jews revolted. They killed guards, stormed the camp armories and stole guns and grenades, and then broke out. In both uprisings, about 300 prisoners escaped. Most were killed soon after. Of those who survived, many joined up with partisan groups and continued to fight until the end of the war.

Late in 1944, prisoners at Auschwitz revolted, too. Like the escapees at Treblinka and Sobibor, most were caught and killed. Young women like Ella Gartner and Roza Robota made the Auschwitz uprising possible. Gartner smuggled gunpowder into the camp from the munitions factory where she worked. Robota helped organize resistance in the camp. Gartner and Robota were executed on January 6, 1945. Less than a month later, Auschwitz was liberated.



▲ Ella Gartner



▶ Roza Robota

| Jews Killed Under Nazi Rule*            |                            |   |                   |
|---|----------------------------|---|-------------------|
|   | Original Jewish Population | Jews Killed                                     | Percent Surviving |
| Poland                                  | 3,300,000                  | 2,800,000                                       | 15%               |
| Soviet Union (area occupied by Germans) | 2,100,000                  | 1,500,000                                       | 29%               |
| Hungary                                 | 404,000                    | 200,000   | 49%               |
| Romania                                 | 850,000                    | 425,000   | 50%               |
| Germany/Austria                         | 270,000                    | 210,000   | 22%               |
| *Estimates                              |                            | Source: Hannah Vogt, <i>The Burden of Guilt</i> |                   |

fake showerheads. After the doors were closed, cyanide gas or carbon dioxide poured from the showerheads or holes in the ceiling. All inside were killed in a matter of minutes. Later, the Nazis installed crematoriums, or ovens, to burn the bodies.

**The Survivors** Some six million European Jews died in these death camps and in Nazi massacres. Fewer than four million survived. Some escaped the horrors of the death camps with help from non-Jewish people. These rescuers, at great risk to their own lives, hid Jews in their homes or helped them escape to neutral countries.

Those who survived the camps were changed forever by what they had experienced. As Elie Wiesel, nearly 15 years old when he entered Auschwitz, noted:

#### PRIMARY SOURCE

Never shall I forget the little faces of the children, whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky. Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever. . . . Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. . . . Never.

ELIE WIESEL, quoted in *Night*

## SECTION

# 3

## ASSESSMENT

**TERMS & NAMES** 1. For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- Aryan
- Holocaust
- *Kristallnacht*
- ghetto
- “Final Solution”
- genocide

### USING YOUR NOTES

2. What Nazi actions were part of the “Final Solution”?



### MAIN IDEAS

3. What was the new racial order proposed by the Nazis?
4. What Nazi action marked the final stage of the “Final Solution”?
5. How did some non-Jews oppose Hitler’s “Final Solution”?

### CRITICAL THINKING & WRITING

6. **ANALYZING MOTIVES** Why might people want to blame a minority group for most of their country’s problems?
7. **MAKING INFERENCES** Why do you think the German people went along with the Nazi policy of persecution of the Jews?
8. **RECOGNIZING EFFECTS** What impact did the Holocaust have on the Jewish population of Europe?
9. **WRITING ACTIVITY** **SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY** Write a **persuasive essay** discussing how German scientists, engineers, and doctors asked to participate in the Holocaust might have opposed Hitler’s policy.

### CONNECT TO TODAY CREATING A MAP

Find information on instances of genocide and ethnic cleansing in the last 20 years. Use the information to create an **annotated map** titled “Genocide in the Late 20th Century.”