

# 3 The Holocaust

## TERMS & NAMES

- Aryans
- Holocaust
- *Kristallnacht*
- ghettos
- "Final Solution"
- genocide

### MAIN IDEA

During the Holocaust, Hitler's Nazis killed 6 million Jews and 5 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.

### Background

Hitler misused the term *Aryan* to mean "Germanic." In fact, the term refers to the Indo-European peoples. (See Chapter 3.)

**SETTING THE STAGE** As part of their new order for Europe, Nazis proclaimed that **Aryans**, or Germanic peoples, were a "master race." They claimed that Jews and other non-Aryan peoples were inferior. This racist message would eventually lead to the **Holocaust**—the mass slaughter of civilians, especially Jews.

## The Holocaust Begins

Nazi propaganda started as an ugly campaign of anti-Semitism. It eventually flared into persecution across Germany. 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. The Nazis even blamed Jews for Germany's defeat in World War I and for its economic problems after that war.

In 1933, the Nazis made persecution a government policy. They first passed laws forbidding Jews to hold public office. Then, in 1935, the Nuremberg Laws deprived Jews of their rights to German citizenship, jobs, and property. To make it easier for the Nazis to identify them, Jews had to wear a bright yellow star attached to their clothing.

### *Kristallnacht*: "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 his native Poland. On November 7, wishing to avenge his father's deportation, Grynszpan shot an employee of the German Embassy 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 around 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."



Hitler's special troops helped spread the message of the government's anti-Semitic policy. The sign these troops are putting up reads, "Germans! Protect yourselves! Don't buy in Jewish stores!"

Young M.I. Libau was only 14 years old when Nazis attacked his family's home. Libau described what the Nazis did:

#### A VOICE FROM THE PAST

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 grim.

**The Flood of Refugees** After Kristallnacht, some Jews realized that violence against them was bound to increase. By the end of 1939, a number of Jews in Germany had fled for safety to other countries. Many of them, however, remained in Germany. Later, there would be millions more in territories conquered by Hitler. At first, Hitler favored emigration as a solution to what he called "the Jewish problem." The Nazis sped up the process. They forced Jews who did not want to leave into emigrating.

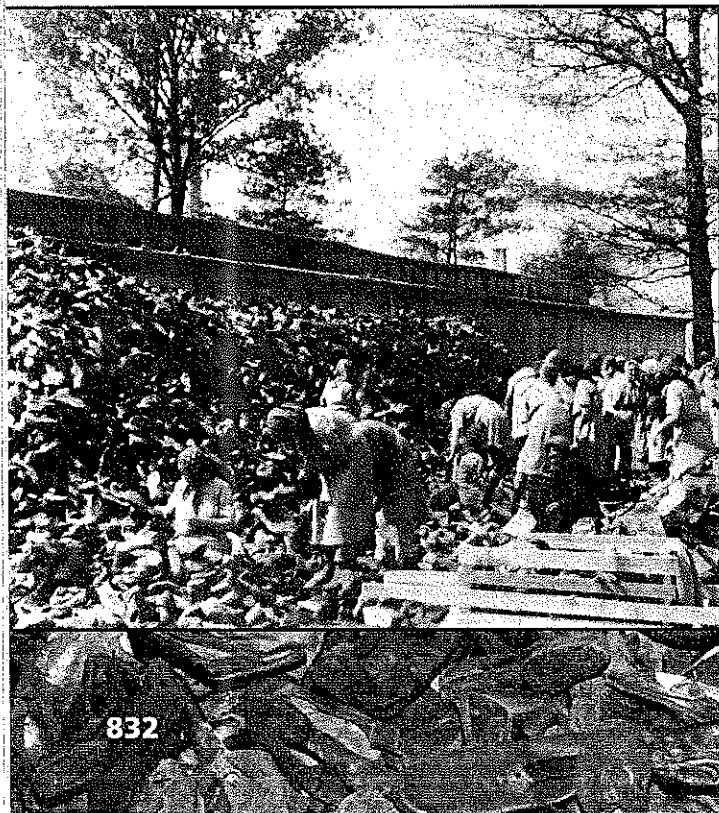
Getting other countries to continue admitting Germany's Jews became a problem. France had admitted 25,000 Jewish refugees and wanted no more. The British, who had accepted 80,000 Jews, worried about fueling anti-Semitism if that number increased. Some 40,000 Jews found homes in Latin America, but that region had closed its doors by the end of 1938. The United States took in around 100,000 refugees (including German scientist Albert Einstein). Many Americans, however, wanted U.S. doors closed. 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** Hitler found that he could not get rid of Jews through emigration. So he put another part of his plan into effect. Hitler ordered Jews in all countries under his control to be moved into certain cities in Poland. In those cities, they were herded into dismal, overcrowded **ghettos**, or segregated Jewish areas. The Nazis then sealed off the ghettos with barbed wire and stone walls. They wanted the Jews inside to starve or die from disease. One survivor wrote, "One sees people dying, lying with arms and legs outstretched in the middle of the road. Their legs are bloated, often frostbitten, and their faces distorted with pain."

This pile of shoes taken from Nazi victims represents the murder of thousands of Jews. The inset shows the living inmates at Auschwitz trying to salvage shoes left by the dead.

THINK THROUGH . . . JOY  
**B. Analyzing Causes** Why might Hitler have chosen Poland to put his ghetto policy for "the Jewish problem" into effect?

Even under these horrible conditions, the Jews hung on. Some formed resistance organizations within the ghettos. They smuggled in food and other needed items. In the midst of chaos, Jews 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.



## Hitler's "Final Solution"

Hitler soon grew impatient waiting for Jews to die from starvation or disease in the ghettos. 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.

Hitler believed that his plan of conquest depended on the purity of the Aryan race. To protect racial purity, the Nazis not only had to eliminate the Jews, but also other races, nationalities, or groups they viewed as inferior—as "subhumans." They included gypsies, Poles, Russians, homosexuals, the insane, the disabled, and the incurably ill. But the Nazis focused especially on the Jews.

**The Mass Killings Begin** After Hitler invaded Poland in 1939, it was still not clear that the Führer meant to eliminate Jews totally. As Nazi armies swept across Eastern Europe, Hitler sent SS units from town to town to hunt Jews down. The SS (Hitler's elite security force) and some thousands of collaborators rounded up Jews—men, women, young children, and even babies—and took them to isolated spots. They then shot their prisoners in pits that became the prisoners' grave.

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. Later, Nazis built camps in other countries they occupied. (See the map on page 847.) 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 the first month. "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 into their mouths."

**The Final Stage: Mass Extermination** The "Final Solution" officially reached its final stage in early 1942. At that time, the Nazis built extermination camps equipped with gas chambers for mass murder. The Nazis built the first six death camps in Poland. The first, Chelmno, actually began operating in late 1941. (See the map on

## SPOTLIGHT ON

### Nazi Medicine

Nazi doctors, such as the notorious Josef Mengele, used many concentration camp prisoners as guinea pigs for their experiments. To promote "racial purity," doctors tested sterilization methods on some prisoners. Doctors infected other prisoners with typhus and other deadly diseases to see how long they could survive. To practice surgery, student doctors would operate on prisoners without anesthesia. In the hands of the Nazis, even medicine became an instrument of pain and destruction.

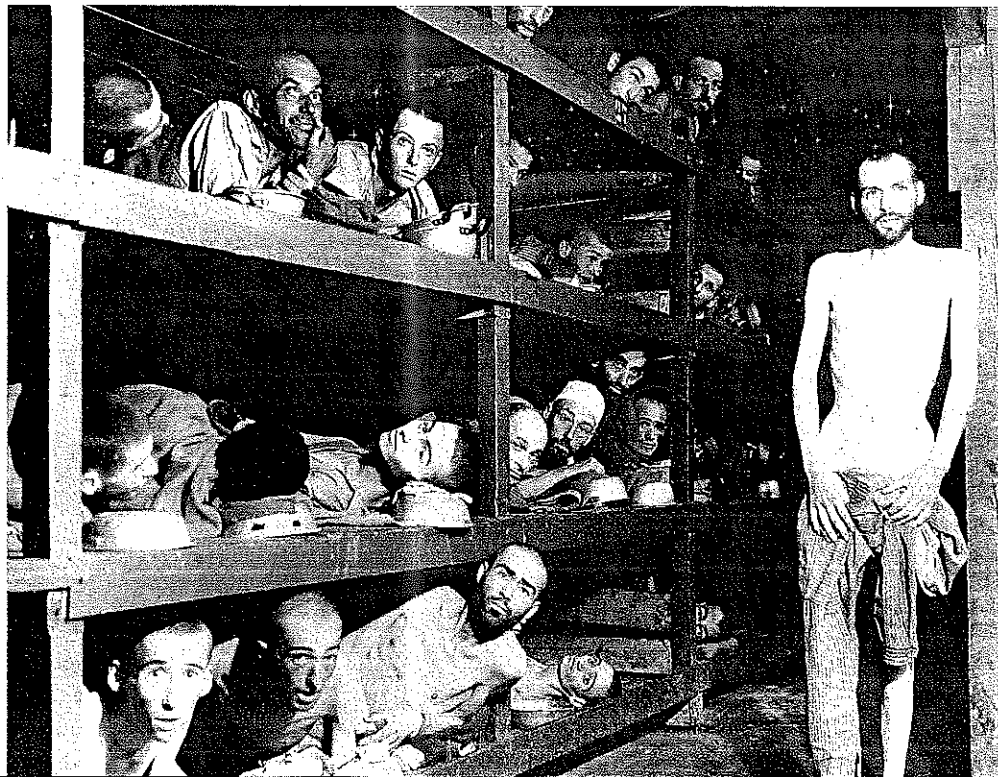
### Vocabulary

**collaborators:** people who assist an occupying enemy force.

### Background

Nazis also slaughtered 5 million Poles, Soviets, and others they considered as "undesirables."

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Slave workers in the Buchenwald concentration camp in Germany. They were among the lucky to have survived to the end of the war. The prisoner highlighted with a circle is Nobel Prize winning author Elie Wiesel. (See "A Voice from the Past," page 834.)



In 1941, Hitler's government required all Jews in German-controlled territories to wear a yellow Star of David when appearing in public places.

### Jews Killed under Nazi Rule\*

	Original Jewish Population	Jews Killed	Percent Surviving
Poland	3,300,000	3,000,000	10%
Soviet Union	2,850,000	1,252,000	56%
Hungary	650,000	450,000	30%
Romania	600,000	300,000	50%
Germany/Austria	240,000	200,000	16 2/3%

\*Estimates

page 847.) The huge gas chambers in the camps could kill as many as 6,000 human beings in a day.

When prisoners arrived at the largest of the death camps, Auschwitz (OUSH-vihts), they paraded before a committee of SS doctors. With a wave of the hand, these doctors separated the strong (mostly men) from the weak, who would die that day. Those chosen to die (mostly women, young children, the elderly, and the sick) were told to undress for a shower. They were led into a chamber with fake showerheads, and the doors closed. The prisoners were then poisoned with cyanide gas that poured from the showerheads. Later, the Nazis installed crematoriums, or ovens, to burn the bodies.

**THINK THROUGH HISTORY**  
**C. Analyzing Motives** How could concentration camp doctors and guards have justified to themselves the death and suffering they caused other human beings?

## SPOTLIGHT ON

### Jewish Resistance

The 700 members of the Jewish Fighting Organization in the Warsaw ghetto were among the Jews who resisted the horrors of Nazism. In April 1943, most of these young people lost their lives battling Nazi tanks and troops who were destroying the ghetto.

Even in the death camps, Jews rose up against the Nazis. In August 1943 at Treblinka, Poland, a small group of Jews revolted. Breaking into the armory, they stole guns and grenades. They then attacked guards and set fire to the gas chambers. Most of these brave fighters died. They had paid the highest price possible to combat Nazi atrocities.

**The Survivors** Six million Jews died in the death camps and in Nazi massacres. Fewer than 4 million European Jews survived the horrors of the Holocaust. Many had help from non-Jewish people who were against the Nazis' treatment of Jews. Swedish businessman Raoul Wallenberg and Protestant religious thinker Dietrich Bonhoeffer are just two examples of Christians who risked their lives to oppose Hitler's policies. These people risked their lives by hiding Jews or by helping them escape to neutral countries such as Switzerland or Sweden.

Those who survived the camps were changed forever by what they had seen. For Elie Wiesel, 15 years old when he entered Auschwitz, the light had gone out:

### A VOICE FROM THE PAST

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

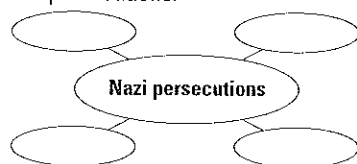
### 1. TERMS & NAMES

Identify

- Aryans
- Holocaust
- Kristallnacht
- ghettos
- "Final Solution"
- genocide

### 2. TAKING NOTES

Using a web diagram like the one below, give examples of Nazi persecutions.



### 3. MAKING INFERENCES

Why do you think German soldiers and the German people went along with the Nazi policy of persecution of the Jews?

#### THINK ABOUT

- Nazi treatment of those who disagreed
- Nazi propaganda
- the political and social conditions in Germany at the time

### 4. THEME ACTIVITY

**Science and Technology** In groups of three or four students, discuss the ethical dilemmas of German scientists, engineers, and doctors asked to organize and participate in the Holocaust.

How might they have opposed Hitler's policy? In public? In secret? What might have been the consequences of public opposition?