

ONE-PAGE SUMMARY OF HOLOCAUST (3-6)

THE HOLOCAUST, 1933-1945

The Holocaust was the systematic, bureaucratic, state sponsored persecution and murder of approximately six million Jews by Germany's Nazi regime and its collaborators in Germany and other European countries.



Where?

The Nazi party came to power in Germany in 1933. During World War II (1939-1945), Germany conquered most of Europe and targeted the Jews of Europe for extermination. The Nazis built six extermination camps in occupied Poland, but the Holocaust occurred throughout Germany's conquered European territories.

When?

Nazi Party leader Adolf Hitler became the Chancellor of Germany in 1933. He and the Nazi party quickly enacted antisemitic laws aimed at eliminating the rights and citizenship of German Jews. Germany started World War II with the invasion of Poland in 1939 and quickly conquered most of Europe where the Nazis targeted all Jews for murder. The Holocaust ended in 1945 when the Germans surrendered to the Allied Forces, ending WWII.

Who?

Perpetrators: The Nazi party, led by Hitler, believed that Germans were a "superior race" called Aryans and that Jews were "racially inferior" and present an existential threat to the "German racial community." The Nazis created what they called the "Final Solution to the Jewish problem": a plan to systematically murder every Jew in Europe.

Victims: Jews were primarily targeted but the Nazis also targeted others because of their perceived "inferiority": Roma and Sinti ("Gypsies"), the disabled, and some of the Slavic peoples (Poles, Russians, and others). Other groups were persecuted on political, ideological, and behavioral grounds, among them Communists, Socialists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and homosexuals.

How?

The devastation of the First World War (1914-1918) took a toll on Europe, leaving open wounds for a second world conflict. During the 1920s and early 1930s, Germany was tossed by economic and political chaos. The Nazis blamed Jews for the nation's problems during this time and, upon taking power in 1933, immediately began the persecution of Jews in Germany.

Seeking "living space" for the "racially superior Aryan people" to expand, Germany invaded its neighbor Poland in 1939, starting World War II. In the following months and years, Germany conquered most of Europe. To isolate, persecute, and exploit the Jewish population in the conquered territories, the Nazis created ghettos, transit camps, and forced-labor camps, where hundreds of thousands died of disease, overcrowding, and starvation.



With the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, German mobile killing squads, or Einsatzgruppen, murdered 1.5 million people in mass shootings, now referred to as "the Holocaust by bullets." In 1942, the Nazis and their collaborators initiated what they called "The Final Solution to the Jewish Question." Throughout the conquered territories, Jews were rounded up, crammed into overcrowded cattle cars for days with no food or water, and sent to a network of thousands of concentration camps, including six extermination camps where Jews were murdered in gas chambers and their bodies burned in ovens. As the German armies retreated in the final months of

the war, German guards forced prisoners on "death marches" back toward Germany in order to hide the living evidence of the camps. Germany surrendered to the Allies on May 8, 1945.

The Aftermath

After the Allies liberated the camps, many survivors couldn't return to their homes. Millions of survivors were held in displaced persons (DP) camps for several years. Hundreds of thousands of Jews eventually emigrated to Israel, Argentina, Australia, the United States, and other countries. The Holocaust utterly devastated Jewish communities in Europe. Six million Jews, almost two out of every three Jews in Europe, were killed.