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Historical Overview

This brief summary of the Holocaust begins by outlining the stages in which Nazi racial policies evolved. During the 1930s **Adolf Hitler** sought to exclude Jews, Gypsies, and others he considered to be "racially inferior" from the German national community. During the first two years of World War II, the Nazi state turned to **genocide**, starting with the German handicapped, then the Soviet Jews, and finally all European Jews and Gypsies. From late 1941 to late 1944 the concentration, deportation, enslavement, and extermination of Jews and Gypsies were in full swing. At the same time millions of Soviet prisoners of war and Slavic civilians were killed in less organized ways. During the last months of the war the Germans stopped the gassings, but they continued to exploit their victims as slave workers and tried to use them as bargaining chips in ransom negotiations. Following the Nazi defeat victims, perpetrators, and bystanders, at different times and in different ways, came to terms with the immediate legacies of the Holocaust.

In addition to summarizing the evolution of the Holocaust, this overview describes the variety of camps and reactions of victims. It also shows why the Holocaust functioned differently in the various countries controlled by or allied with Nazi Germany. What emerges is a sense of the complexity of these events and the diversity of Holocaust experiences for all the groups involved.

EXCLUDING THE "RACIALLY INFERIOR," 1933-1939

On March 21, 1933, the German Reichstag passed the "Enabling Act" that gave Adolf Hitler dictatorial powers, ending three years of political strife. At the time no one could be sure what he and his Nazi Party would do. Their numerous supporters (just over one-third of German voters; the Nazis never won a free nationwide election) expected bold moves to revive the economy and put the millions of unemployed back to work. Hitler's army of brown-shirted SA (Sturmabteilung, or Storm Troopers) had smashed their political oppo-

nents in street battles, and many Germans anticipated equally militant action to end the depression. Members of the conservative establishment who had handed power to Hitler in a backstairs political deal hoped to be able to control him and his followers and use them to crush the threatening Communist movement. Hitler's enemies put on a confident front and predicted his early failure. With all eyes fixed on the economic depression and political turmoil that surrounded the destruction of Germany's democratic Weimar Republic, few Germans paid close attention to Hitler's ideas about race.

In fact, race stood at the very heart of Nazi ideology. Hitler called his political philosophy **National Socialism** — the official name of his party was the National Socialist German Workers' Party, or Nazi for short — by which he meant to suggest that he had reconciled the two great competing political ideas of the nineteenth century, nationalism and socialism. What made it possible for him to bring the two together was his belief that racial thinking would lead to national greatness and social justice. During his formative years before World War I in Austria, Hitler had been deeply influenced by Social Darwinism. This now discredited offshoot of biological Darwinism taught that life was eternal struggle between individuals and groups, nature's way of ensuring the survival of the fittest. Hitler saw a lot of struggle in prewar Vienna — between classes, nationalities, political parties, and business firms — and took it as the central law of history. As a confirmed pan-German nationalist, he concluded that only a ruthlessly united and racially purified Germany could survive in the brutal struggle with other races and nations.

These ideas came through clearly in Hitler's book *Mein Kampf*, published in the 1920s. In it he wrote of Germany's need to conquer *Lebensraum* (living space) at the expense of its Slavic neighbors in Eastern Europe and the necessity of racial conflict with Jews and others who stood in the way of German superiority. The future dictator linked the Jews with communism and identified them as Germany's chief internal foe. "If, with the help of his Marxist creed, the Jew is victorious over the other peoples of the world, his crown will be the funeral wreath of humanity. . . . Hence today I believe that I am acting in accordance with the will of the Almighty Creator: *by defending myself against the Jew, I am fighting for the work of the Lord.*"¹ Often ignored or dismissed as pseudo-intellectual posturing at the time, and later obscured by overriding political and economic concerns, the centrality of race in Hitler's thinking became apparent only gradually.

1. Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1943), p. 65. Emphasis in the original.

Once firmly in power, Hitler and his followers moved quickly to satisfy Germans' longings for jobs and an end to political conflict. The latter was achieved rapidly and brutally by outlawing all political organizations but the Nazi Party, creating a much feared Gestapo (Secret State Police), and sending leading anti-Nazis to newly created **concentration camps** such as **Dachau**, just outside Munich. By the time World War II began in 1939 there would be seven large concentration camps in various parts of Germany and the territories annexed to it, including **Buchenwald** near Weimar; **Ravensbrück**, the women's concentration camp north of Berlin; and **Mauthausen** in Austria. They would also come to hold more than just political opponents of the Nazi Party. Jews, homosexuals, religious dissidents, and common criminals also entered these camps. Run by Hitler's elite SS, the concentration camps imposed draconian discipline on the prisoners, many of whom were killed outright or worked to death. But these were not **extermination camps**. Sometimes prisoners were even released, but only after promising never to speak of camp conditions. Their existence, however, was known to all. Although the regime won the support of an increasingly large number of Germans, the terror served to intimidate political opponents.

Fixing the economy took longer, but the Nazis moved to end unemployment with characteristic determination. They bullied private employers to hire workers, spent vast sums on government building projects, and placed young men in a one-year compulsory national service program called the *Arbeitsdienst* (Labor Service). By the late 1930s, when Germany was rapidly rearming, unemployment disappeared. Naturally, all this cost a fortune, and Hitler had no idea how to pay off Germany's massive debts, except perhaps by conquering and looting most of Europe. But he was not saying so openly, and few asked where the money was coming from. Nothing did more to enhance Hitler's popularity than this spectacular economic recovery.

Hitler's foreign-policy successes likewise impressed Germans. Loudly affirming his peaceful intentions while denouncing the iniquities of the Treaty of Versailles, which had been imposed on Germany at the end of World War I, Hitler set about burying the treaty one clause at a time. The democracies were preoccupied with their own problems and hoped that concessions would calm the dictator. Hence they stood by as Germany rearmed (March 1935), moved its armies into the demilitarized Rhineland (March 1936), seized Austria (March 1938), and annexed the German-speaking Sudetenland from Czechoslovakia (October 1938). Achieving all this without firing a shot, Hitler lifted the pride of a humiliated nation.

These political, economic, and foreign policy victories were the basis of

Hitler's great popularity in the 1930s. They also made the less attractive aspects of Nazism easier for ordinary Germans to swallow. The people might grumble about the obtrusiveness of party hacks in all areas of life and worry about being overheard expressing the "wrong" opinion, but this seemed an acceptable price to pay for national resurgence. As for the sufferings of political dissidents and those deemed racially unworthy, there was nothing one could do. As was true of people in other totalitarian regimes, Germans retreated into their private lives to find shelter from, and avoid offending, the omnipresent Nazi state.

In the case of the Jews, Hitler initially encouraged this attitude of popular indifference by gradually excluding them from the national community and encouraging them to emigrate. He may have been influenced to take this legalistic approach by the results of his first direct attack on the Jews after becoming dictator, the nationwide boycott of Jewish businesses set to begin on April 1, 1933. Hitler placed it under the direction of **Julius Streicher**, one of the early leaders of the Nazi Party, a vicious antisemite and the editor of the scurrilous weekly newspaper *Der Stürmer*. Although Streicher urged Germans not to buy goods in Jewish shops, and Storm Troopers sometimes physically intimidated people from doing so, many patronized them anyway. Foreign reactions were also negative, with Jewish groups and their sympathizers threatening to organize boycotts of German-made goods. The Nazis called off their boycott after the first day and opted instead for less confrontational policies.

These consisted of a series of laws and edicts designed to **Aryanize** German institutions and reverse Jewish emancipation and assimilation. The "Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service" of April 7, 1933, removed anti-Nazis and Jews from government jobs as judges, lawyers, teachers, and officials. Subsequent laws limited Jewish enrollment in schools and universities to 1.5 percent of the student body, barred Jewish dentists and physicians from public insurance programs, revoked the naturalization of Eastern European Jews, and specified that only **Aryans** could edit German newspapers. Simultaneously extralegal pressures on Jewish businessmen to sell their firms, often for only a fraction of their real value, began the gradual process of excluding Jews from the German economy. When local Nazi hotheads revived the practices of boycott and physical attacks aimed at Jews, Hitler firmly returned them to the legal path by promulgating the **Nuremberg Laws** in September 1935.

The Nuremberg Laws enabled the state to limit the rights of Jews as German citizens and banned marriage and sexual relations between Jews and Germans. Legal codicils later defined Jews as persons having more than two Jewish grandparents. Those with two Jewish grandparents were defined as *Mischlinge* (mixed breeds), and they were grouped with the Jews only if they were married to Jews or belonged to Jewish congregations. Persons with one

Jewish grandparent were also considered *Mischlinge* but normally were not grouped with the Jews. Later, in 1938, Hitler decided to create a special category of "privileged mixed marriages" for interracial couples that had married before the Nuremberg Laws went into force. Jewish women married to German men were exempted from anti-Jewish measures. The same was true for Jewish men married to German women if they had children. In making these exceptions Hitler showed that he wanted to minimize the number of Germans who would be hurt by his campaign against the Jews.

Hitler's preference for legal methods of isolating the Jews reflected his sensitivity to public opinion both at home and abroad. As Germany prepared to host the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin, the Nazis wanted nothing to stain their law-and-order image. This had the unintended result of sending mixed signals to the Jews. Nazi antisemitic policies were designed to demoralize the Jews and induce them to emigrate. In fact, emigration was the original Nazi solution to the "Jewish problem," and it remained in force until 1941. Economically and psychologically devastated, some Jews had left the country already or else planned to go soon. And yet most Jews still hoped that conditions would not get worse and that they could ride out the storm. Moreover, departing was never easy. Quite apart from the mental anguish involved in leaving home, it was hard to find a country willing to accept refugees in a time of world economic depression. Further complicating matters was the German emigration tax, which confiscated a considerable portion of an emigrant's wealth. Hence only about 105,000 of the approximately 600,000 German Jews emigrated in the first four years of the Third Reich.

In 1937, as Hitler entered the fifth year of his dictatorship, he felt increasingly confident of his power and less dependent on conservatives at home or popular opinion abroad. In that year the dictator informed his generals of his plans for a war of conquest in the near future. To prepare for war he wanted to cleanse Germany by speeding the Jews on their way. Pressures to Aryanize Jewish businesses increased, as did random acts of anti-Jewish violence. Such acts were conspicuous accompaniments to Germany's forcible **Anschluss** (union) with Austria in March 1938. Also in 1938 foreign Jews and Gypsies were expelled from the Reich. Radical pressures culminated in the **Crystal Night** pogroms of November 9–10, 1938, in which Nazi Storm Troopers, following orders from Berlin, vandalized Jewish shops and homes and burned 267 synagogues. Twenty thousand Jews were sent to concentration camps, and at least ninety-one were actually murdered. The American consul in Leipzig, David Buffum, described the pogroms as the carefully organized work of Nazi fanatics: "Having demolished dwellings and hurled most of the movable effects onto the streets, the insatiably sadistic perpetrators threw many of the trem-

bling inmates into a small stream that flows through the Zoological Park, commanding horrified spectators to spit at them, defile them with mud and jeer at their plight. . . . The slightest manifestation of sympathy evoked a positive fury on the part of the perpetrators, and the crowd was powerless to do anything but turn horror-stricken eyes from the scene of abuse, or leave the vicinity."² Soon thereafter Jews were excluded by law from every conceivable area of German life, including schools, universities, and business activities. The **Aryanization** of Germany's culture and economy was complete.

Although relatively few ordinary Germans joined in the Crystal Night carnage, it was now abundantly clear to the Jews that the Nazi leaders wanted them out. As always, the problem was where to go. Most countries, including the United States and Western European nations such as France and Great Britain, restricted entry to those least likely to swell the welfare rolls — and immigrants, it was widely assumed, were sure to become wards of the state. The British limited Jewish immigration to Palestine in response to protests from the Arab majority there. The **Evian Conference**, held in July 1938 at the suggestion of American president Franklin D. Roosevelt with the goal of finding new homes for German Jewish refugees through intergovernmental cooperation, had been a conspicuous failure. The refugees' plight was dramatized in May 1939 when 930 German Jews left Germany aboard the German luxury liner *St. Louis*, believing they would be admitted to Cuba. Refused permission to disembark there, they sailed to the coast of the United States but were again rebuffed and forced to sail back to Europe.

To break through these obstacles, the German leaders in January 1939 established a **Reich Central Office for Jewish Emigration** under the direction of **Reinhard Heydrich**, chief of the Security Police and the Security Service of the SS. This office coordinated and streamlined everything involved in promoting Jewish emigration both legally and illegally. Whenever sufficient visas could not be obtained, the Germans simply chased groups of Jews across unguarded sections of Germany's borders. All of these procedures were modeled on a smaller Central Office for Jewish Emigration established the previous year in Vienna by **Adolf Eichmann**, the SS specialist in Jewish affairs. Throughout this SS takeover of Jewish emigration, Eichmann continued to distinguish himself by his diligence. By 1939 the Jews were leaving at the rate

2. Quoted in J. Noakes and A. G. Pridham, eds., *Nazism: A History in Documents and Eyewitness Accounts, 1919-1945* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1983-1988), p. 1:556.

of nearly 70,000 yearly, and only about 185,000 Jews were left in Germany proper when World War II began on September 1, 1939.

Jews were not the only "racially dangerous" group targeted by the Nazis for exclusion. Germany's 30,000 **Gypsies** were identified as racially alien and subjected to the terms of the Nuremberg Laws; some were placed in special Gypsy camps. Male homosexuals, blamed for undermining the racial community by failing to produce children, were sometimes sent to regular **concentration camps**. As racial Germans they might (theoretically) be rehabilitated and returned to the community, but in fact few of those sent to concentration camps survived. A third group, also consisting of racial Germans, was already partially excluded by being confined to hospitals and nursing homes. These were the mentally and physically handicapped, considered dangerous carriers of hereditary diseases. The Nazis were firm believers in **eugenics**, the selective breeding of humans for the purpose of improving the race by weeding out the weak and inferior. Starting in 1934 they subjected the handicapped to compulsory sterilization, excluding their future progeny from the national community and, indeed, from life itself.

WAR AND THE BEGINNING OF GENOCIDE, 1939-1941

During the first two years of World War II, the Germans radicalized their racial policies with astonishing speed and began subjecting their victims to **genocide**. The first to be exterminated were the German handicapped, who were gassed during the very first year of the war. Simultaneously the Germans brutally ghettoized the Jews and Gypsies in occupied Poland and later extended the exclusionary policies already in force in Germany to occupied Western Europe. In June 1941, when Hitler widened his war by attacking the Soviet Union, the German armed forces were accompanied by special mobile killing squads whose orders were to kill Jews and other "enemies of the Reich" on Soviet territory. By the end of the year preparations were being made to exterminate the Jews and Gypsies in Europe. Evidently Hitler believed that he could camouflage genocide under the cover of war. The truth might eventually leak out, but a swift victory would render knowledge of mass murder moot.

The Euthanasia (T4) Program

The mass murder of mentally and physically handicapped Germans was planned shortly before the outbreak of war, in the spring of 1939. It began with

the **ethanasia** of around 5,000 severely handicapped children in German hospitals during the winter of 1939–1940. This turned out to be merely a prelude to a massive expansion of the “mercy killing” of the handicapped at Hitler’s order in 1940 and 1941. Whether they had been sterilized or not, these individuals were held to be “useless eaters,” an economic drag on society, having “lives not worth living.” In a secret program, informally named T4 (after the address of the unit’s Berlin headquarters, Tiergartenstrasse 4), German doctors systematically killed at least 70,000 handicapped Germans: the mentally ill, retarded, blind, deaf, mute, senile, epileptic, and physically deformed. This was done chiefly at six killing centers where experiments revealed that the best method was injecting carbon monoxide gas into rooms disguised as showers. Although T4 was to be kept secret, word of it leaked out, and in 1941 courageous leaders of the **Catholic** and **Protestant churches** publicly denounced this murder of the defenseless. Early in August Bishop Galen of Münster delivered a stinging rebuke in a public sermon: “Woe to mankind, woe to our German nation if God’s holy commandment, ‘Thou shalt not kill’ . . . is not only broken, but if this transgression is actually tolerated and permitted to go unpunished.”³ Perhaps even more significant were protests from the German public. Hitler, infuriated at this interference but unwilling to risk dissension during wartime, officially ordered an end to gassings in the killing centers on August 24, 1941. However, the murders of handicapped Germans continued on a decentralized basis throughout the war and took perhaps another 80,000 lives.

T4 was both a logical extension of earlier exclusion policies and a precedent for the coming **Final Solution** of the Jewish problem. The killing centers developed techniques of mass murder that served as models for the **extermination camps**. Additionally, starting in 1941 T4 trained personnel would carry out mass murder on a far larger scale in the east.

Nazi Racial Policies in Occupied Poland

As the German armies swept across western and central Poland in September 1939, some 2,000,000 Polish Jews and smaller numbers of Gypsies and the handicapped were singled out for unusually brutal treatment. At first they were

3. Quoted in J. Noakes and A. C. Pridham, eds., *Nazism: A History in Documents and Eyewitness Accounts, 1919–1945* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1983–1988), p. 2:1038.

the targets of beatings, shootings, lootings, and other random acts of violence. Then the Germans set about conducting more organized atrocities. In the broad band of territory annexed directly to Germany, which constituted about one quarter of prewar Poland, the handicapped were brought under the umbrella of the T4 program and exterminated, whereas the Jews and Gypsies initially were to be rounded up for expulsion to the remaining Polish territory that was under German occupation. This territory, known as the **General Government**, was ruthlessly administered by Governor General **Hans Frank** in **Kraków**. The Germans briefly planned to establish a “Jewish Reservation” at **Nisko**, near **Lublin** in the General Government, and some Jews were actually sent there. However, the reservation was totally unprepared to accept large numbers of deportees, and those who were resettled there died by the thousands. German officials in the General Government as a whole protested that it could not accommodate such large numbers (more than 1,000,000) of Jews and Gypsies in addition to the multitudes of Poles who were also being deported there. Hence Nazi officials in the annexed territories relented and permitted the establishment of a large (with 160,000 inhabitants) ghetto in the industrial city of **Łódź**. This ghetto, intended as a purely temporary expedient, lasted until August 1944, in part because its leadership organized the ghetto inhabitants to produce essential war material for the Germans.

Throughout the annexed territories and the General Government the Germans confiscated the Jews’ property and gradually herded them into **ghettos**, where they were expected to perform various forms of **forced labor**. Comparatively small numbers of Gypsies went along with them. In carrying out these measures the Germans were helped by **Volksdeutsche**, ethnic Germans who had lived in Poland and other eastern European countries for generations. They were often the most enthusiastic supporters of ethnic cleansing.

There were a great many ghettos in the General Government, and they varied in size from the one in **Warsaw**, with 445,000 inhabitants, to small-town ghettos of only a few thousand. The largest ghettos and many of the small ones were sealed off from the remaining local populations, but a few of the ghettos were open to traffic back and forth. However, all of the ghettos had three features in common. First, they were governed by **Jewish Councils** that consisted of Jewish leaders appointed by and responsible to the Germans. Second, they were overcrowded and poorly supplied with food and medicines, resulting in many deaths from malnutrition and disease. Third, they were initially conceived of by the Germans as temporary holding pens until some place could be found to which the inhabitants could be permanently expelled.

Some German officials spoke of expelling the Jews to new homes in “the

East," presumably referring to the Soviet Union. Other German documents referred to **Madagascar** as a possible destination. Before the war began the Polish and French governments had discussed creating a home for the unwanted Jews of Europe on that Indian Ocean island off the coast of Africa, then a French colony (today the Malagasy Republic). Hitler had happily endorsed the idea. Once Germany conquered France in 1940, Madagascar was Hitler's to dispose of as he saw fit, but only if he could defeat or sign an armistice with Great Britain and gain access to the sea routes. In the first years of the war Hitler believed that victory was imminent. Hence in this early stage of the struggle the German policy on Jews and Gypsies remained one aimed at expulsion rather than genocide. That changed at some point in 1941.

Germany and Occupied Western Europe

In these regions, too, the Germans prepared the Jews for expulsion to Madagascar or some other remote spot. In Germany itself the Nazi leaders in 1939 established a kind of Jewish Council, the **Reich Association of Jews in Germany**, and made it responsible for all the remaining German Jews. Most of the Jews who had lived in small towns moved to the big German cities where they found shelter with larger Jewish communities. There the Nazi authorities concentrated them in special Jewish apartment blocs, informal ghettos that further isolated the Jews from German society. The able-bodied were forced to work in war factories. In September 1941 Jews were required to display a yellow Star of David with the inscription *Jude* (Jew) sewn on the front of their clothing whenever they appeared in public. In October the SS began systematic deportations of German Jews and Gypsies to ghettos in Eastern Europe, where they were made to share the fate of the victims already there. Later that same month SS leader Heinrich Himmler banned the voluntary emigration of Jews except in special cases that would enrich the Reich (that is, a few very rich Jews could, and did, buy their way out).

Following the German conquest in 1940 of most Western European countries — France, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and Norway — policies there on Jews and Gypsies were brought into line with those in Germany. The Jews were registered, expropriated, denaturalized, isolated, and required to wear the **yellow badge**. The cooperation of local officials in carrying out these measures was made easier because the harshest treatment was always reserved for foreign Jews. In France, which had the largest Jewish population in Western Europe (350,000), officials of the collaborationist **Vichy** regime rounded up 25,000 foreign Jews and placed them in French concentration

camps in preparation for future expulsion. In Western Europe deportations to the East did not begin until 1942. The only exception was Denmark, where the small Jewish population was relatively unmolested until 1943.

The Attack on the USSR and the Einsatzgruppen Actions

By early 1941 Hitler's war against England had reached a stalemate. In order to bring the war to a rapid conclusion the dictator decided to attack the Soviet Union in the expectation that rapid victory there would also bring the British to their knees. Additionally, as Hitler saw it, conquest of the Soviet Union would solve the problem of German *Lebensraum* (living space) and bring about a final reckoning with the most dangerous Jews of all, the Russian Communists. Operation **Barbarossa**, as the attack was called, began on June 22, 1941. At first it was fabulously successful, penetrating all the way to Moscow before winter weather forced a temporary halt to the invasion. Vast sections of the western Soviet Union were placed under the administration of the leading Nazi Party theoretician, **Alfred Rosenberg**, who was named Reich Minister for the Eastern Occupied Territories.

Included in the planning of Operation Barbarossa was the formation of four **Einsatzgruppen**, mobile killing squads made up of Security Police and Security Service personnel. They were instructed to follow the invading German armies and kill primarily Jews but also Communist officials, Gypsies, and the handicapped. The single largest *Einsatzgruppen* massacre occurred at the end of September 1941 when 33,000 Jews and Gypsies from Kiev were shot and buried at **Babi Yar** just outside the city. Before the war was over these *Einsatzgruppen* had shot and buried in mass graves more than 1,000,000 defenseless civilians of all ages, often with cooperation from the **German army**. Units of the German Order Police engaged in similar actions. Jews and Gypsies not thus disposed of were herded into ghettos like those in Poland. The largest of these were in **Minsk** (100,000), **Kovno** (30,000), and **Riga** (30,000). In rounding up these victims the Germans needed the aid of volunteers from among the conquered peoples of the Soviet Union, especially the Ukrainians and Lithuanians. Called **Hiwis**, these volunteers were also trained to help guard **labor and extermination camps**.

During the early phase of the war against the USSR, vast numbers of Soviet soldiers were also taken captive. As "subhuman" Slavs they were not treated according to the rules of war but rather were shot or mistreated in prisoner of war camps. More than 3,000,000 Soviet soldiers perished after surrendering to the Germans. The "racially inferior" Polish, Russian, and Ukrainian civilians, too,

were starved and exploited. Food and other resources needed to sustain life in Eastern Europe were sent to Germany. Before the war was over millions of Slavic civilians were dead.

The mass murder of Soviet Jews by the Einsatzgruppen may have been part of an existing overall plan to kill every Jew in Europe, although we cannot be certain of this. But three facts are certain. First, the astounding brutality of the war in the Soviet Union nurtured extremist thinking about ways to solve the "Jewish problem." Hitler had told his generals to carry out a "war of extermination" in the USSR, resulting in increasingly desperate resistance by the defending Red Army. Second, the refusal of the Soviet Union to collapse on schedule spoiled German plans to deport the Jews of Poland, Germany, and Western Europe in the near future. Overcrowding and disease in the East European ghettos worried German occupation officials about how much longer they could cope with so many Jews and Gypsies. The fact that Soviet Jews were being murdered seemed to suggest that killing them was an acceptable alternative to having them die slowly in captivity. Third, the Einsatzgruppen were proving imperfect instruments of mass murder. Shooting people one by one took too much time and was too visible. Worse, the men of those killing squads found mass murder so stressful that nervous breakdowns and alcoholism were common. Late in 1941 SS officials began searching for a more efficient and less public method of mass extermination. In September they carried out experimental gassings of Soviet prisoners of war at what was then the small Polish concentration camp at **Auschwitz**. In November construction of what were to become extermination camps began at **Belzec** and **Chelmno**, and in December Jews and Gypsies were being killed in gas vans at Chelmno. Hence many scholars believe that by the end of 1941 what the Germans called the "**Final Solution** to the European Jewish Problem" had begun.

THE FINAL SOLUTION, 1941-1944

The actual plan for the Final Solution was conveyed to the heads of other German government agencies by **Reinhard Heydrich** at the **Wannsee Conference** in 1942. This plan involved sending Jews from all over German-controlled Europe to ghettos, labor camps, and extermination camps in the East. The impact of these policies varied from country to country, and much depended on where the victims lived. News of the camps filtered out, but it was not always believed, and even when it was believed it was difficult to interpret. Many of the victims found ways to resist their tormentors, but for various reasons armed resistance was not a common response during the Holocaust.

The Wannsee Conference

In July 1941 Reich Marshall **Hermann Göring**, after Hitler the most powerful German leader, had authorized SS security chief **Reinhard Heydrich** to draw up "an overall plan of the organizational, functional, and material measures to be taken in preparing for the implementation of the aspired final solution of the Jewish question."⁴ Heydrich headed the Reich Security Main Office, which coordinated all German **police** and security agencies in Germany and the occupied countries. It took him nearly six months to come up with a plan, which suggests that Nazi policies may still have been in flux at that time. Heydrich called a meeting of leading government, party, and SS officials at Wannsee, a suburb of Berlin, on January 20, 1942, to inform them of the project. Hitler, he stated, had authorized the systematic deportation of all 11,000,000 European Jews to camps in Eastern Europe. There they would be forced to work for the Germans until they dropped. Gypsies were not mentioned at the conference, but in practice they would be included in the deportations. Nor was any specific mention made of extermination camps, but it was made clear that those incapable of work would be "dealt with appropriately." (The Nazi leaders always used the euphemisms "Final Solution" and "special treatment" to keep the genocide a secret.) Adolf Eichmann, who took the official notes of the Wannsee Conference, was placed in charge of arresting and deporting the victims to the camps. Once the various agencies represented at the conference had agreed to cooperate, the Final Solution could proceed.

Ghettos

At Wannsee Heydrich spoke of sweeping Europe from west to east. In practice, the Germans found it preferable to deal first with the far larger populations of Jews and Gypsies in Eastern Europe. There most of the Jews were already concentrated in urban **ghettos**, and some of these were emptied during 1942 and their residents sent to labor and extermination camps. But not all the ghettos could be liquidated during the first year of the Final Solution. It took time to complete the forced labor and killing installations, and even then their capacities were limited. Moreover, several of the ghettos were proving useful to the Germans. Ghetto factories and workshops were turning out everything from uniforms for German soldiers to toys for German children. Sometimes these

4. Nuremberg Document NG-2586, quoted in Raul Hilberg, ed., *Documents of Destruction* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1971), p. 89.

enterprises were owned and run by German businessmen, such as **Oskar Schindler** in Kraków. Elsewhere, as in Łódź, the Jews organized and ran the factories themselves. Hence these ghettos were permitted to last into 1943 and, in a few cases, 1944.

The **Jewish Councils** that ran the ghettos for the Germans hoped that such productivity would make the Jews indispensable to the war effort and buy life for at least some of them. Hence the councils sought to maintain strict order and to combat all forms of armed resistance to the Germans, believing that disorder or uprisings would bring down massive retaliation on the whole ghetto. Jewish **police** forces were organized by the councils to keep the ghettos in line and, whenever necessary, to hand troublemakers over to the Germans. Sometimes the police were also expected to supervise the roundups and deportations from the ghetto, as ordered by the Germans; at other times the Germans came in to do the job themselves.

Naturally the Jewish Council members and their families and employees, including the police, were the last to be deported, and they often enjoyed other privileges as well, such as better rations and living quarters. All of this made them controversial in the ghettos, but as they themselves saw it someone had to hold the Germans at bay and keep at least some ghetto inhabitants alive. Some Jewish Council leaders went out of their way to impress the Germans and emulate their authoritarian style, as did **Mordecai Chaim Rumkowski**, "Eldest of the Jews," in Łódź. Other Jewish Council leaders played the dangerous game of working with the Jewish underground while giving priority to keeping the Germans satisfied, as did **Jacob Gens**, chief of the **Vilna** Jewish Council. Council leaders who did not do as they were told were replaced, and defiance in the ghettos led to immediate roundups followed by mass shootings or deportations. Some council heads despaired. When **Adam Czerniaków**, chairman of the **Warsaw** Jewish Council, learned in July 1942 that he could do nothing to halt the massive deportations from the ghetto, he committed suicide. More compliant leadership took his place.

For ghetto inhabitants life was a constant struggle to obtain food and avoid deportation. The Germans granted them only the most minimal food supplies — sometimes as little as 500 calories a day per person — and the smuggling of food was essential to survival. The Jewish Councils typically established soup kitchens and rationing to assure that everyone got something to eat. But it was never enough, and disease and malnutrition brought on high death rates. Equally vital to survival was having a job. Without a work card certifying gainful employment, ghetto dwellers were vulnerable to being rounded up and deported at any time. Newly arriving Jews from Germany and Western

Europe, as well as those herded in from nearby towns and villages, had to be accommodated, another task that fell to the Jewish Councils. Jews in the ghettos, sometimes acting independently of the councils, also worked to keep spirits alive by organizing schools, concerts, plays, libraries, literary societies, and open or clandestine religious services. Secret archives, such as the **Oneg Shabbat** organized by **Emmanuel Ringelblum** in Warsaw, documented and preserved the history of life in the ghettos.

Cooperating with the Germans and promoting Jewish survival were the two poles of Jewish Council policies, but ultimately they could not be reconciled. By August 1944 the last of the big ghettos, Łódź, was being liquidated. Only one ghetto survived to the end, and it was a special case. The Germans made **Theresienstadt**, a town in occupied Czechoslovakia, into a "model ghetto" for privileged Jews, especially elderly German and Austrian Jews and Jewish war veterans who had fought for Germany in World War I. Comparatively good conditions there were exploited by the Germans when they took inquisitive **Red Cross** representatives on a tour of the ghetto in June 1944. At the same time German propagandists made a film of the ghetto showing idyllic conditions. In fact, the ghetto was usually overcrowded, and there were frequent deportations to camps in Poland. Especially in the last year of the war food and sanitary conditions deteriorated and deaths from disease rose. Of the nearly 140,000 Jews sent to Theresienstadt, fewer than 17,000 were freed when the ghetto was liberated in May 1945.

Forced Labor

Jews and Gypsies deported from Eastern European ghettos or from their homes or camps elsewhere in Europe were put through "selections." These might happen in a ghetto before deportation, at the final destination, or during a temporary stop at a transit camp along the way. Selections separated those who were capable of (and needed for) work from those who were not. The former usually went to labor camps and concentration camps; the latter went to extermination camps.

The **labor camps** were both very numerous and extremely varied. Most of them were in Poland, but others could be found in the Soviet Union and in Germany itself. Some labor camps, such as those located at the armaments plants at Skarzysko-Kamienna and Częstochowa in Poland, were enormous. Others might have only a few hundred workers. Some were placed next to existing factories, but in other cases the workers built both their own camps and the factories in which they worked from scratch. Although some labor camps

were owned lock, stock, and barrel by the SS, others were operated by the German army, the Luftwaffe, the Organisation Todt (German construction battalions), and private German firms. But all of them were under the jurisdiction of local SS and police leaders. Assisting the German authorities were guards, often Ukrainian Hiwis, and **prisoner functionaries** consisting of the camp senior and his helpers. In 1943 most of the labor camps were absorbed into the concentration camp system, becoming concentration camps in their own right or else external subcamps of existing concentration camps. The rest were shut down and their prisoners deported or killed.

Other prisoners were sent to forced labor in concentration camps, the numbers of which increased dramatically as they spread from Germany to other parts of Hitler's wartime empire. Most Jews in the prewar German concentration camps were deported to new concentration camps in the East. In all these new camps the existing system of colored triangles distinguished the categories of prisoners: red for political prisoners; green for common criminals; black for "asocials," including Gypsies; and pink for homosexuals. Jews had an inverted yellow triangle sewn over a red one, forming a Star of David. Only at Auschwitz and its satellite camps were the working prisoners tattooed with their serial numbers on the left forearm. Jewish inmates had a triangle added to their tattoos to distinguish them from non-Jews.

In order to run the labor camps as efficiently as possible, the SS carried over an administrative system from the German **concentration camps** that placed important aspects of camp life in the hands of **prisoner functionaries**. These included "capos," who acted as foremen of prisoner work details; "block seniors," who were responsible for the prisoners when they were in their barracks; clerks, who kept camp records and made work assignments; and "runners," usually teenagers who carried messages all over the camps. Their authority was backed up by "enforcers," prisoners armed with whips and truncheons. All of these prisoner functionaries were responsible to a "camp senior," a prisoner who reported directly to the camp commandant, usually an SS officer. At times the SS gave these jobs to the professional criminals among the prisoners, confident that they would demonstrate the requisite lack of pity. At other times, and especially when superior organizing skills were needed, the Germans appointed Jews and other political prisoners to the positions.

The prisoner functionaries had considerable power in the camps, and they were rewarded by being given special privileges, such as private sleeping quarters, more and better food, and exemption from harsh work details. Because these could be withdrawn at any time, members of this camp aristocracy worked hard to satisfy the SS, often treating their fellow prisoners with unbelievable

cruelty. As one survivor recalled: "If he [the prisoner functionary] lost his position, he would go down just like the others, and he was ready, rather, to kill a hundred others. The Germans didn't have to bother with the whole camp population at all; just appoint one Jew, and then he would arrange everything in the best order to their satisfaction, and very often, much beyond their demands."⁵ But that was not always the case. Some of the prisoner functionaries used their positions to shield their comrades from the very worst treatment by faking beatings, reassigning threatened prisoners to easier work details, and sending the sick to infirmaries where prisoner doctors could look after them.

The Germans spoke of forced labor as "extermination through work." This was an appropriate description, for only the fittest prisoners could survive back-breaking work, long hours, brutal punishments, poor and insufficient food, and inadequate medical care. The SS was not alone in profiting from their misery. Giant German firms such as the chemicals conglomerate I. G. Farben, the aircraft manufacturer Heinkel, and the armaments firm Krupp exploited forced labor. Camp products included raw materials such as food and coal as well as all sorts of industrial products, such as synthetic rubber, textiles, aircraft parts, rifle and artillery shells, and electronic components. Toward the end of the war prisoners in Eastern European camps were also sent out to dig trenches for the retreating German army.

Surviving forced labor required both determination and luck. A prisoner had to be determined to survive and willing to take chances to do it. This might include volunteering for extra work in return for additional rations or risking the wrath of some powerful prisoner to ask for a better work assignment. Or it might mean stealing food from the kitchen or faking an illness and hiding from selections and deportations in the sick ward. A prisoner who lost this determination, who gave up — in camp slang a **Muselmann** — was considered to be as good as dead. Such persons either died in the camp or were identified at the frequent camp selections for shooting or deportation to an extermination camp. But prisoners had only limited opportunities to take risks and thus determine their fate. More often than not luck played a decisive role. Did the Germans happen to need workers on the day of your selection? Did you have a skill they could use? Were you young and healthy? Was the prisoner in charge of work assignments from your hometown or country? Any number of purely fortuitous situations could tip the balance one way or the other.

5. Donald L. Niewyk, ed., *Fresh Wounds: Early Narratives of Holocaust Survival* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), pp. 40–41.

Extermination

Jews and Gypsies who were sent to **extermination camps** were too young, too old, or too sick to work, women with children, or simply not needed for forced labor. Four of the six extermination camps were devoted almost entirely to mass murder: **Chełmno**, **Bełzec**, **Sobibór**, and **Treblinka**. No large labor or concentration camps were attached to them, and only a few hundred prisoners were kept alive there to dispose of the bodies (the work of the **Sonderkommando**), sort the victims' belongings, and generally assist the SS in running the camps. The two remaining camps, Majdanek and Auschwitz, were extermination and concentration camps combined. In these camps selections done upon entry determined who lived or died. At the other camps, arrival almost invariably meant death that very day.

Chełmno, just north of Łódź, was the first and smallest of the extermination camps. It was also the only extermination camp in which **gas vans** were used to kill the victims. These were trucks that had been modified to divert engine exhaust into the rear compartments, suffocating those who had been sealed inside. The victims were told to disrobe because they were going to be taken to the showers by truck before continuing on their travels to the East. Most were taken in by the ruse; those who held back were forced to climb aboard. The doors were closed and the engines run until the screams stopped. Then the trucks took the bodies into the nearby forest where Jewish **Sonderkommandos** burned them or buried them in mass graves. **Chełmno** operated from December 1941 to March 1943 and reopened for a few months in mid-1944 to finish off some of the remnants of the Łódź ghetto. Altogether it took the lives of at least 152,000 Jews and Gypsies, mainly those from the area of western Poland annexed to Germany.

Bełzec, **Sobibór**, and **Treblinka**, the remaining extermination camps devoted solely to gassing, are usually treated together as the **Operation Reinhard** camps, named for Reinhard Heydrich after his May 1942 assassination near Prague by Czech patriots. These camps, established primarily to exterminate Polish Jewry, were under the dynamic command of **Odilo Globocnik**, SS and Police Leader in **Lublin**, Poland. Each camp had a staff of around thirty SS men, most of whom had been engaged in the **euthanasia** program, assisted by Ukrainian guards trained at the SS **Trawniki** training camp. **Bełzec**, near **L'vov** in southeastern Poland, operated from March to December 1942. **Sobibór**, in eastern Poland, started in May 1942 and shut down in October 1943. **Treblinka**, in northeastern Poland, specialized in gassing the Warsaw Jews between July 1942 and August 1943.

All three of these Operation Reinhard camps employed specially constructed **gas chambers** deceptively identified as shower rooms. These fixed installations had come to be regarded as far more efficient than the gas vans used at **Chełmno**. The victims were told that they had arrived at a transit camp where they were to be cleaned up before continuing on to places of resettlement. Misleading signs, railroad timetables, and check-ins for clothing and valuables disguised what was really happening. Once the doors were closed, exhaust from a motor salvaged from a tank or truck was piped into the sealed structures. The bodies were buried or burned by the men of the **Sonderkommando**. Prisoner work details also gathered and sorted the victims' possessions. **Bełzec** claimed the lives of 600,000 victims, **Sobibór** 250,000, and **Treblinka** 870,000.

Majdanek, just outside Lublin in the **General Government**, shared with **Auschwitz** the distinction of combining extermination and concentration camp facilities. It was established in 1941 as a camp for Soviet prisoners of war, and a year later Jews, Gypsies, and Polish political prisoners were added to the mix of about 50,000 inmates. **Majdanek** functioned primarily as a giant concentration camp, with emphasis on "extermination through work." A small carbon monoxide gas chamber, later supplemented by another that used **Zyklon B** (hydrogen cyanide) and a **crematorium**, took tens of thousands of lives, but most of the more than 200,000 who died there were shot or fell to hyper-exploitation, malnutrition, and disease. About 30 percent of them were Jews. The worst massacre occurred on November 3, 1943, when virtually all 18,000 Jews from **Majdanek** and its subcamps were machine-gunned by SS men as part of **Operation Harvest Festival**, which was designed to eradicate all remaining Jews in the Lublin district. The camp was evacuated before the Soviet army reached Lublin in July 1944, and the surviving prisoners were sent to **Auschwitz** and concentration camps in Germany.

Auschwitz, far larger than **Majdanek**, likewise became an extermination camp when gas chambers and crematoria were added to an existing concentration camp. Located just outside the Polish town of **Oświęcim** (**Auschwitz** is its German name), it had been a Polish army camp until 1939 when the Germans made it over into a concentration camp for Poles. In March 1941 **Heinrich Himmler** visited **Auschwitz** and ordered its expansion into the largest of the German concentration camps. He was probably influenced by its site at the intersection of two main railroad lines about thirty miles southwest of **Kraków** and close to the large Jewish population of Eastern Upper Silesia. In the course of expanding **Auschwitz** during the next three years, the Germans also turned it into the largest extermination camp, responsible for at least 1,100,000 dead, more than 90 percent of them Jews.

Auschwitz came to be a vast undertaking, holding 105,000 prisoners and covering eighteen square miles in three distinct sectors, each separated from the others by a few miles of open land or by the town itself. The original camp (Auschwitz I), with its brick barracks and a small gas chamber and crematorium, housed the central administrative offices, housing for 30,000 prisoners, a medical ward, and various workshops. A far larger new section of the camp was built on the site of the tiny hamlet of Birkenau (Auschwitz II). Its Polish residents were cleared out and prisoners from the original camp, mainly Soviet prisoners of war, built a vast collection of barracks and administrative structures. Later four huge gas chamber–crematorium complexes were added. Expansion of Birkenau continued nonstop almost up to the time when plans had to be made to evacuate the camp. The heavy industrial sector of Auschwitz was located at Monowitz (Auschwitz III), often referred to by the name of its principal product, Buna, an artificial rubber. In addition to these three sectors of Auschwitz itself, a network of forty external subcamps, some of them many miles away, supplied the main camp with food, coal, and building materials.

The four large gas chamber–crematorium buildings at Birkenau (Auschwitz II) were designed for murder on a truly industrial scale. The largest of them could gas 2,000 people at one time. Its gas chambers were located underground; the bodies were put on elevators to reach the crematoria directly above. These facilities were not completed until 1943. Until then small gas chambers improvised in old farmhouses at the edge of the camp served the purpose. Hydrogen cyanide gas, an industrial-strength pesticide known by its commercial name **Zyklon B**, was used throughout. In the words of camp commandant **Rudolf Höss**, “It took from 3 to 15 minutes to kill the people in the death chamber depending upon climatic conditions. We knew when the people were dead because their screaming stopped. We usually waited about one-half hour before we opened the doors and removed the bodies.”⁶

The gas chambers and crematoria were operated by prisoners of the **Sonderkommando** under direct SS supervision. Their job was to remove the dead from the gas chambers, salvage any valuables hidden in the bodies (including gold dental fillings), and dispose of the remains. Body disposal was always a big problem at Auschwitz. The gas chambers could kill far more people than the crematoria could burn. Hence whenever the gas chambers were running at full capacity, the Sonderkommandos were forced to burn the excess bodies in open pits at the edge of the camp.

6. U.S. Government, *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1946), p. 6:788.

A rail spur was built right into the center of Birkenau, and **selections** were made on the ramp by SS doctors. Almost before newly arrived prisoners knew what was happening, they had been separated into two groups. Those selected to die were moved directly to the gas chamber, where the usual methods of deception were used to make the bewildered victims believe they were entering showers. Those selected for work were assigned to a sector of the main camp or sent to one of the Auschwitz satellite camps. The sexes were separated, with just two exceptions. A special Gypsy family camp, numbering 20,000, was housed in Birkenau until it was liquidated in August 1944 and its inmates either gassed or sent to other camps. The second exception, a family camp of 5,000 Czech Jews sent to Birkenau from Theresienstadt in September 1943, lasted as long as the SS thought it might be a useful ruse should the **Red Cross** insist on inspecting the camp. When that likelihood dimmed, this family camp, too, was liquidated in July 1944.

A few of the Auschwitz prisoners who survived the initial selections were used as guinea pigs in ghastly **medical experiments** done by Dr. **Josef Mengele** and other SS physicians. Few of these prisoners survived the ordeal. Perhaps the luckiest prisoners were those assigned to the Birkenau storerooms for property confiscated from the victims. This sector was nicknamed “Canada” by inmates who imagined it a land of endless wealth. There many of them were able to “organize” (prisoner slang meaning “steal”) valuables to trade on the black market for extra food and other privileges.

Small gas chambers functioned at six of the “ordinary” concentration camps in Germany: **Sachsenhausen**, **Neuengamme**, **Mauthausen**, **Stutthof**, **Gross-Rosen**, and **Ravensbrück**. These took the lives of thousands of Jews, Gypsies, German and Polish political prisoners, and religious dissenters.

Netting the Victims

The German plan to sweep all of Europe and net every single Jew and Gypsy could not be completed. Nor could it be carried out with uniform effectiveness everywhere in Nazi-dominated Europe. In fact, whether one lived or died during the Holocaust often depended on where one was born. Gypsies and Jews under direct German rule were usually at greater risk than those living in countries ruled by allied or collaborationist governments. The attitudes of the surrounding population helped determine whether one’s neighbors would extend or withhold aid. Geography, too, played a role by establishing whether there were hills and forests in which to hide or nearby neutral countries that might offer refuge. Timing was another factor. Populations of Jews and Gyp-

sies that were swept up in the first months of the Final Solution were less likely to survive than those taken later in the war. A country-by-country survey will demonstrate the diverse impact of the Final Solution on the various parts of Hitler's Europe. We begin with those areas of Eastern Europe that were under direct German control, for nowhere else were Nazi policies so harsh or enforced so brutally from the very start. Then we will turn to Germany and the rest of Europe.

Poland, a country that had been revived at the end of World War I after more than a hundred years of foreign domination, was home to more than 3,250,000 Jews (10 percent of the total population) and 50,000 Gypsies. Many Poles resented the Jews' prominence in the business and financial life of the country, which led to policies in the 1920s and 1930s designed to diminish it. However, nothing that the Poles had done approached the level of persecution by the Germans starting in 1939: confiscation of property, concentration in ghettos, and deportation to labor and extermination camps. These were welcomed by a minority of Poles, whereas another minority of them tried to help the victims hide or pass as Poles. This was always dangerous, for many Jews and Gypsies did not look at all like Slavs or speak good Polish. Poles discovered helping them were shot, along with their families and sometimes their whole villages. Hence most Poles chose not to get involved. They had their own hands full trying to cope with extraordinarily harsh German rule.

Given the length and severity of German rule in Poland, the priority given to the large numbers of victims there, the many German police units stationed there, and the unassimilated status of most Polish Jews, few of the targeted victims survived. About 90 percent (2,900,000) of the Polish Jews and at least 16 percent (8,000) of the Polish Gypsies perished.

The Soviet Union had emancipated its nearly 3,000,000 Jews and encouraged their assimilation following World War I. When Hitler attacked in June 1941 Soviet officials managed to evacuate some Jews into the interior, but hundreds of thousands were trapped by the rapid German advance. Harsh German occupation policies were intensified by Hitler's association of Jews with communism. Sweeps by Einsatzgruppen and subsequent deportations to labor and extermination camps decimated the Jewish and Gypsy populations. At least 700,000 Soviet Jews and 30,000 Soviet Gypsies died in the Holocaust.

The Baltic states of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia had been absorbed by the Soviet Union in 1940. Extreme nationalists in these small countries believed that the Jews had welcomed Communist rule, and those in Lithuania actually attacked the Jews when the German armies overran the Baltic region in June 1941. These sentiments and actions enhanced the work of the Einsatz-

gruppen and made ghettoization and deportation easier. In most respects the Final Solution paralleled that in the USSR. About 80 percent of the 245,000 Jews and more than 35 percent of the 7,000 Gypsies in the Baltic states died.

Germany, now enlarged by Austria and lands annexed from Czechoslovakia (the **Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia**, roughly coterminous with today's Czech Republic) and from Poland, deported virtually all its remaining Jews and Gypsies to Eastern European ghettos and camps in 1942 and 1943. A small number of comparatively fortunate Jews were sent to **Theresienstadt**. By the end of 1942 only a few thousand Jews working in important war industries had been exempted from the transports, and they, too, were taken during the following year. About 5,000 German Jews managed to hide with the help of sympathetic friends and neighbors, although this was risky business for all concerned. Some ordinary citizens expressed delight with the deportations, but many others ignored them out of a sense of being able to do nothing about them or because they had other things on their minds.

Many of the Germans who were actively opposed to Hitler and joined the resistance in order to bring his government down were appalled by the persecutions of the Jews. This group included men of the left, such as Julius Leber, conservative resisters, such as **Claus Schenk von Stauffenberg**, and those opposing Hitler on religious grounds, such as **Dietrich Bonhoeffer**. Students belonging to the **White Rose** resistance group centered at Munich University denounced antisemitism and exposed the extermination of the Jews in their anti-Nazi pamphlets. Another German resister, **Kurt Gerstein**, infiltrated the SS in order to get firsthand evidence of Nazi crimes. He informed foreign diplomats about the Final Solution in 1942, but he was not believed. Had efforts by the German resistance to kill Hitler and neutralize the SS succeeded, the Final Solution would have ended.

On the eve of the Final Solution about 150,000 Jews remained in the original German lands, more than 50,000 Jews in Austria, and 92,000 Jews in the annexed Czech lands. Of these groups about 135,000 German Jews, virtually all the Austrian Jews, and 78,000 Czech Jews died. Additional numbers of Jews from these countries who had fled to nearby countries were swept up there. Of the Gypsy populations in those areas, 75 percent of the 20,000 in Germany, 58 percent of the 11,200 in Austria, and 38 percent of the 13,000 in the Czech lands succumbed during the Holocaust.

Yugoslavia was occupied by the Germans in April 1941 and immediately partitioned. Much of it was turned over to the newly created German satellite state of Croatia, but the south, mainly Serbia, was under direct German rule. There the Jews were held responsible for **partisan** attacks on German forces,

and thousands of Jews, Gypsies, and communists were shot in reprisals by the **German Army**. The rest were rounded up and dispatched by gas vans. By June 1942 the head of the German military government in Serbia, Harald Turner, could claim that he had solved his Jewish and Gypsy problems. In fact, hundreds of people from both groups had fled to the mountains to find refuge with the partisans. The rest, 24,000 Jews and at least 1,000 Gypsies, were killed in Serbia itself.

Greece was occupied at the same time as Yugoslavia (April 1941), and part of it was handed over to Germany's ally Bulgaria. The rest was divided into German and Italian occupation zones. Most Greek Jews lived in the German zone, and in 1943 they were placed in a ghetto in Salonika and later deported to Poland. The Italians at first refused to hand over the Jews in their zone, but when Italy surrendered and changed sides in the war, the Germans took over their zone and deported the remaining Greek Jews, including those from the Greek islands and the adjacent country of Albania. Evidently most Greek Jews believed German stories about being resettled in Poland. Only a few thousand went into hiding. About 80 percent of the 73,000 Greek Jews and an unknown number of Greek Gypsies fell victim to the Final Solution.

Hungary, a German ally, did not come under direct German control until March 1944. Before that Hungary's right-wing government, directed by **Miklós Horthy**, passed some anti-Jewish laws but refused to participate in the Final Solution. Only Jews who did not have Hungarian nationality, numbering about 20,000, were deported to German-controlled territory. The 725,000 Jews living inside Hungary's border during World War II were safe until early 1944, when Hitler learned that leading Hungarian politicians were holding secret negotiations for a separate peace with the Allies. Furious, the German dictator ordered his army to occupy the country in March 1944, and Horthy was forced to replace the peacemakers with pro-German politicians. **Adolf Eichmann** traveled to Budapest and personally took charge of the Final Solution in Hungary.

Eichmann forced the Hungarian Jews to form a Central Jewish Council and told them that they would be safe as long as they followed orders. In April they were told to form ghettos, and a month later deportations began. Hungarian police supervised the entire process. Eichmann reassured both the deportees and the Hungarians that the destination was **labor camps** in Germany and Poland, a story that was widely accepted. In fact, some Jews and Gypsies were sent to do forced labor in concentration camps, but the majority of them were killed at Auschwitz, which reached its destructive peak in July and August 1944 with the gassing of approximately 400,000 victims. Although Horthy

was swayed by foreign protests over the deportations and feared having to answer for them should the Allies win, his attempts to block the transports from July on were only partially successful. Eichmann's deportations were slowed but not stopped. Finally, the Germans ousted Horthy in October 1944, and the deportations resumed. Jews who were not sent away were formed into labor battalions to dig fortifications against the Russians. In the end thousands were slaughtered by the Germans or by the Hungarian fascists, members of the **Arrow Cross** movement. More than 200,000 Hungarian Jews survived because the Germans did not have time to finish the job and because Horthy had slowed them down. Roughly two-thirds of the Hungarian Jews had died, as had at least 1,000 Hungarian Gypsies.

Slovakia, another German ally that was taken over by the Germans in 1944, willingly cooperated with Germany at the beginning of the Holocaust. Slovakia had been part of Czechoslovakia before the war, but the Germans had rewarded it for helping destroy that country in 1939 by making it an "independent" country. In fact it was a German satellite ruled by a Catholic priest, **Father Jozef Tiso**. When the Germans asked for the Slovakian Jews, Tiso's government enthusiastically complied and even paid the Germans five hundred marks per Jew, ostensibly to defray the costs of resettlement. Between March and June 1942 around 56,000 of the 89,000 Slovakian Jews were rounded up by the paramilitary **Hlinka Guard** and sent to Poland. Then the Slovakian leaders changed their minds and stopped the transports. They had heard rumors about the extermination camps, and they were being pressured by the Vatican to stop deporting the Jews.

From June 1942 to August 1944 most of the remaining Slovakian Jews were placed in **labor camps** in Slovakia itself. Compared with the German labor camps, these were humanely run. When Soviet forces approached Slovakia in August 1944, an unsuccessful uprising of anti-Tiso partisans led to a German takeover of the country and a resumption of the deportations. In all at least 60,000 (68 percent) of the Jews who had remained in Slovakia and at least 400 Slovakian Gypsies fell victim to the Final Solution.

Croatia, another German satellite state that was created by the Germans, governed most of northern Yugoslavia during World War II. It was ruled by Ante Pavelić, head of the fascist **Ustasha** movement and every bit as brutal and racist as Hitler. From the start Pavelić pursued a policy of ethnic cleansing aimed at removing Serbs (who were hated for dominating Croats when both groups lived in Yugoslavia between 1919 and 1941) as well as Jews and Gypsies. Jews and Gypsies were sent to Croatian labor camps in 1941, and the following year they began to be deported at the request of the Germans. Only

those in the Italian occupation zone of Croatia were spared, and, as in Greece, that changed when Italy surrendered in September 1943 and the Germans took over the entire area. By then, however, most of the Jews and Gypsies had fled to the partisans that were active in the area. The distinguishing feature of the Holocaust in Croatia was the very large proportion of victims killed in Croatia at the hands of the Croatians themselves, perhaps 75 percent of the total. Estimated total losses were 500,000 Serbs, 25,000 Gypsies, and 32,000 Jews (about 80 percent of the Jewish population).

The remaining Eastern European countries allied with Germany — Bulgaria and Romania — declined to deport their Jews to the extermination camps in Poland, and because they were never occupied by the Germans, they were not forced to do so. And yet, the Holocaust touched them too, in diverse ways.

Bulgaria, with a fairly small Jewish population of 50,000 and no history of strong antisemitism, insisted on solving its “Jewish problem” at home, putting off German demands for deportations. Effectively that meant some comparatively mild anti-Jewish legislation, but nothing more. Jews from neighboring countries fled to Bulgaria for refuge, with the result that there were more Jews in the country at the end of the war than at its start. The great exception to this was the fate of the Jews and Gypsies in Macedonia and Thrace, parts of Yugoslavia and Greece given to Bulgaria by Hitler in 1941. There the grateful Bulgarians agreed to round up and deport as many as they could find. More than 11,000 Jews living there were transported to Poland.

Romania, with a far larger Jewish population (441,000 in mid-1941) and a powerful tradition of antisemitism, likewise rebuffed German requests to transport its Jews to Poland. Even more so than in Bulgaria, national pride was an issue. The Romanians disliked the Germans’ arrogance and their failures to deliver promised military aid at a time when Romanian and German forces were fighting side by side in the Soviet Union. Hence they chose to intensify existing anti-Jewish laws but did not go through with plans to deport the Jews. The story might have been very different had the highly antisemitic **Iron Guard** managed to seize power in Romania when it rose up in January 1941. In fact the government remained firmly in the hands of Marshal **Ion Antonescu**, a more moderate antisemite, for the remainder of the war.

Greatly complicating the situation in Romania was the prewar occupation of the disputed border provinces of **Bessarabia** and **Bukovina** by the USSR. Forced to accept this loss in 1940 by Hitler, who was then observing his 1939 Nazi-Soviet Pact with Stalin, Romania regained the provinces when it joined the German assault on the Soviet Union in June 1941. The Romanians claimed

that the 300,000 Jews who lived there had welcomed Soviet rule, and in fact some of them had. In retaliation, Romanian troops and members of a German *Einsatzgruppe* killed thousands of Jews and Gypsies in Bessarabia and Bukovina and herded most of the rest into ghettos across the Dniester River (**Transnistria**) in Romanian-occupied Ukraine. There many more of them were massacred or else left to die from hunger and exposure. Other Jews were killed in Romania proper. Altogether at least 121,000 Jews fell victim, along with a minimum of 19,000 Gypsies.

In Western Europe conditions were crucially different from Eastern Europe, in several ways. Because there were fewer Jews and Gypsies in Western Europe, the Germans went after the more numerous Eastern European victims first. There were also fewer Germans there. With the heaviest fighting going on in the East, their police forces in the West were usually stretched very thin. Jews native to Western Europe were, for the most part, highly assimilated, which made it easier for them to “pass” as Gentiles. Antisemitism was less pronounced in the west and hence less of a barrier to aiding Jews. Finally, several Western European countries shared borders with neutral states that might grant asylum to refugees.

But the Final Solution did not have a uniform impact on the various Western European countries that were under German control. Much depended on the size of a country’s Jewish population, the attitudes of local officials and ordinary people, and the availability of hiding places and neutral refuges. These varied greatly from country to country, and they explain why the Holocaust took a far higher toll in some countries than in others.

France, with 350,000 Jews (many of them refugees) and 40,000 Gypsies, had the largest such populations in Western Europe. It also had a pro-German government during the Final Solution. Known as the **Vichy** regime and led by World War I hero Marshal **Henri Pétain**, the government had been formed by right-wing Frenchmen to collaborate with Germany after France’s defeat in 1940. Pétain’s prime minister, Pierre Laval, was especially keen on demonstrating France’s qualifications for junior partnership in German-dominated Europe and willingly brought French laws into line with German antisemitic legislation. Foreign Jews and Gypsies were placed in French concentration camps, and in 1942 they were deported to Poland. French Gypsies were especially hard hit. Almost 40 percent (just over 15,000) of them died, in part because of a long-standing law that required nomads to be registered with the police and prewar requirements that they stay in designated camps. Vichy officials were less willing to send away native French Jews, but in the end they caved in to German pressure. Without the cooperation of Vichy police and

other officials, the Germans would have had a much harder time enforcing the Final Solution in France. And yet, only just over 20 percent of the Jews in France (75,000) died in the Holocaust. How can this comparatively low figure be explained?

In contrast to much of Europe, France contained a vast and sparsely populated hinterland in the south and west of the country. A significant number of Jews fled there when the Germans invaded, and many had the good sense to stay there in hiding rather than return home. Other Jews fled to these rural backwaters when deportations threatened. There they received help from sympathetic Frenchmen who either hid them or assisted in their escape to Switzerland or Spain, both neutral countries bordering on France. Others made their way to the small Italian zone of occupation from which Jews were not deported until the Germans took it over in September 1943. The village of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, where the local Protestant ministers influenced the people to help thousands of Jews, has come to symbolize this aid, although it was an extreme case. Timing, too, has to be taken into account. The first Jews to be deported were the foreign Jews, always less popular than assimilated French Jews. By the time orders came to arrest the latter, Frenchmen were no longer certain that Hitler was going to win his war and were beginning to shake off defeatism. French policemen became increasingly unreliable, and the Germans lacked the manpower to do the job for themselves. Hence geography, Jewish flight, French helpfulness, and declining German fortunes combined to frustrate German and Vichy plans to deport all the French Jews.

The Netherlands' experience of the Holocaust was very different and far more tragic. About 75 percent of the 140,000 Jews who lived there in 1940 did not survive, as was also true of about half of its 500 Gypsies. The Germans regarded the Dutch as fellow Aryans who eventually would be incorporated into the Reich. Therefore they imposed a stern civilian (that is, Nazi Party) regime directed by an Austrian Nazi, **Arthur Seyss-Inquart**. The Dutch did not take kindly to direct German rule or to the anti-Jewish measures that came with it. When several hundred Dutch Jews were deported to German concentration camps for defending themselves against attacks by Dutch Nazis, the Dutch unions responded with a general strike in February 1941. This was the only act of its kind in any country during World War II. The Germans only cracked down harder, forcing an end to the strike by threatening even more deportations and ruling the Netherlands with an iron fist. In general the Dutch civil service cooperated in identifying and deporting Jews and Gypsies.

When mass deportations from the Netherlands began in 1942, most Dutch Jews followed directives from the **Jewish Council** to report as ordered. The

great majority of them were native-born and well to do, used to trusting their leaders and perhaps incapable of facing up to the dangers that faced them. About 26,000 Jews went into hiding with the help of sympathetic friends and neighbors. But this proved difficult. The Netherlands was small, heavily populated, and lacking any remote rural areas. Hiding had to be done in attics and walled-off rooms, which multiplied the chances of discovery over a three-year period. Discovery and denunciation by the minority of Dutch collaborators and informers was always possible. The fate of **Anne Frank**, whose diary became famous after the war, was similar to that of many in hiding. She and her family were detected when someone reported hearing a toilet flush in a supposedly unused part of a building where they were concealed. Flight, too, was difficult. Neutral countries were far away, and crossing the North Sea to England was all but impossible. The Dutch Jews were trapped.

Belgium in many ways was in a similar position: small, heavily populated, and remote from safe havens. And yet, roughly 60 percent of the 66,000 Jews in Belgium at the start of the war survived the Final Solution. Compared with the Netherlands, German rule in Belgium was less severe. Belgium was not at first slated for annexation to Germany and hence was placed under military administration. Belgian officials were able to exploit the German army's relative indifference to racial policies by refusing to carry out some of the more extreme directives against the Jews. Moreover, the vast majority — more than 80 percent — of the Jews in Belgium were recent immigrants, refugees from Germany and Eastern Europe and hence extremely wary of official policies. Hence many of them evaded registration, went into hiding, sabotaged the work of the Jewish Council, joined underground organizations, and fled to France. In April 1943 an armed Jewish resistance group attacked a deportation train and enabled more than 200 Jews to escape. Still, at least 25,000 Jews from Belgium died in the Holocaust, as did at least 350 Gypsies (60 percent of the total Gypsy population in Belgium).

Denmark is famous for having saved most of its 8,000 Jews by slipping them across to neutral Sweden in small boats in October 1943. That was possible because very unusual conditions prevailed in German-occupied Denmark. Before 1943 the Germans treated the Danes with kid gloves. Danish agricultural products were very important to the German economy, and the Danes made no trouble, in part because the Germans kept the Danish king and government in place. The Germans also refrained from deporting the Danish Jews because they knew that the Danes despised Nazi racism and would react with hostility to antisemitic policies. The story probably would have been very different had the Danish Jewish community not been so small.

Relations between Germans and Danes deteriorated in 1943 as the Germans increased their demands and the Danish underground began to resist. Hitler ordered the German army to take control of the government, and the SS made plans to deport the Jews. But other German officials leaked word of these plans to the Danish underground because they did not want the deportation of Jews to make German-Danish relations even worse. The Danes then organized the flight to Sweden by fishing boats, and fewer than one hundred Danish Jews died in the Holocaust. This was possible because the small Jewish community was concentrated mainly in Copenhagen, neutral Sweden was just a few miles away and willing to take the refugees, and the Germans were divided about how best to deal with the Danes and their Jews.

Italy, alone among the countries of Western Europe, began the war as an ally of the Third Reich. But Italian Fascism was no carbon copy of German Nazism, and Mussolini's views on race differed from Hitler's. The Italian dictator did not especially like Jews, but he was not a radical antisemite, and support for him among the 48,000 Italian Jews was fairly widespread. Racial laws adopted in the late 1930s to cement Italy's new alliance with Germany were only weakly enforced. During the first years of World War II Italian Jews and Gypsies were safe from the Final Solution, and those in Italian occupation zones in France, Greece, and Croatia were shielded from deportations. Several thousand foreign and stateless Jews were placed in Italian concentration camps in 1940, but they, too, were spared worse treatment.

All that changed when Mussolini fell from power following the Allied invasion of Sicily in July 1943. In September Italy surrendered and the German army swiftly seized control of central and northern Italy to prevent the Allies from striking northward. The SS went after the 35,000 Italian Jews who lived there, but they did not find it easy. Italians were not antisemitic, and they despised the Germans. Jews found refuge with friends, neighbors, and various institutions of the Catholic church. They were assisted in this by a joint Jewish-Gentile underground group called *Delasem*, which also helped a considerable number of Jews escape to Switzerland. Only a few Italian policemen were enticed by financial rewards for arresting Jews, and the Germans lacked the manpower to track down many on their own. On the other hand, Mussolini's Fascist militia cheerfully assisted in the deportations. The final death toll, around 8,000 Jews and 1,000 Gypsies, was less than 20 percent of the Italian Jews and about 4 percent of the Italian Gypsies.

Norway, Finland, and Luxembourg, all of which had very small Jewish populations, experienced the Holocaust in diverse ways. Nearly half of Nor-

way's 1,700 Jews crossed the long border with Sweden and were warmly welcomed there. A few others managed to hide from German deportations, but nearly half were arrested by the German and Norwegian police and sent to Auschwitz. Exactly 762 died. Finland, a German ally but independent and remote, firmly declined Himmler's requests to turn over its 2,000 Jews. Just seven out of approximately 300 alien Jews were turned over to the Germans. Luxembourg was effectively annexed to the Third Reich in 1940, and its 3,500 Jews and 200 Gypsies suffered the same fate as those in Germany. Around half the Jews and Gypsies perished.

Evasion and Armed Resistance

The victims responded to Nazi genocide with both evasion and armed resistance. Evasion, nonviolent action aimed at staying alive, took many forms. In Western Europe this might include evading registration, fleeing to neutral countries (or helping others to flee), and hiding from the police. More broadly it involved placing children with Gentile foster parents, jumping from deportation trains, passing as Gentiles, and hiding with Gentile helpers. Evasion in Eastern European ghettos involved smuggling food, hiding from deportations, and escaping to nearby forests. The last of these rarely succeeded unless *partisans* could be found to offer protection. A rabbi in eastern Poland who took 350 of his flock into the forests explained their fate: "[The Germans] were raiding the woods constantly. . . . During the whole summertime we were able to hide in the forest because the leaves [hid the underground] bunkers. The moment the snow fell, since we had to go out on the snow occasionally, we left a trail. They tracked them down to each bunker. . . . Out of the 350, no more than 15 remained."⁷ Evasion also included efforts to keep victims from losing hope (often called "spiritual resistance"): providing concerts, libraries, plays, education, religious observances, and welfare services. In labor and concentration camps evasion by prisoners took such forms as helping one another at work, sharing food, and even organizing escapes from the smaller, poorly guarded camps.

Most attention, however, has been focused on armed resistance, which was much more difficult to pull off. Ordinary Europeans rarely owned firearms, and they were hard to come by during the war. Escape to the forests to join

7. Donald L. Niewyk, ed., *Fresh Wounds: Early Narratives of Holocaust Survival* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), p. 229.

anti-German partisans (assuming there were any nearby) succeeded only if one could bring along a gun. Even if one could, partisans might not accept Jews; especially in Poland there were cases of the underground Home Army murdering Jews who asked to join. Yet another obstacle to armed resistance was the German policy of collective responsibility: holding everyone in the community responsible for the actions of individuals and small groups. Armed attacks on Germans were met with mass executions of entire neighborhoods or ghettos. Even those who believed rumors about the extermination camps hoped to evade deportations, whereas collective responsibility assured that armed defiance would bring down immediate and certain retaliation on the whole community. Finally there is the problem of who knew what about the **Final Solution** at the time it was happening, and when they knew it. Jews and Gypsies from Western and Southern Europe, far from the killing fields of Poland, arrived in genuine ignorance of the camps. News of Einsatzgruppen actions and extermination camps did get out to ghettos and labor camps in Eastern Europe, but it was not always believed. "Denial," the mind's inability to assimilate a terrible truth, led many of the potential victims to disbelieve what they heard about mass murder or to believe that it could only happen to some other group that had done something deserving of punishment. Ignorance and denial deprived many Jews and Gypsies of the sense of urgency required for armed resistance.

Armed resistance in Eastern European ghettos occurred only after the Jewish Council strategy of survival through work was discredited by repeated deportations. Such revolts usually were confined to small ghettos where German control was weak and the ghetto underground well developed. They permitted several thousand Jews to take their chances in hiding with peasants or else forming or joining partisan groups. The one large ghetto to rise up in full armed revolt was Warsaw, and it, too, happened only in the last stages of the deportations, in April 1943, at which time only about 60,000 of the original 455,000 Jews remained. As the Germans moved in to deport them, too, the Jewish underground, led by Mordechai Anielewicz, fought back. Very poorly armed and numbering only about 1,500 fighters, they held off larger and far better armed German forces for more than three weeks (April 19–May 15). The SS and Police Leader in Warsaw, General **Jürgen Stroop**, reported, "The resistance offered by the Jews and bandits could be broken only by the energetic day and night commitment of our assault units. . . . [I] decided to embark on the total destruction of the Jewish quarter by burning down every residential block, including the housing blocks belonging to the armament enterprises. One enterprise after another was systematically evacuated and de-

stroyed by fire."⁸ Around 56,000 surviving Jews were deported. German losses were negligible, and only a few of the resisters managed to escape through the sewers. A much smaller uprising, in the **Bialystok** ghetto at the time of its liquidation in August 1943, was also unsuccessful. Virtually all of the members of the underground who tried to break out of the ghetto at that time died fighting along with their commander, **Mordechai Tennenbaum**. A brief rebellion by the **Vilna** ghetto underground in September 1943 was put down by the Jewish Council under its director, **Jacob Gens**.

Armed resistance in the extermination camps was the work of men belonging to work squads and Sonderkommandos who had learned that they were about to be shot. Truly desperate men, they believed that revolt was the only way to give a few of them a chance to survive. The first such uprising was at Treblinka on August 2, 1943. Having learned that the Germans planned to shut the camp down in a short time and shoot the work crews, the camp underground overpowered some guards, seized arms from the arsenal, and tried to break through the barbed wire and mine fields. About 150 made it to the forest, but only twelve survived the subsequent German manhunt. A short time later, on October 14, 1943, a similar revolt occurred at Sobibór, masterminded by Soviet prisoners among the workers. This time about sixty survived to join Soviet partisans in the nearby forest. At Birkenau (Auschwitz II), 450 members of the Sonderkommando, believing with good reason that their days were numbered, rose up on October 7, 1944. With weapons and explosives smuggled in to them by women arms workers at a nearby camp factory, they were able to kill a capo and three SS men and set fire to one of the crematoria. But most were killed, and not one of them was able to make good his escape.

Jewish armed resistance in underground formations occurred in both Eastern and Western Europe. In Eastern Europe Jews were most in need of the **partisans** in 1942, before very many such units had been formed. From 1943 on perhaps as many as 20,000 Jews fought with the partisans in Poland and the Soviet Union, sabotaging trains, attacking isolated police and army units, and the like. They did so in mixed units, often organized by Soviet officers or Polish communists, as well as in separate Jewish groups. The best known of the latter operated in the Vilna region and was led by the young poet **Abba Kovner**. Jews also fought in partisan units in Slovakia, Serbia, Croatia, and Greece. In Western Europe, where Jews were well assimilated and no ghettos existed, Jewish fighters usually joined mixed underground organizations, in which they were

8. Sybil Milton, ed., *The Stroop Report: The Jewish Quarter of Warsaw Is No More* (New York: Pantheon, 1979), pp. 9–11.

over-represented. There were also specifically Jewish units of young Zionists and Communists, made up chiefly of Eastern European immigrants.

THE END OF THE HOLOCAUST, 1944–1945

In 1944 the increasingly critical need for labor in Germany induced the Germans to transport prisoners from the eastern camps to **concentration camps** in the Reich. With that these camps, which had been depopulated of most Jews in 1942, once again contained large numbers of them, and from that point on their fate paralleled that of all other concentration camp prisoners. The last six months of the Holocaust, stretching from November 1944 to May 1945, corresponded to the invasion from both east and west and increasingly rapid disintegration of the Third Reich. Although the last remaining extermination camp, **Auschwitz**, no longer functioned as a killing center, and the Germans kept Jews and Gypsies alive as slave workers and bargaining tools, deaths from mistreatment, malnutrition, and exhaustion continued. Indeed, many of those liberated by the Allies were already too far gone to recover.

At the end of October 1944 Himmler ordered an end to the gassings at Auschwitz, and a few weeks later he had the crematoria blown up. The German leaders wanted to cover their crimes as much as possible, but these moves may also have been motivated by secret negotiations then going on to exchange Jews for Allied concessions. Already at that time tens of thousands of slave workers were being evacuated from concentration camps all over Eastern Europe to camps in Germany. In January 1945 Auschwitz, too, was abandoned, although about 6,000 sick prisoners were left behind to be liberated by the Soviet army. Almost all these evacuations were done on foot to railheads inside Germany, forced marches appropriately called “**death marches**” by their survivors. In deep snow and freezing temperatures many of the already weakened prisoners dropped in their tracks and were shot by the SS guards. Some daring escapes occurred when prisoners slipped away during snowstorms or blended into crowds of German refugees fleeing the Russians.

Many survivors of these death marches were jammed into **Gross-Rosen**, the easternmost of the German concentration camps and itself the nucleus of a large complex of sub-camps. Others were sent directly to equally overcrowded camps deeper inside Germany. They frequently ended up in new subcamps of the concentration camps, such as those that surrounded **Dora-Mittelbau**, where the V-1 and V-2 rockets were built and which itself had started out as a satellite of Buchenwald. Those still needed as workers were, for the most part,

fortunate at this stage, because those left idle were fed little or nothing. The worst camp, **Bergen-Belsen**, had been established in 1943 as a transit camp to accommodate a few thousand prisoners being held for exchange with the enemy. But by the end of the war it was hopelessly overcrowded with 60,000 walking skeletons. When British forces entered the camp on April 15, 1945, they found it littered with corpses; thousands more died after liberation. There were several cases of SS men shooting survivors in the last days of the war, but for the most part they were too busy running away or trying to hide their uniforms to commit further atrocities. The major concentration camps, such as **Buchenwald** and **Mauthausen**, fell without struggle, but there, too, the death rate in the last days was staggering.

AFTERMATH AND LEGACIES

Survivors of the Holocaust numbered more than 2,000,000 Jews and at least 400,000 Gypsies. Whether they had been liberated from German camps, had just come out of hiding, or were still living in countries that had given them refuge, their natural inclination was to return home and look for surviving relatives as soon as health and travel conditions permitted. Most did, but not all stayed. Particularly in Eastern Europe survivors commonly found no other family members alive, and houses and apartments, if they still stood, were occupied by others who did not want to give them up. The roughly 300,000 Jewish survivors from Poland also found themselves caught in the middle of an undeclared civil war between supporters of the country's new communist government, imposed by the Soviet Union, and its enemies within the bitterly anticommunist Polish underground and the general population. The antigovernment forces often identified Jews as procommunist and made their return as difficult as possible. Tensions culminated in an actual **pogrom** in Kielce, Poland, in July 1946. Forty-two Jews were killed and many more injured. In the end less than 10 percent of the Polish survivors decided to stay. Most of those who left slipped illegally into the American zone of Germany where they became **displaced persons** (DPs) living in camps and awaiting resettlement.

Elsewhere in Communist Eastern Europe surviving Jews were labeled as “capitalists” and “cosmopolitan elements” and made unwelcome. This induced large numbers of Jews to leave Romania and Bulgaria after 1945. Hungarian survivors had an easier time going home. Soviet policies there were less harsh and less unpopular at first, although the strong representation of Jews in the leadership of the Hungarian Communist Party stimulated postwar **anti-**

semitism. Ironically, it was communist persecution of religion and private enterprise that induced many Hungarian Jews to leave. About one quarter (55,000) of the Hungarian survivors became DPs in the west. Smaller numbers of refugees filtered out of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. Soviet Jews, and Jews in the Baltic states, now once more under Soviet control, found it far harder to leave.

Elsewhere, and particularly in Western Europe, return was the norm. The approximately 250,000 Holocaust survivors awaiting resettlement in DP camps after the war had almost all been born in Germany and Eastern Europe. It took six years for all of them to be accommodated, and additional years of camp life were hard to take. The Jewish refugees were not alone, however. Initially there were millions of European DPs. Moreover, there were still laws restricting immigration to Palestine and the United States, destinations preferred by most Jewish DPs. Young Holocaust survivors were often militant advocates of **Zionism** who organized illegal immigration to Palestine. Pressure on Great Britain by the United States to help solve the Jewish DP problem contributed to the decision to partition Palestine and create the State of Israel in 1948. Ultimately about 57 percent of the Jewish DPs found new homes in Israel, 29 percent came to the United States, and the remainder entered Canada and a host of other countries.

Gypsy survivors had it even harder. They, too, were often reduced to DP status as a result of the shattering of their clans. Traditionally suspicious of authority and unused to dealing with bureaucracies, they encountered difficulties handling all the red tape. Nor did Gypsies enjoy the benefits of well-heeled foreign allies. Doubtless many wished to emigrate, but few succeeded. The Gypsies were trapped in a Europe that had no more use for them after the war than before.

Perpetrators of genocide were the subjects of various **trials of war criminals**, but for various reasons justice was not always perfectly applied. The major surviving German leaders were tried by the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg, where judges from the United States, Great Britain, France, and the Soviet Union found all but three of the twenty-two defendants guilty and sentenced twelve to death, including **Göring, Seyss-Inquart, Streicher, Frank, Rosenberg**, and **Ernst Kaltenbrunner**, Heydrich's successor as head of the Reich Security Main Office. Three other defendants were sentenced to life in prison, and the rest to prison terms of varying length. The Nuremberg Trials also provided the first massive documentation of the Final Solution as one of several Nazi "crimes against humanity." Unfortunately several of the major architects of genocide were not present. **Hitler, Himmler, and Goebbels** had es-

caped justice by committing suicide, and **Adolf Eichmann** could not be found. Only later, in 1960, would he be discovered in hiding in Argentina and be brought to trial and executed in Israel. Thousands of lesser perpetrators, mostly pro-Nazi collaborators from Eastern Europe, succeeded in disguising themselves as ordinary DPs and emigrating to the United States and Canada. Years later some were recognized and prosecuted as war criminals. Additional trials in courts set up by the individual military governments in the three Western zones of Germany resulted in more than 5,000 convictions and 794 hangings. In the Soviet zone a great many Nazis were secretly executed and deported, but reliable statistics on them are not available. Trials of war criminals were also held in the four zones of occupation in Austria.

Many war criminals, including labor and extermination camp staff, **Einsatzgruppen** officers, and local helpers were tried in the states whose citizens were victims of atrocities. These trials occurred in both Eastern and Western Europe. Those in Poland and the Soviet Union were especially numerous and often resulted in the death penalty. Their most famous defendant, Auschwitz commandant **Rudolf Höss**, was convicted by a Polish court and hanged on the gallows at Auschwitz. These trials continued for many years. As late as 1987 Klaus Barbie, who as a Gestapo chief in France had deported hundreds of Jews, was sentenced to life in prison by a French court.

Additional trials of Holocaust perpetrators took place in German courts. The West German government at first extended and then abolished the statute of limitations in cases of murder. In 1958 it established the Central Office for the Investigation of National Socialist Crimes to convict former Nazis suspected of murder. The most sensational of the trials that resulted, the "Auschwitz Trial," ended in 1965 with the conviction of sixteen SS staff members and a capo. Six received life sentences (the death penalty had been abolished in West Germany). Altogether the West German courts tried more than 91,000 defendants for war crimes, and sentenced approximately 6,500 to long prison terms. Of these, fewer than 1,000 convictions came after 1951. As time passed it became increasingly difficult to get convictions. Sometimes those charged with crimes could not be found, or the evidence was not strong enough to convict. West German courts attempted to distinguish between those guilty of excessive cruelty, and hence deserving of harsh sentences, and those guilty of following orders given by superiors and hence mere "accessories." In East Germany, 329 convictions for Nazi crimes were handed down between 1951 and 1964.

Germans as a whole were uncomfortable with these trials, in part because they sensed that a few individuals were being held responsible for crimes in

which most Germans were complicit. Among the first to face up to this complicity were the **Catholic** and **Protestant churches**. To be sure, they had not been responsible for genocide, and Hitler and his closest advisors held Christianity in utter contempt. But the German churches had kept silent as Jews and Gypsies were persecuted and deported. Only a few individual clerics, such as the Berlin priest Bernhard Lichtenberg, had taken a stand for the victims. Lichtenberg had prayed openly for the Jews in the Berlin cathedral and, following his arrest, asked to share their fate. He died in the hands of the Gestapo in 1943. That there had been so few like him troubled the postwar German churches, which openly acknowledged their failures and sought to reverse their traditional negative view of Judaism.

West German political leaders also acknowledged Germany's responsibility for the consequences of the **Final Solution** by agreeing to pay **reparations** and restitution to Jewish institutions and individuals. Under the terms of a 1953 Reparations Agreement with Israel, West Germany agreed to deliver goods worth \$845,000,000 to defray the costs of absorbing 500,000 Jews who had been victims of Nazi persecution. In the same year West Germany adopted a Restitution Law to indemnify individual Jews for suffering and loss of property. Since then it has paid more than \$73,000,000,000 to individual survivors living in many countries, and the payments continue. Little restitution has gone to the Gypsies, however. German courts typically ruled that the Gypsies had been arrested as actual or putative criminals, not for racial reasons, and therefore were not eligible to claim restitution. East Germany denied any responsibility for the crimes of the Third Reich but compensated Holocaust survivors who settled there as "Victims of Nazism."

Generational changes were chiefly responsible for Germans coming to terms with the crimes committed by their leaders during the Nazi years. Young Germans who had grown up since World War II, their curiosity piqued by revelations during the Eichmann and Auschwitz trials in the 1960s, began to ask troubling questions of their elders. Later the American television docudrama *Holocaust*, which captured a huge audience when it was shown in Germany in 1979, had a similar effect. Schools and universities in West Germany responded by teaching the history of the Nazi period in some detail. Top German scholars, such as Karl Dietrich Bracher and Hans Mommsen, and able journalists, such as Heinz Höhne and Joachim Fest, revealed Hitler's crimes in all their particulars, and their books were widely read.

Elsewhere willingness to confront participation in the Holocaust has been less dramatic. Austria, which was part of the Third Reich at the time and contributed disproportionately to the SS murder machinery, has preferred to hide

behind the fiction that it was simply and purely the first victim of Nazi aggression. In Eastern Europe the widespread belief that the Jews and Gypsies were treated no worse than the Slavs was reinforced by communist regimes that generalized German crimes and minimized the sufferings of minorities. In Western Europe, too, the cooperation of local officials in persecuting Jews and Gypsies is often forgotten in the rush to blame the Germans for everything.

Table 2 Destinations of German Jewish Emigrants, 1933-1941*

| Destinations | Number | % Total |
|-----------------|---------|---------|
| Europe | 153,767 | 40.68 |
| Palestine | 53,430 | 15.17 |
| Asia | 16,374 | 4.65 |
| Africa | 14,760 | 4.19 |
| Australia | 4,015 | 1.14 |
| South America | 53,472 | 15.18 |
| Central America | 9,728 | 2.76 |
| North America | 57,189 | 16.23 |
| Totals | 362,735 | 100.00 |

Note: The figures for destinations of German Jewish emigrants come from the same source as the higher estimate of Jewish emigration from Germany in Table 1. It is difficult here as well to know with certainty the destination of every German Jew who left Germany between 1933 and 1941. Many receiver countries counted immigrating Jews from Germany as Germans, not as Jews, while others did not keep precise records of incoming Jewish refugees from Germany.

* Bundesarchiv Potsdam 75c Re1. Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland, Organisation — Auswanderung 1933-1941, 8 November 1941.

Table 3 Estimated Jewish Losses*

| | Pre-Holocaust Population | Low Estimate | High Estimate |
|-----------------|--------------------------|--------------|---------------|
| Austria | 191,000 | 50,000 | 65,500 |
| Belgium | 60,000 | 25,000 | 29,000 |
| Bohemia/Moravia | 92,000 | 77,000 | 78,300 |
| Denmark | 8,000 | 60 | 116 |
| Estonia | 4,600 | 1,500 | 2,000 |
| France | 260,000 | 75,000 | 77,000 |
| Germany | 566,000 | 135,000 | 142,000 |
| Greece | 73,000 | 59,000 | 67,000 |
| Hungary** | 725,000 | 502,000 | 569,000 |
| Italy | 48,000 | 6,500 | 9,000 |
| Latvia | 95,000 | 70,000 | 72,000 |
| Lithuania | 155,000 | 130,000 | 143,000 |
| Luxembourg | 3,500 | 1,000 | 2,000 |
| Netherlands | 112,000 | 100,000 | 105,000 |
| Norway | 1,700 | 800 | 800 |
| Poland | 3,250,000 | 2,700,000 | 3,000,000 |
| Romania** | 441,000 | 121,000 | 287,000 |
| Slovakia** | 89,000 | 60,000 | 71,000 |
| USSR | 2,825,000 | 700,000 | 1,100,000 |
| Yugoslavia | 68,000 | 56,000 | 65,000 |
| Totals | 9,067,800 | 4,869,860 | 5,894,716 |

Note: Except for Bohemia/Moravia, Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania, the figures given for pre-Holocaust populations are those for 1933. The numbers of those killed, however, include both indigenous Jews and refugees who may have fled from other countries before 1941.

* These estimates are based on statistics in Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1985), pp. 1201-1220; Israel Gutman and Robert Rozett, "Estimated Jewish Losses in the Holocaust," in Israel Gutman, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust* (New York: Macmillan, 1990), vol. IV, pp. 1797-1802; and Wolfgang Benz, *Dimension des Völkermords: Die Zahl der jüdischen Opfer des Nationalsozialismus* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1991).

** The situation in Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania was complicated by the transfer of Eastern Slovakia from Czechoslovakia to Hungary in 1938 and the transfer of Northern Transylvania from Romania to Hungary in 1940. Both areas had large Jewish populations. Hence the figures for pre-Holocaust populations for all three countries are for 1940, and the losses reflect the Jews within the borders of those countries after that date.







