

"I Have No Words"

On April 15, 1945, American radio listeners sat stunned as newsman Edward R. Murrow told of a horror beyond belief. Murrow was reporting about his visit to the Nazi concentration camp at Buchenwald. He described the emaciated, hollow-eyed prisoners, the stink which was "beyond all description," the children with identification numbers tattooed on their arms, and the hundreds of "bodies stacked up like cordwood." Toward the end of his report, Murrow said:

"I pray you to believe what I have said about Buchenwald. I have reported what I saw and heard, but only part of it. For most of it I have no words. Dead men are plentiful in war, but the living dead, more than twenty thousand of them in one camp. . . . If I've offended you by this rather mild account of Buchenwald, I'm not in the least sorry."

—Edward R. Murrow, CBS Radio Broadcast, April 15, 1945

▲ These starving prisoners at the Ebensee death camp in Austria were liberated by American soldiers.

The Holocaust

Objectives

- Trace the roots and progress of Hitler's campaign against the Jews.
- Explore the goals of Hitler's "final solution" and the nature of the Nazi death camps.
- Examine how the United States responded to the Holocaust.

Terms and People

Holocaust	genocide
anti-Semitism	concentration camp
Kristallnacht	death camp
	War Refugee Board

NoteTaking

Reading Skill: Recognize Sequence As you read, identify the steps that led to Hitler's attempt to exterminate European Jews.

1933: Hitler becomes dictator of Germany;
begins persecution of Jews

Why It Matters From the time he came to power, Adolf Hitler had targeted Jews for persecution. By the end of the war, the Nazis had murdered 6 million Jews and 5 million other people they considered inferior. Today, we continue to remember this tragedy and seek ways to prevent anything like it from ever happening again. **Section Focus Question:** How did the Holocaust develop and what were its results?

Roots of the Holocaust

What Edward R. Murrow saw at Buchenwald was just a fragment of the most horrific chapter of the Nazi era. In 1945, there was no word for it. Today, it is called the **Holocaust**, the Nazi attempt to kill all Jews under their control. The mass murders of Jews, as well as other "undesirables," were a direct result of a racist Nazi ideology that considered Aryans (white gentiles, especially those of Germanic, Nordic, and Anglo-Saxon blood) superior to other people.

Hitler Preaches Hate From the start, the Nazi movement trafficked in hatred and **anti-Semitism**. Hitler blamed Jews for all the ills of Germany, from communism to inflation to abstract painting—and, especially, for the defeat of Germany in World War I.

Other extremists influenced Hitler's ideas and shared his prejudices. In the 1920s, his was just another angry voice in the Weimar Republic, advancing simplistic answers for the nation's grave economic, political, and social troubles. In 1933, however, Hitler became chancellor of Germany.

Nazis Begin the Persecution Hitler's persecution of the Jews began as soon as he came to power. At first, his focus was economic. He urged Germans to boycott Jewish-owned businesses, and he barred Jews from jobs in civil service, banking, the stock exchange, law, journalism, and medicine. In 1935, Hitler moved to a broader legal persecution. The **Nuremberg Laws**, named for the city that served as the spiritual center of Nazism, denied German citizenship to Jews, banned marriage between Jews and non-Jews, and segregated Jews at every level of society. Yet even these measures were not enough for Hitler. He hinted that, in the future, there might be what he called the "Final Solution to the Jewish question."

Hitler employed the full power of the state in his anti-Semitic campaigns. Newspapers printed scandalous attacks against Jews. Children in schools and the Hitler Youth movement were taught that Jews were "polluting" German society and culture. Comic books contained vile caricatures of Jews.

Violence Erupts on Kristallnacht Acts of violence against Jews were common. The most serious attack occurred on November 9, 1938, and is known as **Kristallnacht** (KRIHS tahl nahkt), or the "Night of the Broken Glass." After a Jewish refugee killed a German diplomat in Paris, Nazi officials ordered attacks on Jews in Germany, Austria and the Sudetenland. Secret police and military units destroyed more than 1,500 synagogues and 7,500 Jewish-owned businesses, killed more than 200 Jews, and injured more than 600 others. The Nazis arrested thousands of Jews.

Jewish Refugees Face Obstacles Between 1933 and 1937, about 129,000 Jews fled Germany and Nazi-controlled Austria. They included some of the most notable figures in the scientific and artistic world, including physicist Albert Einstein.

More Jews would have left, but they were not generally welcomed into other countries. During the Great Depression, with jobs scarce, the United States and other countries barred their doors to many Jews. In 1939, the ocean liner *St. Louis* departed Germany for Cuba with more than 900 Jewish refugees on board. Only 22 of the passengers received permission to stay in Cuba. U.S. officials refused to accept any of the refugees. The ship returned to Germany. Almost 600 of the Jews aboard the *St. Louis* later died in Nazi concentration camps.

✓ **Checkpoint** How did Hitler enforce anti-Semitism as chancellor of Germany?

German Jews Face Persecution

In Nazi Germany, Jews were forced to wear yellow stars (below right) with the word *Jude* ("Jew"). By the time of Kristallnacht (below left), Hitler's policy of anti-Semitism had progressed from discrimination to organized violence—but there was even worse to come.



Nazi Adopt the “Final Solution”

Since 1933, the Nazis had denied Jews the rights of citizenship and committed acts of brutality against them. These acts of persecution were steps toward Hitler’s “Final Solution to the Jewish question”: nothing short of the systematic extermination of all Jews living in the regions controlled by the Third Reich. Today, we call such willful annihilation of a racial, political, or cultural group **genocide**.

Nazis Build Concentration Camps In 1933, the year he became chancellor, Hitler opened the first Nazi **concentration camps**, where members of specially designated groups were confined. The earliest camps included Dachau, Sachsenhausen, and Buchenwald. Later, Ravensbruck, not far from Berlin, was opened for female prisoners.

In theory, the camps were designed not to kill prisoners, but to turn them into “useful members” of the Third Reich. The Nazis imprisoned political opponents such as labor leaders, socialists, and communists, as well as anyone—journalists or novelists, ministers or priests—who spoke out against Hitler. Many Jews as well as Aryans who had intimate relations with Jews were sent to camps. Other groups targeted as “undesirable” included Gypsies, Jehovah’s Witnesses, homosexuals, beggars, drunks, conscientious objectors, the physically disabled, and people with mental illness.

Camp administrators tattooed numbers on the arms of prisoners and dressed them in vertically striped uniforms with triangular insignias. For example, political prisoners wore red insignias, homosexuals pink, Jews yellow, and Jehovah’s Witnesses purple. Inside the walls of the concentration camps, there were no real restraints on sadistic guards. They tortured and even killed prisoners with no fear of reprisals from their superiors.

Death by starvation and disease was an everyday occurrence. In addition, doctors at camps such as Dachau conducted horrible medical experiments that either killed inmates or left them deformed. Prisoners were made subjects of bogus experiments on oxygen deprivation, hypothermia, and the effects of altitude. Bodies were mutilated without anesthesia. Thousands of prisoners died in agonizing pain, including some 5,000 mentally or physically disabled children.

Millions Are Murdered in Death Camps When Germany invaded Poland and the Soviet Union, the Nazis gained control of large territories that were home to millions of Jews. Under Nazi rule, Jews in Warsaw, Lodz, and other Polish cities were forced to live in crowded, walled ghettos. Nazis also constructed additional concentration camps in Poland and Eastern Europe.

At first, the murder of Jews and other prisoners tended to be more arbitrary than systematic. But at the Wannsee Conference in January 1942, Nazi leaders made the decision to move toward Hitler’s “Final Solution.” Reinhard Heydrich, an SS leader known as “the man with an iron heart,” outlined a plan to exterminate about 11,000,000 Jews. Although the minutes of the meeting do not use the word “kill,” everyone there understood that killing was their goal.

Many concentration camps, especially in Poland, were designated as **death camps**, where prisoners were systematically exterminated. The largest death camp was Auschwitz in southern Poland. Others included Treblinka, Maidanek, Sobibor, Belzec, and Chelmno. Prisoners from various parts of the Reich were transported by trains to the death camps and murdered. Nazis forced

Nazi Concentration Camps

The Nazi system of concentration and slave labor camps extended over several countries. The six death camps in Poland were designed specifically for the extermination of Jewish prisoners.

Concentration Camps in Europe



Vocabulary Builder

restraint—(rih STRAYNT) *n.*
control; something that holds someone back from action

Vocabulary Builder

arbitrary—(AR buh trer ee) *adj.*
not following any fixed rule or plan; random

prisoners into death chambers and pumped in carbon monoxide or crammed the prisoners into showerlike facilities and released the insecticide Zyklon B.

Some concentration camps that the Nazis converted into death camps did not have gassing equipment. In these camps, Nazi guards shot hundreds of thousands of prisoners. Nazi “Action Groups” that followed the army into Eastern Europe also shot several million Jews and buried them in ditches.

In fully functioning death camps, the bodies of murdered prisoners were further desecrated. Human fat was turned into soap; human hair was woven into wigs, slippers, and mattresses; cash, gold fillings, wedding rings, and other valuables were stripped off the victims. After the Nazis had taken what they wanted, they burned the bodies in crematoriums.

By 1945, about 6 million European Jews had been murdered. But Jews were not the only victims. As many as 5 million others lay dead, including nearly 2 million non-Jewish Poles. While many survivors lived with constant nightmares of the experience, or with the sorrow and guilt of being the last members of their families, many others determined to rebuild their lives and families in the United States, Israel, or elsewhere and continue to be productive citizens.

✓ **Checkpoint** What actions did the Nazis take to carry out Hitler’s “Final Solution”?

The Allies and the Holocaust

The inevitable question about the Holocaust is: Could it have been prevented? Could the nations in the democratic West—especially Britain, France, and the United States—have intervened at some point and stopped the slaughter of millions of innocent people? There are no simple answers to these questions. However, many people today believe that the West could have done more than it did.

Early Response Was Weak Before the war, the United States (as well as other countries) could have done more if it had relaxed its immigration policy. It could have accepted more Jewish refugees and saved the lives of many German and Austrian Jews. However, the State Department at first made a conscious effort to block Jewish immigration. Later commentators have blamed this failure to help European Jews on a variety of factors: anti-Semitism, apathy, preoccupation with the problems of the Great Depression, and a tendency to underestimate Hitler’s genocidal plans.

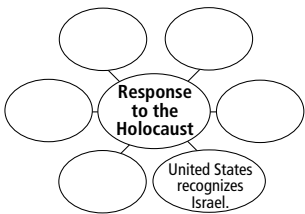
American Government Takes Action Once the war started, news of the mass killings had filtered to the West. By the end of 1942, the allies issued a statement acknowledging that Jews were being taken to Poland and killed there. In April 1943, British and American officials hosted the Bermuda Conference to discuss the possibility of rescuing the surviving Jewish refugees from Europe. However, no concrete action was taken.

By early 1944, however, FDR began to respond to the reports. He established the **War Refugee Board**, which worked with the Red Cross to save thousands of Eastern European Jews, especially in Romania and Hungary.

Tragically, too few were saved. Of the Allies, the Soviet Union was closest to the death camps, but Stalin showed no concern. Britain and the United States expressed sympathy, but their resources and strategy were focused on defeating Hitler not on stopping his genocidal campaign. They might have bombed railway lines to the death camps, but the camps were not military targets. A War Department official told the Refugee Board that bombing the railway lines “could be executed only by the diversion of considerable air support essential to

NoteTaking

Reading Skill: Summarize As you read, identify different ways in which the United States and other nations responded to the treatment of Jews in Nazi Germany before, during, and after the war.



the success of our forces now engaged in decisive operations elsewhere.” The Allies also refused to pressure countries within the Nazi sphere of influence to stop the transportation of Jews to Germany.

Allied Soldiers Liberate the Camps For most Americans, the enormity of the Nazi crime became real only when soldiers began to liberate the concentration camps that dotted the map of Germany. When they saw it all—the piles of dead bodies, the warehouses full of human hair and jewelry, the ashes in crematoriums, the half-dead emaciated survivors—they realized as never before that evil was more than an abstraction.


Hardened by war, accustomed to the sight and smell of death, the soldiers who liberated the camps were nevertheless unprepared for what they saw. Major Richard Winters—who had parachuted behind enemy lines on D-Day, defended Bastogne at the Battle of the Bulge, and risked his life in a number of other engagements—was stunned almost beyond belief:

Primary Source “The memory of starved, dazed men, who dropped their eyes and heads when we looked at them through the chain-link fence, in the same manner that a beaten, mistreated dog would cringe, leaves feelings that cannot be described and will never be forgotten. The impact of seeing those people behind that fence left me saying, only to myself, ‘Now I know why I’m here.’”

—Richard Winters, quoted in *Band of Brothers* (Ambrose)

The liberation of the camps led to an outpouring of American sympathy and sincere longing to aid the victims. Many survivors found temporary or permanent homes in the United States.

The revelation of the Holocaust also increased demand and support for an independent Jewish homeland. In 1948, when the Jewish community in Palestine proclaimed the State of Israel, President Truman immediately recognized the new nation. The United States became perhaps the staunchest ally of the new Jewish State.

 **Checkpoint** How did the U.S. government respond to the German campaign against European Jews?



A Survivor Bears Witness

This 90-year-old Holocaust survivor continues to speak to young Germans about his time in the Auschwitz death camp. He still bears a physical reminder of his suffering: the identification number tattooed on his arm.

SECTION 4 Assessment

Progress Monitoring Online

For: Self-test with vocabulary practice

Web Code: nea-1109

Comprehension

1. Terms and People For each term below, write a sentence explaining how it was connected with the Nazi campaign against the Jews and the U.S. reaction.

- Holocaust
- anti-Semitism
- Nuremberg Laws
- Kristallnacht
- genocide
- concentration camp
- death camp
- War Refugee Board

2. NoteTaking Reading Skill:

Recognize Sequence Use your flowchart to answer the Section Focus Question: How did the Holocaust develop and what were its results?

Writing About History

3. Quick Write: Describe Emotions

Write three sentences describing the emotions of an American soldier liberating a concentration camp in Germany. Be sure to use adjectives and nouns that express specific inner feelings.

Critical Thinking

4. Identify Ideologies How were Hitler's racial ideas and policies connected to his concept of extreme nationalism?

5. Analyze Information One historian has said that the Holocaust began on “the day that the Jews started to be treated differently.” Explain what this statement means and what evidence supports it.

6. Make Decisions Do you think that the U.S. military should have decided to bomb railway lines leading to the death camps? Why or why not?