

The Holocaust

Genocide

Genocide is the act or process used to kill an entire ethnic group or race. Throughout human history none has been as systematic and brutal as the **Holocaust** of World War II and the murder of more than six million people.

German anti-Semitism

Anti-Semitism or hostility against the Jews has been recorded back to ancient times and was not unique to Germany or Europe in the 1930s and 1940s. The Nazi Party came to power with a policy of making Germany great again after the humiliating defeat of World War I and part of this policy included creating a pure 'Aryan' or 'master race'. There was no place in the new Germany for racial, social or political enemies. This included Jews, Slavs, Sinti and Roma people (often referred to as gypsies), political dissidents, criminals and homosexuals.

Hitler's anti-Semitism

Adolf Hitler's anti-Semitism was outlined in his book *Mein Kampf*, which was published in two volumes in 1925 and 1926.

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The Jewish way of reasoning thus becomes quite clear ... lusting after blood and money, the whole earth would become the prey of that hydra. Should Germany be freed from its grip, a great menace for the nations of the world would thereby be eliminated.

Source 10.11.1 *Mein Kampf* by Adolf Hitler

.....
My conduct is in accordance with the will of the Almighty Creator. In standing guard against the Jew I am defending the handiwork of the Lord.

Source 10.11.2 *Mein Kampf* by Adolf Hitler

Germany 1933–38

When the Nazi Party came into power in 1933 they increased propaganda against the Jews, blaming them for Germany's post-war economic problems. They then began to systematically take away the rights of Jews so that they:

- were banned from working in the government
- had their shops and businesses boycotted
- had the right to vote removed
- had their German citizenship revoked
- were banned from the army
- were banned from marrying non-Jews
- were expelled from German schools.

Germany 1938–41

From 1938 the Nazi authorities encouraged violent mobs to attack Jews. This violence culminated in *Kristallnacht* or the 'night of broken glass' when at least 7000 Jewish-owned businesses were destroyed and 1688 synagogues were destroyed. During this period, Jews were forced to live in certain areas of the city in ghettos and the number of Jews sent to **concentration camps** increased. From 1941 all Jews had to wear the Star of David on their clothing.

The 'Final Solution'

In 1941, Germany controlled Poland, the Baltic States and Byelorussia. In these territories there were an estimated 4.3 million Jews. German Waffen-SS units began their systematic murdering. In 1942, the Wannsee Conference held in Berlin sought a 'final solution to the Jewish problem'. The solution was deportation or extermination of all Jews from German-occupied territories.

Concentration camps

The term 'concentration camp' describes the prison camps created by the Nazis. Concentration camps, or death camps were specially designed killing centres. Every type of camp experienced death on a daily basis. When Jews, criminals and others were rounded up, the most physically able were housed in labour camps

is a holding centre before going out to work each day in the local area. The majority of these workers died of starvation. The SS operated the most important killing centres. Both SS men and women beat victims regularly, even to death, in order to get more work from them.

Systematic death

Starvation and brutality were features of every type of camp. The brutality started before victims even arrived. From the moment of identification, victims were herded (with violence) into ghettos or other holding centres awaiting further 'processing'. When ready, the German authorities herded victims onto transport, usually cattle trains. Conditions on the trains were crowded, with people forced to stand up without water or food for days before arriving at the concentration camps. Then they undressed, apparently for showers, and entered special buildings in large naked groups. The doors were locked and Zyklon B gas pellets dropped onto the floor. This was the systematic and shocking end for millions of victims. Before this mechanised system was fully developed or if the victims were far from these special-purpose centres, mass shootings were the norm and bodies were burned and buried in common graves.



Source 10.11.3 Jewish women and children on their way to their deaths at Auschwitz. Yad Vashem Photo Archive



Source 10.11.4 Czesława Kwoka, age 14, went to Auschwitz with her mother in 1942. Within three months, both were dead. Wilhelm Brasse, the photographer (and fellow prisoner) recalled: 'She was so young and so terrified ... She cried but she could do nothing'. Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum

Concentration camps liberated

As the Allies invaded German-occupied areas between 1944 and 1945, they liberated the concentration camps. In many of the camps, the German guards tried to destroy evidence of their crimes by quickly shooting the remaining prisoners or burning them alive while locked in their sleeping quarters. In many cases, Allied officers forced captured SS and Gestapo to load bodies onto trucks or perform other tasks they had ordered prisoners to do.

The Nuremberg Trials

At the end of the war the Allies held a war crimes tribunal in the German city of Nuremberg from 1945 to 1947. Many German officers were executed for their crimes.

ACTIVITIES

Remembering and understanding

- 1 Define the term 'genocide'.
- 2 Which group supervised the operation of the 'Final Solution'?

Applying and analysing

- 3 Explain how Hitler and the Nazis were able to take away the rights of Jewish people in Germany.
- 4 What groups of people were targeted by Nazis? Why?

Evaluating and creating

- 5 Research the reaction of German civilians to the Holocaust during World War II through primary source documents online. Discuss the reactions based on your research.