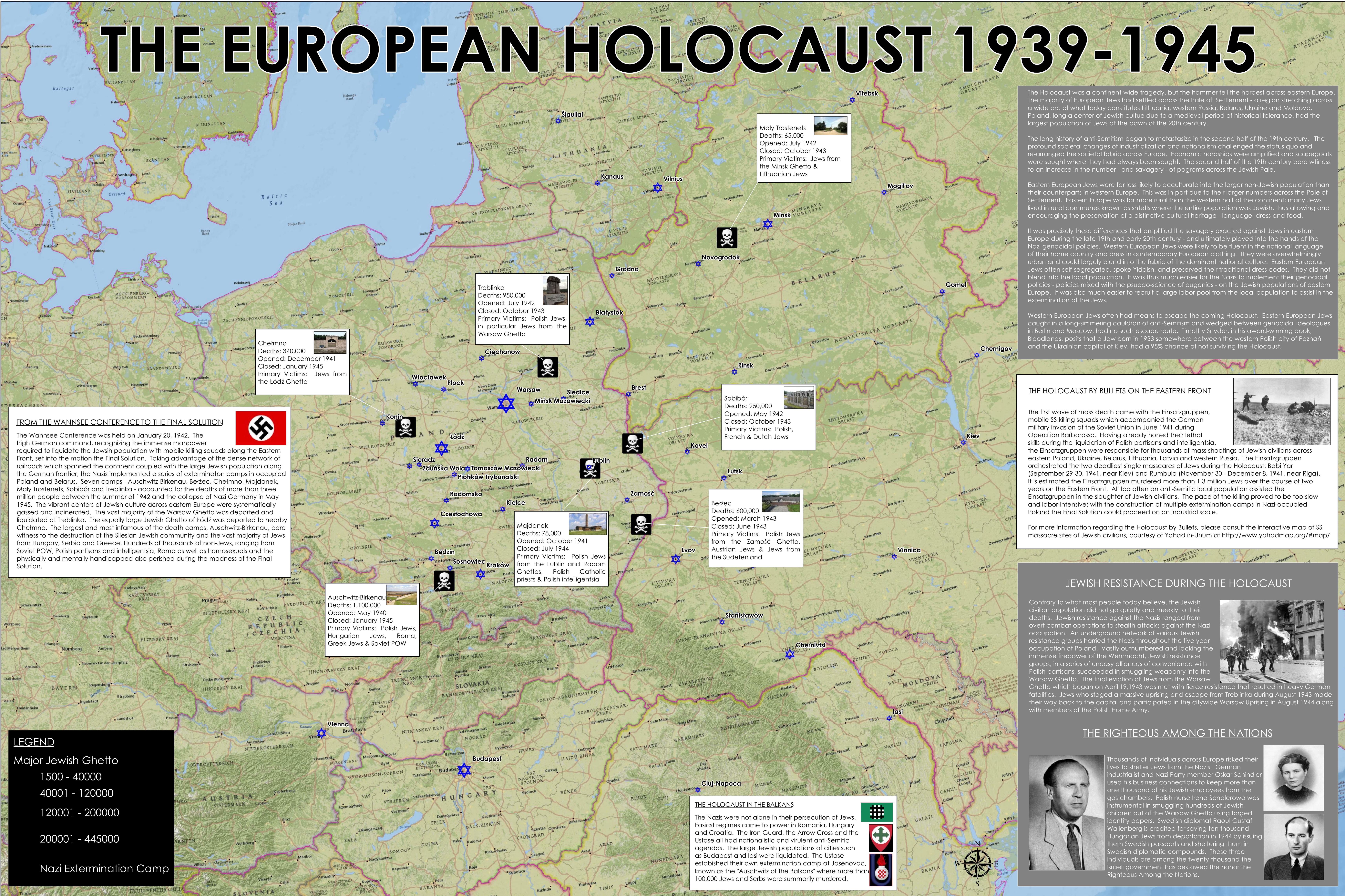


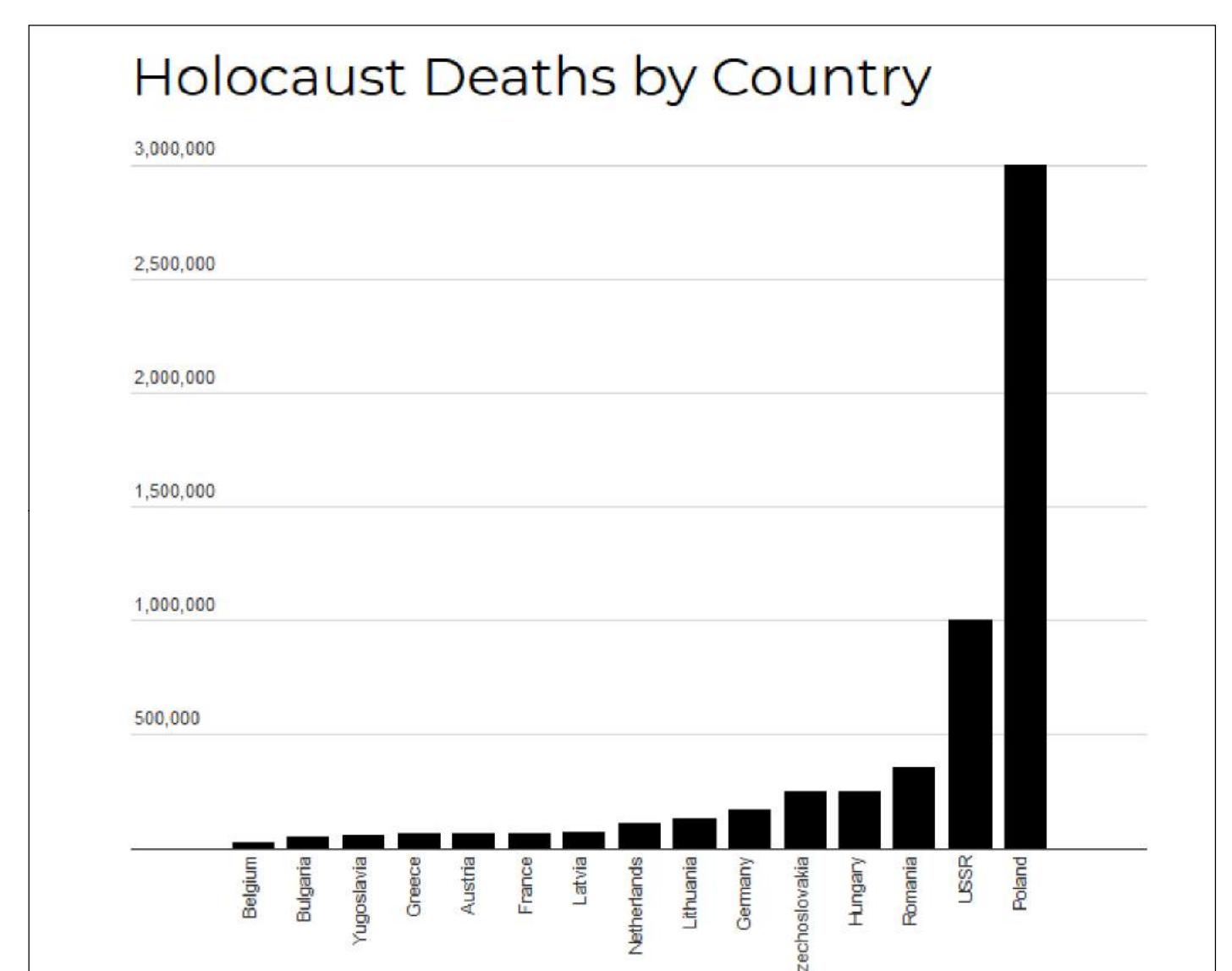
THE EUROPEAN HOLOCAUST 1939-1945



Centuries of anti-Semitism across much of Europe exploded in the fourth decade of the 20th century into a concentrated attempt to erase the Jewish people from the face of the Earth. The fact a great deal of the mass murder took place within the context of a much larger geopolitical conflict does not belie the fact the Nazis went to extreme measures to plan and execute mass murder on a scale never before witnessed - and hopefully never again - in world history. More than six million people - Jews, Roma, Soviet POW, the physically infirm, the mentally handicapped and homosexuals - were wiped away in a systematic attempt to rid the world of people which a regime deemed undesirable. The term genocide, coined by Raphael Lemkin in 1944, in itself was created as a result of the Holocaust.

The perpetrators of genocide all have one thing in common. They claim they are the victims. Turks wishing to create a pan-Turkish state out of the corpse of the Ottoman Empire in 1915 claimed the Armenians were a dangerous threat to Turkish nationalism. The ethnic cleansing perpetrated by Serbian paramilitary forces in both Bosnia and Kosovo during the 1990s had its roots in deep-seeded Serbian lore to right the historical wrongs which had been inflicted upon them in centuries past by Muslim interlopers into the Balkans. Hutu militias justified their slaughter of some 800,000 ethnic Tutsis in 1994 on the grounds that the Tutsi minority were on the verge of regaining power and would return the Hutu to second-class citizen status within Rwanda. Burma's military junta claims the violence unleashed upon Rohingya Muslims is to protect the Burmese majority from violent separatists. The Nazis were no different. Despite an overwhelming numeric and military advantage over defenseless Jewish civilians, the Nazis justified their extermination of Jews on a host of grounds ranging from scientific to religious, but ultimately in the end it was to protect the German-speaking Volkisch from the inferior peoples of European society - and to rectify the historic wrong committed against the German people when a civilian government comprised of socialist and Bolshevik elements (both code words for Jews) opted to surrender to the Allies in November 1918, sending Germany on the path to economic ruin and national humiliation.

It is also important to note that genocide never occurs in a vacuum. Genocide requires planning on an immense scale - and a population willing to participate, or at least to be passively complicit in the face of state-sponsored violence on a grand scale. These factors all converged in the 1930s as the forces of militarization, industry and advanced transportation networks merged with long-simmering hatred, resentment and suspicion of an ancient people with whom Europeans had cohabited for two millenia. Systematic violence against the oppressed minority is also a key ingredient. To both the majority as well as the minority community the violence becomes normalized to the point that by the time it reaches a level which can be categorized as genocide, the victims have become so accustomed to violence that they accept it as normal. The forces of oppression which lead to genocide rarely manifest all at once. They often take decades to foment - sometimes centuries. Thus it is critical for outside forces to recognize the signs - and to act decisively to stop them from metastasizing.



No nation suffered more structural damage during World War II than did Poland. Poland, a nation without any true natural defenses, was caught in the crossfire between powerful geopolitical rivals in Berlin and Moscow. The Nazis viewed Poles as inferior Slavic people destined to the slag heap of history. The Soviets saw the Poles as a bourgeois threat on their western frontier. No nation in Europe had a larger Jewish population in 1939 than did Poland - and no nation lost as many Jews as

The graph above reveals to what extent the devastation the Holocaust was centered upon eastern Europe. The series of colored-coded maps below displays the Jewish population prior to the Holocaust, immediately after the Holocaust, the number of Jews killed in each country, and the percent of the Jewish population which was killed during the Holocaust. The viewer should recognize these figures are broad estimates. The chaos of World War II spawned a mass exodus of people across the continent, making it exceptionally difficult to come to decisive and definitive figures. The process is also clouded by the fact that many nations represented in the maps below did not exist during the Holocaust, and that others, such as Poland, saw a radical realignment of their boundaries following the conclusion of WWII.



The distant voices of anti-Semitism and ultranationalism which gave rise to the Holocaust are still with us today. The end of the Cold War and recent crises across the Middle East and Africa has spawned a wave of immigrants and refugees which will fundamentally alter the demographic fabric of Europe. The majority of Europeans have accepted these changes but a large and growing minority have embraced far right-wing nationalist political parties who are often allied with those who promote anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial. The United States is also not immune to these forces. Long assumed to be relegated to the fringes of American society, the stunning political changes that altered the balance of power in 2016 has unleashed a powerful undercurrent of racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism, some of which has been tacitly endorsed by the highest echelons of American government. It is essential as Americans that we recognize the delicate balance that exists between championing the right to freedom of speech and expression and aptly calling out hate speech for what it is. The argument of moral equivalency is a vacant one when the evidence of the past reveals how frighteningly often such rhetoric leads to actual violence and to its genocidal apotheosis in the Holocaust.

