

# Introduction to the Holocaust

BY

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## Major Topics

- History of Antisemitism
- Life in Europe Before the Holocaust
- Early Persecution of the Jews- Nuremberg Laws 1935
- Germany Under Dictatorship
- 1933-1939 Pre-war Germany
- Propaganda
- World War II
- T-4 Euthanasia Program
- Other victims

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- Formation of the Ghettos
- Early Camps- Types of Camps
- Expansion of the Camps
- Mobile Killing Squads
- Evian Conference-1938-U.S. & World Response
- Wannsee Conference-1941-Final Solution
- Resistance-Rescuers-Partisans-Righteous Gentiles
- Liberation
- DP (Displaced Persons) Camps-Emigration
- Post-war trials- Nuremberg Trials

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- Other Genocides
- Survivors Today
- Other topics as they come up...Questions...Wrap Up



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## Antisemitism Through The Ages

- Christian Theology
- Gospels and Church Fathers developed 3 themes:
  - Jews responsible for deicide (murder of Jesus)
  - Judaism at time of Jesus was degenerate
  - The crime for deicide was dispersion of the Jews

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- Roman world became Christianized, attitudes became legal codes...i.e. forbade Jews from building new synagogues.
- This pattern dominated Europe for hundreds of years.
- Crusades- outburst of violence against Jewish communities
- Limits on professions Jews could enter
- Ritual murder allegation- blood libel claimed Jews used blood of Christian children to make matzos or wine.

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- Restrictions on dress, Jewish literature
- Blamed Black Death (1347-1350) on Jews poisoning the wells of Europe
- Spanish expulsion of the Jews (edict by Ferdinand and Isabella)
- Germany- Martin Luther burned synagogues, destroyed Jewish homes, etc. served as a foreshadow of Adolph Hitler's program
- Karl Marx (economist)- "Money is the zealous God of Israel..."

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- Protocols of Elders of Zion- Forged publication claimed Jews were out to conquer the world and were part of a grand conspiracy.
- 1850- German composer Richard Wagner said the Jews responsible were the born enemy of pure humanity
- Holocaust brought together all strands of antisemitism

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### Jewish Life in Europe Before the Holocaust

- Jews lived in every country of Europe
- 9 million in 21 countries (by the end of the war 2 out of every 3 of these Jews were dead)
- Poland- largest Jewish population
- Small towns- shtetls
- Yiddish language, culture, theater, movies, etc
- Jews in all walks of life (farmers, tailors, doctors, teachers, etc.)

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## The Nuremberg Laws- 1935

- Deprived Jews of rights of citizenship
- Forbidden to marry or have relations with Aryans
- “Law for the Protection of German Blood”
- Full Jew: 3 grandparents were Jewish
- Mischlinge of first or second degree (2 or 1 Jewish grandparent)

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## Adolph Hitler

- Austrian sign painter
- Rejected 2 times from art school
- Soldier in WW I
- Joined political party- National Socialist German Workers' Party
- Lead revolt (Beer Hall Putsch) to overthrow Bavarian government
- Spent 9 months in jail
- Wrote “Mein Kampf” (My Struggle)

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- 1932- Unsuccessfully ran for President against Hindenburg
- 1933 appointed Chancellor of Germany
- Suspended the constitution and brought Nazis to power
- “Night of the Long Knives” he had all opponents to his party murdered
- Declares self Fuhrer (leader)
- 1938 absorbs Austria and Sudentanland (region of Czechoslovakia) as part of Germany

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- 1939 WW II starts when Hitler declares war on Poland
- 1940 takes over Denmark, Norway, Netherlands, Belgium and France with Blitzkrieg (lightning war)
- 1941 Hitler invades Russia after signing a non-aggression pact with them

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### Pre-War Germany 1933-1939

- 1933- Boycott of Jewish Shops
- 1933- Gestapo (secret police) Born
- 1933- Burning of Books
- 1933- Dachau Opens
- 1934- Night of the Long Knives
- 1934- Hitler Becomes Fuhrer
- 1934- Triumph of the Will
- 1935- Nuremberg Laws
- 1936- Nazis March into Rhineland

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- 1936- Berlin Olympics
- 1937- Hitler Reveals War Plans
- 1938- Nazis Take Austria
- 1938- Conquest at Munich
- 1938- Night of Broken Glass
- 1939- Nazis Take Czechoslovakia
- 1939- Nazi-Soviet Pact

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## Propaganda

- Der Sturmer (The Attacker): published by Julius Streicher
- Active Nazi and Antisemite
- Appealed to common man
- Political cartoons
- Posters on kiosks
- All antisemitism themes
- Exaggerated and distorted facts
- "The Eternal Jew" (Der Ewige Jude)- book with 256 pictures depicting Jews published in 1937

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## Der Giftpliz (The Poisonous Mushroom)

- Aimed at kids
- Used in schools
- Cartoons / drawings with captions such as:
  - How To Tell A Jew
  - How Jewish Traders Cheat
  - How Jews Torment Animals
  - Money Is The God of All Jews

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## World War II in Europe 1939-1945

- Hitler was fighting two wars...one against all the countries he conquered and the other was the war against the Jews as you will see.
- Many people say that if he put as much energy into the war against the other countries as he did against the Jews he might have won WW II.

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## T-4 Euthanasia Program

- Established in Fall of 1939
- Headquarters at Tiergartenstrasse 4, Berlin
- Code name T-4
- Guiding Principles:
  - Racial hygiene and racial purity
  - Killing or forced sterilization of "inferior races", Jews, Gypsies, mentally defective, handicapped, insane, incurably sick people

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- Between December 1939 and August 1941, about 50,000 to 60,000 children and adults secretly killed by lethal injections or in gassing installations.
- Euthanasia program was a valuable precursor to the "Final Solution" later implemented by the Nazis
- Other victims (11 Million in total): Jews specifically earmarked for extermination, Roma (Gypsies), Poles, Political Dissidents, Dissenting Clergy, Jehovah's Witnesses, Homosexuals, African-German children

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## The Ghettos

- Transition areas or collection areas used for deportation to death camps and concentration camps.
- 5 Major Ghettos: Warsaw, Lodz, Krakow, Lublin, Lvov
- 356 Ghettos established by Nazis in Poland, Soviet Union, Baltic States, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Hungary between 1939-1945.
- Small town ghettos not sealed off
- Larger city ghettos sealed off with brick or stone walls, wooden fences, barbed wire.

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## Life in the Ghetto

- Wretched, filthy, poor sanitation, extreme overcrowding, disease rampant, no clothes or heating fuel in bitter cold winter, food supply so low people starved to death.
- Resistance: educated their children, held religious services, secret libraries, theaters, celebrate Jewish holidays

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## The Warsaw Ghetto-Established October 1940

- 400,000 Jews in a 3.5 square mile area of Warsaw which normally housed 160,000
- Sealed off by a 10 foot high wall on November 15, 1940
- Survival on a bowl of soup a day
- 300-400 persons died each day from starvation or disease
- By July of 1942 about 80,000 Jews perished
- Jewish Council (Judenrat) established

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## Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

- January 1943, Himmler ordered SS to remove remaining 60,000 Jews from ghetto by February 15.
- Jewish Fighting Organization (ZOB): 22 groups of 20-30 men, boys and women each smuggled in weapons and fought back from rooftops, cellars and attics
- April 19, 1943 Germans attacked with tanks, flame throwers, artillery, 1200 Jews left fought back with smuggled weapons
- Resisted 28 days before troops burned down ghetto building by building- End May 16, 1943

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## Early Concentration Camps- Dachau, Established March 20, 1933

- 50,000 died in Dachau
- Training location for SS
- November 1938 10,000 Jews arrive after Kristallnacht
- 2 crematoria
- 1942 gas chamber built (never used)
- Medical experiments conducted on victims: high altitude, freezing, Malaria, TB, drinkable seawater

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## 6 Major Killing Centers

- Auschwitz
- Belzec
- Chelmno
- Majdanek
- Sobibor
- Treblinka

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## Types of Camps

- Death Camps (Killing Centers): Part of Hitler's Final solution: Sole purpose was to kill all Jews, gas chambers or burned to death 3.5 million Jews murdered
- Concentration Camps
- Transit Camps
- Slave labor Camps

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## Auschwitz

- Death and Work Camp Combined
- 12,000 killed daily
- 2.5 million Jews and gypsies died here
- Southern Poland
- Largest Camp

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## Einsatzgruppen (Mobile Killing Squads)

- Nazi units and police
- Job was to kill any Jews they could find in occupied Soviet territory.
- Entered small towns, rounded up all Jews, marched them to open fields, forests, ravines and shot them, gassed them in vans, dumped them into mass graves.

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## Evian Conference

- Summer of 1938: Called by President Roosevelt
- 32 countries, 9 days
- 1924 immigration quotas not lifted- depression
- All countries agreed the situation of the Jews trying to escape was desperate BUT none of them opened their doors to let Jews escape Hitler's grip.
- Germany responded by saying others countries criticized them but were unwilling to take the refugees.

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## Wannsee Conference- July 1941

- Called by Reinhard Heydrich, Chief of German State Police
- Goal: Deal with the "Final Solution to the Jewish Question"
- 15 other people attended
- First time plans for Jews was actually formalized
- Protocol's language camouflaged actual content with such words as "Final Solution" for extermination or "Evacuation" for deportation

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## Auschwitz and the "Final Solution Of The Jewish Question"

- Jews seen as internal enemy
- Summer 1941 Heinrich Himmler ordered commander of Auschwitz, Rudolf Hoess, to prepare plans for mass extermination of Jews and to reconstruct the Auschwitz concentration camp in order to "solve the Jewish Question"
- September 1941 first attempts to use Zyclon-B gas took place at Auschwitz.
- Some days, up to 24,000 people were murdered

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## Resistance-Rescuers-Partisans, Righteous Gentiles

- Resistance Took Many Forms:
  - Struggle for physical survival
  - Legal or illegal emigration
  - Hiding
  - Smuggling Food, Clothing, Medicine
  - Very hazardous- great risk of immediate Nazi retaliation to the larger population after an insurrection

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## Resistance

- Rebellions in ghettos and camps
- Spiritual- practice Jewish rituals secretly
- Underground newspapers
- Hiding written documents about daily life
- Concerts, plays in ghettos
- Partisans in the forests and swamps formed camps to smuggle things into the ghetto and disrupt Nazi supply lines and bridges

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## Rescuers

- Many acts of courage and kindness documented
- Denmark reached out in protecting its Jewish population
- Andre Trocme, minister of French village, Le Chambon
- Oskar Schindler

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- 2 million Jews survived because of aid given freely by men and women who, asking nothing in return sometimes died for their efforts.
- Rescuers came from all walks of life...students, teachers, shopkeepers, factory workers, housewives, farmers
- Put self and own family in great danger
- Ordinary people who responded to extraordinary circumstances in a morally exemplary fashion.

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## Partisans

- Provide food, receive and transmit news and information, boost morale, smuggle needed supplies behind ghetto walls
- Armed Resistance- in forests, gather intelligence of troop movements, blow up bridges, derail trains, slash phone lines, set fire to Nazi supply depots
- Partisans captured were first tortured then killed

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## Righteous Gentiles

- Non-Jews who risked their lives to save Jews
- Yad Vashem Museum in Jerusalem, over 11,000 Righteous Gentiles are honored, almost 5,000 are Polish

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## Liberation- 1945

- Allied troops entered Nazi-occupied territories
- Stumbled upon concentration camps
- General Eisenhower insisted on photographing and documenting the horror for future generations to learn from and not repeat.
- Eisenhower also forced villagers neighboring the death camps to view what had occurred in their own backyards.

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## DP-Displaced Persons Camps

- 1945-1951 survivors could or would not return to their homes
- Camps set up to hold them
- Immigration restrictions to Palestine- British placed them in camps on Cyprus.
- February 1947- U.N. General Assembly voted to partition Palestine into independent Jewish and Arab states.
- In the Winter of 1946-47 there were about a quarter of a million DP's in Europe.

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## Immigration to Israel

- May 14, 1948 Israel declared as a state
- Immigration to Israel grew rapidly
- For some DP's it was no choice when asked where they wanted to go...Palestine was their only choice in most cases
- Establishment of Israel more important in light of the Holocaust...a sense of urgency prevailed about its establishment.

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## Post War Crime Tribunal- Nuremberg Trials

- 1945 Nuremberg, Germany
- 22 Nazi officials
- Some claimed to just be following orders
- Trials lasted 11 months
- 11 sentenced to death, 3 acquitted, rest received prison terms

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## Pre-and Post-Holocaust Genocides

- Armenia- 1915
- Bangladesh- 1971
- East Timor- 1975
- Cambodia- 1978
- Rwanda- 1996
- Former Yugoslavia- Kosovo, Bosnia,
- Chechnya
- Iraq

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## Survivors Today

- 1996 Figures:
  - 300,000 Holocaust survivors living in Israel
  - Of these about 200,000 are aged 65 +, and 100,000 were children during the war, making them 55-65 today.
  - 2/3 of survivors went to Israel
  - Another 150,000 scattered all over the world
  - The clock is running out of time to get their stories and testimonies recorded

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# Questions?

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