

# THE HOLOCAUST, 1933-1945

*During World War II, the Nazi party in Germany killed 6 million Jews and 5 million others in a systematic and state-sponsored genocide.*



## Where?

The Nazi party came to power in Germany in 1933. In an attempt to create 'Lebensraum,' or living space for Aryans, the Nazis targeted Jews and others in Belarus, Croatia, Estonia, France, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Ukraine, and the USSR for extermination to expand territory available for Germany.

## When?

Adolf Hitler was elected Chancellor of Germany in 1933 and almost immediately began enacting anti-Semitic laws aimed to eliminate Jews' rights. The Holocaust ended in 1945 when the Germans surrendered to the Allied Forces, ending WWII.

## Who?

**Perpetrators:** The Nazi party, led by Hitler, blamed the Jews for many of Germany's problems (anti-Semitism and anti-Bolshevism), wanted land for German expansion (*lebensraum*), believed in the German master race (Aryan supremacy), and created a "Final Solution" – eliminating all Jews in Europe. Many ordinary German and other European citizens committed heinous crimes.

**Victims:** Jews were primarily targeted but the Nazis also targeted others because of their perceived "inferiority:" Roma (Gypsies), the disabled, and some of the Slavic peoples (Poles, Russians, and others). Other groups were persecuted on political, ideological, and behavioral grounds, among them Communists, Socialists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and homosexuals.

## How?

The devastation of World War I took a toll on Europe, leaving open wounds for a second world conflict. Germany's economy worsened; hyperinflation caused money to become virtually worthless, and families burned banknotes to cook or keep warm. Hitler, elected in 1933, was *Time* Magazine's 1938 Man of the Year for improving Germany's economy.

Before the Nazis created extermination camps, the Einsatzgruppen, mobile killing squads, killed 1.5 million people in a 'Holocaust by bullets.' The Einsatzgruppen marched victims to deserted fields, ordered them to dig massive graves, and then shot them into trenches.



To concentrate the Jewish population and to make deportation easier, the Nazis created ghettos, transit camps, and forced-labor camps, where hundreds of thousands died of disease, overcrowding, and starvation. Jews were rounded up, crammed into overcrowded cattle cars for days with no food or water, and sent to a network of 42,600 concentration camps throughout Europe, including six extermination camps, among them Auschwitz and Treblinka, where Jews were killed in gas chambers and their bodies burned in ovens. Dr. Josef Mengele, Auschwitz physician, led horrific medical experiments on prisoners. Nazis also eliminated the handicapped and mentally ill to 'purify' the Aryan race. Victims were brought to killing centers disguised as hospitals and euthanized. In the

last months of the war, SS guards forced prisoners on "death marches" to hide the living evidence of the camps, and they destroyed thousands of pages of documents. Germany surrendered to the Allies on May 8, 1945.

## **The Aftermath**

After the Allies liberated concentration camps, many prisoners couldn't return home. Millions were held in displaced persons (DP) camps for several years. The camps transformed into centers of culture and community. Hundreds of thousands of Jews eventually emigrated to Israel, Argentina, Australia, the United States, and other countries after WWII. The Holocaust utterly devastated Jewish communities in Europe. Six million Jews, almost two out of every three Jews in Europe, and five million others were killed.