

## 36 Questions About the Holocaust

### 1. When speaking about the "Holocaust," what time period are we referring to?

**Answer:** The "Holocaust" refers to the period from January 30, 1933, when Hitler became Chancellor of Germany, to May 8, 1945 (V-E Day), the end of the war in Europe.

### 2. How many Jews were murdered during the Holocaust?

**Answer:** While it is impossible to ascertain the exact number of Jewish victims, statistics indicate that the total was over 5,860,000. Six million is the round figure accepted by most authorities.

### 3. How many non-Jewish civilians were murdered during World War II?

**Answer:** While it is impossible to ascertain the exact number, the recognized figure is approximately 5,000,000. Among the groups which the Nazis and their collaborators murdered and persecuted were: Gypsies, Serbs, Polish intelligentsia, resistance fighters from all the nations, German opponents of Nazism, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, habitual criminals, and the "anti-social," e.g. beggars, vagrants, and hawkers.

### 4. Which Jewish communities suffered losses during the Holocaust?

**Answer:** Every Jewish community in occupied Europe suffered losses during the Holocaust. The Jewish communities in North Africa were persecuted, but the Jews in these countries were neither deported to the death camps, nor were they systematically murdered.

### 5. How many Jews were murdered in each country and what percentage of the pre-war Jewish population did they constitute?

**Answer:** (Source: **Encyclopedia of the Holocaust**)

Austria 50,000 -- 27.0%  
Italy 7,680 -- 17.3%  
Belgium 28,900 -- 44.0%  
Latvia 71,500 -- 78.1%  
Bohemia/Moravia 78,150 -- 66.1%  
Lithuania 143,000 -- 85.1%  
Bulgaria 0 -- 0.0%  
Luxembourg 1,950 -- 55.7%  
Denmark 60 -- 0.7%  
Netherlands 100,000 -- 71.4%  
Estonia 2,000 -- 44.4%  
Norway 762 -- 44.8%  
Finland 7 -- 0.3%  
Poland 3,000,000 -- 90.9%  
France 77,320 -- 22.1%  
Romania 287,000 -- 47.1%  
Germany 141,500 -- 25.0%  
Slovakia 71,000 -- 79.8%  
Greece 67,000 -- 86.6%  
Soviet Union 1,100,000 -- 36.4%

Hungary 569,000 -- 69.0%  
Yugoslavia 63,300 -- 81.2%

## 6. What is a death camp? How many were there? Where were they located?

**Answer:** A death (or mass murder) camp is a concentration camp with special apparatus specifically designed for systematic murder. Six such camps existed: Auschwitz-Birkenau, Belzec, Chelmno, Majdanek, Sobibor, Treblinka. All were located in Poland.

## 7. What does the term "Final Solution" mean and what is its origin?

**Answer:** The term "Final Solution" (*Endlösung*) refers to Germany's plan to murder all the Jews of Europe. The term was used at the Wannsee Conference (Berlin; January 20, 1942) where German officials discussed its implementation.

## 8. When did the "Final Solution" actually begin?

**Answer:** While thousands of Jews were murdered by the Nazis or died as a direct result of discriminatory measures instituted against Jews during the initial years of the Third Reich, the systematic murder of Jews did not begin until the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941.

## 9. How did the Germans define who was Jewish?

**Answer:** On November 14, 1935, the Nazis issued the following definition of a Jew: Anyone with three Jewish grandparents; someone with two Jewish grandparents who belonged to the Jewish community on September 15, 1935, or joined thereafter; was married to a Jew or Jewess on September 15, 1935, or married one thereafter; was the offspring of a marriage or extramarital liaison with a Jew on or after September 15, 1935.

## 10. How did the Germans treat those who had some Jewish blood but were not classified as Jews?

**Answer:** Those who were not classified as Jews but who had some Jewish blood were categorized as *Mischlinge* (hybrids) and were divided into two groups:

*Mischlinge* of the first degree--those with two Jewish grandparents;  
*Mischlinge* of the second degree--those with one Jewish grandparent.

The *Mischlinge* were officially excluded from membership in the Nazi Party and all Party organizations (e.g. SA, SS, etc.). Although they were drafted into the Germany Army, they could not attain the rank of officers. They were also barred from the civil service and from certain professions. (Individual *Mischlinge* were, however, granted exemptions under certain circumstances.) Nazi officials considered plans to sterilize *Mischlinge*, but this was never done. During World War II, first-degree *Mischlinge*, incarcerated in concentration camps, were deported to death camps.

## 11. What were the first measures taken by the Nazis against the Jews?

**Answer:** The first measures against the Jews included:

April 1, 1933: A boycott of Jewish shops and businesses by the Nazis.

April 7, 1933: The law for the Re-establishment of the Civil Service expelled all non-Aryans (defined on April 11, 1933 as anyone with a Jewish parent or grandparent) from the civil

service. Initially, exceptions were made for those working since August 1914; German veterans of World War I; and, those who had lost a father or son fighting for Germany or her allies in World War I.

April 7, 1933: The law regarding admission to the legal profession prohibited the admission of lawyers of non-Aryan descent to the Bar. It also denied non-Aryan members of the Bar the right to practice law. (Exceptions were made in the cases noted above in the law regarding the civil service.) Similar laws were passed regarding Jewish law assessors, jurors, and commercial judges.

April 22, 1933: The decree regarding physicians' services with the national health plan denied reimbursement of expenses to those patients who consulted non-Aryan doctors. Jewish doctors who were war veterans or had suffered from the war were excluded.

April 25, 1933: The law against the overcrowding of German schools restricted Jewish enrollment in German high schools to 1.5% of the student body. In communities where they constituted more than 5% of the population, Jews were allowed to constitute up to 5% of the student body. Initially, exceptions were made in the case of children of Jewish war veterans, who were not considered part of the quota. In the framework of this law, a Jewish student was a child with two non-Aryan parents.

## **12. Did the Nazis plan to murder the Jews from the beginning of their regime?**

**Answer:** This question is one of the most difficult to answer. While Hitler made several references to killing Jews, both in his early writings (*Mein Kampf*) and in various speeches during the 1930s, it is fairly certain that the Nazis had no operative plan for the systematic annihilation of the Jews before 1941. The decision on the systematic murder of the Jews was apparently made in the late winter or the early spring of 1941 in conjunction with the decision to invade the Soviet Union.

## **13. When was the first concentration camp established and who were the first inmates?**

**Answer:** The first concentration camp, Dachau, opened on March 22, 1933. The camp's first inmates were primarily political prisoners (e.g. Communists or Social Democrats); habitual criminals; homosexuals; Jehovah's Witnesses; and "anti-socials" (beggars, vagrants, hawkers). Others considered problematic by the Nazis (e.g. Jewish writers and journalists, lawyers, unpopular industrialists, and political officials) were also included.

## **14. Which groups of people in Germany were considered enemies of the state by the Nazis and were, therefore, persecuted?**

**Answer:** The following groups of individuals were considered enemies of the Third Reich and were, therefore, persecuted by the Nazi authorities: Jews, Gypsies, Social Democrats, other opposing politicians, opponents of Nazism, Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals, habitual criminals, and "anti-socials" (e.g. beggars, vagrants, hawkers), and the mentally ill. Any individual who was considered a threat to the Nazis was in danger of being persecuted.

## **15. What was the difference between the persecution of the Jews and the persecution of other groups classified by the Nazis as enemies of the Third Reich?**

**Answer:** The Jews were the only group singled out for total systematic annihilation by the Nazis. To escape the death sentence imposed by the Nazis, the Jews could only leave Nazi-

controlled Europe. Every single Jew was to be killed according to the Nazis' plan. In the case of other criminals or enemies of the Third Reich, their families were usually not held accountable. Thus, if a person were executed or sent to a concentration camp, it did not mean that each member of his family would meet the same fate. Moreover, in most situations the Nazis' enemies were classified as such because of their actions or political affiliation (actions and/or opinions which could be revised). In the case of the Jews, it was because of their racial origin, which could never be changed.

### **16. Why were the Jews singled out for extermination?**

**Answer:** The explanation of the Nazis' implacable hatred of the Jew rests on their distorted world view which saw history as a racial struggle. They considered the Jews a race whose goal was world domination and who, therefore, were an obstruction to Aryan dominance. They believed that all of history was a fight between races which should culminate in the triumph of the superior Aryan race. Therefore, they considered it their duty to eliminate the Jews, whom they regarded as a threat. Moreover, in their eyes, the Jews' racial origin made them habitual criminals who could never be rehabilitated and were, therefore, hopelessly corrupt and inferior.

There is no doubt that other factors contributed toward Nazi hatred of the Jews and their distorted image of the Jewish people. These included the centuries-old tradition of Christian antisemitism which propagated a negative stereotype of the Jew as a Christ-killer, agent of the devil, and practitioner of witchcraft. Also significant was the political antisemitism of the latter half of the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries, which singled out the Jew as a threat to the established order of society. These combined to point to the Jew as a target for persecution and ultimate destruction by the Nazis.

### **17. What did people in Germany know about the persecution of Jews and other enemies of Nazism?**

**Answer:** Certain initial aspects of Nazi persecution of Jews and other opponents were common knowledge in Germany. Thus, for example, everyone knew about the Boycott of April 1, 1933, the Laws of April, and the Nuremberg Laws, because they were fully publicized. Moreover, offenders were often publicly punished and shamed. The same holds true for subsequent anti-Jewish measures. *Kristallnacht* (The Night of the Broken Glass) was a public pogrom, carried out in full view of the entire population. While information on the concentration camps was not publicized, a great deal of information was available to the German public, and the treatment of the inmates was generally known, although exact details were not easily obtained.

As for the implementation of the "Final Solution" and the murder of other undesirable elements, the situation was different. The Nazis attempted to keep the murders a secret and, therefore, took precautionary measures to ensure that they would not be publicized. Their efforts, however, were only partially successful. Thus, for example, public protests by various clergymen led to the halt of their euthanasia program in August of 1941. These protests were obviously the result of the fact that many persons were aware that the Nazis were killing the mentally ill in special institutions.

As far as the Jews were concerned, it was common knowledge in Germany that they had disappeared after having been sent to the East. It was not exactly clear to large segments of the German population what had happened to them. On the other hand, there were thousands upon thousands of Germans who participated in and/or witnessed the implementation of the

"Final Solution" either as members of the SS, the *Einsatzgruppen*, death camp or concentration camp guards, police in occupied Europe, or with the *Wehrmacht*.

### **18. Did all Germans support Hitler's plan for the persecution of the Jews?**

**Answer:** Although the entire German population was not in agreement with Hitler's persecution of the Jews, there is no evidence of any large scale protest regarding their treatment. There were Germans who defied the April 1, 1933 boycott and purposely bought in Jewish stores, and there were those who aided Jews to escape and to hide, but their number was very small. Even some of those who opposed Hitler were in agreement with his anti-Jewish policies. Among the clergy, *Dompropst* Bernhard Lichtenberg of Berlin publicly prayed for the Jews daily and was, therefore, sent to a concentration camp by the Nazis. Other priests were deported for their failure to cooperate with Nazi antisemitic policies, but the majority of the clergy complied with the directives against German Jewry and did not openly protest.

### **19. Did the people of occupied Europe know about Nazi plans for the Jews? What was their attitude? Did they cooperate with the Nazis against the Jews?**

**Answer:** The attitude of the local population vis-a-vis the persecution and destruction of the Jews varied from zealous collaboration with the Nazis to active assistance to Jews. Thus, it is difficult to make generalizations. The situation also varied from country to country. In Eastern Europe and especially in Poland, Russia, and the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania), there was much more knowledge of the "Final Solution" because it was implemented in those areas. Elsewhere, the local population had less information on the details of the "Final Solution."

In every country they occupied, with the exception of Denmark and Bulgaria, the Nazis found many locals who were willing to cooperate fully in the murder of the Jews. This was particularly true in Eastern Europe, where there was a long standing tradition of virulent antisemitism, and where various national groups, which had been under Soviet domination (Latvians, Lithuanians, and Ukrainians), fostered hopes that the Germans would restore their independence. In several countries in Europe, there were local fascist movements which allied themselves with the Nazis and participated in anti-Jewish actions; for example, the Iron Guard in Romania and the Arrow Guard in Slovakia. On the other hand, in every country in Europe, there were courageous individuals who risked their lives to save Jews. In several countries, there were groups which aided Jews, e.g. Joop Westerweel's group in the Netherlands, *Zegota* in Poland, and the Assisi underground in Italy.

### **20. Did the Allies and the people in the Free World know about the events going on in Europe?**

**Answer:** The various steps taken by the Nazis prior to the "Final Solution" were all taken publicly and were, therefore, reported in the press. Foreign correspondents commented on all the major anti-Jewish actions taken by the Nazis in Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia prior to World War II. Once the war began, obtaining information became more difficult, but reports, nonetheless, were published regarding the fate of the Jews. Thus, although the Nazis did not publicize the "Final Solution," less than one year after the systematic murder of the Jews was initiated, details began to filter out to the West. The first report which spoke of a plan for the mass murder of Jews was smuggled out of Poland by the *Bund* (a Jewish socialist political organization) and reached England in the spring of 1942. The details of this report reached the Allies from Vatican sources as well as from informants in Switzerland and the Polish underground. (Jan Karski, an emissary of the Polish underground, personally met with Franklin Roosevelt and British Foreign Minister Anthony Eden). Eventually, the American Government

confirmed the reports to Jewish leaders in late November 1942. They were publicized immediately thereafter. While the details were neither complete nor wholly accurate, the Allies were aware of most of what the Germans had done to the Jews at a relatively early date.

## **21. What was the response of the Allies to the persecution of the Jews? Could they have done anything to help?**

**Answer:** The response of the Allies to the persecution and destruction of European Jewry was inadequate. Only in January 1944 was an agency, the War Refugee Board, established for the express purpose of saving the victims of Nazi persecution. Prior to that date, little action was taken. On December 17, 1942, the Allies issued a condemnation of Nazi atrocities against the Jews, but this was the only such declaration made prior to 1944.

Moreover, no attempt was made to call upon the local population in Europe to refrain from assisting the Nazis in their systematic murder of the Jews. Even following the establishment of the War Refugee Board and the initiation of various rescue efforts, the Allies refused to bomb the death camp of Auschwitz and/or the railway lines leading to that camp, despite the fact that Allied bombers were at that time engaged in bombing factories very close to the camp and were well aware of its existence and function.

Other practical measures which were not taken concerned the refugee problem. Tens of thousands of Jews sought to enter the United States, but they were barred from doing so by the stringent American immigration policy. Even the relatively small quotas of visas which existed were often not filled, although the number of applicants was usually many times the number of available places. Conferences held in Evian, France (1938) and Bermuda (1943) to solve the refugee problem did not contribute to a solution. At the former, the countries invited by the United States and Great Britain were told that no country would be asked to change its immigration laws. Moreover, the British agreed to participate only if Palestine were not considered. At Bermuda, the delegates did not deal with the fate of those still in Nazi hands, but rather with those who had already escaped to neutral lands. Practical measures which could have aided in the rescue of Jews included the following:

- Permission for temporary admission of refugees
- Relaxation of stringent entry requirements
- Frequent and unequivocal warnings to Germany and local populations all over Europe that those participating in the annihilation of Jews would be held strictly accountable
- Bombing the death camp at Auschwitz

## **22. Who are the "Righteous Among the Nations"?**

**Answer:** "Righteous Among the Nations," or "Righteous Gentiles," refers to those non-Jews who aided Jews during the Holocaust. There were "Righteous Among the Nations" in every country overrun or allied with the Nazis, and their deeds often led to the rescue of Jewish lives. Yad Vashem, the Israeli national remembrance authority for the Holocaust, bestows special honors upon these individuals. To date, after carefully evaluating each case, Yad Vashem has recognized approximately 10,000 "Righteous Gentiles" in three different categories of recognition. The country with the most "Righteous Gentiles" is Poland. The country with the highest proportion (per capita) is the Netherlands. The figure of 10,000 is far from complete as many cases were never reported, frequently because those who were helped have died.

Moreover, this figure only includes those who actually risked their lives to save Jews, and not those who merely extended aid.

### **23. Were Jews in the Free World aware of the persecution and destruction of European Jewry and, if so, what was their response?**

**Answer:** The news of the persecution and destruction of European Jewry must be divided into two periods. The measures taken by the Nazis prior to the "Final Solution" were all taken publicly and were, therefore, in all the newspapers. Foreign correspondents reported on all major anti-Jewish actions taken by the Nazis in Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia prior to World War II. Once the war began, obtaining information became more difficult, but, nonetheless, reports were published regarding the fate of the Jews.

The "Final Solution" was not openly publicized by the Nazis, and thus it took longer for information to reach the "Free World." Nevertheless, by December 1942, news of the mass murders and the plan to annihilate European Jewry was publicized in the Jewish press.

The response of the Jews in the "Free World" must also be divided into two periods, before and after the publication of information on the "Final Solution." Efforts during the early years of the Nazi regime concentrated on facilitating emigration from Germany (although there were those who initially opposed emigration as a solution) and combatting German antisemitism. Unfortunately, the views on how to best achieve these goals differed and effective action was often hampered by the lack of internal unity. Moreover, very few Jewish leaders actually realized the scope of the danger. Following the publication of the news of the "Final Solution," attempts were made to launch rescue attempts via neutral states and to send aid to Jews under Nazi rule. These attempts, which were far from adequate, were further hampered by the lack of assistance and obstruction from government channels. Additional attempts to achieve internal unity during this period failed.

### **24. Did the Jews in Europe realize what was going to happen to them?**

**Answer:** Regarding the knowledge of the "Final Solution" by its potential victims, several key points must be kept in mind. First of all, the Nazis did not publicize the "Final Solution," nor did they ever openly speak about it. Every attempt was made to fool the victims and, thereby, prevent or minimize resistance. Thus, deportees were always told that they were going to be "resettled." They were led to believe that conditions "in the East" (where they were being sent) would be better than those in ghettos. Following arrival in certain concentration camps, the inmates were forced to write home about the wonderful conditions in their new place of residence. The Germans made every effort to ensure secrecy. In addition, the notion that human beings--let alone the civilized Germans--could build camps with special apparatus for mass murder seemed unbelievable in those days. Since German troops liberated the Jews from the Czar in World War I, Germans were regarded by many Jews as a liberal, civilized people. Escapees who did return to the ghetto frequently encountered disbelief when they related their experiences. Even Jews who had heard of the camps had difficulty believing reports of what the Germans were doing there. Inasmuch as each of the Jewish communities in Europe was almost completely isolated, there was a limited number of places with available information. Thus, there is no doubt that many European Jews were not aware of the "Final Solution," a fact that has been corroborated by German documents and the testimonies of survivors.

### **25. How many Jews were able to escape from Europe prior to the Holocaust?**

**Answer:** It is difficult to arrive at an exact figure for the number of Jews who were able to escape from Europe prior to World War II, since the available statistics are incomplete. From 1933-1939, 355,278 German and Austrian Jews left their homes. (Some immigrated to countries later overrun by the Nazis.) In the same period, 80,860 Polish Jews immigrated to Palestine and 51,747 European Jews arrived in Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay. During the years 1938-1939, approximately 35,000 emigrated from Bohemia and Moravia (Czechoslovakia). Shanghai, the only place in the world for which one did not need an entry visa, received approximately 20,000 European Jews (mostly of German origin) who fled their homelands. Immigration figures for countries of refuge during this period are not available. In addition, many countries did not provide a breakdown of immigration statistics according to ethnic groups. It is impossible, therefore, to ascertain.

## **26. What efforts were made to save the Jews fleeing from Germany before World War II began?**

**Answer:** Various organizations attempted to facilitate the emigration of the Jews (and non-Jews persecuted as Jews) from Germany. Among the most active were the Jewish Agency for Palestine, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, HICEM, the Central British Fund for German Jewry, the *Reichsvertretung der Deutschen Juden* (Reich Representation of German Jews), which represented German Jewry, and other non-Jewish groups such as the League of Nations High Commission for Refugees (Jewish and other) coming from Germany, and the American Friends Service Committee. Among the programs launched were the "Transfer Agreement" between the Jewish Agency and the German government whereby immigrants to Palestine were allowed to transfer their funds to that country in conjunction with the import of German goods to Palestine. Other efforts focused on retraining prospective emigrants in order to increase the number of those eligible for visas, since some countries barred the entry of members of certain professions. Other groups attempted to help in various phases of refugee work: selection of candidates for emigration, transportation of refugees, aid in immigrant absorption, etc. Some groups attempted to facilitate increased emigration by enlisting the aid of governments and international organizations in seeking refugee havens. The League of Nations established an agency to aid refugees but its success was extremely limited due to a lack of political power and adequate funding.

The United States and Great Britain convened a conference in 1938 at Evian, France, seeking a solution to the refugee problem. With the exception of the Dominican Republic, the nations assembled refused to change their stringent immigration regulations, which were instrumental in preventing large-scale immigration.

In 1939, the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees, which had been established at the Evian Conference, initiated negotiations with leading German officials in an attempt to arrange for the relocation of a significant portion of German Jewry. However, these talks failed. Efforts were made for the illegal entry of Jewish immigrants to Palestine as early as July 1934, but were later halted until July 1938. Large-scale efforts were resumed under the *Mosad le-Aliya Bet*, Revisionist Zionists, and private parties. Attempts were also made, with some success, to facilitate the illegal entry of refugees to various countries in Latin America.

## **27. Why were so few refugees able to flee Europe prior to the outbreak of World War II?**



**Answer:** The key reason for the relatively low number of refugees leaving Europe prior to World War II was the stringent immigration policies adopted by the prospective host countries. In the United States, for example, the number of immigrants was limited to 153,744 per year, divided by country of origin. Moreover, the entry requirements were so stringent that available quotas were often not filled. Schemes to facilitate immigration outside the quotas never materialized as the majority of the American public consistently opposed the entry of additional refugees. Other countries, particularly those in Latin America, adopted immigration policies that were similar or even more restrictive, thus closing the doors to prospective immigrants from the Third Reich.

Great Britain, while somewhat more liberal than the United States on the entry of immigrants, took measures to severely limit Jewish immigration to Palestine. In May 1939, the British issued a "White Paper" stipulating that only 75,000 Jewish immigrants would be allowed to enter Palestine over the course of the next five years (10,000 a year, plus an additional 25,000). This decision prevented hundreds of thousands of Jews from escaping Europe.

The countries most able to accept large numbers of refugees consistently refused to open their gates. Although a solution to the refugee problem was the agenda of the Evian Conference, only the Dominican Republic was willing to approve large-scale immigration. The United States and Great Britain proposed resettlement havens in under-developed areas (e.g. Guyana, formerly British Guiana, and the Philippines), but these were not suitable alternatives.

Two important factors should be noted. During the period prior to the outbreak of World War II, the Germans were in favor of Jewish emigration. At that time, there were no operative plans to kill the Jews. The goal was to induce them to leave, if necessary, by the use of force. It is also important to recognize the attitude of German Jewry. While many German Jews were initially reluctant to emigrate, the majority sought to do so following *Kristallnacht* (The Night of Broken Glass), November 9-10, 1938. Had havens been available, more people would certainly have emigrated.

## **28. What was Hitler's ultimate goal in launching World War II?**

**Answer:** Hitler's ultimate goal in launching World War II was the establishment of an Aryan empire from Germany to the Urals. He considered this area the natural territory of the German people, an area to which they were entitled by right, the *Lebensraum* (living space) that Germany needed so badly for its farmers to have enough soil. Hitler maintained that these areas were needed for the Aryan race to preserve itself and assure its dominance.

There is no question that Hitler knew that, by launching the war in the East, the Nazis would be forced to deal with serious racial problems in view of the composition of the population in the Eastern areas. Thus, the Nazis had detailed plans for the subjugation of the Slavs, who would be reduced to serfdom status and whose primary function would be to serve as a source of cheap labor for Aryan farmers. Those elements of the local population, who were of higher racial stock, would be taken to Germany where they would be raised as Aryans.

In Hitler's mind, the solution of the Jewish problem was also linked to the conquest of the eastern territories. These areas had large Jewish populations and they would have to be dealt with accordingly. While at this point there was still no operative plan for mass annihilation, it was clear to Hitler that some sort of comprehensive solution would have to be found. There

was also talk of establishing a Jewish reservation either in Madagascar or near Lublin, Poland. When he made the decisive decision to invade the Soviet Union, Hitler also gave instructions to embark upon the "Final Solution," the systematic murder of European Jewry.

### **29. Was there any opposition to the Nazis within Germany?**

**Answer:** Throughout the course of the Third Reich, there were different groups who opposed the Nazi regime and certain Nazi policies. They engaged in resistance at different times and with various methods, aims, and scope.

From the beginning, leftist political groups and a number of disappointed conservatives were in opposition; at a later date, church groups, government officials, students and businessmen also joined. After the tide of the war was reversed, elements within the military played an active role in opposing Hitler. At no point, however, was there a unified resistance movement within Germany.

### **30. Did the Jews try to fight against the Nazis? To what extent were such efforts successful?**

**Answer:** Despite the difficult conditions to which Jews were subjected in Nazi-occupied Europe, many engaged in armed resistance against the Nazis. This resistance can be divided into three basic types of armed activities: ghetto revolts, resistance in concentration and death camps, and partisan warfare.

The Warsaw Ghetto revolt, which lasted for about five weeks beginning on April 19, 1943, is probably the best-known example of armed Jewish resistance, but there were many ghetto revolts in which Jews fought against the Nazis.

Despite the terrible conditions in the death, concentration, and labor camps, Jewish inmates fought against the Nazis at the following sites: Treblinka (August 2, 1943); Babi Yar (September 29, 1943); Sobibór (October 14, 1943); Janowska (November 19, 1943); and Auschwitz (October 7, 1944).

Jewish partisan units were active in many areas, including Baranovichi, Minsk, Naliboki forest, and Vilna. While the sum total of armed resistance efforts by Jews was not militarily overwhelming and did not play a significant role in the defeat of Nazi Germany, these acts of resistance did lead to the rescue of an undetermined number of Jews, Nazi casualties, and untold damage to German property and self-esteem.

### **31. What was the *Judenrat*?**

**Answer:** The *Judenrat* was the council of Jews, appointed by the Nazis in each Jewish community or ghetto. According to the directive from Reinhard Heydrich of the SS on September 21, 1939, a *Judenrat* was to be established in every concentration of Jews in the occupied areas of Poland. They were led by noted community leaders. Enforcement of Nazi decrees affecting Jews and administration of the affairs of the Jewish community were the responsibilities of the *Judenrat*. These functions placed the *Judenrat* in a highly responsible, but controversial position, and many of their actions continue to be the subject of debate among historians. While the intentions of the heads of councils were rarely challenged, their tactics and methods have been questioned. Among the most controversial were Mordechai Rumkowski in Lodz and Jacob Gens in Vilna, both of whom justified the sacrifice of some Jews in order to

save others. Leaders and members of the *Judenrat* were guided, for the most part, by a sense of communal responsibility, but lacked the power and the means to successfully thwart Nazi plans for annihilation of all Jews.

### **32. Did international organizations, such as the Red Cross, aid victims of Nazi persecution?**

**Answer:** During the course of World War II, the International Red Cross (IRC) did very little to aid the Jewish victims of Nazi persecution. Its activities can basically be divided into three periods:

#### *1. September, 1939 - June 22, 1941:*

The IRC confined its activities to sending food packages to those in distress in Nazi-occupied Europe. Packages were distributed in accordance with the directives of the German Red Cross. Throughout this time, the IRC complied with the German contention that those in ghettos and camps constituted a threat to the security of the Reich and, therefore, were not allowed to receive aid from the IRC.

#### *2. June 22, 1941 - Summer 1944:*

Despite numerous requests by Jewish organizations, the IRC refused to publicly protest the mass annihilation of Jews and non-Jews in the camps, or to intervene on their behalf. It maintained that any public action on behalf of those under Nazi rule would ultimately prove detrimental to their welfare. At the same time, the IRC attempted to send food parcels to those individuals whose addresses it possessed.

#### *3. Summer 1944 - May 1945:*

Following intervention by such prominent figures as President Franklin Roosevelt and the King of Sweden, the IRC appealed to Miklós Horthy, Regent of Hungary, to stop the deportation of Hungarian Jews.

The IRC did insist that it be allowed to visit concentration camps, and a delegation did visit the "model ghetto" of Terezin (Theresienstadt). The IRC request came following the receipt of information about the harsh living conditions in the camp.

The IRC requested permission to investigate the situation, but the Germans only agreed to allow the visit nine months after submission of the request. This delay provided time for the Nazis to complete a "beautification" program, designed to fool the delegation into thinking that conditions at Terezin were quite good and that inmates were allowed to live out their lives in relative tranquility.

The visit, which took place on July 23, 1944, was followed by a favorable report on Terezin to the members of the IRC which Jewish organizations protested vigorously, demanding that another delegation visit the camp. Such a visit was not permitted until shortly before the end of the war. In reality, the majority were subsequently deported to Auschwitz where they were murdered.

### **33. How did Germany's allies, the Japanese and the Italians, treat the Jews in the lands they occupied?**

**Answer:** Neither the Italians nor the Japanese, both of whom were Germany's allies during World War II, cooperated regarding the "Final Solution." Although the Italians did, upon German urging, institute discriminatory legislation against Italian Jews, Mussolini's government refused to participate in the "Final Solution" and consistently refused to deport its Jewish residents. Moreover, in their occupied areas of France, Greece, and Yugoslavia, the Italians protected the Jews and did not allow them to be deported. However, when the Germans overthrew the Badoglio government in 1943, the Jews of Italy, as well as those under Italian protection in occupied areas, were subject to the "Final Solution."

The Japanese were also relatively tolerant toward the Jews in their country as well as in the areas which they occupied. Despite pressure by their German allies urging them to take stringent measures against Jews, the Japanese refused to do so. Refugees were allowed to enter Japan until the spring of 1941, and Jews in Japanese-occupied China were treated well. In the summer and fall of 1941, refugees in Japan were transferred to Shanghai but no measures were taken against them until early 1943, when they were forced to move into the Hongkew Ghetto. While conditions were hardly satisfactory, they were far superior to those in the ghettos under German control.

#### **34. What was the attitude of the churches vis-a-vis the persecution of the Jews? Did the Pope ever speak out against the Nazis?**

**Answer:** The head of the Catholic Church at the time of the Nazi rise to power was Pope Pius XI. Although he stated that the myths of "race" and "blood" were contrary to Christian teaching (in a papal encyclical, March 1937), he neither mentioned nor criticized antisemitism. His successor, Pius XII (Cardinal Pacelli) was a Germanophile who maintained his neutrality throughout the course of World War II. Although as early as 1942 the Vatican received detailed information on the murder of Jews in concentration camps, the Pope confined his public statements to expressions of sympathy for the victims of injustice and to calls for a more humane conduct of the war.

Despite the lack of response by Pope Pius XII, several papal nuncios played an important role in rescue efforts, particularly the nuncios in Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, and Turkey. It is not clear to what, if any, extent they operated upon instructions from the Vatican. In Germany, the Catholic Church did not oppose the Nazis' antisemitic campaign. Church records were supplied to state authorities which assisted in the detection of people of Jewish origin, and efforts to aid the persecuted were confined to Catholic non-Aryans. While Catholic clergymen protested the Nazi euthanasia program, few, with the exception of Bernhard Lichtenberg, spoke out against the murder of the Jews.

In Western Europe, Catholic clergy spoke out publicly against the persecution of the Jews and actively helped in the rescue of Jews. In Eastern Europe, however, the Catholic clergy was generally more reluctant to help. Dr. Jozef Tiso, the head of state of Slovakia and a Catholic priest, actively cooperated with the Germans as did many other Catholic priests.

The response of Protestant and Eastern Orthodox churches varied. In Germany, for example, Nazi supporters within Protestant churches complied with the anti-Jewish legislation and even excluded Christians of Jewish origin from membership. Pastor Martin Niemöller's Confessing Church defended the rights of Christians of Jewish origin within the church, but did not publicly

protest their persecution, nor did it condemn the measures taken against the Jews, with the exception of a memorandum sent to Hitler in May 1936.

In occupied Europe, the position of the Protestant churches varied. In several countries (Denmark, France, the Netherlands, and Norway) local churches and/or leading clergymen issued public protests when the Nazis began deporting Jews. In other countries (Bulgaria, Greece, and Yugoslavia), some Orthodox church leaders intervened on behalf of the Jews and took steps which, in certain cases, led to the rescue of many Jews.

### **35. How many Nazi criminals were there? How many were brought to justice?**

**Answer:** We do not know the exact number of Nazi criminals since the available documentation is incomplete. The Nazis themselves destroyed many incriminating documents and there are still many criminals who are unidentified and/or unindicted.

Those who committed war crimes include those individuals who initiated, planned and directed the killing operations, as well as those with whose knowledge, agreement, and passive participation the murder of European Jewry was carried out.

Those who actually implemented the "Final Solution" include the leaders of Nazi Germany, the heads of the Nazi Party, and the Reich Security Main Office. Also included are hundreds of thousands of members of the Gestapo, the *SS*, the *Einsatzgruppen*, the police and the armed forces, as well as those bureaucrats who were involved in the persecution and destruction of European Jewry. In addition, there were thousands of individuals throughout occupied Europe who cooperated with the Nazis in killing Jews and other innocent civilians.

We do not have complete statistics on the number of criminals brought to justice, but the number is certainly far less than the total of those who were involved in the "Final Solution." The leaders of the Third Reich, who were caught by the Allies, were tried by the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg from November 20, 1945 to October 1, 1946. Afterwards, the Allied occupation authorities continued to try Nazis, with the most significant trials held in the American zone (the Subsequent Nuremberg Proceedings). In total, 5,025 Nazi criminals were convicted between 1945-1949 in the American, British and French zones, in addition to an unspecified number of people who were tried in the Soviet zone. In addition, the United Nations War Crimes Commission prepared lists of war criminals who were later tried by the judicial authorities of Allied countries and those countries under Nazi rule during the war. The latter countries have conducted a large number of trials regarding crimes committed in their lands. The Polish tribunals, for example, tried approximately 40,000 persons, and large numbers of criminals were tried in other countries. In all, about 80,000 Germans have been convicted for committing crimes against humanity, while the number of local collaborators is in the tens of thousands. Special mention should be made of Simon Wiesenthal, whose activities led to the capture of over one thousand Nazi criminals.

Courts in Germany began, in some cases, to function as early as 1945. By 1969, almost 80,000 Germans had been investigated and over 6,000 had been convicted. In 1958, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG; West Germany) established a special agency in Ludwigsburg to aid in the investigation of crimes committed by Germans outside Germany, an agency which, since its establishment, has been involved in hundreds of major investigations. One of the major problems regarding the trial of war criminals in the FRG (as well as in Austria) has been the fact

that the sentences have been disproportionately lenient for the crimes committed. Some trials were also conducted in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR; East Germany), yet no statistics exist as to the number of those convicted or the extent of their sentences.

### **36. What were the Nuremberg trials?**

**Answer:** The term "Nuremberg Trials" refers to two sets of trials of Nazi war criminals conducted after the war. The first trials were held November 20, 1945 to October 1, 1946, before the International Military Tribunal (IMT), which was made up of representatives of France, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States. It consisted of the trials of the political, military and economic leaders of the Third Reich captured by the Allies. Among the defendants were: G"ring, Rosenberg, Streicher, Kaltenbrunner, Seyss-Inquart, Speer, Ribbentrop and Hess (many of the most prominent Nazis -- Hitler, Himmler, and Goebbels -- committed suicide and were not brought to trial). The second set of trials, known as the Subsequent Nuremberg Proceedings, was conducted before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals (NMT), established by the Office of the United States Government for Germany (OMGUS). While the judges on the NMT were American citizens, the tribunal considered itself international. Twelve high-ranking officials were tried, among whom were cabinet ministers, diplomats, doctors involved in medical experiments, and SS officers involved in crimes in concentration camps or in genocide in Nazi-occupied areas.

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