

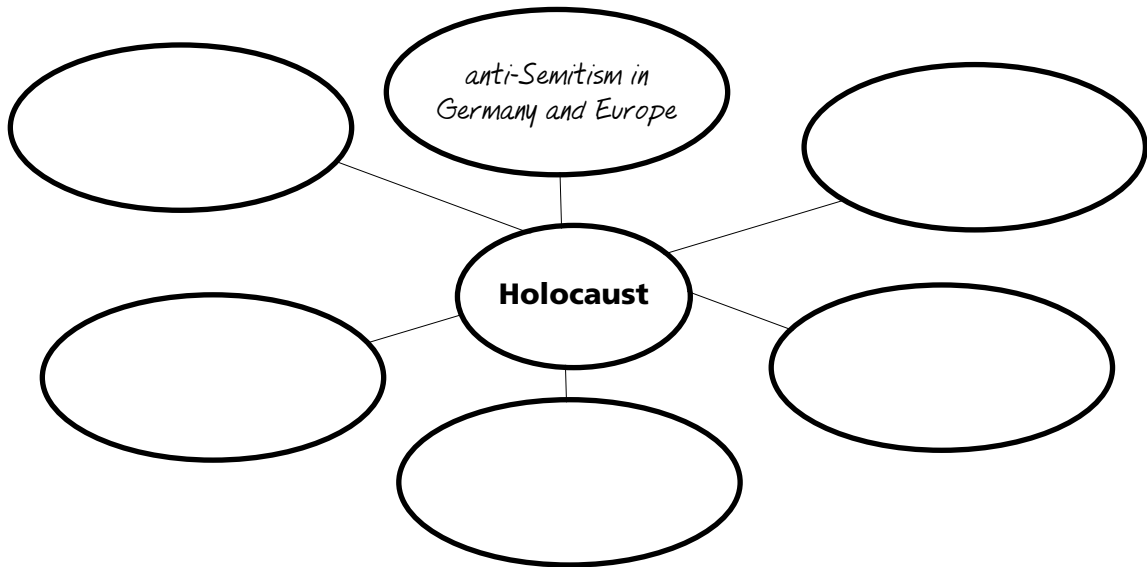
The Holocaust

BEFORE YOU READ

In the last section, you saw how Hitler began World War II. In this section, you will see how Hitler put his plan of Aryan domination into place by killing Jews and other groups he considered inferior.

AS YOU READ

Take notes on the chart below. Fill it in with the attitudes and actions that led to the Holocaust.



TERMS AND NAMES

Holocaust Systematic murder of 11 million Jews and other people in Europe by the Nazis

Kristallnacht Name given the night of November 9, 1938, when Nazis in Germany attacked Jews, their businesses, and their synagogues

genocide Deliberate and systematic killing of an entire people

ghetto A segregated neighborhood

concentration camp Prison camps operated by the Nazis where Jews and others were starved while doing slave labor, or murdered

The Persecution Begins

How did the persecution of the Jews begin in Germany?

Part of Hitler's plan for Germany was to make the country racially pure. In 1933, just three months after taking power, Hitler ordered all non-Aryans out of government jobs. Then Hitler began an organized persecution of non-Aryans, particularly of Jews. This resulted in the **Holocaust**—the systematic murder of over 11 million people across Europe. Over half of the murdered people were Jews.

Anti-Semitism, or hatred of Jews, had a long history in Germany and in other parts of Europe.

For a long time, Germans had used Jews as a scapegoat, someone to blame for their own failures and frustrations. Therefore, when Hitler blamed Jews for Germany's defeat in World War I, many Germans agreed. When Hitler blamed the Jews for Germany's economic problems, many Germans supported him.

Persecution of Jews increased under Hitler. In 1935, new laws took away Jews' civil rights and their property. Jews were forced to wear yellow stars of David on their clothing.

On November 9, 1938, organized, violent persecution began with **Kristallnacht**. (*Kristallnacht* is

a German word meaning “crystal night,” or night of broken glass.) Gangs of Nazi *storm troopers* attacked Jewish homes, businesses, and *synagogues* across Germany. The streets were littered with broken glass. Then the Nazis blamed Jews for the destruction. Many Jews were arrested; others were fined.

Many Jews started to flee Germany. Nazis were in favor of this, but other nations did not want to accept the Jewish refugees. Some refugees, including Albert Einstein and Thomas Mann, were allowed into the United States. But the United States would not change its immigration quotas. This was partly American anti-Semitism. It was also because many Americans feared competition for the few jobs during the Depression.

Once war broke out in Europe, Americans said they feared that refugees would be “enemy agents.” The Coast Guard even turned away a ship carrying refugees who had *emigration papers* for the United States. Three-quarters of those passengers were killed by the Nazis after the ship was forced to return to Europe.

1. How did the world react to Germany’s persecution of the Jews?

Hitler’s “Final Solution”

How did the Nazis try to kill off the Jews and others?

In 1939, there were only about a quarter of a million Jews left in Germany. But other countries that Hitler occupied had millions more Jews. Hitler’s ultimate goal was to get rid of all of Europe’s Jews. He began implementing the “final solution.” This plan amounted to **genocide**, the deliberate and systematic killing of an entire population.

The “final solution” was based on the Nazi belief that “Aryans” were a superior people and that their strength and racial purity must be preserved. To accomplish this, the Nazis arrested people they identified as “enemies of the state,” condemning these people to slavery and death. In

addition to Jews, the Nazis rounded up political opponents—Communists, Socialists, liberals—and other groups including Gypsies, Freemasons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, homosexuals, the disabled, and the terminally ill.

Some Jews were forced into **ghettos**—segregated Jewish areas where they were made to work in factories or left to starve. Despite brutal conditions, Jews hung on, resisting the Germans and setting up schools and underground newspapers.

2. Who were the targets of the “final solution”?

The Final Stage

How did the Nazis kill so many people?

Most Jews were sent to **concentration camps**, where they suffered hunger, illness, overwork, torture, and death. The early concentration camps did not kill Jews fast enough for the Nazis. In 1941, six death camps were built in Poland. These camps had gas chambers that could kill 12,000 people a day. Prisoners were separated upon arrival at death camps by SS doctors. Those who were too old or too weak to work were led to the gas chambers and killed. At first bodies were buried or burned in huge pits. Then the Nazis built huge ovens called crematoriums that destroyed the bodies and all evidence of the mass murder that had taken place. Other prisoners were shot or hanged or subjected to horrible medical experiments by camp doctors.

Six million Jews died in death camps and Nazi *massacres*. Some Jews, however, were saved. Ordinary people sometimes risked their own lives to hide Jews or to help them escape.

Some Jews even survived the concentration camps. Elie Wiesel, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986, is a survivor of Auschwitz. He has written memorably about his concentration camp experiences and the need to prevent such genocide from ever happening again.

3. Why were certain people separated from the others and led to the gas chambers?
