

AN OVERVIEW OF THE HOLOCAUST

Written and Compiled by Dr. Nancy E. Rupprecht*
Middle Tennessee State University

"You hear me speak. But do you hear me feel?"

Written by German/Jewish poet Gertrud Kolmar who was murdered in
Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1943

When Adolf Hitler's National Socialist Party seized power on January 30, 1933, there were approximately 525,000 people of Jewish faith living in Germany, less than one percent of the population. Hitler quickly destroyed the Weimar Republic and created a totalitarian state based on racial ideology in theory, in law and in practice.

The Holocaust or Shoah,¹ the genocide directed primarily against the Jews of Europe, developed gradually and inexorably with small discriminatory measures such as university quota limits for Jews and the prohibition of Jewish ownership of German land (both in 1933) and escalated with the Nuremberg Laws of 1935 that defined what it meant to be a Jew,² deprived Jews of German citizenship and legally prohibited them from a variety of occupations and rights of citizenship. At the same time laws were passed making sexual relations between Germans and those of unacceptable race into a new crime called "Racial Pollution" (*Rassenschande*) that was punishable by a variety of sanctions up to and including the death penalty for both participants.³

¹ Although some scholars prefer the Hebrew word *Shoah* (catastrophe) to the term Holocaust, this overview will use Holocaust. For many years scholarship on the Holocaust focused on the German perpetrators rather than their victims, primarily because the Germans created most of the written official records. However, in the recent past more emphasis has been placed on Holocaust victims; new methodologies and categories of analysis, such as questions of gender and class, have been developed, and projects to videotape the testimony of Holocaust survivors have broadened the scope of Holocaust scholarship. A relatively short list of suggestions for further reading on the Holocaust is appended to this essay as Appendix III.

² The Nuremberg laws defined "full Jews" as having three or four Jewish grandparents or those with two Jewish grandparents who were married to Jews and/or belonged to a Jewish community. All other people who had two Jewish grandparents were defined as First Degree *Mischlinge*, people of mixed racial ancestry. Second Degree *Mischlinge* were defined as people with one Jewish grandparent and Aryans were defined as people with no Jewish grandparents.

*Dr. Rupprecht has graciously allowed The National WWII Museum to post her work on its website. When quoting from this paper, please acknowledge the author, her affiliation, and The National WWII Museum.

Hitler justified this racist legislation by incorrectly defining Jews as a race and arguing in *Mein Kampf* (1924), that Jews use religion as a shield to mask their supposedly nefarious racial, political and economic goals in order to assure them:

...of the tolerance that the Aryan is always ready to accord a religious creed. For actually, the Mosaic religion [Judaism] is nothing other than a doctrine for the preservation of the Jewish race. ...A Jew is and remains a typical parasite, a sponger who like a noxious bacillus keeps spreading as soon as a favorable medium invites him. And the effect of his existence is also like that of spongers: wherever he appears, the host people die out. ...The Jew today is the great agitator for the complete destruction of Germany.

From 1933 on there was slow, steady progress toward the destruction of Europe's Jews from discrimination to expropriation to degradation, to persecution, to national pogrom, to forced labor, to mass deportations and finally to genocide.⁴ Also in *Mein Kampf*, Hitler had predicted that a general European war would result "in the extermination of the Jewish race in Europe," a prediction he repeated in a Reichstag speech in January 1939 and three times during World War II. It was, of course, a self-fulfilling prophecy despite the fact that few people interpreted his warnings literally.

It frequently has been argued that Germany's Jews should have anticipated what the German state had in store for them and emigrated abroad long before the exterminations began. However, in the years immediately after Hitler's seizure of power the most virulent forms of persecution were levied against non-Jewish Germans whom he considered to be enemies of the new German state such as Communists, Social Democrats and other political opponents. Intent is much easier to assess in hindsight.

³ *Rassenschande* prosecutions for sexual intercourse between Jews and German gentiles were much more common than prosecutions for sexual relations between gentiles and Afro-Germans *Mischlinge* or gentiles and Sinti and Roma. Although there were a relatively small number of Afro-Germans in the Third Reich, approximately 385 of them were sterilized to preclude their further procreation and, during the war, some were conscripted for forced labor. On the other hand, some black German *Mischlinge* joined the Hitler Youth and/or fought in the German army during WWII.

⁴ An extensive, though not complete, list of these discriminatory measures—such as the loss of the right to use public telephones, swim in public pools or own dogs and cats—is included in Appendix I to this Holocaust Overview.

In July 1933 eugenic laws were enacted permitting the involuntary sterilization of those Germans who physicians thought might transmit serious physical or mental diseases to the next generation. In October, 1939, physicians sorted out patients at hospitals and nursing homes to send those believed to be suffering from specified incurable conditions, handicaps, injuries, and diseases to special facilities to be put to death. This so-called euthanasia program offered a practical opportunity for the Third Reich to experiment with the quickest, cheapest, and most professional way to kill large numbers of people using a variety of lethal gasses and poisons as well as finding efficient methods of disposing of huge numbers of corpses. By August 1941 there had been approximately 70,000 victims of the euthanasia program. Word of this program leaked out and an outcry of public indignation managed to reduce it in the Reich. However, it was replaced by a decentralized program which continued until 1945.⁵

The first steps on the path to genocide were designed to subject the German-Jewish population to what historian Marion Kaplan has described as social death. By investigating the everyday lives of German Jews, Kaplan explains how state policies designed to isolate, disenfranchise, denigrate, and demean them led to what she calls “secular excommunication,” a form of social ostracism that separated them from non-Jewish Germans. This enabled the Nazi state to define Jews as an alien race living among Germans and encouraged non-Jewish Germans to become desensitized to what was happening to them. Kaplan argues that the “Social death of Jews and German indifference were prerequisites for the ‘final solution’.”⁶

The turning point from social death to active persecution in the pre-war Third Reich was *Reichskristallnacht* (“the Night of Broken Glass”), the horrendous pogrom of November 9, 1938,

⁵ This decentralized program, in which hospital personnel continued to kill patients, existed until the end of the war and, in some places these murders were not ended until Allied occupation forces discontinued them. Approximately 100,000 people were put to death after August 1941.

⁶ Kaplan’s term should not be interpreted to exclude the visceral forms of anti-Semitism that existed in Germany, most of Europe, the United States and much of the world.

that resulted in the murder of approximately 100 Jews and the destruction of 101 synagogues and 7,500 Jewish-owned businesses. An additional 75 synagogues and countless Jewish stores and shops were damaged. About thirty thousand Jewish men were taken to concentration camps. After *Kristallnacht*, it was clear to almost every German Jew that the best way to survive was to emigrate. Undoubtedly many more would have left if they had found any country in the world willing to accept them. However, some Jews with financial resources and/or connections abroad were able to obtain passports that permitted them to emigrate until emigration was forbidden in the fall of 1941.

At the instigation of American President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, an international conference was convened at Evian-sur-Bains, France July 6-15, 1938 to discuss the problem of Jewish refugees. Not only did the 32 countries' representatives in attendance fail to amend immigration laws to permit more immigration, they failed even to pass a resolution condemning National Socialist Germany's treatment of the Jews. Historian Martin Gilbert observed, "It was a neutral stance, not a hostile one, but this neutral stance was to cost a multitude of lives." Great Britain, the Netherlands, and Sweden did eventually accept some transports of Jewish children. Groups such as the Quakers and dedicated individuals organized efforts to transport children to safety on the so-called Kindertransports. Sir Nicholas Winton, for example, is credited with saving 669 Czechoslovak Jewish children.

Once systematic genocide had become state policy and the possibility of escape was almost impossible, Jews who were married to Aryans had the best chance to survive. Kaplan estimates that of the Jewish German survivors who did not emigrate, only 1% were not in mixed marriages. Jews remaining in Germany who went into hiding were called "submarines" (*U-Boote*) because they had to live below the surface of life. Only about 25% of the Jews who went into hiding survived and the majority of them were women.⁷ There are many ways in which the

⁷ Jews who lived underground in German society not only had to avoid the Gestapo (secret police) and other state functionaries, they also had to elude the *Greifer* (snatchers, catchers.) These were Jews, such

Holocaust experiences of male and female Jews differed. These differences are now being studied by scholars because, as Myrna Goldenberg explains, “the hell may have been the same for women and men during the Holocaust but the horrors were different.” After *Kristallnacht*, the Nazi persecution of Jews escalated dramatically, but it was only after the Second World War began that genocide became state policy.

With the outbreak of war in Europe in September 1939 the persecution of German and European Jews escalated, at least partially because military exigencies permit governments to employ more ruthless measures than normally are considered permissible. Moreover, during the war, tighter secrecy could be employed to shield the details of the exterminations under the guise of national security. The euthanasia program had taught Hitler the necessity for absolute secrecy when carrying out programs that he knew many Germans would consider immoral. He was determined not to be stopped or slowed down by people he considered to be misguided idealists.

Until 1940 most Germans, even high ranking National Socialist officials, thought the forced emigration of the Jews was the final goal of the German state. In 1939, racial theorist Alfred Rosenberg developed a plan to send European Jews to Madagascar and put them on reservations much like those Native Americans had been confined to in the United States. Documents dated as late as June 1940 in the bureau of Franz Rademacher, Under Secretary in Joachim von Ribbentrop's Foreign Office, document that the Madagascar Plan was considered to be state policy. However, Germany's failure to defeat Britain and gain control of the seas made the Madagascar Plan unworkable.

The Second World War made the Holocaust possible in two ways: first, it was much more difficult for Jews to flee from Hitler's persecution and, second, German military victories brought millions of non-German Jews, over 90% of those who would be murdered, under National Socialist control. As historian Gerhard Weinberg explains, “The war provided a framework within which the

as the notorious Stella Goldschlag, who were used by the Gestapo to locate and help entrap other underground Jews.

Germans initiated and developed systematic killing programs; it also provided them with the overwhelming majority of their victims.”

Shortly after the war began in 1939, special units of the SS rounded up the Jews in Poland and shot them in ditches in outbreaks of largely random and sometimes spontaneous violence.⁸ By 1940, techniques of mass murder had become much more advanced with the introduction of mobile killing vans that were developed and tested in the East. These vans were simply trucks that had been rigged to feed carbon monoxide from the engine back into the cargo area. The death vans not only took too long to kill, they wasted valuable gasoline because they had to be driven until all of the victims died. Moreover, Himmler considered these forms of killing too emotionally taxing for the Germans who carried them out as well as too slow to handle the large number of murders he intended to commit.

Therefore, before the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, special units were supplemented with police battalions that were instructed to kill all Jews in the vast areas the Germans expected to occupy. These units murdered several hundred thousand Jews, primarily by shooting them, in the second half of 1941.

In June 1941, a directive was sent from Hermann Goering to Reinhard Heydrich instructing him "to prepare a solution to the Jewish question in the form of emigration or evacuation which favorably fits existing conditions." As the head of the Reich Security Main Office (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt* or RSHA), Heydrich was charged with implementing this directive to "purify" Europe by eliminating the Jews in what would become the most horrific example of ethnic cleansing in the twentieth century. He began to deport Jews from Germany, Austria, and Bohemia to the ghettos of Warsaw and Lodz as well as places such as the Opole Ghetto and Bochnia near

⁸ At least one notable example of racial annihilation occurred on the Western front between May-June 1940 when German forces massacred approximately 3,000 West African troops fighting in the French army. According to historian Raffael Scheck, most of these soldiers were executed immediately after they surrendered, but some also were murdered after they had become prisoners of war.

Krakow in Poland. All World War II ghettos established by the Germans were brutal urban prisons, not sub-standard neighborhoods in the American sense of the word ghetto.

From 1940-1942 the Jewish "deportees" were permitted to take along 50 kilos (ca 110 lbs.) of luggage and 100 German Marks. The remainder of their property was confiscated by the state or taken by neighbors. Until early 1942 most Jews were sent to the ghettos; after 1941-42 they no longer were destined for eastern ghettos, but for the extermination or death camps (*Vernichtungslager*) created specifically to murder Jews and other enemies of National Socialism-- Auschwitz-Birkenau, Belzek, Chelmo, Sobibor, or Treblinka.

These extermination or death camps (*Vernichtungslager*) were kept as secret as possible. The existence of the concentration camps (*Konzentrationslager* or *KZ*) that first were established in 1933 to incarcerate Hitler's political enemies, such as Dachau in Bavaria, were common knowledge in the Third Reich. The German government hoped that knowledge of their existence, combined with rumors about what was happening in them, would act as a deterrent to resistance. Although many people were murdered in these camps, they were not established specifically for that purpose.⁹

The Jews were not the only ones to be targeted. In January 1941, SS Commandant Heinrich Himmler told a gathering of SS officials that the "destruction of 30 million Slavs was prerequisite for German planning in the East." Special SS task forces (*Einsatzkommando*) were instructed to round up European Jews and the Sinti and Roma as well as some communists, Slavs, Soviet officials, homosexuals, socialists, political opponents and Jehovah's Witnesses for extermination.

The invasion of the U.S.S.R. in June 1941, and the increased power that devolved on the ideologically fanatical wing of the National Socialist Party was complemented by Alfred Rosenberg's grandiose dream of colonizing the East with ethnic Germans. As a bonus,

⁹ Most camps were intended for both genders, but one KZ, Ravensbrueck, was established inside Germany for female prisoners.

eliminating the Jews and Slavs would provide more and better living space (*Lebensraum*) for Germans to settle in the East.

In July 1941 Heydrich was commissioned to work out a plan for a "Final Solution" (*Endloesung*) for the Jewish problem. There is no doubt that it was Hitler's decision to implement genocide as a state policy.

In the fall of 1941, the final mass deportation of German Jews began. On the pretext that they were being resettled in the East, they were transported in cattle and box cars to the death camps.

In January 1942 at Wannsee, a suburb of Berlin, a conference of top party, state, and SS leaders took place to coordinate the policy and practice of mass murder, a policy that had been decided previously. Although historians disagree about the exact date that the decision to eliminate the Jews of Europe was reached irrevocably, most agree that it was decided no later than mid-1941 and probably before that. At the Wannsee meeting the European portion of the Final Solution (*Endloesung*) was discussed thoroughly, including methods of implementing it. Thereafter, directives for and regarding the Final Solution almost always were transmitted verbally from Hitler and Himmler through Heydrich and his successor, Ernst Kaltenbrunner, to Gestapo (*Geheime Staatspolizei* or state secret police) chiefs Heinrich Mueller and Adolf Eichmann, who were in tactical charge of the operation. Eichmann and Mueller refined the plans and transmitted the orders for genocide through the bureaucratic apparatus of the Third Reich to the local officials in charge of implementing this policy.

After the Wannsee Conference, the job of organizing and enacting plans for cost-efficient genocide began in earnest. The first task was to comb through Europe picking up Jews and transporting them in railroad cattle cars to their deaths. Moving from West to East, the Jews of Europe all were to be herded into ghettos and then moved by stages to the death camps to be killed. The quasi-aborted German euthanasia program served as a pilot program for the Holocaust. It provided SS extermination camp functionaries with valuable information about

effective methods of mass murder, models for the efficient implementation of genocide and a cadre of personnel experienced in murdering large numbers of people.

Jews and others considered to be “unworthy of living” were transported to the death camps where they were sorted and classified--usually by the camp physician. The young and the old were murdered immediately while healthy adults were worked nearly to death and fed less than enough to survive.¹⁰ Eventually even those who had been strong grew weak and then were gassed. Only those with special talents--such as accountants, musicians, cobblers, and physicians--had even a small chance to survive. Wherever possible, the Germans used prisoners called *Sonderkommando* who soon were scheduled to die to do the particularly dirty jobs such as working in the crematoria and collecting the victims' hair, eyeglasses, shoes, and other possessions.

The Germans employed the latest in European and especially in modern American business technology and techniques in order to increase the efficiency of murder. Adolf Hitler did not invent genocide, but he did industrialize the process of mass murder.

The goal for Eichmann, Mueller and their subordinates was to do their jobs in the most economical way possible. Treblinka and some of the other death camps used carbon monoxide gas, but it was far less efficient than the Zyklon-B (prussic acid) used at Auschwitz-Birkenau that could kill large numbers of people in three to fifteen minutes, thereby substantially increasing the daily death totals.

Eichmann and lower-level officials tried to cover the cost of transporting and gassing their victims by getting a significant amount of free labor from the condemned prisoners before exterminating them. They obtained additional revenue by extracting whatever profit could be obtained from the prisoners' possessions, bodies, teeth, and hair. Gerhard Weinberg's research

¹⁰ The extermination of “useless mouths” (i.e. those people who were unable to work or whose labor was not profitable for the state) was the major reason for dispatching children and the elderly to the gas chambers as soon as they arrived at the death camps. However, it also is true that by murdering Jewish

has revealed that German submarine crews who contributed greatly to the Axis war effort by sinking Allied shipping, were issued felt slippers made from human hair shorn from the victims of the extermination camps and were rewarded with gifts of watches that had been confiscated from them.

In the summer of 1942, when it looked as if Field Marshal Erwin Rommel might conquer the Middle East, a special murder commando was attached to his headquarters to kill the Jews in Palestine and elsewhere in the vicinity. Eventually it was turned over to the Italians.

A secret meeting between Himmler and the SS generals took place on October 4, 1943 in order to increase killing efficiency by updating extermination procedures. Here Himmler observed, "This is a page of glory in our history which has never been written and is never to be written...It shall be said on this occasion, openly, here among ourselves, but we shall never speak of it publicly...But we have fulfilled this most difficult task out of love for our people." In line with directives issued after this meeting, in 1943-44 most death camps switched to Zyklon-B gas for greater efficiency.

During the war the German Army sometimes tried to stop the liquidation of some Jews primarily because they could be used as slave labor and to produce materials necessary for the military. Those prisoners who remained alive within the conquered areas of Europe owed their survival almost entirely to their continued usefulness to the German war machine. Toward the end of the war there was active competition between the military and the SS for them. At first decisions about whether prisoners should be given to the military or exterminated were split almost equally between these two alternatives. However, by late 1943 when it must have been clear to Hitler that it was possible that Germany might lose the war, he became convinced that his great legacy to the world was to be the elimination of the Jews of Europe. Therefore, as the war wound down, more and more Jews and other categories of people were included in the transports

women and children, the Third Reich was taking proactive measures to preclude a Jewish future in Europe in the event of military reversals.

to the death camps despite their usefulness to the remnants of the German military machine. It is probable that if Hitler had won the war and exterminated all of the Jews and Gypsies of Europe, Slavs and people of mixed ancestry (*Mischlinge*) would have been the next categories of people to be murdered.

One myth about the Holocaust that shows no sign of disappearing is the idea that “the Jews of Europe went without protest like lambs to the slaughter.” While the overwhelming presence of the Nazi death machine made Jewish resistance very difficult, it did occur: Jews were active in resistance and partisan groups throughout occupied Europe. Both successful and unsuccessful resistance activity usually resulted in massive reprisals by the Germans in the form of murdering disproportionately large numbers of innocent civilians, but there are many examples of resistance operations that were undertaken with the knowledge that retribution for these acts would be swift and terrible. The most important of these actions was an uprising in the Jewish ghetto in Warsaw that began in January of 1943 and was not completely subdued until July of that year.¹¹ It is no coincidence that other major rebellions of European Jews took place after this time when they had an actual example to show them that resistance was possible. German women also staged a successful protest against the decision made by their state to round up their Jewish husbands and deport them to the death camps. On February 28, 1943 these women marched to the prison in the Rosenstrasse in Berlin where their husbands were being held and staged a public demonstration that resulted in their release.¹²

While the work of partisan units and resistance groups was, in the final analysis, militarily insignificant in the conduct of the war, it was extremely important for the morale and self-esteem

¹¹ These dates represent the day that the Germans first entered the ghetto after the summer deportations of 1942 until the ghetto lay in rubble. The dates usually given for the active phase of the uprising are April 23-May 16, 1943.

¹² There also were a few men who stood outside with these women and some women who were being held inside the prison. For example, both Gad Beck and his twin sister Miriam were incarcerated in the Rosenstrasse prison. Beck’s memoir discusses seeing a number of men in the crowd outside protesting their imprisonment.

for both those who resisted and those who did not. Although there were uprisings in many of the ghettos and killing centers of Europe after the Warsaw ghetto rebellion, perhaps the two most spectacular examples of these are the temporary escape of approximately 150 prisoners from Sobibor in 1943 and the explosion that destroyed one of the crematory ovens at Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1944.¹³

Also in 1944, Adolf Eichmann boasted that if he were called upon to die for what he had done, he would "leap laughing into my grave" because of the great satisfaction he had derived from the 5,000,000 Jews he had helped to exterminate. The final total of Holocaust victims numbered well over 6,000,000 lives. It was only with the liberation of the death and concentration camps by Allied troops during the final days of the war that the gruesome German genocide machine finally was dismantled. The military defeat of the Third Reich precluded Hitler from achieving his objective of murdering all of the Jews and "racially unworthy" peoples whom he considered to be "life unworthy of life" (*Lebensunwertes Leben*).¹⁴

Another aspect of Holocaust history that needs to be stated explicitly is that the governments of the world, including the United States and Great Britain, knew about what was happening in the killing centers of Europe. Although many political leaders expressed sympathy for European Jews, almost nothing was done to help them. The same is true of Pope Pius XII. As Gerhard Weinberg explained, the Pope, "having declined to denounce publicly the mass killing of Catholic priests in Poland in the winter of 1939-40...was not about to voice any explicit public disapproval of the mass killing of non-Catholics." While more active support from governments and religious leaders would not have deterred the Nazis, it might have given courage to good

¹³ Some people have argued that violent resistance was morally questionable given the certainty of reprisals against innocent civilians. French philosopher and novelist Simone de Beauvoir, a member of a French resistance network, stated the moral dilemma clearly when she asked the metaphorical question: does one ever have the right to pay with "the blood of others?" Although she argued that in the case of Nazi occupied Europe such resistance was both moral and justified, some people, such as Holocaust survivor and forensic psychiatrist Dr. Emanuel Tanay, disagree.

people all over Europe to join a resistance group or to take active steps to hide or otherwise aid victims of Nazi genocide.

Perhaps the most difficult fact to accept about the Holocaust is that it was carried out not by monsters but by those who historian Christopher Browning describes as “ordinary men.” The chilling realities and calculating nature of the Holocaust document what philosopher Hannah Arendt brilliantly characterized as the “banality of evil.”

Most Germans claimed they knew nothing about the Final Solution and some of them were telling the truth. However, nearly all German adults knew that the Jews were being deported and most of them must at least have suspected that they were being murdered. Some Germans admitted hearing reports about genocide while listening illegally to the BBC or hearing about what was going on in the East from returning soldiers and civilian workers. Nonetheless, many of them claimed they discounted this information because they had heard equally scandalous rumors during World War I, many of which had turned out to be propaganda that was manufactured or embellished by the Allied powers.

Moreover, in order to help maintain the fiction that nothing more insidious than deportation was happening to the Jews, the German government was careful to locate most of the extermination camps outside the Reich itself. This enabled many Germans to rationalize what they could not ignore and to ignore much of what they saw and heard. Some of what they saw and heard came directly from the mouths of eyewitnesses because the German army, unlike other WW II armies, permitted home leave from the front for German soldiers. Since some of those soldiers had cameras, many Germans on the home front heard stories of the killings and even saw photographs of atrocities during the war. Nonetheless, wishful thinking, rationalization, and convenient historical memory have made it possible for countless Germans to maintain that they were "apolitical" during the Third Reich.

¹⁴ An ironic connection between the war and the creation of the state of Israel is included in this synopsis as Appendix II.

Although great efforts were made to hide the fact of genocide from the general public, there is little doubt that many leaders of German business and industries not only knew about the genocide, but were actively involved with subsidiary aspects of it. German railroads transported Jews from collection sites to the death camps in box and cattle cars.¹⁵ German industry cooperated with the SS in running the camps in order to utilize slave labor, to collect the clothing, possessions, and hair of the victims, and to use their bones for fertilizer. German bankers received the jewelry and gold fillings of victims and deposited them in vaults of the *Reichsbank*. German scientists and physicians carried out gruesome medical experiments upon the helpless victims of genocide and, toward the end of the war, Himmler and Eichmann actually offered to barter Jewish lives for war material.

There were some people in Germany and throughout Europe who risked their lives to try to shelter or otherwise aid and protect Jews as well as some individual Jews who saved other Jews. However, the most significant rescue work was undertaken by organizations such as the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS.) It conducted many dangerous operations in German occupied Europe that saved thousands of Jews at great risk to the HIAS agents who carried them out. Twenty-two HIAS employees in France alone were arrested, deported, and/or killed by the Germans.

Also significant in saving European Jews was the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JOINT or JDC). Founded at the urging of Henry Morgenthau Sr. in 1914 to save Palestinian Jews from starvation, JOINT helped thousands of German and Austrian Jews emigrate from the Third Reich in the 1930s. During the Holocaust, JOINT enabled many European Jews to escape with their lives and it also aided others attempting to survive underground.

¹⁵ Stella Goldschlag's biographer Peter Wyden observed that in the post-WW II world not a single German railroad executive was tried for genocide-related crimes, a fact that he ascribes to shameful motives of expediency on the part of the Allied powers.

In addition, more than a year after he received incontrovertible evidence that the Jews of Europe were being systematically murdered, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt created the War Refugee Board (WRB) on January 22, 1944 at the urging of Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau, Jr. The WRB may have been instrumental in saving as many as 200,000 Jewish lives, despite the late date of its creation. Most notably, the WRB and the World Jewish Congress (WJC) worked with Swedish diplomat Raul Wallenberg to rescue over 100,000 Hungarian Jews. In the final days of the war, the War Refugee Board was active in saving large numbers of European Jews, primarily by threatening to have Nazi and Axis officials tried for war crimes after the war.¹⁶

In addition to rescue operations, there also were Germans who were active in resistance movements that unsuccessfully attempted to overthrow the National Socialist government. Countless other Germans despised Hitler but were unable to find the inner strength to oppose their government when the rumors of genocide surfaced. While such people were not resisters, they also were not enablers. Nonetheless, it was these "apolitical" Germans who were not criminals but did not question their leaders or attempt to find out what was happening that allowed the genocide to continue. While such people were not legally guilty, some historians have suggested that they were morally guilty of complicity by their silence. As historian Ian Kershaw explains, "The road to Auschwitz was built by hate but paved with indifference."

It is difficult for those of us who never have been forced to live in a totalitarian state to know how we would react in a parallel situation or to judge others who have had to face it. Nonetheless, Edmund Burke's dictum that "all that is necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing" never has been as chillingly illustrated as it is by the history of National Socialist Germany.

¹⁶ JOINT, HIAS, and the WJC still exist as Jewish aid and advocacy organizations.

In the post-war world, some so-called apolitical Germans later were to lament that although he did some good things, on the whole Hitler was a misfortune for Germany. Exiled German playwright Bertolt Brecht had correctly interpreted the hypocrisy behind such attitudes when he wrote, "Let's not talk about misfortune, let's talk about shame!"¹⁷

¹⁷ These lines are included in a scene titled, "The Jewish Wife," from Brecht's play *Furcht und Elend des III Reiches*, written in the mid-1930s. This title of this play translates *Fear and Misery in the Third Reich* and it was published under that title in England. It was published as *The Private Lives of the Master Race* in the United States.

Appendix I

A partial list of the discriminatory measures enforced against the Jews by the Nazi state before the implementation of the policy of genocide. Although no dates are included, they are in approximate chronological order. Most, but not all, of this information is taken from Marion Kaplan's *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany*.

- ❖ Jews are forbidden to purchase German land.
- ❖ Quotas established for Jews applying for university admission.
- ❖ Books by Jews and German political opponents are publicly burned.
- ❖ Jewish stores are boycotted. Signs appear on Aryan businesses forbidding Jews to enter (*Juden nicht erwünscht!*) and are marked *Judenfrei* to assure gentile customers that no Jews would be admitted.
- ❖ Jews are forbidden to swim in public pools.
- ❖ Nuremberg Laws formally deprived Jews of rights as citizens and established racial segregation. Aryan Germans are legally defined as citizens, Jews as subjects.
- ❖ Racial pollution (*Rassenschande*) was defined as a felony,
- ❖ Jews could no longer hire "Aryan" household help.
- ❖ "Nur fuer Arier!" (Only for Aryans) signs appear on various types of public conveniences such as public benches and restrooms forbidding Jews to use them,
- ❖ Jewish men lose jobs and Germans destroy the patriarchal Jewish family
- ❖ Divorce law changed to encourage German women married to Jewish men to annul the marriage and re-claim their citizenship rights.
- ❖ *Kristallnacht*--violence and increased persecution. See text.
- ❖ Jews were forbidden to own domestic animals such as dogs.
- ❖ German state expropriated all valuable metals and stones from Jews.
- ❖ All Jewish emigration was banned
- ❖ Jews with "Aryan" names were required to add Israel or Sarah to their names.
- ❖ Jews are forbidden to use public telephones.
- ❖ Jewish food rations are cut, completely eliminating legumes, fruit, and most meat.
- ❖ Shopping hours were restricted for Jews.
- ❖ Jewish rations cut again.
- ❖ Jews restricted to poor housing and were forbidden to buy clothing, cloth, etc.
- ❖ September 19, 1941 – All Jews over age 6 were required to wear a yellow star marked "Jude" (Jew) on their clothing.
- ❖ Jews were forbidden to ride trains, busses and all public transportation.
- ❖ All able-bodied Jews were required to report for forced labor.
- ❖ The homes of Jews were required to display a yellow star on the front outside wall.
- ❖ Genocide.

Appendix II—World War II and the State of Israel

Ironically, the German military defeat enabled the United Nations to create the state of Israel in 1948, the homeland for Jews in Palestine that had been the political dream of European Zionists since 1896 when that goal was articulated by Theodor Herzl in *The Jewish State*. Although the British had promised to support the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine in the Balfour Declaration of 1917, they also promised Palestine to the Arabs as an incentive for them to rebel against the Turks.

As Gerhard Weinberg explains, the defeat of the Axis forces in North Africa in 1942 was a necessary prerequisite for the creation of the state of Israel:

The final crushing of Axis forces in North Africa ended all prospects for a German occupation of the British mandate of Palestine and the slaughter of its Jewish community, an action an optimistic Adolf Hitler had once promised Haj Amin el-Husseine, [sic el-Husseini] the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem. British evacuation plans which had provided for leaving the Jewish inhabitants of the mandate to the Germans--who intended to kill them all--never had to be implemented. The survival of a Jewish presence in Palestine, certainly a prerequisite for the establishment of a Jewish state there, was thus one result of the Allied victory in North Africa.

Although some Jewish survivors may have found a modicum of comfort in this, the Holocaust was the most catastrophic episode in the long history of anti-Semitic persecutions endured by the Jewish people.

APPENDIX III—Suggestions for Further Reading

I have included a short list of non-fiction works below. Those marked with an asterisk (*) are those I relied on in writing this synopsis. For those unable to read extensively on this topic, I would recommend the books by Doris Bergen and Marion Kaplan listed below.

General Works:

Allen, Michael Thad. *The Business of Genocide: The SS, Slave Labor, and the Concentration Camps.*

Bauer, Yehuda. *A History of the Holocaust*

Bankler, David, ed. *Secret Intelligence and the Holocaust*

Bergen, Doris. *War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust.*

*Browning, Christopher. *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland.*

*Burleigh, Michael and Wippermann, Wolfgang. *The Racial State, Germany 1933-1945*

Burleigh, Michael. *Death and Deliverance: Euthanasia in Germany 1900-1945.*

Campt, Tina M. *Other Germans: Black Germans and the Politics of Race, Gender and Memory in the Third Reich.*

Davidowicz, Lucy S. *The Holocaust and the Historians*

Delbo, Charlotte. *Convoy to Auschwitz*

Dwork, Deborah and van Pelt, Jobert Jan. *Holocaust: A History.*

Felstiner, Mary Lowenthal. *To Paint Her Life: Charlotte Salomon in the Nazi Era.*

Fleming, Gerald. *Hitler and the Final Solution.*

Friedlander, Saul. *Nazi Germany and the Jews, Vols. I and II: The Years of Persecution, 1933-1939 and The Years of Extermination.*

* Gilbert, Martin. *The Holocaust, The Jewish Tragedy.*

Hallie, Philip. *Lest Innocent Blood be Shed: The Story of the Village of Le Chambon and How Goodness Happened There.*

*Hilberg, Raul. *The Destruction of the European Jews*

_____. *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe 1933-1945.*

*Hitler, Adolf. *Mein Kampf.*

*Kaplan, Marion. *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany.*

*Kershaw, Ian. "Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich: Bavaria, 1933-1945" *German Studies Review*, 7, no. 2 (May, 1984), 370-371.

Laqueur, Walter. *The Terrible Secret: suppression of the truth about Hitler's "final solution."*

Lipstadt, Deborah. *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory.*

*Marrus, Michael. *The Holocaust in History*

McKale, Donald. *Hitler's Shadow War.*

Tec, Nechama. *Defiance: The Bielski Partisans.*

For the connection between World War II and genocide consult:

Bartov, Omar. *Hitler's War and the Holocaust*

Scheck, Raffael. *Hitler's African Victims: The German Army Massacres of Black French Soldiers in 1940.*

*Weinberg, Gerhard L. *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II*

Or for a more compact analysis see

*Weinberg, Gerhard L. "The Final Solution and the War in 1943" in his shorter work, *Germany Hitler and World War II.*

For a discussion of gender during the Third Reich and Holocaust see:

- Baer, Elizabeth and Goldenberg, Myrna eds. *Experience and Expression: Women, the Nazis and the Holocaust*.
- Baumel, Judith. *Double Jeopardy: Gender and the Holocaust*
- Eibeshitz, Jehoshua and Anna, eds. and trans. *Women in the Holocaust: A Collection of Testimonies*.
- *Goldenberg, Myrna. "Different Horrors, Same Hell: Women Remembering the Holocaust" in *Thinking the Unthinkable: Meanings of the Holocaust*, Roger Gottlieb, ed.
- Koonz, Claudia. *Mothers in the Fatherland*
- Ofer, Dalia and Weitzman, Lenore eds. *Women in the Holocaust*.
- Raphael, Melissa. *The Female Face of God in Auschwitz: A Jewish Feminist Theology of the Holocaust*.
- Littell, Marcia Sachs, ed. *Women in the Holocaust: Responses, Insights and Perspectives: Selected Papers from the Annual Scholars' Conference on the Holocaust and the Churches 1990-2000*.
- *Rittner, Carol and Roth, John K eds. *Different Voices: Women and the Holocaust*.
- Saidel, Rochelle. *The Jewish Women of Ravensbrueck Concentration Camp*.
- Stephenson, Jill. *Women in Nazi Germany*.
- Tec, Nechama. *Resilience: Women, Men and the Holocaust*.
- *Von Saldern, Adelheid. "Victims or Perpetrators: Controversies about the Role of Women in the Nazi State" in David F. Crew, *Nazism and German Society, 1933-1945*.
- *Wyden, Peter *Stella*. (This is a biography of the notorious Greifer [catcher, snatcher] Stella Golschlag written by her childhood friend and fellow pupil at a Berlin Jewish school in the 1930s).

Autobiographical Works:

- Adler, Stanislaw. *In the Warsaw Ghetto, 1940-1943*.
- *Anthonioz, Genievie De Gaulle. *The Dawn of Hope : A Memoir of Ravensbruck*.
- Bauman, Janina. *Winter in the Morning, A Young Girl's Life in the Warsaw Ghetto and Beyond 1939-1945*.
- *Beck, Gad. *An Underground Life: Memoirs of a Gay Jew in Nazi Berlin*.
- Berg, Mary. *Warsaw Ghetto: A Diary*, ed. S. L. Shneiderman, 1945. Reissued in 2007 with a forward by Susan L. Pentlin.
- Delbo, Charlotte. *Auschwitz and After*.
- Donat, Alexander. *The Holocaust Kingdom, A Memoir*.
- Eichengreen, Lucille. *From Ashes To Life: My Memories of the Holocaust*. (Lodz ghetto).
- Frank, Anne. *Diary of a Young Girl*.
- Heilman, Anna. *Never Far Away: The Auschwitz Chronicles of Anna Heilman*
- Jacobs, Benjamin. *The Dentist of Auschwitz: A Memoir*
- Kaplan, Chaim. *Scroll of Agony, The Warsaw Diary of Chaim Kaplan*, revised and translated by Abraham I. Katsch, 1973.
- Klein, Gerda Weissmann. *All But My Life*.
- Kluger, Ruth. *Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered*
- Koehn, Ilse Mischling. *Second Degree: My Childhood in Nazi Germany*
- Leitner, Isabella. *Fragments of Isabella: A Memoir of Auschwitz*
- *Lengyel, Olga. *Five Chimneys, A Woman's True Story of Auschwitz*.
- *Massaquoi, Hans. *Destined To Witness: Growing up Black in Nazi Germany*
- Milu, Lians. *Smoke Over Birkenau*
- Nir, Yahuda. *The Lost Childhood*.

Perechodnik, Callel. *Am I a Murderer? The Testament of a Jewish Ghetto Policeman*.
Ringelblum, Emanuel. *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto, The Journal of Emanuel Ringelblum*, trans.
and ed. Jacob Sloan
*Tanay, Emanuel. *Passport to Life*
Tec, Nechama. *Dry Tears, The Story of a Lost Childhood*.
Toll, Nelly, *Behind the Secret Window*.
*Tillion, Germaine. *Ravensbrueck*.
Wiesel, Elie. *Night and Dawn*.
Zapruder, Alexandra, ed. *Salvaged Pages: Young Writer's Diaries of the Holocaust*
Zuckerman, Yitzhak. *A Surplus of Memory: Chronicle of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*

Works of Philosophy and Literature used in Compiling this Overview:

*Arendt, Hannah. *On Totalitarianism*.
*Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Blood of Others*
*_____. *The Ethics of Ambiguity*
*Brecht, Bertolt. "The Jewish Wife" *The Private Lives of the Master Race*.
*Kolmar, Gertrud. "Die Dichterin" ("The Woman Poet") *Dark Soliloquy: Selected Poems of Gertrud Kolmar*. Also see "Wir Juden" ("We Jews") from this dual language volume.

Holocaust Websites:

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum— www.ushmm.org

Because there are many websites run by Holocaust deniers, etc., that have very plausible sounding academic titles, I recommend that you use only websites found on the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum website. It contains many such references and also includes a link to reputable Holocaust websites, such as those run by state Holocaust Commissions, for every state in the U.S.