

Section 3

The Holocaust

Guide to Reading

Big Ideas

Group Action The Nazis believed Jews to be subhuman. They steadily increased their persecution of Jews and eventually set up death camps and tried to kill all the Jews in Europe.

Content Vocabulary

- concentration camp (p. 698)
- extermination camp (p. 698)

Academic Vocabulary

- prohibit (p. 694)
- assume (p. 696)
- virtually (p. 699)

People and Events to Identify

- *Shoah* (p. 694)
- Nuremberg Laws (p. 694)
- Gestapo (p. 696)
- Wannsee Conference (p. 698)

Reading Strategy

Organizing As you read about the Holocaust, complete a graphic organizer similar to the one below by listing examples of Nazi persecution of European Jews.

Examples of Persecution	

Nazis first acted upon their racist ideology when they imposed restrictions on Jews and stripped them of basic rights. Eventually, Nazi Germany created concentration camps and systematically attempted to kill all European Jews and others whom they regarded as inferior.

Nazi Persecution of the Jews

MAIN Idea Nazi laws stripped Jews of citizenship and all fundamental rights; immigration restrictions in other countries made leaving Germany difficult.

HISTORY AND YOU Do you know anyone who came to the United States as a refugee? Read how Jewish refugees were turned away in the late 1930s.

During the Holocaust, the Nazis killed nearly 6 million European Jews. The Nazis also killed millions of people from other groups they considered inferior. The Hebrew term for the Holocaust is *Shoah*, meaning “catastrophe,” but it is often used specifically to refer to the Nazi campaign to exterminate the Jews during World War II.

The Nuremberg Laws

Although the Nazis persecuted anyone who dared oppose them, as well as the disabled, Gypsies, homosexuals, and Slavic peoples, they reserved their strongest hatred for the Jews. This loathing went far beyond the European anti-Semitism that was common at the time. Over the centuries, people who were prejudiced against Jews had discriminated against them in many ways. For example, Jews had sometimes been segregated in ghettos or **prohibited** from owning land.

After the Nazis took power, they quickly moved to deprive German Jews of many established rights. In September 1935, the **Nuremberg Laws** took citizenship away from Jewish Germans and banned marriage between Jews and other Germans. Two months later, another decree defined a Jew as a person with at least one Jewish grandparent and barred Jews from holding public office or voting. Another law compelled Jews with German-sounding names to adopt “Jewish” names. Soon the passports of Jews were marked with a red *J* to identify them as Jewish.

By the summer of 1936, at least half of Germany’s Jews were jobless, having lost the right to work as civil servants, journalists, farmers, teachers, and actors. In 1938 the Nazis also banned Jews from practicing law and medicine and from operating businesses. With no source of income, life became very difficult.

PRIMARY SOURCE

The Persecution Begins, 1935–1938

▼ Nazi stormtroopers place warning signs encouraging a boycott on Jewish-owned businesses in 1933.



▲ On Kristallnacht, November 7, 1938, roaming bands of Nazi storm troopers destroyed Jewish property and terrorized Jewish families across the Third Reich.

Analyzing VISUALS

1. **Hypothesizing** What effect do you think the signs might have had on the woman in the photograph on the left?
2. **Making Connections** How do you think publication of the photograph of the synagogue would have affected world opinion toward the Nazis?

Despite worsening conditions, many Jews chose to remain in Germany during the early years of Nazi rule. Well integrated into German society before this time, they were reluctant to leave and give up the lives they had built there. Many also thought that conditions would surely improve after a time. In fact, conditions soon became worse.

Kristallnacht

On November 7, 1938, a young Jewish refugee named Herschel Grynszpan shot and killed a German diplomat in Paris. Grynszpan's father and 10,000 other Jews had been deported from Germany to Poland, and the distraught young man was seeking revenge for this act and for the persecution of the Jews in general.

In retaliation, an infuriated Hitler ordered his minister of propaganda, Joseph Goebbels,

to stage attacks against the Jews that would seem like a spontaneous popular reaction to news of the murder. On the night of November 9, this plan played out in a spree of destruction. In Vienna, a Jewish child named Frederick Morton watched in terror that night as Nazi storm troopers broke into his family's apartment:

PRIMARY SOURCE

"They yanked out every drawer in every one of our chests and cupboards, and tossed each in the air. They let the cutlery jangle across the floor, the clothes scatter, and stepped over the mess to fling the next drawer. . . . 'We might be back,' the leader said. On the way out he threw our mother-of-pearl ashtray over his shoulder, like confetti. We did not speak or move or breathe until we heard their boots against the pavement."

—quoted in *Facing History and Ourselves*

The anti-Jewish violence that erupted throughout Germany and Austria that night came to be called *Kristallnacht*, or “night of broken glass,” because broken glass littered the streets afterward. By the following morning, more than 90 Jews were dead, hundreds were badly injured, and thousands more were terrorized. The Nazis had forbidden police to interfere while bands of thugs destroyed 7,500 Jewish businesses and wrecked more than 180 synagogues.

The lawlessness of *Kristallnacht* persisted. Following that night of violence, the **Gestapo**, the government’s secret police, arrested at least 20,000 wealthy Jews, releasing them only if they agreed to emigrate and surrender all their possessions. The state also confiscated insurance payments owed to Jewish owners of ruined businesses.

Jewish Refugees Try to Flee

Kristallnacht and its aftermath marked a significant escalation of Nazi persecution against the Jews. Many Jews, including Frederick Morton’s family, decided that it was time to leave and fled to the United States. Between 1933, when Hitler took power, and the start of

World War II in 1939, some 350,000 Jews escaped Nazi-controlled Germany. These emigrants included prominent scientists, such as Albert Einstein, and business owners like Otto Frank, who resettled his family in Amsterdam in 1933. Otto’s daughter Anne kept a diary of her family’s life in hiding after the Nazis overran the Netherlands. The “secret annex,” as she called their hiding place, has become a museum.

Limits on Jewish Immigration By 1938, one American consulate in Germany had a backlog of more than 100,000 visa applications from Jews trying to leave for the United States. Following the Nazi *Anschluss*, some 3,000 Austrian Jews applied for American visas each day. Many never received visas to the United States or to the other countries where they applied. As a result, millions of Jews remained trapped in Nazi-dominated Europe.

Several factors limited Jewish immigration to the United States. Nazi orders prohibited Jews from taking more than about four dollars out of Germany. American immigration law, however, forbade granting a visa to anyone “likely to become a public charge.” Customs officials tended to **assume** that this description

PRIMARY SOURCE

The Holocaust

▼ After World War II broke out, the Nazis methodically deprived Jews of their rights, confining many to overcrowded ghettos. After weeks of fierce resistance, Jews in the Warsaw ghetto in Poland (below) were rounded up for deportation to concentration camps in May 1943.



▲ By 1943, the Nazis had started to implement their plans to exterminate the Jews. The system of ghettos was abandoned in favor of herding men, women, and children onto cattle cars for transport to death camps.

applied to Jews, because Germany had forced them to leave behind any wealth. High unemployment rates in the 1930s also made immigration unpopular. Few Americans wanted to raise immigration quotas, even to accommodate European refugees. Others did not want to admit Jews because they held anti-Semitic attitudes. The existing immigration policy allowed only 150,000 immigrants annually, with a fixed quota from each country. The law permitted no exceptions for refugees or victims of persecution.

International Response At an international conference on refugees in 1938, several European countries, the United States, and Latin America stated their regret that they could not take in more of Germany's Jews without raising their immigration quotas. Meanwhile, Nazi propaganda chief Joseph Goebbels announced that "if there is any country that believes it has not enough Jews, I shall gladly turn over to it all our Jews." Hitler also declared himself "ready to put all these criminals at the disposal of these countries . . . even on luxury ships."

As war loomed in 1939, many ships departed from Germany crammed with Jews desperate

to escape. Some of their visas, however, had been forged or sold illegally, and Mexico, Paraguay, Argentina, and Costa Rica all denied access to Jews with such documents. So, too, did the United States.

The St. Louis Affair On May 27, 1939, the SS *St. Louis* entered the harbor in Havana, Cuba, with 930 Jewish refugees on board. Most of these passengers hoped to go to the United States eventually, but they had certificates improperly issued by Cuba's director of immigration giving them permission to land in Cuba. When the ships arrived in Havana, the Cuban government revoked the certificates and refused to let the refugees come ashore. For several days, the ship's captain steered his ship in circles off the coast of Florida, awaiting official permission to dock at an American port. Denied permission, the ship turned back toward Europe. The passengers finally disembarked in France, Holland, Belgium, and Great Britain. Within two years, the first three of these countries fell under Nazi domination. Many of the refugees brought to these countries perished in the Nazis' "final solution."

Reading Check Analyzing Why did many Jews stay in Germany despite being persecuted?



In 1944 Elie Wiesel was taken to a concentration camp. In the excerpt below, he describes his wait during a move from one camp to another in 1944:

PRIMARY SOURCE

"The snow fell thickly. We were forbidden to sit down or even to move. The snow began to form a thick layer over our blankets. They brought us bread—the usual ration. We threw ourselves upon it. Someone had the idea of appeasing his thirst by eating the snow. Soon the others were imitating him. As we were not allowed to bend down, everyone took out his spoon and ate the accumulated snow off his neighbor's back. A mouthful of bread and a spoonful of snow. The SS [guards] who were watching laughed at the spectacle."

—Elie Wiesel, *Night*



▲ When the war ended, Allied troops managed to liberate the few surviving inmates of the death camps—many of whom were too shocked to believe they were being freed.

DBQ Document-Based Questions

- Explaining** How did the prisoners in Weisel's account try to quench their thirst?
- Describing** How did the guards react?

The Final Solution

MAIN Idea Nazi atrocities included sending millions of Jews, Gypsies, Slavs, the disabled, and others to concentration camps and extermination camps.

HISTORY AND YOU Can you think of a conflict today where violence is motivated by ethnic or religious hatred? Read to learn how prejudice led to mass murder in Nazi Germany.

On January 20, 1942, Nazi leaders met at the **Wannsee Conference** to determine the “final solution of the Jewish question.” Previous “solutions” had included rounding up Jews, Gypsies, Slavs, and others from conquered areas, shooting them, and piling them

into mass graves. Another method forced Jews and other “undesirables” into trucks and then piped in exhaust fumes to kill them. These methods, however, had proven too slow and inefficient for the Nazis.

At Wannsee, the Nazis made plans to round up Jews from the vast areas of Nazi-controlled Europe and take them to detention centers known as **concentration camps**. There, healthy individuals would work as slave laborers until they dropped dead of exhaustion, disease, or malnutrition. Most others, including the elderly, the infirm, and young children, would be sent to **extermination camps**, attached to many of the concentration camps, to be executed in massive gas chambers.



Concentration Camps

The Nazis had established their first concentration camps in 1933 to jail political opponents. After the war began, the Nazis built concentration camps throughout Europe.

Buchenwald, one of the largest concentration camps, was built near the town of Weimar in Germany in 1937. During its operation, more than 200,000 prisoners worked 12-hour shifts as slave laborers in nearby factories. Although Buchenwald had no gas chambers, hundreds of prisoners died there every month from exhaustion and horrible living conditions.

Leon Bass, a young American soldier, saw Buchenwald at the end of the war. A room built to hold 50 people had housed more than 150, with bunk beds built almost to the ceiling. Bass recalled:

PRIMARY SOURCE

"I looked at a bottom bunk and there I saw one man. He was too weak to get up; he could just barely turn his head. He was skin and bones. He looked like a skeleton; and his eyes were deep set. He didn't utter a sound; he just looked at me with those eyes, and they still haunt me today."


—quoted in *Facing History and Ourselves*

Extermination Camps

After the Wannsee Conference, the Nazis built extermination facilities in a number of the concentration camps, mostly in Poland, to kill Jews more efficiently. At these camps, including the infamous Treblinka and Auschwitz, Jews were the Nazis' main victims. Auschwitz alone housed about 100,000 people in 300 prison barracks. Its gas chambers, built to kill 2,000 people at a time, sometimes gassed 12,000 people in a day. Of the estimated 1,600,000 people who died at Auschwitz, about 1,300,000 were Jews. The other 300,000 were Poles, Soviet prisoners of war, and Gypsies.

Upon arrival at Auschwitz, healthy prisoners were selected for slave labor. Elderly or disabled people, the sick, and mothers and children went immediately to the gas chambers, after which their bodies were burned in giant crematoriums.

In only a few years, Jewish culture, which had existed in Europe for over 1,000 years, had been **virtually** obliterated by the Nazis in the lands they conquered. Despite exhaustive debate, there is still great controversy about why and how an event so horrifying as the Holocaust could have occurred. No consensus has been reached, but most historians point to a number of factors: the German people's sense of injury after World War I; severe economic problems; Hitler's control over the German nation; the lack of a strong tradition of representative government in Germany; German fear of Hitler's secret police; and a long history of anti-Jewish prejudice and discrimination in Europe.

 **Reading Check** **Summarizing** How did Hitler try to exterminate Europe's Jewish population?

Section 3 REVIEW

Vocabulary

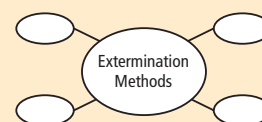
1. **Explain** the significance of: *Shoah*, Nuremberg Laws, Gestapo, Wannsee Conference, concentration camp, extermination camp.

Main Ideas

2. **Listing** What early steps did Germany take in persecution of Jewish people?
3. **Analyzing** What was the purpose of the Wannsee Conference?

Critical Thinking

4. **Big Ideas** Do you think the German people or other nations could have prevented the Holocaust? Why or why not?
5. **Organizing** Use a graphic organizer similar to the one below to list the methods the Nazis used to try to destroy the Jewish population.



6. **Analyzing Visuals** Study the photos on pages 695–696. How do the images show the destruction of Jewish life?

Writing About History

7. **Persuasive Writing** Imagine that you are living in the United States during the 1930s. You believe that more Jewish immigrants should be allowed to come into the country. Write a letter to your representative or senator in Congress to express your point of view.

History  **ONLINE**

Study Central To review this section, go to glencoe.com and click on Study Central.