

ordinary Germans ignored these atrocities out of indifference to the Jews or a sense of powerlessness to help them.

These policies aimed at forcing Jewish emigration held for more than a year after World War II began. While many Jews in the part of Poland conquered by Germany in 1939 were mistreated, the Nazi bureaucracy made plans to expel them and all other Jews in German hands farther to the east or else to the Indian Ocean island of Madagascar. Only when Hitler invaded the Soviet Union in 1941 did emigration give way to extermination. Believing that the German people would not understand such a ghastly policy, the Nazis carried out the genocide of the Jews in secrecy and under cover of war. Accordingly, responsibility for mass murder was placed in the hands of the SS (*Schutzstaffel*), Hitler's special guard of policemen and soldiers that had grown into the central agency of terror in Nazi-dominated Europe. Some of its officers were convinced anti-Semites who accepted the view that the Jews were Germany's most dangerous enemies. All of them were convinced Nazis who were sworn to obey orders without question.

Genocide was too vast a process for the SS alone. The German army cooperated in the roundup of victims. Volunteers from the conquered Eastern countries served as auxiliary police and as guards in the camps out of sympathy with the Nazis or the desire to escape some worse fate at German hands. Occasionally local mobs in Poland, the Baltic states, and the Ukraine massacred their Jewish neighbors, with German encouragement. However, unlike the Germans, none of these other groups were dedicated to the systematic slaughter of every single Jew in Europe. The point is, the Holocaust was masterminded and implemented by Hitler's elite guard, the SS.

Genocide: Policies and Procedures

As SS leaders prepared to participate in Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, they created four mobile killing squads called *Einsatzgruppen* for the purpose of liquidating Jews, Polish and Soviet intellectuals, and Communist Party officials. The 3000 members of these four squads shot and buried in mass graves between 1 and 2 million Jews during the course of the war on the Eastern Front, but their methods were considered slow and inefficient — particularly if all 11 million European Jews were to die. Hence, Hermann Goering placed the formulation of what was to become the Nazis' "Final Solution to the Jewish problem" in the hands of Reinhard Heydrich, the most powerful SS leader after Heinrich Himmler. Heydrich's plan was submitted at a conference of top Nazi officials held in the Berlin suburb of Wannsee in January 1942. It called for concentrating all the Jews under German control in Eastern European ghettos and labor camps, where those capable of doing slave labor for the

Third Reich would be worked to death. Those who could not work or who were not needed would be sent to special camps for immediate extermination.

Existence for the Jews in ghettos and their nearby forced labor camps almost defies description. Overcrowded, overworked, and underfed, they could hope only that producing for the Nazi war machine would buy enough time to save at least a remnant of the Jewish people. That hope, combined with the Nazi policy of holding all the Jews of the ghetto collectively responsible for any attempt at opposition or escape, kept Jewish resistance to a minimum. In 1944, the SS shut down the last of the ghettos and sent their piteous remnants to camps in Germany or else to the extermination centers.

The six extermination centers, all of them situated on what had been Polish territory, ended the lives of 3 million Jews. Four of them — Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka — were strictly killing centers, where victims were gassed immediately following their arrival. The Nazis already possessed the technical expertise, having employed poison gas to kill more than 70,000 incurably ill Germans in a "euthanasia" program between 1939 and 1941 (see chapter 6). The remaining two extermination centers — Auschwitz and Majdanek — were both killing and slave labor camps. In them, the able-bodied were selected for work in various military industries; the rest were consigned to the gas chambers or firing squads. To be selected for work often meant only a brief reprieve, since conditions were atrocious. As the SS saw it, the victims were to die eventually anyway, and there was no reason to spare them when a steady stream of replacements kept arriving. Hence tens of thousands were literally worked to death. Others were subjected to grotesque and painful medical experiments. Survival depended on almost superhuman determination to live and often on the good fortune of securing jobs in camp kitchens, offices, or medical wards.

Auschwitz was the last of the extermination centers to be shut down as Soviet forces overran Poland late in 1944. The SS drove the survivors of the various camps to Germany, where they were dumped in already overcrowded concentration camps and their outlying slave labor centers. Deprived of even the most elementary needs in the last days of the war, thousands died of malnutrition, tuberculosis, typhus, and other diseases. The liberating Allied armies found the camps littered with unburied corpses, and many of those still alive were too far gone to be saved. Of the approximately 200,000 Jews who survived, the majority attempted to return to their former homes, while the remainder entered European displaced persons' camps and applied for permission to enter Palestine, the United States, or some other place of permanent refuge.

Why the Jews?

Answering the question "Why the Jews?" requires an understanding of Adolf Hitler, the undeniable author of the Holocaust. His anti-Semitism dates from his youth in Austria before World War I, where Jew-baiting was advanced by the politicians he admired and the tabloids he read. If the psychohistorians are to be believed, it may have been more deeply rooted in some early personal trauma (Binion, 1976; Waite, 1977).

Whatever its sources, Hitler's Judeophobia comprised all the well-established and virtually universal stereotypes: Jews were corrupt and predatory materialists, devoid of patriotism and feelings for others, and they advocated subversive ideas such as liberalism, Marxism, and cultural modernism. Hitler adopted this hackneyed litany in its most extreme, social Darwinian form that interpreted history as a struggle between superior and inferior races. By the time he began his political career in postwar Munich, he was a convinced anti-Semite.

Doubtless, Hitler's anti-Semitism, and that of many of his followers, was intensified by the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, Germany's defeat in World War I, and the abortive Spartacus Revolt by German Communists in 1919. Then Hitler and his fledgling Nazi Party began associating the Jews with the alleged "stab in the back" of the German army, the liberal Weimar Republic established in Germany after the defeat, and the Communist menace. Anti-Semitism was always one of his central teachings. Occasionally Hitler called for the emigration or deportation of the Jews, but more often he blamed problems on a Jewish world conspiracy without specifying a cure beyond inviting Germans to support his movement. Moreover, the Nazi Party tended to use anti-Jewish propaganda opportunistically, playing it up or down depending on the responses it received. Hence no one could know exactly what Hitler and his party planned to do with the Jews, and it cannot be said that the large minority of Germans who came to support him after 1930 deliberately endorsed violent anti-Semitism. Today it is far clearer than it was at the time that genocide was implicit in Hitler's ideology.

That genocidal impulse became explicit as part of the events surrounding Operation Barbarossa, the attack on the USSR in 1941. No one knows exactly when or why the Germans decided to kill all the European Jews (and not just those targeted by the *Einsatzgruppen*). Fragmentary evidence suggests that the euphoric atmosphere surrounding Germany's initial victories on the Eastern Front may have convinced Hitler that the creation of his Aryan utopia was imminent. The dictator's increasingly barbaric campaign against the Soviet Union also sharpened his hatred for what he called "Judeo-Bolshevism" at the same time as it foreclosed opportunities to resettle the Jews. By 1942, Nazi genocide was being aimed at all of European Jewry.

The Victims

Although the Third Reich targeted all the Jews in Nazi-dominated Europe, their fate varied with local conditions. Jews were most vulnerable where German officials managed affairs directly (and did so from the beginning of the Holocaust); where the Jewish communities were large and unassimilated; and where indigenous anti-Semitism encouraged some degree of cooperation with the murderers.

All three of these elements combined to decimate the Jews of Poland, the western USSR, and the Baltic states. There Nazi rule was most openly brutal. First under the guns of the *Einsatzgruppen* and then in ghettos and labor and extermination camps, Jews from these areas died in numbers amounting to three quarters of the total Holocaust casualties. Very few survived. Direct German control over Serbia, the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, and part of Greece meant that their Jews were deported to Poland and subjected to similar atrocities. Such was also the fate of the remaining German and Austrian Jewish communities. Only small numbers of German Jews who were of mixed race, living in mixed marriages, highly decorated war veterans, or prominent persons were spared. Hungary came under direct German rule only in March 1944, following which the SS, aided by Hungarian officials, swallowed up more than half of the large Jewish population. Doubtless the losses in Hungary would have been even greater had the Nazis taken control earlier.

Unlike Hungary, Germany's other Eastern European allies — Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia, and Croatia — retained some measure of independence to the end of the war. Slovakia and Croatia, both satellites created by Nazi Germany, willingly established their own forced labor camps for some of the Jews and sent the rest to the extermination centers. Romania and Bulgaria, however, refused to comply with some Nazi demands. Neither was a German creation, and both were fiercely protective of their national rights. Bulgaria confiscated the property of many native-born Jews and forced some of them into slave labor, but it would not hand them over to the Germans. It did, however, deport Jews from lands newly acquired from Greece and Yugoslavia. In Romania, where (unlike Bulgaria) there was considerable anti-Semitism, tens of thousands of Jews in the newly reconquered provinces of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina were murdered in pogroms or else deported across the Dniester River to be murdered by the *Einsatzgruppen* or at Auschwitz. And yet, the majority of Bulgarian and Romanian Jews survived the Holocaust.

The Jews of Western Europe, remote from the killing fields and the intense anti-Semitism of Eastern Europe, lost about 40 percent of their numbers to the Nazis. The SS gave priority to exterminating the Jews of the east, and the war ended before it could finish its work in the west. There, too, the pace of extermination varied with local conditions. In

Holland, which had been placed under direct German rule, three quarters of the Jews perished because they were numerous, heavily concentrated in one place (Amsterdam), and led by passive community officials; they also had little opportunity to escape or hide in their heavily populated country. French Jews, too, perished as a result of the Vichy regime's collaboration with the Nazis. And yet, only about 20 percent of them died in the Holocaust because they seized opportunities to hide in remote villages or to flee to neutral Spain and Switzerland.

At the opposite extreme, almost all members of the very small Danish Jewish community were transported the short distance by boat to Sweden by Danes who had no sympathy with anti-Semitism. The Italians, too, although German allies, were not racists. Only after Mussolini's fall and the German takeover of the country were about 16 percent of the Italian Jews sent to their deaths, and the retreating Nazis had to do the job themselves. Hence, in certain circumstances resistance to the occupiers by local officials and private individuals saved lives. The fate of the different Jewish communities was determined by various concatenations of local attitudes, opportunities for flight or concealment, the size and location of the Jewish populations, and the nature of Nazi rule in the several countries (Fein, 1979).

Participants and Bystanders

Direct participation in the Holocaust by SS officials, Einsatzgruppen personnel, and camp guards was required in relatively small numbers. Indirect involvement by police, civil servants, private businessmen who profited from slave labor, and the like was considerably broader. Moreover, news of the exterminations rapidly leaked out of Eastern Europe in 1942, enmeshing much of the world in the catastrophe.

German police and government bureaucrats who defined, identified, assembled, and deported the Jews to the east were not always fanatical Nazis or anti-Semites. Many were careerists and efficient professionals, dedicated to following instructions and improvising solutions to problems in the spirit of their superiors. Amoralism was encouraged by specialization; each department and individual was accountable for only one small segment of the program, diffusing personal responsibility. Ordinary Germans who had nothing to do with the Holocaust might hear rumors of crimes against the Jews in Eastern Europe, but they were preoccupied with staying alive and making ends meet in an increasingly disastrous wartime situation. The Jews quite literally were out of sight and out of mind.

In occupied Western Europe, the Nazis were stretched thin and depended heavily on local authorities to deliver the Jews for deportation. Especially in France and Holland, such assistance was widespread, encouraged by careerism and fear of reprisals. Small minorities in all the

Western European countries risked their lives to hide Jews or help them escape to neutral havens. Tens of thousands were saved as a result. Equally small minorities of Nazi sympathizers turned Jews and their helpers in to the authorities. The vast majority, however, were as apathetic and self-absorbed as most Germans.

Neutral countries such as Switzerland, Sweden, Spain, and Turkey accepted limited numbers of refugees, but none wanted to antagonize Hitler while his armies seemed invincible. Once the tide turned against him, however, they became more willing to aid the Jews. The Vatican also held to its traditional neutrality. Pope Pius XII kept silent about the Holocaust, evidently fearing German reprisals and hoping to enhance his role as a mediator. Individual Catholic clerics and laymen, however, did intervene on behalf of the Jews, notably in France, Hungary, and Slovakia.

The nations allied against Hitler reacted to the genocide of the Jews in diverse ways. The Soviet Union gave refuge to large numbers of Eastern European Jews who had fled before the *Wehrmacht*, but it acknowledged no special Nazi program to kill the Jews. In contrast, Great Britain and the United States warned the Germans and their allies that they would be called to account for their acts of genocide. A key question is: Could more have been done? It has been charged that Jewish lives could have been saved if President Roosevelt had not waited until 1944 to establish the War Refugee Board; if Germany and its satellites had been pressed to release their Jews; if the Allied air forces had bombed Auschwitz and its rail approaches in 1944; and if negotiations with the Nazis to ransom the Jews had been pursued. That the measures were not taken may be explained by indifference or even covert anti-Semitism among Allied leaders.

Or it may be argued that the Allies' single-minded preoccupation with the military side of the war was responsible. As they saw it, the best way to help all the victims of fascism was to press for the quickest possible victory. Nor will everyone agree that such measures would have altered the outcome in any significant way. No one should underestimate Nazi determination to exterminate the Jews, regardless of disruptions of the killing centers and promises held out in negotiations.

The Burden of History

A number of historical trends combined to make the Holocaust possible: anti-Semitism, racism, social Darwinism, extreme nationalism, totalitarianism, industrialism, and the nature of modern war. The absence of any one of these trends would have made the genocide of the Jews unlikely.

Anti-Semitism has a long history in most of Europe, not just in Germany. Traditional anti-Semitism arose out of Christian rejection of the Jews as deicides and deliberate misbelievers. Once it had generated