AN INTRODUCTION TO
THE HOLOCAUST FOR
THE YOUNG READER

It Really
Did Happen
It Really Did Happen...

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE HOLOCAUST FOR THE YOUNG READER

The Holocaust Resource Center and Archives
QUEENSBOROUGH COMMUNITY COLLEGE
The City University of New York • Bayside, New York

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Dr. William L. Shulman
Director
The word “Holocaust” is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word “Shoah,” and is defined as a complete destruction by fire. The term “Shoah,” which has its origins in the Bible, is also used to describe this period of time.

The Holocaust took place in Europe between 1933 and 1945. During this time the attempt to destroy the Jewish people was undertaken by the Nazis and their collaborators under Adolf Hitler. This was the only time in history that there was an attempt to exterminate all Jews. Many other innocent people were persecuted and killed during the Holocaust, such as communists, political prisoners, Jehovah’s Witnesses, homosexuals, the disabled, and Romani (Gypsies).

Genocide is the term used for the liquidation of a people. The word was first used in 1933. It comes from the Greek word “genos” meaning “race,” and the Latin word “caedes” meaning “killing.”

Photo collection (at left) depicts some of the Holocaust victims.
Why the Jews?

The origins of anti-Semitism, the hatred of the Jews, go back many centuries. As a result of the teachings of the Church, the Jews, who lived throughout the Christian world, were periodically persecuted. Though they were few in number, they were also attacked as economic competitors and were sometimes used as political scapegoats. There were times and places in Europe where Jews were accepted, allowed to become citizens and to play an active role in the community. However, anti-Semitism remained part of the culture.
On January 30, 1933, President Hindenburg appointed Adolf Hitler as Reich Chancellor (Reichskanzler). The Nazi Party adopted anti-Semitism as a focal point of its policies. Hitler is seen here arriving for a huge May Day youth parade in Berlin's Olympic Stadium.
Adolf Hitler was born in Braunau, Austria in 1889, but he considered Linz his hometown. He was a poor student and dropped out of school before the age of 16. When he was 19 he set out for Vienna, the capital of Austria, to pursue a career in art. He failed at this. Hitler was to blame others for his failures all through his life. It was in Vienna that he developed his hatred for Jews. At the age of 24, because of his disappointments in Vienna and his keen interest in German history, he moved to Germany and joined the army. After World War I, unable to accept Germany's defeat, he decided to go into politics. He was a powerful speaker and drew crowds. Before long, Hitler formed the Nazi party. In 1923, he tried to seize power in what became known as the "Beer Hall Putsch" and was imprisoned for 9 months. In prison, Hitler wrote *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle), which outlined his main ideas concerning anti-Semitism, racism, "living space," and the "Jewish plot." During the next 10 years, Hitler traveled all over Germany spreading his ideas, and by 1930 the Nazi party had become the second largest in Germany. It consisted of average citizens as well as doctors, professors, lawyers, teachers and scientists. Hitler was also successful in recruiting young people and indoctrinating them into the teachings of Nazism. In 1933 he was appointed Chancellor of the Third Reich and absolute dictator.

In 1945, when Hitler realized that his defeat was near, he committed suicide.
population, their impact on German culture was enormous. Of Germany made up only one percent of the total. Though they distinguished themselves in the sciences and the arts, Jews were full citizens. They were lawyers, professors, and culture of their non-Jewish neighbors. In Germany, Jews in Western Europe were more fully integrated into their societies and they tended to adopt the manners of their religion played an important part in their daily lives. Yiddish newspapers and went to the Yiddish theater. "Sheites". They spoke their own language, Yiddish, read organizations. Many Jews lived in small towns called "lived normal lives. They were occupied with their The Jewish people in pre-Holocaust Eastern Europe.

What was Jewish life like before the Holocaust?
Where did the Jews live before the Holocaust?

The Jews lived throughout Europe, but the majority lived in the following countries:

- Austria: 185,000
- Czechooslovakia: 118,000
- France: 350,000
- Germany: 500,000
- Greece: 76,000
- Hungary: 650,000
- Italy: 57,000
- The Netherlands: 140,000
- Poland: 3,300,000
- Romania: 757,000
- Soviet Union: 3,000,000
arm salute and the use of the Nazi emblem, the swastika, showing allegiance to Hitler and the Nazi Party were the straight
supervision of the German people. Two of the methods of
radio, Goebbels was able to publicize to the Germans the
propaganda as his Minister of Propaganda. Through newspapers
promote his cause was through propaganda. He named Joseph
One of the ways that Hitler was able to spread lies to
and Jewish children were expelled from German schools.
"Sarax" to their names so they would not be taken as Germans;
their jobs were taken away; men had to add "Israel" and women;
the laws were: Jews were forbidden to vote in German elections;
Nuremberg laws and were a direct order from Hitler. Some of
Civil rights of the Jewish people. These were known as the
In September 1935, a set of laws was passed restricting the
by Jews and opponents of the Nazis. That year there was a public burning of books written
should buy from a Jewish-owned store. In May of
In 1933, Hitler issued orders that no German
To promote his racist views, Hitler wanted Germany to be made up of a pure Aryan race, which he defined as white with blue eyes and blond hair. Scientists attempted to prove that different races of people had different types of blood, and that Aryan blood was superior.

During the mid-thirties, Hitler's main objective was to make Germany "Judenrein" (cleansed of Jews). Many Jews left, but they were not allowed to take any of their possessions.

In July 1938, delegates from 32 countries – including the United States and Great Britain – met in Evian, France to discuss the problem of the refugees. All but one of these countries refused to allow the Jews to enter. The Germans now saw that they could go ahead with their policies against the Jews, since no country wanted them and therefore had no right to criticize the Germans.

In 1938 Hitler annexed Austria to the Third Reich. This was called the "Anschluss." In 1939, Czechoslovakia also became part of the Third Reich. The same anti-Semitic laws were implemented in these countries as in Germany.
After Kristallnacht
on the morning
in Euskirchen
synagogue
annihilated
of the cupola of the
from the windows
flames burst forth
On the evening of November 9, 1938, rioting began as synagogues were burned and Jewish-owned stores were looted. These riots, called “Kristallnacht” (Night of Broken Glass), were the first anti-Jewish pogroms planned by the government and the Gestapo, the political police. The local police did not interfere and the looting went on for two days. Over 1,000 synagogues were burned and 7,000 Jewish businesses were looted and destroyed. Thousands of Jewish men were arrested by the Gestapo and sent to concentration camps.

On September 1, 1939, the German army invaded Poland and World War II began. The Nazis now spread their hatred and lies against the Jews throughout Poland. They isolated and separated the Jews from the rest of the people. Jews were made to wear a six-pointed yellow star with the word “Jude” (the German word for Jew), or armbands with a blue star. Everyone over the age of six was forced to wear this badge. Because of this, most people avoided their Jewish friends and neighbors.

As Hitler invaded other countries, such as Belgium, France and Holland, the Jews in each country were treated in the same manner.
conditions, many died of starvation and disease. Since there was little food and poor sanitation and medical care under armed escorts, for work at German installations. Those who were not allowed to leave the ghettos except in groups were called "Aryanization" of Jewish property. The Jews and their possessions were taken over by the Nazis in what was forced to live within a few square blocks. A city each city. The entire Jewish population of each city the first ghettos in Poland, in the poorest areas of the city forced to live. The Nazis borrowed this idea, establishing ghettos. The word "ghetto" was first used in the 16th century in Italy and denoted the walled-in area where Jews were neighbors were and reported them. Also, many local people knew who their Jewish neighbors were and reported them. was traced through parents and grandparents. Egon, and, for the first time, a person's race, religion, and such information as birth and marriage dates, etc. In 1939 Germany conducted a census. This included
The “final solution” was the term used by Nazi officials that referred to the “Jewish problem” and which meant that all Jews were to be killed. In January 1942, in Wannsee, Germany, a conference was held to work out plans for the destruction of the Jewish people. Among the things that were discussed at this conference was who was to be considered a Jew and where and how the Jews were to be annihilated.

After the Jews were rounded up from the ghettos, they were transported by cattle cars to various concentration camps. They were forced to stand in packed cars with no sanitary facilities and no food for several days, until they reached their destination. Many died during the trip under these conditions.

In 1941, mobile killing squads murdered masses of Jews in Babi Yar, a ravine in the Ukraine. As the Jews approached the ravine, they were forced to hand over their possessions and remove their clothing before they were shot.
Dachau, and Ravensbruck, a camp for women only. Others were scattered throughout Europe.

Sobibor and Theresienstadt were located in Poland and some were in Germany—Buchenwald,

Some of the camps—Auschwitz-Birkenau, Belzec, Majdanek—

Killed after the "research" was completed. Many people died during the experiments and others were

valued. Many people died during the experiments and others were

ed by Nazi doctors. Most of these experiments had no medicinal

care. Children were subjected to cruel "medical experiments" conducted

Auschwitz-Birkenau and other camps, many prisoners, including

and a badge denoting what type of prisoner they were. In

Their heads were shaven and they had to wear special clothes

their arms and were no longer known by name, only by number.

In some camps, the prisoners were tattooed with numbers on

The largest camp anywhere, was reaching 12,500 each day.

Effort. By 1943, the number of killings at Auschwitz-Birkenau, the

put to death by the Nazis, since they could not help in the war

Gasping and fuming squads. The elderly, the very young and the handicapped were immediately

In the extermination camps, the Nazis systematically murdered the Jews by hanging.

Coffee and dried-up bread, late at night with only a meager diet of watered-down soup and

had to rise very early in the morning and do heavy work until

strong enough were selected by the Nazis for forced labor. They

gathered the Jews and other victims. Those Jews who were

A concentration camp was a common center where the Nazis SS
Were the Jews able to fight back?

There was physical resistance. There were several uprisings in the ghettos and the camps, as well as Jewish resistance fighters, called Partisans, in the forests. In the Warsaw Ghetto, Jews managed to smuggle in small amounts of ammunition and were able to resist the Nazis (though the Jews were outnumbered and weak) for several weeks. Most of the Jewish fighters were killed but some escaped to the forests through the sewers of the ghetto.

Another kind of resistance was spiritual resistance. For example, though schools were forbidden in the ghettos, secret schools were set up, as well as an underground press. Religion was also practiced secretly.

Though the camps were surrounded by electrified barbed-wire fences and watch-towers, revolts occurred in Auschwitz, Treblinka and Sobibor.

Escape from a camp was nearly impossible. If someone was able to get out, he or she would often be caught by the hostile non-Jewish population and turned in.
Sweden was a neutral country. Nearly all of the Jews of Denmark - by sending them to Denmark, learning of this, were able to rescue over 7,000 of its Jews - at least 6,000,000 Jews, including 1,500,000 children, had perished, and 5,000,000 non-Jews as well. In Poland alone, 90% of 16 million Jews died, and the war would be saved. By the end of the war Germany and Japan, their theory was that if they were concerned with winning the war against Germany, and its allies, Great Britain and Russia, did not act in any rescue effort. These powerful allies were aware of the plight of the Jews, the Jewish state was threatened of these heroic individuals.

Children, including Anne Frank, were hidden through the efforts of these individuals. In hiding, the Jews were known as "righteous Gentiles." Many Jewish nuns hid Jews in convents and monasteries. These lives and the lives of their families to hide Jews. Many priests there were individuals in every country who risked their...
In January 1945, as the Russian armies advanced west, the SS liquidated Auschwitz and its satellite camps by leading 104,000 prisoners on death marches into Germany. More than half died from exhaustion and exposure in the freezing weather. There were many more instances of death marches.

In May of 1945, World War II ended in Europe. As the Allies marched into Germany and Poland, they discovered the horrors of the camps. The American, British and Russian soldiers who liberated the camps could not believe their eyes. They saw human beings looking like skeletons, many dying of starvation, hunger and disease, thousands of dead bodies piled one on top of the other, and gas chambers disguised as shower rooms near ovens that were used to burn the victims. They also found piles and piles of shoes, hair, and eye glasses that were taken from the prisoners.

What were the Nuremberg Trials? In the city of Nuremberg, Germany, the Allies set up an international court to place on trial the major Nazi officials. These criminals were charged with various crimes including the enslavement and murder of millions of people and crimes against humanity. 19 of those on trial were found guilty and 12 were hanged. Their defense was that they were just following orders. The Nuremberg Trials lasted 11 months, from November 1945 to October 1946.

Some high Nazi officials, such as Adolf Eichmann, who was in charge of the “final solution” of the Jews, escaped to South America. In 1960, he was captured and brought to trial in Israel. He was found guilty and hanged in May of 1962.
What happened to the survivors? After liberation, many of the Jewish survivors went back to their homes hoping to find family members and friends. They found that their homes and businesses had been taken over by the local citizens and most of their families and friends had perished.

Displaced persons camps were established and most of the survivors had to start new lives as temporary "homes" to help the survivors establish productive lives and maintain significant contributions in productive fields.

Today, over 50 years later, the survivors have built productive lives and made significant contributions in medicine, law, business, politics, teaching, music, art and other fields. They can never forget however the horror of those terrible years and the loss of their mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers and children.

Some survivors who had relatives in the United States were able to come to this country. The majority of the survivors went to Israel, the Jewish homeland, which became a state in 1948.
**Glossary**

**ALLIES** - Nations that joined the war against Nazi Germany, including the United States and Great Britain.

**ANSCHLUS** - German word for union; it was the term applied to the Nazi takeover of Austria.

**ANTI-SEMITISM** - Prejudice towards Jews.

**ARYAN** - Term used by Nazis to describe the German people as the “superior” race.

**AUSCHWITZ-BIRKENAU** - The largest of the Nazi concentration camps. It was a forced labor camp and an extermination camp. Established in Poland in 1940. More than 1.3 million Jews were murdered in the gas chambers.

**BABY YAR** - Ravine in Kiev, in the Ukraine, where masses of Jews were shot in September 1941.

**BEER HALL PUTSCH** - Attempt by Hitler to overthrow the German Republic and seize political power in 1923. Armed storm troopers entered a large beer hall in Munich to start the uprising. Hitler was arrested and sent to prison.

**BELZEC** - Originally a forced labor camp, it became an extermination camp in 1941. Located in Poland. 600,000 Jews were killed there between March 1942 and December 1942.

**CHANCELLOR** - Prime minister, head of the government.

**CONCENTRATION CAMPS** - Prison camps built to hold Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals, political prisoners, resisters, and anyone the Nazis considered socially or racially undesirable.

**DEATH MARCH** - A forced march with brutal treatment by the SS.

**DISPLACED PERSONS (DP) CAMPS** - Set up after the war for victims freed from the Nazi camps. Cared for by Allied occupation forces and administered by United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA). Due to anti-Semitic incidents provoked by non-Jewish inmates, Jews were separated and placed in strictly Jewish camps.

**EICHMANN, ADOLF** (1906-1962) - Lieutenant Colonel in the SS. Head of the “department of Jewish affairs” of the Gestapo. He organized the transport of Jews to concentration camps. He escaped Germany after the war and fled to South America, but was captured. In 1962 Eichmann was tried in Israel and executed for his crimes.

**EUTHANASIA PROGRAM** - Set up by Nazis in 1933 as a systematic method of killing certain groups of people by gassing and lethal injection, with the participation of doctors and nurses. Victims included the mentally and physically disabled.
Hitler outlining his ideas about race and anti-Semitism.

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MEIN KAMPF (My Struggle) - Book written by Adolf Hitler outlining his ideas about race and anti-Semitism.

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The Nazis started to extermination camps in 1938, 1 of the largest being MAUTHAUSEN - Concentration camp in Austria, established in 1938. Over 500,000 Jews were killed in the camps. The survivors were sent to Chelmno to be gassed. The most notorious of the killing centers was Auschwitz-Birkenau, where 1.5 million Jews were murdered. The camps were named after the Nazi ss-Reichsführer, Heinrich Himmler. The camps were used to exterminate the Jews of Europe. The Final Solution - Code words used by the Nazis for the systematic extermination of Jews in Europe.

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FEINAN - City in France where 300,000 Jews were killed. The Nazis targeted the Jews for persecution. Up to 100,000 Jews were killed in the ss-Reichsführer, Heinrich Himmler. The camps were named after the Nazi ss-Reichsführer, Heinrich Himmler. The camps were used to exterminate the Jews of Europe. The Final Solution - Code words used by the Nazis for the systematic extermination of Jews in Europe.

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GERMAN - German word meaning "descent of Jews."

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KINDERTRANSPORT - In 1933-1945, Great Britain agreed to rescue children, mostly Jewish, unaccompanied by their parents, bound for Germany. The children, mostly Jewish, unaccompanied by their parents, bound for Germany. The children, mostly Jewish, unaccompanied by their parents, bound for Germany. The children, mostly Jewish, unaccompanied by their parents, bound for Germany. The children, mostly Jewish, unaccompanied by their parents, bound for Germany. The children, mostly Jewish, unaccompanied by their parents, bound for Germany. The children, mostly Jewish, unaccompanied by their parents, bound for Germany. The children, mostly Jewish, unaccompanied by their parents, bound for Germany. The children, mostly Jewish, unaccompanied by their parents, bound for Germany. The children, mostly Jewish, unaccompanied by their parents, bound for Germany. The children, mostly Jewish, unaccompanied by their parents, bound for Germany. The children, mostly Jewish, unaccompanied by their parents, bound for Germany. The children, mostly Jewish, unaccompanied by their parents, bound for Germany. The children, mostly Jewish, unaccompanied by their parents, bound for Germany. The children, mostly Jewish, unaccompanied by their parents, bound for Germany. The children, mostly Jewish, unaccompanied by their parents, bound for Germany. The children, mostly Jewish, unaccompanied by their parents, bound for Germany. The children, mostly Jewish, unaccompanied by their parents, bound for Germany. The children, mostly Jewish, unaccompanied by their parents, bound for Germany. The children, mostly Jewish, unaccompanied by their parents, bound for Germany. The children, mostly Jewish, unaccompanied by their parents, bound for Germany. The children, mostly Jewish, unac...
NAZI - Term used for the National Socialist German Workers Party, a radical, anti-Semitic political party formed in 1919 and headed by Adolf Hitler from 1921-1945.

NUREMBERG LAWS - Laws formulated in 1935 which stripped the Jewish people in Germany of their civil rights and restricted their political and social life.

NUREMBERG TRIALS - A series of public trials set up by the Allies. The first of these trials was held from November 1945 until October 1946. Twenty-two major Nazi officials were tried.

PARTISAN - Resistance fighter operating behind enemy lines, mostly in the forests.

POGROM - Russian word used to describe organized violence against Jews, often with the consent of the government or police.

RAVENSBURCK - Concentration camp established in 1939 in Germany. Primarily a women’s camp.

RIGHTEOUS GENTILES - The Christians who saved Jews at the risk of their own lives.

SCAPEGOAT - A person or group of people that is unfairly blamed for wrongs done by others.

SHOAH - Hebrew word meaning “devastation.” Term used for the Holocaust.

SHTETL - Yiddish word for a small town or village in Eastern Europe where many Jews lived.

SS - Schutzstaffel, the elite guard which was originally the blackshirted personal guard of Hitler. Later the SS served as political police and administered the concentration and extermination camps.

SWASTIKA - Nazi insignia.

THERESENSTADT - Ghetto established in 1941 in Czechoslovakia. Also known as Terezin. Nazis used it as a "model" ghetto to show the Red Cross how well Jews were being treated. Actually, thousands died of disease and starvation, and thousands were sent to extermination camps.

THIRD REICH - Nazi terminology for Germany from January 1933 to May 1945.

TREBLINKA - Extermination camp in Poland, established in 1941. Between July 1942 and November 1943, 750,000 Jews and more than 2,000 Gypsies were murdered there.

WANNSEE CONFERENCE - Meeting held on January 20, 1942 in Wannsee, a suburb of Berlin, where the Final Solution, the plan for the killing of all of the Jews, was adopted.

WARSAW - Capital of Poland where 375,000 Jews lived before World War II. A ghetto was established there in 1940. Thousands died of disease and starvation, hundreds of thousands were sent to Treblinka and other camps. There was an uprising in the ghetto by Jewish resistance fighters in 1943.

YIDDISH - Language spoken mainly by the Jews of Eastern Europe, which combines Hebrew and German.
1938
FRANCE to discuss refugee issues.
MARCH 13 - Austria is annexed by Germany.

1939
In Poland, Jewish refugees are removed until 6,000 are over.

1936
McGuffin, Luxembourg, Holland and France. Denmark, Norway.

1935
Germany invades Poland. World War Two begins.

1934
Hilter allows doctors to kill mentally disabled persons.

1933
November - Nazi party establishes one and only legal political party in Germany.
MAY 10 - Public burning of books written by Jews.
APRIL 1 - National boycott of Jewish businesses.

Chronology

1933
January 30 - Adolf Hitler becomes Chancellor of Germany.
1941
MARCH 24 - Germany invades North Africa.
APRIL 6 - Germany invades Yugoslavia and Greece.
JUNE 22 - Germany attacks the Soviet Union.
SEPTEMBER 28-29 - 34,000 Jews are murdered by mobile killing squads at Babi Yar, near Kiev in the Ukraine.
DECEMBER 7 - Japan attacks Pearl Harbor.
DECEMBER 11 - Germany declares war on the United States.

1942
JANUARY 20 - Wannsee Conference held in Berlin to discuss "final solution of Jewish question."
Mass extermination of Jews in gas chambers begins at camps located in Poland.

1944
MARCH 19 - Germany occupies Hungary.
MAY 15 - JULY 9 - More than 430,000 Jews of Hungary deported to Auschwitz, most of them gassed.
JUNE 6 - D-Day. Allies invade western Europe.
OCTOBER 7 - Prisoners in Auschwitz revolt and destroy one of the gas chambers.

1945
JANUARY 17 - Nazis evacuate Auschwitz. Prisoners are forced on "death marches" toward Germany.
JANUARY 27 - Russian troops liberate Auschwitz.
APRIL 1 - MAY 9 - Allies liberate the camps.
APRIL 30 - Hitler commits suicide.
MAY 7 - Germany surrenders. The war ends.
NOVEMBER - OCTOBER 1946 - Nuremberg trials of major Nazi war criminals.

1948
Establishment of the State of Israel.
- The Liptsalis Room
- Pearl, Lila - Four Pieces Paddles
- Lymann, Darly - Holocaust Rescuers
- Leitmer, Isabell - The Big Lie
- Leitman, Michael - Witnesses to War
- Certor, Arnold - Heroes of the Holocaust
- Friedmann, Hana - The Other Victims
- Frank, Anne - The Diary of Anne Frank
- Bock, Jache - We are Witnesses
- Adler, David - We Remember the Holocaust & Memorials
- Schindl's Heaven - The Holocaust: Understanding & Remembering
- Rosem, Seymon - The Holocaust: The World and the Jews
- Berezbinum, Michael - The World Must Know
- Bachrach, Izsak - Tell Them We Remember
- Alhiner, David - Hitler's War Against the Jews

AND SUCCESSFUL READING
PHILOLOGICAL SOURCES
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