

The Holocaust

Name: _____

The Holocaust was the systematic, bureaucratic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of approximately six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its collaborators. "Holocaust" is a word of Greek origin meaning "sacrifice by fire." The Nazis, who came to power in Germany in January 1933, believed that Germans were "racially superior" and that the Jews, deemed "inferior," were an alien threat to the so-called German racial community. They used the term "[Final Solution](#)" to refer to their plan to annihilate the Jewish people. It is not known when the leaders of Nazi Germany definitively decided to implement the "Final Solution."

Those who did not fit Hitler's view of the perfect Aryan German race faced extermination. Targets included Jews, Slavs, the Roma (Gypsy) people, homosexuals, the mentally handicapped, and others.

On November 9, 1938, the world got its first glimpse of the terror that lay head for Jews in Germany. German gangs attacked and burned synagogues and Jewish business throughout Germany. Jewish hospitals, homes, schools and cemeteries were also vandalized. The night became known as *Kristallnacht*, or the "night of the broken glass." Some 30,000 Jews were arrested and placed in prisons called concentration camps.

The Nazis used the concentration camps for many atrocities. Camp prisoners were used as slave laborers and were often worked to death. The Nazis conducted cruel medical experiments without using anesthesia.

In time, the Nazis adopted a policy of genocide, the deliberate and systematic extermination of a group of people based on their race, religion, or culture. The concentration camps became death camps with gas chambers for mass killings.

Many prisoners were forced to dig their own graves. Once the graves were dug, the prisoners were shot. Those who survived the shooting were buried alive. Other prisoners were starved to death, or died from lack of medical care. One of the cruelest atrocities involved "showers." Naked men, women, and children were herded into a large room expecting to be showered with water. Instead, poison gas filled the room, causing a cruel, painful death. The bodies were then removed and cremated.

Altogether, as many as six million Jews and five million others perished in what became known as the Holocaust. After the war, the Allied Powers convicted the Nazi leaders for "crimes against humanity," for their atrocities. The few survivors of the Holocaust have implored the world to never let the world forget the tragedy for the Jewish people, or for any people. More than half a century after the Holocaust, institutions, memorials, and museums continue to teach the history of the Holocaust to future generations.

What aspects of the history of the Holocaust did you find most relevant to your own experiences? Do you think that people today can learn something from this history? If so, what? If not, why not?

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Also cited: <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005151>

Notes:

1. Who is to blame for the Holocaust?

2. What lessons must be learned from the Holocaust?

3. What aspects of the history of the Holocaust did you find most relevant to your own life and experiences? Why?

4. How do we, as responsible and aware human beings, ensure that an event such as the Holocaust or any type of racial genocide never occurs again?