

# SECTION 3 The Holocaust

## Guide to Reading

### Main Idea

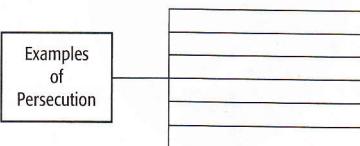
The Nazis believed Jews to be subhuman. They steadily increased their persecution of Jews and eventually set up death camps and tried to kill all the Jews in Europe.

### Key Terms and Names

Holocaust, Shoah, Nuremberg Laws, Wannsee Conference, concentration camp, extermination camp

### 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 German Jews.



### Reading Objectives

- **Describe** Nazi prejudices against Jews and early persecution of German Jews.
- **Explain** the methods Hitler used to try to exterminate Europe's Jewish population.

### Section Theme

**Civic Rights and Responsibilities** The Nazis systematically deprived Jews of their rights, while other nations refused to accept many Jewish refugees.

### Preview of Events

1933	1936	1939	1942
Autumn 1935	November 1938	June 1939	January 1942
Nuremberg Laws deprive German Jews of citizenship	Anti-Jewish violence erupts during <i>Kristallnacht</i>	SS St. Louis denied permission to dock in the United States	Nazis' Wannsee Conference determines "final solution" for Jews

## ★ An American Story ★



Mira Ryczke



Mira Ryczke was born in 1923 to a middle-class Jewish family in Danzig, Poland, a port on the Baltic Sea. After World War II broke out in September 1939, the Nazis expelled Danzig's Jews to Warsaw, where they were forced to live in deplorable conditions in a special area known as the Warsaw ghetto. In 1943 the Nazis emptied the Warsaw ghetto. The Ryczkes had to ride for three days in a suffocating cattle car headed for Auschwitz, the infamous Nazi death camp, and its neighboring camp of Birkenau.

After arriving at the camps, the terrified newcomers learned that a selection was to take place. When 20-year-old Mira asked what the selection was for, an old-time prisoner pointed to chimneys on top of a building and replied, "Selected for the gas chambers to go up in smoke." Mira later wrote:

“[W]e were told by the old-timers to try to look strong, healthy, and to walk in an upright position when our turn came. . . . Because the women I was with were young, only a few were taken out. Their numbers, tattooed on their left arms, were written down by the SS, and after a few days during roll call, their tattoo numbers were called out and these women were marched to the gas chamber.”

—quoted in *Echoes from the Holocaust*

### Nazi Persecution of the Jews

Mira Ryczke and her family were only a few of the millions of Jews who suffered terrible persecution before and during World War II. During the **Holocaust**, the catastrophe that ravaged Europe's Jews, the Nazis killed nearly 6 million Jews. The Nazis also killed

# Profiles IN HISTORY

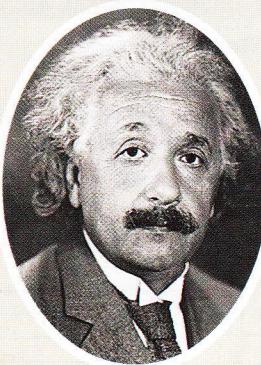
## Albert Einstein

1879–1955

Among the Jews who left Nazi Germany in the early 1930s was Albert Einstein, whose brilliant scientific theories revolutionized physics. Einstein gained international fame in 1919 when the Royal Society of London announced that calculations had supported his general theory of relativity. Einstein's fame increased after he won the Nobel Prize for Physics in 1921. Lecture invitations poured in from around the world.

Einstein never actively practiced Judaism, but he did proudly identify himself as a Jew. As anti-Semitism took hold in Germany, Einstein's worldwide fame contrasted with the insults he faced in Berlin for practicing "Bolshevism [Communism] in physics." His public support for Zionism, the right of Jews to settle in Palestine (later Israel), aroused further anger among Nazis.

Soon after Hitler became Germany's chancellor in 1933, Einstein renounced his citizenship and left Germany for Belgium. Fears for his life prompted friends to take him secretly by private



yacht to England. He later settled in Princeton, New Jersey.

A pacifist who had opposed World War I, Einstein ironically saw his scientific ideas applied to the creation of a powerful and destructive weapon, the atomic bomb. After the United States detonated the first atomic bomb in combat over Hiroshima, Japan, in 1945, Einstein devoted his final years to promoting pacifism. The scientist's greatest legacy, however, would be the revolutionary scientific discoveries he had made in the early 1900s. As Einstein himself had observed, "Politics are for the moment. An equation is for eternity."

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.

**Nazi Ideology** Once the Nazis took power in Germany, they acted swiftly to implement the political racial policies Hitler had outlined in *Mein Kampf*. 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 common at the time. Over the centuries, people who were prejudiced against Jews had put down Jewish religious practices and discriminated against Jews in many ways. For example, Jews were sometimes segregated in ghettos or prohibited from owning land. For the Nazis, however, all Jewish

people were evil no matter what their religion, occupation, or education.

**The Nuremberg Laws** After the Nazis took power, they quickly moved to deprive German Jews of many rights that all citizens had long taken for granted. 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 prohibited Jews from holding public office or voting. Other laws forbade Jews from employing female German servants under age 35 and compelled Jews with German-sounding names to adopt "Jewish" names. Soon the passports of Jews were marked with a red "J" to clearly 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.

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, they 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 for the killing, an infuriated Hitler ordered his minister of propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, to stage attacks against the Jews that would appear to be 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 10 young Nazi Storm Troopers broke into his family's apartment:

“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. When daylight came, more than 90 Jews lay dead, hundreds were badly injured, and thousands more were terrorized. The Nazis had forbidden police to interfere while roving bands of thugs destroyed 7,500 Jewish businesses and wrecked over 180 synagogues.

The lawlessness of *Kristallnacht* did not end with the dawn. 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.

The week after *Kristallnacht*, Nazi interior minister Hermann Goering added insult to injury by fining the Jewish community to pay for the damage. “German Jewry,” he proclaimed “shall, as punishment for their abominable crimes . . . have to make a contribution for one billion marks. . . . I would like to say that I would not like to be a Jew in Germany.”

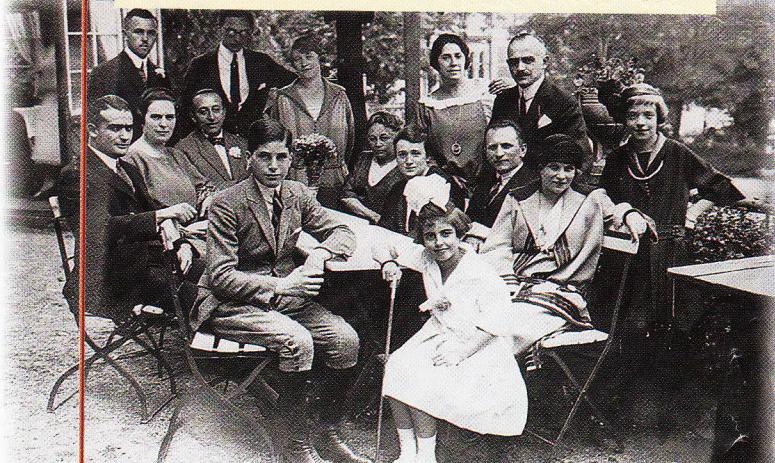
**Jewish Refugees Try to Flee** *Kristallnacht* and its aftermath marked a significant escalation in the Nazi policy of persecution against the Jews. Many Jews, including Frederick Morton’s family, decided that it was time to leave and fled to the United States. Between 1933, when Hitler took power, 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 businesspeople like Otto Frank, who resettled his family in Amsterdam in 1933. Otto’s daughter **Anne Frank** would later keep a diary of her family’s life in hiding after the Nazis overran the Netherlands.

By 1938 the American consulate in Stuttgart, Germany, had a backlog of over 100,000 visa applications from Jews trying to leave Germany and come to the United States. Following the Nazi *Anschluss*, 3,000 Austrian Jews each day applied for American visas. Many never received visas to the United States

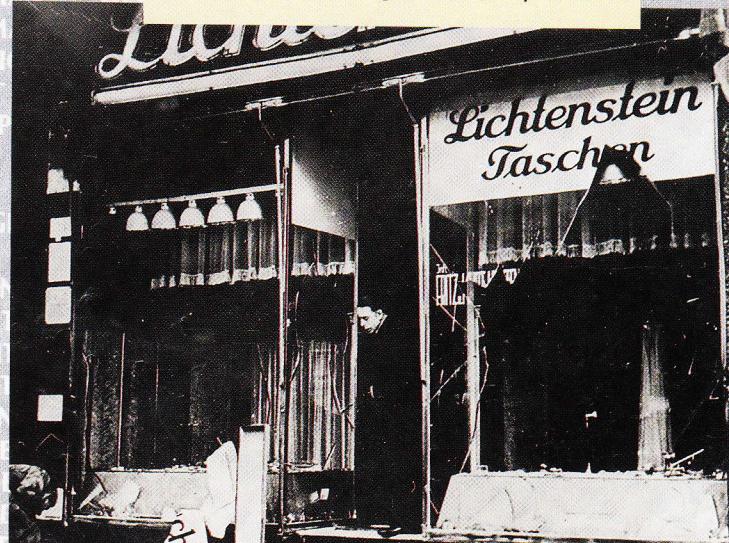
## The Final Solution

FINKELSTEIN · LEIBEL FINKELSTEIN  
A SHWARTZ · FELUSIA SHWARTZ · DAN AND BAILA ROSENTHAL  
FAMILY · LEIBKE AND ESTHER ROSENTHAL AND FAMILY  
IRSCHEL ·  
SPRINGER ·  
IMAN ·  
IM ·  
ET ·  
TOP ·  
JO ·  
ZANGER · REGINA ZANGER · SAMUEL ZANGER · JOSEF ZANGER ·  
JA ROSNER ZANGER · FRANIA ROSNER · HEINRICH ROSNER ·  
ROSNER · MARYSIA ROSNER · CHAIM MENDELSOHN ·

Before the war, a Jewish family in Germany poses for a photograph during a family outing. Few members of this family would survive the war.



On *Kristallnacht*, roaming bands of thugs destroyed Jewish property and menaced Jewish families throughout Germany.



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. First, Nazi orders prohibited Jews from taking more than about four dollars out of Germany. Second, many countries refused to accept Jewish immigrants. In the United States, laws restricted granting a visa to anyone "likely to become a public charge." American customs officials tended to assume that this applied to Jews since Germany had forced them to leave any wealth behind. High unemployment rates in the 1930s also made immigration politically unpopular. Few Americans wanted to raise immigration quotas, even to accommodate European refugees. The existing immigration policy allowed only a total of 150,000 immigrants annually, with a fixed quota from each country. The law permitted no exceptions for refugees or victims of persecution.

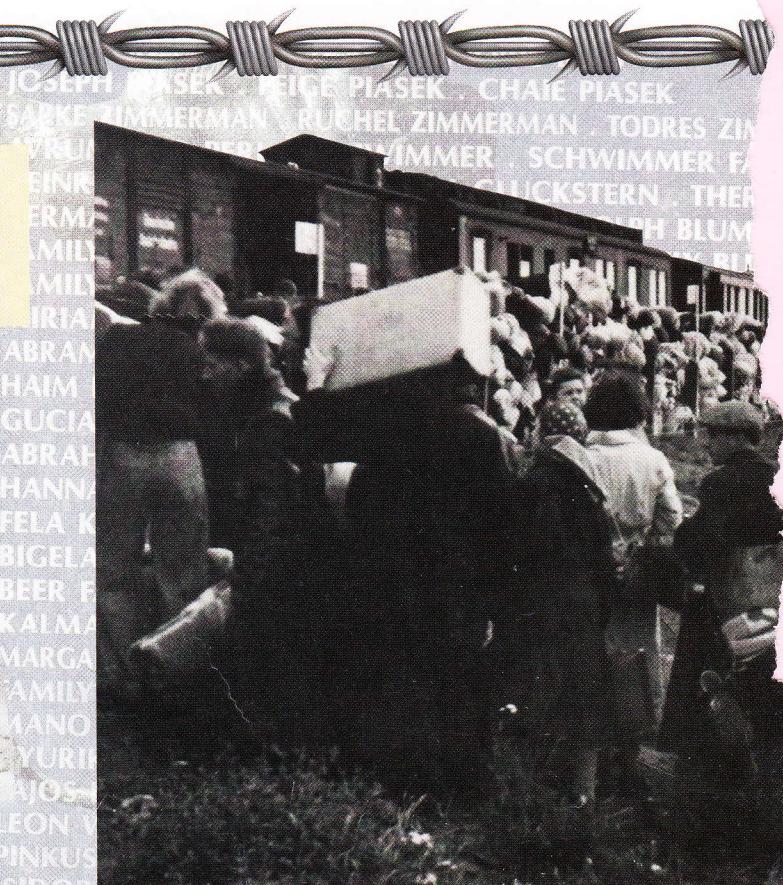
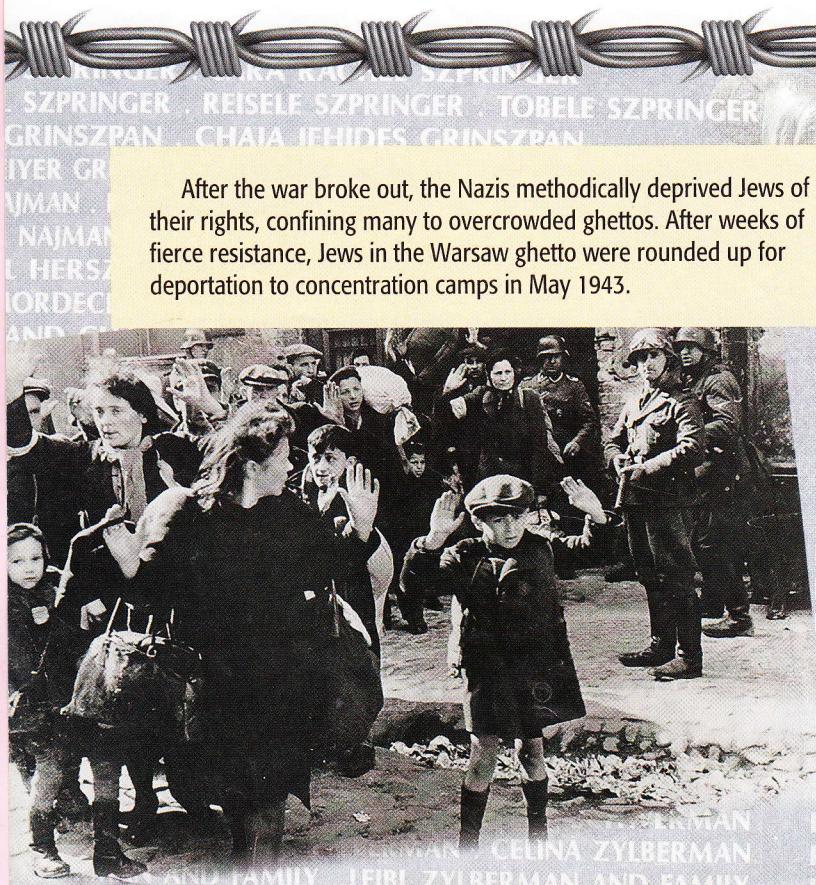
At an international conference on refugees in 1938, several European countries, the United States, and Latin America stated their regret that they could not take in more of Germany's Jews without raising their immigration quotas. Meanwhile, Nazi propaganda chief Joseph Goebbels announced that "if there 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.

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, partly in response to anti-Semitic sentiment stirred up by Nazi propaganda, 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 a United States port. Denied such permission, the ship turned back toward Europe on June 6. The forlorn 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 aboard the *SS St. Louis* perished in the Nazis' "final solution."

## ✓ Reading Check

**Reading Check** **Analyzing** Why did many Jews remain in Germany even though they were persecuted?



## The Final Solution

On January 20, 1942, 15 Nazi leaders met at the **Wannsee Conference**, held in a Berlin suburb, to determine the “final solution of the Jewish question.” Previous “solutions” had included rounding up Jews, Gypsies, and Slavs from conquered areas, shooting them, and piling them into mass graves. Another method required forcing Jews and other “undesirables” into trucks and then piping 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 first and largest concentration camps, was built near the town of Weimar in

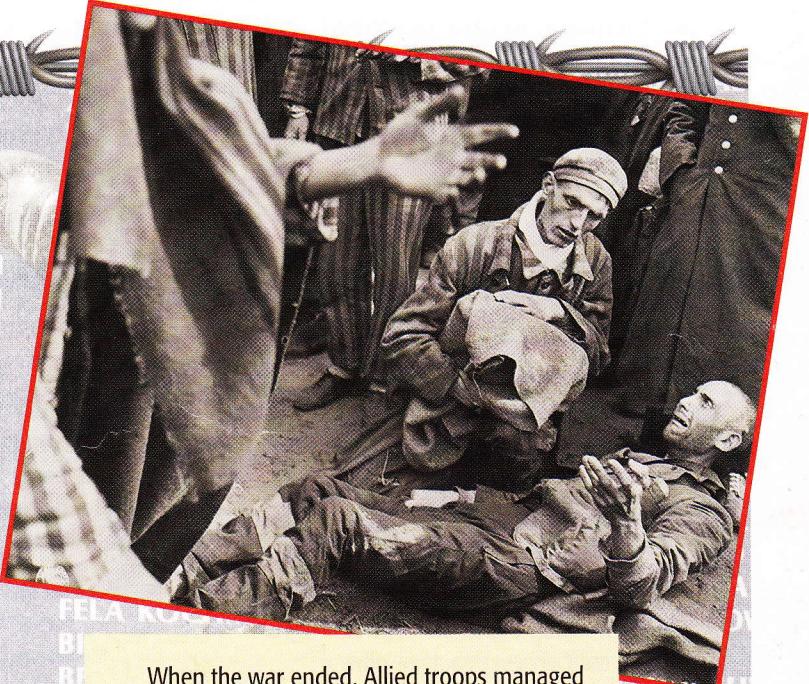
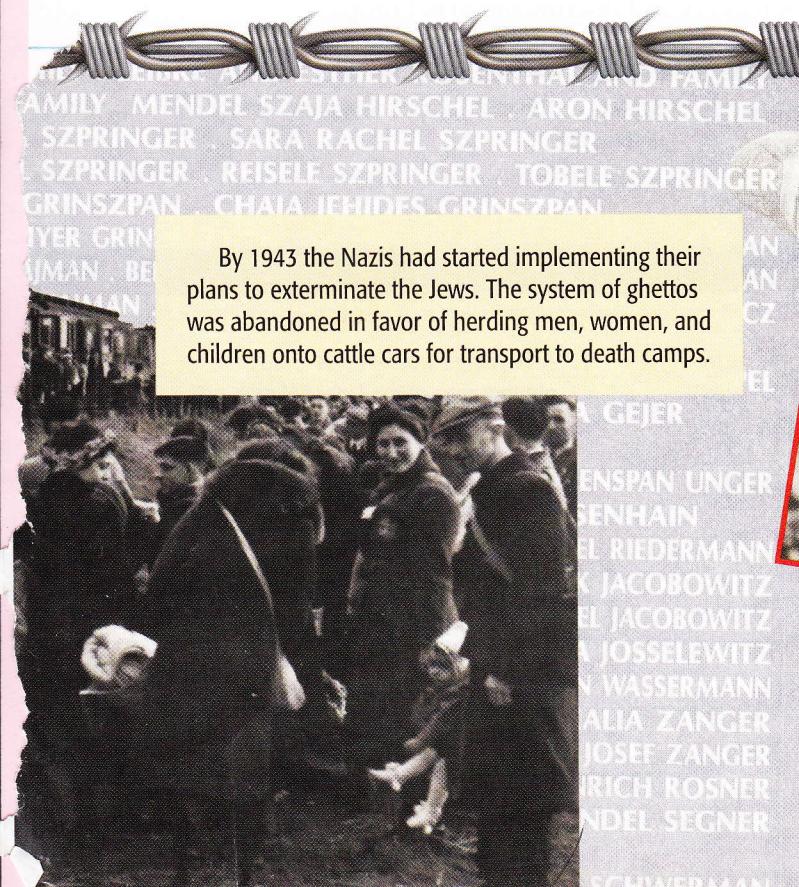
Germany in 1937. During its operation, over 200,000 prisoners worked 12-hour shifts as slave laborers in nearby factories. Though Buchenwald had no gas chambers, hundreds of prisoners died there every month as a result of exhaustion and the horrible living conditions.

Leon Bass, a young American soldier, described viewing a barracks in Buchenwald at the end of the war. Built to hold 50 people, the room had housed more than 150, with bunks built almost to the ceiling. Bass recalled:

“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



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.

**Jewish Losses, 1939–1945****Geography Skills**

- Interpreting Maps** What country had the highest number of Jews in its population killed?
- Applying Geography Skills** A relatively low percentage of Italy's Jewish population died in the Holocaust. From this information, how would you compare Fascists and Nazis in terms of their Jewish policies?

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** What methods did Hitler use to try to exterminate Europe's Jewish population?

**SECTION 3 ASSESSMENT****Checking for Understanding**

- Define:** Holocaust, concentration camp, extermination camp.
- Identify:** Shoah, Nuremberg Laws, Wannsee Conference.
- List** the groups of people who were persecuted by the Nazis.

**Reviewing Themes**

- Civic Rights and Responsibilities** Do you think the German people or other nations could have prevented the Holocaust? Why or why not?

**Critical Thinking**

- Analyzing** What are some factors that attempt to explain the Holocaust?
- Organizing** Use a graphic organizer similar to the one below to list the methods used to try to exterminate Europe's Jewish population.

**Analyzing Visuals**

- Analyzing Photographs** Study the photographs of the Final Solution on pages 597–599. How do the photographs show the systematic destruction of Jewish life?

**Writing About History**

- Descriptive Writing** Take on the role of a person living in Germany during *Kristallnacht*. Write a diary entry describing the events of that night. Include a description of events during the days following *Kristallnacht* as well.