

The Holocaust

BACKGROUND

The War Within the War

On January 30, 1939, Hitler made a vicious attack on the Jews. He declared to the *Reichstag* that if Europe was dragged into another war, it would be the fault of the Jews. Hitler then promised the extermination of the Jews in Europe if war broke out.

When World War II began a few months later, Nazi persecution of the Jews, in Germany and in each conquered territory, increased dramatically. Earlier policies, which had encouraged emigration of Jews, were replaced by more restrictive measures after Germany invaded Poland. Beginning in the autumn of 1939, Jews were rounded up and forced to live in ghettos—specially designated areas of towns and cities. These ghettos, some of which pre-dated the Nazi period, were often surrounded by walls and Jews required special passes to enter or leave. Supplies of food and services were steadily reduced. Many Jews smuggled in food to keep their families alive. A great number died from diseases caused by overcrowding and starvation. Those who tried to escape or resist were brutally punished or murdered.

All Jews under German rule or occupation were steadily stripped of their rights. Any Jew over the age of six was forced to wear the yellow star of David. Soon the star had to be displayed on all Jewish houses. Jews were not allowed to have radio sets or own pets, nor were they al-

lowed to leave their houses without special permission or to use public transportation. They had to relinquish all available clothing, and Jewish children were not allowed to attend school.

After the conquest of western Europe and the invasion of the Soviet Union, Hitler and other Nazi leaders decided on a program of genocide in order to exterminate all Jews. On July 31, 1941, Göring ordered Heydrich to prepare for the "Final Solution" of the Jewish question. Heydrich declared that all frontiers were closed to the Jews.

Death squads known as Death's-Head Units (*Totenkopfverbände*), wearing the skull-and-crossbones badge, rounded up Jewish men, women, and children, and marched them to execution sites where they were forced to dig their own graves. Stripped of their clothing and valuables, they were then lined up in front of the mass grave and shot. Nearly two million people were killed in this manner.

Despite the number of executions, Nazi leaders considered this method too slow and a waste of valuable bullets. On September 23, 1941, the first experiments with gassing were carried out at Auschwitz. Gas chambers disguised as showers were capable of killing up to 6 000 people a day. Crematoria were built to burn the bodies of the victims.

With several death camps in place, the deportation of German Jews began on October 14, 1941. The Nazis started eliminating the ghettos. S.S. troops entered the ghettos to round up the Jews for transportation to the camps. Some Jewish leaders on the ghetto councils cooperated with the Nazis in the mistaken hope of easing the plight of their people or of saving themselves and their families.

The final deportation of Jews from the Warsaw ghetto, 1943.

Mass execution of Polish Jews, location unknown.



To get the Jews to leave peacefully, the Nazis told the ghetto-dwellers that they were being relocated to farms in eastern Europe. People were packed into freight cars like animals. They sometimes stood for two or three days, and many died even before they arrived at the camps. When they were unloaded from the trains, they were immediately divided up into groups. The very young, old, and weak were sent directly to the death camps to be murdered. Those who were still strong enough to work were sent to slave-labour camps (concentration camps) and forced to work for the German war effort. Undernourished and brutalized, few of these slaves survived the conditions for more than three months. The

Children being transported to death camps.



moment anyone became incapable of working, he or she was immediately transferred to one of the death camps.

When news of the atrocities of the death camps reached the ghettos, some Jews revolted against their Nazi oppressors. They fought S.S. tanks and machine guns with home-made bombs, bricks, and bare hands. The biggest uprising occurred in 1943 when Jewish fighters in the Warsaw ghetto held off crack German troops for several weeks against impossible odds. On August 2, 1943, a few Jewish prisoners staged a revolt at the Treblinka death camp, killing S.S. guards and destroying the compound.

Some Jews succeeded in escaping the ghettos and camps to join the underground resistance or partisan groups. Hiding in the forests and countryside, they organized guerrilla attacks against Nazi posts, trains, and supply lines. Some partisan groups refused to admit Jews into their ranks and, in a few cases, betrayed them to the Nazis.

The Allies landed in France in June 1944. In the autumn of 1944, Himmler suspended the extermination of Jews and instructed that they be used temporarily *only* as slaves. On November 24, Himmler ordered the destruction of Auschwitz, the largest death camp.

Dachau, 1945. Piled up against the walls of the crematorium, these corpses were amongst the hundreds awaiting incineration when the U.S. Seventh Army entered the camp.



Approximately 67% of the Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe were murdered. Although the Jews were the main target of the Nazi extermination policy, they were not the only victims. Ten million Slavs, including Poles, Ukrainians, and Russians, were shot, starved, or worked to death. Other groups—gypsies, homosexuals, communists, blacks, and political dissidents—were considered undesirable and inferior and were murdered on a massive scale. Tragically, many people who survived the camps died of disease, hunger, and exhaustion after liberation.

Questions

THE WAR WITHIN THE WAR

1. How did the Nazis treat the Jews once World War II began?
2. Why did the Nazis build death camps?
3. What often determined whether or not Jews would be murdered immediately?
4. What forms of resistance did the Jews use to fight the Nazis?
5. What other groups of people were murdered on a massive scale by the Nazis?

DOCUMENTS

What Nazi Beliefs Led to the "Final Solution"?

"Out with them [the Jews] from all the professions and into the ghettos with them! Fence them in somewhere where they can finish as they deserve while the German people look on, the way people stare at wild animals."—Hitler

from *Hitler: A Study in Personality and Politics* (W. Carr)

ON THE "FINAL SOLUTION"

At the end of February, 1942, shortly after the Wannsee conference at which the "final solution" was ordained, he declared to his table companions: "The discovery of the Jewish virus is one of the greatest revolutions which has been undertaken in the world. The struggle we are waging is of the same kind as, in the past century, that of Pasteur and Koch. How many diseases can be traced back to the Jewish virus! We shall regain our health only when we exterminate the Jews." [Hitler insisted] he had recognized his true mission, his "cyclopean task."

from *Hitler* (J.C. Fest)

[Hitler] told Croatian Foreign Minister Kvaternik on July 21, 1941[:] "If the Jews were given their way, as they are in the Soviet paradise, they would carry out the maddest plans. That is how Russia has become a plague center for humanity. . . . If only one country for whatever reason tolerates a Jewish family in it, that family will become the germ center for fresh sedition. If there were no longer any Jews in Europe, the unity of the countries of Europe would no longer be disturbed."

from *Hitler* (J.C. Fest)

In any case, whenever the decision for the final solution was made, it had nothing to do with the deteriorating military situation. It would be a crude misunderstanding of Hitler's fundamental intentions to represent the massacre in the East as the expression of growing bitterness at the development of the war, as an act of revenge upon the ancient symbolic enemy. Rather, that act was fully consistent with Hitler's thinking and was, given his premises, absolutely inevitable. On the other hand, the plan, temporarily considered in the Race and Settlement Bureau of the S.S. and in the Foreign Office as well, to establish the Island of Madagascar as a kind of great ghetto

for some 15 million Jews, negated Hitler's intention on a crucial point. For if Jewry really was, as he had repeatedly stated and written, the infectious agent of the great world disease, then to his apocalyptic mind there could be no thought of providing a homeland for that agent, no course but to destroy its biological substance.

As early as the end of 1939 the first deportations to the ghettos of the Government General (Poland) began. But Hitler's specific decision for mass extermination apparently was made during the period of active preparation for the Russian campaign. The speech of March 31, 1941, which informed a sizeable group of higher-ranking officers about Himmler's "special tasks" in the rear area, represents the first concrete reference to plans for mass killings. . . . Finally, on July 31, 1941, Göring issued to SD Chief Reinhard Heydrich the directive concerning the "desired final solution of the Jewish question."

from *Hitler* (J.C. Fest)

. . . [To] Heydrich by Goering, acting on Hitler's behalf. It was dated July 31st, 1941:

Supplementing the task that was assigned to you on January 24th, 1939, to solve the Jewish problem by means of emigration and evacuation in the best possible way according to present conditions, I herewith instruct you to make all necessary preparations as regards organizational, financial and material matters for a total solution of the Jewish question within the area of German influence in Europe. . . . I instruct you further to submit to me as soon as possible a general plan showing the measures for organization and for action necessary to carry out the desired final solution of the Jewish question.

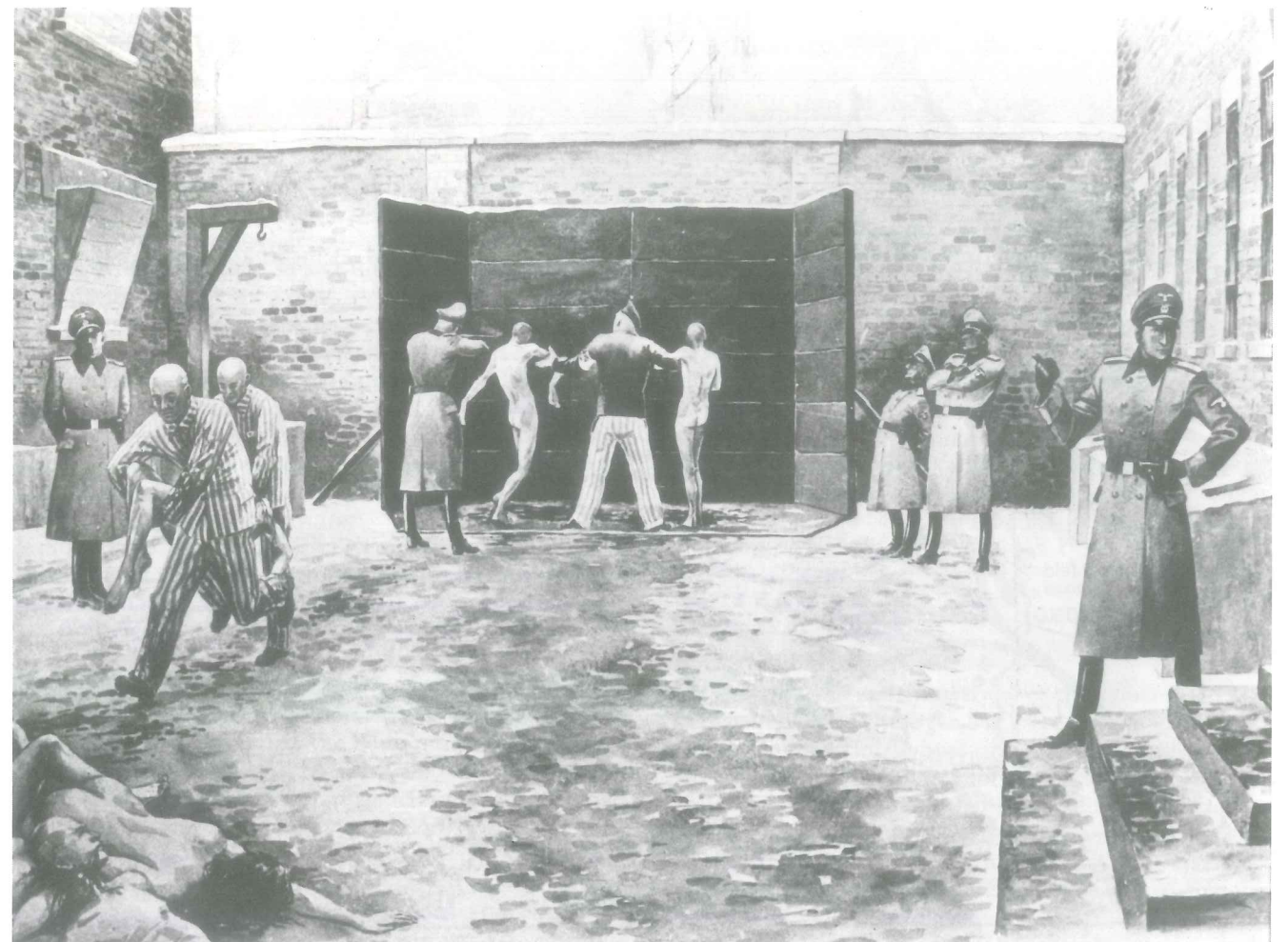
The orders for genocide were normally expressed in ambiguous terms, such as "final solution."

Parallel with this order, indeed integrated with it, was the meeting in Berlin to which Himmler summoned Rudolf Hoess, commandant of Auschwitz concentration camp near Cracow in the Government-General. Speaking as a witness at the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg in April, 1946, Hoess said of Himmler:

He told me . . . that the Führer had given the order for a definite solution of the Jewish question. We, the SS, were to carry out that order. . . . We had chosen Auschwitz because of the easy access by rail and also because the extensive site could readily be isolated. . . . About 20 000 acres of the surrounding country had been cleared of all inhabitants. . . . The actual compound called Birkenau, where later on the

A painting by a former inmate of Auschwitz that shows an execution scene supervised by the most feared camp officials. The inmates who carried the corpses and ran the crematoria were

called the Sonderkommando. In return for doing the most wretched of all jobs, these men were "promised" their lives and better rations.



extermination camp was constructed, was situated two kilometres from the Auschwitz camp.

Hoess claimed that he personally was responsible as commandant for the deaths of some two million prisoners. He showed no sign of remorse, he had been obeying valid orders.

from *Adolf Hitler: The Man and the Myth* (R. Manvell and H. Fraenkel)

Assignment 20

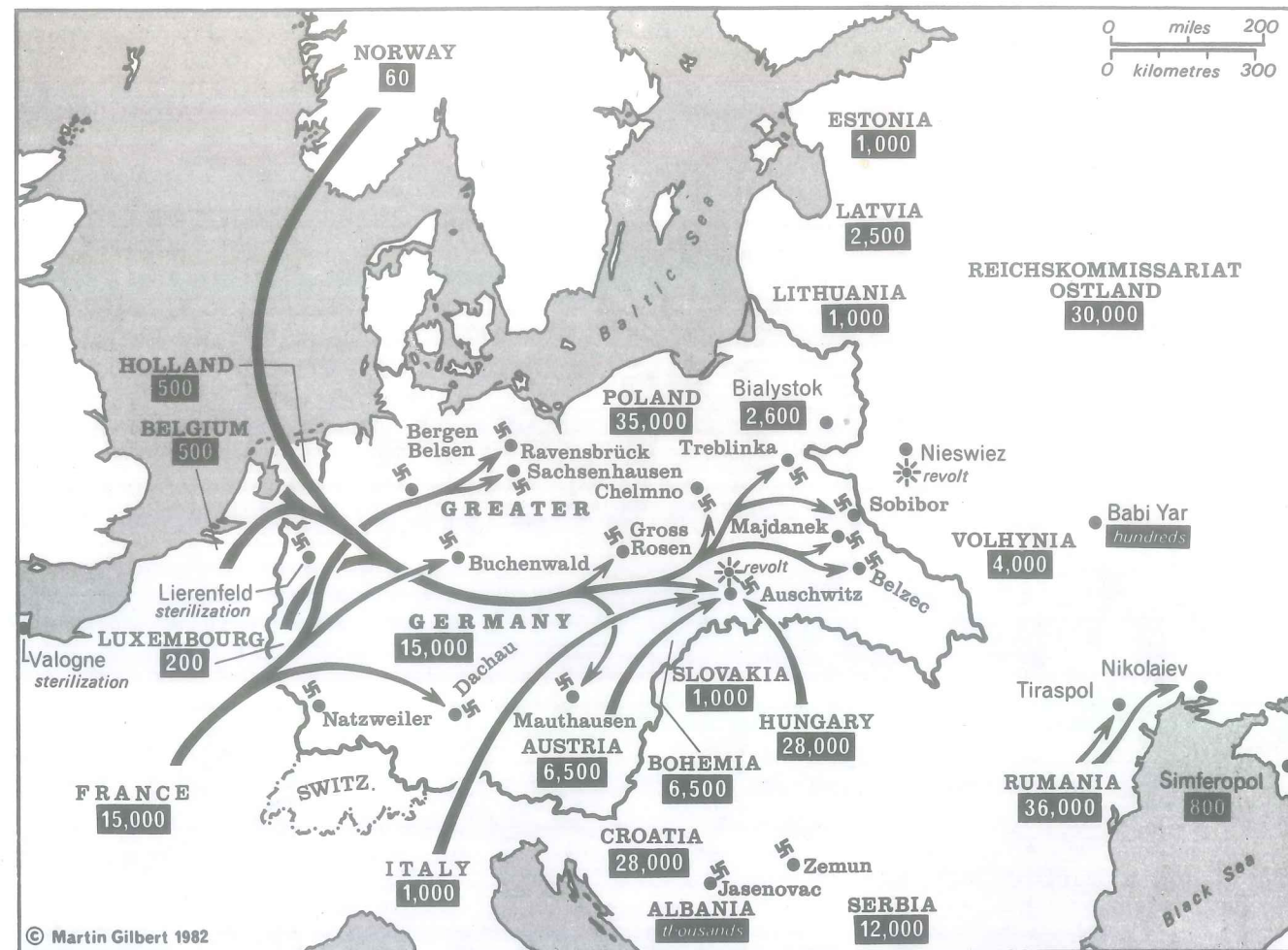


Keeping a Record

In your journal, record some of the reasons Hitler and Nazi leaders gave to "justify" the "Final Solution"—the extermination of the Jews.

How Was the "Final Solution" Implemented?

The basic factor in the Ghetto's lack of preparation for armed resistance was psychological; we did not at first believe the Resettlement Operation to be what in fact it was, systematic slaughter of the entire Jewish population. For generations, East European Jews had looked to Berlin as the symbol of law, order, and culture. We could not now believe that the Third Reich was a government of gangsters embarked on a program of genocide "to solve the Jewish problem in Europe." We fell victim to our faith in mankind, our belief that humanity had set limits to the degradation and persecution of one's fellow man. This mentality underlay the behavior of the Jewish leadership at the very beginning of the Resettlement, when the overwhelming majority voted against armed resistance.



Some felt we ought to wait for a joint rising with the Poles. Others were resigned to sacrificing 70 000 Jews rather than jeopardizing the entire community of 400 000—the Nazi policy of collective responsibility was very much alive in our memories. Still others were religious Jews, committed to the tradition of *Kidush Hashem*: that is, a martyr's death in the name of God.

from *The Holocaust Kingdom* (Alexander Donat)

TWO STORIES OF RESISTANCE: CHOICELESS CHOICE

I saw a young mother run downstairs into the street to get milk for her baby. Her husband, who worked at the *Ostbahn*, had as usual left earlier that morning. She had not bothered to dress, but was in bathrobe and slippers. An empty milk bottle in hand, she was headed for a shop where, she knew, they sold milk under the counter. She walked into Operation Rein-

hard. The executioners demanded her *Ausweis*.

"Upstairs . . . *Ostbahn* . . . work certificate. I'll bring it right away."

"We've heard that one before. Have you got an *Ausweis* with you, or haven't you?"

She was dragged protesting to the wagon, scarcely able to realize what was happening. "But my baby is all alone. Milk . . ." she protested. "My *Ausweis* is upstairs." Then, for the first time, she really looked at the men who were holding her and she saw where she was being dragged: to the gaping entrance at the back of a high boarded wagon with victims already jammed into it. With all her young mother's strength, she wrenched herself free, and then two, and four policemen fell on her, hitting her, smashing her to the ground, picking her up again, and tossing her into the wagon like a sack. I can still hear her screaming in a half-crazed voice somewhere between a sob of utter human despair and the howl of an animal.

from *The Holocaust Kingdom* (Alexander Donat)

I cannot count the times I was called a "dirty Jew" while strolling down Main Street, Hungary. Sneaky whispers: "Dirty Jews." No, "Smelly Jews"—that's what I heard even more often. Antisemitism, ever since I can remember, was the crude reality. It was always present in the fabric of life. . . .

They really hate us, I would think. It certainly felt that way. You couldn't hide from it. You couldn't run from it. It was everywhere. It was thinly veiled, when it was veiled at all. It was just under the skin. It was hard to live with.

You, my former neighbors, I cannot live with you again. You could have thrown a morsel of sadness our way while we were dragging ourselves down Main Street. But you didn't. Why?

Please take me away from here. I don't know these people. I don't ever want to know them. I can't detect the difference between them and the SS, so I'll go with the SS.

Soon we are packed into the cattle cars . . . cars with barred windows, with planks of wood on the bars, so that no air can enter or escape . . . 75 to a car . . . no toilets . . . no doctors . . . no medication.

It is Sunday, May 28, my birthday, and I am celebrating, packing for the big journey, mumbling to myself with bitter laughter—tomorrow is deportation. The laughter is too bitter, the body too tired, the soul trying to still the infinite rage. My skull seems to be ripping apart, trying to organize, to comprehend what cannot be comprehended. Deportation? What is it like?

A youthful SS man, with the authority, might, and terror of the whole German army in his voice, has just informed us that we are to rise at 4 a.m. sharp for the journey. Anyone not up at 4 a.m. will get a *Kugel* (bullet).

A bullet simply for not getting up? What is happening here? The ghetto suddenly seems beautiful. I want to celebrate my birthday for all the days to come in this heaven. God, please let us stay here. Show us you are merciful. If my senses are accurate, this is the last paradise we will ever know. Please let us stay in this heavenly hell forever. Amen. We want nothing—nothing, just to stay in the ghetto. We are not crowded, we are not hungry, we are not miserable, we are happy. Dear ghetto, we love you; don't let us leave. We were wrong to complain, we never meant it.

We're tightly packed in the ghetto, but that must be a fine way to live in comparison to deportation. Did God take leave of his senses? Something terrible is coming. Or is it only me? Am I mad? There are seven of us in nine feet of space. Let them put fourteen together, twenty-eight. We will sleep on top of each other. We will get up at 3 a.m.—not 4—stand in line for ten hours. Anything. Anything. Just let our family stay together. Together we will endure death. Even life.

from *Fragments of Isabella: A Memoir of Auschwitz* (Isabella Leitner)

HOW THE JEWS WERE DECEIVED

" . . . To disarm the [Warsaw] ghetto's panic, the Germans on July 24, 1942, directed the Judenrat to issue a notice: 'In view of the false information circulating in the Jewish quarter in Warsaw in connection with the resettlement, the Judenrat in Warsaw has been empowered by the authorities to announce that the resettlement of the non-productive population in the Jewish quarter actually will take place in the Eastern territories.'

"Thereafter, rounding up the required contingent of 6 000 Jews daily became routinized. SS formations patrolled the ghetto, shooting at random.

"When enough Jews had been assembled to load the trains, they were herded through an inspection team of two or more SS officers at the entry to the second square. A few hundred fit-looking men were separated and sent to transit labor camps. The rest, under the brutal goad of the Jewish police, were pushed into the waiting freight cars. . . ."—Lucy S. Dawidowicz, "How the Jews Were Deceived"

from *Keeping Posted* (February 1976)

MASS EXECUTIONS

"Witness: . . . We were told to leave the houses—to take with us only the children. We were always used to leaving the ghetto at short order, because very often they would take us all out for a roll-call. Then we would all appear. But we felt and realized that this was not an ordinary roll-call, but something very special. As if the Angel of Death was in charge. The place was swarming with Germans. Some four [or] five Germans to every Jew.

Attorney-General: Then all of you were driven out, and taken to this square, weren't you?

Witness: No, we were left standing in the ghetto. They began saying that he who wishes to save his life could do so with money, jewels and valuable things. This would be ransom, and he would be spared. Thus we were held until the late afternoon, before evening came.

Presiding Judge: And did the Jews hand over jewels and so on?

Witness: We did not. We had nothing to hand over. They already took all we had before.

Presiding Judge: I see.

Attorney-General: Yes. And what happened towards sunrise?

Witness: And thus the children screamed. They wanted food, water. This was not the first time. But we took nothing with us. We had no food and no water, and we did not know the reason. The children were hungry and thirsty. We were held this way for twenty-four hours while they were searching the houses all the time—searching for valuables.

In the meantime, the gates of the ghetto were opened. A large truck appeared and all of us were put on the truck—either thrown, or went up himself.

Attorney-General: Did they count the Jews?

Witness: Yes, they were counted. They entered the ghetto again, and searched for every missing person. We were tortured until late in the evening.

Attorney-General: Now, they filled up this truck. And what happened to the people for whom there was no room in the truck?

Witness: Those for whom there was no room in the truck were ordered to run after the truck.

Attorney-General: And you ran with your daughter?

Witness: I had my daughter in my arms and ran after the truck. There were mothers who had two or three children and held them in their arms running after the truck. We ran all the way. There were those who fell—we were not allowed to help them rise. They were shot—right there—wherever they fell.

When we reached the destination, the people from the truck were already down and they were undressed—all lined up. All my family was there—undressed, lined up. The people from the truck, those who arrived before us. . . .

There was a kind of hillock. At the foot of this little hill, there was a dugout. We were ordered to stand at the top of the hillock and the four devils shot us—each one of us separately.

Attorney-General: Now these four—to what German unit did they belong?

Witness: They were SS men—the four of them. They were armed to the teeth. They were real messengers of the Devil and the Angel of Death.

Attorney-General: Please go on—what did you see?

Witness: When I came up to the place—we saw people, naked, lined up. But we were still hoping that this was only torture. Maybe there is hope—hope of living. One could not leave the line, but I wished to see—what are they doing on the hillock? Is there anyone down below? I turned my head and saw that some three or four rows were already killed—on the ground. There were some twelve people among the dead. I also want to mention what my child said when we were lined up in the ghetto, she said: 'Mother, why did you make me wear the Shabbat dress; we are being taken to be shot'; and when we stood near the dug-out, near the grave, she said, 'Mother why are we waiting, let us run!' Some of the young people tried to run, but they were caught immediately, and they were shot right there. It was difficult to hold on to the children. We all took children not ours, and we carried them—we were anxious to get it all over—the suffering of the children was difficult; we all trudged along to come nearer to the place and to come nearer

to the end of the torture of the children. The children were taking leave of their parents and parents of their elder people.

Presiding Judge: How did you survive through all of this?

Attorney-General: She will relate it.

Presiding Judge: Please will you direct the Witness.

Witness: We were driven: we were already undressed; the clothes were removed and taken away; our father did not want to undress; he remained in his underwear. We were driven up to the grave, this shallow. . . .

Attorney-General: And these garments were torn off his body, weren't they?

Witness: When it came to our turn, our father was beaten. We prayed, we begged with my father to undress, but he would not undress, he wanted to keep his underclothes. He did not want to stand naked.

Attorney-General: And then they tore them off?

Witness: Then they tore . . . the clothing off the old man and he was shot. I saw it with my own eyes. And then they took my mother, and we said, let us go before her; but they caught mother and shot her too; and then there was my grandmother, my father's mother, standing there; she was eighty years old and she had two children in her arms. And then there was my father's sister. She also had children in her arms and she was shot on the spot with the babies in her arms.

Attorney-General: And finally it was your turn.

Witness: And finally my turn came. There was my younger sister, and she wanted to leave; she prayed with the Germans; she asked to run, naked; she went up to the Germans with one of her friends; they were embracing each other; and she asked to be spared, standing there naked. He looked into her eyes and shot the two of them. They fell together in their embrace, the two young girls, my sister and her young friend. Then my second sister was shot and then my turn did come.

Attorney-General: Were you asked anything?

Witness: We turned towards the grave and then he turned around and asked: 'Whom shall I shoot first?' We were already facing the grave. The German asked: 'Whom do you want me to shoot first?' I did not answer. I felt him take the child from my arms. The child cried out and was shot immediately. And then he aimed at me. First he held on to my hair and turned my head around; I stayed standing. I heard a shot, but I continued to stand and then he turned my head again and he aimed the revolver at me and ordered me to watch and then he turned my head around and shot at me. Then I fell to the ground into the pit amongst the bodies; but I felt nothing. . . . I thought I

was dead, that this was the feeling which comes after death. Then I felt that I was choking; people falling over me. I tried to move and felt that I was alive and that I could rise. I was strangling. I heard the shots and was praying for another bullet to put an end to my suffering, but I continued to move about. I felt that I was choking, strangling, but I tried to save myself, to find some air to breathe, and then I felt that I was climbing towards the top of the grave above the bodies. I rose, and I felt bodies pulling at me with their hands, biting at my legs, pulling me down, down. And yet with my last strength I came up on top of the grave, and when I did, I did not know the place, so many bodies were lying all over, dead people; I wanted to see the end of this stretch of dead bodies but I could not. It was impossible. They were lying, all dying; suffering; not all of them dead, but in their last sufferings; naked; shot, but not dead. Children crying 'Mother,' 'Father'; I could not stand on my feet.

Presiding Judge: Were the Germans still around?

Witness: No, the Germans were gone. There was nobody there. No one was standing up."—Rivka Yosseelevska, "Arisen from the Grave"

from *Final Journey: The Fate of the Jews in Nazi Europe* (Martin Gilbert)

WORK-CAMPS

" . . . There was ultimately systematized not only mass murder on a scale never known before but [also] mass slavery on a level of bestial cruelty. This was a form of bondage in which the victim was forced to work for a carefully calculated period (usually no more than three months) and then, through methods of deprivation calculated with equal care, allowed to die.

"Slaving at the nearby factory of I.G. Farben or at the Farben coal mines (or at whatever camp maintenance work the SS were able to contrive), the thousands of inmates initially spared the gas chambers were doomed to a sick and starving death-in-life perhaps more terrible than quick extinction . . .

"Only in a situation where human bodies were endlessly replaceable could such a form of slavery attempt to be efficient—but the Nazis, who aspired to be among the century's leading efficiency experts, had no cause for concern on this count, supplied as they were with all the Jews of Europe, besides thousands of Poles, Russian prisoners of war, and others."—William Styron, "Hell Reconsidered"

from *The New York Review of Books* (June 28, 1978)

"Women in the Strafblock lived in strict isolation. . . . Their labor was the hardest. . . . In the evenings their hands were bloody, their fingers literally dripping with blood. The Strafblock had the roughest SS su-

The Nazis forced all Jews, such as this Berlin businessman, to wear the Star of David.



pervisors, beating the inmates at work with their fists or their whips. If a tortured woman lifted her arm to protect her face, she was accused that she had meant to hit her torturer. The SS supervisors had dogs that they sicked on women who did not work fast enough. Daily there were tragic scenes. One was witnessed by Marie Náchodská. When the Strafblock was detailed to clean out the swamps on a lakeshore, one girl fell face down into the mud. The supervisor placed her foot on the fallen girl and held her till she ceased to breathe. Such incidents were not exceptional. . . ."

Dagmar Hájková, "Middle Ages Nazi Style"

from *Women in the Resistance and Holocaust* (Vera Laska)

This Soviet Jew, like countless others in Nazi-occupied territories, had to perform any menial task assigned to her.



"A long Appell. We stand in our rows of fives for hours. Other blocks are also lined up, waiting. Finally the SS women come with their dogs and two male deathheads. They order the fallen bodies thrown on the cart collecting the corpses. One is still alive; it does not matter, the flames in the ovens do not discriminate. *Achtung!* Look snappy, stand at attention. The camps are overcrowded, and this is selection time. As the masters of life and death pass from row to row, we freeze, and the very fear straightens our sagging backs. The delegation of judges playing God is nearing my row. The SS Brunhilde points to a woman with gray stubs of hair and nudges her with a stick to the group of women already selected and standing aside. Everybody knows what is going on. They know that we know. Yet there is absolute silence. The SS men do not like disturbance and noise, they silence it with their revolvers. Fate is standing in front of me. I lift my chin and look at her. My brain tells me to smile confidently, and I feel like a moral prostitute for it. But before my face can obey or refuse my brain, she passes on to the next row, and the selection continues. Several hundred women are taken away to the gas chambers. Life, such as it is, goes on, where permitted to do so by supermen and superwomen.

"And the skies with their wandering clouds look on, going about their business as usual. Where are you

Gods invoked in all languages? Are you deaf? Only the grimy soot keeps falling on us like black snowflakes of mourning, memento mori, memento mori.

"Another day. An SS man enters the block. *Achtung.* We stand at attention. Slowly he unwraps the package under his arm, and starts tossing slices of bread high into the air, one to the right, one to the left. Women rush to catch the bread. A human zoo, and a spectator is amused by the animals. The women fight, they holler, they scratch, they elbow their way through the twisted masses of arms and legs, they roll on the floor in search of the food. The SS man is enjoying the game. He is standing with his legs apart, his head thrown back, and his hearty laugh is heard over the din of the desperate, starving packs of women. After a while he rolls the empty paper into a ball and tosses it in the face of the *Blockälteste*, a green triangle. She catches the ball, and they both exit laughing. Most of the bread ended up in crumbs on the floor. Some cover the motionless bodies trampled to death. The rats will again have a field day tonight."—Vera Laska, "Auschwitz: A Factual Deposition"

from *Women in the Resistance and Holocaust* (Vera Laska)

The following color-coding was established for the triangles worn below the prisoners' numbers:

yellow—Jews	purple—religious offenders
red—political	pink—homosexual
black—asocials	green—professional criminals

from *Women in the Resistance and Holocaust* (Vera Laska)

In addition to Auschwitz there existed, so far as I am aware, the following extermination centers for Jews:

Culenhof, new Litzmannstadt	Engine exhaust gases
Treblinka on the Bug	" " "
Sobibor near Lublin	" " "
Belzec near Lemberg	" " "
Lublin (Maidanek)	Cyclon B

from *Commandant of Auschwitz* (Rudolf Hoess)

DETAILS FROM A MASS EXECUTION BY THE EINSATZGRUPPEN

Without screaming or weeping these people undressed, stood around in family groups, kissed each other, said farewells and waited for a sign from another S.S. man, who stood near the pit, also with a whip in his hand. During the fifteen minutes that I stood near the pit I heard no complaint or plea for mercy. . . .

An old woman with snow-white hair was holding a one-year-old child in her arms and singing to it and tickling it. The child was cooing with delight. The parents were looking on with tears in their eyes. The

These remains of anti-Nazi women were found in the crematoria of a camp near Weimar, Germany by the U.S. Third Army.



father was holding the hand of a boy about 10 years old and speaking to him softly; the boy was fighting his tears. The father pointed to the sky, stroked his head and seemed to explain something to him.

The people, completely naked, went down some steps and clambered over the heads of the people lying there to the place to which the S.S. man directed them. They lay down in front of the dead or wounded people; some caressed those who were still alive and spoke to them in a low voice.

from *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (William L. Shirer)

The death marches at Auschwitz were sprightly and merry tunes, straight out of Viennese and Parisian operetta.

To such music, recalling as it did happier and more frivolous times, the men, women and children were led into the "bath houses," where they were told to undress preparatory to taking a "shower." Sometimes they were even given towels. Once they were inside the "shower-room"—and perhaps this was the first moment that they may have suspected something was amiss, for as many as two thousand of them were packed into the chamber like sardines, making it diffi-

cult to take a bath—the massive door was slid shut, locked and hermetically sealed. Up above where the well-groomed lawn and flower beds almost concealed the mushroom-shaped lids of vents that ran up from the hall of death, orderlies stood ready to drop into them the amethyst-blue crystals of hydrogen cyanide, or Zyklon B, which originally had been manufactured as a strong disinfectant and for which, as we have seen, Herr Hoess had with so much pride found a new use.

Surviving prisoners watching from blocks nearby remembered how for a time the signal for the orderlies to pour the crystals down the vents was given by a Sergeant Moll. "Na, gib ihnen schon zu fressen" ("All right, give 'em something to chew on"), he would laugh and the crystals would be poured through the openings, which were then sealed.

Through heavy-glass portholes the executioners could watch what happened. The naked prisoners below would be looking up at the showers from which no water spouted or perhaps at the floor wondering why there were no drains. It took some moments for the gas to have much effect. But soon the inmates became aware that it was issuing from the perforation

in the vents. It was then that they usually panicked, crowding away from the pipes and finally stampeding toward the huge metal door where, as Reitlinger puts it, "they piled up in one blue clammy blood-spattered pyramid, clawing and mauling each other even in death."

Twenty or thirty minutes later when the huge mass of naked flesh had ceased to writhe, pumps drew out the poisonous air, the large door was opened and the men of the *Sonderkommando* took over. These were Jewish male inmates who were promised their lives and adequate food in return for performing the most ghastly job of all. Protected with gas masks and rubber boots and wielding hoses they went to work. Reitlinger has described it.

"Their first task was to remove the blood and defecations before dragging the clawing dead apart with nooses and hooks, the prelude to the ghastly search for gold and the removal of teeth and hair which were regarded by the Germans as strategic materials. Then the journey by lift or rail-wagon to the furnaces, the mill that ground the clinker to fine ash, and the truck that scattered the ashes in the stream of the Sola."

from *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (William L. Shirer)

Prominent guests from Berlin were present at the inauguration of the first crematorium in March 1943. The "program" consisted of the gassing and burning of 8 000 Cracow Jews. The guests, both officers and civilians, were extremely satisfied with the results and the special peephole fitted into the door of the gas chamber was in constant use. They were lavish with their praise of the newly erected installation. . . .

from *Facing History and Ourselves* (Margot Strom and William Parsons)

All cash proceeds in German notes were to be deposited to the Reichsbank account of the SS . . . which managed the economic enterprises and administered the concentration camps. Foreign currency (specie or paper), precious metals, jewelry, precious or semi-precious stones, pearls, dental gold, and scrap gold were to be delivered to the WVHA [Economic and Administrative Main Office] for immediate transmittal to the Reichsbank. All timepieces, alarm clocks, fountain pens, mechanical pencils, hand- or electric-operated shavers, pocket knives, scissors, flashlights, wallets and purses were to be sent to the WVHA installation for cleaning and price estimation, and then forwarded, for sale, to the combat troops. Men's underwear, men's clothing, including footwear, were first to fill staff needs at the concentration camps and then to be sent, for sale, to the troops as an undertaking of the Ethnic German Welfare Office (VOMI). The proceeds were to go to the Reich. Women's clothing, underwear, and footwear and also children's clothing and

underwear were to go to the VOMI for cash. Pure silk underwear was assigned to the Ministry of Economy. Eiderdowns, quilts, blankets, dress materials, scarves, umbrellas, canes, thermos bottles, ear muffers, baby carriages, combs, handbags, leather belts, shopping bags, tobacco pipes . . . were to go to VOMI, with specific provisions for payment. Bed linens, sheets, pillow cases, handkerchiefs, washcloths, tablecloths were delivered to VOMI for cash. All kinds of eyeglasses and spectacles were assigned to the Public Health Office for sale. High class furs, dressed or undressed, were to be delivered to WVHA; cheaper fur goods (neck-pieces, hare and rabbit furs) were to be delivered to the Clothing Works of the Waffen-SS at Ravensbruck.

from *The War Against the Jews* (Lucy S. Dawidowicz)

THE MEDICAL EXPERIMENTS

There were some practices of the Germans during the short-lived New Order that resulted from sheer sadism rather than a lust for mass murder. Perhaps to a psychiatrist there is a difference between the two lusts though the end result of the first differed from the second only in the scale of deaths.

The Nazi medical experiments are an example of this sadism, for in the use of concentration camp inmates and prisoners of war as human guinea pigs very little, if any, benefit to science was achieved. It is a tale of horror of which the German medical profession cannot be proud. Although the "experiments" were conducted by fewer than two hundred murderous quacks—albeit some of them held eminent posts in the medical world—their criminal work was known to thousands of leading physicians of the Reich, not a single one of whom, so far as the record shows, ever uttered the slightest public protest.

In the murders in this field the Jews were not the only victims. The Nazi doctors also used Russian prisoners of war, Polish concentration camp inmates, women as well as men, and even Germans. The "experiments" were quite varied. Prisoners were placed in pressure chambers and subjected to high-altitude tests until they ceased breathing. They were injected with lethal doses of typhus and jaundice. They were subjected to "freezing" experiments in icy water or exposed naked in the snow outdoors until they froze to death. Poison bullets were tried out on them as was mustard gas. At the Ravensbruck concentration camp for women hundreds of Polish inmates—the "rabbit girls" they were called—were given gas gangrene wounds while others were subjected to "experiments" in bone grafting. At Dachau and Buchenwald gypsies were selected to see how long, and in what manner, they could live on salt wa-

Mrs. Faye Schulman (third from right, reclining) and her fellow partisans who fought the Nazis on the Polish-Russian border. Mrs. Schulman survived the wholesale extermination of her

hometown. It was fortunate for her that very few in the group knew that she was Jewish because many partisans were themselves anti-Semitic.



ter. Sterilization experiments were carried out on a large scale at several camps by a variety of means on both men and women; for, as an S.S. physician, Dr. Adolf Pokorny, wrote Himmler on one occasion, "the enemy must be not only conquered but exterminated."

from *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (William L. Shirer)

Assignment 21



Keeping a Record

Try to depict the sufferings of the Jewish people in the ghettos, on their journeys to the death camps, and in the death camps themselves. You might describe these ordeals not only in words but also through photographs or dramatic sketches.

How Did the Jews Resist the Nazis?

"Among the thousands of poignant chapters in the Holocaust, there is one in particular to which a woman added a heroic finale in Auschwitz.

" . . . Then they were told that they were being sent to Switzerland to be exchanged as Americans for German prisoners of war. The train, however, delivered them to the gas chambers of Auschwitz, together with Horowitzová. When she was ordered by SS man Josef Schillinger to remove also her brassiere before entering the 'shower,' she whipped off her garment and startled him by hitting him with it in his eyes. While he was blinded by pain, she grabbed his revolver and shot him and another guard. Some SS men fled the scene, but others with pistols drawn ordered the *Sonderkommando* to herd the 'Americans' into the gas chamber."—Vera Laska, "Auschwitz: A Factual Deposition"

from *Women in the Resistance and Holocaust* (Vera Laska)

"... We—the besieged in the Ghetto—send you heartfelt brotherly greetings.

"Every threshold in the Ghetto has been and will remain a fortress. . . . At the cost of our lives, we shall not surrender. Along with you, we aim to punish our common foe for all the crimes. . . . This is a struggle for our common freedom, for common human and social dignity and honor!

"We shall avenge the crimes committed in Auschwitz, Treblinka, Belzhetz and Maidanek!

"Long live liberty. . . . Long live the moral struggle against the occupier!"—Hyman Bass, "A Day of Remembrance" from *The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*

THE WARSAW GHETTO UPRISING

In April of that year [1943] the Germans laid plans to clear out the ghetto totally. S.S. General Juergen Stroop was given the following forces under his command:

- SS armored grenadiers (tanks)—about 1 000
- SS cavalry—about 1 000
- Ordnungspolizei (regular Police)—about 500
- Sicherheitsdienst (security service police)—about 100
- Guardsmen from the Trawniki concentration camp—about 100
- Regular Armed forces (Wehrmacht):
 - One 10-cm howitzer
 - One flame-thrower
 - Sappers (engineers)—about 50
 - Sanitary groups—about 20
 - Three 2.28-cm anti-aircraft artillery
 - One armored vehicle of Waffen-SS
 - Two tanks of Waffen-SS

Against this massive array of armaments and men the Jews stood only with some handguns, machine-guns, and Molotov cocktails. Besides the ZOB [Jewish Fighting Organization], there were a few other small organizations geared to resistance—some of them including women and children.

The last phase of the armed struggle started on April 19, 1943. It was Passover. The battles had the appearance of a regular war, including daily bulletins by the two warring sides.

Units of the SS and German police with armored cars re-entered the ghetto on April 19th. The invaders were met with Molotov cocktails and gunfire. The Germans retreated after a number of their men had been killed, 24 wounded and two armored vehicles disabled. There was rejoicing among the Jewish fighters, whose communique stated, "Those German heroes retreated, afraid and terrorized by Jewish home-made bombs and hand grenades."

Indeed, the Jewish resistance stunned the Germans. However, the Nazis rolled out even more overwhelming artillery and systematically burned out most of the buildings. Thousands of women and children were incinerated within these habitations. Despite this, the Figlibers continued resisting mainly in the form of guerrilla warfare. Over 56 000 perished. An indeterminate number succeeded in escaping to the "Aryan side."

from *The Warsaw Ghetto Commemorative Journal*

The ghetto Councils, faced with the choice—to resist or not to resist—did not act on a rigid pattern. There were variations, but the end remained the same. In Vilna, the Judenrat did whatever the Germans asked. . . . In Kovno, while the Council seemed to be carrying out Nazi orders, its leader worked secretly with the resistance, and the Jewish police chief doubled as a resistance leader. In Lvov, two Council heads refused to collaborate with the Nazis.

from *Never To Forget: The Jews of the Holocaust* (Milton Meltzer)

Then, in the summer of 1943, a small group of Jewish prisoners planned and led an armed rebellion, killing the SS guards and destroying the compound. . . .

Some time after the revolt the camp at Treblinka was razed and the land plowed. All the documents were destroyed. Only 40 men and women of the 600 who managed to escape during the revolt were alive on V-E Day.

from *In Everlasting Remembrance* (American Jewish Congress)

To Arms! The Proclamation of the Rebels in the Ghetto of Vilna

Jews, defend yourselves with arms!

The German and Lithuanian hangmen have approached the gates of the Ghetto. They have come to murder us! Soon they will be leading us in droves through the gates.

Thus hundreds were led away on Yom Kippur!

Thus were led away our brothers and sisters, our mothers and fathers, our children.

Thus tens of thousands were led to their death! But we shall not go!

We will not stretch out our necks to the slaughterer like sheep!

Jews, defend yourselves with arms!

Do not believe the lying promises of the murderers. Do not believe the words of traitors. Whoever leaves the Ghetto is sent to Fonar [a Vilna suburb where Jews were murdered in tens of thousands].

Fonar means Death!

Jews, we have nothing to lose; sooner or later we shall be killed. Who can believe that he will survive when the fiends are exterminating us with calculated efficiency? The hands of the executioner will ultimately reach everyone; escape and cowardice will save no one.

Only armed resistance can possibly save our lives and our honor.

Brothers, it is better to die in the battle of the Ghetto than to be led away like sheep to Fonar! Lest you forget—there is an organized Jewish fighting force which will rebel with arms.

Help the rebellion!

Do not hide in hideaways and shelters. In the end you will be caught like rats in the traps of the murderers.

...

from *Flame and Fury* (Sara Feinstein)

JEWISH RESISTANCE THWARTED

When some 3 000 of Tuczyn's 6 000 Jews fled to the forests nearby, their Ukrainian neighbors turned in between one-third and one-half of them within a few days. Most of the rest were killed by the Ukrainians themselves, and some were caught by the Germans; exactly 15 survived. Similarly, Don Ben-Yakov, a former partisan who now lives in Israel, reports that of the ghetto fighters who escaped from his one-time home of Czestochowa in Poland, most were murdered by Polish partisans.

from *They Chose Life* (Yehuda Bauer)

DANISH DEMOCRACY AND RESISTANCE

In October 1943, the Nazis decided to round up Denmark's eight thousand Jews for shipment to the death camps. The entire country acted as an underground movement to ferry the eight thousand to Sweden. It was one of the few times that Eichmann had been frustrated. He visited Copenhagen in a rage—but to no avail. The Jews were saved. . . .

It was only in Denmark that almost everyone, from king to fisherman, took an active role in rescuing the Jews. It was only in Denmark that after World War II over 98.5 percent of the Jews were still alive.

One important factor is Denmark's geographical proximity to neutral Sweden and the fact that after 1943 Sweden was willing to accept all refugees who reached her shores. The Danes at least had a refuge to which they could send their Jews. . . .

Luck too played its part. The Danes were fortunate in that the German head of shipping operations in Copenhagen, Duckwitz, was so opposed to the Nazi persecution of the Jews that he was willing to risk his life by revealing to the Danes secret information about the preparations for the raid. . . .

For many Danes, the rescue of the Jews was primarily an act of protest against the German occupation. . . . For many of the younger Danes, love of adventure was often the initial motivation. . . . Danish youths had little notion of the brutality with which the Germans carried out their reprisals. . . .

Leadership was certainly an important factor. The king, church leaders, the heads of the medical profession, student groups and business organizations set examples which inspired others to emulate their stubborn resistance.

. . . Many Christian Danes had close Jewish relatives, and rare was the Danish Jew without a Christian member of the family to whom he could turn in distress. And if there were no relatives, there were almost always close friends. The Danish Jews were never forced to keep to themselves, and never voluntarily kept to themselves.

All of these factors played their part, but they do not answer the key question of why the entire Danish population acted spontaneously to help.

That answer is to be found in the Danish tradition of democracy. . . .

All of these things undoubtedly went into the shaping of the modern Dane, giving him confidence, belief in his own worth and a sense of responsibility toward his fellow countrymen.

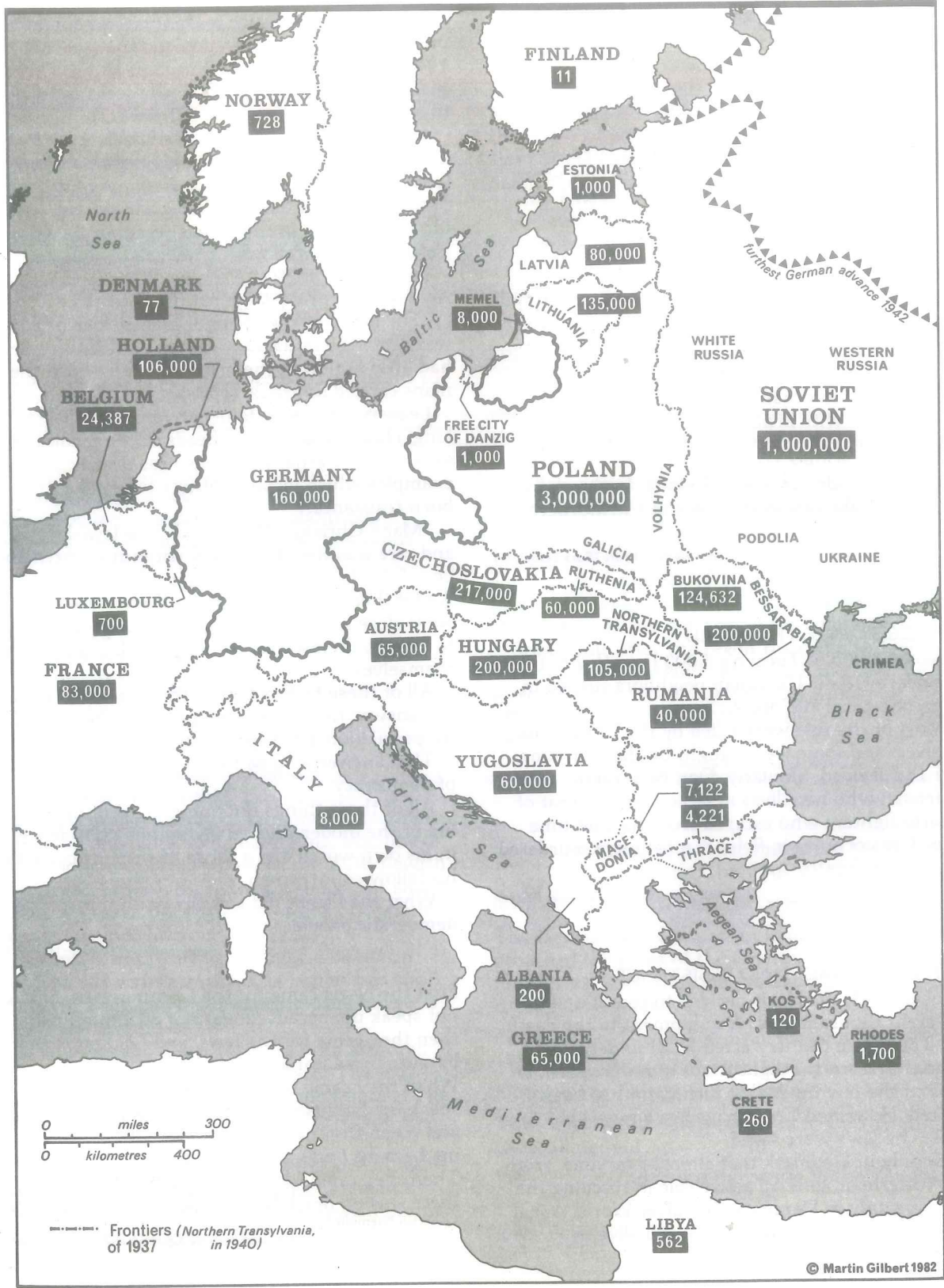
What the Danes did was the natural response of a democratic people.

from *Rescue in Denmark* (Harold Flender)

First the Nazis came for the Communists, and I did not speak up, because I was not a Communist; then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak up, because I was not a Jew. When they came for the trade-unionists, I did not speak up, because I was not a trade-unionist; and when they came for the Catholics, I did not speak up, because I was a Protestant. Then they came for me, and by that time there was no one left to speak up for anyone.—Pastor Martin Niemöller

from *Women in the Resistance and Holocaust* (Vera Laska)

Jews murdered between September 1, 1939 and May 8, 1945:
an estimate.



Estimated Number of Jews Killed in the Final Solution

Country	Estimated Jewish Population Pre-Final Solution	Estimated Jewish Population Annihilated	
		Number	Percent
Poland	3 300 000	3 000 000	90
Baltic Countries	253 000	228 000	90
Germany/Austria	240 000	210 000	90
Bohemia/Moravia	90 000	80 000	89
Slovakia	90 000	75 000	83
Greece	70 000	54 000	77
The Netherlands	140 000	105 000	75
Hungary	650 000	450 000	70
SSR White Russia	375 000	245 000	65
SSR Ukraine*	1 500 000	900 000	60
Belgium	65 000	40 000	60
Yugoslavia	43 000	26 000	60
Rumania	600 000	300 000	50
Norway	1 800	900	50
France	350 000	90 000	26
Bulgaria	64 000	14 000	22
Italy	40 000	8 000	20
Luxembourg	5 000	1 000	20
Russia (RSFSR)*	975 000	107 000	11
Denmark	8 000	—	—
Finland	2 000	—	—
Total		8 861 800	5 933 900 67

*The Germans did not occupy all the territory of this republic.

Total Numbers of Those Killed

Group	Approximate Number Killed
Jews	5 933 900
Slavs	10 - 11 000 000
including:	
Polish Christians	3 000 000
Ukrainians	4 600 000
Belorussians	2 300 000
Russian prisoners of war	3 000 000
Gypsies	500 000
Homosexuals	500 000

Large numbers of political opponents, religious opponents, and German criminals were also eliminated, but estimates are too vague for inclusion in this table.

from Facing History and Ourselves (Margot Strom and William Parsons)

Assignment 22



Keeping a Record

In your journal describe the different ways the Jews resisted their Nazi murderers.