

COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST

Source: Simon Wiesenthal Center – Museum of Tolerance:

<http://motlc.wiesenthal.com/site/pp.asp?c=gvKVLcMVIuG&b=394663>

1. Which Jewish communities suffered losses during the Holocaust?

Answer: Every Jewish community in occupied Europe suffered losses during the Holocaust.

2. How many Jews were murdered in each country and what percentage of the pre-war Jewish population did they constitute?

Answer: (Source: Encyclopedia of the Holocaust)

Austria 50,000 -- 27.0%
Italy 7,680 -- 17.3%
Belgium 28,900 -- 44.0%
Latvia 71,500 -- 78.1%
Bohemia/Moravia 78,150 -- 66.1%
Lithuania 143,000 -- 85.1%
Bulgaria 0 -- 0.0%
Luxembourg 1,950 -- 55.7%
Denmark 60 -- 0.7%
Netherlands 100,000 -- 71.4%
Estonia 2,000 -- 44.4%
Norway 762 -- 44.8%
Finland 7 -- 0.3%
Poland 3,000,000 -- 90.9%
France 77,320 -- 22.1%
Romania 287,000 -- 47.1%
Germany 141,500 -- 25.0%
Slovakia 71,000 -- 79.8%
Greece 67,000 -- 86.6%
Soviet Union 1,100,000 -- 36.4%
Hungary 569,000 -- 69.0%
Yugoslavia 63,300 -- 81.2%

3. What does the term "Final Solution" mean and what is its origin?

Answer: The term "Final Solution" (*Endlösung*) refers to Germany's plan to murder all the Jews of Europe. The term was used at the Wannsee Conference (Berlin; January 20, 1942) where German officials discussed its implementation.

4. When did the "Final Solution" actually begin?

Answer: Thousands of Jews were murdered by the Nazis or died as a direct result of persecution of Jews during the initial years of the Third Reich. The systematic murder of Jews did not begin until the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941.

5. How did the Germans define who was Jewish?

Answer: On November 14, 1935, the Nazis issued the following definition of a Jew: Anyone with three Jewish grandparents; someone with two Jewish grandparents who belonged to the Jewish community on September 15, 1935, or joined thereafter; was married to a Jew or Jewess on September 15, 1935, or married one thereafter; was the offspring of a marriage or extramarital liaison with a Jew on or after September 15, 1935.

6. Did the Nazis plan to murder the Jews from the beginning of their regime?

Answer: Hitler made several references to killing Jews in early writings and speeches but there was no plan until late winter or early spring of 1941 along with the plan to invade the Soviet Union.

7. What was the difference between the persecution of the Jews and the persecution of other groups classified by the Nazis as enemies of the Third Reich?

Answer: The Jews were the only group singled out for total systematic annihilation by the Nazis. However, in most situations the Nazis' enemies were classified as such because of their behavior, lifestyles or political affiliations. Jews were targeted because of their racial origin, which could never be changed.

8. Why were the Jews singled out for extermination?

Answer: It was thought that the goal of the Jews was world domination and to obstruct Aryan dominance. Nazis considered it their duty to eliminate the threat of Jews. In their eyes, the Jews' racial origin made them habitual criminals who could never be rehabilitated and were, therefore, hopelessly corrupt and inferior.

In addition there a centuries-old tradition of Christian Anti-Semitism propagated a negative stereotype of the Jew as a Christ-killer, agent of the devil, and practitioner of witchcraft. Significant Anti-Semitism in the latter half of the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries singled out the Jew as a threat to the established order of society including linking the Jews to Communism.

9. What did people in Germany know about the persecution of Jews and other enemies of Nazism?

Answer: Certain initial aspects of Nazi persecution were common knowledge in Germany including the Boycott of April 1, 1933, the Laws of April, the Nuremberg Laws. Anti-Jewish measures, such as *Kristallnacht* (The Night of the Broken Glass) were a public pogrom, openly carried out. The public knew general information on the concentration camps and the treatment of the inmates, but not details.

10. Did all Germans support Hitler's plan for the persecution of the Jews?

Answer: There was no large scale protest regarding the treatment of Jews, but there were small numbers of Germans who defied anti-Jewish policies and put themselves at risk.

11 Did the people of occupied Europe know about Nazi plans for the Jews? What was their attitude? Did they cooperate with the Nazis against the Jews?

Answer: In every occupied country with the exception of Denmark and Bulgaria, the Nazis found many locals who were willing to cooperate fully.

12. Did the Allies and the people in the Free World know about the events going on in Europe?

Answer: The various steps taken by the Nazis prior to the "Final Solution" were all taken publicly and were, therefore, reported in the press

13. What was the response of the Allies to the persecution of the Jews? Could they have done anything to help?

Answer: The response of the Allies to the persecution and destruction of European Jewry was inadequate. No attempt was made to call upon local populations.

14. Who are the "Righteous Among the Nations"?

Answer: "Righteous Among the Nations," or "Righteous Gentiles," refers to those non-Jews who aided Jews during the Holocaust. There were "Righteous among the Nations" in every country overrun or allied with the Nazis, and their actions often saved Jewish lives. They numbered around 10,000, although there were probably more.

15. Were Jews in the Free World aware of the persecution and destruction of European Jewry and, if so, what was their response?

Answer: The response of the Jews in the "Free World" can also be divided into two periods, before and after the publication of information on the "Final Solution." Efforts during the early years of the Nazi regime concentrated on facilitating emigration from Germany. Following the news of the "Final Solution," attempts were made to launch rescue attempts via neutral states and to send aid to Jews under Nazi rule. These efforts were hampered by lack of assistance and obstruction from government channels.

16. Did the Jews in Europe realize what was going to happen to them?

Answer: Every attempt was made to fool the victims and, thereby, prevent or minimize resistance. Deportees were always told that they were going to be "resettled," and that their conditions would improve. Since the Jews in Europe was almost completely isolated, they had no way to find out what was going to happen to them.

17. How many Jews were able to escape from Europe prior to the Holocaust?

Answer: Thousands were able to get passports to leave, but many were rejected from other countries due to immigration policies. Many left using passports with false identities, so it is impossible to determine how many left.

18. What efforts were made to save the Jews fleeing from Germany before World War II began?

Answer: Various organizations attempted to facilitate the emigration of the Jews and persecuted non-Jews from Germany. Help came from Jewish agencies including the Jewish Agency for Palestine and non-Jewish groups such as the League of Nations High Commission for Refugees. Wealthy individuals and private organizations also aided.

19. Why were so few refugees able to flee Europe prior to the outbreak of World War II?

Answer: The key reason was the stringent immigration policies adopted by the prospective host countries during the 1920s and 1930s. The number of immigrants allowed by the US was limited to 153,744 per year, divided by country of origin. The majority of the American public consistently opposed the entry of additional refugees.

20. What was Hitler's ultimate goal in launching World War II?

Answer: Hitler's ultimate goal in launching World War II was the establishment of an Aryan empire in Europe.

21. Was there any opposition to the Nazis within Germany?

Answer: Opposition came from political groups, church groups, students, and from German businesses, but there was never a unified resistance movement in Germany.

22. Did the Jews try to fight against the Nazis? To what extent were such efforts successful?

Answer: Despite the difficult conditions, Jews resisted in the Warsaw Ghetto and partisan units including Bielski.

23. Did international organizations, such as the Red Cross, aid victims of Nazi persecution?

Answer: The International Red Cross (IRC) did little during WWII, but their responses can be divided into three periods:

From September, 1939 - June 22, 1941 the IRC sent food packages to those in distress in Nazi-occupied Europe.

From June 22, 1941 - Summer 1944 the IRC refused to publicly protest the mass annihilation of Jews and non-Jews in the camps.

From Summer 1944 - May 1945: Following intervention by President Franklin Roosevelt and the King of Sweden, the IRC appealed to the Regent of Hungary to stop the deportation of Hungarian Jews. The IRC visited the "model ghetto" of Terezin (Theresienstadt), after giving the Nazis time to complete a "beautification" program as propaganda tactic that conditions in the ghetto were relative tranquil. The Terezin inmates were then deported to Auschwitz where they were murdered.

24. How did Germany's allies, the Japanese and the Italians, treat the Jews in the lands they occupied?

Answer: Neither the Italians nor the Japanese, both of whom were Germany's allies during World War II, cooperated with the "Final Solution." The Italians did not allow Jews to be deported. The Japanese were also relatively tolerant, and Jews in Japanese-occupied China were treated well.

25. What was the attitude of the churches concerning the persecution of the Jews? Did the Pope ever speak out against the Nazis?

Answer: The head of the Catholic Church, Pope Pius XI, was aware of details as early as 1942. The Vatican expressed sympathy, but did little to help. The response from the Catholic clergy in Western Europe, Protestants and Eastern Orthodox varied.

26. How many Nazi criminals were there? How many were brought to justice?

Answer: We do not know the exact number of Nazi criminals. Since 1945, thousands were put on trial, and the effort to locate Nazi criminals continues today.

27. What were the Nuremberg trials?

Answer: The term "Nuremberg Trials" refers to two sets of trials of Nazi war criminals conducted after the war. The first trials were held November 20, 1945 to October 1, 1946. Political, military and economic leaders of the Third Reich captured by the Allies were tried. The second set of trials, known as the Subsequent Nuremberg Proceedings tried cabinet ministers, diplomats, doctors involved in medical experiments, and SS officers involved in crimes in concentration camps or in genocide in Nazi-occupied areas. A total of 24 criminals were tried, 12 were hung, 7 were imprisoned, and 3 were acquitted.