

## 6. *Escalating Violence*

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*And what was said long ago is true: Nations are made not of oak and rock but of men, and, as the men are, so will the nations be.*

MILTON MAYER

### OVERVIEW

In Chapter 2, we saw that every individual and every nation has a “universe of obligation” – a circle of persons “toward whom obligations are owed, to whom rules apply and whose injuries call for [amends] by the community.” Each, however, defines that universe just a little differently. Chapter 6 focuses on the way individuals and nations defined their “universes of obligation” in the late 1930s and the consequences of those definitions.

Hitler made no secret of his racist views or his plans to build a “Greater Germany.” As early as 1928, he spelled them out in *Mein Kampf*. It was all there – the antisemitism, the militarism, and the demands for *Lebensraum*, or living space in the East. Throughout the 1930s, he advanced those plans step by step. When one action against an individual or a nation encountered little or no opposition, he carried the next step a little further. This chapter highlights the steps he took between 1936 and 1940 and explores the following questions: Why didn’t the German people stop Hitler when he threatened minorities at home? When he turned on neighboring countries? Why didn’t world leaders take a stand?

The chapter also considers what it meant to be outside a “universe of obligation.” To be, in Richard Rubenstein’s words, “superfluous.” As he puts it, “Men without political rights are superfluous men. They have lost all right to life and human dignity. Political rights are neither God-given, autonomous nor self-validating. The Germans understood that no person has any rights unless they are guaranteed by an organized community with the power to defend such rights.”<sup>1</sup> His words were as true of nations as they were of individuals.

## READING 1

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### *Hitler’s “Saturday Surprises”*

In foreign policy, as in domestic policy, Hitler acted on his belief that “every road...is expedient.” As early as 1933, he realized that he could set the terms of international affairs by complaining about the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. This allowed him to portray himself as a patriot who wanted only justice for his country. In October, he used the treaty to explain Germany’s withdrawal from the League of Nations. There was, in fact, no link between the two events. The treaty did not force Germany to join the League. German leaders chose to do so years after the treaty was signed. Yet no one challenged Hitler’s stand.

Although most world leaders were aware that the treaty had nothing to do with Germany’s decision to join the League of Nations nor with the decision to withdraw, they chose to remain silent. They knew that the treaty held Germany responsible for the war even though it was not the only nation at fault. So Hitler’s comments made some feel a little guilty. Others feared that challenging Hitler might lead to war and almost everyone wanted to avoid another war. There were, of course, other reasons no one spoke out. Many admired Hitler’s stand against communism. They, too, saw the Russians as the “enemy.” Although few shared Hitler’s belief in a Jewish conspiracy at work everywhere in the world, many considered Jews “different,” perhaps even dangerous. There were, of course, world leaders who disagreed with Hitler’s views, but few believed that he would go to war to achieve his goals. As a result, Hitler found that he could make outrageous demands without fear of a confrontation.

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On March 8, 1935, Hitler sprang the first of his “Saturday surprises” on the world. Like the others, it took place on a weekend when British leaders retreated to their country homes. In the name of “defense,” Hitler announced that he was rebuilding the German air force, reinstating the draft, and rearming the nation. He assured the world these were purely “defensive” measures. In a speech to the Reichstag, he contended that “the principal effect of every war is to destroy the flower of the nation.



Germany needs peace and desires peace.” He vowed that “the German government is ready to agree to any limitation which leads to abolition of the heaviest arms, especially suited for aggression, such as the heaviest artillery and the heaviest tanks.” And he warned that “whoever lights the torch of war in Europe can wish for nothing but chaos.”

The speech was praised both at home and abroad. When journalist William Shirer, one of Hitler’s early critics, reread his diary forty-five years later, he was astonished to discover that he, like so many others, “left the Reichstag that evening convinced that Hitler, despite all my reservations about him, really wanted peace and had made the West, at least, a serious offer. I had been derisive of the Germans for swallowing Hitler’s propaganda. I should have included myself.”

The second “Saturday surprise” took place on March 7, 1936. That day German soldiers marched into the Rhineland as German fighter planes roared overhead. The Treaty of Versailles had set aside the Rhineland, a strip of land thirty-one miles wide, as a buffer between Germany and both France and Belgium. Although it was officially part of Germany, the nation could not keep troops there or fortify the area. Now Hitler simply ignored that agreement.

German generals opposed the move into the Rhineland. They feared that the French would defeat their half-trained, inadequately equipped army within hours. But Hitler was so confident that the French would not intervene that he promised to retreat if they even tried to stop the invasion. Fredric Zeller recalls what happened next:

Everybody seemed to hunch up and hold their breath. But nothing happened. Nothing. France and England did nothing. The press was jubilant. There was euphoria in the streets. Strangers smiled at each other, comrades in arms. Even anti-Nazis, friends of my parents, now said Hitler was doing some good things for Germany.

“Germany has been on her knees too long,” we heard them say, wagging a finger. “And look at unemployment...he’s certainly doing something about that.”

My parents didn’t reply. I heard them say later, “He’s clearing up unemployment...yes, but how? The *Reichsarbeitsdienst* – Universal Labor Service conscription – hard labor with practically no pay. Military service call-up for millions. Armament production. Don’t people see where it’s all going? Do they really want another war? Are our last good Christian friends turning into Nazis too?”

And then Father mentioned a Jewish businessman in Spandau who said that Hitler was really doing good things for Germany.

“‘He’s making us strong,’ Herbert said. ‘He’d be all right if only he didn’t have this thing about the Jews.’”

Father caught me following the conversation, saw my eyes widen at his saying – making “us” strong – and smiled:

“Yes...the man said ‘us.’”<sup>2</sup>

Why didn’t the French challenge Hitler? They did not want another war. Too many people in France still remembered the battles of World War I where thousands died to gain a mile or two of territory. The French were also reluctant to act without British support. Geoffrey Dawson, the editor of the *Times*, reflected the views of most people in Britain when he asked, “What has it got to do with us? It’s none of our business, is it? It’s their own back-garden they are walking into.”

Winston Churchill, then a member of Britain’s Parliament, was among the few to disagree. He argued, “The violation of the Rhineland is serious from the point of view of the menace to which it exposes Holland, Belgium, and France. It is also serious from the fact that when it is fortified...it will be a barrier across Germany’s front door, which leave her free to sally out eastward and southward by the back door.”<sup>3</sup> For years, Churchill, like most Europeans, had regarded Joseph Stalin, the head of the Soviet Union, as the most dangerous leader in Europe. By 1936, he considered Hitler a greater threat.

Most people, however, preferred to believe that Hitler was sincere when he called the invasion of the Rhineland a “purely defensive” move. They applauded when he declared, “We have no territorial demands to make in Europe!” And they took heart from his vow that “Germany will never break the peace.” Many believed him because they feared that if Hitler were overthrown, the Communists would take over Germany. In their view, a communist Germany would be a more serious threat to world peace than a fascist Germany.

Others simply wanted to avoid another world war. In Britain, thousands of college students pledged that they would never go to war – no matter what the circumstances. In 1935, the United States Congress passed the first in a series of neutrality laws. These laws stated that the United States would do more than just stay out of all “foreign wars.” The nation would not make loans, sell arms, or provide any other assistance to warring nations.

## CONNECTIONS

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By 1936, William Shirer had become more skeptical of Hitler’s words. The evening he filed a news story describing Hitler’s announcement of the invasion of the Rhineland and his latest peace proposal, he wrote in his diary, “The [peace] proposal is a pure fraud, and if I had any guts, or American journalism had any, I would have said so in my dispatch. But I am not supposed to be ‘editorial.’”<sup>4</sup> What is a reporter’s responsibility to his or her readers? Is it to describe events? Or to make judgments about those events?

How did Hitler use such words as *peace* and *defense*? Were they euphemisms?

What did Hitler assume about human behavior? About the foreign policy objectives of other nations? What did the leaders of other nations assume about his objectives? How accurate were these assumptions? Record your answers so that you can refer to them later.

Why were Fredric Zeller and his parents surprised at the reaction of the businessman who was Jewish to the invasion? What does his reaction suggest about the willingness of people to overlook the bad in order to attain the good? What was the businessman willing to overlook? What did he hope to gain?

What assumptions did the United States Congress make when it passed the neutrality laws? What do those laws suggest about the way members of Congress defined the nation’s “universe of obligation”?

When should one nation get involved in a crisis in another country? How do leaders decide? What say does the average American have? How can he or she influence government policy? Such questions are still being debated as Americans struggle to define the nation’s role in the affairs of such countries as Somalia, Bosnia, and Haiti. Investigate the arguments of those who support intervention and those who oppose it. Evaluate each argument. Is the reasoning logical? Is it moral? Then compare the arguments to those made in response to Hitler’s actions in the 1930s. What similarities do you notice? What differences are most striking?

## READING 2

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### *Taking Austria*

**H**itler had a clear objective that guided his dealings with other nations. “We National Socialists must hold unflinchingly to our aim in foreign policy, namely, to secure for the German people the land and soil to which they are entitled on this earth.” Hitler argued that some of that land would come from territories lost in World War I, most of which lay to the east. “Russia and her vassal border states” also lay to the east of Germany and Hitler was eager to claim those lands as well. After all, the Russians were not only Communists but also Slavs, a people he regarded as “subhuman.” In his view, they, like other “subhumans” were a clear threat to the racial purity of the German people.

In the fall of 1936, Hitler allied with Italy. The agreement had a number of consequences. It gave Mussolini German support for his invasion of Ethiopia. It also opened the way for the *Anschluss*, or union of Germany and Austria. Now Mussolini sided with Germany. By 1938, Hitler was ready to make his move. On February 12, he summoned Austrian Prime Minister Kurt von Schuschnigg to a secret meeting that consisted of eleven hours of insults and threats. At one point, the Fuehrer flew into a rage and screamed that Austria must become a part of “Greater Germany.” When Schuschnigg disagreed, Hitler gave him three days to change his mind. The Austrian leader used the time to organize a national election so that the people of Austria could decide the matter for themselves.

Before the voting could take place, the Fuehrer announced that unless Schuschnigg and the Austrian president resigned, he would invade to “restore order in a chaotic country.” Schuschnigg responded in a radio address. “I declare before the world that the reports launched in Germany concerning disorders by the workers, the shedding of streams of blood, and the creation of a situation beyond the control of the Austrian government are lies from A to Z.”

Hitler believed that every road is expedient, including lying.
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The reports were indeed false. Yet when German troops entered Austria on March 11, no one came to the nation’s defense. When the Nazis called for a vote on the *Anschluss* a few weeks after the invasion, 99.7 percent of Austria’s voters expressed approval. Most outsiders felt that Austria was not worth fighting over. Once again, Winston Churchill disagreed. Comparing Germany to “a boa constrictor” that has “devoured a goat or a deer,” he warned that Czechoslovakia would be next. Most people dismissed his remarks as “war-mongering.”

## CONNECTIONS

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Hitler believed that every road is expedient, including lying. What power did that position give him over other world leaders?

What point was Churchill making when he compares Germany to a boa constrictor? Who is the “deer”?

Schuschnigg later said of his meeting with Hitler that the Fuehrer might as well be “speaking Hindustani”; he was “a man from another world.” Do you think he really lost control or were the insults and threats part of a strategy?

In Chapter 4 (Reading 15), a professor interviewed by Milton Mayer described the small, seemingly unimportant compromises he made that led to larger ones later. Was the *Anschluss* a small step that might lead to a larger compromise later? How can individuals and national leaders know which compromises are significant and which are not? Historian William Manchester writes that Churchill had a “moral compass” that guided his responses to Hitler’s actions. What is a “moral compass”? To what extent does it guide leaders today? How does it guide you?

## READING 3

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### *Stateless People*

In *Mein Kampf*, Adolf Hitler argued that “the race question not only furnishes the key to world history, but also to world culture.” He went on to say, “There is absolutely no other revolution but a racial revolution. There is no economic, no political, no social revolution. There is only the struggle of the lower races against the dominant, higher races.” As Hitler expanded eastward, he applied these ideas of race to the peoples he now ruled. Austria’s two hundred thousand Jews were the first to discover what that meant.

Within weeks of the *Anschluss*, observers were reporting hundreds of antisemitic incidents throughout the nation. Some noted the sharp increase in suicides, as thousands of Jews tried desperately to emigrate only to find stumbling blocks wherever they turned. Their difficulty in leaving “Greater Germany” could not be blamed on the Nazis. The Nazis were more than eager to see the Jews go as long as they left their money and possessions behind. Indeed in just six months, Adolf Eichmann, a young SS officer who made himself an expert on the “Jewish question,” had pushed 50,000 Jews out of Austria. The problem lay with other nations. They had no interest in accepting thousands of penniless Jewish refugees.

Can a state, without upsetting the basis of our civilisation, and indeed, of all civilisation, arbitrarily withdraw nationality from a whole class of its citizens, thereby making them stateless persons whom no country is compelled to receive on its territory?
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Shortly after the *Anschluss*, United States President Franklin Roosevelt called for an international conference to discuss the growing refugee crisis. In July 1938, delegates from thirty-two nations met in Evian, France. There, each representative expressed sorrow over the growing number of “refugees” and “deportees,” boasted of his nation’s traditional hospitality, and lamented its inability to do more in the “present situation.” The British noted that many refugees wanted to go to Palestine, which was under British rule. They would like to admit them, but in view of the ongoing conflict between Jews and Arabs, it was not a practical solution. The French claimed that their country had already done more than its fair share. The Americans noted that Congress would have to approve any change in immigration. The delegates spoke in general terms and few referred to refugees as *Jews*.

Only one representative addressed the real issue. M. J. M. Yepes of Colombia told the delegates that there were two central questions. One was a question of fact that each nation had to answer for itself: “How many refugees would it admit?” The other question involved a matter of principle: “Can a state, without upsetting the basis of our civilisation, and indeed, of all civilisation, arbitrarily withdraw nationality from a whole class of its citizens, thereby making them stateless persons whom no country is compelled to receive on its territory?”

Yepes went on to say that as long as the central problem was not decided, the work of the conference would not be lasting and a dangerous example would be set – an example that in his view would make the world “uninhabitable.” Most delegates did not want to deal with either issue.

As the Jewish observer from Palestine, Golda Meir, who later became prime minister of Israel, was not allowed to speak. She later wrote. “I don’t think that anyone who didn’t live through it can understand what I felt at Evian – a mixture of sorrow, rage, frustration, and horror. I wanted to get up and scream at them, ‘Don’t you know that these so-called numbers are human beings, people who may spend the rest of their lives in concentration camps, or wandering around the world like lepers if you don’t let them in?’ Of course, I didn’t know then that not concentration camps but death camps awaited the refugees whom no one wanted.”<sup>5</sup>

Only the Dominican Republic agreed to accept Jewish immigrants. The nation’s leader, Rafael Trujillo Molina, hoped that Jews would marry local inhabitants and “lighten” the race. He also believed that Jews were good at making money and would therefore be an asset to his country. He granted visas to one thousand Jews who were to live in Sosua, a special community established for them. After the conference, Hitler concluded, “Nobody wants these criminals.”

Men without political rights are superfluous men. They have lost all right to life and human dignity. Political rights are neither God-given, autonomous nor self-validating. The Germans understood that no person has any rights unless they are guaranteed by an organized community with the power to defend such rights.

## CONNECTIONS

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What is a *political refugee*? How do nations today regard such individuals? What does your answer suggest about the way they define their “universe of obligation?” *Elements of Time*, pages 138-152, discusses the impact that a narrow definition had on German Jews.

Compare the way the nations that attended the Evian Conference defined their “universe of obligation” with more modern definitions. What similarities do you notice? What differences seem most striking?

The Dominican Republic based its immigration policies on racist beliefs. It was not alone. In the early 1900s, many Americans also supported an immigration policy based on “racial” considerations. A psychology professor at Princeton University maintained: “According to all evidence available, then, American intelligence is declining, and will proceed with an accelerating rate as the racial admixture becomes more and more extensive.” He proposed that “legal steps” be taken “which would insure a continuously progressive upward evolution.” Among those steps? “Immigration should not only be restrictive but highly selective.”<sup>6</sup> Other Americans agreed and in the 1920s, Congress passed a series of immigration laws that limited the number of European immigrants to 150,000 and virtually cut off immigration from Asia and Africa. How did Hitler take advantage of the attitudes and beliefs that shaped those laws?

In the late 1800s, Emma Lazarus wrote these words:

Give me your tired, your poor;  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free;  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore;  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me;  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door.

What is the poet saying about the United States? Why do you think the poem is carved on the base of the Statue of Liberty? How widespread were such beliefs in the 1920s and 1930s? How widespread are they today? Investigate attitudes toward refugees today. What values and beliefs are reflected in debates over the arrival of “boat people” from Haiti? Vietnam? China?

Germany was not the only nation to turn some of its citizens into “stateless” people. In the 1920s, the Soviet government deprived about 1.5 million Russians of their citizenship rights. Most were opponents of the new Communist regime. In the years that followed, the number of stateless people grew. Some, like the Russians, lost citizenship when they lost a civil war within their country. Others became stateless because they were a hated or feared minority. Richard Rubenstein calls these men, women, and children “outlaws.”

[They were not] outlaws because of any crime they had committed, but because their status had been altered by their country's civil service or police bureaucracy. They had been deprived of all political status by bureaucratic definition. As such, they had become superfluous men... What made [them] superfluous was no lack of ability, intelligence, or potential social usefulness. There were gifted physicians, lawyers, scholars, and technicians among them. Nevertheless, in most instances no established political community had any use for the legitimate employment of their gifts. This was especially true of the Jewish refugees, but they were by no means alone.<sup>7</sup>

The overview to this chapter quoted Rubenstein as saying, "Men without political rights are superfluous men. They have lost all right to life and human dignity. Political rights are neither God-given, autonomous nor self-validating. The Germans understood that no person has any rights unless they are guaranteed by an organized community with the power to defend such rights." How does this reading support his argument? What current events support Rubenstein's position? What events call it into question?

→The film *Sosua* contains footage from newsreels that show the early days of the Jewish colony in the Dominican Republic. It also explores what happened to those who came to Sosua and its status today. Walter Bieringer discusses the results of the Evian Conference in a videotaped interview, discussed in *Elements of Time*, pages 72-73. Both videos are available from the Facing History Resource Center. So is a videotape of a lecture by Henry Feingold, author of *Politics of Rescue*. He argues that the failure of world leaders to respond to the plight of the Jews is a negative legacy of the modern nation state. He warns of the dangers of similar failures to respond to threats from dictators in recent times. His lecture is summarized in *Elements of Time*, pages 360-361.

## READING 4

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### *Appeasing Hitler*

**J**ust as Jews had no one to come to their aid, nations also found themselves isolated and alone as Hitler threatened their freedom. Austria was the first to fall. Hitler then turned his attention to Czechoslovakia, much as Churchill had predicted. About three million German-speakers lived in western Czechoslovakia in an area known as Sudetenland. In 1938, with secret funding from the Nazis, many of those Germans agitated for "a return to the Reich." By summer, Hitler was openly supporting those demands. Fearful, the Czechs turned to their allies for help. France and Russia were among the nations that had promised to protect the country's independence.

You were given the choice between war and dishonour. You chose dishonour and you will have war.

As tensions mounted, Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain of Britain decided to defuse the situation by appeasing the Germans. That is, he called for concessions to avoid a war. Chamberlain even made a dramatic flight to Germany to confer with Hitler. Not long after his arrival, he confided in a letter to his sister Ida, “I had established a certain confidence, which was my aim, and on my side, in spite of the hardness and ruthlessness I thought I saw in his face, I got the impression that here was a man who could be relied upon when he had given his word.”

Yet over the next few weeks, Chamberlain was unable to find a compromise Hitler would accept. Hitler remained firm in his demand for the Sudetenland. And the Czechs were equally firm in their refusal to give up the territory. Then, at what seemed to be the last minute, Benito Mussolini of Italy invited German, French, and British leaders to a meeting in Munich, Germany, to resolve the crisis. There the four nations agreed to give Hitler the Sudetenland. He, in turn, promised that it would be his last territorial demand.

The agreement infuriated the Czechs. And it worried at least one of the leaders who negotiated the pact. When Edouard Daladier, the prime minister of France, returned from Munich, he fully expected to be jeered for his failure to stand up to the Germans. Instead, the French gave him a hero’s welcome. He shook his head and muttered that those who rejoiced at the pact were fools.

Chamberlain was also hailed. Thousands of admiring Germans lined the streets of Munich to cheer the British leader as he traveled to the airport. When he landed in London, another crowd of well-wishers gathered to hear him promise that the agreement would bring “peace for our time.” He added that it would be a “peace with honor.” Critics were less optimistic. Still most believed that he had preserved the peace for at least for a few years. Only Winston Churchill disagreed. He told Chamberlain, “You were given the choice between war and dishonour. You chose dishonour and you will have war.”

Although Russia was not invited to the meeting, Joseph Stalin was willing to send troops to help the Czechs. But neither Poland nor Romania would allow those troops to march through their territory. They feared that doing so might draw them into another war. As a result, Czechoslovakia stood alone.

## CONNECTIONS

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Winston Churchill defined an *appeaser* as “one who feeds a crocodile – hoping that it will eat him last.” Do you agree? Or is it one who overlooks the bad in order to attain the good – in this case, peace? Reread “The Hangman” (Chapter 4, Reading 23). Were the townspeople appeasers?

How were the methods Hitler used to take Czechoslovakia similar to those used to acquire Austria? What differences seem most striking?

Study a map of Europe in 1938. After the Germans took Austria and the Sudetenland, which countries had the most cause for concern?

Research newspapers or news magazines published in the fall of 1938. How did each publication report the Munich agreement? What do the letters to the editor suggest about the way ordinary people viewed the event? Then research newspapers or news magazines published in the fall of 1994. How did each publication react to the crises in what was Yugoslavia? What do the letters to the editor suggest about the way ordinary people viewed the situation? What similarities do you notice between the two crises? What differences seem most striking?

## READING 5

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### *The Night of the Pogrom*

At Evian, the delegate from Colombia raised a fundamental question, “Can a state, without upsetting the basis of our civilisation, and indeed, of all civilisation, arbitrarily withdraw nationality from a whole class of its citizens, thereby making them stateless persons whom no country is compelled to receive on its territory”? It was a question that went unanswered that July. By November, the failure to answer it would lead to yet another crisis.

Throughout 1938, Hitler and his top officials accelerated their campaign against his primary enemy, the Jews. The first step was the mandatory “Aryanization” of Jewish businesses. Up until then, it was voluntary. But now the Nazis required that all Jewish-owned companies be sold to “Aryans,” usually at a fraction of their value. Then in June, the Nazis rounded up Jews “previously convicted” of crimes to remove the “criminal element” from the population. Although many were guilty of nothing more than a traffic violation, about five hundred men described as “antisocial” were sent to a concentration camp at Buchenwald, a town near Weimar, Germany.

In August, a new law required that all Jews have a “Jewish first name” by January 1, 1939. If the name chosen was not on a list of approved “Jewish first names,” the Nazis would add “Israel” to the man’s name and “Sarah” to the woman’s. In September, the government announced that Jewish lawyers could no longer practice their profession. A month later, at the request of Switzerland, which was bombarded by Jews trying to leave Germany, the Nazis began to mark the passport of every Jew with the letter *J*. The Nazis then turned their attention to Jews who were not German citizens. Their first target was Russian Jews.

After the Nazis expelled every Jew who held a Russian passport, the Polish government feared that Jews with Polish passports would be next. To keep them from returning to Poland, the nation required that they secure a special stamp for their passports. The order affected about seventy thousand Jews living in Germany. Although few wanted to return to Poland, they needed passports to emigrate to any other nation. Yet when they tried to get the required stamp, Polish officials turned them away.

The crisis came to a head when the Polish government announced that October 31 was the last day it would issue stamps. On October 26, the Nazis responded by expelling all Polish Jews. When Poland refused to accept them, thousands of men, women, and children ended up in refugee camps near the German-Polish border. Among them were the parents of seventeen-year-old Herschel Grynszpan.

Grynszpan was living in France at the time. Angry and frustrated by his inability to help his family, he marched into the German Embassy in Paris on November 7 and shot a Nazi official. When the man died two days later, the Germans decided to avenge his death. The night of November 9-10 came to be known as *Kristallnacht* (“Night of the Broken Glass”) outside Germany and as the Night of the Pogrom within the nation. That night the Nazis looted and then destroyed thousands of Jewish homes and businesses in every part of the country. They set fire to 191 synagogues, killed over ninety Jews, and sent thirty thousand others to concentration camps.

Joseph Goebbels, Hitler’s minister of propaganda, held a press conference the next day. He told reporters that *Kristallnacht* was not a government action but a “spontaneous” expression of German dissatisfaction with the Jews. “It is an intolerable state of affairs that within our borders and for all these years hundreds of thousands of Jews still control whole streets of shops, populate our recreation spots and, as foreign apartment owners, pocket the money of German tenants, while their racial comrades abroad agitate for war against Germany and gun down German officials.” Two days later, the government fined the Jewish community one billion marks for “property damaged in the rioting.”

Frederic Morton, a writer whose family fled from Vienna shortly after *Kristallnacht*, never forgot that night.

The day began with a thudding through my pillow. Jolts waked me. Then, like an alarm clock, the doorbell rang. It was six in the morning. My father, my mother, my little brother and I all met in the foyer, all in our robes. We did not know yet exactly what. But we knew. We were Jews in Vienna in 1938. Everything in our lives, including our beds, stood on a cliff.

My father opened the door on Frau Eckel, the janitress.

“They are down there...they are throwing things.” She turned away. Went on with her morning sweep. Her broom trembled.

We looked down into the courtyard. Pink-cheeked storm troopers chatted and whistled. Chopped-up furniture flew through the window.

The troopers fielded the pieces sportively, piled them into heaps. One hummed something from “The Merry Widow.”

“Franz! Run somewhere!” my mother said to my father.

By that time we’d gone to the window facing the street. At the house entrance two storm troopers lit cigarettes for each other. Their comrades were smashing the synagogue on the floor below us, tossing out a debris of Torahs and pews.

“Oh, my God!” my mother said.

Something overwhelming wanted to melt down my eyes. I couldn’t let it. All this might not be real as long as real tears did not touch my face. A crazy last-resort bargain with fate.

“All right,” my father said. “Meanwhile we get dressed.”

Meanwhile meant until they come up here. No other Jews lived in the building. It had no back door. But as long as I could keep my tears down, I could keep them down. While they were destroying down there, they would not come up here. As long as the shaking of the floor continued, the axe blows, the sledgehammer thuds, we might live.

I had gym for my first class. I laced on my sneakers. I knew I never would see school that morning. I didn’t care that I knew. I only cared not to cry. I tried to pour my entire mind into the lacing of my sneakers.

We met in the living room. We saw each other dressed with a normality made grotesque by the crashing of the perdition downstairs. It stopped. The shaking and the thudding stopped. Silence. A different sound. Heavy, booted steps ascending. I relaxed my sneakers.

My father had put on his hat. “Everybody come close to me,” he said. “My two sons, you put your hands on top of your heads.”

We put our hands on top of our heads, as hats. My father put his arms around all our shoulders, my mother’s, my brother’s, mine.

“Shema Yisroel,” my father said. “Repeat after me: *Shema Yisroel Adonoy Elohenu Adonoy Ehod...*” [“Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is One...”]

The doorbell rang. Once. Ever since the Anschluss, we’d rung our doorbell twice in quick succession to signal that this was a harmless ringing, not the dreaded one. Now the dreaded ring had come.

“Hansi, you go,” my father said.

“No!” my mother said.

“Hansi is the only one they might not hurt on sight,” my father said. “Hansi, go.”

My brother, a tiny blond eight-year-old, an Aryan-looking doll, went.

A minute later he returned. Behind him towered some 10 storm troopers with heavy pickaxes. They were young and bright-faced with excitement. Ten bridegrooms on their wedding day. One had freckles. How could a freckle-faced man kill us? The freckles kept me from crying.

“House search,” the leader said. “Don’t move.”

We all stood against the wall, except my father. He placed himself, hat still on, a foot in front of us.

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. Their exuberance was amazing. Amazing, that none of them raised an axe to split our skulls.

“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.

“I am going to the office,” my father said. “Breitel might help.”

Breitel, the Reich commissar in my father’s costume-jewelry factory, was a “good” Nazi. Once he’d said we should come to him if there was trouble. My father left. My mother was crying, with relief, with terror; she cradled against herself my little stunned brother. I turned away from her. I swore I would do something other than cry.

I began to pick up clothes, when the doorbell rang again. It was my father.

“I have two minutes.”

“What?” my mother said. But she knew. His eyes had become glass. “There was another crew waiting for me downstairs. They gave me two minutes.”

Now I broke down. Now my father was the only one not crying. His eyes were blue glass, relentlessly dry. His kiss felt stubbly. He had not shaved this morning. After one more embrace with my mother he marched to the door, turned on his heel, called out.

“Fritz!”

I went to him, sobbing.

“Stop!”

I couldn’t stop.

Harshly his hands came down on my shoulders.

“If I don’t come back – avenge me!”

He was gone. The fury of his fingers stung. It burned into my skin a sense of continuity against all odds. I stopped.

Four months later he rang our doorbell twice, skull shaven, skeletal, released from Dachau, somehow alive.

Forty years later, today, he is practicing the tango with my mother in Miami Beach. My little brother Hansi is chairman of the political science department at Queens College. I am a writer in America with an American family. We are atypically lucky. But to this day we all ring our American doorbells twice.<sup>8</sup>

## CONNECTIONS

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The Germans call *Kristallnacht* the “Night of the Pogrom.” A *pogrom* is a government-organized or inspired massacre of a minority group, particularly of Jews. It is a Russian word that literally means “riot” or “destruction.” Over one hundred years ago, the nobles of St. Petersburg demanded that the “people’s wrath” be vented against the Jews. The peasants in the nearby town of Elizanetgrad responded with the first pogrom in modern times. A Russian writer has described the subsequent murders, rapes, and looting as the “unending torture” of a religious and ethnic minority. Was *Kristallnacht* a pogrom? What evidence suggests it was planned? That the murder of the Nazi official was an excuse for a riot not its cause?

At the time of the first pogrom, the Russian government blamed the Jews for the violence. Whom did the Germans blame? Are victims ever to blame for violence committed against them?

Morton was an eyewitness to the events of *Kristallnacht*. How does his account differ from the official view? What insights does he offer as to why many Jews saw *Kristallnacht* as a turning point?

Edwin Landau (Chapter 4, Reading 4) said of the Nazis’ boycott of Jewish businesses in 1933, “To me the whole thing was inconceivable. It would not sink in that something like that could even be possible in the twentieth century, for such things had happened, at most, in the Middle Ages.” How do you think someone like Landau would have responded to this new outrage? Would he have been as shocked in 1938 as he was in 1933? Trace the steps that led to *Kristallnacht*. How did each prepare the public for state-sanctioned violence against a minority within the nation? What attitudes and values allowed people to remain silent when their neighbors were deprived of citizenship?

→What is the significance of the name *Kristallnacht*? How does the name cloud the fact that it was more a night of broken lives than of broken glass?

→Peter Gay, a Jewish teenager in Berlin during the 1930s, reflects on the way *Kristallnacht* differed from earlier events that targeted Jews in *Elements of Time*, pages 103-105. Joan B. in the video montage *Friedrich* describes how it altered life for her family and contributed to the death of her parents. The video is available from the Facing History Resource Center. A study guide on *Kristallnacht* is also available.

## READING 6

### *Taking a Stand*

German Jews saw *Kristallnacht* as a turning point. So did many “Aryan” Germans. They also made important choices that night and in the days that followed. Dan Bar-On, an Israeli psychologist, describes the decision one family made:

It was the autumn of 1938. Andre was twelve years old and lived with his parents in a small town in northern Germany. One evening he came home from his youth movement meeting.

“Daddy,” he said to his father, “we were told at the meeting that tomorrow we are supposed to throw stones at the Jewish shops in town. Should I take part?”

His father looked at him. “What do you think?”

“I don’t know. I have nothing against the Jews – I hardly know them – but everyone is going to throw stones. So what should I do?”

Their conversation proceeded, the son presenting questions to his father, the father turning the questions back to his son.

“I understand,” said Andre. “You want me to make up my own mind. I’m going for a walk. I’ll let you know what I’ve decided when I come back.”

When Andre returned a short while later, he approached his parents, who were sitting at the table.

“I’ve made up my mind, but my decision involves you too.”

“What is it?”

“I’ve decided not to throw stones at the Jewish shops. But tomorrow everyone will say, ‘Andre, the son of X, did not take part, he refused to throw stones!’ They will turn against you. What are you going to do?”

His father’s sigh was one of relief tinged with pride. “While you were out, your mother and I discussed this question. We decided that if you made up your mind to throw stones, we would have to live with your decision, since we had let you decide, after all. But if you decided not to throw stones, we would leave Germany immediately.”

And that is what they did. The following day, Andre’s family left Germany.<sup>9</sup>

For the space of a second I was clearly aware that something terrible had happened there. Something frighteningly brutal. But almost at once I switched over to accepting what had happened as over and done with, and avoiding critical reflection.

Other Germans made other choices. Some protested by resigning their membership in the Nazi party – though many made it clear that they were not objecting to antisemitism but to mob violence. Others sent anonymous letters of protest to foreign embassies. Still others quietly brought Jewish families food and other necessities to replace items that had been destroyed. Neighbors told one Jewish woman that helping her was a way

to “show the Jews that the German people had no part in this – it is only Goebbels and his gang.”

Most Germans, however, responded much the way Melita Maschmann did. She lived in a small suburb of Berlin and knew nothing of *Kristallnacht* until the next morning. As she picked her way through the broken glass on her way to work, she asked a policeman what had happened. After he explained, she recalls:

I went on my way shaking my head. For the space of a second I was clearly aware that something terrible had happened there. Something frighteningly brutal. But almost at once I switched over to accepting what had happened as over and done with, and avoiding critical reflection. I said to myself: the Jews are the enemies of the New Germany. Last night they had a taste of what this means... With these or similar thoughts, I constructed for myself a justification of the pogrom. But in any case, I forced the memory of it out of my consciousness as quickly as possible. As the years went by, I grew better and better at switching off quickly in this manner on similar occasions.<sup>10</sup>

Maschmann was not alone in placing the night in perspective. Dietrich Goldschmidt, a minister in the Confessing Church, explains that for most Germans “the persecution of the Jews, this escalating persecution of the Jews, and the 9th of November – in a sense, that was only one event, next to very many gratifying ones. Here the famous stories of all the things Hitler did come in: ‘He got rid of unemployment, he built the Autobahn, the people started doing well again, he restored our national pride again. One has to weigh that against the other things.’”<sup>11</sup>

## CONNECTIONS

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Each of the individuals quoted in this reading reached a decision as a result of the events of *Kristallnacht*. How did each make his or her decision? What values and beliefs shaped the choice each made?

What were the short-term consequences of each choice described in the reading? The long-term consequences? For example, what do you think happened to non-Jews who resigned from the Nazi party? Tried to emigrate? Protested? What does each decision tell you about the person’s “universe of obligation”? How were the choices open to each individual different from the ones he or she could have made in 1933? In 1935?

What did Melita Maschmann mean when she says “I constructed for myself a justification of the pogrom”? Why did she find it necessary to do so? What did she mean when she says as the years went by, she grew better and better “at forcing the memory of events like the pogrom out of my consciousness as quickly as possible”?

Evaluate Goldschmidt's explanation of why public outrage did not last long. Did the good outweigh the "other things"?

→ *Now...After All These Years*, offers a glimpse of *Kristallnacht* by combining interviews with current citizens of Rhina, a small town in Germany, and the town's former citizens. The video, which is available from the Facing History Resource Center, raises questions about how one's perspective affects his or her view of an event.

## READING 7

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### *World Responses*

Newspapers around the world reported *Kristallnacht*. The story filed by Otto D. Tolischus of the *New York Times* was typical of many.

A wave of destruction, looting and incendiaries unparalleled in Germany since the Thirty Years War and in Europe generally since the Bolshevik revolution, swept over Greater Germany today as National Socialist cohorts took vengeance on Jewish shops, offices and synagogues for the murder by a young Polish Jew of Ernst von Rath, third secretary of the Germany Embassy in Paris.

Beginning systematically in the early morning hours in almost every town and city in the country, the wrecking, looting and burning continued all day. Huge but mostly silent crowds looked on and the police confined themselves to regulating traffic and making wholesale arrests of Jews "for their own protection."

All day the main shopping districts as well as the side streets of Berlin and innumerable other places resounded to the shattering of shop windows falling to the pavement, the dull thuds of furniture and fittings being pounded to pieces and clamor of fire brigades rushing to burning shops and synagogues. Although shop fires were quickly extinguished, synagogue fires were merely kept from spreading to adjoining buildings.<sup>12</sup>

There are times when the mere instincts of humanity make silence impossible.

People everywhere were outraged. As the Archbishop of Canterbury, Cosmo Gordon Lang, wrote in a letter to the editor of the *Times*, "There are times when the mere instincts of humanity make silence impossible." Thousands of Americans agreed. They showed their outrage at huge rallies held in support of German Jews. In reporting these events to Berlin, the German ambassador expressed a fear that these protests might jeopardize the Munich agreement.



Although *Kristallnacht* strained the policy of appeasement, it did not end it. When members of Britain’s Parliament pressed Neville Chamberlain to condemn the pogrom, he simply verified that newspaper reports were “substantially correct.” He also acknowledged “deep and widespread sympathy” for those who were made “to suffer so severely” for the “senseless crime committed in Paris.”

Similar attitudes in France led the editor of a newspaper called *La Lumière*, to warn, “In the past, when we protested against massacres in Ethiopia, China, Spain, we were told, ‘Silence! You are warmongering.’ When we protested against the mutilation of Czechoslovakia, we were told, ‘Keep quiet! You are a war party.’ Today, when we protest against the contemptible persecution of defenseless Jews and their wives and children, we are told, ‘Be silent! France is afraid.’”<sup>13</sup>

He that would make his own liberty secure, must guard even his enemy from oppression, for if he violates this duty, he establishes a precedent that will reach to himself.

The only world leader to take a stand was Franklin D. Roosevelt. He did so only after a number of individual and groups had urged him to speak out. On November 15, six days after *Kristallnacht*, he opened a press conference by stating, “The news of the last few days from Germany has deeply shocked public opinion in the United States. Such news from any part of the world would produce a similar profound reaction among American people in every part of the nation. I myself could scarcely believe that such things could occur in a twentieth-century civilization.” Although he announced that the United States was withdrawing its ambassador to Germany, he did not offer to help the thousands of Jews now trying desperately to leave the Third Reich.

Few Americans criticized Roosevelt's stand. According to a poll taken at the time, 57 percent of all Americans approved the recall. But 72 percent did not want more Jewish refugees in the United States and over half opposed aid to refugees who wished to settle elsewhere.

## CONNECTIONS

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→What did the Archbishop of Canterbury mean when he said, "There are times when the mere instincts of humanity make silence impossible"? What are those "instincts"? Do all humans have them? At what times is silence impossible? How do such times affect government responses today? Individual reactions? An ABC special about Bosnia, available from the Facing History Resource Center, explains why a few State Department officials resigned in protest of the failure of the United States government to take meaningful action to stop the killings in the Balkans.

In 1776, Thomas Paine said, "He that would make his own liberty secure, must guard even his enemy from oppression, for if he violates this duty, he establishes a precedent that will reach to himself." How did he define his "universe of obligation"? Which of the following shared that definition: the archbishop, Chamberlain, the editor of *La Lumière*, or Roosevelt?

What does the poll suggest about the way many Americans defined their "universe of obligation"? About the limits of people's outrage?

Compare the way people responded to *Kristallnacht* in Germany with responses abroad. What similarities do you notice? What differences seem more striking?

What was the editor of *La Lumière* trying to tell people? How is his message similar to the one found in "The Hangman" (Chapter 4, Reading 23)? What is the key difference?

## READING 8

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### *The Narrowing Circle*

German leaders also reacted to *Kristallnacht* and the public outcry that followed. On November 10, Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels called a press conference "to remove certain misunderstandings that appear to have their way into reports sent abroad." He warned that if Jews continued to spread "exaggerations of yesterday's happening, of the kind contained in the accounts and leading articles of the American press, then they would defeat their own ends, and they would be digging the graves of the Jews in Germany."

Most government officials, however, were opposed to *Kristallnacht* and other “undisciplined individual actions.” Indeed, the Night of the Pogrom was the last occasion when Jews had to fear street violence in Germany. After *Kristallnacht*, writes Richard Rubenstein, “the hoodlums were banished and the bureaucrats took over.” In the weeks that followed, key Nazi officials, led by Heinrich Himmler, saw to it that measures against the Jews were strictly “legal.” On November 15, the bureaucracy excluded all Jewish children from state schools. By December 6, Jews could no longer walk or drive in certain parts of every major city. Jews who lived in those areas had to have a police permit to go home. Jews were advised to move and perhaps even exchange residences with “Aryans” who lived in “Jewish sections of town.”

The Night of the Pogrom was last occasion when Jews had to fear street violence in Germany. After *Kristallnacht*, “the hoodlums were banished and the bureaucrats took over.”

At about the same time, the government announced that Jews could no longer attend German universities. A few days later, Himmler prohibited them from owning or even driving a car. Jews were also banned from theaters, movie houses, concert halls, sports arenas, parks, and swimming pools. The Gestapo even went door to door confiscating radios owned by Jewish families.

## CONNECTIONS

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A number of Jews who lived in Germany during those years spoke of a “narrowing circle.” What do you think they meant? Picture what your world would be like if you could no longer attend school, shop at the mall, see a movie, play ball in the park, or even watch TV.

How significant was the decision to banish the “hoodlums” and let the bureaucrats take over? How was it like the actions the Nazis took after the Night of the Long Knives (Chapter 4, Reading 17)? How did it differ? How do you think the outcry over the events of *Kristallnacht* affected the decision? Was *Kristallnacht* a turning point for the Nazis?

Shortly after *Kristallnacht*, the Nazis released the film *Der Ewige Jude* (Chapter 5, Reading 6). How might the two events be linked?

→The novel *Friedrich* by Hans Peter Richter describes the effects of *Kristallnacht* on two German families, one Christian and the other Jewish. Classroom sets of the books are available from the Facing History Resource Center.

## READING 9

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### *Death Threats and Broken Promises*

On January 30, 1939, six years after he became chancellor of Germany, Hitler told the Reichstag that other nations were hypocritical in their complaints that Germany mistreated the Jews.

In accordance with their own declarations they cannot find a single reason to excuse themselves for refusing to receive this most valuable race in their own countries. Nor can I see a reason why the members of this race should be imposed upon the German nation, while in the States, which are so enthusiastic about these “splendid people,” their settlement should suddenly be refused with every imaginable excuse. I think that the sooner this problem is solved the better; for Europe cannot settle down until the Jewish question is cleared up...

One thing I should like to say on this day which may be memorable for others as well as for us Germans: In the course of my life I have very often been a prophet, and have usually been ridiculed for it. During the time of my struggle for power it was in the first instance the Jewish race which only received my prophecies with laughter when I said that I would one day take over the leadership of the State, and with it that of the whole nation, and that I would then among many other things settle the Jewish problem. Their laughter was uproarious, but I think that for some time now they have been laughing on the other side of their face. Today I will once more be a prophet: If the international Jewish financiers in and outside Europe should succeed in plunging the nations once more into a world war, then the result will not be the bolshevization of the earth, and thus the victory of Jewry, but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe!

Less than two months later, Hitler took over all of Czechoslovakia. “Peace in our time” had lasted just six months. World leaders were remarkably silent. Neville Chamberlain spoke out only when Hitler threatened Poland. He vowed that Britain would come to the nation’s aid in case of attack. France made a similar promise. Although the United States was an ocean away, Roosevelt was also concerned. He asked Mussolini and Hitler to promise they would not attack against 30 specific countries. William Shirer described Hitler’s response:

He claimed he had asked the nations which Roosevelt thought threatened whether they so considered themselves and “in all cases the reply was negative.” States like Syria, he said, he could not ask because “they are at present not in possession of their freedom, but are occupied and consequently deprived of their rights by the military

agents of democratic countries.” And “the fact has obviously escaped Mr. Roosevelt’s notice that Palestine is at present occupied not by German troops but by the English.” And so on in this sarcastic manner, from which with a masterly touch – Hitler was a superb actor today – he drew every last drop of irony. America champions the conference method of settling disputes? he asked. But was it not the first nation to shrink from participation in the League [of Nations]? “It was not until many years later that I resolved to follow the example of America and likewise leave the largest conference in the world.”<sup>14</sup>

In the end, Hitler gave “an assurance of the kind desired by Mr. Roosevelt” and concluded the session by demanding the return of the city of Danzig and part of Poland. Once again, Hitler vowed that it would be his last territorial claim in Europe.

## CONNECTIONS

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What is Hitler’s solution to the “Jewish question”? Was he offering it as an idea or as a policy? How did he expect other nations to respond?

Were Hitler’s charges true? Were his arguments believable? If so, whom would they convince? How did he use history to make his case? How did he distort the past? Do you think his response to the questions Roosevelt raised was sincere or was he acting?

## READING 10

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### *The Failure to Help*

**B**y 1939, more and more Jews were obsessed by the need for “papers.” They needed official passports to leave Germany, Austria, and other countries now under Nazi rule. They also needed written documents to enter another country. Among the Jews caught up in the search for the “right papers” were the 937 men, women, and children who boarded the ship, the *St. Louis*, on May 14. Each had paid \$150 – a huge sum of money in 1939 – for permission to land in Cuba. For only a few was the island their final destination. Most were on a waiting list for entry to the United States.

As the *St. Louis* neared Cuba, President Federico Laredo Bru suddenly canceled the landing permits of the Jewish passengers. As they and various international Jewish groups tried to change his mind, the ship’s captain was optimistic. He reasoned that most of his passengers would eventually be allowed to enter the United States. Therefore, even if the situation in Cuba deteriorated, the American government would quickly resolve the

matter by accepting them a little sooner. His passengers were less hopeful. Two tried to commit suicide. To prevent other attempts, the crew lowered lifeboats and lit the waters around the ship. When the captain heard rumors of a mass suicide pact, he added special patrols.

When news of the first suicide attempt (the second one was kept secret) reached the United States, many Americans demanded that their government accept the passengers. Others sent Bru telegrams of protest, but he refused to reconsider his stand. As a result, the ship left Cuban waters on June 2 with all but 30 passengers still on board. The 30 were non-Jews or Jews with special visas. Unsure of where to take the remaining passengers, the captain marked time while negotiations continued. When they ended on June 7 without a settlement, he was forced to return to Germany. As the ship recrossed the Atlantic, the desperate passengers cabled Neville Chamberlain: "Beg to be saved by being granted asylum in England or at least disembarkation at Southampton as return to Hamburg impossible and acts of desperation would be unavoidable."

The Nazis turned the incident into propaganda. They claimed that it demonstrated that the Jews were universally disliked and distrusted. On June 10, Belgium responded with an announcement that it would accept two hundred passengers. Two days later, the Netherlands promised to take 194. Britain and France took in the rest. The United States remained silent. Furious at the role the United States government played in the crisis, a resident of Richmond, Virginia, wrote to a local paper:

[The] press reported that the ship came close enough to Miami for the refugees to see the lights of the city. The press also reported that the U.S. Coast Guard, under instructions from Washington, followed the ship...to prevent any people landing on our shores. And during the days when this horrible tragedy was being enacted right at our doors, our government in Washington made no effort to relieve the desperate situation of these people, but on the contrary gave orders that they be kept out of the country... The failure to take any steps whatever to assist these distressed, persecuted Jews in their hour of extremity was one of the most disgraceful things which has happened in American history and leaves a stain and brand of shame upon the record of our nation.<sup>15</sup>

By 1939, more and more Jews were obsessed by the need for papers. They needed official passports to leave Germany, Austria, and other countries now under Nazi rule. They also needed written documents to enter another country.

In the 1930s Americans were more concerned with unemployment at home than with stateless Jews in Europe. Although many were willing to accept a few famous writers, artists, and scientists who happened to be Jewish, they were less willing to let in thousands of ordinary Jews. A 1939 poll helps explain why. Over 5,000 people were asked with which of the following statements they agreed:

In the United States the Jews have the same standing as any other people and they should be treated in all ways exactly like all other Americans.

Jews are in some way distinct from other Americans but they make respected and useful citizens so long as they do not try to mingle socially where they are not wanted.

Jews have somewhat different business methods and, therefore, measures should be taken to prevent Jews from getting too much power in the business world.

We should make it a policy to deport Jews from this country to some new homeland as fast as it can be done without inhumanity.

Although 39 percent agreed with the first statement, 53 percent regarded Jews as different from “real Americans.” About 32 percent wanted to restrict their “business methods” and about 10 percent favored their deportation. Eight percent had no opinion. Other polls resulted in similar findings. Few Americans were violently antisemitic, but many felt that Jews had to be kept in their “place.”<sup>16</sup>

Enforcement of the nation’s immigration laws reflected these views. The United States could legally admit as many as 26,000 German immigrants each year. Yet in 1934, the State Department allowed only about 5,000 to enter the nation. Approximately 6,000 were permitted to enter in 1935 and less than 11,000 in 1936.

Then in February 1939, Senator Robert Wagner of New York and Representative Edith Nourse Rogers of Massachusetts sponsored a bill that would bypass the immigration laws and temporarily admit 20,000 Jewish children who would stay in the country only until it was safe for them to return home. As most were too young to work, they would not take away jobs from Americans. Furthermore, their stay would not cost taxpayers a penny. Various Jewish groups had agreed to assume financial responsibility for the children.

Yet the bill encountered strong opposition. Why, opponents asked, were Christian children from Poland or Chinese children (Japan invaded China in 1933) not included? Others made openly antisemitic remarks. One warned “that twenty thousand children would soon grow into twenty thousand ugly adults.” The bill was never passed.

## CONNECTIONS

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The *St. Louis* was not the only boat to be turned away from the United States in the late 1930s. What do such incidents suggest about the nation’s “universe of obligation”?

How would you respond to the letter written to the Virginia newspaper? How do you think a government official would respond?

What does the controversy over the Rogers Bill suggest about antisemitism in the United States? About anti-immigrant feeling? In 1993, a poll similar to the one taken in 1939 revealed that 60 percent regarded immigration as a

“bad thing for this country.” About 62 percent believed that immigrants take the jobs of U.S. workers. Compare the two polls.

Over fifty years after the *St. Louis* incident, boatloads of refugees from Haiti, Vietnam, and China sought asylum in the United States and once again government officials turned them away. The officials claimed that the only refugees allowed to enter the nation were those whose lives would be in danger if they were returned to their homeland. Check newspapers and magazines written in the early 1990s to find out how Americans responded to that policy. How did memories of the *St. Louis* affect their reaction?

→The Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University has created *Flight From Destiny*, a video montage that deals with the voyage of the *St. Louis*. The video is described in detail in *Elements of Time*, pages 189-197 and is available from the Facing History Resource Center. Also available is a PBS special on American attitudes during those years. In addition a study guide is available for use with a video of Lianne Rief Lehrer and documents that detail what happened to relatives who sailed on the *St. Louis*. Walter K.’s memories of the *St. Louis* are summarized in *Elements of Time*, pages 234-236.

## READING 11

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### *Enemies become Allies*

**B**y the summer of 1939, war in Europe seemed inevitable. As people braced themselves, many wondered how the Soviet Union would respond. In the mid-1930s, Joseph Stalin had shifted from a policy of opposition to all capitalist nations to one that targeted fascist regimes. Still no one could be sure what Stalin or Hitler would do.

On August 23, 1939, the two dictators shocked the world by announcing a nonaggression pact. They also secretly agreed to divide Poland. In addition, Hitler promised Stalin a free hand in Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Bessarabia – countries that had been part of the Russian Empire before World War I. Although the treaty did not alter the long-range policies of either leader, it did startle people in both Russia and Germany. Max von der Gruen was thirteen years old when the treaty was signed.

I can remember the day the pact was signed as if it were yesterday. Probably the reason this agreement caused such a sensation and stirred up so many people was that ever since 1933 it had been drummed into the heads of the Germans that they were waging a life-and-death struggle against the forces of Bolshevism. But now the Nazis had made a pact with the Russians. People did not understand this; they were rattled, and suddenly began to have doubts about the Fuehrer.

That evening von der Gruen attended a meeting of Hitler Youth. The boys asked their squad leader to explain why Hitler had formed an alliance with his archenemy Stalin. Von der Gruen recalled:

The squad leader...said that the explanation was really quite simple: To be sure, Hitler had always been against Bolshevism, but only against the Bolshevism in the German Reich, not that in the Soviet Union; therefore, the pact was logical, understandable, and even long overdue...

And yet people continued to feel uneasy. On those rare occasions when one of us children dared to ask questions, our teachers did not know what to reply. They used to repeat the things that were said over the radio, which Goebbels controlled. The Fuehrer, they said, must know what he was doing, and thus he had a right to make a pact with the devil himself if he wanted to. Our history teacher actually said this to us.<sup>17</sup>

## CONNECTIONS

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Why were Germans so uncomfortable with the alliance with the Soviet Union? What does their discomfort suggest about the strengths and weaknesses of German propaganda?

For over twenty years, Germans were taught to regard the Bolsheviks as their enemies. Now they were told otherwise. How do enemy nations become allies? How does the average citizen come to view a former enemy as a friend? What part does propaganda play in the creation of enemies? In the process of turning those same enemies into allies? How can years spent learning to hate a particular group be unlearned?

## READING 12

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### *Those Considered Unworthy to Live*

As Hitler consolidated his power at home and abroad, he moved against yet another enemy. This enemy consisted of the weakest Germans – the people he called “useless eaters.” They included epileptics, alcoholics, people with birth defects, hearing losses, mental illnesses, and personality disorders as well as those who were visually impaired, had developmental lags, or even suffered from certain orthopedic problems. In his view, these people were “marginal human beings” who had to make a case for their own survival at a time when the nation was preparing for war.

The first to be eliminated were too young to speak on their own behalf. In the fall of 1938, the parents of a severely disabled infant petitioned Hitler for the right to kill the child. He granted the petition and saw in the request

an opportunity to encourage what he called “mercy killings” or “euthanasia.” According to his chief medical officer, “the Fuehrer was of the opinion that such a program could be put into effect more smoothly and rapidly in time of war, and that in the general upheaval of war, the open resistance anticipated from the church would not play the part that it might in other circumstances.”

The following spring, Hitler set up a committee of physicians to prepare for the murder of disabled and “retarded” children. Known as the “Reich Committee for the Scientific Treatment of Severe Hereditary and Congenital Diseases,” the group was told to keep its mission secret. Then just two weeks before the invasion of Poland, members asked doctors and midwives to fill out a questionnaire for every child with a deformity or disability. The focus was on children under the age of three. The committee claimed it was using the data “to clarify certain scientific questions.” In fact, the information was used to determine which children would be allowed to live.

The committee used the questionnaires to make its decisions. Members did not personally examine the children, consult with other physicians, or speak to the families involved. Once the decision was made, the committee told the child’s parents only that their baby was being placed in a special hospital to “improve” treatment. Their death came quickly. After the war, a doctor involved in the program told Robert Jay Lifton, “According to the thinking of that time, in the case of children killing seemed somehow justifiable...whereas in the case of the adult mentally ill, that was definitely murder.”<sup>18</sup>

If you had directed a nurse to go from bed to bed shooting these children... that would not have worked. As a result, “there was no killing, strictly speaking... People felt this is not murder, it is a putting-to-sleep.”

The doctor went on to describe how nurses were ordered to give the children sedatives that were harmless in small amounts but deadly in large doses. The doctor noted, “And with these sedatives...the child sleeps. If one does not know what is going on, he [the child] is sleeping. One really has to be let in on it to know that...that he really is being killed and not sedated.” Lifton added:

While Dr. F. admitted that one might wonder about a child, “Why is he sleeping so much?” he insisted (quite erroneously) that one could ignore that inner question because “the death rate of [those killed] wasn’t much above the regular death rate with such children.” He stressed the absence of either a direct command (“If I get the order to kill... I don’t know but I [think I] would refuse...but certainly there was no such order...for us”) or of manifest homicide (“I mean if you had directed a nurse to go from bed to bed shooting these children...that would not have worked.”) As a result, “there was no killing, strictly speaking... People felt this is not murder, it is a putting-to-sleep.”<sup>19</sup>

The program was later expanded to include not only young children but also teenagers and adults. One “euthanasia expert” justified the murders by arguing, “The idea is unbearable to me that the best, the flower of our youth, must lose its life at the front, in order that feebleminded and asocial elements can have a secure existence in the asylum.” Another

suggested that a doctor's duty is to rescue the "fit" for the future by weeding out the "unfit" in the present.

In some places, doctors used mobile gas vans to carry out the killings. By June 1940, the vans were being replaced with "showers" that sprayed gas. Between 1939 and 1941 at least seventy thousand persons were killed. A number of experts place the figure higher, claiming that at least two hundred fifty thousand were murdered.

## CONNECTIONS

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What is "mercy killing"? "Euthanasia"? Was either the goal of the Nazi program? Who decided who would live and who would die? Does it matter who makes that decision?

A poster widely distributed in Nazi Germany stated: "Everyday, a cripple or blind person costs 5-6 [Reichmarks], a mentally ill person 4, a criminal 3.50. A worker has 3-4 [Reichmarks] a day to spend on his family." To what prejudices does the poster appeal? How does it justify killings without ever mentioning them?

What distinction does the doctor Lifton interviewed make between murder and "putting to sleep"? Between the killing of young children and adults? How do the euphemisms make the killing easier? Help the perpetrators rationalize their actions?

A Nazi eugenics manual referred to doctors as "alert biological soldiers." What did the name mean? How would you define a doctor?

A bureaucracy developed to implement the new policies. It included not only doctors, nurses, and other medical personnel but also administrators, secretaries, and file clerks. They saw to it that the policy was "properly" carried out. What choices did these men and women make as they did their jobs? How do you account for the fact that they never mutinied or rebelled? Who was part of their "universe of obligation"? Who was not?

How did the name "Reich Committee for the Scientific Treatment of Severe Hereditary and Congenital Diseases" cloud the real work of the group? Why did the Nazis choose to mask its real task?

→ In the 1930s, a number of states in the United States had laws that called for the sterilization of individuals with certain disabilities. And some physicians openly discussed "euthanasia" as a way of dealing with the "unfit." Yet no state ever permitted the practice. Why were Americans willing to go only so far and no further? Additional information on the eugenics movement in the United States can be found on the video *Medicine at the Crossroads*, available from the Facing History Resource Center. The Resource Center also has a packet of materials that provides insights into the legacy of eugenics on American society, including its educational system.

How do Americans today view children with disabilities? Adults with the same disabilities? What prejudices does each group encounter? How do those attitudes make individuals with disabilities a potential target for discrimination and isolation?

## READING 13

### *Opposition to “Euthanasia”*

Government officials went to great lengths to keep the euthanasia program secret. Unlike other Nazi policies, this one was not loudly proclaimed. There were, however, too many people involved in the murders to keep the truth from coming out. From the start, families, religious leaders, and hospital personnel were suspicious of the government. When they raised awkward questions, the government either denied any wrongdoing or refused to answer questions because of the need for secrecy in wartime.

As rumors mounted, a few people demanded answers. Among them were Friedrich von Bodelschwingh and Paul-Gerhard Braune. The two men were ministers in the Confessing Church (Chapter 4, Reading 14) and heads of institutions that served disabled adults. Once they realized how the questionnaires were being used, they refused to fill out forms, voiced objections with key Nazi officials, and stalled as long as possible to keep their patients from being taken away.

Fearful that a public stand might jeopardize his patients, each man worked behind the scenes. Braune, however, sent top government officials a long report with detailed evidence of the murders. In it, he asked, “How far does one want to go with the extermination of so-called lives unworthy of life? The mass actions up to now have shown that many people have been taken who were in large part clear and of sane mind. Where does the limit lie? Who is abnormal, anti-social, who is hopelessly ill?... It is a dangerous venture to abandon the integrity of the person without any legal foundation... Will it not endanger the ethics of the entire population, when human life counts for so little?”<sup>20</sup>

A month later, Braune was imprisoned for “sabotaging measures of the regime in an irresponsible manner.” His fellow pastors in the Confessing Church gave him little support. Most wanted more proof before they took a stand. The few who did speak out lived in villages and small towns. They had no way of being heard beyond their community.

Then in May 1941, the Reich Committee for the Scientific Treatment of Severe Hereditary and Congenital Diseases began sending its questionnaires to homes for the elderly. A few months later, Clemens Graf von

It is a dangerous venture to abandon the integrity of the person without any legal foundation... Will it not endanger the ethics of the entire population, when human life counts for so little?

Galen, the Catholic bishop of Muenster, asked his congregation, “Do you or I have the right to live only as long as we are productive?” If so, he argued, “Then someone has only to order a secret decree that the measures tried out on the mentally ill be extended to other ‘nonproductive’ people, that it can be used on those incurably ill with a lung disease, on those weakened by aging, on those disabled at work, on severely wounded soldiers. Then not a one of us is sure anymore of his life.”<sup>21</sup>

The sermon was secretly reproduced and distributed throughout Germany. Three weeks later, Hitler signed an order officially ending the program. In fact, it did not end. It continued secretly throughout the war and may have claimed one hundred thousand more lives.

Do you or I have the right to live only as long as we are productive?
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## CONNECTIONS

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What does the phrase “unworthy of life” mean? What are the consequences of believing that some are “unworthy of life”?

How did the Nazis answer the questions raised in Braune’s report? The questions the bishop raised? How did the German people answer them in 1939? How would you respond?

Braune asked, “Will it not endanger the ethics of the entire population, when human life counts for so little”? How would you answer? Was the question asked publicly? Was it asked when the Nazis took the first steps against dissenters, Communists, and Jews? When is it too late to speak out?

Although most Nazis’ activities against the “other” were loudly proclaimed, the “euthanasia” program was kept secret. Why do you think the Nazis chose to do so?

How do you account for the fact that few Germans protested “euthanasia” even though it was directed against “Aryan” Germans as well as Jews and other minorities?

→*Ambulance*, an eight-minute silent video, is a dramatization showing a group of children and their adult caretaker about to board a mobile gas van. As the four Nazi soldiers prepare the van, the teacher remains calm in order to keep the children from feeling any panic. The children are playing blind man’s bluff and other children’s games as they unknowingly await their death. The film then follows the careers of those doctors. The video is available from the Facing History Resource Center.

## READING 14

### *Targeting the “Gypsies”*

As the Nazis prepared for war, they also moved against the people they called “Gypsies.” At first, the Nazis were content to enforce existing laws against the Sinti and Roma. In time, however, they amended laws that singled out other groups to include the “Gypsies.” Among those laws was a 1933 act calling for the sterilization of “mental defectives,” a 1934 law allowing the deportation of “undesirable aliens,” and the 1935 Nuremberg Laws aimed at the Jews. The Nazis also added a new law entitled the “Fight against the Gypsy Menace.” Its authors stated: “Experience gained in the fight against the Gypsy menace and the knowledge derived from race-biological research have shown that the proper method of attacking the Gypsy problem seems to be to treat it as a matter of race.”

Under the new law, the Sinti and the Roma were required to register with the police. They were then issued special papers indicating their racial identity. The next step was deportation. Some were shipped to ghettos, while others were sent to a special camp just for “Gypsies.” Still others were herded off to concentration camps such as Buchenwald, Dachau, and Ravensbruck. One man, then a boy known as Bubili, recalled the day the SS arrived for his family.

At first, the Nazis were content to enforce existing laws against the Sinti and Roma. In time, however, they amended laws that singled out other groups to include the “Gypsies.”

[On the morning of] June 26, 1939 (I can never forget the date), SS and Austrian police surrounded the wagons at daybreak. My aunt tried to signal me to leave. She sang as loudly as she could in our Romani language. “Bubili, run.” But when one is young, one sleeps so well. When I did not wake up, she sang louder, “Run, run, the police are here. The Deathheads have come.”

I grabbed my pants and started to jump out the door. A waiting SS man seized me. “You,” he said, pushing me down the hill, “join the others.”

“I’ll help my uncle take the horses out of the stall so the horses can pull the wagon to the police station,” I said.

“No,” the SS man said. “Leave them in the stable. You’ll pull the wagon yourself.”

My uncle had only one leg. My aunt and I and two others harnessed ourselves to the wagon. Just outside the city, I tried to dart away. But the SS man grabbed me. In the courtyard of the police station, so many Sinti were there already that we stood there together like herrings crammed in a barrel.

While the police were registering the men, my aunt whispered, “Bubili, hide beneath my petticoat. Our women wore three and four skirts that touched the ground. I was very thin and agile and could easily have hidden.

“I can’t. Uncle has only one foot. I have to help him.”

The next day, the Germans forced all the young men to climb into busses and trucks. I was the only young boy among 1,035 men. The women and children were released to go home. Where was my father?

My father had been picked up in an earlier raid on Brueck an der Mur. At the railroad station, he found out that my uncle and I had been taken. He asked the Germans to let us travel in the same boxcar. Two days later, June 28, the train stopped just outside the gates of Dachau. We waited, locked in the airless boxcar for about three quarters of an hour. Then we heard a shout as thirty or forty young SS men unlocked the bolts and threw open the doors. “Austrian pigheads,” they screamed. “Out, out. Run, you Congo niggers, run.” Their whips fell on us, killing two men as we ran toward the gates of Dachau.

“Line up. Faces to the sun.” The whole square was filled with prisoners in striped uniforms. Many of them wore yellow stars on their shirts. The others had different colored triangles on their uniforms.

We stood on the assembly place, the sun beating down on us from early morning until three in the afternoon. If someone dropped, we were not allowed to pick him up. Then an SS man with a whip drove us into a building.

“Sit down,” the guard said. He held a board with my name and number 3 4016 across my chest. The photographer snapped my picture. With his foot, the photographer pushed a lever that punched a nail into my rear. Like a trained monkey, I jumped through the small window leading to the property room. Why couldn’t they just tell us to get up instead of punching us with a nail?

In the property room, the guards shouted at us, “Take off all your clothes. Put everything else in the two baskets – your jewelry, your papers, your money.” We stood there naked as the guards led us toward the showers. It was after the shower I lost my hair. I wondered what more could the Nazis do to us?

The prisoners in charge of the clothing laughed as they threw it at us. If you were tall, you got striped pants that were too short. If you were short, you got striped pants that were too long. I would not look any more ridiculous. I “found” thread and shortened my pants.

The shoes were even worse. Only the kapos, the prisoners in charge of other prisoners, and the block “elders” had leather shoes. The rest of us were thrown wooden clogs. The wooden shoes hurt and bruised my feet. I had to figure out how to get a pair of leather shoes. It was summer, and we were taken out to help the farmers bring in crops. At the risk of my life, I smuggled potatoes in my shirt into camp. The big commodity was schnapps (whiskey). By bartering, I got schnapps, which someone had stolen from the SS. The schnapps I traded for leather shoes.<sup>22</sup>

Nazi officials were divided on the fate of the Roma and the Sinti once they were in the camps. Some advocated sterilization to render the “Gypsies” “biologically harmless.” Others favored annihilation.

## CONNECTIONS

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How were the techniques used to isolate the Sinti and Roma similar to those used to isolate Jews? What differences seem most striking?

What does it mean to render a people “biologically harmless”? What does the phrase suggest about the way the Nazis viewed the “Gypsies”? Why do you think the Nazis referred to them as “Congo niggers”?

In 1956, the West German Federal Supreme Court decided that “until May of 1943 most deportations of Gypsies were carried out for military or ‘crime-preventing’ reasons, not on racial grounds.” As a result, only token restitution has been granted “Gypsies” by the German government (about \$3 for each day spent in a death camp). In 1992, young Germans attacked the “Gypsies.” The government responded by deporting the Sinti and the Roma. What stereotypes are inherent in the court ruling? In the deportations?

→In the video *Triumph of Memory*, non-Jewish prisoners testify to the treatment of the Sinti and Roma. The video is available from the Facing History Resource Center, as is an article entitled “The Other Victims: Non-Jews Persecuted and Murdered by the Nazis.”

## READING 15

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### *Targeting Poland*

**O**n August 31, 1939, the Nazis took a group of prisoners from a concentration camp to Gleiwitz, a town on the Polish border. After being dressed in Polish army uniforms, the prisoners were killed. The next morning, the German army and the SS marched into Poland. They claimed that they were retaliating a Polish “attack on Gleiwitz.”

Max von der Gruen’s grandparents had one of the few radios in their small village in Germany. That evening, relatives and neighbors gathered to listen to Hitler declare war on Poland.

It is the Fuehrer’s and Goering’s intention to destroy and exterminate the Polish nation.
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No one cheered at the end of the speech, not even my aunt who had always cheered for Hitler; no one cried “Heil!” or turned somersaults with joy. Perturbation was written on everyone’s face. No one spoke, and even the neighbors who had come to listen with us said nothing.

My grandfather wept. I could scarcely believe that I was seeing this old, worn-out man crying. No one asked him why he was crying. They were distressed because all of them knew what he had gone through during World War I. He had often told me about it.

No one displayed any enthusiasm. Not in school, not on the streets, not in the shops, not even among the Hitler Youth. No one dared to look anyone else in the face for fear that he might be asked what he thought about the war.

Of course, not everyone felt this way. A few of the boys in my class – we were thirteen years old – regretted that they were not older, for then they could have volunteered to join the Army; meanwhile, I consoled myself with the thought that the war would be over by the time I got out of school...

Three days after Hitler attacked Poland, Great Britain and France declared war on Germany...

People who in the past had been opposed to Hitler were now reluctantly forced to acknowledge that he was a great general and statesman. After all, he had defeated Poland in only 18 days.<sup>23</sup>

Immediately after the invasion, Germany's Quartermaster General, Colonel Eduard Wagner noted in his diary, "It is the Fuehrer's and Goering's intention to destroy and exterminate the Polish nation. More than that cannot even be hinted at in writing."

Jacob Birnbaum, a Jew who lived in the town of Piotrkow, quickly discovered what those secret plans meant to the Jews of Poland.

Whenever one pulls the trigger in order to rectify history's mistake, one lies.

The next day, Saturday, September 2, at 8:30 in the morning, Piotrkow was heavily bombed, resulting in many casualties. The heavy bombing continued through the following day, destroying a number of public buildings, including the city hall, police headquarters, the State Bank, the post office, and the city's water system. On Tuesday, September 5, at 4:00 in the afternoon, German ground troops entered Piotrkow and conquered the city after two hours of street fighting. That same day they set out on a search for Jews in the almost deserted city, found twenty, among them Rabbi Yechiel Meir Fromnitsky, and shot them in cold blood. Thus it began.

The next day, September 6, the Germans set fire to a few streets in the Jewish quarter and shot Jews trying to escape from their burning homes... Both individually and in groups the Germans invaded the Jewish community and stole virtually everything they feasibly could – clothes, linen, furs, carpets, valuable books. They often invited the Poles on the streets to take part in the looting, after which they would fire bullets into the air in order to give the impression that they were driving away the Polish "thieves." These scenes were photographed by the Germans to demonstrate for all that they were protecting Jewish property from Polish criminals.

Jews, many of them elderly, were kidnapped and sent to forced labor camps where they were tortured and beaten – often to the point of loss of consciousness. These kidnappings took place during the days preceding Rosh Hashanah, as well as on the holy day itself. Jewish men hid themselves in cellars, attics, and elsewhere, yet most were caught. The worst fate was that of the Jews sent to the SS Precinct. The main objective of the work there was torture, not productivity. Jews were forced, for instance, to do “gymnastics” while being beaten and subjected to various other forms of humiliation...

One common insult suffered by the Jews during the early days under the new regime was their being chased away or beaten as they tried to wait in line for food together with other citizens. All Jews who attempted to resist were gunned down immediately.

During the holy days of Rosh Hashanah, as Jews hurriedly gathered to pray in the synagogues and private homes, still more torture was inflicted upon them. Several German officers entered the Great Synagogue stirring up much confusion among the worshipping Jews, many of whom attempted to escape. Twenty-nine worshippers were beaten brutally and taken away to prison, among them the lay leader of the congregation. The news of this event spread rapidly through the city, causing a great deal of fright, consternation, and anxiety. There were no worshippers in the synagogue on the second day of Rosh Hashanah.

Two days before Yom Kippur, German officers and troopers entered the shut synagogue, broke up the furnishings, and completely demolished the beautifully ornamented eastern wall.<sup>24</sup>

## CONNECTIONS

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Hitler believed that if a lie were outrageous enough, people would believe it. How does the incident that led to war reflect that belief?

How do you account for reactions in Max von der Gruen’s village to news of the invasion?

In 1933, the Nazis isolated the Communists. Then they turned against gays, Jews, and “Gypsies.” By 1939, they were targeting the disabled. Now they labeled an entire nation as “unfit” and “subhuman.” How did each step in the process prepare for the next one? How did the notion that some groups are “subhuman” or “unworthy of life” make opposition more difficult? Where was the opposition?

What does Jacob Birnbaum’s description of the events in Piotrkow tell you about Nazi policy in Poland?

In the 1990s, Serbs, Croats, and Bosnians fought for land and power in what was once Yugoslavia. Joseph Brodsky, a Nobel-Prize-winning poet, wrote of that conflict:

What's happening now in the Balkans is very simple: It is a bloodbath. Terms such as "Serbs," "Croats," "Bosnians" mean absolutely nothing. Any other combination of vowels and consonants will amount to the same thing: killing people. Neither religious distinctions – Orthodox, Catholic, Muslim – nor ethnic ones are of any consequence. The former are forfeited with the first murder (for "Thou shalt not kill" pertains at least to any version of the Christian creed); as for the latter, all these people are what we in our parts define as Caucasian.

Evocations of history here are bare nonsense. Whenever one pulls the trigger in order to rectify history's mistake, one lies. For history makes no mistakes, since it has no purpose. One always pulls the trigger out of self-interest and quotes history to avoid responsibility or pangs of conscience. No man possesses sufficient retrospective ability to justify his deeds – murder especially – in extemporaneous categories, least of all a head of state.<sup>25</sup>

How do Brodsky's comments apply to events in Europe in the 1930s? To violence in other parts of the world today?

## READING 16

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### *Conquests in the East*

After the surrender of Poland in the fall of 1939, the Nazis quickly incorporated western Poland and parts of central and southern Poland into Germany and renamed the territory Warthegau. Hitler called the rest of the country "the General Government of Poland" and placed it under the rule of Hans Frank, one of his chief advisors. To "Aryanize" Warthegau, the Nazis deported millions of Poles as well as all Jews and "Gypsies" to the General Government.

From the start, the Nazis made their plans clear: "Poles who have failed to understand that they are the conquered and we are conquerors and who act against...regulations, expose themselves to the most severe punishment." According to those regulations, Poles were required to "leave the pavement free" for their conquerors; they had to serve Germans and German Poles first in every shop; and they were to tip their hats to "important personalities of State, Party and armed forces" but were not allowed to say "Heil Hitler!"

Educated Poles were subject to arbitrary arrest. In early November, 1939, the Nazis shipped 167 professors at Cracow University to Sachsenhausen, a concentration camp outside Berlin. Later that week, they arrested a thousand Polish intellectuals. In December, Hitler issued a special decree, allowing anyone considered a threat to German security to “vanish without a trace into the night and fog.”

Six months later, in May 1940, Heinrich Himmler plotted the future of Polish children. “For the non-German population of the East, there must be no higher school than the fourth grade of elementary school. The sole goal of this schooling is to teach them simple arithmetic, nothing above the number 500; writing one’s name; and the doctrine that it is divine law to obey the Germans... I do not think that reading is desirable.” Only “racially valuable” children – Polish children with “Aryan” features and backgrounds – were exempt. To turn them into true “Aryans,” the Nazis kidnapped an estimated two hundred thousand children and shipped them to Germany. There the boys were trained as soldiers and the girls prepared for motherhood.

Even before Warsaw fell to the Nazis, Reinhard Heydrich, the Chief of the Reich Central Security Office, called a meeting in Berlin of the leaders of several SS units known as the *Einsatzgruppen*. At the meeting, Heydrich distinguished between “the final aim (which will require extended periods of time)” and “the stages leading to the fulfillment of this final aim (which will be carried out in short periods).” He began by ordering the concentration of the Jews from the countryside into large cities. Jewish communities with less than five hundred persons were to be dissolved and those living there transferred to the nearest “concentration center.”

By the end of 1939, every Jew had to wear a “yellow star.” Jews were also subject to a curfew that kept them off the streets between 9:00 P.M. and 5:00 A.M. Failing to abide by these or any one of the other laws the Nazis imposed could mean ten years in prison. The Nazis established nearly 400 ghettos and 437 forced labor camps in occupied Poland. Within months, they had reenacted six years of step-by-step measures in Germany. Although Polish Jews had long lived with antisemitism, they were in no way prepared for the Nazis.

Warsaw with over 350,000 Jews had the largest Jewish population in Europe. Even though the Nazis did not set up a ghetto there until the fall of 1940, a reign of terror began almost immediately. In December 1939, Chaim Kaplan, the principal of a Warsaw Hebrew school, recorded in his diary two stories from the city of Lodz, a major center of Jewish life. The first concerned a group of girls.

These girls were compelled to clean a latrine – to remove the excrement and clean it. But they received no utensils. To their question: “With what?” the Nazis replied: “With your blouses.” The girls removed their blouses and cleaned the excrement with them. When the job was done they received their reward: the Nazis wrapped their faces

in the blouses, filthy with the remains of the excrement, and laughed uproariously. And all this because “Jewish England” is fighting against the Fuehrer with the help of the Juden.

The second story focused on a rabbi forced to spit on the Torah, the Five Books of Moses.

In fear of his life, he complied and desecrated that which is holy to him and to his people. After a short while he had no more saliva, his mouth was dry. To the Nazi’s question, why did he stop spitting, the rabbi replied that his mouth was dry. Then the son of the “superior race” began to spit into the rabbi’s open mouth, and the rabbi continued to spit on the Torah.<sup>26</sup>

These incidents not only shocked Kaplan. They also bothered some Germans. When one medical officer complained that some soldiers were disturbed by such cruelty, Hitler “took note of it calmly enough at first, but then began another long tirade of abuse at the ‘childish ideas’ prevalent in the army’s leadership; you cannot fight wars with the methods of the Salvation Army.”

A few generals also complained. Foremost among them was Johannes Blaskowitz, the commander-in-chief of the Eastern Territories. He was particularly concerned about the effects of these incidents on his men. In his view, they resulted in “tremendous brutalization and moral depravity which is spreading rapidly among precious German manpower like an epidemic.” And he warned, “If high-ranking SS and police officials demand and openly praise acts of violence and brutality, before long people who commit acts of violence will predominate alone.”<sup>27</sup> Hans Frank responded by threatening to dismiss Blaskowitz. In the end, Blaskowitz kept his job and later went on to head the German army in the Netherlands. What of the policies he protested? They continued. The Nazis had no intention of abandoning them.

## CONNECTIONS

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Are all enemies equal? Compare the way the Nazis regarded Jewish and Gentile Poles. What similarities do you see? What differences seem most striking? Does what happens to one group eventually happen to all groups in a society?

What do the stories Kaplan recounted in his diary tell you about life in Warsaw? Why do you think he included them in his diary?

Do you agree with Blaskowitz that incidents of violence lead to “tremendous brutalization and moral depravity”?

What conclusions can you draw from Blaskowitz's protest? What does it suggest about his "universe of obligation"? What conclusions can you draw from the fact that he did not lose his job despite his protests?

Why did it take the Germans six years to isolate German Jews but only a few weeks to isolate Polish Jews? What does your answer suggest about the Germans' "universe of obligation"?

→Krysta S., a Polish schoolgirl who studied in secret throughout the war, describes how the Nazis tried to curtail education in her country in the video montage *Childhood Memories*, available from the Facing History Resource Center and summarized in *Elements of Time*, pages 228-233.

## READING 17

### *A Return to the Ghettos*

**B**y the summer of 1941, Jews throughout Eastern Europe had been forced into ghettos. Just two weeks before the Jewish section of Warsaw was closed off, Chaim Kaplan wrote in his diary, "A Jewish ghetto in the traditional sense is inconceivable. Many churches and government buildings are in the heart of the ghetto. They cannot be eliminated, they fulfill necessary functions. Besides that, it is impossible to cut off the trolley routes going from one end of the city to the other through the ghetto... To differentiate citizens of one country according to race, and erect partitions between them, is a sick pathological idea." Two days later, Kaplan noted, "The face of Warsaw was changed so that no one who knows it would recognize it. People from outside do not enter now, but if a miracle were to take place and one of its inhabitants who fled returned to the city, he would say, 'Can this be Warsaw?'"<sup>28</sup>

The face of Warsaw was changed so that no one who knows it would recognize it. People from outside do not enter now, but if a miracle were to take place and one of its inhabitants who fled returned to the city, he would say, "Can this be Warsaw?"

Before long a brick wall nine feet high encircled the Warsaw ghetto. Although public utilities still linked it to the outside world, in almost every other way, the inhabitants were isolated. Within its walls about 33 percent of the city's population lived on less than 3 percent of the land. The Nazis rationed enough food for only twenty percent of the ghetto's inhabitants. As a result, nearly one-fifth ultimately died of "natural causes" – hunger and disease.

Still many Jews felt the ghetto offered them some measure of protection. They believed that they would be safe "as long as we are among Jews." The Nazis encouraged that delusion by creating a *Judenrat* or "Council of Jewish Elders" in each ghetto. The *Judenrat* gave Jews the impression that they had some measure of authority over their own community. In fact, they had none. Shmuel Zygelboim, a member of the Warsaw *Judenrat*, wrote:

[About] 50 Gestapo men under the command of an officer entered the hall. All carried pistols or whips... Finally, in a threatening, harsh voice the officer uttered: “Jews, you listen to me, and listen carefully! The commandant has ordered that all Jews of Warsaw must leave their present homes and move to the streets that have been designated for the ghetto, not later than Tuesday. To assure that the order is strictly carried out, all 24 alternates will be taken hostages. With their heads they are responsible for the exact execution of the order. You, the members of the Judenrat, are also responsible with your heads. We are not taking you away now simply because somebody must remain here to take care of the execution of the order.” The 24 Jews, present only by accident, were then surrounded by the Gestapo men. Orders were shouted:

“About face, forward march” and they marched out. Outside, in the street, trucks were waiting and the Jews were carried away.<sup>29</sup>

Terror became a part of daily life. After watching the Nazis toss a three-year-old into the snow, Emanuel Ringelblum wrote, “Its mother jumped off the wagon and tried to save the child. The guard threatened her with a revolver. The mother insisted that life was worthless for her without her child. Then the Germans threatened to shoot all the Jews in the wagon. The mother arrived in Warsaw, and here went out of her mind.”<sup>30</sup>

## CONNECTIONS

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Richard Rubenstein writes:

According to [historian Raul] Hilberg, the measure that gave the civil service bureaucrats least difficulty in exterminating their victims was the imposition of a starvation diet. In a bureaucratically controlled society where every individual’s ration can be strictly determined, starvation is the ideal instrument of ‘clean’ violence. A few numbers are manipulated on paper in an office hundreds of miles away...and millions can be condemned to a prolonged and painful death. In addition, both the death rate and the desired level of vitality of the inmates can easily be regulated by the same bureaucrats. As starvation proceeds, the victim’s appearance is so drastically altered that by the time death finally releases him, he hardly seems like a human being worth saving.<sup>31</sup>

How were the distinctions the bureaucrats made between starvation and other forms of murder similar to those German physicians made between murdering patients and “putting them to sleep”? What differences seem most striking?

Heinz Jost, a German soldier, spent a rare day off (it was, in fact, his birthday) taking pictures in the Warsaw Ghetto. The 129 photographs have been

arranged in an exhibit called *A Day in the Warsaw Ghetto*. In an article about the exhibit, *Newsweek* reported that “at his birthday dinner that evening, Jost found he had no appetite. In his letters home during the rest of the war, he made no mention of what he’d seen.” How do you account for his response? How is it similar to the way many Germans responded to *Kristallnacht*?

→To create the B.B.C. video, *The Warsaw Ghetto*, the producers used Nazi newsreels and “documentaries.” The result is a powerful film that offers vivid proof of what happens when one group considers another “subhuman.” Historian Lucy Dawidowicz, however, expressed concern at this use of images shot as propaganda. Do you agree?

Nowadays we live in an era of photomania, where photographs are regarded as the magic key to unlock the doors of the past, which only the more effortful study of history had previously been able to open. Nowadays people regard pictures as the essence of truth, forgetting that, like written documents, pictures too can lie, can distort the truth. Even more effectively than written documents, the camera falsifies objective reality because it creates its own illusion of reality.

Too often pictures have been made to serve the uses of propaganda. Selective photography, posed or staged subject matter, technical tricks of the trade which bring into existence nonexistent subjects – these are the standard ways the camera is made to lie. Too often the camera serves ends that contribute neither to the truth of art nor to the truth of history.<sup>32</sup>

## READING 18

### *A Return to Tradition?*

Many Jews in Europe saw Nazi rules and regulations as a “return to the Middle Ages.” During the Middle Ages, the Church enacted a series of laws that isolated Jews from their Christian neighbors. (Chapter 1, Reading 14). In *A Boy of Old Prague*, Sulamith Ish-Kishor describes the effects of those laws on a young Christian in 1556. Tomas grew up accepting all that he had heard about the people of the ghetto until the day his master sent the frightened boy to work for a Jew.

In categorizing Jews as outsiders, Hitler was giving new life to those old prejudices.

I held back heavy as a dummy, while Paul and Girard pushed and dragged me to the gate. They whistled three times, and the watchman came slowly out of his cottage beside the [Ghetto] wall. He was a Christian, and I thought he looked at me with a mocking wink. As we passed through those terrible gates into the abode of the accursed, I

remembered all the dreadful tales of witchcraft and black magic I had heard told of the Jews. One night came back to me, when we boys sat together over the kitchen fire, eating nuts and apples and telling terrible stories about the Jews: a Jew had cut himself up in pieces, and put himself into a flask, and had become immortal; another had made himself invisible with the herb Andromeda when the Devil came for his soul; another had turned the sun red with the stone called heliotrope, and another had cut off his shadow and given it to his master the Devil in a cave; another had brought on a terrible storm by means of a copper basin. I thought I saw the Archdemon himself grinning over the walls; I made one prayer to the Virgin Mary, and fainted...

The tall, gloomy houses were solid black and terrifying in the night; their gabled tops seemed to waver and mock at me, and here and there a lighted window stared like the eye of a devil. I wondered weakly how anyone could have the cruelty to do what my lord was doing to a Christian soul.

At last we came through the muddy streets, as crooked and close as an eagle's claws, to a high, narrow house, bolted and dark. A black cat gliding between my legs nearly upset my balance again, so weak was I with terror...

"Here's the boy my lord has promised you," scowled Girard. "Mind you don't cut his heart out and bake it for Satan's supper..."

The old Jew pushed open a door into a large, warm room. There was an Eastern carpet on the floor, and several couches around the walls. A fire roared in the grate. The Jew left me alone for a while, and I crept nearer the fire, and looked around the room.

There was a low table, from which the chairs had been hastily pushed back; on it was a board painted with red and black squares, with funny little wooden figures tumbling out of a box beside it. These, I thought, must be puppets which the Jews had made, in order to prick them and cause the death of the Christians whom they represented. On the floor, face upward, lay a painted rag doll.

I looked up, and nearly fell backward into the fire. The Jew was approaching me with a large knife in his hand! Now I knew why I had been bought! It would soon be the Passover festival, when the Jews kill Christians in order to drink their blood! My scalp pricked, my blood felt thick and dry, my heart beat loud and fast, and I saw nothing for a moment.

The Jew stood before me, waiting.

"You want to sleep all tied up like an animal?" he exclaimed sourly. Getting behind me he began sawing away at the rope that bound my hands together. The small of my back contracted painfully, in expectation of the sharp, penetrating dig of the knife. I stood stiff, saying more prayers in that moment than ever before in my life. But nothing happened to me; the rope fell from my hands, and he

motioned me to the table on which he had placed a large piece of black bread and several slices of meat. So I saw that I was not to be slaughtered at present.

In time, Tomas learned that Jews were not demons but people much like himself. If he had not been sent to work among them, however, he would have never known. In categorizing Jews as outsiders, Hitler was giving new life to those old prejudices. Historian Raul Hilberg revealed the connection between past and present when he compared Nazi laws with those enacted during the Middle Ages.

### CHURCH LAW

1. Prohibition of intermarriage and sexual intercourse between Christians and Jews - Synod of Elvira, A.D. 306
2. Jews and Christians not permitted to eat together - Synod of Elvira, 306
3. Jews not allowed to hold public office - Synod of Clermont, 535
4. Jews not allowed to employ Christian servants or possess Christian slaves - 3rd Synod of Orleans, 538
5. Jews not permitted in the streets during Passion Week - 3rd Synod of Orleans, 538
6. Burning of the Talmud and other books - 12th Synod of Toledo, 691
7. Christians not permitted to patronize Jewish doctors - Trulanic Synod, 692
8. Christians not permitted to live in Jewish homes - Synod of Narbonne, 1050
9. Jews obliged to pay taxes for support of the Church to the same extent as Christians - Synod of Gerona, 1078
10. Jews not permitted to be plaintiffs or witnesses against Christians in the Court - 3rd Lateran Council, 1179
11. The marking of Jewish clothes with a badge - 4th Lateran Council, 1215
12. Construction of new synagogues prohibited - Council of Oxford, 1222
13. Christians not permitted to attend Jewish ceremonies - Synod of Vienna, 1267
14. Compulsory ghetto - Synod of Breslau, 1267
15. Christians not permitted to sell or rent real estate to Jews, Synod of Ofen, 1279
16. Adoption by a Christian of the Jewish religion or return by a baptized Jew to the Jewish religion defined as a heresy - Synod of Mainz, 1310
17. Jews not permitted to obtain academic degrees - Council of Basel, 1434.

### NAZI LAW

1. Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor - Sept. 15, 1935
2. Jews barred from dining cars - Dec. 30, 1939
3. Law for the Re-establishment of the Professional Civil Service - April 7, 1933
4. Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor - Sept. 15, 1935
5. Decree authorizing local authorities to bar Jews from streets on certain days - Dec. 3, 1938
6. Book burnings in Germany - 1933
7. Decree of July 25, 1938
8. Directive by Goring providing for concentration of Jews in houses - December 28, 1938
9. Jews must pay special income tax in lieu of donations to the Party imposed on Nazis - Dec. 24, 1940
10. Jews not permitted to institute civil suits - Sept. 9, 1942
11. Decree of Sept. 1, 1941
12. Destruction of synagogues in entire Reich - Nov. 10, 1938
13. Friendly relations with Jews prohibited - Oct. 24, 1941
14. Order by Heydrich - Sept. 21, 1939
15. Decree providing for compulsory sale of Jewish real estate - Dec. 3, 1938
16. Adoption of Jewish religion by a Christian places him or her in jeopardy of being treated as a Jew - 6/26/42
17. Laws against Overcrowding of German Schools and Universities - April 25, 1933<sup>33</sup>

## CONNECTIONS

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Like most people of his day, Tomas could not read or write. Where then did he learn to hate? How did he learn whom to fear? Whom to hate?

At one point in the story, Tomas fears that the Jew is planning to kill him and then drink his blood. That notion resulted from stories that linked Jews with the demons who were widely believed to murder Christian children for religious purposes. Tomas's terror shows the power of these stories. How do such stories incite hatred and violence? What do they suggest about the way fear blurs one's vision? The way stereotypes distort the truth?

How do dictionaries define the word *myth*? What is the connection between myth and misinformation? To what extent were Tomas's views of Jews based on myths? How does isolation foster myths? How did the fact that those myths were rooted in tradition affect their power? Are people more likely to obey a new idea or an old one?

Write a working definition for the word *ghetto*. Compare the ghettos of the sixteenth century with those the Nazis built in the twentieth century. In what respects are they similar? What differences seem most striking?

How did the Nazis give life to old prejudices? Do leaders today do the same thing?

Lydia Gasman-Csato was fifteen when the Nazis took over Romania. She later described the humiliation of the new rules as being as "bad as dying. Humiliation. Lack of dignity... I consider human dignity to be as important as food and as breathing, and that is what I was deprived of." Compare her response to Frederick Douglass's view of slavery (Chapter 2, Reading 3). What similarities seem most striking?

## READING 19

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### *Conquests in the West*

**I**n the spring of 1940, the Nazis turned their attention to the West. In April, they conquered Denmark and Norway. Early in May, they overran Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. By June 22, France had fallen. Hitler now controlled all of Western Europe except Britain. While the British fought on alone, many conquered nations formed governments-in-exile in London. Each prepared for the day its people would be free again.

Nazi victories led to a change in leadership in Britain. Winston Churchill became prime minister in May 1940. Upon taking office, he vowed to "wage war, by sea, land or air, with all our might and with all the

In 1933 a French premier ought to have said... "The new Reich Chancellor is the man who wrote *Mein Kampf*, which says this and that. This man cannot be tolerated in our vicinity. Either he disappears or we march!" But they didn't do it. They let us alone.

strength God can give us; to wage war against a monstrous tyranny, never surpassed in the dark, lamentable catalogue of human crime. That is our policy. You ask, what is our aim? I can answer in one word: It is victory, victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory however long and hard the road may be; for without victory there is no survival.”

Churchill spoke in one of the worst moments in the war. The Nazis and their allies now controlled almost all of Europe. Only Spain, Portugal, Switzerland, and Sweden were still neutral. Germany’s successes encouraged allies and would-be allies both in Europe and in Asia. In the Middle East, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, a Muslim leader, saw in those successes an opportunity.

Germany and Italy recognize the illegality of the “Jewish Home in Palestine.” They accord to Palestine and to other Arab countries the right to solve the problem of the Jewish elements in Palestine and other Arab countries in accordance with the interest of the Arabs, and by the same method that the question is now being settled in the Axis countries. Under this agreement no Jewish immigration into the Arab countries should be permitted.<sup>34</sup>

Democracies don't like to listen to bad news. Democracies don't want to think about bad possibilities in the future. Democracies don't want their comfort or profits interfered with. Democracies may or may not win out in the long term. It is entirely possible that until now they have merely been lucky.

In most conquered nations, the Nazis established a new government. In some places, it was a military government, in others, it was headed by civilians, and in still others, by the SS. Occasionally, it was a complicated mixture of all of all three. France was divided among three different governments. Alsace and Lorraine, the provinces Germany lost in World War I, were restored to the “Fatherland.” A German military commander governed northern France and the area along the Atlantic coast. Henri Philippe Petain, a hero of World War I, and Pierre Laval, a French politician, were in charge of the rest of the nation. After the two agreed to work with the Nazis, they were allowed to set up a government in the town of Vichy.

Antisemitism was official policy in every conquered nation. Although Jews legally had the same rights as other citizens, they quickly found themselves separated from their neighbors. One of the first laws passed by the Vichy government declared that Jews were inferior and were therefore barred from employment in government, the military, education, or the media. The number of Jewish doctors and lawyers was also limited. The only exceptions were veterans with distinguished combat records.

When French Jews were ordered to register at local police stations, many protested. Among them was Marc Haguenu, who later died fighting to free France from the Nazi rule. “I count in my family too many generations of French Israelites, who have lived under all regimes – monarchies, empires, republics – not to be capable of judging in a completely French spirit what a backward step this is for our country, as regards the respect for all spiritual values in which I was raised, and to which I remain attached. I would have considered it contrary to my dignity not to make this brief and useless declaration.”<sup>35</sup>

Marion Pritchard, then a student, recalled the way the Germans also separated the Jews from “Aryans” in the Netherlands.

Gradually the Germans instituted and carried out the necessary steps to isolate and deport every Jew in the country. They did it in so many seemingly small steps, that it was very difficult to decide when and where to take a stand. One of the early, highly significant measures was the Aryan Attestation: all civil servants had to sign a form stating whether they were Aryans or not. Hindsight is easy; at the time only a few enlightened people recognized the danger and refused to sign. Then followed the other measures: Jews had to live in certain designated areas of the towns they lived in, and the curfew was stricter for them than for the general population. Jews over the age of six had to wear yellow stars on their clothing; Jewish children could not go to school with gentile children; Jews could not practice their professions, use public transportation, hire a taxicab, shop in gentile stores, or go to the beach, the park, the movies, concerts, or museums. The Jewish Committee was instructed by the Germans to publish a daily newspaper in which all these measures were announced, the regular Dutch press was not allowed to print anything about Jewish affairs.<sup>36</sup>

We wanted to come to power legally, but we did not use power legally.

When the Germans tried to deport four hundred Jews in February 1941, Gentiles in the Netherlands decided to take a stand. Miep van Santan Gies, who later hid Anne Frank and her family recalled:

In order to show the full measure of indignity, we Dutch felt about the treatment of Jewish people, we called a general strike for February 25. We wanted our Jews to know that we had great concern for what was happening to them.

On February 25 all hell broke loose! All transport and industry ground to a halt. At the forefront of the strike were our dockworkers, and all other workers followed suit. Before the German occupation, Holland had had a great many different parties and political groups. Now, suddenly, we were all one: anti-German.

The February strike lasted for three marvelous days. I heard that the morale of Dutch Jews rose tremendously; everyone felt the solidarity the strike inspired. Dangerous, yes, but wonderful to be doing something against our oppressors. But after three days the Nazis reasserted themselves with brutal reprisals.<sup>37</sup>

After the Nazis ended the strike, they shipped the Jews to death camps. Then mass deportations began. By 1941, Hitler had achieved most of his foreign policy goals. Just a year earlier, Joseph Goebbels reflected on his methods in a secret meeting with German journalists:

Up to now we have succeeded in leaving the enemy in the dark concerning Germany’s real goals, just as before 1932 our domestic foes never saw where we were going or that our oath of legality was just a

trick. We wanted to come to power legally, but we did not use power legally... They could have suppressed us. They could have arrested a couple of us in 1925 and that would have been that, the end. No they let us through the danger zone. That's exactly how it was in foreign policy too... In 1933 a French premier ought to have said (and if I had been the French premier I would have said it): "The new Reich Chancellor is the man who wrote *Mein Kampf*, which says this and that. This man cannot be tolerated in our vicinity. Either he disappears or we march!" But they didn't do it. They let us alone and let us slip through the risky zone, and we were able to sail around all dangerous reefs. *And when we were done, and well armed, better than they, then they started the war!*

## CONNECTIONS

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How did Nazi policy in Western Europe differ from policy in Eastern Europe? How do you account for those differences?

Make an identity chart for Marc Haguenu. What does he mean when he says, "I would have considered it contrary to my dignity not to make this brief and useless declaration"?

What did the Dutch response to antisemitism demonstrate? What does it suggest about the choices people had in other conquered nations?

Why didn't the French premier or anyone else, for that matter, stop the Nazis?

Columnist William Pfaff compared world problems in the 1990s with those in the 1930s:

In the 1930s there certainly was no popular clamor for the democracies to block Hitler from remilitarizing the Rhineland, or annexing Austria, or partitioning Czechoslovakia. Chamberlain and Daladier were the popular politicians, calm and reasonable men who refused to take risks over distant issues and improbable dangers. The public turned to Churchill and de Gaulle only after all the combinations of appeasement (and collaboration) had been tried and had failed.

So there is nothing new in what is happening. But it does reiterate a lesson. Governments that are passively dependent upon public opinion, as democracies are as a general rule, are incapable of dealing with long-term threats requiring the sacrifice of lives, or even the serious risk of lost lives, even when a reasoned case can be made that this will save lives in the long run...

The fact is that democracies compete badly with despotisms. Democracies don't like sacrifices, or the politicians who demand them. Democracies are no good at looking after their security interests when a gun is not pointed at their heads. Democracies don't like to listen to bad news. Democracies don't want to think about bad possibilities in

the future. Democracies don't want their comfort or profits interfered with. Democracies may or may not win out in the long term. It is entirely possible that until now they have merely been lucky.<sup>38</sup>

How are Pfaff's warnings similar to the ones Lincoln made in the 1800s? What differences seem most striking? What are the responsibilities of democratic leaders? Is it to follow public opinion or to stand up for things they believe are right? What are the responsibilities of a citizen?

## READING 20

### *The Invasion of Russia*

For Hitler, World War II was more than a series of battles between rival armies. It was also a "racial" war against those he regarded as "inferior," "subhuman," or simply "unworthy of life." He told his officers, "I know that the necessity of making war in such a manner is beyond the comprehension of you generals, but I cannot and will not change my orders, and I insist that they be carried out with unquestioning and unconditional obedience." That demand for obedience would be stretched farther and farther.

For Hitler, World War II was more than a series of battles between rival armies. It was also a "racial" war against those he regarded as "inferior," "subhuman," or simply "unworthy of life."

On June 22, 1941, Hitler ordered the invasion of Russia to destroy once and for all the "Jewish-Bolshevik menace." As the German army advanced into what was then the Soviet Union, four SS units known as the *Einsatzgruppen* followed close behind. Each had its own territory: *A* served in the north, *B* along the central Russian front, *C* in the northern Ukraine, and *D* in the southern Ukraine, the Caucasus, and Crimea. Each had orders to murder anyone the Nazis considered an "enemy of the state." There were murders before the invasion. But now, the killings became more systematic, deliberate, and routine. On July 31, Hermann Goering gave the following order to Reinhard Heydrich, Chief of the Security Police:

I hereby charge you with making all necessary preparations with regard to organizational and financial matters for bringing about a complete solution of the Jewish question in the German sphere of influence in Europe.

Wherever other governmental agencies are involved, these are to cooperate with you.

I charge you furthermore to send me, before long, an overall plan concerning the organizational, factual, and measures necessary for the execution of the desired solution of the Jewish question.<sup>39</sup>

Goering used code words to protect the secrecy of the operation. On October 10, 1941, the commander in chief on the eastern front spoke more bluntly to his troops.



The essential aim of the campaign against the Jewish-Bolshevist system is the complete crushing of its means of power and the extermination of Asiatic influence in the European cultural region.

This poses tasks for the troops which go beyond the one-sided routine of conventional soldiering. In the Eastern region, the soldier is not merely a fighter according to the rules of the art of war, but also the bearer of an inexorable national idea and the avenger of all bestialities inflicted upon the German people and its racial kin.

Therefore, the soldier must have full understanding for the necessity of a severe but just atonement on Jewish subhumanity. An additional aim is to nip in the bud any revolts in the rear of the army, which, as experience proves, have always been instigated by Jews...

Apart from any political consideration of the future, the soldier has to fulfill two tasks:

1. The total annihilation of the false Bolshevist doctrine, of the Soviet State, and of its armed forces;
2. The pitiless extermination of alien treachery and cruelty, and thus the protection of the lives of the German forces in Russia.

Only in this way will we do justice to our historic task of liberating the German people, once and for all, from the Asiatic-Jewish peril.”<sup>40</sup>

Russian Jews had no idea that they were in danger. According to German intelligence reports, they were “remarkably ill-informed.” “They do not know how Jews are treated in Germany, or for that matter, in Warsaw, which after all is not so far away.” By the end of 1941, they were only too aware of the danger. By then, the Germans had murdered over seven hundred thousand Jews. They also killed thousands of Ukrainians, “Gypsies,” Poles, and other “enemies.”

Prejudice and racism are in fact the cornerstones of dehumanization.

## CONNECTIONS

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Why did the Germans camouflage their activities and plans? How did they use language to do so?

Why do you think the general referred to his victims as members of the “Jewish subhumanity”? Is a “subhuman” entitled to the same respect as a “fellow human”? The Jews were not the only people the Germans regarded as “subhuman”? Who else did they dehumanize?

Although some consider dehumanization the “extreme end of a scale which also includes prejudice and racism,” Bohdan Wytwycky has argued that is a “dangerously misleading” view. He maintains that “prejudice and racism are in fact the cornerstones of dehumanization.” He warns, “The possibility of mass atrocities appears to be so remote that we are unlikely to pay serious attention to the budding of poisonous attitudes. However, given a sudden and traumatic shift in social conditions, dehumanization can easily develop its own deadly momentum if the ground is fertile.”<sup>41</sup> How does this reading support Wytwycky’s view? How does his warning apply to events in the news today?

## READING 21

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### *The United States Enters the War*

As 1941 drew to a close, the Nazis reevaluated their plans. They had expected Russian soldiers to turn against their Communist leaders. Instead they fought bravely in battle after battle. The same was true of the Russian people. Instead of rebelling against the Communists, they fiercely protected their homeland. The people of Leningrad held out against the Germans for nearly two and one half years. And in the end, it was the Germans who withdrew. As the war dragged on, the Nazis found them-

selves waging a land war against the Soviets in the east and mainly an air war against the British in the west.

Then on December 8, 1941, the United States declared war on Japan. The day before, the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor, the United States naval station in Hawaii. Japan and Germany were allies. So on the morning of December 9, the Japanese ambassador to Germany asked for Hitler's support against the United States. Some of the Fuehrer's advisors argued that the Japanese had provoked the Americans by bombing Pearl Harbor. So Germany was not obligated to support Japan. Hitler, however, was not looking for a way to avoid a fight. On December 11, he declared war on the United States. In doing so, he united three powerful nations – Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States – against Germany. Although the three did not always agree, they were united in their determination to win the war.

## CONNECTIONS

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A mystery of the war is why Hitler chose to declare war on the United States. How do you account for his decision? You may want to do some research before you offer an opinion. For example, you may want to find out whether there were strategic advantages in expanding the war. Or you might want to investigate the military strength of the United States in 1941. Did Hitler have reason to believe that the United States was too weak to be a threat?

→Historian Steve Cohen discusses the significance of the events of 1941 in his presentation, "1941: Turning Point in World War II," described in *Elements of Time*, pages 345-346. A videotape of the talk is available from the Facing History Resource Center.

## READING 22

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### *Blame the Rabbits*

**J**ames Thurber, an American humorist and social critic, is the author of a fable in which the animals behave like people.

Within the memory of the youngest child there was a family of rabbits who lived near a pack of wolves. The wolves announced that they did not like the way the rabbits were living. (The wolves were crazy about the way they themselves were living, because it was the only way to live.) One night several wolves were killed in an earthquake and this was blamed on the rabbits, for it is well known that rabbits pound on the ground with their hind legs and cause earthquakes. On another night one of the wolves was killed by a bolt of

"They were trying to escape," said the wolves, "and, as you know, this is no world for escapists."

lightning and this was also blamed on the rabbits, for it is well known that lettuce-eaters cause lightning. The wolves threatened to civilize the rabbits if they didn't behave, and the rabbits decided to run away to a desert island. But the other animals, who lived at a great distance, shamed them, saying, "You must stay where you are and be brave. This is no world for escapist. If the wolves attack you, we will come to your aid, in all probability." So the rabbits continued to live near the wolves and one day there was a terrible flood which drowned a great many wolves. This was blamed on the rabbits, for it is well known that carrot-nibblers with long ears cause floods. The wolves descended on the rabbits, for their own good, and imprisoned them in a dark cave, for their own protection.

When nothing was heard about the rabbits for some weeks, the other animals demanded to know what had happened to them. The wolves replied that the rabbits had been eaten and since they had been eaten the affair was a purely internal matter. But the other animals warned that they might possibly unite against the wolves unless some reason was given for the destruction of the rabbits. So the wolves gave them one. "They were trying to escape," said the wolves, "and, as you know, this is no world for escapist."

Moral: Run, don't walk, to the nearest desert island.<sup>42</sup>

## CONNECTIONS

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Explain the moral of the fable. To whom does it apply? Why? How does the moral apply to what you have read so far in the Resource Book? What other morals might you add? For what reasons?

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Rubenstein, *The Cunning of History* (Harper & Row, 1975), 33.

<sup>2</sup> Fredric Zeller, *When Time Ran Out: Coming of Age in the Third Reich* (The Permanent Press, 1989), 82-83.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in William Manchester, *The Last Lion: Winston Spencer Churchill; alone 1932-1940* (Little, Brown, 1988), 189.

<sup>4</sup> William Shirer, *Berlin Diary*, 51.

<sup>5</sup> Golda Meir, *My Life* (G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1975), 158.

<sup>6</sup> Carl C. Brigham, *A Study of American Intelligence* (1923), 210.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Rubenstein, *The Cunning of History*, 15.

<sup>8</sup> Frederic Morton, "Kristallnacht," *New York Times*, 10 November 1978, Op-Ed page. Copyright 1978 by The New York Times Company. Reprinted by permission.

<sup>9</sup> Dan Bar-On, *Legacy of Silence*, 1.

<sup>10</sup> Melita Maschmann, *Account Rendered*, 56-57.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Victoria Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 142.

<sup>12</sup> Otto D. Tolischus, "The Pogrom," *New York Times*, 19 November, 1938. Copyright 1938 by The New York Times Company. Reprinted by permission.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Anthony Read and David Fisher, *Kristallnacht; The Unleashing of the Holocaust* (Peter Bedrick Books, 1989), 155.

<sup>14</sup> William Shirer, *Berlin Diary*, 166.

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- <sup>15</sup> Quoted in Arthur Morse, *While Six Million Died* (Overlook Press, 1985), 280.
- <sup>16</sup> Charles Stember (ed.), *Jews in the Mind of America* (1966), 120-125.
- <sup>17</sup> Max von der Gruen, *Howl Like the Wolves*.
- <sup>18</sup> Robert Jay Lifton, *Nazi Doctors*. Copyright 1986 by Robert Jay Lifton. Reprinted by permission of Basic Books, a division of Harper Collins, Publishers, Inc.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>20</sup> Quoted in Victoria Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 110-111.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.
- <sup>22</sup> Quoted in Ina Friedman, *The Other Victims* (Houghton Mifflin, 1990), 10-12.
- <sup>23</sup> Max von der Gruen, *Howl Like the Wolves*.
- <sup>24</sup> Jacob Birnbaum, "Account of the Piotrkow Ghetto" unpublished document. Available from the Facing History Resource Center.
- <sup>25</sup> Joseph Brodsky, "Blood, Lies and the Trigger of History," *New York Times*, 4 August 1993, Op-Ed page. Copyright 1993 by The New York Times Company. Reprinted by permission.
- <sup>26</sup> Chaim Kaplan, *Scroll of Agony: The Warsaw Diary of Chaim Kaplan* (Macmillan, 1965). Reprinted by permission.
- <sup>27</sup> Quoted in *The Good Old Days*, ed. Ernst Klee, et al, trans. Deborah Burnstone (The Free Press, 1991), 5.
- <sup>28</sup> Chaim Kaplan, *Scroll of Agony*.
- <sup>29</sup> From *The Zygelboim Book*, compiled by J. S. Herz, quoted in Nora Levin *The Holocaust Years* (Krieger Publishers, 1990), 203.
- <sup>30</sup> Quoted in Martin Gilbert, *The Second World War* (Henry Holt, 1989), 152.
- <sup>31</sup> Richard Rubenstein, *The Cunning of History*, 25-26.
- <sup>32</sup> Lucy Dawidowicz, "Visualizing the Warsaw Ghetto," *Mainstream*.
- <sup>33</sup> Adapted from Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (Holmes & Meier, 1985), 11-12.
- <sup>34</sup> Quoted in "During WWII, Grand Mufti Plotted to Do Away with All Jews in the Mideast," *Response: The Wisenthal Center World Report*, Fall 1991, 2-3.
- <sup>35</sup> Quoted in Leon Poliakov, *Harvest of Hate* (Greenwood Press, 1951), 54.
- <sup>36</sup> Quoted in *The Courage to Care*, 28-29.
- <sup>37</sup> Miep Gies with Alison Leslie Gold, *Anne Frank Remembered: The Story of the Women who Helped Hide the Frank Family* (Simon & Schuster, 1987), 68.
- <sup>38</sup> William Pfaff, "The Complacent Democracies," Copyright 1993 Los Angeles Times Syndicate.
- <sup>39</sup> Quoted in Nora Levin, *The Holocaust Years*, 234.
- <sup>40</sup> Quoted in *The Holocaust Reader*, ed. Lucy Dawidowicz (Berman House, 1976), 70- 71.
- <sup>41</sup> Bohdan Wytwycky, *The Other Holocaust*, 82-83.
- <sup>42</sup> James Thurber, "The Rabbits Who Caused all the Trouble" in *Thurber Carnival* (Dell Books, 1962).