**The Final Solution**

***“This war will not end as the Jew imagines, namely in the liquidation of all European and Aryan Peoples; the outcome of this War will be the extermination of all Jewish People. ”———Adolph Hitler, January 30, 1939.***

Adolph Hitler often referred to finding a “ﬁnal solution” to the “Jewish problem.” With the beginning of World War II, the Germans realized that Kristallnacht and the terror that followed would not be enough to drive the Jews out of Germany. By 1940 the Nazis began to devise plans for a mass expulsion of all Jews to the island of Madagascar off the African coast or to reservations in Poland. However, these plans were found to be unworkable.

In 1941 the Einsatzgruppen, special units of the security police and SS Security Service, followed German armies into Russia and set out to kill all Jews as well as Soviet ofﬁcials, the handicapped, and Gypsies. Victims were executed by mass shootings and buried in mass unmarked graves. Close to one and a half million Jews were killed by the Einsatzgruppen in the

Baltics and the Soviet Union.

Nazis began to realize that mass shootings were not an efﬁcient method for killing millions of people. By early 1942, the Nazi leadership committed to move forward with the mass execution of Jews from all over Europe. Death camps were constructed in Poland, Where gas was to be the primary means of execution, and the Germans had begun mass deportations of Jews from

Germany and Western Europe to the ghettos in Eastern Europe.

Satisﬁed that the machinery was in place to implement the “ﬁnal solution,” Nazi leaders met in the Berlin suburb of Wannsee in January 1942. The purpose of the Wannsee Conference was to officially coordinate the “ﬁnal solution.” Participants at the conference openly discussed the various methods of killing Jews, planned how the death camps would be organized, and scheduled the transportation of Jews from all over Europe to Poland.

From 1942 to 1945, the lows were plunged into a hell of planned murder that neither the Jews nor the majority of modem humanity could have conceived. What made the Holocaust different from other human tragedies was that for the ﬁrst time the technology and administration of the modern industrial world was organized to murder defenseless people. In the end, Nazi efforts at a “ﬁnal solution” to the “Jewish problem” resulted in the death of more than 6,000,000 Jews and millions of others.

The Holocaust: How could this happen?

**ONE STEP AT A TIME**

The Nazis gradually but steadily “chipped away” at the Jews’ rights and quality of living. Perhaps if all of the restrictions had come at once, the Jews would have been more likely to ﬂee. Because the regulations appeared one by one, the Jews thought that perhaps they could adjust and make the best of the situation. It was this desire to adapt to the gradual changes that eventually “burned” them (think of a pot of boiling water).

Even though Jews had been living in Germany for centuries and felt a loyalty to what they believed was their native country, equal constitutional rights had not been formally granted to them until the 1919 constitution. Even though anti-Semitism had had a long tradition in Germany, the Jews were still unprepared for what was happening to them.

The Fatal Step ~ 1935

The Third Reich and its anti-Jewish policies began in 1933. A number of actions were taken in 1933, l934, and 1935; however, it was Hitler’s proclamation at a mass Nazi Party rally on September 15, 1933, of two laws known as the Nuremberg Laws and the regulations for their enforcement that sealed the fate of the Jews.

Citizenship taken away

If other actions had already restricted Jewish life so much, what signiﬁcant additional harm could the Nuremberg Laws possibly bring? The Nuremberg Laws did what no other had done before: They stripped the Jews of their citizenship.

The ﬁrst of the laws the “Reich Citizenship Law,” very clearly state that only citizens of “German or kindred blood” (Aryans) were entitled to civil and political rights. Those of “impure blood” (non-Aryans) were considered to be inferior, so inferior that they were no longer considered to be citizens —~ only subjects of the German State. Because Jews no longer had civil rights, they were vulnerable and unable to defend their families, homes, jobs and properties. The second laws prohibited the marriage of Jews and “citizens of German or kindred blood” as well as any sexual relations between Jews and Aryans. In addition, Jews were not allowed to ﬂy the German ﬂag or to employ housemaids of “German or kindred blood” who were under the age of forty—ﬁve.

Who was a Jew?

At ﬁrst, the Nuremberg Laws applied only to German Jews, but eventually they affected Jews in countries occupied by the Nazis as well as Gypsies. How did the Nazis decide who was a Jew, who was a German and who had “kindred blood”? It was a complicated task. Because Hitler hated the idea of the “contamination” of German blood with Jewish blood, he used the number of blood relatives, speciﬁcally one’s Jewish grandparents, as the factor which determined “racial identity” for purposes of enforcing the Nuremberg

Laws. Those people who had three Jewish grandparents were considered full Jews. Those with one or two were put into the category of “Mischlinge,” but eventually anyone who had even one Jewish grandparent was technically counted as a Jew and no longer as a German citizen. In order to prove one’s German descent an individual had to show his own birth or-baptismal certiﬁcate as well as certiﬁcates for both parents and all four grandparents. The Germans were very careful and very thorough when they included a person‘s “religion” on his birth certiﬁcate.

**Questions from the Reading on the Holocaust?**

1. Why did German Jews not ﬂee when the Nazis began to place restrictions on their citizenship?

3. The Nuremberg Laws were a series of anti-Jewish restrictions enacted in 1935. The “Reich Citizenship Law” was one of these. How did the “Reich Citizenship Law” hurt Jews living in Germany?

4. Another important part of the Nuremburg Laws was the “Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor.” How did this affect German Jews?

5. Because Hitler hated “contamination” of Jews and Aryans he redeﬁned what it meant to be Jewish. Under Nazi rule, a person was categorized as Jewish if...

6. Hitler’s original plan was to use attacks on Jews (like Kristallnacht) to scare Jews into ﬂeeing Germany. When this didn’t work, what other alternatives do the Nazis turn to?

7. What was the “Final Solution”?

8. What was agreed to at the Wannsee Conference?

9. What made the Holocaust different from other human tragedies in history?

10. Why were ghettos used by Nazis?

11. What is the primary difference between a Concentration Camp and an Extermination Camp?

12. What was the difference in the role of the Gestapo and the role of the SS during the Final Solution?

13. Using the map and chart provided, why do you think most killing centers were in Poland?

14. Which country had the most Jews killed during the Holocaust? Which country had the highest percentage killed?

15. Go through the picture links on my website and answer the questions on the back of this paper after looking at the images.



