

Vocabulary

Allies - The nations fighting Nazi Germany, Italy, and Japan during World War II; primarily the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union.

Aryan Race - "Aryan" was originally applied to people who spoke any Indo-European language. The Nazis, however, primarily applied the term to people of Northern European racial background. Their aim was to avoid what they considered the "worst of the German race" and to preserve the purity of European blood.

Auschwitz - Concentration and extermination camp in upper Silesia, Poland, 37 miles west of Krakow. Established in 1940 as a concentration camp, it became an extermination camp in early 1942. Eventually, it consisted of three sections: Auschwitz I, the main camp; Auschwitz II (Birkenau), an extermination camp; Auschwitz III (Monowitz), the I.G. Farben labor camp, also known as Buna. In addition, Auschwitz had numerous sub-camps.

Axis - the Axis powers originally included Nazi Germany, Italy, and Japan who signed a pact in Berlin on September 27, 1940. They were later joined by Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, and Slovakia.

commandant - a commanding officer of a military organization

concentration camps - Immediately upon their assumption of power on January 30, 1933, the Nazis established concentration camps for the imprisonment of all "enemies" of their regime: actual and potential political opponents (e.g. communists, socialists, monarchists), Jehovah's Witnesses, gypsies, homosexuals, and other "asocials." Beginning in 1938, Jews were targeted for internment solely because they were Jews. Before then, only Jews who fit one of the earlier categories were interned in camps. The first three concentration camps established were Dachau (near Munich), Buchenwald (near Weimar) and Sachsenhausen (near Berlin).

Final Solution - The cover name for the plan to destroy the Jews of Europe - the "Final Solution of the Jewish Question." Beginning in December 1941, Jews were rounded up and sent to extermination camps in the East. The program was deceptively disguised as "resettlement in the East."

genocide - The deliberate and systematic destruction of a religious, racial, national, or cultural group.

ghetto - The Nazis revived the medieval ghetto in creating their compulsory "Jewish Quarter" (Wohnbezirk). The ghetto was a section of a city where all Jews from the surrounding areas were forced to reside. Surrounded by barbed wire or walls, the ghettos were often sealed so that people were prevented from leaving or

entering. Established mostly in Eastern Europe (e.g. Lodz, Warsaw, Vilna, Riga, Minsk), the ghettos were characterized by overcrowding, starvation and forced labor. All were eventually destroyed as the Jews were deported to death camps.

Holocaust - The destruction of some 6 million Jews by the Nazis and their followers in Europe between the years 1933-1945. Other individuals and groups were persecuted and suffered grievously during this period, but only the Jews were marked for complete and utter extinction. The term "Holocaust" - literally meaning "a completely burned sacrifice" - tends to suggest a sacrificial connotation to what occurred. The word Shoah, originally a Biblical term meaning widespread disaster, is the modern Hebrew equivalent.

Mein Kampf (My Struggle) - This autobiographical book (My Struggle) by Hitler was written while he was imprisoned in the Landsberg fortress after the "Beer-Hall Putsch" in 1923. In this book, Hitler propounds his ideas, beliefs, and plans for the future of Germany. Everything, including his foreign policy, is permeated by his "racial ideology." The Germans, belonging to the "superior" Aryan race, have a right to "living space" (Lebensraum) in the East, which is inhabited by the "inferior" Slavs. Throughout, he accuses Jews of being the source of all evil. Unfortunately, those people who read the book (except for his admirers) did not take it seriously but considered it the ravings of a maniac.

Nuremberg Laws - Two anti-Jewish statutes enacted September 1935 during the Nazi party's national convention in Nuremberg, taking away the Jews' civil rights. The first, the Reich Citizenship Law, deprived German Jews of their citizenship and all pertinent, related rights. The second, the Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor, outlawed marriages of Jews and non-Jews, forbade Jews from employing German females of childbearing age, and prohibited Jews from displaying the German flag. Many additional regulations were attached to the two main statutes, which provided the basis for removing Jews from all spheres of German political, social, and economic life. The Nuremberg Laws carefully established definitions of Jewishness based on bloodlines. Thus, many Germans of mixed ancestry, called "Mischlinge," faced antisemitic discrimination if they had a Jewish grandparent.

Resistance - the "underground" organizations working to help the Jews against Hitler/Nazi army

SS - Abbreviation usually written with two lightning symbols for Schutzstaffel (Defense Protective Units). Originally organized as Hitler's personal bodyguard, the SS was transformed into a giant organization by Heinrich Himmler. Although various SS units fought on the battlefield, the organization is best known for carrying out the destruction of European Jewry.