

Session 9: The Holocaust: From Poland to Barbarossa

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1939

On January 30, 1939—marking the 6th anniversary of his rise to power--Hitler delivered a two and a half hour speech to the *Reichstag*

“Today I will once more be a prophet! If international Jewish financiers inside and outside Europe again succeed in plunging the nations into a world war the result will not be the bolshevization of the earth and with it the victory of Jewry, but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe.”

...it is a shameful spectacle to see how the whole democratic world is oozing sympathy for the poor, tormented Jewish people, but remains hard-hearted and obdurate when it comes to helping them.”

Hitler did not provide details of what he meant by “annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe” and most listening that night might have thought that he was referring to a large scale resettlement or forced emigration—few would have taken his threats literally.

The second remark by Hitler (***“...it is a shameful spectacle to see how the whole democratic world...”***) clearly resulted after observing the ineptness, indifference and outcome of the Évian Conference (July 6th -15th, 1938). For nine days delegates from 32 countries met in Évian-les-Bains, France in a feeble attempt to solve the growing Jewish refugee crisis. The fact that the conference did not even pass a resolution condemning Hitler’s treatment of the Jews was widely seen as a “Hitler’s green light for genocide.” By the end of the conference all 32 countries expressed their sympathies for the Jews but none offered to change its immigration policies.

Although German Jewry, numbering about 400,000 (at the time of the Évian Conference) was already under considerable threat, there was little reason for European Jewry to fully react—all that began to change on March 15 1939. On that day German forces marched into Bohemia and Moravia making it a German Protectorate. Fifty-six thousand Jews lived in Prague, the capital, of whom almost half were refugees from Germany and Austria. On March 23rd the city of Memel was occupied and an additional 9,000 Jews came under Nazi control. Most of Memel’s Jews fled to neighboring Lithuania while some of Prague’s Jews migrated either north to Poland or south to Hungary. A few Jews went to Britain—very few, as they were not welcome.

In the meantime the Hungarian government, home to well over 500,000 Jews, passed anti-Jewish laws which prevented any Hungarian Jew from becoming a judge, lawyer, school teacher or member of Hungarian Parliament (May 3, 1938).

To further aggravate the tightening noose around the Jews on May 17, 1938 the British government issued the MacDonald White Paper (Parliamentary Document 6019) in an attempt to appease Arab Palestinians. The White Paper, in effect, reversed Britain’s commitment to the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine as set forth in the Balfour Declaration of 1917 and shut off an escape route for many thousands of Jews coming under Nazi occupation.

At the time of the British White Paper there were still 200,000 Jews trapped in Germany (many had already left after *Kristallnacht*), 55,000 in what had been Austria and tens of thousands in the viciously anti-Semitic Slovakia. The British government also pressured Yugoslavia, Rumania, Turkey and Greece to not allow boats carrying ‘illegal immigrants’ to proceed to Palestine.

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Many debated what they felt was the true fate of Jews trapped in central Europe. Some, in the British government, even expressed doubt of any real threat to the Jews and felt that they were unduly panicked. Others, like Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, recognized the Jewish plight but offered little. In a July 30th letter from the British Prime Minister he commented, *“I believe the persecution arises out of two motives: a desire to rob the Jews of their money and a jealousy of their superior cleverness. No doubt the Jews aren’t a loveable people; I don’t care for them myself, but that is not sufficient to explain the Pogrom.”*

Later in 1939, on August 23rd, the world would learn of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact—the non-aggression pact signed between Germany and the Soviets. In that pact lay the promise that with the invasion of Poland the Soviets would stand aside—ominous news for almost 3.3 million Polish Jews.

A week later, on Friday September 1, 1939 German troops marched into Poland. Though Polish Jews had lived with their anti-Semitic neighbors and weathered pogroms they were—up to that point—not without defenses. There was a Jewish press, a Jewish economy, Jewish institutions and even representation in the Polish parliament—all that was about to disappear. On the day of the invasion Warsaw had a population of over 390 thousand Jews. Only New York City and Palestine had greater Jewish population.

Within hours of German occupation of small towns and villages Jews were already being singled out for abuse and massacre by special “SS operational groups” in the rear of advancing German troops. The tone had been set. On September 3, 1939 German troops entered the frontier town of Wieruszow. Twenty Jews, among them prominent citizens of the town, were taken to the market place, lined up and shot. When Israel Lewi, a 64 year old man stood at the market place, his daughter Liebe, ran up to say farewell to her father. A German ordered her to open her mouth—and then fired a bullet into it. That day France and Great Britain declared war on Germany. The “final solution” had not yet been planned but an almost six-year ordeal was about to start. In the end one-third of world Jewry would be murdered and perhaps the most significant event in Jewish history since the Exodus over 3200 years earlier was about to start.

Months later--soon after the invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939--the Nazis intentions for the Jews were unfolding. Though the *“final solution to the Jewish problem”* had not been determined the early and intermediate goals were being developed. A September 21, 1939 memo from Reinhard Heydrich to the chiefs of the *Einsatzgruppen* made clear that the Jews should be concentrated—moved from remote areas of Poland to the large cities—Warsaw, Łódz, Kraków, Lublin, and Lvov—where railway transportation was available. This was especially important “in view of the end goal.” Certain parts of Poland would become “Jew-free zones” or *Judenrein* to facilitate resettlement of ethnic Germans. Jewish councils (*Judenräte*) were to be established in order to carry out German directives.

Heydrich also ordered *Einsatzgruppen* commanders to provide him with the number and location of Polish Jews along with an accounting of their property. In these memoranda an ambitious plan was already taking shape—the *ghettoization* of Polish Jewry. This was the beginning of the “war within the war.” While a conventional war was developing in Europe a separate war against European Jews was being formulated.

February 21, 1939—German Jews are required to surrender all their gold and silver to the government authorities.

March 15, 1939—German troops march into Prague and the German army is sent into Bohemia and Moravia. Another 118,000 Jews fell under German control. Parenthetically, Slovakia's 90,000 Jews had also come under Germany's control by then as Hitler had engineered Slovakian secession from Czechoslovakia.

Munich Conference

On **September 15, 1938** Neville Chamberlain gave consent to Hitler's annexation of the Sudetenland. The French PM Edouard Daladier added his endorsement days later. On **September 30, 1938** Hitler, Chamberlain, Daladier of France and Mussolini of Italy met at the so called "Munich Conference." The Czech government was not represented but "agreed" to comply. Neville Chamberlain returned home promising "peace in our time." The Czechs were informed by the British and the French that they could either submit to the annexation or resist on their own. On October 1st, 1938 German troops moved into the Sudetenland. Now Hitler had succeeded in bring both Austria (*Anschluss of March 12, 1938*) and the Sudetenland into the Reich.

March 31, 1939—British PM Neville Chamberlain announces that the U.K. and France will guarantee Poland's sovereignty. On **August 25, 1939**, two days after the Nazi-Soviet Pact, the Polish-British Common Defense Pact was formalized and signed.

The Story of the St. Louis: On May 15, 1939 the Nazis allowed more than 900 Jews on the ocean-liner, the St. Louis, which set sail from Hamburg, Germany to Cuba. Passengers carried what they believed were valid permits guaranteeing them temporary stay in Cuba until visas and permanent refuge to the U.S. could be secured. This of course, would depend on the availability of "spots" under the quota system that existed in the U.S. On arrival in Havana only 29 were allowed to disembark. The rest were denied entry under revised Cuban immigration laws.

For 3 days the liner cruised slowly off the U.S. coast, waiting for this country to accept them. After 35 days at sea the St. Louis was forced to return to Europe, where the governments of England, France, Holland and Belgium finally agreed to divide the passengers between them.

In 1976 the film, *Voyage of the Damned*, was released recounting the story of this tragic episode in human history.

May 15, 1939—a women's concentration camp opens at Ravensbrück.

May 17, 1939—The British White Paper of 1939 was issued to satisfy increasing Arab pressure against further Jewish immigration to Palestine. The MacDonald White Paper, as it was also called, had the net effect of sealing Jewish fate. As the Nazi threat loomed over hundreds of thousands of Jews in Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia there were few legal means of escape. The British White Paper of 1939 was, in essence, a reversal of its policy under the Balfour Declaration.

Background of the McDonald White Paper

Long before Hitler's rise to power there was already a history of violent Arab opposition to the British Mandate and Jewish settlement. Shortly at the Treaty of Versailles the first pogroms against the Jews had already been perpetrated by the Arab Palestinians. During Easter (April 4-7) 1920, Amin El Husseini (who would become the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem) and Aref el Aref, led a particularly violent pogrom in Jerusalem during which over 200 Jews were wounded, women were raped and shops and synagogues were ransacked.

Following Hitler's rise to power a growing number of European Jews were prepared to spend the money necessary to enter Palestine—particularly after the 1936 Nuremberg Laws stripped nearly 500,000 German Jews of their citizenship.

The large numbers of Jews entering Palestine led to the 1936-1939 Arab revolt. Britain responded to the revolt by appointing the **Peel Commission** to study the problem. The Peel Commission recommended in 1937 that Palestine be partitioned into 2 states—one Arab and one Jewish.

When Hitler annexed Austria in March 1938 an additional 200,000 Jews became stateless as did an additional 100,000 Jews with the annexation of the Sudetenland. Disastrously, at a time when there was the greatest need for countries to accept Jewish immigration none were willing to admit Jews in any significant numbers. The U.S. quota of 27,000 Jews per annum was fixed and did not change as a result of the Évian conference. The British quota was limited to 10,000 per year after the British White Paper.

In February 1939, the British attempted to negotiate an agreement between the Arabs and the Zionists. The Arab delegation refused to meet its Jewish counterpart, to recognize their authority or even to use the same entrances to the building, so the British government made separate proposals to the two parties, who both rejected them. The conference ended in failure on March 17, 1939 as a total failure that Hitler would exploit.

The White Paper of 1939 contained three sections:

Section I stated that with over 450,000 Jews having now settled in the mandate, the Balfour Declaration about a "national home for the Jewish people" had been met. The Paper called for an independent Palestine established within 10 years governed by Arabs and Jews.

"His Majesty's Government therefore now declares unequivocally that it is not part of their policy that Palestine should become a Jewish State. They would indeed regard it as contrary to their obligations to the Arabs under the Mandate, as well as to the assurances which have been given to the Arab people in the past, that the Arab population of Palestine should be made the subjects of a Jewish State against their will."

Section II stated that Jewish immigration to Palestine under the British Mandate was to be limited to 75,000 over the next five years, after which it would depend on Arab consent.

Section III (Land). Previously no restriction had been imposed on the transfer of land from Arabs to Jews. The White Paper declared that *"the High Commissioner will be given general powers to prohibit and regulate transfers of land."*

Section III. Land: Previously no restriction had been imposed on the transfer of land from Arabs to Jews, while now the White Paper stated:

"The Reports of several expert Commissions have indicated that, owing to the natural growth of the Arab population and the steady sale in recent years of Arab land to Jews, there is now in certain areas no room for further transfers of Arab land, whilst in some other areas such transfers of land must be restricted if Arab cultivators are to maintain their existing standard of life and a considerable landless Arab population is not soon to be created. In these circumstances, the High Commissioner will be given general powers to prohibit and regulate transfers of land."

The British policies actually succeed in keeping the numbers of Jewish immigrants far lower than allowed by the White Paper. Similar obstacles exist in the United States which has limited Jewish immigration.

August 17, 1939—Jewish men in Germany must adopt the middle name "Israel." Jewish women must take the middle name "Sara." Jews are eliminated from the German economy and their assets are seized.

August 23, 1939—before Hitler attacks Poland he checks any potential opposition from the Soviet Union. Hitler opens negotiations with Joseph Stalin and found the Soviet dictator receptive. On August 23, 1939 the Soviet Union and Germany sign the **German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact (Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact)**, which guarantees that the 2 countries will not attack one another. In addition the Pact contains a provision that stipulates the partitioning of Poland in the event of war.

By the end of August 1939 an increasing number of Jews are falling under Hitler's influence. The ability of Jews to leave Germany and German-occupied territories is dwindling. Hitler has already tested the potential Soviet Union's response to an attack on Poland and the stage is set for "**Operation White**"—the invasion of Poland.

August 25, 1939—in response to the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, the Anglo-Polish Alliance is signed and formalized guaranteeing that Great Britain will assist Poland should it be the victim of Hitler's aggression.

September 1, 1939 – Germany troops invade Poland. SS accompany regular German Army.

September 1--October 25, 1939—Operation Tannenberg is carried out by the Einsatzgruppen. Jewish synagogues are burned in Poland. Polish Jews and Catholic intellectuals are murdered.

September 3, 1939 –Sir Neville Henderson, the British Foreign Minister to Germany gives Hitler an ultimatum—either withdraw from Poland by 11 AM or a state of war exists between Great Britain and German. At 11:15 AM Neville Chamberlain, speaking on British public radio, declares war on Germany. France enters the war that same day responding to the plight of their Polish ally.

September 12, 1939—Throughout the Reich Jews were ordered to shop only in special stores belonging to "reliable Aryans." Jews could shop only from 8-9:30 AM.

September 17, 1939 –Eastern Poland is invaded by the Soviet Union.

September 21, 1939 – Reinhard Heydrich, head of Nazi Germany's Security Police, sends a message to the chiefs of the *Einsatzgruppen*, whose responsibilities covered the Nazi occupied Polish territories. The subject of the message was the "Jewish Question." Although Heydrich

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does not state a “Final Goal” or “Final Solution” it is clear that he begins to take intermediate steps toward achieving it. These intermediate steps include:

- Moving Jews from the countryside and villages into larger cities close to railway lines, “*in view of the end goal.*”
- Certain parts of Poland would become *Judenrein* (cleansed of Jews) so that ethnic Germans could be resettled.
- Judenräte or Jewish Councils would be established to implement Heydrich’s directives.
- Providing Heydrich with updates on the number and location of Polish Jews as well as their properties.
- Ghettoization of Polish Jewry.



Reinhard Heydrich

In retrospect it seems clear that in this early stage of the war the Germans had no clear plans. The German policy with respect to Jews of the Generalgouvernement was consistent with the measures that they applied before the war—**identification, segregation, expropriation, concentration and emigration.**

September 23, 1939—Yom Kippur—German Jews were ordered to turn their radios over to the German authorities.

October 1939—Germany annexes Poland’s western and northern districts. Much of the country’s heartland—Lublin, Kraków and Warsaw became a German colony known as the *Generalgouvernement*. On September 1, 1939 Poland had a population of 33 million among which 10% or 3.3–3.5 million were Jewish—the largest Jewish population in Europe. As a result of the German *Blitzkrieg* and the partitioning of Poland, an additional two million Jews fell under German domination.

From Germany’s standpoint the Jews of Czechoslovakia and Poland underscored the question-- *what to do with the Jews?* The September 21, 1939 missive from Heydrich to his *Einsatzgruppen* commanders provided a strong hint of the “solution” to the Jewish problem.

October 12, 1939—The Nazi deportation of Jews from Austria and Moravia to Poland begins.

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October 24, 1939—Jews in Wloclawek, Poland are required to wear a yellow cloth triangle identifying them as Jews.

October 26, 1939—The Labor Department of the *Generalgouvernement* of Occupied Poland issues the *Arbeitspflicht* (Work obligation) which enslaves Polish men and women between the ages of 14 and 60.

October 30, 1939—SS Chief Heinrich Himmler designates the next 3 months as the period during which all Jews must be cleared from rural areas of Western Poland.



Heinrich Himmler

November 7, 1939—Mass deportation of Jews from Western Poland begins.

November 15, 1939—Nazis destroy all of the synagogues in Łódź, Poland.

November 23, 1939—Hans Frank, the Governor-General of Nazi-occupied Poland ordered all Polish Jews over the age of 10 to wear white armbands with a blue Star of David on their right arm, or risk imprisonment or execution. The Nazis' inspiration for the Jewish badge came from medieval times, when both Muslims and Christians decreed that Jews must wear articles of clothing that would set them apart and shame them for being different.

In 1941 the SS ordered the Jews to wear a yellow six pointed star, four inches high, on the left side of the breast and on the back.

December 1, 1939—1350 Jews are murdered by German troops at Chelm, Poland.

Winter 1939-1940: The T-4 Program (named after its headquarters at Tiergartenstrasse 4, Berlin—from which the codename T-4 was derived).

In the summer of 1939 Hitler's physician, Dr. Karl Brandt along with Philipp Bouhler began to organize secret killing operations for disabled children in Germany and Austria. That summer, the Reich Ministry of the Interior compelled doctors, nurses and midwives to report children (newborns to age 3) who showed signs of severe mental retardation or physical disability. Euthanasia as used by the Nazis was based not on the notion of mercy but from pseudo-scientific theory and ruthless economic policy. The Nazis destroyed "life unworthy of life" (*lebensunwertes leben*) as they termed it--part of a strategy to murder that part of the population least able to defend itself.

In the fall of 1939 Germany's public health system "encouraged" parents of such children to admit them to specially designated pediatric clinics throughout Germany and Austria. In reality these were killing centers where specially recruited medical staff murdered their victims using

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either lethal injection or starvation. In time the program expanded to include juveniles up to the age of 17.

The so-called “euthanasia” (“good death”) program usually refers to the inducement of painless death for the chronically or terminally ill who would, according to the regime, otherwise suffer.

Euthanasia planners quickly envisioned extending the killing program to adults with disabilities who they felt were a drain on Germany’s economic resources and who were housed in institutional settings. The headquarters of the operation were housed at Tiergartenstrasse 4, Berlin—from which the codename T-4 was derived.

The T-4 program was responsible for the deaths of 200,000 German children and adults who died by lethal injections, gassing installations or starvation. Estimates vary considerably regarding the number killed. What should be noted is that these occurred in killing centers scattered throughout Germany, *under medical supervision and in facilities often made to look like hospitals*. There were 6 gassing facilities and killing centers scattered throughout Germany, including the well known psychiatric clinic at Hadamar. The T-4 program was eventually headed by an SS man named Christian Wirth, a notorious brute with the nickname 'the savage Christian.'

At Brandenburg, a former prison was converted into a killing center where the first Nazi experimental gassings took place. The gas chambers were disguised as shower rooms, but were actually hermetically sealed chambers connected by pipes to cylinders of carbon monoxide. Patients were generally drugged before being led naked into the gas chamber. Each killing center included a crematorium where the bodies were taken for disposal. Families were then falsely told the cause of death was medical, in nature, such as heart failure or pneumonia.



Hartheim castle, a euthanasia killing center where people with physical and mental disabilities were killed by gassing and lethal injection. Hartheim, Austria, date uncertain

On August 3, 1941, a Catholic Bishop, Clemens von Galen, delivered a sermon in Münster Cathedral attacking the Nazi euthanasia program calling it "plain murder." The sermon sent a shockwave through the Nazi leadership by publicly condemning the program and urged German Catholics to "withdraw ourselves and our faithful from their (Nazi) influence so that we may not be contaminated by their thinking and their ungodly behavior."

The Nazis retaliated against the Bishop by beheading three parish priests who had distributed his sermon, but left the Bishop unharmed to avoid making him into a martyr.

As a result, on August 23, 1941 Hitler suspended Aktion T4, which had accounted for nearly a hundred thousand deaths by this time. It did, however, continue quietly without gassings.

Wortman

Eventually the technical knowledge and specific use of gas chambers at the euthanasia centers served to prepare the SS for the use of gas chambers and crematoria at Auschwitz, Treblinka and other extermination camps that would later kill hundreds of thousands each.

Winter of 1939--In the United States

A Gallup poll reports that 83% of Americans oppose the admission of a large number of Jewish Refugees. An Elmo Roper poll claims that 53% of Americans feel that Jews are “different” and require “social and economic restrictions.”

December 5, 1939—German authorities seize Jewish property in Poland. This includes businesses, homes, furniture, currency, bank accounts, art, jewelry and other valuables. The Jews are left economically helpless.

The "euthanasia" program represented in many ways was a preview of upcoming Nazi genocidal policies. Keep in mind that the term **genocide**, coined by Raphael Lemkin, was not even invented until 1944. The Nazi leadership extended the initial concept of the T-4 program-- ideological justification for the destruction of the "unfit" to other categories of "enemies" most notably to Jews and Roma and Sinti (Gypsies). Planners of the so-called **Final Solution** later borrowed the gas chamber and accompanying crematoria, specifically designed for the T4 campaign, to murder Jews in German-occupied Europe. T4 personnel who had shown themselves reliable in this first mass murder program, figured prominently among the German staff stationed at the Operation Reinhard killing centers of **Belzec**, **Sobibor** and **Treblinka**. Like those who planned the physical annihilation of the European Jews, the planners of the "euthanasia" program imagined a racially pure and productive society and embraced radical strategies to eliminate those who did not fit within their vision.

December 12, 1939—compulsory labor for all Jewish males between ages 14-60 is established in eastern areas of Greater Germany.

Eugenics Movement and the T-4 Program

The T-4 program did not begin in a vacuum. Eugenics as a social movement gained popularity after the works of Charles Darwin and drew attention from many well-meaning individuals prior to World War II when the movement pursued notions of racial supremacy and purity. Eugenics was promoted by governments, influential individuals and institutions. Its advocates regarded it as a social philosophy for the improvement of human hereditary traits through the encouragement of greater reproduction of people possessing desirable traits, and the limitation of reproduction of certain people and traits.

The advocates of eugenics included luminaries such as Margaret Sanger, Marie Stopes, H.G. Wells, Woodrow Wilson, Prescott Bush, Theodore Roosevelt, George Bernard Shaw, Winston Churchill, Linus Pauling and John Harvey Kellogg.

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Ghettoization—the term "ghetto" originated from the name of the Jewish quarter in Venice, established in 1516, in which the Venetian authorities compelled the city's Jews to live in an area on the site of the city's foundry. The name is derived from the "campo gheto" an area set aside by the iron foundries in the 14th and 15th centuries for cooling 'slag'. Slag is a particularly noxious by-product of smelting iron ore in order to purify it.

During the Holocaust, ghettos were an essential step in the Nazi process of control, dehumanization, and mass murder of the Jews.

After the German invasion of Poland on 9-1-1939, more than 2 million Polish Jews came under German control. This number increased after Operation Barbarossa (June 1941) when Germany invaded the Soviet Union.

The Nazis sought to concentrate the Jews into marked off sections of cities called ghettos. The aim was to isolate them from the rest of Polish society, dispossess them of any material wealth, humiliate them and force them to live under miserable conditions. Most ghettos, especially the larger ones, were located near the railway system for reasons that would become all-too-obvious. Whatever the eventual solution to the Jewish problem would be—emigration or genocide—it was clear that concentrating and isolating the Jews would suit Nazi needs.

German occupation authorities established the first ghetto in Poland in Piotrków Trybunalski in October 1939.

Over 1000 ghettos were established in Poland, the largest of which was in the capital city of Warsaw, once home to almost half a million Polish Jews.

Some of the ghettos lasted only days while others lasted years. Some ghetto residents were sent to forced labor camps. With the establishment of the Final Solution the Germans systematically destroyed the ghettos—the majority of the ghetto residents were shot and buried in mass graves while others were transported to extermination camps.

The Warsaw ghetto held over 400,000 Jews into an area of 1.3 square miles. Other major ghettos were established in Krakow, Lodz, Bialystok, Lvov, Lublin, Vilna, Kovno, Czestochowa and Minsk. Tens of thousands of European Jews were also deported to ghettos in the east.

As with many other facets of the war the Nazis appointed Jewish councils (Judenräte) to administer daily life in the ghetto. The German authorities also appointed a ghetto police force to carry out ordinances of the Jewish councils.



1940

Hatred began to unfold in 1940. Ghettoization had already started and increased dramatically through 1940.

Mordechai Rumkowski (1877-1944), the former director of an orphanage and an unsuccessful businessman, was appointed as Chairman of the *Judenrät* in the Lodz ghetto in Poland, following the September 1, 1939. He, like other *Judenräts* was torn between his duties to the German authorities and to his own people.

Rumkowski petitioned the German authorities (April 5, 1940) to allow him to organize the Łódź Ghetto into a work force that would serve the Reich and hopefully spare Jewish lives. In many ways this echoed the Nazi euphemism “*Arbeit macht frei*” (“work will make you free”). Several weeks later he received a reply that contained a series of commands that make him responsible for enforcing ghetto “laws” and for organizing an “orderly economic life.” By May 1, 1940 the ghetto was sealed—along with the fate of its Jews.

Eventually 120 factories were set up that employed thousands of Jews producing goods for the Germans. Rumkowski became one of the more controversial *Judenräts* in that he often cooperated with the German authorities and behaved dictatorially towards his fellow Jews. Some have said that he easily gave into German deportation demands. By late 1941 the Chelmno death camp had been readied and Rumkowski would decide who was to be deported. In the first 5 months of 1942 fifty-five thousand Jews were sent to their death at Chelmno.

Only a few days prior to sealing the Lodz ghetto, on April 27, 1940, ghetto Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS decided that a concentration camp would be established near the town of Oświęcim; site of the former Polish military barracks. The Germans renamed the town Auschwitz. Three hundred Jews were conscripted from Oświęcim to begin construction of the death camp under SS Captain Rudolf Höss. Though the Auschwitz extermination camp’s original mission was to be a regional prison for opposition Poles—largely non-Jewish—it soon became a death camp to over a million people—90% of whom were Jews that were transported from all over Nazi occupied Europe.

On the military front, German spirits soared with the swift occupation of Poland as well as the successful invasion of Denmark, Norway, Belgium, France, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. Were it not for the phenomenal sea evacuation of over 330 thousand British, French and Belgium armed forces at Dunkerque, France the Germans would have garnered a decisive military victory over the main opposing forces. On June 5, 1940 a final assault on France occurred and only weeks later an armistice was signed.

The armistice with France divided the country into two zones with the Nazi occupying the northern two-thirds including Paris. Southern France, Vichy, remained unoccupied until 1942. The armistice allowed the French government to remain in place in exchange for collaboration with the Nazis—enacting punitive measures against the Jews and providing the labor demands for Germany’s industrial needs.

By the spring of 1940 a half-million Jews from Western Europe were now under German control. They would eventually be rounded up and sent to the East in an attempt to “concentrate” them into ghettos. Later in the war, after the Nazi’s had crystallized their plans for the Jews many would find themselves transported to the extermination camps of Poland.

But the solution to the Jewish problem was far from being settled in 1940. This is clearly demonstrated in the May 27th, 1940 memorandum from Himmler to Hitler containing recommendations for the “treatment of the peoples of alien races in the East.” The goal, according to Himmler, was to turn the racially inferior population into “laborers without leaders.”

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Himmler's vision called for the racially inferior people of the East to serve the everlasting cultural tasks of the German people. In that same May 27th memorandum Himmler made reference to a large emigration of all Jews to Africa or some other colony (see Madagascar Plan below). Himmler also called for separating Jewish children from their parents for the purposes of assimilation and the elimination of "Jewish ways." Himmler felt that those measures, while cruel, were superior to the "un-German and impossible ...Bolshevist method of physical extermination of a people." At the beginning of July, Eichmann informed delegates of the *Reichsvereinigung* and of the Vienna and Prague Jewish communities that the transfer of some four million Jews to an unspecified country was envisioned. But with Germany's failing war effort against the Brits, and no quick victory in sight, the use of British naval vessels to enact the evacuation plan could not occur.

When mass emigration of Jews proved impossible the physical extermination became far more palatable to Himmler and the Nazis. In fact this is exactly what happened with Operation Barbarossa—the invasion of Russia on June 22nd 1941.

Meantime in the United States the number of American visas issued to refugees from Germany or German-occupied countries declined precipitously. In fact, by the summer of 1940, immigration to the United States became all but impossible. Americans were already paranoid and the fear of enemy agents infiltrating this country as refugees was a significant factor in the American decision to shut down immigration. One of the great obstacles to immigration was the head of the State Department's "Special Problems Division," Assistant Secretary of State Breckinridge Long who would later come under attack by the Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau.

The American fear silenced its own Jewish leaders. Rabbi Stephen Wise, president of the World Jewish Congress, in a letter to one of Roosevelt's economic advisors (September 1940 to Otto Nathan) stated: "With regard to the political refugees, we are in the midst of the most difficult situation, an almost unimaginable quandary. On the one hand, the State Department makes all sorts of promises....A few people slip through, but we are afraid, this in the strictest confidence, that the Consuls have private instructions for the Department to do nothing, which would be infamous beyond words. What I am afraid lies back of the whole think is the fear of the Sipper's [Roosevelt] friends in the State Department that any large admission of radicals to the United States might be used effectively against him in the campaign. Cruel as I may seem, as I have said to you before, his re-election is much more important for everything that is worthwhile and that counts than the admission of a few people, however imminent their peril."

The ripple effect of America's immigration policy affected the entire hemisphere. In 1940, Chile and Brazil sealed its doors to Jewish entry—encouraged to do so by our own State Department concerned that German agents could enter as Jewish refugees.

In summary, 1940 was a year of enormous cruelty to European Jews—despite the fact that extermination was not yet formally seen as the final solution. Concentration and ghettoization were well under way with hopes that some method of ridding Europe of its Jews would be achieved.

The Jews of Reich were leaving to the east. In an internal memorandum of December 4, 1940 Eichmann disclosed that the number of Jews who had left the Reich, Austria, and the Protectorate at 501,711. Thus, according to Eichmann's computations, 315,642 Jews—as defined by the Nuremberg Laws—remained in the Greater Reich. The solution, according to a December 10th address given by Himmler in Berlin, with respect to "The Final Solution of the Jewish Question" was brief: *"It will be achieved by way of transfer of the Jews out of the European economic space of the German people to a still-to-be-determined territory; the numbers that come into consideration in this project are approximately 5.8 million Jews."*

January 1940 – By early 1940 the tone in Warsaw had been set. A physician, Dr. Cooperman, had been shot for being out after 8 o'clock (Jan. 1). The following day the Jews were prohibited

Wortman

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from posting obituaries. On January 14, 1940 some 880 Polish Jews were taken prisoner. One hundred were shot on the way to the prison. On January 15th 400 were killed and the following day another 150 were killed. A week later the *Generalgouvernement* (General Government) orders registration for all Jewish property.

January 25, 1940—the town of Oswiecim is chosen for a new concentration camp.

February 8, 1940—after months of planning, a Jewish ghetto was established in Łódź, Poland, the second largest Jewish community in Poland. Before its invasion Łódź was home to 230,000 Jews. The German name for the town had been changed to Litzmannstadt. The ghetto resting on 1.6 square miles soon became temporary “shelter” for Jews of Łódź.

Łódź Ghetto

The original plan was to assemble the ghetto in a single day—it took several weeks. Jews were ordered to report to the sectioned off area only bringing what they could quickly pack. The Jews were concentrated to 3.5 people per room. On **May 1, 1940** the ghetto was ordered sealed. Within the ghetto the Nazis decided that the Jews should pay for the expense of their incarceration—food, security and sewage removal.

The Nazis chose Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski the Älteste ("Elder of the Jews") responsible for the Jewish population of the ghetto. Rumkowski headed the Jewish Council and hoped to keep Jews alive by turning Łódź into slave workshop for the Germans. Rumkowski's motives for organizing Jews into work details were somewhat suspicious when their work was “paid out” in food—which Rumkowski rationed. Starvation became rampant and many died to typhus, tuberculosis and malnutrition.

After the 1942 Wannsee Conference most of the ghettos inhabitants were sent to the gas vans of Chelmno or to Auschwitz.

Parenthetically, one of Rochester's most active survivor-educators and member of CHAI, Angie Suss-Paul was a survivor of the Łódź Ghetto. She is author of *Angie's Story*. Her sister, Barbara is still alive today and lives in Rochester.

February 12, 1940—First deportation of German Jews into occupied Poland

February 21, 1940—Himmler is informed of a “suitable site” for a new quarantine camp at Oswiecim (Auschwitz).

April 9, 1940—Nazis invade Denmark (8,000 Jews) and conquer it in a single day. Norway (2,000 Jews) is invaded.

April 29, 1940—Rudolf Höss arrives at Auschwitz to set up camp.

May 1, 1940—Łódź Ghetto is sealed off from the outside world. Rudolf Höss is chosen to be the commandant of Auschwitz

May 10, 1940—Nazis invade France (350,000 Jews), Belgium (65,000 Jews), Holland, (140,000 Jews) and Luxembourg (3500 Jews). The Blitzkrieg against Great Britain begins and Winston Churchill is named British Prime Minister.

May 15, 1940—Holland surrenders to Germany. More shocking is that France reports total defeat to Winston Churchill after only 5 days.

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June 14, 1940—Nazis occupy Paris.

June 18, 1940—Hitler present Mussolini with Madagascar Plan. After the victory over France, Himmler proposed to Hitler that the Jews be banished to the French colony of Madagascar. Ultimately the Madagascar Plan was shelved months later when Germany failed to win its battle with Great Britain. The French refused to cooperate with the plan.

June 22, 1940 – Hitler signs armistice with France

August 1, 1940—Jewish expulsions begin in Kraków. One-third would be sent to Warsaw and other Polish towns. In May 1940 the Germans announced that they wanted Kraków to be the “cleanest” city in the. The Kraków ghetto was formally established the following year (March 3, 1941).

The Kraków ghetto was the setting for the Steven Spielberg’s movie, *Shindler’s List*. From November 1942, many Jews from the ghetto were sent to the SS forced labor camp in Plaszow, a suburb of Kraków. Among them were the Jews who worked in Oskar Schindler's enamel factory. Oskar Schindler protected his Jewish workers and helped them during the liquidation of the ghetto.

August 3, 1940—Vichy France passes anti-Jewish racial laws.

August 16, 1940—Vichy France prohibits “aliens” (Jews) from practicing as physicians, dentists or pharmacists.

August 15, 1940—Eichmann releases a draft document titled *Reichssicherheitshauptamt: Madagaskar Projekt*, proposing the “resettlement” of one million Jews per year, over 4 years, to Madagascar. Many Nazi, as well as the authorities of the *Generalgouvernement*, viewed the plan with favor as they wished world perception to be that Germany had given “autonomy” to the Jewish settlement in Madagascar.

September 16, 1940—Slovakia enacts Ordinance *Judenkodex* (Jewish Code) which is part of a series of laws designed to strip Jews of their livelihood.

October 12, 1940—The *Generalgouvernement* announces the establishment of the Warsaw Ghetto.

November 15, 1940 – Warsaw Ghetto is sealed off.

November 28, 1940--The anti-Jewish film *Der Ewige Jude*, The Eternal Jew, is released.

December 12, 1940-- The refugee ship *Salvador* is denied entrance into Palestine by the British and is sunk. Two hundred and fifty Jews including 75 children are drowned.

The Madagascar Plan

Strange as it may sound the notion of evacuating European Jews to Madagascar was not new. In fact, it had been proposed as far back as 1885 by Paul de Lagarde (1827-1891), a German-born biblical scholar and orientalist. Lagarde was a well-known anti-Semite and his teaching laid the foundation for the National Socialist ideology. He argued that Germany should create a “national” form of Christianity stripped of Semitic elements. He referred to Jews as “pests and parasites” that should be destroyed “speedily and thoroughly.”

Henry Hamilton Beamist (1873-1948) was a well known British Anti-Semite who was also an early proponent of the Madagascar Plan—the evacuation of European Jewry to Madagascar. He claimed to have taught Adolph Hitler and in 1920 spoke that “Bolshevism was Judaism.”

In May 1940, Heinrich Himmler wrote *Reflections on the Treatment of Peoples of Alien Races in the East*. In his treatise he declared “I hope that the concept of Jews will be completely extinguished through the possibility of a large emigration of all Jews to African or some other colony.”

The planning process was set in motion in 1940 but was quickly abandoned when the Nazis lost the Battle of Britain. It was part of the Plan that the transport of Jews would take place on British ships.

December 18, 1940-- Hitler prepares for the invasion of Russia and changes the name from Operation Fritz to "Operation Barbarossa." Barbarossa was the mythic Emperor of Medieval Germany, destined to rise again and lead Germany in glory and victory. The intended date for the invasion is May 15, 1941.

Major ghettos in Poland 1939-1941



The Warsaw Ghetto



On **October 12, 1940** the Germans decreed the establishment of the Warsaw Ghetto and required all Jewish residents of Warsaw to move into a designated area which had been sealed off from the rest of the city in November 1940. The ghetto was enclosed by 10 foot high walls topped with barbed wire. The population of the ghetto swelled to 400,000 as it had to absorb Jews from nearby *shetls*. The ghetto occupied 1.3 square miles and “housed” an average of 7.2 persons per room. Various aid organizations, including the New York-based American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and the ORT (Organization for Rehabilitation through Training) attempted to keep the Jewish population alive. Starvation and disease was rampant in the ghetto, as food allotments were barely a thousand calories a day. During a 2 year period (1940-42) 83,000 died of starvation or disease.

Emanuel Ringelblum, a Warsaw-based historian, founded a clandestine organization that provided an accurate record of events during the period of ghettoization in Warsaw. The record became known as “Oneg Shabbat.” Some of the recovered Ringelblum Archives remains an important source regarding life in ghetto.

Between July 22 and September 12, 1942 265,000 Jews were deported from the ghetto to Treblinka; about 35,000 were killed inside the ghetto walls during that same period. When word leaked back a resistance group called the ZOB (Zydowska Organizacja Bojowa or Jewish Fighting Organization) formed led by 23 year old Mordechai Anielewicz. In January 1943 when the SS returned the ZOB, now in possession of some smuggled weapons fired upon German troops as they tried to round up another group for deportation. After several days the German troops retreated thereby inspiring the ghetto fighters to prepare for future resistance.

On **April 19, 1943** a new SS unit and police force appeared outside the ghetto walls with the intent of liquidating the ghetto and transporting the remaining inhabitants to forced labor at Lublin. The resistance that ensued last until May 16, 1943 when the ghetto uprising was finally put down. The SS was successful in deporting 42,000 Jews to various work camps. Some 7,000 Jews died in the fighting while another 7,000 were sent to Treblinka.

The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was such an important symbol of Jewish resistance that the Knesset (Israeli Parliament) in 1951 considered using the Hebrew date (14 Nisan) as the commemoration of Yom Hashoah. Because that date fell immediately before Passover the date was moved to the 27th of Nisan –8 days prior to Yom Ha’atzm’ut (Israeli Independence Day).

1941

By the end of 1940 the number of Jews killed in Nazi Germany was approximately 100,000. 1941 was significant for a geometric increase in the number of Jewish lives that were lost. The number grew as the murder of Jews became German state policy. Though the Wannsee Conference would not occur until January 1942 over a million Jews were killed in 1941 alone! Clearly, German policy had changed during a year that became a turning point in Jewish destiny.

A week before Operation Barbarossa—June 15, 1941—Goebbels, Hitler’s most devoted underling, was summoned to the Reich Chancellery. Goebbels would record that “the most powerful attack that history had ever seen” was about to take place. *“What happened to Napoleon would not repeat itself...the Fuhrer estimated that the entire campaign would take approximately 4 months; I think it will be much less. We stand on the eve of an unparalleled victory...It is not Czarism that will be brought back to Russia; an authentic socialism will replace Judeo-bolshevism....The pact with Russia [the non-aggression treaty] was, in fact, a stain on our shield...what we have fought against throughout our life, we shall now exterminate. I say this to the Fuhrer and he completely agrees with me.”* Hitler would make one comment that caught Goebbels by surprise. *“The Fuhrer says whether we are right or wrong, we must win. This is the only way. And it is right, moral and necessary. And once we have won, who will ask us about the methods. In any case, we have so much to account for that we must win; otherwise our whole people—and we in the first place, and all that we love—would be erased.”*

With the decision to invade Russia the die were cast—there was no going back.

On June 22, 1941 Operation Barbarossa began and an important, fateful and deadly turning point occurred--alongside German troops moving eastward into the Soviet Union were the *Einsatzgruppen*. Within weeks these mobile killing units destroyed hundreds of Jewish communities and killed almost a quarter of all Jews that died in the Shoah. These men, women and children were killed, one at a time, by the 3000 members of the four *Einsatzgruppen* in what was described by Father Patrick Desbois in his book *The Holocaust by Bullets*.

On July 31, 1941 Hermann Göring, the second in command in the Third Reich, authorized Reinhard Heydrich to prepare “The Final Solution to the Jewish Question.” Göring, however, did not specify how this was to happen and it is generally accepted that the authorization empowered Heydrich to become the “architect” of a plan. For the first time in human history an entire “race” of people were to be murdered on a scale never before seen.

The Nazis often employed euphemisms such as “resettlement,” “special action,” “the Jewish problem,” and “Final Solution (*Endlösung*).” Historians can’t tell us when the decision was made to implement the “Final Solution” but it is clear from both the actions of 1941 and the dramatic rise in the Jewish death toll, that 1941 was the year of a dramatic shift in Germany’s solution to the “Jewish problem.”

By late autumn of 1941 construction of stationary gas chambers began at Belzec and Auschwitz. Zyklon B was “tested” in September 1941 and the industrialization of the Holocaust was under way. That same month a two-day orgy of murder would take 34,000 Jewish men, women and children at a ravine called Babi Yar outside of Kiev.

The bombing of Pearl Harbor brought the United States into the war on December 8th, 1941. That very same day 700 Jews near Chelmno, Poland were executed in mobile gas trucks using carbon monoxide.

By the end of 1941 the Germans were tiring of the butchery involved in killing Jews one at a time –bullet by bullet--and were concerned with its “inefficiency” in meeting the goals of the Final Solution. Eichmann would later testify at his trial in Jerusalem that he hadn’t the stomach to

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watch the barbarity of this ‘holocaust by bullets’. The major change in German policy involved the *ghettoization* and *deportation* of Jews to killing centers that had been established in Poland.

January 9, 1941—Hitler officially abandons *Seelöwe*, the German plan for the invasion of England.

January 30, 1941-- Hitler repeats his threats of annihilation of the Jews at a speech he makes in front of the Reichstag.

February 25, 1941—Thousands of Dutch citizens protest the deportation of Dutch Jews from their country and go on strike. This was the only such strike in Europe in reaction to the deportation of the Jews.

March 1, 1941--Bulgaria officially joins the Tripartite Pact signed previously by Germany, Italy and Japan.

March 1, 1941 - Himmler makes his first visit to Auschwitz, and orders a new compound, Birkenau, to be built under the leadership of Kommandant Höss. Birkenau was to hold 100,000 prisoners—largely Russian POWs that would be used for various building and agricultural projects.

March 3, 1941—A Jewish ghetto at Kraków is established.

March 25, 1941—Yugoslavia joins the Axis countries.

Late March 1941—A ghetto is established in Lublin, Poland.

April 6, 1941-- Germans invade Yugoslavia and Greece on Palm Sunday.

April 7, 1941—At Kielce the Nazis drove 24,000 Jews into a ghetto. It was immediately closed. All were shut in. The Radom ghetto is established on the same day.



Ghettoization in Poland

April 9, 1941—Jewish ghetto is established at Czestochowa, Poland.

April 13, 1941-- German troops enter Belgrade Yugoslavia. 75,000 more Jews would now fall under the German yoke.

June 22, 1941: Operation Barbarossa--Germany invades the Soviet Union. 2,000,000 more Jews would soon be under German oppression. This day would see the start of systematic destruction of Jewish towns and communities. German killing squads, the *Einsatzgruppen* would begin to organize local collaborators in Lithuania, Latvia and the Ukrainian states. Thousand of Jews would be killed within the next few days.

Operation Barbarossa

From 1939-41 Germany upheld the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact—the non-aggression pact with Russia. Once the Nazis withdrew from the Battle of Britain, however, their attention turned to the East.

Operation Barbarossa was the code name for the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union during WWII that began on 22 June 1942. Over 3 million German troops, 3500 tanks and 1800 German aircraft invaded the USSR along an 1800 mile front. Another 900,000 Axis troops were also involved in the offensive. In terms of sheer manpower, area traversed and the number of casualties, Operation Barbarossa was the largest military operations in human history. It should be noted that Hitler conducted the operation against the advice of many of his generals who were concerned about opening up a second front in the war.

The goal of Operation Barbarossa was the rapid conquest of the European part of the Soviet Union west of a line connecting the cities of Arkhangelsk and Astrakhan, often called the A-A line. By the January 1942, the Red Army had withstood Hitler's worst attack and the Fuhrer had not achieved the quick victory he'd hoped for. While the Germans had occupied much of the Ukraine they were pushed back from their advance on Moscow. The failure of Operation Barbarossa was the turning point in World War II. Hitler had not envisioned the war dragging on through the winter of 1942.

Barbarossa's failure led to Hitler's demands for further operations which included the Siege of Leningrad, Operation Nordlicht and the Battle of Stalingrad, among other battles in occupied Soviet territory.

The war with the Soviets continued until July 1943 when Germany was finally beaten. The cost of the war was enormous as 28 million Soviets died during the bloodiest war in world history—7 million Soviet troops and 20 million civilians!

The outcome of Operation Barbarossa was the major turning point in the war for Germany.

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