West Essex Regional High School Library
English I – Article Reserves

Important Notice to Students: Materials used in connection with this course may be protected by Copyright Law (Title 17 U.S.C). The Board of Education of the West Essex Regional School District, according to West Essex board policy 2531, requires that all administration, faculty, staff, and students using copyrighted materials for educational purposes do so in accordance with U.S. Copyright Law. The use of these materials on reserve is for students enrolled in the English I course.

Notice of Copyright:
This material may be protected by Copyright Law (Title 17 U.S.C.).

MLA Citation:

Print. Literature in Context.
advancing Soviet Army, for most people the march became an agonizing dance with death.

Despite the harsh treatment by the SS, there were some Germans who did help some Jews escape death. Oskar Schindler is reported to have saved over 1,500 Jews by having them work in his factory. Steven Spielberg made a movie, Schindler's List, about his efforts to save Jews, and it won the Academy Award for Best Picture in 1994.

THE FINAL SOLUTION

Like a rage that ran through Nazi Germany and occupied Europe, the Final Solution attempted to annihilate the Jewish people. This Nazi process followed several stages. In their concerted effort to make whole areas of Germany "Jew-free," the Nazis at first tried to expel the Jews from their homes and villages. Emigration was the next step in the process. Forced to sell their property for whatever they could get, more than half of the 1933 German Jewish population, 500,000 people, had emigrated by 1938. Emigration was further complicated by the fact that other countries wanted proof that those wishing to emigrate could support themselves. And more often than not, there were strict limitations on the foreign exchange of money. What was exchanged was done so at exorbitant rates. By the time even the wealthiest Jew had emigrated, not much of their estate was left.

Despite the unfair hardships being placed on them, the rest of the world's acceptance of German Jews was less than enthusiastic. During the 1930s the whole world was in an economic slump, and no one seemed very willing to increase the number of people in their labor markets. Those that were accepted usually were farmers and miners; the German Jewish professional class was not particularly welcomed at all. Anti-Semitism played a large part in the limits of Jewish immigration as well; this attitude has never been an exclusively German phenomenon. The Jewish people really had no place to go.

In 1938 the condition of the German Jews reached a crisis point. As the Nazis moved toward war with their European neighbors, their policies toward the Jews grew more radical. Concerned about the problem, President Roosevelt organized an international conference, but the conference ended up "largely stating what they
could not do." After the Kristallnacht brutality, which made it abundantly clear that the Nazis' actions against the Jews would continue to become increasingly extreme and violent, emigration exploded and the Jews went to any place they could find: Palestine, Britain, the Americas, even Shanghai.

Interestingly, in the 1930s the idea to mass murder the Jews was an option that seemingly had not been widely discussed. Yet experts note that when the killings did take place in the 1930s, they were mostly isolated within the concentration system; no fewer than 100 Jews were killed then among the several thousands of other political prisoners murdered at places such as Sachsenhausen, Buchenwald, and Dachau. When Germany annexed Austria in March 1938, and Bohemia and Moravia in March 1939, murder as a policy for resolving the Jewish Question still did not exist—even though the number of Jews under Nazi control increased by another 250,000. In pre-war Germany emigration remained the primary policy, but only if other nations would continue to take in the migrating Jews. Another problem for the Jewish people leaving the Nazi menace was that Germany was seemingly gaining territory as rapidly as people could flee.

As Germany's conquest of Europe developed, the murder of Jews in the expanding concentration camp system multiplied. Experts observe that when the Germans were planning for the invasion of the Soviet Union, they realized they would have to do something with the 5 million Jews in that territory. The brutal treatment of the Jews by Nazis also had not been protested by the United States or the Vatican, so there was no reason to suspect any reaction if the brutality were to intensify. Some experts argue that until early 1941 the Nazis, with the possible exception of Hitler, had not given the murdering of all Jews a prominent place on their agenda. The rapid conquest of eastern Europe and Russia not only made it possible to destroy a huge portion of European Jewry, but the successful invasion made it a necessity, according to the deranged mentality of Hitler and his henchmen.

Because SS documentation was destroyed, there is no written order in the archives to be found specifically directing the annihilation of the Jewish people. Bauer notes that Hitler probably gave the order to destroy European Jewry to Himmler sometime between October 1940 and May 1941. The order to destroy the Jewish people, as well as all Soviet officials and all communists, was
The Holocaust

then passed down to the Einsatzgruppen (Action Groups) commander, Otto Ohlendorf. Thus began mass murder of historical proportions. Kiev, where 33,000 victims died, is the best-known site of Jewish massacre in the former USSR. By the end of 1942, fully 1.4 million Jews had been murdered in the USSR.

In Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland, Christopher Browning writes:

In mid-March 1942 some 75 to 80 percent of all victims of the Holocaust were still alive, while 20 to 25 percent had perished. A mere eleven months later, in mid-February 1943, the percentages were exactly the reverse. At the core of the Holocaust was a short, intense wave of mass murder. The center of gravity of this mass murder was Poland, where in March 1942, despite two and a half years of terrible hardship, deprivation, and persecution, every major Jewish community was still intact, and where eleven months later only the remnants of Polish Jewry survived in a few rump [remnant] ghettos and labor camps. In short, the German attack on the Jews of Poland was not a gradual or incremental program stretched over a long period of time, but a veritable blitzkrieg, a massive offensive requiring the mobilization of large numbers of shock troops.

The Einsatzgruppen was given the primary responsibility to round up and murder the Jews in occupied territory:

In preparation for the invasion of Russia and the “war of destruction” Hitler intended to wage there, four special mobile units of the SS known as Einsatzgruppen were formed and trained in the late spring of 1941. The core of these units came from Heydrich’s Security Police (Gestapo and Kripo) as well as his intelligence apparatus (Security Service, or SD). They were supplemented by small units of Waffen-SS (the military branch of Himmler’s SS). In addition, however, the three companies of Order Police Battalion 9 were distributed to three of the four Einsatzgruppen.

The Order Police was a military formation used to maintain order behind the front lines; they were primarily an occupying force. Bauer observes that of the first four Einsatzgruppen commanders, three had Ph.D.s, including Ohlendorf. In addition, quite a few of the subordinate officers were university educated and one was a
pastor. Only 12.5 percent of the total men were Nazis; 87.5 percent remaining were just "ordinary men."36  

On 20 January 1942 the Nazi leadership held the Wannsee Conference near Berlin. At this conference the Nazis discussed strategies for the complete annihilation of the 11 million Jews in Europe. Although specific methods were not debated, it was determined that the same procedures they had already used to kill the 1.4 million Jews would be inadequate to kill the remainder. The primary importance of this conference is that it marked the time when the German bureaucracy focused on the extermination of the Jews. On 8 December 1941, the same day that the first death camp was established at Lodz in Poland, poisonous gas was first used to kill Jews in Chelmo, Poland, five weeks before the conference.37 Death camps would soon dot the countryside throughout occupied Europe, killing as many Jews as quickly as the death machinery could manage it. The Germans maintained these death camps right up to the very last days of the war.

**AFTERMATH**

The Jews, who had suffered so greatly during the war, did not find the world particularly sympathetic immediately after Germany’s surrender either. Of the 200,000 Jews who had managed to survive in the Nazi concentration camps, most tried to go back to their home country; but 65,000 Jews from Poland and Lithuania could not do so because they were not welcome anymore.38 The newly formed Jewish Brigade, a group of Palestinian Jews who had served in the British Army, began searching Germany and Austria for surviving Jews to be smuggled across the Italian border for eventual emigration to Palestine. It took groups like the Jewish Brigade to help their own people because the Jewish displaced (DPs) were not getting adequate assistance from the Allies until President Truman stepped in. The basic issue of contention was that the Allies wanted the Jewish DPs to return to their home of origin, but the Jews who were still residing in refugee camps did not. They wanted to go to Palestine to form their own nation. Thus, the most important consequence of the Holocaust was the establishment of the Jewish State of Israel on 14 May 1948. However, Bauer argues that Israel did not necessarily originate as a direct consequence of the Holocaust; it might have been established earlier had the Holocaust never occurred. He does allow
that the pressing number of Jewish DPs residing in camps accelerated the State of Israel's establishment.

Freed from Nazi terror, the Jews who survived the war were not freed from the psychic and emotional scars of the Holocaust. Out of this experience the Jewish people have developed a universal mentality of never letting it happen again. Bauer observes that remembering the Holocaust has become a dominant feature of Jewish identity everywhere. The issue of the Holocaust, the recognition that humanity is not only capable of enormous inhumanity but that modern technologies and bureaucracies have made it even more convenient to do unimaginable harm to innocent people, is a touchstone for Jews and non-Jews alike. Knowing that atrocity in the modern age can explode at a moment's notice, we have to be on guard at all times.

NOTES

3. Gilbert, Holocaust, 68.
5. Ibid.
7. Ibid., 69–70.
9. Gilbert, Holocaust, 73.
11. Gilbert, Holocaust, 73.
15. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
20. Gilbert, Holocaust, 121.
22. Gilbert, Holocaust, 582.
23. Ibid., 688.
25. Ibid., 78.
27. Ibid., 129.
29. Ibid.
31. Ibid., 194.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid., 199.
35. Ibid., 9.
37. Ibid., 209.
38. Ibid., 338.
39. Ibid., 348.