

# The Jews of Germany

By Devorah Kirsch

## Part III: Into the Abyss

**I**n the summer of 1914, imperial ambitions and rivalries, and entanglement<sup>4</sup> in alliances among European powers led to World War I. Beginning on Tisha B'Av — August 14 — it was to encompass millions of lives. Over 100,000 Jews served in the German army; a total of 12,000 fell in battle. Germany lay in shambles after the war. The defeat and misery would leave the nation open to a new ideology.

World War I began well for the Germans. In April 1917, however, the United States declared war on Germany, and by mid-1918 sufficient numbers of American troops were in France to help the Allies turn the tide.

On November 11, 1918, after four years of fighting, an armistice was signed between Germany and the Allies. Kaiser Wilhelm II had fled, and the Social Democrats, a popular political party, set up a provisional — temporary — government. On January 9, 1919, a national election was held at Weimar, a city in Prussia. In February 1919, a new constitution was adopted, drafted principally by Hugo Preuss, a prominent Jewish leader.

Thus began the Weimar Republic, a brief period of German democracy, during which the Jews finally reached their dream of complete equality. Fully integrated into German society, they produced vast achievements in every sphere — politics, art, economics, and science. Berlin, the capital of Germany, became the center of vibrant creativity during this period, largely because of the Jews.

Politically and economically, however, the situation in Weimar Germany steadily worsened. The government began under squabbles between right- and left-wing factions; these squabbles were to continue throughout the next decade, greatly undermining the republic. Between November 1918 and April 1919 numerous uprisings took place in Berlin and Bavaria. Many Jews took part, particularly on the side of communism; however, the rebellions were brutally suppressed by remnants of the army, called the *Freikorps*.

Most Germans had a deep aversion to "Bolshevism," which was their name for the communist idea.

Political instability and weakness characterized the Weimar Republic during its fourteen-year history. It was crippled from the start when Germany, under the Treaty of Versailles, was forced to yield to Allied terms of surrender. Germany had to cede about 13.5 percent of her prewar territory to neighboring countries. In the process Germany lost about 10 percent of her population.

In addition, the Allies presented their enormous bill for war damages (called *reparations*): 132 billion gold marks, to be paid by Germany in 59 annual installments. Such high amounts produced disastrous inflation. Before World War I, an American dollar was worth 4.2 marks. By mid-November 1923 it was worth 6,600 *trillion* marks! That sum could barely buy a loaf of bread.

Such chaos lent a fertile environment for extremist groups. Many blamed the Jews for Germany's defeat and the Versailles Treaty. Lamenting the loss of Bismarck's "Iron and Blood" nation, they viewed the gentle Weimar Republic as a Jewish creation, and spread the myth that the Reich had lost the war because of "a stab in the back" by the Jews.

There were indeed Jews in the Weimar government, but the only one to rise to prominence was Walther Rathenau. Although he kept his Jewishness unobtrusive, he was often singled out by

### Aftermath

On October 1, 1946, in a courtroom in Nuremberg, the verdict was declared. Twelve defendants were sentenced to death, three to life imprisonment, and four to prison terms. Three were acquitted. That date happened to fall on Yom Kippur, the Day of Judgment, and the coincidence was apt. Nuremberg, the German city of Hitler's racial laws, was now home to one of history's greatest trials, for "crimes against humanity."

The "crimes against humanity" had been revealed to the world a year-and-a-half earlier. In April 1945, as the Allies overran Western Germany, the battle-worn troops found new reserves of horror the further inland they went.

At Dachau and Buchenwald, the American GI's were greeted by skeletal figures clad in striped prison uniforms. The ground was strewn with leathery corpses. The gas chambers had been left intact by the fleeing SS. Standing over an

open pit, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the American commander, solemnly surveyed the victims, for whom liberation had come too late.

In the neighboring villages, the German populace was commanded to walk through the camps and see their Fuehrer's handiwork. During the tour, a number of people fainted.

In Poland, Russian troops had liberated Auschwitz in January of that year. They too were shocked by what they saw. Rapidly the Red Army closed in on Germany,

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until it finally reached the Elbe River. One by one the camps were discovered — Majdanek, Belzec, Ponary — and along with the dead the killing apparatus that had claimed some ten million lives. In all, over 80 camps scarred the landscape of Germany and Eastern Europe. There, some four million Jews had perished.

After the collapse of the Third Reich, many Nazis had either fled or taken their lives. However, enough were caught to make the world clamor for justice. Thus began the first attempt in history to internationally condemn and punish anti-Semitism. When the United Nations War Crimes

anti-Semitic propagandists as evidence that Weimar was indeed a *Judenrepublik* (Jewish republic). Labeled a "Jewish sow" in a popular song, he was assassinated in 1922. The conspicuous presence and influence of the Jews in Berlin infuriated the anti-Semites even more.

Once again anti-Semitism became a political force. During the 1920's, bills were introduced in the *Reichstag* — the seat of the German government — against the Jews. As for the public, as many as 430

crystallized. Like many, he blamed the Jews for Germany's defeat.

In Munich, where he continued to live after the war, Hitler joined the German Workers' Party, and in 1920 renamed it the National Socialist Party — the Nazis. Indeed, he was the Nazi Party's biggest asset; a fervent nationalist and gifted rabble-rouser, he rose rapidly until he dominated his cohorts. He designed the swastika — based on an ancient Persian emblem — and the *Heil* salute as symbols.



societies existed, and 700 periodicals, which nurtured the fantasies of extremist factions. The youth were especially anti-Semitic.

One group, however, violently and ultimately came to the forefront. Steadily it gained control over Germany; its leader lives on in memory to this day as the very embodiment of anti-Semitism.

Adolf Hitler, a World War I corporal, formally entered politics in 1919. It was in prewar Austria, his birthplace, where he developed his obsessive hatred toward Jews. In 1913, he moved to Munich, the capital of Bavaria, in southern Germany. There he was drawn to the city's active political climate, and his twisted ideas

He also recruited a private army, called Storm Troopers (SA), to guard his meetings and intimidate opponents. But Hitler's most effective weapon was his oratory. With his amazing flair for speech, he could sway millions of people — which he did. In the postwar climate of economic crisis and social unrest, he blamed Germany's misfortunes on foreigners, communists (who had also gained tremendous influence), government officials, and above all the Jews. According to the Nazi Party, no Jew could ever be made a member of the German nation. *Deutschland erwache, Judah verrecke* (Germany awake, Jews drop dead) was their slogan, which was applied — literally

Commission prepared lists of 36,529 "war criminals" (including Japanese), the majority of the accused were charged with anti-Jewish atrocities.

After the first trials, a total of twelve others followed — the Subsequent Nuremberg Proceedings. Some 177 Nazis were convicted; twelve were sentenced to death, twenty-five to life imprisonment, and the remainder to long prison terms. Thousands more were caught and tried over the years, both by the German and Israeli courts; hundreds were sentenced to death. The pursuit of Nazi criminals continues into the present age.

Attempts were later made to provide monetary compensation, called **reparations**, to the Nazi victims. The West German

### *The pursuit of Nazis continues into the present age.*

government expressed genuine desire to make amends. After their economy was rebuilt, the Federal Republic offered the victims restitution for loss of life or limb, damage to health, and loss of careers, professions, pensions, and insurance. It also offered a dollar for each day the victims were imprisoned, or forced to live in a ghetto or wear a star. By the end of this century, an estimated \$30 billion will have been paid out to survivors.

## **An example can be found in a children's book of that era:**

**"Without solution of the Jewish question, no salvation of mankind."**

— in the years to come.

In November 1923, Hitler made his first bid for power. Supported by some 600 armed followers, he seized Bavarian state leaders in a Munich beer hall, fired a shot into the ceiling, and cried, "The national revolution has begun." The next day, he was arrested and others in his group were killed by police. Though sentenced to five years, he only served nine months; in the interim, he brilliantly exploited his trial to make himself one of the most talked-about figures in Germany.

While in prison, he wrote his autobiography, *Mein Kampf* ("My Struggle"), in which he spewed more of his venom toward Jews. In addition, Hitler elaborated on the ideas of the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, about a new civilization which would favor the strong. Germans, inheritors of the Roman tradition, were the "master race," and the Jews, whose Bible favored the weak, were inherently inferior. In addition, Hitler enjoyed the music of Richard Wagner, whose operas were filled with mythic German heroes and supermen.

By the time of the "Beer Hall Putsch," as the Munich fiasco came to be called, Hitler's party had already acquired a sizable following. Afterwards, the Nazis became a force in Bavarian right-wing politics. In the 1924 national elections, the Nazis gained 32 electoral votes. The Beer Hall Putsch also taught Hitler patience and convinced him that the way to power was through the vote. Steadily, through sheer drive and intimidation, he gained supporters.

The stock market crash of 1929 did much to enhance Hitler's popularity. With the loss of foreign credit, Germany was hit hard, and in the ensuing Great Depression millions of her citizens were put out of work. Farmers, professionals, and the self-

employed — the German middle class — suffered the most, and in their despair many looked to a leader who promised to end their misfortune.

In 1930, a Reichstag election was held. The Nazis polled 6,500,000 votes and gained 107 seats; they were still a minority, but a significant one. In early 1932, the Nazis tallied 230 seats; in November, however, they lost 30 seats and Hitler the election.

The majority of Germans, it should be noted, had rejected Hitler. There were plenty who saw this person for what he was — a tyrant and a madman. Nevertheless, Hitler was able to secure the leadership by a fluke. In an effort to placate the right-wing groups, the aging President Paul von Hindenberg appointed him chancellor (prime minister) of Germany, and in January 1933 Adolf Hitler was formally instated.

Thus began the twelve-year period called the Third Reich. In 1933, democracy died in Germany, and with it the hopes of the Jews. Although the Third Reich would eventually destroy Jews in most of Europe, the initial recipients of the Nazi terror were those who lived in Germany. Through Hitler their glorious history came to a dismal end.

No sooner was Hitler in office than he made good his threats. Overnight, prominent Jewish individuals who had faithfully served Germany became her enemies. They were dismissed from posts, barred from civil service, expelled from schools and universities, forbidden to own land. One by one anti-Jewish ordinances were passed — Preservation of German Civil Service, Preservation Against Overcrowding in German Schools, German Farmers Act. Hitler fulfilled his promise of employment for the German people. They now had jobs — vacated by



the Jews.

How did the German Jews react to the new regime? Initially, they (and many Germans as well) couldn't believe that this country, so refined and sophisticated, would even allow someone like Hitler to be elected, let alone remain in office. Many imagined that the traditionally powerful Prussian military would get rid of him — or simply that human decency would not allow this to continue.

They sadly learned otherwise. Hitler shrewdly consolidated his power over Germany, with the help of his henchmen — some of the most despicable individuals ever to walk the earth. Among them was Heinrich Himmler, whose defense corps, called the *Schutzstaffel*, merged with the SA and became known as the SS — the instrument of Nazi terror.

Himmler, a repressed, pedantic man, had once been a chicken farmer, who liked to apply his particular kind of breeding to human beings. He envisioned a Germany filled with blond "Aryan" he-men (which he wasn't), who would eventually populate and control the world — and in the process eliminate inferior types like Slavs and Jews. Germany, whose borders were diminished after World War I, needed *lebensraum* — living space — for its

citizens. In addition, Himmler was a self-styled mystic, who spent hours devoted to the study of ancient Germanic lore, and who tried to revive and emulate the tribal rites of pre-Christian Germany.

This was the man who commanded the SS. Himmler became second to Hitler in power, competing with Hermann Goering, a flamboyant World War I ace, whose own secret police, the Gestapo, was busy rounding up all political opponents. Eventually the Gestapo, as well as the internal security service (called the SD), fell under Himmler's jurisdiction and spread its tentacles into every part of German life.

Slowly, opposition to the new regime strangled and died. The brave German individuals who sympathized with the Jews or at the very least opposed Hitler ended up in the concentration camps of Dachau and Buchenwald, both set up in early 1933. Thousands of Germans and Jews — especially communists — were taken into "protective custody," the euphemism for arrest; some died "while trying to escape." An urn containing their ashes was presented to their families.

In May 1933, thousands of Nazis seized books by prominent German authors, many of them Jewish, and cast them into

However, not all Germans were either financially generous or morally supportive. The industrialists, in particular, remained surprisingly callous toward their use of Jewish slaves during the war; they argued that forced labor in such times was not unlawful. Arrogantly, they resisted compensation every legal inch of the way. Declared one: "Nobody . . . will be willing to believe that we committed crimes against humanity and nothing will convince us that we are war criminals." Altogether the German companies have paid out a total of only \$13 million, and fewer than 15,000 Jews have received a share of it.

East Germany has behaved even more indifferently. While the Third Reich remains on the conscience of most West Germans, East German youths grow up with a different perspective on the Nazi era.

In their communist system, East Germans are taught that the Nazis were a product of "capitalism." They learn about Germans who opposed the regime — the communists who died in concentration camps, as well as the men who tried to kill Hitler in July 1944. Therefore, the East Germans believe themselves to be free of guilt. While West Germany has paid trillions of marks in restitution, East Germany has until recently denied any obligation of this nature, on the grounds that it is not the successor to the Third Reich and has no moral or legal obligation for the Nazi evil.

Austria has proven to be even worse. In spite of their complicity with the Nazis, the Austrians consider themselves victims of the Nazi invasion, and therefore have managed to shirk moral responsibility. Said a political leader in 1946: "It is not Austria that should make restitution. Rather, it is

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to be  
even worse.*

to Austria that restitution should be made." Very few Jews received any kind of compensation from Austria.

No amount of money could truly amend for the millions murdered, and the millions more who lost their property, health, livelihood, and loved ones — all for the sake of Hitler's "New Order." But the Nuremberg trials, and their repercussions, at least showed the world's changing mentality toward racial and religious persecution.

Has the world learned its lesson? It's hard to say. On the one hand, more and more countries have become democratic in recent years. On the other hand, the recent events in Kampuchea, where over a million Cambodians (and perhaps many more) were slaughtered, while the world did nothing, demonstrate that we have a long way to go.

raging bonfires. Texts were rewritten to glorify Nazi policies and denigrate the Jews. An example can be found in a children's book of that era: "Without solution of the Jewish question, no salvation of mankind."

Hitler's propaganda minister, Josef Goebbels, organized the first of Germany's boycotts against the Jews in April 1933. Groups of SA and SS thugs stood outside the windows of Jewish businesses, especially department stores, bearing signs that urged Germans not to enter. Stars of David were painted, yellow on black, across the doors and windows, and in crude lettering the word *Jude* (Jew) was written, along with a swastika. "On some," wrote a witness, "you saw caricatures of Jewish noses."

In the first year, 1933, only 37,000 Jews chose to emigrate. Their reactions were based on individual, not communal, considerations; most of these Jews were either professionals, political dissidents whose lives were endangered in any case, or Zionists, who had planned to make *aliyah* long ago. The majority of Jews considered the new regime temporary.

There were other reasons why most of Germany's Jews chose to remain. Some felt that fleeing was cowardly. This anti-Semitism, they felt, was merely a reenactment of previous harassments against the Jews. In time it would pass. In the meantime, they had to stay and combat it. Religious Jews saw the new oppression as G-d's punishment for assimilation. The Agudas Israel implored Jews to do *teshuvah* — to repent — and return to the traditional fold.

For some Jews, emigration was either impractical or unfeasible. People hesitated to abandon their livelihood and

community for a strange land and culture. In addition, emigration visas were difficult to obtain, and many countries, including the United States, had restrictive immigration quotas. In these countries, too, the citizens, threatened by the influx of Jewish professionals, legally blocked their entry. In Palestine, where Arab hostility had increased, Jewish immigration was restricted by the British.

Many Jews continued to love Germany and insisted on their right to be German. They appealed to Pres. Hindenberg for relief. Under pressure, Hitler lessened the decrees — allowing, for example, concessions to World War I veterans. Most of the Jews retained loyalty to Germany and faith in the goodness of her people.

Hitler himself deluded the Jews into believing their situation would turn for the better. Persecution followed a cyclical pattern. Like a cancer it inched forward, only to fall in remission for awhile. In 1933, a number of decrees were enacted against the Jews. Then Hitler backed off. Emigration rose and fell according to the enactment of laws. The year 1934 was relatively mild for the Jews, with little open hostility. Many Jews welcomed this as a sign of change. Emigration dropped as many Jews hoped that normalcy would return.

Some, completely bitter and disillusioned by the new regime, responded by committing suicide. So widespread was this epidemic that the rabbinate in the city of Cologne urged the public to maintain inner strength. The majority of Jews, however, still chose to cope as best they could with the Third Reich. The next five years, 1933-38, marked the sunset of German Jewry, filled with constant struggle and degradation.

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The Nazis organized a general society of German Jews, called the *Reichsvertretung*. This committee represented all of Germany's 500,000 Jews — however, in name only. The Jewish community was too divided politically and ideologically to allow for any real solidarity. The majority — 80% — were assimilated; often they disagreed about how to deal with the Nazis.

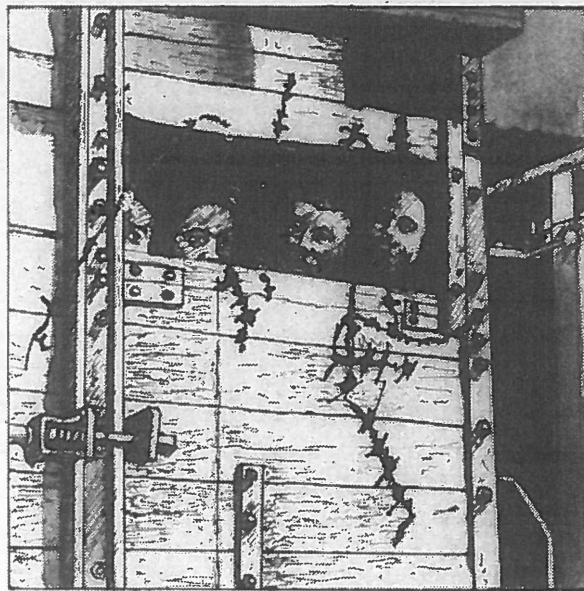
Many assimilationists blamed themselves for the rabid anti-Semitism. Basing their arguments on the Enlightenment, they felt that they had alienated the Germans through their dominance in the professions and commerce. Were the Jews more productive in other fields, they wouldn't have elicited such resentment. Therefore, Jews sought to make themselves "useful." Many tried to learn new trades; sometimes they had no choice, as their former ones were now barred to them.

Others, once assimilated, violently cast off their loyalty to Germany and turned to their religion for comfort. They filled the synagogues and schools; even if they didn't know the liturgy or ritual, they at least wanted to be with other Jews. Passover and Chanukah, festivals of freedom, took on new significance, and during Purim, when Haman's name was mentioned, the noisemakers sounded loudly through synagogue halls.

The *Reichsvertretung* had the unenviable task of appeasing the Nazis while at the same time boosting Jewish morale. Mainly it served the Jews through three ways: emigration, vocational training, and relief. In addition, it established soup kitchens and handled relief funds, largely supplied by friends in America. Because *shechitah* — kosher slaughtering — was outlawed,

observant Jews had to import meat from elsewhere. Over the years, as impoverishment grew, increasing numbers of German Jews ended up on the dole.

Jews in the arts eventually joined the *Kulturbund Deutscher Juden* — the Society for German Jewish Culture — where they organized their own activities. They managed to raise



morale through concerts, plays, paintings, and poetry readings. The number of Jewish artists, writers, and entertainers who were either expelled from Germany or killed left the nation culturally depleted.

Most of the German Jews found themselves fighting a losing battle against Hitler. In spite of brief lulls, the hostility toward them did not cease. The year 1935 brought them additional misfortune. Hitler, now *Fuehrer* (leader) of Germany (Hindenburg had died a year earlier), tightened his control. The Nuremberg Laws, designed to "increase and preserve German people biologically," established a set of laws stating who was a Jew and who wasn't. Regardless of the Jewish definition — anyone either converted or born of a Jewish mother — the Germans expressed

their own: anyone with three Jewish grandparents. The Jews were forbidden to intermarry with Germans. Those with only one parent or grandparent fell into a peculiar category called *Mischlinge* (mongrels). They were subject to their own complex set of laws.

In addition, Jewish citizenship was revoked. Jews could no longer call themselves German; rather, they were "Jews in Germany." They were also forbidden to display the German national colors or hire non-Jewish domestic help under forty-five years of age. Police surveillance of all Jewish organizations tightened; the Gestapo was everywhere, even sitting in on synagogue services.

Censorship of the Jewish press reached absurd heights. Certain subjects, such as German landscape, were banned — including the word "blond," because it had become a code word for "Nazi." Often periodicals

were suspended for long periods and their writers and editors arrested. Jews were forbidden from performing works by Aryan writers or composers.

Very few Germans protested against the treatment of the Jews. Most of them feared for their own lives, as their land had become a total police state. Apathy, an effective political weapon, stood in the way of effective intervention. There were, however, many individuals who risked their lives to assist the Jews. And though the churches, both Catholic and Protestant, accepted Hitler's policies, some clergymen stood out — like Reverend Niemoller, who was later sent to Dachau, and Canon Bernhard Littenberg, who prayed daily for the persecuted Berlin Jews. The majority of Germans, however, either supported Hitler or

could do nothing against him.

Even those who were initially skeptical of Hitler eventually accepted him. Many grew intoxicated with the nation's military and economic successes. Germany was slowly rearming herself and preparing for war. In 1935, the Saar, the district along the French border, was reclaimed, and in 1936 the Germans occupied the Rhineland, further south. In November of that year, Hitler joined forces with Italy and Japan, creating the Berlin-Rome-Tokyo Axis. Goering's Four-Year Plan, which would make Germany ready for war, involved seizure of Jewish property. Goering helped himself to some of the treasures.

The year 1938 was a watershed for the German Jews, and the last in which they had any kind of autonomy. "Aryanization" of businesses took over, as one by one they transferred out of Jewish hands into German ones. Jews were required to give themselves Jewish first names — "Israel" for men and "Sarah" for women. The letter *J* appeared on German passports that were issued to Jews. In addition, the *Ostjuden*, the Jews originally from Eastern Europe, were deported back to Poland.

The bloodless invasion of Austria, called the *Anschluss*, brought an additional 185,000 Jews into the German fold. At least 170,000 lived in Vienna alone. In their treatment of the Jews, Austrian Nazis were even worse than their German counterparts; they looted Jewish homes and forced Jews to wash the streets. The annexation of Czechoslovakia later that year gave Germany an additional 90,000 Jews.

By then the German Jews saw emigration as their only solution. Thousands besieged the emigration offices in need of visas. Often they received help, strangely enough, from the Nazis. In their quest to "cleanse" Germany of Jews, the Nazis tried to send as many to Palestine as possible,

# A Tribute

By ESTHER MIRI  
PINKASOVITS

(16 yrs. old, 11th grade,  
Bnos Yisrael Vlsnitz)

WRITING CONTEST  
WINNER No. 2

There is so much to tell,  
About the six million that fell.  
Whose lives were lost,  
During the Holocaust.

The old men that prayed,  
To rest they were laid.  
Yet their faith they had not lost,  
During the Holocaust.

The young ones that toiled,  
Their future was spoiled.  
As martyrs their lives they lost,  
During the Holocaust.

Others that were fed,  
To the "Chambers of the Dead,"  
Their spirit they had not lost,  
During the Holocaust.

We must not forget,  
The story that's told,  
Of six million souls,  
Whose lives were lost,  
During the Holocaust.

but the British blockade made wide scale emigration impossible.

In Austria, Adolf Eichmann set up his bureau, Jewish Affairs and Evacuation Affairs, under the auspices of the RSHA (Reich Security Main Office). Eichmann fervently worked to get Jews out of the Greater Reich, as Germany and Austria came to be called. Often, he extorted sums of money before letting them go.

The world began to grow alarmed at the desperate influx of German

Jewish refugees. A conference was called in Evian, France, where world leaders met and discussed the problem. In the end, nothing was accomplished, and no country was willing to accept large numbers of Jews. Even an economic boycott of Germany was ineffectual. Nothing stood in Hitler's way.

The end of 1938 marked a disaster forever engraved in Jewish memory. In Paris on November 7, a young Jew named Hershl Grynspan, whose *Ostjuden* parents had just been expelled from Germany, shot and killed the secretary to the German ambassador.

The Nazis used this act as an excuse for what was to come, though actually it had been planned long ago. On the night of November 9, thousands of Jewish homes, businesses, and synagogues went up in flames. The shattered plate glass that littered the German streets gave the event its name: *Kristallnacht*, or Crystal Night. By the next day some 7,000 Jewish businesses had been destroyed, 100 Jews killed, 30,000 sent to concentration camps, and thousands more subjected to wanton violence. The Jews finally acknowledged the truth: they were no longer wanted in Germany.

Before *Kristallnacht*, nearly 150,000 Jews had left Germany. In the months afterwards, another 150,000 followed. All Jewish institutions were either burned down or banned by the Gestapo. The Jewish press was suppressed. The *Reichsvertretung* was dissolved, and a Central Committee was started. It took over the tasks of emigration, vocational training, and education. For the most part, however, it simply carried out Gestapo edicts.

After 1938, the remnants of the German Jewish community lingered and died a slow death for another five years. Their rights continued to dwindle in 1939. Most of those who

remained lived in poverty.

Meanwhile, Hitler didn't abandon his interest in heredity and the German race. The mentally ill or incompetent gained his attention. In their "Euthanasia Program," Nazi doctors tried a new way of helping these people — by killing them in gas-filled vans. Thus, the first victims of extermination were Germans.

World War II, begun in September of that year, ushered in the Holocaust. Within a month, Germany had conquered western Poland, and eventually all of it. The Polish Jews suffered their own horror as the Germans quickly divided the country into regions and established ghettos. In 1940, a group of German Jews was deported into Poland.

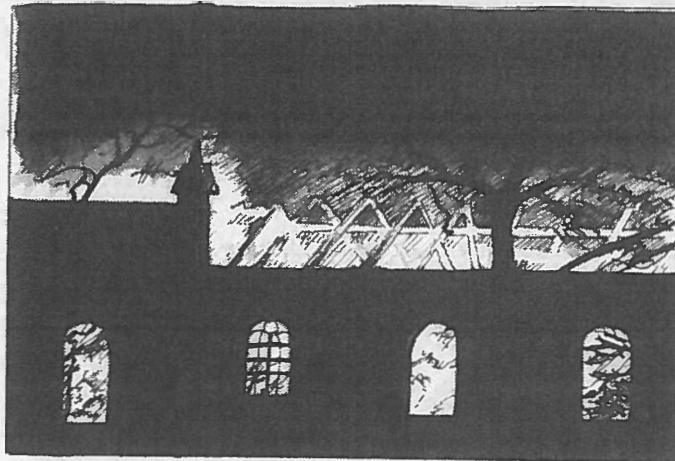
After his military victories, Hitler expressed his desire for a "New Order": a Europe ruled by Germany. All the "subhumans" — those not Aryan — had to go. In 1942, at what came to be known as the Wannsee Conference, a group of SS officers discussed the fate of the Jews in German-occupied territory. They reached a "Final Solution": the systematic and deliberate annihilation of the Jews.

By September 1941, all the Jews who were left in Germany had to wear the yellow Star of David. They continued to be deported to Poland and elsewhere, to the ghettos and concentration camps.

One place differed from the rest. Himmler had always envisioned a showplace for distinguished Jews (either world leaders or World War I veterans); he chose the Czech town of Terezin (Theresienstadt) to set up this "model camp." Around 40,000 "privileged" German Jews were deported, and there they languished under horrendous living conditions.

Theresienstadt, for all its "model" status, was basically a transit point for the major extermination centers. Most of the Jews who passed through its gates ended up at Auschwitz or similar places.

Though World War II and the Holocaust ended in 1945, the final chapter of the German Jews was written two years earlier. In 1943,



their community was liquidated and Berlin officially declared *Judenrein* — free of Jews. In truth, however, many Jews stayed in Berlin through the war, fighting Nazi attempts to locate them with the assistance of brave non-Jewish friends. At war's end, some 26,000 Jews were left in Germany (and Austria), most of them "Jewish" by Nazi racial standards only. In all, between 160,000 and 180,000 German Jews are estimated to have perished. Their venerable history had come to a bitter end.

Interestingly, the Jews and the Holocaust played a major role in Germany's defeat in World War II. So obsessed was Hitler in destroying the Jews that he completely forgot he was fighting a conventional war.

The Final Solution occupied thousands of military personnel from the SS. The SS was given priority over the regular German army — the *Wehrmacht* — even during critical battles. The transport of Jews to the extermination centers paralyzed the railway system, which was badly

needed to supply arms to the front. In addition, over 3,000,000 productive workers, who could have serviced the acute labor shortage in German factories, perished at the hands of the SS. Even after June 6, 1944 — D-Day — when the Allies invaded Western Europe and Germany began to fight a defensive war, preference continued to be given to the Final Solution.

The Wehrmacht protested, but to no avail. The once powerful German general staff had been intimidated by Hitler, who took to rages and imaginary victories. Eventually the Wehrmacht collapsed under relentless onslaught by the Allies on two fronts. From an empire in 1942 extending over most of Europe, the Third Reich by April 1945 had been

reduced to an underground Berlin bunker.

There, with Russian troops a hundred yards away, Hitler took his own life — while still ranting against the Jews. This people, at a cost of six million souls, had influenced German history for the last time.

### Jews in Germany Today

The number of Jews in West Germany numbers about 50,000. They are not descendants of the old German community.

All the larger communities have their own rabbis, and kosher meals are obtainable. There are two elementary Talmud Torah schools, which have a total of just over 300 pupils.

In East Germany, some 400-500 Jews remain there officially, although there are believed to be many more who are unregistered. There is no rabbi, and religious affairs are run by a few volunteers. A *shochet* comes twice a month from Hungary. In East Berlin, religious services are held on the Sabbath, but elsewhere only on High Holidays.



701

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# The Jewish Reader

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"The Israelites  
went  
on the  
dry land  
in the midst  
of the sea."

## TO OUR READERS

It has been over forty years since the Holocaust came to an end. It was the worst tragedy ever to befall the Jewish people. No magazine can adequately detail the horror of the Holocaust. Only the survivors can tell us what it was really like.

Still, it is important for every human being to study this period of our history, and so several articles in the current issue focus on the Holocaust. "The Jews of Germany" traces the saga of German Jewry, which came to a bitter close at the hands of Hitler. The heroic rescue of the Jews of Denmark by their non-Jewish neighbors is depicted in "A Time to Remember." "Estherke" is a fictional tale of a family that is separated by the war.

Pesach is the subject of "Torah Highlights" and "The King and the Pawn." And our cover subject is the crossing of the Red Sea by the Israelites, which occurred on the seventh night of Pesach.

"Across the Atlantic" is taking a vacation this issue so that its author, Chayim Pesach Silverman, can get married. **Mazel tov!**

Have a **chag kasher vesame'ach** — a kosher and happy holiday!

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is made possible in part  
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Laboratories.

# MAIL

# ROOM

## Likes Magazine

Dear Editor,

My mother just ordered the magazines for me, and they are great! I like them a lot. So I give you a big thank you!

Hindie Brook  
Brooklyn, NY

□ □ □

## Enjoys "Atlantic"

Dear Editor,

I really enjoy the story "Across the Atlantic." But it's so long; when is it going to finish?

Also, would I be cheating to copy a story from another book (for the writing contest)? Please answer me.

Dvorah van Elkan  
Brooklyn, NY

*Afraid so. Not only is plagiarism (copying someone else's work) cheating, it is illegal. Also, it is a form of stealing, and therefore against the Torah.*

*Most of all, copying someone else's story is harmful to yourself. The purpose of our contest is to encourage you to write, think and develop your*

*own ideas. Relying on someone else can make you mentally lazy, as well as dishonest.*

*As for "Across the Atlantic," it will continue for several more issues.*

□ □ □

## Problems, Problems

Dear Editor,

My name is Chana Perl. Your articles are very nice. One thing is bothering me. In the Teves issue, I was doing the fun corner. I was doing "What's Missing?" When I came to the "Wordfind," I was not able to find the words Shifrah, Miriam, Re'uel, Straw, and Goshen. I looked and looked, but in vain.

I'm nine years old. My birthday is 3 Teves, 5740. I just turned nine!

I would like to tell you that I have to compliment Chayim P. Silverman, the author of "Across the Atlantic." I just can't wait for the end of the story. "A Trip to Odessa in 1936" was great. "The Story of Yosef Caro" was good, but a little confusing. It said the child was screaming "Mama! Papa!"

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