

The holocaust a overview history essay

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Remy T. Oliver A. P. World History Dr. Smith In July 1944, Germany was being forced back into its home territories by the superior tactics, armaments, and numbers of the Allied troops. When Soviet troops entered Poland, they did not know the horrors that awaited them at Maidanek, located a scant two miles outside the city of Lublin. Alexander Werth, a correspondent for the London Sunday Times and the BBC, was accompanying them, and he wrote down a description of the atrocities committed there and his observations of the camp for a special report to the BBC. However, his superiors dismissed the report as a Soviet propaganda ploy due to its outrageous nature. Not until progress was made by the British on the Western Front, and other camps such as Dachau and Auschwitz were revealed was his report released. He stated " I had imagined something horrible and sinister without words...it looked singularly harmless from the outside." But, these buildings were designed for only one purpose: genocide, particularly of the " Jewish Race" but also of gypsies, homosexuals, the mentally and physically disabled and other peoples considered " undesirables" by Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Regime. Maidanek camp was estimated to have killed 1. 5 million people during its three years of operation. Facilitating the extermination was the ploy that the gas chamber was just a disinfecting room after a brief shower. Werth elaborates, " the process of gassing began...pale blue crystals of [Cyclon B] were showered down on the people... they rapidly evaporated...in anything from 2 to 10 minutes everyone was dead (Witness to History). The cold efficiency of the concentration camps allowed Nazi Germany to kill over 5, 860, 000 Jews, and approximately 5, 000, 000 other " undesirables"(Simon Wiesenthal Center). This extreme genocide against all enemies of the Nazi party and the " Aryan race" is widely recognized as the largest single

targeted extermination throughout history. The Holocaust rose out of many different factors, and occurred from January 30, 1933 to May 8, 1945, the inauguration of Hitler as Chancellor of Germany and Victory in Europe Day respectively. The roots of the Holocaust lie in the barbaric practice known by the name "Genocide", which is generally defined as: "the deliberate extermination of a racial, religious, or ethnic group." Unlike civilian deaths in other situations such as total warfare (see firebombing of Dresden and Tokyo), genocide is a planned effort to wipe out one or more specific groups. A more simplified example besides the Holocaust is the Rwandan genocide of April 7th, to July 16th 1994. This occurred between two major ethnic groups, the Hutu, and the Tutsi. Catalyzing the violence was the longstanding rivalry between the Hutu, who were generally farmers and who were greater in number, and the Tutsi, who were more educated and formed the ruling class created by European colonizers. When the Hutu president's plane was shot down by an extremist, the Hutu used this as an excuse to "purge" the Tutsis and all moderate Hutu who objected to the slaughter. Similar to the death squads of Nazi Germany, the Interahamwe ('those who fight together') went door to door, using handheld weapons such as clubs and machetes to kill victims. Like the Nazis before them, they were fueled not by drugs, alcohol, or out of mindless violence, but by endless devotion to a political cause, in this case the notion of Hutu dominance. By the end, between direct killing, and rape by HIV positive men, almost 2 million (1,952,078) people died in the genocide, confirming that history repeats itself. Especially echoing the Nazi propaganda is this quote by a Hutu radio broadcaster, "mercy is a sign of weakness. Show them any mercy and they will make slaves of you again" (Rwandan Genocide). This ideology has

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repeated itself throughout history, with conflicts in Darfur, Sudan, Armenia, Cambodia (Khmer Rouge), the Japanese occupation of Manchuria (Rape of Nanjing) and Korea all escalating into genocide at either a countywide, or local(individual level). However, genocide was not recognized by the United Nations until December 9, 1948 in the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide. Nazi Germany was the worst perpetrator of genocide in modern times, however it is not the first, nor will it be the last to attempt to exterminate its enemies through mass-murder (Genocide Timeline). The primary targets of the Nazi genocide, the Jews, have been persecuted throughout history, by multiple nations due to a variety of factors. Abraham (Abram) was presumed to have been born in the city of Ur in Babylonia around 1800bce. He became increasingly religious, and came to the conclusion that the entire universe was the work of a single Creator. Eventually, according to Jewish tradition, he made a b'rit (covenant) with Yahweh in which he had to leave his home and family, in exchange he would be blessed and would create a powerful nation (Genesis 12). Supposedly, at the age of 100, his wife Sarai bore him a son, Isaac, whom is considered the " biblical ancestor" of the Hebrew or Jewish people (Genesis 17-18). Then, Isaac's son, Jacob bore twelve sons who were said to have created the people of Israel, also known as Hebrews. Eventually, after escaping slavery at the hands of an Egyptian Pharaoh, under the leader David, the Hebrews defeated the Philistines and founded the nation of Israel (Rich). However, this is considered a purely mythological origin story (Citation????). In secular history, the Indo-European Hebrew people had a functioning state (Israel) and distinctive religion (Judaism) by 1000bce. After fighting multiple wars and being conquered by other surrounding states, they were defeated and

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absorbed into the Roman Empire as a protectorate by 63bce. During the first Jewish rebellion, Roman armies destroyed the city of Jerusalem in 70ce, leading to the first Roman-era Diaspora. After a second rebellion against the Emperor Hadrian in 135ce, most of the Jews were expelled from Judea, and the region was renamed Syria Palestina. After this, most of the native Jewish population immigrated outward, primarily to Babylon, Europe and the rest of the Middle East. Thus began a cycle of state-sponsored persecution that would continue into the modern era. Although not the rule, Christians were the primary conductors of violence and discrimination against Jews. Two Biblical concepts played into this. One was that sin, guilt, and punishment can ethically be translated from a guilty person to an innocent person. The key passage is in Matthew 27: 25: " Then answered all the people and said, 'His blood be on us, and on our children!" The author of the Gospel of Matthew wrote that the responsibility for the execution of Jesus of Nazareth (Jesus Christ) was willingly accepted by first century CE Jews on behalf of themselves and their next generation of children. By using the supposed murder of Jesus by the hand of a Jew, the medieval and renaissance Christians were able to justify the despicable acts they committed against all Jewish people. A brief timeline of some important incidents is as follows. In 339ce, converting to Judaism became a criminal offense, enacted by Constantius, a Christian Roman Emperor. In 415ce, St. Augustine wrote " The true image of the Hebrew is Judas Iscariot, who sells the Lord for silver. The Jew can never understand the Scriptures and forever will bear the guilt for the death of Jesus." In 722ce, Pope Leo III outlawed Judaism, and many Jews were baptized against their will. In 1189, Jews were persecuted in England. The Crown claimed all Jewish possessions. Most of their houses were burned.

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Most of this sort of activity continued and intensified through the Medieval Era, culminating in massive Anti-Semitic acts during the Bubonic Plague outbreak, where the naïve Christian population used them as a scapegoat for why this outbreak of disease had occurred. Specially telling was the confession of Agimet of Geneva, whom confessed under torture to the following. " I am giving you a little package of half a span in size which contains some prepared poison and venom in a thin, sewed leather-bag. Distribute it among the wells, cisterns, and springs about Venice and the other places to which you go, in order to poison the people who use the water of the aforesaid wells that will have been poisoned by you, namely, the wells in which the poison will have been placed." The poison was allegedly given to him by his Rabbi, Peyret (Robinson). In cities across Europe, Jews played roles as bankers, merchants, and shopkeepers, directly competing economically with the other Christians. In Strasbourg, Germany, like most other areas in Europe, decided that the Jews had spread the epidemic there. So, the population took action for themselves, and burnt most of the local population who would not accept baptism. The motivations are simple once the actions of the people are examined. Jacob Von Konigshofen stated " The money was indeed the thing that killed the Jews. If they had been poor, and if the feudal lords had not been in debt to them, they would not have been burnt" (Duiker, Spielvogel) Through the fact that they primarily chose trades that the local population would not or could not perform, they became for the most part, the wealthiest members of the community besides the feudal lords, in some cases becoming richer than the feudal lords. By exterminating every Jew within the city, the craftsmen were able to divide the material

wealth between themselves, and the feudal lords were able to cast-off their debts.