

# Holocaust



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HOLOCAUST After the commencement of extermination of the Jews by the Nazis, there were many responses to Nazi persecution by the Jews in various forms both collective and individual. There were factors that encouraged both rebellion and the inhibition of rebellion and resistance. For example, in a Jewish ghetto, often resistance would be held back by community leaders because of the fear that any Jews caught gathering weapons or planning escape would bring down punishment on the whole community. This was not outlandish thinking, either, because this is exactly how the Nazis meted out justice for individuals: against the whole community. On the other hand, there were organized rebellions and resistance, bolstered by internal support as well as a reaction to external reasons.

One thing that may have hindered Jewish resistance during this time was that there was the problem that Jews who did fight back or escape often faced an ambivalent setting in other nations. After the early twentieth century, and arguably long before this as well, the climate in Europe was changing towards a status quo which was turbulent, to say the least, towards those of the Jewish faith: " at the end of World War I... groups blamed the Jews for the social disruption, political instability, and economic crises that ensued" (Leventhal 2008) At this time, around 1934, the Nazis also began to persecute Jews. Laws were passed banning Jews from respected professions, and the boycotting of Jewish stores was encouraged. In the same sort of blurred reasoning that made the Nazis see the Reichstag building as an enemy, the Nazis considered Judaism to be an ethnic rather than a religious distinction. Therefore, even citizens who had converted to Christianity were considered to be Jewish if they had Jewish ancestry. This is at the very least ironic, since according to many sources, Hitler himself came from Jewish

roots. During this period, the Nazis “ encouraged boycotts of Jewish-owned shops and businesses and began book burnings of writings by Jews and by others not approved by the Reich” (Leventhal, 2008). This was a backdrop against which organized rebellion was very difficult.

It was also hard for Jews to fight back against the Nazis because the Nazis were in charge of an enormous propaganda machine that influenced the German people. Propaganda was also important to the expansion of Nazi power. One instance of

Nazi propaganda occurred at the 1936 Olympics, which were filmed by the famous

filmmaker Leni Reifenstahl to emphasize Hitler’s notions of Aryan supremacy. Though

the African-American Jesse Owens won several gold medals at these Olympics, he was

not portrayed as doing so by Hitler’s propaganda machine. This further shows the

disturbing ease with which the Nazi government denied logic and facts in favor of its

own generally preconceived notions. It was hard for any organized group to call them on these notions, however, because there was such tight control over Hitler’s anti-Semitic media.

In Spigelman’s recent story about the Holocaust “ Maus,” the narrator Artie confronts questions of why the Jews did not fight back enough against the Nazis, which are questions which still trouble people today. In the book, Artie is someone trying simply to understand what happened to his father in the Holocaust, his sister before her suicide, and other characters as well, as well

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as other general views that the artist wants to portray in family talk understanding of history and memory. “ I don’t get it, why didn’t the Jews at least try to resist?... It wasn’t so easy like you think. Everyone was so starving and frightened, and tired they couldn’t believe even what’s in front of their eyes. And the Jews lived always with hope. They hoped the Russians can come before the German bullet arrived from the gun into their head.” (Spiegelman, p. 47). This echoes a question and answer posed in other sources as well: “ Why didnt the victims put up more of a fight? Since then enough evidence of Jewish resistance in places like Warsaw and Vilna (even within the death camps themselves) has come to light to put the debate to rest. The real mystery is not why Jews failed to resist but why any survived at all. The balance of power was one-sided in the extreme” (Powell, 1999). The answer to these questions of why there wasn’t more fighting back need to consider both objective and subjective considerations. Subjectively, there may have been a lot of impetus for rebellion and resistance, but objectively, there wasn’t much infrastructure, support, or really opportunity.

#### REFERENCE

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