

# The holocaust and its aftermath on central europe

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The Holocaust and Its Aftermath on Central Europe Nicole Walsh Sheridan  
College For the 12 years that Germany was ruled by the Nazi Party, a central belief was that there existed in society, certain people who were dangerous and needed to be eliminated for German society to flourish and survive. They included Gypsies, Poles, and Russians, but always and most certainly, the Jews. The Nazis condemned the Jews to death and there was no escape. No change in their behaviour or their beliefs would help them escape their fate. At every stage of the war, the Germans used their military power to dominate and terrorize the Jews. Thousands of Nazis and their accomplices searched the cities and countryside of Europe to eliminate Jews. This was a goal to which the Nazis devoted themselves completely. The Jews were in turn abandoned by their neighbours and by the world. They had no country of their own to which they could turn, and no means of self defense. The majority of the populations in which they lived remained indifferent to their fate. Many even helped the Nazis to imprison and deport Jews to the death camps. When the war finally came to a halt, the impact on cultural, economy and social well-being continued. In this essay I will discuss how the aftermath of the holocaust had profound economic, social and cultural effects on central Europe, showing to a degree how the tragedy influenced the developments around the continent. The first consequence of the Holocaust was an economic one. There are several perspectives to this problem. The Jewish population had had a strong involvement in the economic, cultural and political life of the countries in Central Europe. The Jewish population were also active in the financial sector, in the manufacturing industries and several other economic sectors. Their innovative approaches had often

helped with the development of the economies of these countries. “ After the Holocaust and the emigration of many of the Jewish people, these businesses were abandoned or, given the fact that in all of the countries in Central Europe, the Communist parties took over, they were replaced with state economies" (Gutman, 1984). However, the lack of the Jewish schooled management and businesses were a significant problem for the economies of central Europe. In addition, when losing about 12 million people from society, majority of which were pre-retirement age, the economy loses a productive life. “ The loss of competition for workers increased wages for survivors, but the loss of skills increased the value of specialization and reduced the value of being a generalist" (Hilberg, 1985). The sudden decline of workers reduced overall welfare of Holocaust survivors. Next, the second consequence of the Holocaust was a social one, at war's end there were about 10 million people in the Nazi concentration camps, forced labour units, and prisoner of war camps. Among the huge number of newly freed people who hoped to return to their homes, there were only about 200, 000 surviving Jews who had neither homes nor countries to return to. “ The Jews from the western countries of France, Holland, and Belgium, as well as many Hungarian Jews did indeed return to their countries of origin" (Williams, 1993). However the majority of the surviving Jews of Poland and Lithuania refused to return because they had neither family nor friends waiting for them in their original homelands and communities, only unfriendly neighbours who feared that the returning Jews would ask to have their property returned to them. Also, tens of thousands of survivors found themselves in Displaced Persons Camps, waiting to immigrate to Israel.

These survivors included Jews from Germany, Austria, Italy, and in particular, Poland, where they no longer found a viable Jewish community. "The Jews who had survived were still the objects of hate and murder by Polish nationalists" (Williams, 1993). The survivors of the Holocaust were condemned to wait many times for long months and sometimes even years until they were able to immigrate to Israel. Their determination to reach that land and rebuild their community was a result of the survivors will for the renewal of Jewish life in their homeland. One important factor of the Holocaust was that the Nazi genocide of the Jews was aimed not only at the destruction of the European Jewish Community, but also at the Jewish seed itself. It was a war not only against the Jews racial existence, but also against the Jewish procreative potential. The very number of individuals imprisoned and murdered in the concentration camps and the amount of suffering sustained is difficult to comprehend. Anyone with any sign of physical disease was eliminated. The suffering and deprivation were enormous. Mortality after liberation was so great that many of the physically weak died almost immediately after the liberation they had longed for. Lastly, a third consequence of the Holocaust was a cultural one. After the Holocaust, Germany became an entirely new country culturally. At the end of the War they were free to choose their education, travel, arts, music, build communities, and businesses. "Many different races can be found thriving all over Germany's vast lands the different ethnic groups, began growing and spreading their own culture" (Hartman, 2002). Before long, arts and music began making its presence known in the different communities. Each racial society and ethnic group brought their own culture to the forefront and

worshipped their own religious beliefs. However the Jewish culture in Central Europe was never re-built, but instead re-located to Israel, America and Western Europe. In addition, The Holocaust also had a major impact on works of art created before the Holocaust. The reason is that " huge amounts of works of art were looted by the Nazis from Jewish art collectors and dealers, either by outright theft or fire sales made under extreme duress" (Jacobs, 2005). The original owners of the artwork were usually, in turn brutally murdered during the Holocaust. In addition, the Holocaust also created a dramatic and sudden decrease in the use of Yiddish, as a result of the Jewish communities, that used Yiddish being destroyed. " Before the Holocaust, there were 11 to 13 million Yiddish speakers in the world" (Jacobs, 2005). Around 5 million, or 85%, of the victims of the Holocaust, were speakers of Yiddish. In the decades following World War II, there was a tremendous growth in the recognition of Yiddish as an official Jewish European language. Seen as a Yiddish renaissance, there had been large increases in Yiddish press and literature, including educational and scientific works. In conclusion, the Holocaust had a major impact on social, economic and cultural well-being in Europe. Also, there can be no doubt that the Holocaust changed the face of the Jewish people. In 1900, 81 percent of all the Jews in the world lived in Europe. Today, only a few communities remain, and the Jews have ceased to be a European people altogether. In turn, central Europe will forever be changed. Works Cited: Braham, Randolph L. (1988). The Psychological Perspectives of the Holocaust and of its Aftermath. New York, Columbia University Press. Gutman, Yisrael and Shatzker, Chaim. (1984) The Holocaust and Its Significance. Jerusalem, The Zalman Shazar

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