

Outline narrative – The Holocaust Galleries

The Holocaust has become a foundational part of Western culture and a fundamental part of the memory of the Second World War. It is, above all else, the story of a state sponsored mass murder.

There was nothing inevitable about the decision of the Nazis and their collaborators to attempt to exterminate the Jews of Europe. The Holocaust was a process that employed industrial systems and procedures, but was actualised by men and women on the ground participating in brutal and ruthless face-to-face killing. Its implementation was dependent on a wide range of participants across Europe. Different communities were affected in different ways -- and not just people were destroyed but an entire way of life. Governments were implicated for their lack of intervention, as well as individuals and organisations for their active involvement. The Holocaust introduced the legal concept of genocide and changed the way that we think about ourselves and what we are capable of.

The path that led to these events was chaotic and changing, determined both by the course of the war, and by an ill-conceived, mistaken and unstable concept and understanding of race. It led to the deaths of 6 million people.

This is the account of how these things happened.

Overview

The narrative runs in three overlapping sections, with separate opening and closing subdivisions. The core sections are thematic rather than explicitly chronological, though they do follow a linear time scale.

Opening: **The Life Before** – addresses Jewish life across Europe in the centuries before the Holocaust (including the issues arising from the First World War and its aftermath)

- **Persecution**, looks at the global situation at the end of the First World War. It identifies how ways of thinking that have become prevalent through western culture impact, influence and inform the Nazi regime. It identifies how gradually the ideas of racial ideology gain purchase in the early days of the Reich and how incoherent much of implementation of this is. It examines Jewish emigration as the preferred National Socialist policy and the diverse early Jewish responses to this.
- **Escalation**, identifies how violence towards Jewish people and communities developed through the 1930s becoming increasingly sinister and overt – particularly through the *Anschluss* and in the November Pogrom and its aftermath. The section covers the occupation of Poland, the formation of the ghettos and the so-called 'Territorial Solution'.
- **Annihilation**, examines how Nazi policy crosses the threshold into wide-scale state-sponsored murder. It clarifies that this is a European project. It identifies the systems and processes that allow for this, and the warped rationale and economic exploitation that underpins it as a strategy. It 'decentralises' the status of the gas chambers, acknowledging the 'Holocaust by bullets', starvation and 'annihilation through work' as all being profoundly significant as well as the death camps.

Closing: **After the End** – addresses the contradiction of liberation, the challenge of recovering lost lives, the problem of retribution and justice. It addresses the formation of Israel and the legacy of the legal principle of genocide.

1. OPENING: THE LIFE BEFORE

Jewish individuals and communities have existed in Europe for centuries. The way that they live their lives varies widely. Some retain a devout orthodoxy, and structure their existence entirely around this, while others are entirely assimilated in the countries in which they are living, retaining no personal relationship with either a Jewish religious, or a Jewish cultural identity.

This section presents an overview of how long these communities have existed, where they are and what percentage of the countries' populations they comprise.

2. PERSECUTION

This area looks at the early stage of the events that will become the Holocaust, acknowledging the gradual and insidious nature of its evolution, and the influence of a range of factors on this that are both immediate and historical. It begins by addressing the European landscape in the years after the First World War, including paramilitary violence and rising ethno-nationalism in the states of central and eastern Europe, and the circumstances that allow for the rise of the Nazis within Germany (especially the Great Depression). It discusses the legacy of European imperialism, and how attitudes to the broadening of national territories have informed the perception of 'othered' populations and communities. It then covers the way that Nazi thinking specifically evolves, how it is implemented, and how that is experienced across Germany. It identifies the way that the early examples of persecution, coupled with institutional and private initiatives to promote ideas of race and the inherent danger of 'the Jew', create increasing marginalisation. It qualifies this, however, by discussing some of the more complicated responses within Germany in the pre-War Reich. It looks at the networks and principles that will develop form and focus as 'Judenpolitik' advances.

2.1.1. 'The Better World'

- The state of the geographies of the world in the aftermath of the First World War

2.1 Power (1918-33)

- The circumstances in Germany that allow for the emergence of the Nazi party, amongst a number of other extreme political groups
- The late 1920s financial disaster that causes global chaos
- The emergent significant individuals in the Nazi movement
- The Nazis coming to power

2.2 A New Order (1933)

- Germany as a single party state, and the dominance of this party in all cultural, leisure and sporting pursuits
- The global racial and scientific theories used by the Nazis to legitimise antisemitic policies and outlook and the way that these theories are packaged and sold to the German public.
- The movements and associations in Germany that nurture a sense of national inclusiveness, and that serve to accentuate the concurrent programme of exclusion of selected individuals and groups

2.3 The Network of Terror Grows (1934-36)

- The systems, organisations and institutions that emerge to enforce Nazi policies, including the early camps
- The 1935 creation of the Nuremberg laws
- The nascent dominance of the SS as Himmler takes total control of the uniformed police in Germany

2.4 The Olympics: Faster, Higher, Stronger

- Germany preparing for tourists, presenting an acceptable face to the world
- The way that the world responds to competing in an Olympics within the Third Reich

2.5 Preparing for War (1936-39)

- The announcement of Goering's Four Year Plan as the Nazis start looking increasingly to territorial expansion in the east

2.6 An Exodus

- The decision of the Reichsvertretung to advocate emigration amongst an increasing exclusion of Jews from every aspect of cultural and social life
- The financial exploitation of those able to emigrate, and the growing programmes of 'Aryanisation'
- The pressure exerted by the Nazis on German Jews to leave the Reich, as their preferred solution to the 'Jewish question'
- The problem faced by those Jews looking to emigrate in finding anywhere that will take them, and the inertia of the countries of the world in offering any comprehensive solution
- The process by which the Third Reich assists in emigration

3. ESCALATION

This area looks at the sinister development of attitudes, behaviour and policies: significantly, this is not always determined by a centrally mandated position on Judenpolitik by the Nazis, but by individuals on the ground. The motivations that compel these are complex. They are usually underpinned by wider events, and what we now know as the progression towards war, but they don't require orders or anything like them.

3.1 Terror in New Territories

- The conspicuous emergence of physical violence against Jews in the streets of Vienna after the Anschluss
- The appearance of 'The Vienna Model' as a way of exploiting Jewish individuals, a model that is transferred back to Germany

3.2 The November Pogrom

- The marked escalation of antisemitic violence that 'Kristallnacht' represents
- The German response to the pogrom
- The international response to the pogrom
- The consequences of 'Kristallnacht', particularly in terms of concentration camp composition and suicide rates, together with level of emigration

3.3 The Flight of the Children

- The impossibly difficult decision of parents to send their children into the arms of strangers on the Kindertransport
- The little discussed 'refugee domestics' who fled Germany to work as domestic servants in the UK
- The account of those identified as Jewish who remain within Germany and its annexed territories and have been unable to leave, so now must remain to await what comes

3.4 Outbreak

- The start of the war and first use of the Einsatzgruppen in Operation Tannenberg
- The new reality of German occupation and the consolidation of Nazism as an explicitly murderous regime
- The Nazi development of an intended 'territorial solution' to the so-called 'Jewish question'

3.5 T4

- The implementation of the state sponsored mass murder of men, women and children deemed 'unworthy of life' under the justification of race theory

3.6 Outcast

- The emergence of ghettos within the occupied territory as means of separating and confining Jewish individuals
- The nature of life within the ghettos on a day to day basis
- The Nazi approach to, and rationalisation of, these ghettos
- Individuals existing in hiding in urban areas across the occupied territories, either in 'plain sight' on false papers or in concealed spaces
- The process by which ghetto existence is recorded by groups and individuals for the knowledge of future generations

4. ANNIHILATION

Though both T4 and Operation Tannenberg involve the killing of innocents, they are separate from the exterminatory conduct of the 'Final Solution'. The 'twisted road' that has been determined by the practical realities of government, the perverse beliefs of race theory and the conduct of the early part of the war reaches a fatal juncture with the German

invasion of the Soviet Union. The time for emigration has gone; the Nazis plans now look towards a 'world without Jews'.

4.1 Massacre in the East

- The deployment of *Einsatzgruppen* behind the advancing Wehrmacht line in the light of the German invasion of the Soviet Union, and their face to face murder of first military age men and then swiftly women and children in appalling numbers
- The identities and composition of the members *Einsatzgruppen* and their collaborators

4.2 A 'Final Solution'

- The movement of Nazi formal policy towards 'the final solution' becoming a programme of total extermination
- The Wannsee Conference as a lens into this continuum of systemic decision making

4.3 Selections

- The development and implementation of a systematic approach to the mass murder of Jews across Europe in designated killing centres in occupied Poland -- and who those selected for murder are
- The practical means by which those targeted are transported to the death camps, using in large part the European railways
- The appalling conditions experienced by those transported
- The networks of complicity that the Nazis rely on in implementing their international project
- The rescuers and partisans who help those able to escape the tightening net

4.4 Killing Centres

- The creation of the so-called Reinhard camps and the use of gas chambers as a means of mass murder.
- The process by which those murdered are made to comply
- The final exploitation and commodification of victims in the theft of possessions and clothing, as well as teeth and hair
- The emergence of Auschwitz and Majdanek as centres of extermination as well as places of slave labour
- The grotesque reality of 'industrial murder' and the process by which this happens and is managed

4.5 Slave labour

- The evolution of 'Jewish policy' towards slave labour as the course of the war changes
- The working conditions of those subject to 'extermination by labour' in sites across Europe
- The commercial companies and Nazi agencies who profit from slave labour (including medical experimentation)

4.6 Uprisings

- The final phase of the Nazi ghettos
- Uprisings in the death camps and ghettos

4.7 Breakdown

- An account of the rapid implementation of the Holocaust in Hungary
- The halt of the Holocaust in Hungary and Romania as the tide of the war definitively changes
- The programme of concealing evidence
- The Death Marches that occur as the remaining camps empty towards Germany in the face of the Allied lines of advance
- The final phase of the camp system, particularly Belsen

5. CLOSING: AFTER THE END

This area looks at the complex situation that those who had survived the Holocaust were forced to contend with as the war ended. Individuals are left to deal with incalculable loss, and frequently long term injury – both mental and physical. The Allied powers attempt to find the appropriate means of pursuing justice in a series of high profile trials, ultimately enshrining the principle of genocide in international law. Smaller groups also enforce retribution and revenge in more direct and brutally informal ways. For many survivors there is no longer a home to return to, and no one to find when they get there. DP camps became centres of post-war existence and are sites of rehabilitation but also resentment, with those living with them having to readjust to lives forever changed. There are increasing calls for the formation of an Israeli state, as attention starts to concentrate on a profoundly altered and unforeseen future.

5.1 'Liberation'

- The liberation of the camps and immediate challenge of survival that those left alive are presented with
- Existence in the DP camps that were created to manage the survivors left alive at the war's end
- The growth of Zionism within the DP camps and the movement towards the formation of Israel

5.2 Justice, Retribution and Revenge

- The process by which formal justice is conceived and enacted at the end of the Holocaust in order to prosecute the perpetrators
- The processes of informal justice leading to the summary murder and execution of former perpetrators

5.3 Genocide

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- The codification of the principle of genocide in the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide