

Teaching notes

This resource is one of a sequence of eight resources, originally planned for OCR's Unit 2 Option: Democracy and Dictatorships in Germany 1919-1963 (Y221). The sequence focuses on the key topic 'The impact of war and defeat on Germany 1939-49'. Although the content of the resources is drawn from this particular specification, there is no reason why they couldn't be used to support the teaching of other similar courses, perhaps with some adaptation of the suggested activities.

The eight resources in the sequence are:

1. The war economy and Total War (search '25206' to find it on [Teachit History](#))
2. The impact of bombing (search '25207')
3. **Racial policies and the Final Solution (this resource)**
4. Morale (search '25209')
5. Opposition and resistance (search '25210')
6. Consequences of the Second World War (search '25211')
7. The Cold War and Potsdam (search '25212')
8. Bizonia and the Berlin Blockade (search '25213')

Each resource contains a section of reading followed by some suggested tasks. These could be completed in class or as independent homework tasks.

Background

Hitler had always believed that the Second World War would be both a conventional confrontation with Germany's enemies, Britain and France, but it would also contain a second, more hidden aspect. For Hitler it would be a racial war, fought not on battlefields against armies, but in occupied territories against Jews, Poles, Gypsies and other racial 'degenerates'. As Hitler's war changed between 1939 and 1942, so did his racial priorities, resulting in an escalation and a radicalisation of racial policy until the Final Solution, the mass extermination of all Europe's Jews was attempted.

One of the problems for historians in exploring the evolution of the Holocaust is the fact that Hitler rarely wrote anything down or committed his signature to any documents about the genocide. He was wary about being held to account for the fate of the Jews and also preferred to operate his government informally. This means that historians attempting to trace the connection between Hitler and the Holocaust have often drawn radically different conclusions. There have been three main schools of thought about Hitler and the fate of the Jews since the end of the Second World War. See the table below:

Theory	Argument
Intentionalist	<p>Intentionalist historians (mainly writing in the two decades after the end of the war), argued that Hitler had a long term plan for the Holocaust. This plan dated back to 1918, when it first became a major ambition of Hitler's and was carefully put into action over the next two and a half decades.</p> <p>Most primary evidence does not support this view and many intentionalists, such as the historian Lucy Dawidowicz have relied largely on secondary sources such as Hitler's autobiography, <i>Mein Kampf</i>.</p>
Functionalist	<p>Functionalist historians argue that the cause of the Holocaust was less to do with Hitler and more the product of the inner workings of the Nazi State. This is a position that seems to be more supported by evidence. Some extreme functionalists have argued that Hitler was completely unaware of the Holocaust, but this is an argument that has been largely dismissed by academic historians.</p>
Synthesist	<p>The Synthesist approach, pioneered by Ian Kershaw, presents elements of both arguments. Kershaw argued that the development of policy in Nazi Germany could be best described as 'working towards the Führer'. This meant that Hitler expressed himself in 'broad visions' and never went into specifics. His ambitious ministers then attempted to interpret his will, competing with one another, which helped to radicalise policy. Hitler was intimately involved in policy making that interested him and could intervene decisively when necessary, but often stepped back from direct administration.</p>

Racial Policy 1939-41

Poland and the Einsatzgruppen

When Hitler divided Poland between Germany and the Soviet Union the two victims of German racial policy were the Poles and the Jews. The fate of the Poles that Hitler had planned was to turn them into a slave people to serve their German masters. This meant that their leaders (nobles, intellectuals, priests) would be executed and Poles would be prohibited from education or any kind of political organisation. A Polish Army barracks at the town of Ożwiecim was turned into a concentration camp and a site of terror for Polish political prisoners where brutal treatment was meted out. When the town was Germanified, it was renamed Auschwitz.

Long before the Final Solution had been decided upon, the mass killing of Jews had begun in Poland. The country was divided into three, the Warthegau and East Prussia were considered sufficiently Germanic to incorporate directly into the Reich, but a large 'rump' state, called the General Government by the Nazi Regime, was run as a direct colony by Hans Frank. Hitler wished to see the newly annexed areas become Jew and Pole free and told their Gauleiters that he was unconcerned how they achieved this. One method was to indiscriminately dump racial undesirables across the border in the General Government without Frank's authorisation. This action led directly to the development of ghettos (see next section).

Einsatzgruppen

The Einsatzgruppen (Special Squads) were established by Heinrich Himmler's second in command Reinhard Heydrich. Their role was to travel into occupied territories behind the German Army and kill the Third Reich's racial enemies. This meant the political leadership of Poland, but it also meant Poland's Jews. Long before there was an organised policy of mass extermination, the Einsatzgruppen had license to indiscriminately kill Jews and though they came under the control of the army, their orders really came from Heydrich. The role of the Einsatzgruppen was dramatically expanded in 1941 when the Third Reich invaded the Soviet Union. The German Army believed it was legitimate to execute partisans (enemy fighters who did not wear uniforms but blended in with the local population and used guerrilla tactics) and when Hitler, in December 1941, instructed Himmler that all partisans be executed, he appears to have instructed that Jews be killed in the same way. The scale of mass killings in Russia dwarfed those in Poland and the murder of civilians, including women and children took a heavy psychological toll on the Wehrmacht, Einsatzgruppen and SS men who carried it out. In 1941 Jews were killed at a rate of 100,000 per month, mainly in mass executions.

Ghettoisation across Europe

As the policy towards the Jews gradually evolved between 1939 and 1941, it became increasingly important for the SS to concentrate the Jews in Germany and other occupied parts of Europe into controlled areas. This manifested itself in ghettos (often walled districts in cities like Warsaw, Lodz and Cracow in Poland and other countries), where tens of thousands of Jews were crammed behind barbed wire and high walls. The policy had two main functions:

1. To kill as many Jews as possible from starvation and disease as a potential solution to the 'Jewish Question'.
2. To keep Jews in one place where they could be economically exploited for their labour.
3. To keep Jews in one place until a policy could be finally decided on.

Whilst a policy of mass extermination gradually developed and was finalised at the Wannsee Conference (see below), it was abundantly clear from 1940 onwards when the first ghettos were created that some form of Jew free Europe would be created through violent means.

Failed 'solutions'

The Nazis had explored several options in attempting to solve the 'Jewish Question'. Many functionalist historians have suggested that the Holocaust did not come about because of one clear policy dictated by Hitler, instead it has been suggested that a 'crooked path' towards genocide existed. The development of the Holocaust was linked to the chaos within the regime and the unpredictable events of the Second World War.

Nazi planners between 1939 and 1941 had initially hoped that shipping the Jews to Germany's temporary ally the Soviet Union, to work and die in Stalin's labour camps would be a solution. Having been faced with a refusal to accept millions of Jews from a paranoid Stalin, who assumed they would be used by some foreign power as a hidden army within Russia (wildly unrealistic, but consistent with much of Stalin's thinking) the Nazis contemplated shipping the Jews to Madagascar.

Madagascar was under the control of France, a country conquered by Germany in 1940. The puppet Vichy regime, established under the French fascist Pierre Laval and the anti-Semitic World War One General Marshal Phillipe Petain, would have been happy to oblige the Germans. But the British Royal Navy, a powerful enemy presence at sea, made the plan of sailing millions of Jews through the Mediterranean, the Suez Canal and down the coast of East Africa a pipe dream. With Britain still in the war, the Madagascar plan was unlikely to ever happen. The Nazis next scheme, the Ostplan, following the invasion of Russia in the summer of 1941, was a bid to ship Jews to be worked to death in the far north of German conquered Russia. But by the winter of 1941 the plan, along with the invasion of Russia, was in disarray, as German hopes for a swift victory were in tatters after a massive Soviet counter offensive at Moscow. Germany had conquered a huge swathe of Russia and Eastern Europe, and instead of divesting herself of Jews, she had most of the world's Jews within her new borders, as Poland and Russia were the traditional European homelands of the Jews.

In February 1942, following these crises, and also the December decision by Hitler to declare war on the USA, the Wannsee Conference, where the final destruction of the Jews on a mass industrial scale was planned, took place. It seems unlikely that the new realities of a war on several fronts that had not, as Hitler had hoped, been a short and easy affair, didn't have a major bearing on the radicalisation of policy. His policy for the colonisation of Russia and the mass starvation of 30 million Russians was never realised due to the inability to fully defeat the Red Army. This meant that the genocide of the Jews, a policy that Hitler most likely had timetabled for after the end of the war, was brought forward, to be carried out while the conflict was still being fought.

The Wannsee Conference

In February 1942 Reinhard Heydrich called a meeting of senior Nazi officials and members of the SS at a villa in the Berlin suburb of Wannsee. He had been instructed by Goering and most likely by Hitler too (though, as mentioned previously, there is no paperwork to officially show this), to organise a meeting of officials to plan the 'final solution to the Jewish Question', and orchestrate the killing of every Jew in Europe. By this point the decision to kill using poison gas had been decided upon as cost effective and efficient and Europe's railway network was the most efficient way of transporting millions of victims. The conference was significant because it dramatically increased the scope of the Holocaust, instead of ethnically cleansing areas of Eastern Europe designated for German colonisation, now the deportations would happen from Greece in the south to Norway in the far north.

To understand why the Nazis were obsessed with killing every Jew in Europe, it is important to look at how the Jews were regarded. They were seen as inferior by the Nazis but unlike all other 'untermenschen' (Poles, Russians, and Gypsies), the Jews were thought to be a direct and dangerous threat to Germany. As Hitler became increasingly detached from reality during the war, he blamed defeats in Russia and the intervention of the USA in the war on Jewish manipulation.

Despite the determination to commit genocide against the Jews, Heydrich told his adjutant, Adolf Eichmann (who was writing up the minutes of the meeting), to keep any direct mention of killing out of the notes. Instead terms like 'transportation' would be used as euphemisms. Even as the policy was being decided, Heydrich knew that it was too shocking to allow open discussion.

The first four camps in Heydrich and his boss Himmler's new empire of mass murder in Poland were christened the Reinhard camps (Sobibor, Treblinka, Chelmno and Belzec). They were situated on railways lines and, unlike the later camp at Auschwitz Birkenau, they were relatively small. Virtually no prisoners were kept alive for slave labour; instead prisoners were quickly gassed after arrival. The camps killed large numbers of Jews and Gypsies:

Camp	Numbers killed
Belzec	450,000 - 600,000
Sobibor	200,000 - 250,000
Chelmno	150,000 - 340,000
Treblinka	750,000 - 900,000

Widespread corruption, an escape at Sobibor and maladministration saw the Reinhard Camps closed down by the end of 1943 (though Chelmno was re-opened). Official Nazi policy as the war became a desperate struggle for survival was to extract as much labour from the prisoners as possible. This policy saw the development of a vast slave labour empire, and its focal point was Auschwitz Birkenau.

Auschwitz

Auschwitz was not just one camp but a large complex of camps that combined slave labour and extermination. There were three main sections to Auschwitz:

1. **Auschwitz One:** Mainly used for the imprisonment and execution of Polish political prisoners. It was designed to terrorise the Poles into submission.
2. **Auschwitz Birkenau:** Birkenau was several kilometres away from the original Auschwitz site and was far larger. It contained long wooden barracks (originally designed to stable horses), which were supposed to accommodate 250 prisoners at a time but normally kept well over 1,000. On site were two gas chambers and crematoria and prisoners were divided into those who could work and those who would immediately be sent to be gassed on arrival at the camp. The prisoners who survived the initial selection would work as slave labourers at a range of different German run industries close to Auschwitz.
3. **Auschwitz Monowitz:** Monowitz was the largest sub camp of the Auschwitz system. It was a vast synthetic rubber plant run by the giant industrial conglomerate IG Farben.

In total there were 44 sub camps in the Auschwitz system, with companies like Siemens and Krupp benefitting from Jewish slave labour.

The Hungarian Jews



Arrival of Hungarian Jews in Auschwitz

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At Auschwitz Birkenau Jews from across Europe were murdered, but the largest number arriving from any one country came from Hungary in 1944. The Hungarian dictator Admiral Horthy, an ally of Hitler, had initially been reluctant to deport Jews but in March 1944 Germany occupied Hungary and installed a new more cooperative government. The large number of deportations that followed led to the SS building a new section of railway line directly into Auschwitz Birkenau. The platform that the Jews stepped out of cattle wagons onto was known as the 'selection

ramp', and the speed of gassings and cremations dramatically increased. In two months 440,000 Jews were deported from Hungary to Auschwitz on 145 trains, nearly all of whom died in the gas chambers or from hunger, disease and overwork.

The death marches

At the end of the Second World War the Soviet Red Army invaded Poland, forcing the German Army to retreat and the SS to abandon the death camps. The last surviving prisoners of Auschwitz were evacuated by their SS captors and forced to march back into the Reich. Thousands of starving prisoners walked through the snows in January 1945 and died along the way from exhaustion and summary executions. The guards had little idea of where they were meant to be going and had few orders from above. The captives were intended to be used as man power for the industries of Nazi Germany, but this showed how detached from reality the SS guards had become. By the time the death marches ended the German war industry was on its knees and the Third Reich was months away from final collapse.

Tasks

1. Research and debate:

Work in groups of four, divided into two teams of two. One team will argue the Intentionalist point of view; the other group will argue the Functionalist point of view (to remind yourself of these beliefs see pp.1-2). Once you have familiarised yourself with the arguments of both sides again, you need to find evidence to support them. You can use this resource, the internet and textbooks. You might want to make notes under the following headings:

1. Long term causes of the Holocaust.
2. The impact of the war on the development of the Holocaust.
3. The role of Hitler's ministers in the final solution.

When you have your information, you can debate the following statement in your group:

'The Holocaust developed more out of chaos than design.'

The table below will give you a rough outline of how the debate should be conducted. You must set out your argument and then listen to the other side's argument. Following this you then need to present the evidence that shows why you are correct. Then the other team will have an opportunity to ask questions or query your ideas. Once both sides have had a chance to present their evidence and answer questions, you can conclude the debate.

Team	Present arguments	Present evidence	Take questions	Conclusion
Intentionalists	5 mins	10 mins	5 mins	2 mins
Functionalists	5 mins	10 mins	5 mins	2 mins

2. Essay task:

'A genocide of some sort was always Hitler's intention, the Second World War simply gave him the opportunity he was seeking.' How valid is this statement?