

Name _____

Date _____

The Holocaust

Learn more about this topic! Each section gives more detail on one of the lyrics from the song. Read each section, and then respond by answering the question or taking notes on key ideas.

1. The Holocaust was the systematic persecution and murder of millions of Jewish people by the Nazi Party. The Nazis believed that Aryan Germans were superior to all other people. They launched a devastating genocide against people they considered to be inferior to them. These were mainly European Jews. However, the Nazis also persecuted other groups like the Roma, Jehovah's Witnesses, disabled people and gay people. Adolf Hitler was the head of Germany's Nazi Party. He led this campaign of hatred. Beginning with Hitler's rise to power in 1933, the Nazi Party made discrimination against Jewish people a part of German law. This legalized prejudice led to the murder of millions of people during World War II.

Notes

2. The Holocaust was not one single and random act of violence. It was carefully planned and orchestrated over a span of years. It happened because the German government created policies to persecute whole groups of people. These policies stripped people of civil rights. They made inequality legal. And the majority of citizens that were not directly affected by these laws did not oppose them. So German society normalized discrimination. This eventually led to outbreaks of violence and ultimately the mass murder of millions of Jewish people during World War II. It's important to study and remember these horrific events and to understand that they happened in part because people did not stand to help those who were being persecuted.

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3. After the end of the First World War, Germany faced serious problems. Many Germans were upset that their country had been defeated. They were angry that the new government, the Weimar Republic, took the blame for the war and accepted the Treaty of Versailles. This treaty crippled Germany's economy. The Nazi Party gained power because many Germans felt discontented. The Nazi Party was made up of proud German nationalists, many of whom were obsessed with racial purity. They believed that Aryan people of pure German descent were superior to others. The Nazi Party gained power and support because of its focus on German excellence. Hitler, the head of the Nazi Party, portrayed himself as a strong leader who could bring wealth and power back to Germany. Germans supported him because they felt Hitler could restore Germany as a superpower in Europe. Hitler was elected chancellor in 1933. By the following year, Hitler and the Nazi Party had created a dictatorship called the Third Reich. Hitler now ruled Germany with absolute power.

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4. As Hitler solidified his power in Germany, he began to restrict the rights of Jewish people. The Nazi Party believed that all non-Aryans, but especially Jewish people, were inferior. Many Germans believed Jewish people actually benefited from Germany's failures after World War I. So the Nazis used harsh anti-Semitic laws to make life difficult for Jews. The Nuremberg Laws were passed in 1935. These laws inaccurately defined Judaism as a race and stripped Jewish people of basic civil rights. Jews were no longer considered citizens in Germany. These laws were later expanded to exclude Roma and black people from German citizenship as well. In the subsequent years, Jews were banned from public spaces like parks, restaurants and theaters. Many Jewish students were not allowed to attend German schools. Germans boycotted Jewish shops. Therefore, many shops closed, leaving Jewish families without any source of income. Jewish people were also forced to wear yellow Star of David badges at all times to identify themselves as Jews.

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5. The Kristallnacht pogrom in November 1938 was a turning point in the Nazis' persecution of Jewish people. A pogrom is organized harassment of or violence against a group. Kristallnacht, or the Night of Broken Glass, was a planned nationwide campaign of street violence against Jews in Germany and Austria. Nazis pillaged Jewish communities and businesses. They burned synagogues and physically attacked Jewish people. Following Kristallnacht, all Jewish-owned businesses were forced to close. In 1939, after Germany's invasion of Poland, World War II started. The Nazis then began to force Jewish people into ghettos. These were parts of cities that were sectioned off with walls and barbed wire. Ghettos were set up to segregate Jews from the rest of the population. At this point, Jewish people had lost most of their freedoms. They were not allowed to leave the ghettos where conditions were dirty and crowded. They would face darker horrors when Nazis began deportations to the concentration camps.

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6. Starting in 1941 and 1942, Nazi authorities began to deport Jewish people en masse to concentration camps. Jews from all parts of Nazi-occupied Europe were packed into trains and transported to camps located throughout Germany and Poland. Nazi intentions were clear. They used the phrase "Final Solution" to describe their "answer" to the "Jewish question;" that is, the planned mass murder of European Jews and others they deemed inferior. Upon arriving at these camps, Jewish people became prisoners. Families were torn apart, and men and women were separated into different living quarters. Nazi officers took away their clothes and belongings, shaved their heads and tattooed identification numbers on their arms. Jewish prisoners were then forced into hard labor. Conditions in the camps were horrible. Many people froze to death or died from disease or starvation. Prisoners who were too old or young to work were killed. Some prisoners were also subject to gruesome medical experimentation that was often lethal. The Nazis also established death camps that were designed for one specific purpose: mass murder. At these centers, Nazis killed large groups of prisoners in gas chambers. Later, their bodies were burned or dumped in mass graves.

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7. The Nazi's organized dehumanization and murder of Jewish people continued until 1945. By the end of the World War II, the Nazis had murdered millions of innocent men, women and children. It's estimated that 11 million people were killed during the Holocaust. This includes one million children and six million Jewish people. The Nazis killed approximately two-thirds of all Jews living in Europe. They also killed five million other people including Roma people, Jehovah's Witnesses, disabled people, gay people and political opponents of the Nazis.

When Soviet, British and American forces liberated concentration camps and death camps in 1945, the true horrors of the Nazi regime were fully exposed. Thousands of Jewish survivors were rescued, but they suffered from starvation and disease and many still died. Of those who survived, most had no homes to return to; they had been destroyed in the war. Jewish refugees struggled to rebuild their lives. Many were forced to emigrate to western Europe, North America and South America and begin anew.

8. Following the Holocaust, international courts had trials to hold Nazi war criminals accountable for the genocide. Adolf Hitler, the mastermind of the war and genocide, was never brought to trial. He committed suicide towards the end of the war. An international court tried 22 high-ranking Nazi officials in the Nuremberg trials from 1945 to 1946. Of that group, 12 Nazi officials were charged with crimes against humanity. They were put to death. However, many Nazis avoided trial and went on to live relatively normal lives without facing the consequences for their actions in the war.

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