

HOW DID NAZI POLICY DIVIDE SOCIETY?

German police and soldier checking the identification papers of a Jewish man on the streets of Krakow, 1940. Photo from the State Archives in Krakow.

Life under Nazi rule was incredibly difficult for people who the Nazis deemed inferior. Those of Jewish heritage, Eastern Europeans, gay men, and people with intellectual and physical disabilities were targeted for harassment and abuse.

Using propaganda and censorship, the Nazis turned the German people against their neighbors; systematically teaching them that these groups were a threat to the country, dangerous, and a drain on the economy. The Nazi party was able to control what information the people had access to and eliminated their ability to protest by controlling the police, schools, and the media.



In order to justify the sterilization and murder of the disabled, Nazi propaganda appealed to the taxpayer's frugality.

This poster reads "60,000 Reichsmark is what this person suffering from hereditary illness costs the community in his lifetime. Fellow citizen, that is your money too..."

Photo from the Vancouver Holocaust Education Center

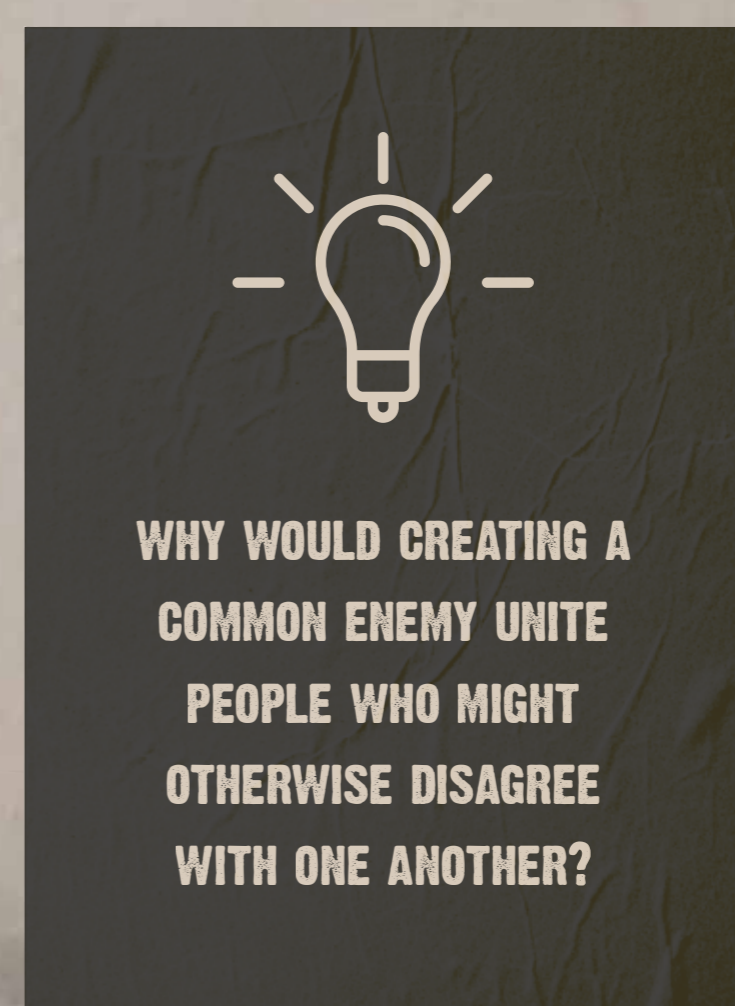
With the implementation of the Nuremberg Laws of 1935, people of Jewish heritage, regardless of their religious beliefs, lost their citizenship, their rights, and, in many cases, their ability to work. Without these rights and protections, the Jewish people were vulnerable. They were unable to emigrate or defend themselves against the racial policies of the Nazis.



Nazi Antisemitic and anti-Soviet propaganda poster used in Poland after the German occupation.

It reads "Death to the Jewish-Bolshevik plague!"

Poster created by DPA Ludwig 90054/f



Antisemitic signs in Germany. The sign reads "The Jews are our misfortune! He who buys from Jews is a traitor to the nation!" Photo from the USHMM.

WHAT WAS LIFE LIKE IN THE GHETTOS?

*Jews working in a factory in the Warsaw Ghetto, circa 1942-1943.
Photo by Stanislaw Poznański*

In 1939, at the start of WWII, the first ghetto was established in Poland. Jews were forced to move into small sealed neighborhoods that soon became overcrowded with extremely limited resources. Disease and starvation were widespread.

The Judenrat (Jewish Council) attempted to maintain a sense of normalcy by establishing Jewish-only medical, religious and educational services and cultural activities. These attempts did little to extend the lives of the Jews forced into hard labor by the Nazis.

An estimated 20,000 to 30,000 Jews escaped the ghettos by going into hiding but, they lived in constant fear of discovery or betrayal. Others who escaped formed or joined resistance groups, sabotaging troop movements or destroying Nazi supplies.



*Children smuggling food into the Warsaw Ghetto, circa 1941.
Photo by Stanislaw Poznański*



Germans arrest group of Dutch men for participating in a general strike to oppose Nazi occupation forces, 1941.

*Photo from the National Archives of the Netherlands,
National Information Service.*

In April of 1943, when the genocide of the Jewish people had become the Nazi's primary objective, residents of the Warsaw Ghetto organized a revolt. Using a few smuggled weapons and crudely made explosives, the brave young men and women in the ghetto held off the Nazi army for almost 30 days. The uprising ended when Nazis burned and destroyed the ghetto, building-by-building.



**IS THERE A TIME WHEN
STANDING UP TO
AUTHORITY IS NOT ONLY
JUSTIFIED BUT
NECESSARY?**

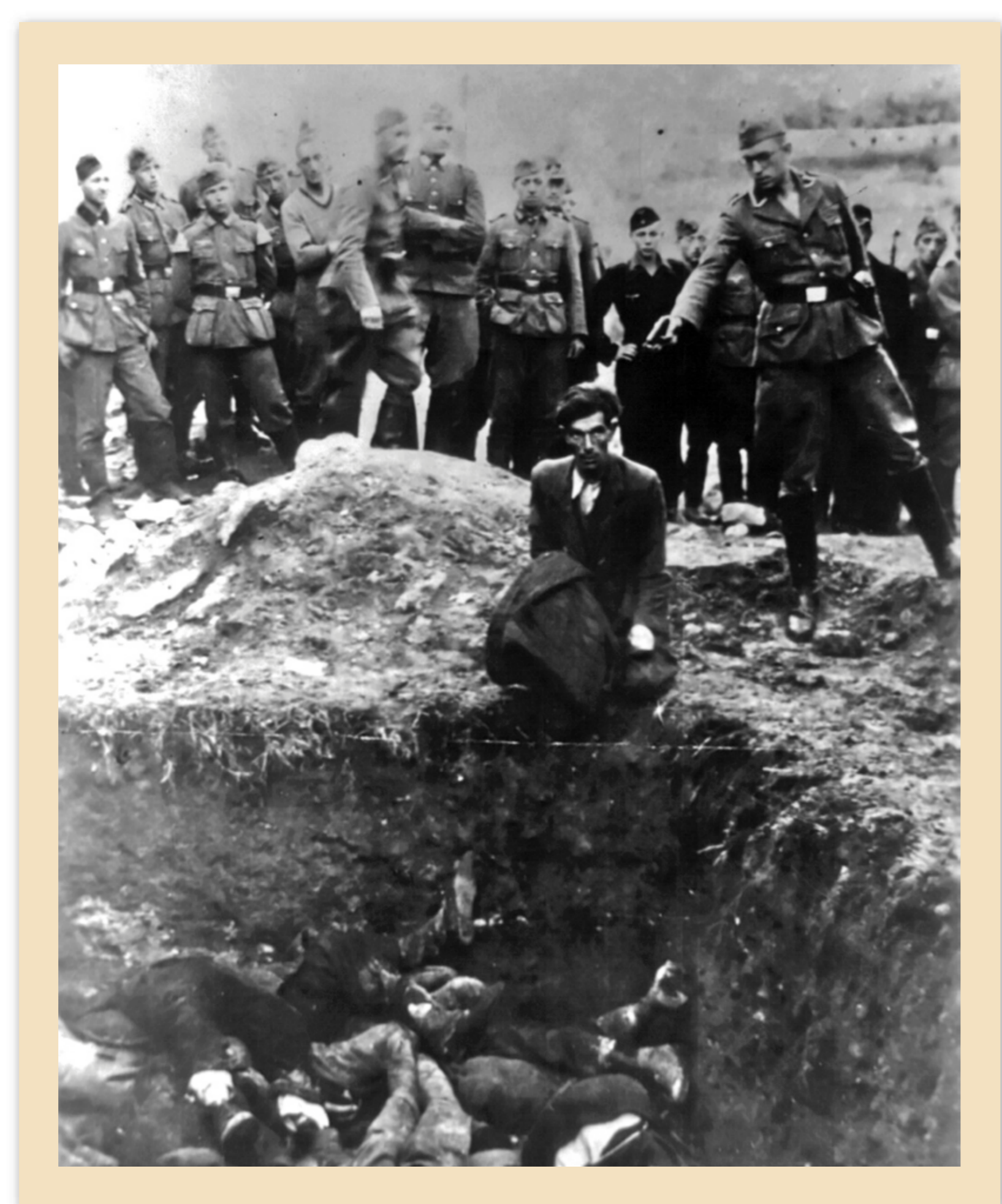
*Gdański railway station and burning ghetto in Warsaw.
Photo by Tomasz Pawłowski and Jarostaw Żeliński*



HOW DID THEY MURDER SO MANY?

Jews traveling in cattle cars to the Majdanek killing center. Source unknown

With the invasion of the Soviet Union, Hitler's troops began systematically murdering without fear of consequences. Mobile killing units, the Einsatzgruppen, moved in behind the army killing Jews and others deemed inferior by the Nazis in these newly occupied territories. Aided by locals, the victims were rounded up, marched to isolated areas, and murdered. Over 1.5 million people were massacred in this way.



A member of Einsatzgruppe D prepares to execute a Jewish man at the edge of a mass grave near the town of Vinnytsia, Ukraine, 1941. Source unknown.

In 1941 the Nazis launched their "Final Solution," the plan to murder every Jewish person in Europe. Six killing centers were established in Poland near railway lines to assist with the plan. With promises of better conditions, food, and work, some people in the ghettos volunteered to be sent east. Eventually, all the ghettos were emptied with their inhabitants sent by cattle cars to the killing centers. Those who tried to escape were shot or beaten.

The cattle cars used to transport the victims were filled well beyond their capacity, with barely room to stand inside. The journey could last for weeks, depending on how far they traveled. At every stop, passengers begged for water. Onlookers who tried to help were forced away by Nazi guards. Thousands died on the trains.



Jewish children from an orphanage in Litzmannstadt Ghetto being sent to the Kulmhof killing center, 1942. Photo from Stanislaw Poznanski.



HAVE YOU EVER FELT HELPLESS OR UNABLE TO ASSIST OTHERS?



Jewish men being deported from the Białystok Ghetto, 15–20 August 1943. Photo from the ŻIH Archives, Poland

HOW DID PEOPLE REACT AT THE KILLING CENTERS?



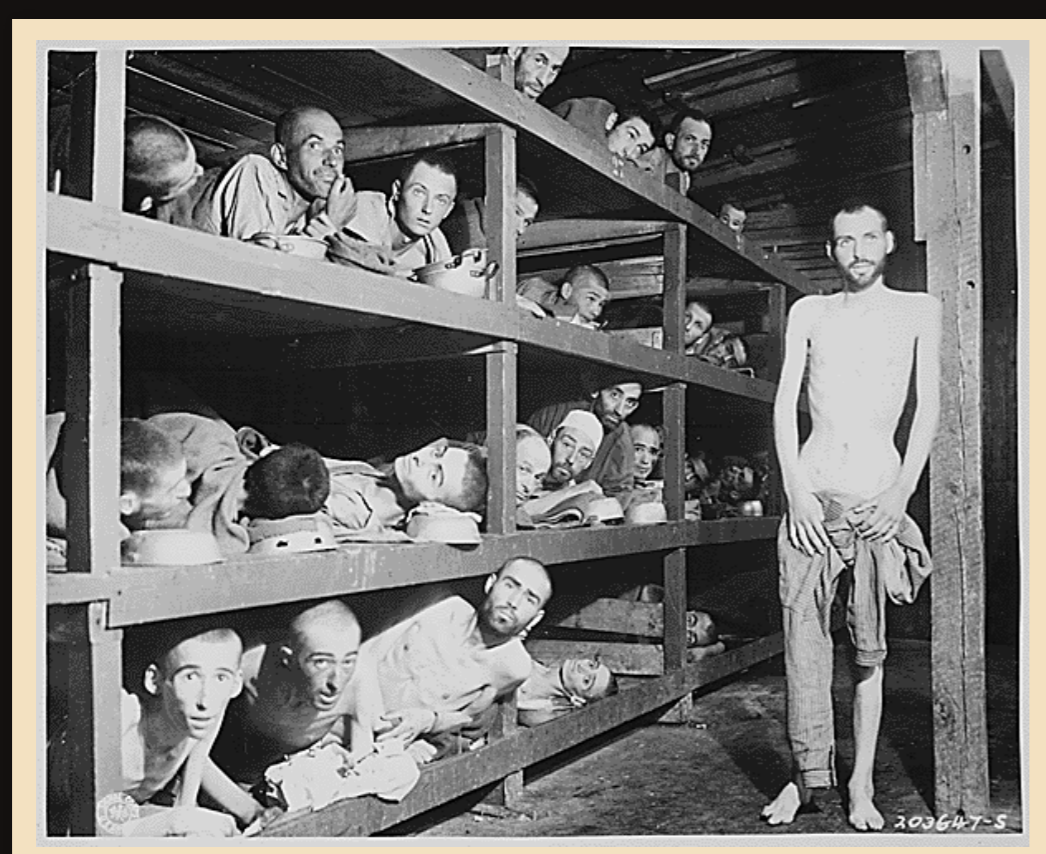
HOW MIGHT THE VICTIMS HAVE FELT ONCE THEY REALIZED THEY HAD BEEN DECEIVED?

Hungarian Jews arriving at Auschwitz-Birkenau, lined up for the selection process, May/June 1944. Photo from the Auschwitz Album, Yad Vashem

When the trains arrived at the killing centers, the passengers had no idea what to expect. Nazis went to great lengths to confuse the panicked prisoners. Some camps even had bands playing to create calm.



Prisoners standing during a roll call at Buchenwald, Germany. Photo courtesy of Robert A. Schmuhl



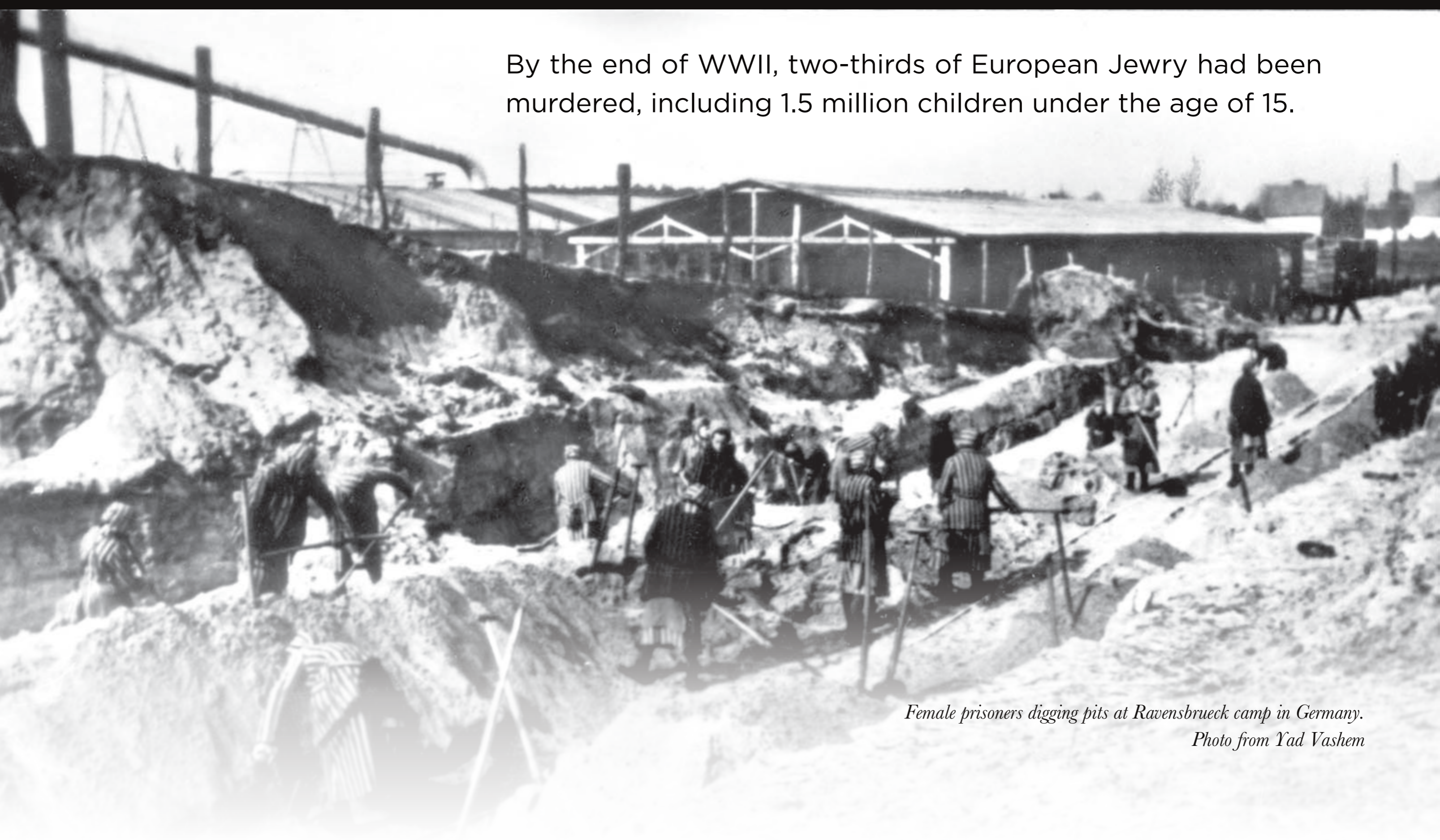
Prisoners in the barracks at Buchenwald camp. The man in the second row, seventh from the left is Elie Wiesel. Photo from the NARA.

At most of the killing centers, nearly all arrivals were immediately murdered in gas chambers. At Majdanek and Auschwitz, a “selection” by a Nazi doctor decided who would live and who would die. The elderly, young, and weak were murdered. Those who appeared strong became slave laborers.

For those “selected,” the conditions in the camps were even worse than the ghettos. Prisoners were barely fed enough to keep them alive. Daily roll calls, beatings, and torture were routine. Their ability to work was their only chance to survive, and any sign of illness was a death sentence. Prisoners survived on fierce determination, hope, and luck.

Even in the killing centers, some captives resisted. Some practiced their religion or contacted anti-Nazi groups outside the camps. At Sobibor, Treblinka, and Auschwitz, some victims risked armed uprisings.

By the end of WWII, two-thirds of European Jewry had been murdered, including 1.5 million children under the age of 15.



Female prisoners digging pits at Ravensbrueck camp in Germany. Photo from Yad Vashem