










Module 9: World War II
Topic 3 Content: The Holocaust and other Genocides

The Holocaust and other Genocides

The Holocaust and other Genocides of the 20th Century

WANTED FOR GENOCIDE

				
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The Holocaust and other Genocides

Yellow badge that Jews living in German-controlled territories were required to sew on their clothes.

Jewish shops destroyed during Kristallnacht

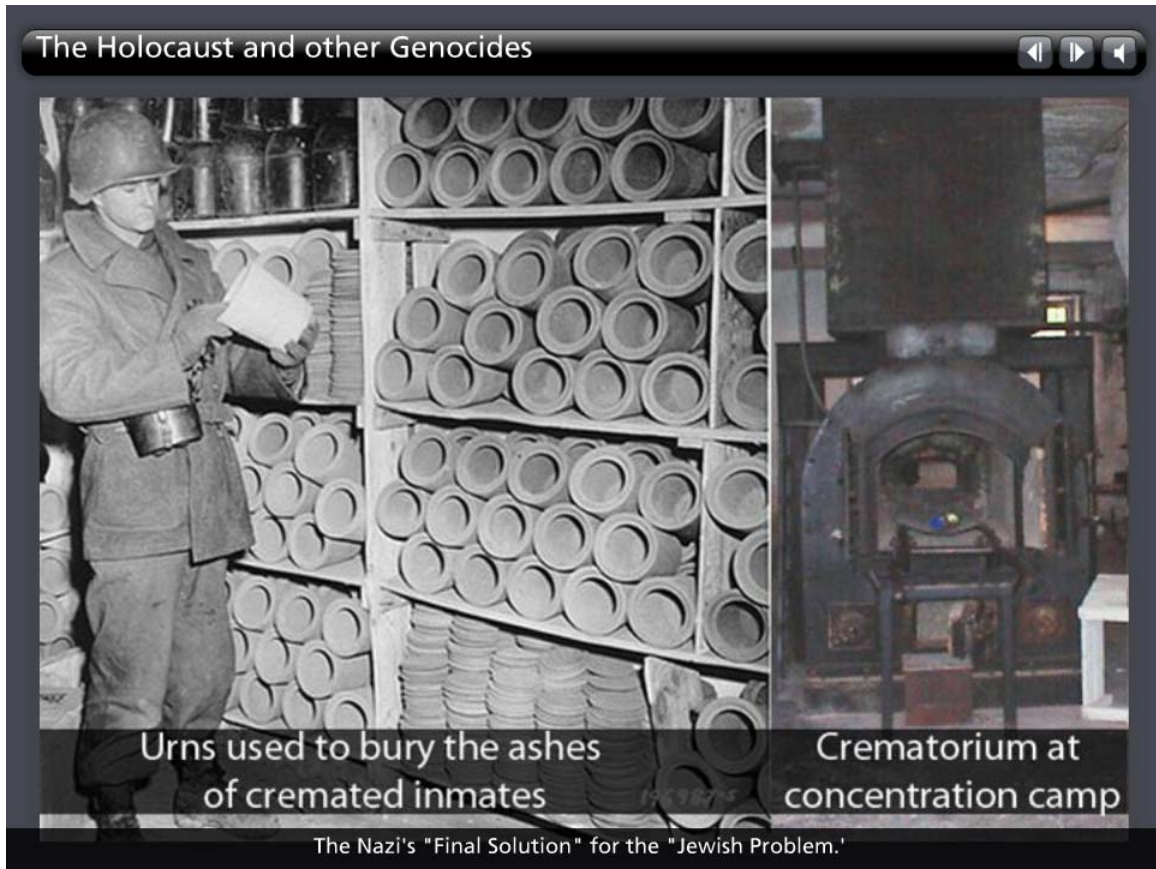
Elements leading to the Holocaust

Hitler and the Nazi party came to power by exploiting the economic problems in Germany as a result of the worldwide depression of the 1930s. Instead of trying to find real solutions that would help the economy, Hitler claimed that the Jews and other minority groups were the source of Germany's economic problems and responsible for the country's defeat in World War I. Many Germans were looking for scapegoats on which they could blame their problems. Anti-Semitism in Europe and Russia had a long history dating back centuries and many Germans accepted that the Jews were responsible for the nation's troubles.

The Nazis exploited anti-Semitism to pursue its maniacal agenda which was to rid the country of Jewish people and other alleged "undesirables". Hitler and the Nazi party put forth the idea of creating a German "master race," consisting of what they considered to be the ideal traits and lineage.

As Hitler and the Nazis established a totalitarian regime rooted in extreme nationalism, they portrayed the Jews as a common enemy of the German people. In 1938, the Nazi's encouraged people to destroy Jewish businesses and places of worship during Kristallnacht, or "The night of broken glass." After the invasion of Poland, Germany made Jews wear armbands so that they could be easily identified. The Nazi government took away other rights from the Jews and other minority groups, including prohibiting school attendance and revoking their German citizenship.

[Image of broken shop windows courtesy of German Federal Archive. Image of Star of David courtesy Daniel Ullrich.]



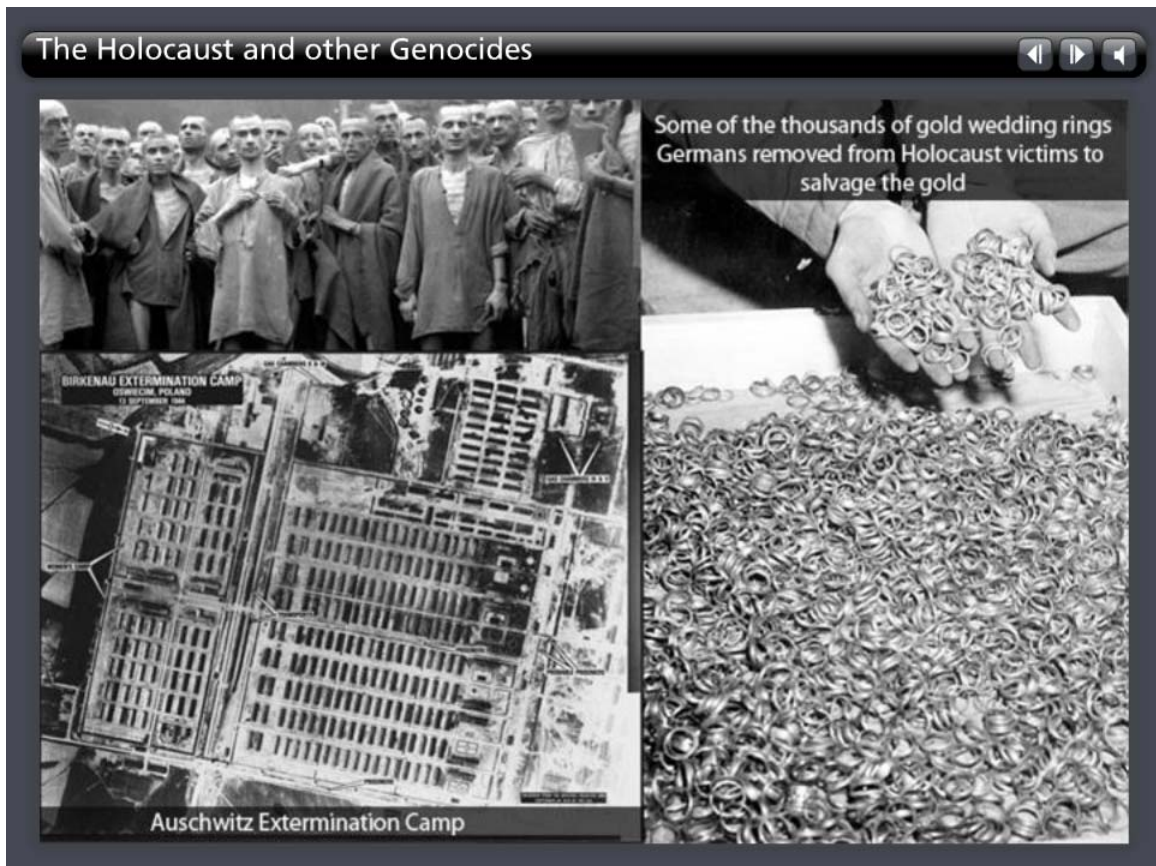
As the war continued, the Nazis devised what they considered to be a “Final Solution” for their Jewish problem - to remove individuals and families from their homes and send them to compounds called concentration camps. At the concentration camps, those who were not killed were used as slave labor for the war effort. This genocide became known as the Holocaust. It resulted in the murder of around six million Jews and millions of other people.



German troops burn buildings to force out Jewish insurgents during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1943.

As German troops invaded most of Europe, Hitler sent mobile killing squads from his SS guard into cities with orders to kill civilians, especially targeting Jews. In addition, Jews were removed from their homes and forced to live in confined areas of cities known as ghettos. The ghettos were extremely overcrowded and the residents were prisoners there since they couldn't leave.

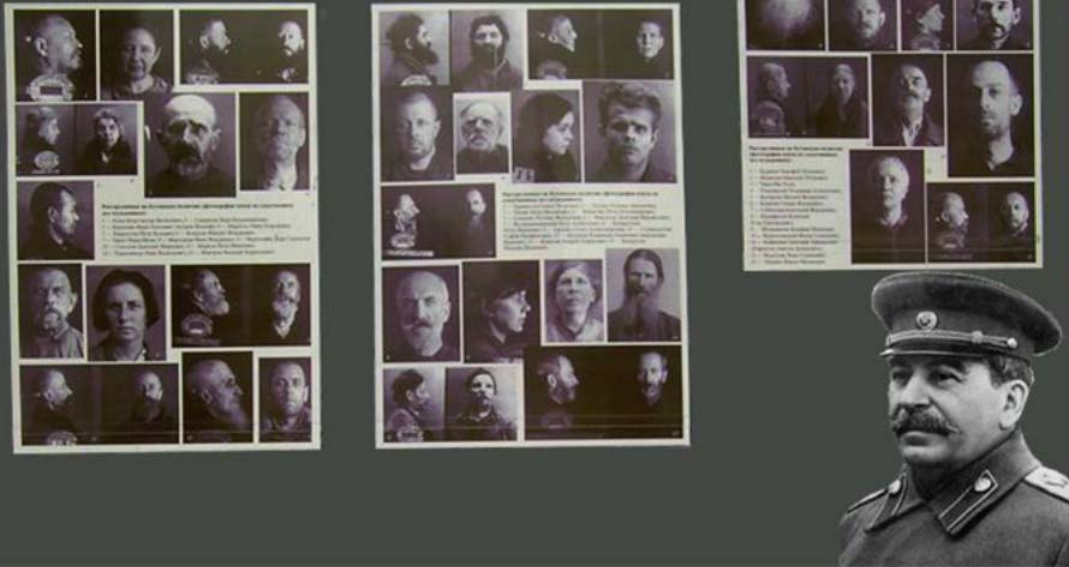
Some Jews resisted being forced to move to ghettos or transferred to concentration camps. One of the best known acts of resistance was the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, which took place in Warsaw, Poland. During the first five months of 1943, between five hundred and one thousand poorly-armed Jewish insurgents fought over two thousand well-equipped German soldiers. After suffering losses, the Germans started burning down the buildings with flamethrowers. Eventually, the uprising was defeated with over thirteen thousand Jews killed, and about fifty thousand residents shipped off to concentration camps.



After 1942, the Nazis started to implement their “Final Solution.” Jews and other “undesirables” were shipped by train to 30 new concentration camps. When they arrived, the prisoners were divided into those healthy enough to work, usually adult men and woman, and those who would be killed in the gas chambers immediately including children, pregnant women, elderly people, and the infirm.

During the height of the Holocaust, tens of thousands of prisoners were killed every day at concentration camps such as Auschwitz and Dachau. Nazi scientists also conducted experiments on the prisoners. It is estimated that 6 million people were killed by the Nazi death camps. The Allied powers liberated about two hundred thousand prisoners from concentration camps when Germany surrendered.

Victims of Stalin's Great Purge



While the Holocaust remains the best known example of attempted genocide, it was not the only one that occurred during the 20th century. During Joseph Stalin's rule over the Soviet Union, he was responsible for close to twenty million deaths. Stalin targeted anyone he thought might threaten his hold on power, including high ranking members of the military and Communist Party. He also targeted peasants and anyone that was part of the elite prior to the Communist Revolution.

While Stalin only directly ordered a small number of those killed, many people believe that he was responsible for creating the government policies that were designed to punish or kill those who resisted his rule. One such example is the roughly five million Ukrainian peasants who died during the famine of 1932 to 1933.

The Holocaust and other Genocides



Armenian civilians being marched to prison by armed Ottoman soldiers, April 1915

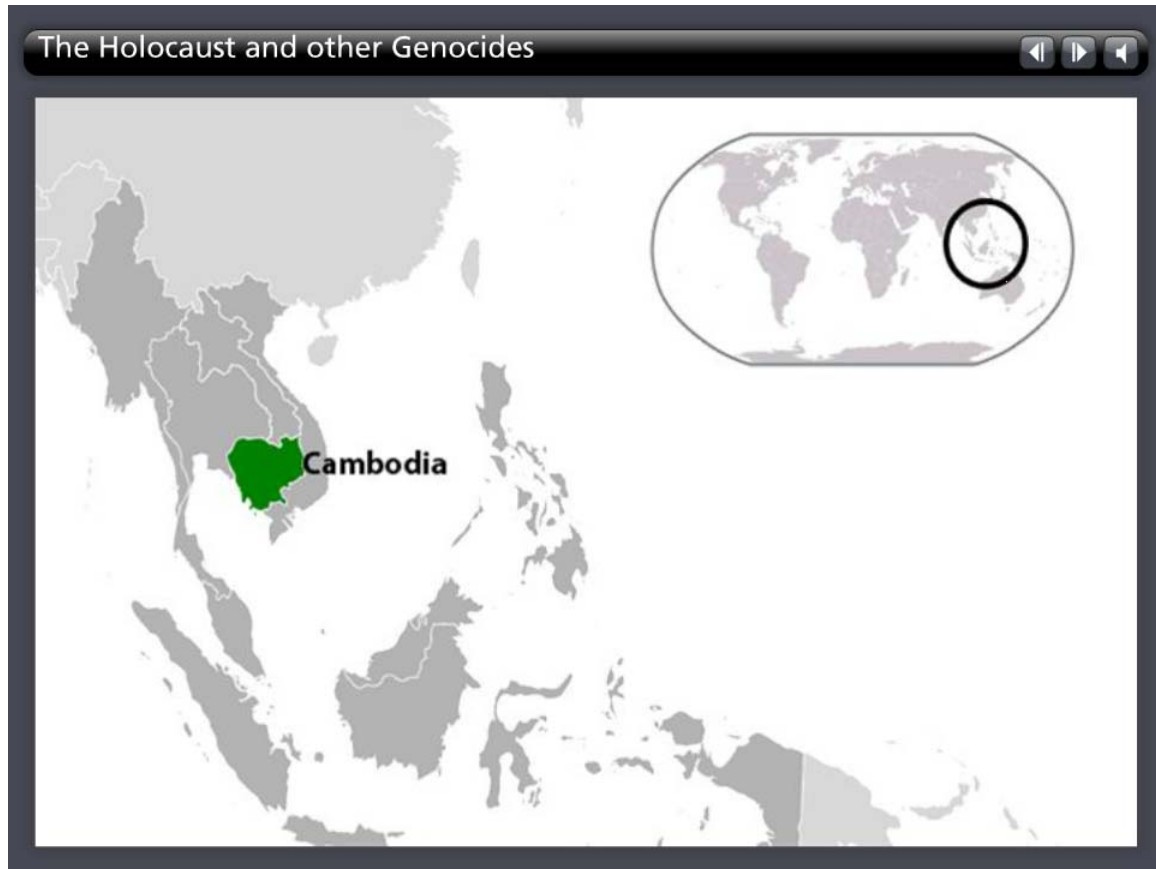
Over one million Armenians killed from 1914 - 1918

Many nations including Turkey do not recognize the events as genocide

Just after World War I, the Ottoman Turks targeted Armenians and several other ethnic groups living in the Ottoman Empire. As the Ottoman Turks' empire declined, many groups within the country experienced greater freedoms and religious reforms. One group was the Armenians, a Christian ethnic group that made up roughly 10% of the country's predominantly Muslim population.

Under a series of leaders, the Ottoman Empire, later known as Turkey, persecuted the Armenian population, plundering their towns and forcing people out of their homes. From 1914 until 1918, during World War I, the Young Turks, the group that was in power at the time, deported and massacred Armenians. Over one million people were killed.

The Armenian genocide is still a highly contentious issue for many nations. Despite strong evidence, Turkey does not recognize the events as genocide and has lobbied many countries not to recognize it as such.



Cambodia experienced civil war from 1970 to 1975. After the war, a communist government was established with a man named Pol Pot as its leader. He wanted to create a society based entirely on agriculture in which everyone had to work on communal farms. After taking power, Pol Pot made his military forces, the Khmer Rouge, move people from the cities to the countryside, often by force. When the Khmer Rouge took over the capital of Phnom Penh, they forced the two point five million people living there to move to the countryside to work on farms.

Pol Pot distrusted intellectuals, religious figures, artists, and those from the middle and upper classes. He targeted these groups and any foreigners or people with ties to the outside world in a brutal campaign. This was in preparation for the establishment of a communist society.

The results were disastrous. From 1975 to 1979, when Pol Pot was in power, the Khmer Rouge inflicted a deadly campaign to eliminate those people that posed a threat to their ideal society. In a nation of about eight million people, the Khmer Rouge killed or directly caused the deaths of between one point five and two million people - nearly twenty-five percent of the total population. In terms of people killed per capita, the Cambodian genocide was the most deadly genocide in modern times.

After Vietnam invaded the country in 1979, the Khmer Rouge fled to the countryside. There, they ruled small areas of the country until 1997 when leaders, including Pol Pot, were arrested. Some of these leaders are now on trial for their crimes against the Cambodian people.



In June of 1994, officials from the Administration of President Bill Clinton were instructed to avoid calling the Rwanda killings 'genocide' when speaking to the press.



Rwanda is a small country in Central Africa. Over a period of about one hundred days lasting from April to July of 1994, the country was in the news almost daily. During that time, somewhere between five hundred and eight hundred thousand Rwandans were slaughtered in a genocidal campaign.

Rwanda is dominated by two ethnic groups: the Hutu, who make up about eighty-five percent of the population, and the Tutsi who make up the remainder. Despite their smaller numbers, the Tutsi held most of the political and economic power within the country before and during the colonial era.

After Rwanda achieved independence from Belgium in 1962, the Hutu came to power with the support of the Belgians. Many Tutsi fled the country. In the 1990s, Tutsi exiles formed the Rwandan Patriotic Front and went to war with the Hutu government. After three years of fighting, a cease-fire was brokered by the United Nations. While these negotiations were going on, the Rwandan president's plane was shot down, killing the president of the country who was Hutu. The Rwandan government's response was immediate and brutal.



After ten Belgian U.N. peacekeepers that were protecting Tutsi Rwandan government officials were killed by Rwandan soldiers, the United Nations withdrew most of its forces from the country. With no one to stop them, Hutu soldiers, militias, and many civilians murdered between five hundred and eight hundred thousand Tutsis and moderate Hutus. This was equal to between ten and twenty percent of the country's population. Finally, after about one hundred days, the Rwandan Patriotic Front defeated the Rwandan Army and stopped the killings.

About two million Hutus fled into neighboring countries fearing revenge by the Tutsis. This caused a humanitarian crisis and two wars in eastern Congo, which claimed the lives of nearly four million people, mostly due to starvation and disease. The U.N. and the Rwandan government established courts that have convicted some of the main figures in the genocide. President Clinton called his failure to intervene to stop the Rwandan Genocide the biggest failure of his presidency.

[Image courtesy Scott Chacon]

The Holocaust and other Genocides

Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide

*Adopted by Resolution 260 (III) A of the United Nations General Assembly on 9 December 1948
Currently signed by 160 nations.*

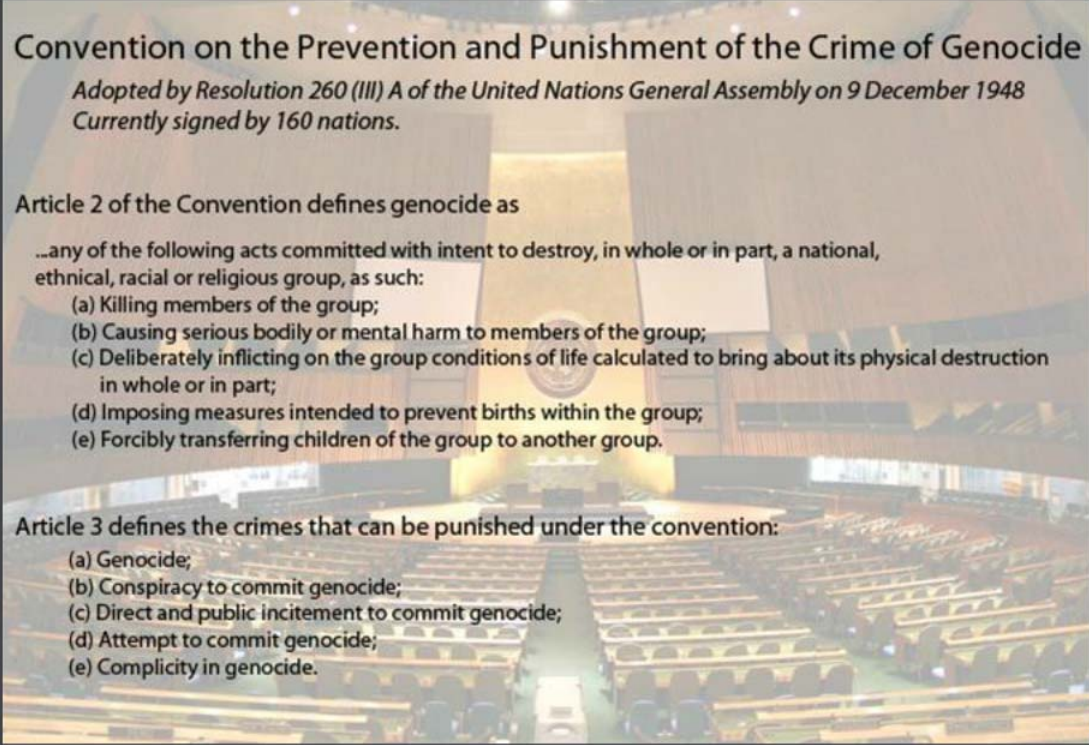
Article 2 of the Convention defines genocide as

...any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

Article 3 defines the crimes that can be punished under the convention:

- (a) Genocide;
- (b) Conspiracy to commit genocide;
- (c) Direct and public incitement to commit genocide;
- (d) Attempt to commit genocide;
- (e) Complicity in genocide.



After World War II ended, the world was exposed to the heinous attempts by the Nazis to eliminate the Jews and others from Germany. The United Nations adopted the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in 1948. This was a way to prevent future genocides from occurring, or at least have a plan of action when they occurred.

The primary goals of the Genocide Convention were to define what acts represent genocide, as well as lay out who could be held responsible for committing this crime. Currently, the act has been signed by 160 nations.

It is difficult to enforce the Genocide Convention because it is hard to discover these acts while they are happening, or to get acknowledgement that these acts are genocide before hundreds of thousands are killed. Although the U.N. did not stop the genocides in Cambodia and Rwanda, the Genocide Convention did establish the legal framework used by the courts to convict some of the perpetrators of this crime.

[Image courtesy Patrick Gruban.]