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DBQ 6: WORLD WAR II, 1939–1945

Historical Background

During the time Hitler's authority in Germany began to escalate, there were approximately nine million Jews living in Europe. Most of the Jewish population lived beyond the boundaries of Germany, but Hitler relentlessly accused Jews of responsibility for countless German socioeconomic problems, historical failures, and even the outcome of World War I. He used the accusations to foster a belief in the racial supremacy of the German nation. Unfortunately, the Jewish people became a target for endless blame. In 1935, the Nazi government established the Nuremberg Race Laws, which forced Jews to wear the Star of David, give up property rights, and lose professional jobs. Moreover, numerous Jews were already exiled from Germany. Many nations were reluctant to accept more immigrants because they were still dealing with the negative ramifications of the Great Depression and feared the prospect of job competition. With the commencement of WWII in 1939, leaving Germany became quite the challenge, and, in 1941, the Nazi government contradicted their previous exile and stopped allowing Jews to leave the country. The ones who remained became trapped—only to await a destiny that was beyond their control. Consequently, Hitler and the Nazi Party created a plan known as the Final Solution. This plan involved the systemic genocide of all Jews.

SECTION

1

QUESTION: How was the Final Solution implemented?

The following documents will examine the methods for implementing the Final Solution. Analyze each document carefully, and answer the question or questions that follow.

Document A

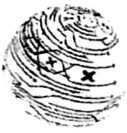
The Führer has ordered the Jewish question to be solved once and for all and that we, the SS are to implement that order. The existing extermination centers in the East are not in a position to carry out the large Aktionen which are anticipated. I have therefore earmarked Auschwitz for this purpose because of its good position as regards communications and because the area can be easily isolated and camouflaged.

You will treat this order as absolutely secret, even from your superiors.

The Jews are the sworn enemies of the German people and must be eradicated. Every Jew we can lay our hands on must be destroyed now during the war, without exception.

War Crimes Tribunals, 1941
Rudolf Höss





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1. How was the "Jewish question to be solved once and for all"?

2. Why has Rudolf Höss earmarked Auschwitz?

3. What validation does Höss give for the Final Solution?

Document B



Bundesarchiv, Bild 101I-134-0771A-30
Foto: Zermin | Mai 1941

A Child Lies in the Street in the Warsaw Ghetto, 1941
Bundesarchiv, Bild 101I-134-0771A-39/P.K. Zermin/CC BY-SA 3.0



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1. What is a Jewish ghetto?

2. Why is this child in the middle of the street in the Warsaw Ghetto?

3. Describe the reactions of the bystanders in this photograph.

Document C

The Jewish population remained temporarily unmolested shortly after the fighting, [but] months later specially detached formations executed a planned shooting of Jews.

It was done entirely in public with the Ukrainian militia and unfortunately in many instances also with members of the armed forces taking part voluntarily. The way these actions, which included old men, women and children of all ages were carried out was horrible. So far 150,000-200,000 Jews may have been executed. [N]o consideration was given to the interest of the economy.

Letter from a German Armament Inspector in the Ukraine, December 1941

1. After the fighting finished in Ukraine, what was the next plan of action for German troops?

2. Why was the inspector shocked after visiting the Ukraine?





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Document D



Mauthausen Concentration Camp, May 5, 1945
Lt. Arnold E. Samuelson

1. Explain the purpose of a concentration camp.

2. Describe the experiences of these prisoners in the Mauthausen Concentration Camp.



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Document E

[W]e heard salvos of rifle fire at regular intervals. I decide to investigate. A pit had been cut in the ground about 4 m wide and 7-8 meters long; the side of the pit was stained all over with streams of blood. The pit itself was filled with human corpses of all kinds and both sexes in such numbers it was difficult to estimate them. The uniforms of the commandos were stained with blood. In a wide circle stood countless soldiers of troop units stationed there, some as spectators, dressed in swimming trunks, as well as many civilians with women and children.

Major Rösler's Report from Zhitomir, Ukraine, January 1942

1. How does Major Rösler specifically describe this pit? Use details from the passage to support your answer.

Document F

Jewish Victims of the Holocaust*			
Country	Minimum Loss	Maximum Loss	% of Jewish Population
Austria	50,000	50,000	27%
Belgium	28,900	28,900	44%
Bohemia and Moravia	78,150	78,150	66%
Bulgaria	0	0	0%
Denmark	60	60	0.70%
Estonia	1,500	2,000	44%
Finland	7	7	0.30%
France	77,320	77,320	22%
Germany	134,500	141,500	25%
Greece	60,000	67,000	86%
Hungary	550,000	569,000	69%
Italy	7,680	7,680	17%
Latvia	70,000	71,500	78%
Lithuania	140,000	143,000	85%
Luxembourg	1,950	1,950	56%
Netherlands	100,000	100,000	71%
Norway	762	762	45%
Poland	2,900,000	3,000,000	90%
Romania	271,000	287,000	47%
Slovakia	68,000	71,000	80%
Soviet Union	1,000,000	1,100,000	36%
Yugoslavia	56,200	63,300	81%

*As many as five million non-Jews were also killed in the Holocaust, including Communists, Roma, Serbs, Polish intelligentsia, political opponents, resistance fighters, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the physically and mentally disabled.

Data from the National WWII Museum





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1. According to this table, which countries lost the highest percentage of their Jewish population?

2. What other groups were targeted during the Holocaust?

3. Define genocide. Does genocide occur today? Why or why not?

Document G

[I]n June 1942 I was entrusted with the task of obliterating the traces of the executions carried out by the Einsatzgruppen in the East. This order was top secret. The order could not be carried out immediately because the material required for the burning of the bodies was not available. In May and June 1943 the order was carried out.

During my visit in August I myself observed the burning of bodies in a mass grave near Kiev. It took about two days until the grave burned down to the bottom. According to my orders I should have extended my duties over the entire area occupied by the Einsatzgruppen, but owing to the retreat from Russia, I could not carry out my orders completely.

Nuremberg Affidavit, 1947
SS Colonel Paul Blobel

1. Who are the Einsatzgruppen?



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2. What orders were the Einsatzgruppen meant to carry out?

Document H

In this convoy, the freight cars had been very seriously overcrowded, and many Jews were no longer able to walk. There were Jews who could not possibly have walked as far as the undressing barracks. Hering [the camp commandant] ordered me to shoot these Jews... I should like to stress that the victims concerned had suffered severely from the journey. It is hard to describe the condition of these people after the long journey in indescribably overcrowded freight cars. I looked on killing them in this way as a kindness and a release. I shot the Jews with a machine gun from the edge of the ditch. In each case I aimed for the head, so that each one died instantly. I can say with absolute certainty that not one of them suffered...

SS Officer Robert Juhrs, 1942

1. How did the "overcrowded freight cars" impact the transport of Jews?

2. What explanation does SS Officer Robert Juhrs give as to why he carried out his orders?

SECTION 2

ESSAY TOPIC: How was the Final Solution implemented?

