

Witnesses to the Holocaust Archive

Journaling and Discussion Questions

Prewar Jewish Life

- Compare this survivor's description of his/her prewar life to your own family and life. How are they fundamentally different? How are they similar or the same?

Antisemitism

- Where, if ever, have you seen or heard instances of antisemitism or antisemitic stereotypes in your own life or in the world around you? Was the stereotype interpreted as being positive or negative? Explain why seemingly "positive" stereotypes are still discriminatory.
- Holocaust historian Raul Hilberg has characterized the history of antisemitism in this way:

From the earliest days, from the fourth century...the missionaries of Christianity had said in effect to the Jews: "You may not live among us as Jews." The secular rulers who followed them from the late Middle Ages then decided: "You may not live among us," and the Nazis finally decreed: "You may not live."

Analyze this quote and explain what each segment means in terms of what options were available to the Jews to avoid persecution and/or death in that period.

1933-1939 – Limited Solution

- Identify what has to happen to strip a minority group of its civil rights in a democracy. Use the example of transition from democracy to dictatorship in Germany to illustrate your conclusions.
- Explain what the Nazis gained by their actions during Kristallnacht.

1939-1941 – Situational Solutions

- Distinguish how adults and children experienced the hardships of the ghetto differently.
- What effect do you believe the close-contact murder of unarmed civilians had on the members of the Einsatzgruppen?

1941-1945 – Final Solution

- What benefits did the Germans achieve by physically distancing themselves from the killing method by switching from mass shootings to gas chambers?
- Explain how official, bureaucratic terms such as 'resettlement' and 'Final Solution' mask the true intentions of the Nazis. Who were they attempting to hide their policy from?
- Why did Himmler, leader of the SS, say that the murder of the Jews would remain unwritten history even though he believed the Germans should be proud of their actions? (refer to Himmler's speeches at Posen)
- How did the process of moving Jews from the trains either to the gas chambers or into the death camps maintain order and calm?

Jewish Responses

- Holocaust historian Lawrence Langer says that Jews in the Holocaust were faced with *choiceless choices* which “do not reflect options between life and death, but between one form of ‘abnormal’ response and another, both imposed by a situation that was in no way of the victim’s own choosing.” (“The Dilemma of Choice in the Death Camps,” *Centerpoint: The Holocaust*, 4.1 (1980)).

In your opinion, what makes a choice choiceless? Use a specific example from the Holocaust to illustrate your point.

- Why do you think most Jews followed German orders? Evaluate the pros and cons of making this ‘decision’.
- What was necessary for Jews to mount an armed resistance? Evaluate the pros and cons of making this ‘decision’.
- What was necessary for Jews to go into hiding? Evaluate the pros and cons of making this ‘decision’.
- What was necessary to emigrate from Europe? Evaluate the pros and cons of making this ‘decision’.

Non-Jewish Responses

- When, in the course of a conflict, is it the responsibility of world governments to react and intervene diplomatically? Defend your reasoning.
- When, in the course of a conflict, is it the responsibility of world governments to react and intervene with force? Defend your reasoning.
- Outline what was necessary for a non-Jew to hide a Jew during the Holocaust.
- Evaluate the responsibility of each of the following based on the spectrum of responsibility ranging from Perpetrator to Collaborator to Bystander to Rescuer. Why did you reach each conclusion?
 1. Nazi officer who works a desk job in the Gestapo office in Berlin.
 2. Heinrich Himmler, leader of the SS.
 3. A Polish non-Jew who moves into the apartment of a Jew who was forced into the ghetto.
 4. A Latvian non-Jew who participated in the shooting deaths of 100 Jews from his town.
 5. A train conductor who drove the trains to and from Treblinka.
 6. Polish non-Jewish farmers who owned land near Sobibor.
 7. Members of Żegota – a Catholic resistance organization – who removed nearly 2,500 Jewish children from the Warsaw ghetto.

Liberation and Aftermath

- Read the New York Times (www.nytimes.com) for one week. Identify at least one place in the world where genocide, ethnic conflict, or ethnic cleansing is currently occurring. Analyze the role of the media in reporting that news. If you feel that the event is receiving appropriate media attention, what do you believe is the responsibility of the public in seeking out that news?
- Explain how liberation was both a time of great joy and great sorrow for Holocaust survivors.