

In the Face of the Holocaust

Part III. The Perpetrators and Their Collaborators

1. Divide the students into five groups and give each one a photograph (supplements 15–20). Next ask the students to, first in groups, then in a class discussion, describe the situation that they can see in the photograph, based on the following scheme:

- Look closely and examine the individuals in the pictures and describe their behavior. Who are they? What are they doing? What can you say about the emotions that the people in the photographs are displaying?

2. Once the students have presented all of the photographs during the class discussion have them point out the individuals, in these pictures, that they feel are the perpetrators as well as their collaborators.

Next, discuss the question of the difference between the perpetrators and their collaborators as well as the problem of guilt and the responsibility of given individuals for the Holocaust.

- Who can we consider a perpetrator and who can we look upon as a collaborator?
- What is the basic difference between these people?
- Do all of them hold the same responsibility for what had happened to the Jews?
- Can we place the same blame on all of them for the crime that was committed against the Jews?

3. The role of the German occupiers of Poland

Present to the students the audiovisual materials from the collection of the USC Shoah Foundation Institute: testimony 3—*In the Face of the Holocaust. The Perpetrators and Their Collaborators* (part 1: fragment of testimony by Majer Grosman) and ask them to read the texts of source material (supplement 4), then based on this, discuss the following questions:

- Majer Grosman speaks in his testimony about the time he saw a German soldier cold bloodedly kill a Jewish girl. Before he did this, he offered her a sandwich to eat, and then he shot her. What do you think, why did he do this? Was it because the little girl was Jewish? What do you think were his systems of morals and values? Is this system of values normal? How was it formed?
- How did Major Trapp justify the actions of killing the Jews? What was to make it easier for the soldiers to execute this order?
- Why did the German commanders claim that the Jews were responsible for the bombing of German cities? Why did the soldiers believe in these arguments?
- What did the Germans do to drown out the soldiers conscience and feelings of guilt for the crimes that they were committing?

In the Face of the Holocaust

Part III. The Perpetrators and Their Collaborators

- After the war, most German war criminals explained that their actions were the result of the necessity to follow orders, whereas there were also many of those who refused to take part in mass executions and they did not incur severe penalties for this. What do you think of this? When do you believe a soldier has the right to refuse to obey carrying out an order?
- Comment on the statement: “I did not feel anything doing these things, since I received such orders. This is the way in which I was raised.” (Josef Kramer, Commandant of the Belsen Concentration Camp).
- What might the results be for uncritical thinking as well as the blind following of orders?
- Do you know of any other examples of situations where the right to give orders was misused?
- How should we act when someone is giving us an order? How should we evaluate the content of their command?

4. Acquaint the students with basic knowledge concerning the international efforts, which were undertaken to punish Nazi war criminals (such as, the Nuremberg trials, trial of Adolf Eichmann, and the Auschwitz Trial in Krakow) as well as the modern legal solutions concerning the prosecution of perpetrators of genocide.

5. The role of the local population.

Ask the students to read the source texts (supplement 5) and together carry out a discussion on this topic.

Questions to discuss:

- What does Reinhard Heydrich’s order of 29 June 1941 deal with? Who was it addressed to and in what circumstances was it given?
- What were the circumstances that led the Poles to act out against the Jews in Radziłów?
- What role did the Germans play in the pogrom?
- What were the ways in which the Poles persecuted the Jews?
- Think about what the reason could have been for the Poles’ brutal actions against their Jewish neighbors. What is your opinion about the collective guilt?
- Do you know of other pogroms? Where did they take place?

Present students with information about pogroms against the Jews that had their

In the Face of the Holocaust

Part III. The Perpetrators and Their Collaborators

place in the territories seized by the Germans in June and July of 1941, after the invasion of the Soviet Union and the lands that it occupied. Show map of the region, pointing out places where they occurred, for example, Kaunas, Lwow, and Jedwabne. Discuss the causes of the pogroms; point out, among others, the encouragement by the Germans and the exploitation by the Nazis of the anti-Semitic sentiment that existed within the surrounding community, as well as the fact that this was all compounded by the perception that Jews were Communists or, also, supporters of the Soviet authorities. Then lead a discussion with the students about the problem of “social amnesia,” which existed during the era of Communist rule in Poland, in dealing with the tragic issue of Polish-Jewish relations during the war.

Questions to discuss:

- Why was the issue of pogroms which had taken place during the Second World War presented to the wider public only in the last decade of the previous century? Why did the subject arouse so much controversy that it initiated such a lively public debate?
- Are you aware of other cases of neighbors, who had lived in harmony, but later began to hate and persecute each other? Look up more information about such events as well as the places where they occurred. Based on these examples, in your class or school discuss the causes of such conflicts and how to prevent them.

6. Present students with visual material from the collection of USC Shoah Foundation Institute: testimony 3—*In the Face of the Holocaust. The Perpetrators and Their Collaborators* (part 2: part of the testimony of Michał Głowiński), and on this basis, discuss the following issues:

- Michał Głowiński in his testimony speaks about a situation where to the apartment where he was hiding with his mother, came a particular man. This man said that he would turn them in, if they do not pay a ransom. Individuals blackmailing Jews who were in hiding were known as “szmalcowniks.” Think about his motivations, what led him to do such a thing. Explain why the Polish Home Army fought against these szmalcowniks. Try to write the speech for the prosecution of a szmalcownik, which could have been said during a trial against one of these extortionists.
- When Michał’s mother left to acquire some money and he was left alone with this man, the man proposed that they play chess to kill time. Years later, Głowiński compared this situation to the familiar concept within European culture of playing chess with Death, one often alluded to by artists. Consider why Michał made this comparison.
- The theme of playing chess with Death was utilized in the Swedish film, by the

In the Face of the Holocaust

Part III. The Perpetrators and Their Collaborators

outstanding director Ingmar Bergman, entitled *The Seventh Seal*. Why do you think artists often refer to this theme?

7. Ask students to read the source text (supplement 6) about the demoralization of Polish society and their participation in the persecution of the Jews, and then discuss this issue with the class.

Questions to discuss:

- What, according to the author, was the cause of the demoralization of Polish society? What were its effects?
- What is the author's attitude to the actions she described as "heinous"? From where does it come from?

(See the biographical note of Zofia Kossak-Szczucka).

- Consider and, then along with others in the classroom discuss, whether the proposals advanced by the author for the prevention of "demoralization" and "depravity" had any chance of succeeding within the conditions created by the war. What else did the success of this endeavor depend on?
- What actions were undertaken to save the Jewish people? Who carried out these actions and with what level of success? Locate information on this subject, taking advantage of the publications included in the bibliography.

8. Present students with the audio-visual material from the collection of USC Shoah Foundation Institute: testimony 3—*In the Face of the Holocaust. The Perpetrators and Their Collaborators* (part 3: part of testimony by Maria Szarach), and based on this, discuss the following issues:

- Consider the reason why some Poles exposed Jews who were in hiding to the German occupiers.
- Do you agree with the opinion of Maria Szarach that had it not been for these blackmailers, or szmalcowniks, the Germans would have not been able to murder so many people? Explain your position.
- Consider whether the fear, which was fed by Maria Szarach's brother and mother, about the threats lurking on the other side of the wall towards Jews were justified. Discuss this issue in groups, with your colleagues. Look for arguments both for and against, and take into account the knowledge attained throughout the lesson. The discussion on this subject should be carried out using the SWOT analysis method, which deals in weighing the strengths and weaknesses of the situation and determine the resulting opportunities and threats.

In the Face of the Holocaust

Part III. The Perpetrators and Their Collaborators

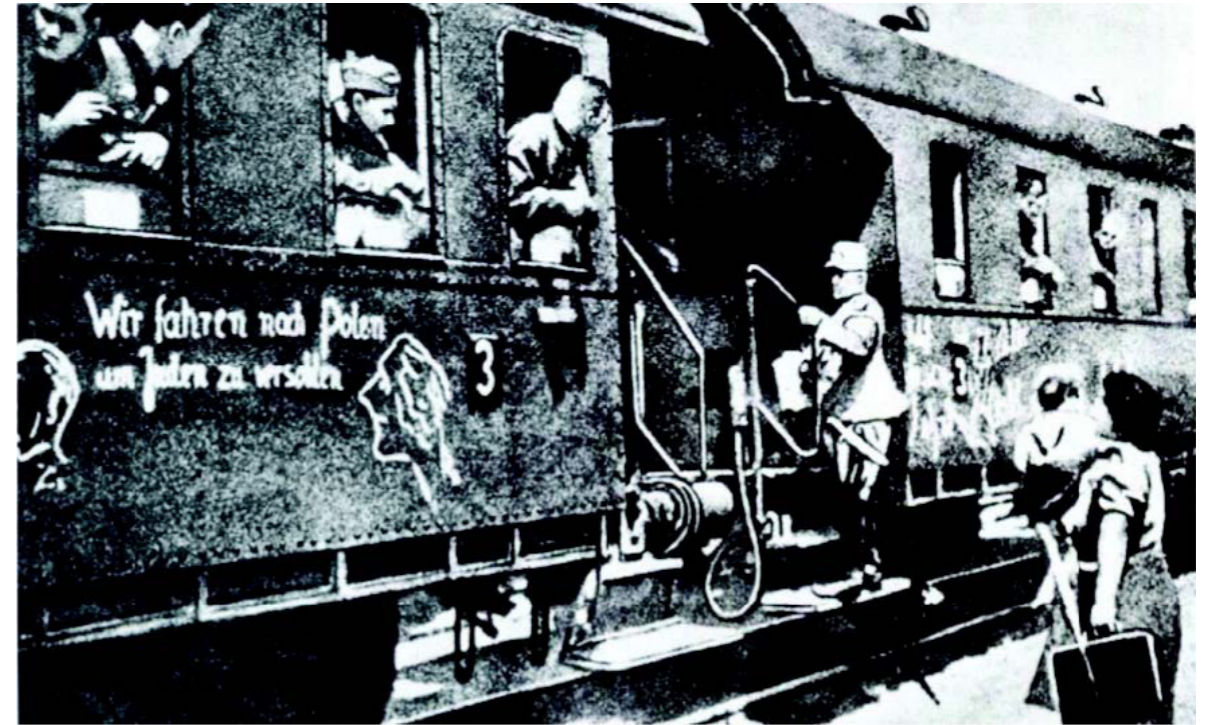
Is it better to stay in the Ghetto, or get into the Aryan side?

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
THREATS	OPPORTUNITIES



Austrian Nazis forcing Jews to wash the streets. The stripping of these peoples' dignity is looked upon by a staring crowd, which includes the young as well as children.

Source: Photo Archives of the United States Holocaust Museum and Memorial, courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration, College Park.



German soldiers leaving by train for war, September 1939. The writing on the side of the rail car says: "We're going to Poland to get even with the Jews."

Source: Jewish Historical Institute Archive in Warsaw.

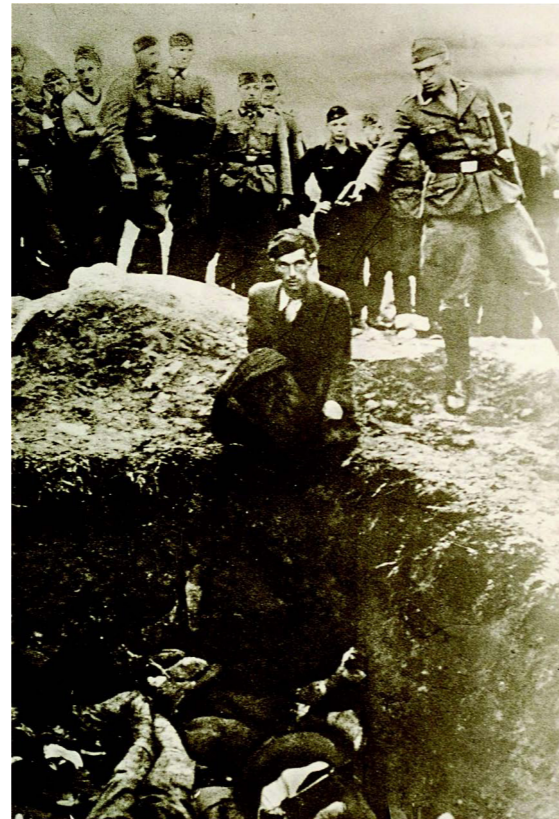


[On the left] Members of a German Police Battalion, which was attached to Einsatzgruppe C, are posing for a photograph at the railway station in Vienna before their departure to Drohobych in the Ukraine.

Source: Yad Vashem, © Yad Vashem Visual Archive, FA-3/4.

[On the right] Jews being shot in a mass murder action in Vinnytsia, the Ukraine, in the summer of 1942.

Source: Photo Archive of the United States Holocaust Museum and Memorial, courtesy of the Library of Congress.



Adolf Eichmann, responsible for the preparation and implementation of the “final solution of the Jewish question,” among others, organizing transports of Jews from various countries of Europe to death camps that were located in the occupied areas of Poland. In fulfilling this duty, he showed exemplary bureaucratic abilities as well as a steel will. He was very scrupulous in completing the goals that were set before him. After the war, he was arrested, then later, in Jerusalem, put on trial and sentenced to death as the “murderer from behind the desk.” The picture shows Eichmann during his trial in 1961.

Source: Photo Archives of the United States Holocaust Museum and Memorial in Washington, D.C.



Tomaszów Mazowiecki, in the autumn of 1939. Cutting off beards was one of the many ways that German troops tormented Jews in the first months of the war. This often happened with the aid of the local Polish population.

Source: Photo Archives of the United States Holocaust Museum and Memorial in Washington, D.C., courtesy of the Institute for National Remembrance in Poland.



Pogrom against the Jews in Kaunas in Lithuania. Members as well as supporters of the Lithuanian Front (a nationalist organization that collaborated with the Germans) from June 25 until 29 in 1941 brutally murdered several hundred Jews from Kaunas (among them many women and children).

Source: Bundesarchiv, B 162/364, photograph 20.

A

Testimony of a German policeman from the 101st Police Battalion on the subject of executing Jews in Józefów near Biłgoraj, which took place in the summer of 1942.

Major Wilhelm Trapp [the leader of the battalion] gave a speech, already at the site where we were to carry out a mass execution and he clearly stated that those who we were to shoot were Jews. During his speech he told the men that they should remember about our wives and children in the fatherland, who have had to endure the air-raid bombings. And to especially remember the fact, that in Germany these bombs had killed many women and children. Thinking about this would make it easier for us to carry out the orders in the approaching action. Major Trapp stated that these orders were not to his liking, but they came from above.

B

A fragment from the testimony by Kurt Möbius, a former police battalion official in Chełmno, dealing with the subject of his motivation in taking part in the mass murder of Jews, given during his trial on November 8, 1961.

I would also like to say that it did not at all occur to me that these orders could be unjust. I know that it is the duty of the police to protect the innocent, but I was then of the conviction that the Jews were not innocent but guilty. I believed in the propaganda, that all Jews were criminals and subhuman as well as the fact that they were the cause of Germany's decline after the First World War. The thought that one should disobey or evade the order to participate in the extermination of the Jews did not, therefore, enter my mind at all.

Source: Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners. Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*, Warsaw 1999, pp. 196 and 167.

A

Fragments of a telegram from Reinhard Heydrich, the commander of the Einsatzgruppen, dealing with the issue of "self-cleansing actions" and the role that the German military and police units were to take part in these events.

Nothing is to be put in the way of the self-cleansing actions of anti-Communist and anti-Jewish circles in the newly occupied areas. On the contrary, without trace they are to be unleashed and, when necessary, to be intensified and to be steered onto the right path, but in such a way that the local "self-defense groups" would not later be able to cite orders or political promises that were made. ... The creation of a permanent unit of the central management of self-defense at the beginning should be avoided; instead it is advisable to instigate local pogroms in a way that has been presented above.

Source: Tomasz Szarota, *U progu zagłady. Zajścia antyżydowskie i pogromy w okupowanej Europie*. Warszawa, Paryż, Amsterdam, Antwerpia, Kowno, Warsaw 2000, pp. 294–295.

B

Testimony of Chaja Finkelsztejn, twelve-year-old Jewish schoolgirl from Białystok, about the anti-Jewish actions in Radziłów, which she gave on October 12, 1945.

My experience during the German occupation... When the Germans arrived, the mass murder of the Jews began. Immediately, they started to persecute the Jews. Right away that morning a delegation of Poles came up to the Germans and asked whether there was any fear of punishment for killing a Jew. The Germans responded that there was no law that protected the Jews and that one could do what one liked with them. The Poles straightaway started to organize pogroms. At night, they attacked Jewish households. They pulled the men from the homes and beat them unconscious. And this was night after night. Then they rounded up people off the street and harassed them without exception. They were led to the river and harassed. ... Next they took the Holy Books from Beit Midrash ordered the old Jews to the river, so that they could put them aboard their barges. They caught the older Jews with beards, cut half the beards off and made caricatures of them, beat them, so that they would grimace. ... The Germans gathered the Jews on the main square and told the Poles "Here are all the Jews, do what you want with them." And then they drove off. The Poles tormented whomever they wanted... We waited in our house. We thought that since we had been released from the market square, they would not threaten us. But they came to get us. Drove us out of our house. Led us to those Jews. We were perhaps a hundred yards from the barn when we heard a shot and saw the smoke. The barn filled with the Jews was set on fire. The boys disappeared. So, then we ran away into the fields. You could hear the screams of the

victims, until the earth trembled. The stench of burning bodies was carried over the fields.

Source: Jewish Historical Institute Archive in Warsaw.

An excerpt of an editorial piece that appeared in the Catholic weekly Prawda [The Truth], which was edited by Zofia Kossak-Szczucka, about the demoralization of the Polish society resulting from participation in the persecution and murder of the Jewish population, spring 1942.

A burning issue is the question of the demoralization and depravity, which the slaughter of the Jews is causing among us. Since it is not just the Lithuanian [Riflemen's Union], the Volksdeutsche, or the Ukrainians who have been exploited for these monstrous executions. In many locations... the local population has voluntarily participated in the massacres. We must oppose such disgraceful behavior with all available means. We must inform people that they are becoming Herod's hired assassins, denounce them in the underground press, call for the boycott of the executioners, threaten, and pronounce harsh judgments against these murderers in the free Polish Republic. For now, nobody has touched this issue; the press has been shamefully silent, and this evil is spreading like an epidemic, the crimes are becoming an addiction. Under no circumstances can we allow this plague of savagery and sadism to infect us.

Source: *Żegota. Rada Pomocy Żydom 1942–1945. Wybór dokumentów*, Warsaw 2002, p. 21.