

HISTORY OF THE JEWS OF EASTERN EUROPE

In 1933 the world's largest Jewish populations were concentrated in Eastern Europe, including Poland, Russia, Lithuania, Latvia, and Ukraine. Those Jews who lived in shtetls had spoken Yiddish, for centuries; it was essentially a Middle German dialect with elements of Hebrew, Aramaic, and also Slavic. They conducted their lives in this language reading Yiddish books and newspapers and attending Yiddish cultural events, so that most of the Jewish immigrants arriving in Northern Rhodesia during the late 1800s and early 1900s spoke Yiddish as their first language.

Amongst the Jews from Eastern Europe were tailors, seamstresses, factory hands, and teachers. Others were accountants, doctors and small-business owners. Some were wealthy; more were poor. Many poorer children left school to work and supplement the family income. But impoverished or affluent, when the Nazis seized power in 1933, all Jews became potential victims and their lives and destinies were changed forever.

HITLER'S GERMANY, THE SECOND WORLD WAR AND THE HOLOCAUST

The Holocaust was the systematic persecution, isolation, and murder of European Jews by the regime of Nazi Germany and its collaborators during World War II. The Nazis defined their policy to eliminate Jews from Europe as the 'Final Solution', which was promulgated in January 1942. At the time of Hitler's rise to power some nine million Jews lived in the countries that would ultimately be occupied by Germany and by the end of World War II a total of more than six million would be dead. Communists, partisans, gypsies, homosexuals, and any religious and other opponents of the Nazi order were also among those hunted down and annihilated.



A transport of Jews from Subcarpathian Rus is taken off the cattle trains and assembled on the ramp at Auschwitz-Birkenau. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration, College Park



Outside a ghetto. The sign reads: Residential area of the Jews. No admittance.



A synagogue in Baden-Baden burns the morning after Kristallnacht. November 9-10, 1938. Stadtmuseum Baden-Baden, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration, College Park



Jews captured by SS and SD troops during the brutal suppression of the Warsaw ghetto uprising are forced to march to the Umschlagplatz for deportation to concentration and death camps. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration, College Park