

WHAT IS THE HOLOCAUST?

The Holocaust is the state-sponsored systematic persecution and annihilation of European Jewry by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945.

Jews were the primary victims -- six million were murdered; Roma and Sinti (Gypsies), people with mental and physical disabilities, and Poles were also targeted for destruction or decimation for racial, ethnic, or national reasons. Millions more, including homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Soviet prisoners of war, and political dissidents, also suffered grievous oppression and death under Nazi Germany. (Source: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum)

Categories of Behavior in the Holocaust

Those involved in the Holocaust can be placed in categories based on their choices and behavior. A person is not necessarily in a category permanently – choices are fluid. For example, an individual could make a choice to be a perpetrator in one instance and make a choice to be a rescuer in another instance.

Perpetrators Those responsible for the crimes, deaths, and acts of hatred. The perpetrators were not beasts but human beings who made moral and ethical choices. They chose to commit evil and violate human rights. Perpetrators were not born with hatred – they were taught hatred.

Collaborators Individuals or groups who worked with the Nazis regardless of whether they shared a common goal or believed in the Nazi racial ideology. Collaborators made the choice to join and assist the Nazis for many reasons. Examples: the Axis powers that enforced anti-Jewish laws, Norwegian police who assisted in deportations of Jews to Auschwitz, villagers in Poland who dug mass graves for bodies after shootings.

Targets Groups and individuals who were targeted for destruction or decimation for racial, ethnic or national reasons. All Jews were targets but not all targets were Jews. According to Nazi ideology, a person was a Jew if they had at least one grandparent who was Jewish, even if a person was a practicing Christian or practiced no religion.

Rescuers & Resisters Individuals or groups risked their own lives by making the choice to save others and stand up against bigotry, prejudice, and hate. Resistance was not always violent. A person could resist by going into hiding or even keeping a diary.

Bystanders The largest group of people during the Holocaust. Bystanders were those who remained silent, passive, and indifferent. It is vital to teach and discuss the consequences of what happens when people make the choice to be a bystander.