The Holocaust: Every Tragedy Leaves Behind a Triumph

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Historical Paper

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From what most of us know, the Holocaust was a hate crime committed by the German leader Adolf Hitler before and during World War II. The main group that was targeted were the Jews, but they also fixated on Gypsies, Non-Jewish Poles civilians, other Slavic groups, physically and mentally disabled, Jehovah’s Witness, and members of the LGBTQ community. ¹ All of these different groups have dramatically different death rates: Jews had around 6 million, Gypsies had 196,000-220,000, Non-Jewish Polish had 1.8 million, Jehovah's Witness had 1,900, LGBTQ had approximately 1,000 and, people with mental or physical disabilities had up to 250,000 killed. The Holocaust is remembered as a tragedy due to the significant amount of death associated with it; however, it was also a triumph because the survivors made memoirs, museums were constructed, lessons learned, and our future generations can remember this tragic event.

Many people have asked this question, “Why was it mainly the Jews?” Even right now, that answer still is not very clear, but there are many factors on why Adolf Hitler did what he did. The first one is the religious conflict: a conflict between Judaism and Catholicism had been in Europe for a long time during this time period which had created an atmosphere of anti-semitism from the beginning. Secondly, Jewish Economic Power: At this point in history, the Jews had a lot of economic power when World War I broke out, and an array of financial institutions, banks, and large companies were ran mostly by Jewish citizens. Hitler thought that the Jews were to blame for Germany’s economic downfall which was primarily from the recent war. ² Then, there were some conspiracy theories: Hitler thought that the Jews were planning to

control the world and eventually stab the Germans in the back whenever needed. Finally, anti-semitism in Vienna: As a young boy, Hitler’s hometown was Vienna, Austria. In Vienna, anti-semitism was very prevalent compared to everywhere else, so people think one of the reasons of the discrimination against Jews and many other different groups could have been brought up and learned at an early age for him.\(^3\)

One question many people have is how did the Holocaust, this tragic event, even begin. The Holocaust did not happen overnight, it began in the previous decades of the early 1900’s in Europe concerning religious conflicts and racial ideologies. Then came the racial ideology, meaning that the Germans thought they were the “superior race,” so that means they saw the Jews, Gypsies and even the handicapped, as a serious biological threat to the purity of the Aryan (German) race, also there was hatred being thrown at the Jews from racial slurs to propaganda being printed everywhere.\(^4\) Arguably, posters were the easiest to make, but the fastest way to get the information out there to the citizens of Germany, which primarily made them want the Jews to leave the country even more. There were also illustrations hung on big storefront windows, all the way to newspaper articles each day.

While that was happening, more segregation laws for the Jews were being made such as taking their high-paying jobs away from them and soon enough they became second-class citizens, not from their affiliation or religion, but based off of who their grandparents were, meaning if their grandparents or even just one of them were Jewish, that makes the grandchildren Jewish too no matter what. Then, the segregation had gotten worse, the Jews could not go to

\(^3\) “Why Did Hitler Hate the Jews?,” History on the Net, https://www.historyonthenet.com/why-did-hitler-hate-jews
public schools, cinemas, vacation resorts, and could not even walk in certain areas of Germany's
cities. In November 1938, the Nazis had a riot program organized to burn down synagogues,
arrest male Jews, vandalized their homes and businesses, also killing some individuals, Jews
were also forced to wear yellow stars to show that they were inferior.5

Another side to the tragedy were the numerous concentration camps created to house
these inferior groups. Certain people did not even meet the criteria that the Nazis had already set,
like age and if they were compatible. Therefore elderly, children, and the people with disabilities
were instantly killed. But there were also the struggles for victims who passed the criteria had
went through, as we all know, were the worst part of the Holocaust. They worked so hard doing
basically nothing beneficial the whole day, like in the story Night by Elie Wiesel, he mentioned
that the SS guards would make them pick up huge rocks and bring them to the other side of the
room.6 They were fed very un-nutritious foods like soups, that by the end of all of this was near
to hot water. “The food there was very basic, the break was made from half saw dust and half
wheat, we would spend time pulling out chips of saw dust from our pieces.” ~ a survivor from
Chateau de Chabannes Children's House.7 Most of the terror came from roll call right in the
morning, which they were forced to stand still no matter what obstacles were in the way like
rain, snow, cold, or even knowing that an SS man, guard, or kapo is going to suddenly strike at
them. Some days they would be randomly moved to a different camp in trains. “Later we were
moved and driven into railway wagons - the sort of transport for animals - which were part of a

5 “The ‘Night of Broken Glass,’” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Accessed February 20,
7 Yad Vashem, (2016, April 19,) “Holocaust Survivor Describes Food at Chateau de Chabannes
Children's Home,” [Video file.] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=acCm7Tgxy6M
long train. Some of the wagons were open-topped and some were closed.” ~Agnes, an 11 year-old from Czechoslovakia.⁸

On top of all of that, they usually stood in that same position for hours and hours at a time. While the Jews were being broken down (physically + mentally) they also were given false hope. All over there were signs posted that said “Work will set you free” as if, if they worked hard enough, they would get out of there faster. Which made them want to work harder. This is exactly what the Nazis wanted because the food they were eating was not replacing the calories they used, therefore they would starve to death faster.

It also came down to the things that happened after the war. There was a woman who was a victim in the Holocaust named Sonia Reich, who was a Holocaust runaway from 1942-1945, all alone but had tried to start her life after the fact. She had a husband and a son named Howard, Howard noticed his mother doing weird things like sitting in her room in the pitch black, and never sleeping, when he was younger he thought this was normal, but as he got older he realized it got worse. What they didn’t know is that she was suffering from the undetected symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. “The past and the present are totally intermingled in her consciousness and she can't separate them. She’s taken so much time to suppress the traumas that she can’t run her own life anymore.” ~ Howard.⁹ After all of this, even 5-10 years after the Holocaust, many of the Jews would still relive the moments of it because of PTSD.

The most infuriating fact about the Holocaust is, some people do not even believe it happened! It all started from the Nazis when they would, themselves, under-exaggerate the

things they did to the Jews. They would use words like special treatment to mask the actual meaning to what they were saying. They also tried to conceal the crimes they had committed when they knew the Holocaust was coming to an end by destroying papers and documents they had kept track of. Some of the deniers start off by reading a speech given at the time, for example Himmler's speech in which he is explaining that the Jews will be exterminated, some deniers have said that there was a “translation error” in which in his speech when he had said extermination, he had said or meant to really say deportation.

While it is obvious that this is a very tragic event, there is always something good that comes out of any bad. One example of a triumphant thing that emerged from this event are the survivors memoirs. Were they able to tell us the correct information of what actually happened, we so will not have history repeat itself. (Also the fact that we have many museums and statues built for the survivors for people to learn what happened.)

Memoirs from the victims helped us understand what and why certain things happened. Lewkowicz is the last Holocaust survivor of the Little Fortress at Terezin; a small prison inside a huge concentration camp where more than 30,000 Jews had died and 85,000 had been deported to death camps.\textsuperscript{10} He finally published his memoir twenty-five years after writing it. Lewkowicz wrote, "Suddenly I threw myself on the ground in front of the officer who seemed to be the most senior. Clamping my hands together as if praying, I cried out, ‘Please sir, please shoot me.”\textsuperscript{11}

There were also Eva Mozes Kor and Miriam Mozes who were twin survivors from the very lethal experiments that Josef Mengele had conducted on many twins during the Holocaust. When


they first arrived to Auschwitz their mother was holding their hands until an SS guard yelled “Twins! Twins!” and she asked if that was a good thing. The SS guard nodded and their mother had confirmed they were twins. As the SS guard pulled them away they screamed and looked back at their mother, and never saw her after that. It was very hard to be living there, the first time she went to the end of the children's barrack she had seen a pile of dead bodies. “The first time I went to use the latrine located at the end of the children's barrack, I was greeted by the scattered corpses of several children lying on the ground. I think that image will stay with me forever. It was there that I made a silent pledge- a vow to make sure the Miriam and I didn’t end up on that filthy floor.” ~Eva

She and Miriam were put through many brutal experiments twins would go through. Eva described, “I was given five injections. That evening I had developed an extremely high fever. I was trembling. My arms and legs were swollen, huge size. Mengele, Dr. Konig and three others came in the next morning. They looked at my fever chart, and Dr, Mengele said, laughingly, ‘Too bad she’s so young. She has only two weeks to live…”

Eva later said there were a pair of Gypsy twins sewn back to back because Mengele was attempting to create a siamese twin by connecting blood vessels and organs. They screamed all day and all night, and three days later, they died. Eva and Miriam were the first twins shown in the footage the Soviets had taken just to ease into the questions - showing the horrors of the Holocaust. Eva and Miriam were Mengele’s favorite subjects, he let them keep their hair, wear their own clothing and get extra food rations. As long as they were healthy, Mengele wanted

them alive. It is amazing that Eva and Miriam survived Auschwitz and it is wonderful they got to share their experience about what really happened, so people can know the real truth and we can all learn from this experiment.

Another triumph would be the museums that were made in memory the victims. There are many museums, but the majority are in France. Holocaust museums have so many exhibits with so many different topics you could learn from, from telling you what genocide means and how to look out for it, to the remembrance to all Holocaust victims. They help us learn about what we could do to not repeat itself over again. From what you can seen from many videos, these Holocaust museums do a great job at making the scenery around you and the lighting making you feel the same emotions as the victims did, that will make people understand more.

The awareness of this tragic event occurred very slowly throughout the world. Pictures of the concentration camps were put on the United States and British newspapers, and people were stunned to see something so graphic on a public handout. There were a few people who believed it was real and wanted something done about it, but there were also some people who thought there were some rumors going around and did not believe something like this was true. People thought it was so insane that they had a Soviet soldier who went to a concentration camp to see for himself, and he had seen both piles of dead bodies and human bones. As the world started to fully figure out what was going on, the Allied and Soviet troops were catching up to Axis powers. This was the starting point of the last stage of the Holocaust which were the death marches. The marches started during the summer of 1944; there were many Jews that died during these marches, but most of them died from hypothermia and illness. These marches lasted until
the literal last moments of the Holocaust, and approximately a quarter of a million victims were killed in this time period.

The Holocaust is remembered as a tragedy due to the significant amount of death associated with it; however, it had been a triumph because the survivors made memoirs, museums were constructed, lessons learned, and our future generations can remember this tragic event. The Holocaust was a large scale event that had affected many families, and even the survivors’ futures because of what they had endured during their time in the camps. The Holocaust had its tragedies: why were these groups targeted, the Nazis giving false hope to these prisoners of being set free, the struggles each victim went through to just stay alive, and the obstacles and trauma they had to endure. However, there were also several triumphs that came with this event as well. Many survivors came out with memoirs to tell their story to teach us what truly happened. Furthermore, with these memoirs and museums we will learn to not repeat history with an event like this: therefore, even though the Holocaust was a tragic event, there are still triumphs in everything.
Annotated Bibliography

Primary


I used a story and a quote for a person who actually went through the experience of having PTSD. It helped me understand what it is really like to have something like that.


This source gave me more information for the paper about some very fatal experiments that twins would go through. It also gave me some primary sources as there were quotes about what the twins had to say and what they experience.


This source talked more about how Br. Eberl would order Jews to do experiments on and he would order so many that the cams were literally running out of Jews to do work. It also talked about how before entering the gas chambers, the men and women gave the Nazis their valuables.

This source was about how many Jews they had killed just for when a German soldier or an ethnic German would get killed or hurt. This topic helped me understand that the Jews were more just picked and killed rather than sorted out. The author of this topic is Boehme, and they know a lot about this topic and this document because they were the Commanding General Serbia, and they witnessed it.


I feel like this source helps me with this project because it tells me how the people felt. And by people I mean I get to find out how the ‘workers’ felt and how the victims felt. This document showed that the victims were terrified, scared and were in a lot of pain. But this document also showed that the ‘workers’ weren’t really about what they had to do either. Finally, it tells you how a gas chamber exactly works.


This source talks about what happened specifically in the camp of Treblinka. It said that the guard there was Kurt Franz, who originally was a Ukrainian guard. This document also mentioned the uprising of the Holocaust in August of 1943. There were approximately 80 men that came to that camp by train each day, but sometimes 2 trains came and there would be 160 men.


This entry talks about all of it. It talks about the things happening before and after each step that the Germans took to get rid of them, talks about the process and also talks about the aftermath of it all. This source does a very good job of explaining everything in a non-bias way.

This source says that the Nazis started to think about how the Jews were “ruining” their population approximately 30 years before the war actually took place. It also talks about how the Holocaust happened in the first place, like all of the factors.

Tilles, Daniel, and John Richardson. *EBSCOhost*,

This source talks more about how the Pole’s had suffered also. This source almost tries to persuade you that the Pole’s had more suffering and herois than the Jews did. It states that there were polls in Poland after the Holocaust and they asked people who they thought more victimized, the Pole’s or the Jews.

Secondary


I used this source to provide more information about the “Holocaust deniers” and why they feel the way they do. It helped me also know what their reasons were so I could try to understand and put it into my own words.

“Daily Life,” *The Holocaust Explained*,
https://www.theholocaustexplained.org/the-camps/daily-life/, Accessed Date February 25, 2019

This source gives a lot of the quotes that I felt the need to add. They help the things I am explaining. They also helped me understand more and expand on the topics I am mentioning so I can give the reader a clearer picture.


This entry talks about all of it. It talks about the things happening before and after each step that the Germans took to get rid of them, talks about the process and also
talks about the aftermath of it all. This source does a very good job of explaining everything in a non-bias way.


This source talks about the day in the life of a Jew. It talks about what really happened and how they were really treated. It also talks about what happened when they stopped to just stretch and when they wanted some water. This source talks about the torture they went through everyday.


This source talks about how Hitler started to put restrictions on the Jews and why he started to separate them from the Germans in the first place. It talks about the steps he took to continue to do this. First he created a law that even if your half German, it still means you’re half Jew, which he took that citizenship away from them. Then he created one stating what or who makes a Jew.


In the beginning, this source talks about briefly about how many of them died. The Holocaust was 90% successful of the “elimination” of Jews. After the Holocaust, ⅔ of the European Jews were dead and ⅓ of the worlds Jews were dead. Germans took them out of their houses into ghettos, then concentration camps.


The first paragraphs of this source talks about how and why we associate Auschwitz to the burning, killing and the starvation of East European Jews. It also says that there were mostly Western European.


I used this information to find out reasons why it was the Jews more specifically. It lets me get into detail. Helps me understand why he did it so I can base that off for the rest of my paper.

Goldberg, Dan, “Memoir of a Survivor Who Begged a Nazi to Shoot Him,” *Haaretz.com*, August 2019, Accessed Date, January, 2019,
This source talks about how a man wrote his memoir. The memoir adds more detail about what happened. I can also get into detail on how he produced it and how that made people feel.


This source helped me figure out and be able to get into detail about how the Nazis started to get defeated, and the actions they started to take. It also gets into detail about how the survivors are doing now and