

The History of the Holocaust and Eyewitness Accounts

"The Holocaust - a unique evil which cannot simply be consigned to the past and forgotten." - UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan



During World War II, the Nazis killed nearly six million European Jews in what is known as the Holocaust. This genocide stemmed from the Nazis' desire to annihilate the Jewish population, rooted in their anti-Semitic ideology influenced by centuries of hostility towards Jews, modern racism, and nationalism.

Throughout history, Jews in Europe faced discrimination and persecution for religious reasons, often living in segregated areas or ghettos. They were scapegoated during riots and, in Russia, subjected to violence in the late 19th century. Racial ideologies of the 19th century further alienated Jews, considering them a different race.

After Germany's defeat in World War I in 1918, some extremists blamed Jews for various issues, including economic exploitation and links to communism. However, there was no direct path from Nazi anti-Semitism to the Holocaust.

Hitler's writings and speeches expressed his hatred for Jews and their perceived incompatibility with Germany, but mass killings were not initially planned. It was

only during World War II that genocide became a consideration, as earlier plans for deporting Jews became unfeasible due to the war's circumstances. Therefore, the Holocaust resulted from a series of decisions influenced by evolving circumstances.



"Persecution of Jews by the Crusaders."

Illustration from: Jacques Basnage de Beauval's "The History of the Jews, from the Time of Jesus Christ to the Present Day."

Between 1933 and 1939, nationalists made life even more challenging for Jews in Germany. Jews became victims of discrimination, isolation, looting, and violence. Sometimes, the Nazis killed Jews, but not systematically. At that time, the main goal of the Nazis was to expel Jews from Germany, allowing them to emigrate.

In 1935, the Nuremberg Laws came into effect. Jews lost their citizenship, officially making them second-class citizens with fewer rights than non-Jews, which encouraged them to emigrate.



The Munich Synagogue - one of approximately 1500 synagogues destroyed or damaged during November 9-10, 1935.

Eddie Jaku calls himself “the happiest person on Earth.” He vowed to smile every day after surviving the horrors of World War II as a German Jew.

Here are some memories from 99-year-old Eddie:

"I was a proud young German. On November 9, 1938, I returned from a boarding school where I had lived under a false name for five years because I was Jewish. I lived far from my family as an orphan, receiving an education under pressure and fear that someone would discover I wasn't Walter Schlaff, the name I pretended to be. I was in great danger.

On that fateful night, I returned home, but my family was gone; they were in hiding, and I was alone. At 5 o'clock in the morning on November 10, 1938, 10 Nazis invaded our house. I'm ashamed to say what they did to me; it was so terrible that I told myself, 'Eddie, today you will die.' Later, they forced me to watch the destruction of our two-hundred-year-old house and the killing of my beloved dog Lulu, who tried to protect me.

I lost my dignity, my freedom, and my faith in humanity. I lost what I lived for. I was a person and became nothing."

In 1938, the Nazis organized pogroms throughout Germany: Kristallnacht or the Night of Broken Glass. Jewish houses, synagogues, and shops were destroyed, and thousands of Jews were sent to concentration camps.

"At that time, none of us understood that Kristallnacht was only the beginning of the nightmare, which would later become even worse. On that day, I was brought to my first concentration camp, Buchenwald, where I spent about five months with 11,000 Jews." - says Eddie Jaku

According to American researchers' estimates, the Nazis managed to create around 7,000 camps and ghettos.



Eddie Jaku on TED Talk

Today, at the remarkable age of 100, Eddie Jaku finds solace in the embrace of his beloved wife and cherished family. His heart swells with pride as he looks upon his two devoted sons, along with a multitude of grandchildren and great-grandchildren. *Eddie's life's journey has become a living testament to the pursuit of happiness,*

and he generously shares this profound wisdom with those around him.

In reflection, it is sobering to acknowledge that the Holocaust left an indelible mark, inflicting unimaginable suffering upon 15 to 20 million souls, as estimated by American researchers.

These tragic events serve as a poignant reminder, not only condemning the heinous acts of the Nazi regime but also as a solemn lesson on the catastrophic consequences of discriminating against people based on their race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or political beliefs.

Sources:

Eddie Jackie's memoirs: <https://youtu.be/scCvi3vY4jQ>