



## WEEK 3

# Hitler's Foreign Policy and Initiating Another World War: Why did Germany Invade Poland and What Unfolded?

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## Week 1 Unit Learning Outcomes

**ULO 1.** evaluate in a reflective and critical manner the consequences of racism and prejudice

**ULO 3.** synthesise core historiographical debates on how and why the Holocaust occurred

**ULO 4.** recognise important linkages between the Second World War and the Holocaust, and question Hitler's role in these events

## Introduction

This learning module is divided into three sections. The first section focuses on Hitler's foreign policy prior to the Second World War. It examines the relationship between Germany's invasion of Poland in September 1939 (which marked the outbreak of war) and the Holocaust (which occurred during wartime). It asks if the invasion of Poland should be seen as the start of implementing a longstanding plan to exterminate Europe's Jews, or whether the conflict was launched by Hitler for more "conventional" reasons associated with war and conquest.

Section 2 explores the anti-Jewish policies that were enacted in occupied Poland, including ghettoisation and initial attempts to deport Jews further east. It remains a matter of conjecture whether these measures were improvised or part of an overarching, longer-term plan to exterminate Jews.

Section 3 looks at the wider demographic program of "ethnic cleansing" that the Nazis undertook in occupied western Poland. It saw the forced two-way movement of millions of people, in a process known as "Germanisation." Jews were only one part of a much wider process of "cleansing" that also included large numbers of ethnic Poles being removed from territory incorporated into the Greater German Reich so that ethnic Germans from across central and eastern Europe could be relocated. Jews and ethnic Poles all were treated very harshly by the German occupying forces. Even so, Jews were treated differently to their ethnic Polish counterparts and this raises an important question: in occupied Poland between late 1939 and mid-1941, were Jews simply one

component of a much wider demographic project or were they already being singled out for ghettoisation as a first step toward genocide?

After completing this learning module you will continue to evaluate, in a reflective and critical manner, the consequences of racism and prejudice. Furthermore, you will begin to recognise important linkages between the Second World War and the Holocaust, and question Hitler's role in these events. You also will continue to grapple with and synthesise a core historiographical debate on how and why the Holocaust occurred.

## **Section 1. Hitler's Prewar Foreign Policy and Germany's Invasion of Poland**

Had the effects of anti-Jewish policy been confined to Germany alone, the terrible consequences for Germany's Jews notwithstanding, the Holocaust as we understand it – the extermination of six million European Jews – would not have occurred. How was Adolf Hitler able to put into place anti-Jewish measures beyond Germany's borders? The short answer is that, through a series of diplomatic triumphs and military conquests, Hitler extended German rule over most of continental Europe. At the peak of its power Nazi Germany controlled the fate of most of European Jewry.

There is a clear correlation between Germany's engagement in war and the Nazis' escalating persecution of Jews. How should this be interpreted?

Apart from anything else, there is a simple equation: the greater the territory under Nazi domination, the larger the number of Jews subject to Nazi rule. As war became more ferocious so, too, did the level of genocidal violence towards Jews. This has led some historians to ask whether Germany went to war specifically to exterminate Europe's Jews. Was his pathological hatred of Jews a, or perhaps even the, key motivating factor for why Hitler embarked on war?

This first section of the learning module examines the debate surrounding Nazi Germany's foreign policy aims and their implications for Europe's Jews by focusing on Hitler's decision to invade Poland in September 1939. It discusses whether:

- Hitler's ideology shaped the development of German foreign policy;
- the extermination of European Jewry was a, or perhaps even the, key motivation behind Hitler's decision to go to war;
- the "Final Solution" (i.e. the mass extermination of Jews by gassing in purposely built death camps) was an unforeseen "by-product" of German military success, which resulted in millions of European Jews coming under direct Nazi control in occupied territories, or;
- the extermination of Jews was simply part of a broader program of Nazi "ethnic cleansing" and enormous two-way population transfers throughout eastern Europe.



*And so another world war begins. Wehrmacht (German Army) soldiers dismantle a Polish border post on 1 September 1939. Nazi Germany's invasion of its eastern neighbour Poland signalled the start of the Second World War, which would last more than five years until 1945.*

Source: "Images -- The Military, Foreign Policy, and War," GHDI.

[http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_imglist.cfm?startrow=21&sub\\_id=196&section\\_id=13](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_imglist.cfm?startrow=21&sub_id=196&section_id=13)

[Accessed 1 March 2017]

### **a) German Foreign Policy: An Extension of Nazi Ideology?**

When Hitler came to power in 1933, he seemed to have quite clear ideas about what Germany's relationship to other states should be. You are already familiar with many of Hitler's foreign policy aims including:

- revenge for the humiliation of Germany's loss in the First World War;
- revocation of the Treaty of Versailles, especially restoring lost territory to truncated Germany and increasing the size of Germany's army and munitions;
- destruction of Soviet communism (through a policy of "anti-Bolshevism");
- racial struggle against "non-Aryans," particularly Jews and eastern European Slavs whom the Nazis viewed as "sub-humans" (*Untermenschen*);
- German expansion in "the East" as embodied in the concept of *Lebensraum* ("living space");
- placating the concerns of the international community by taking care not to engage too openly in measures that could be considered threatening (as you work through this week's topic you will notice that this became less important as Hitler's confidence and power increased).



**READING EXCERPT:** PMH Bell, in "[Nazi Doctrine and German Foreign Policy](#)," observes that many of the above points were explicitly spelled out in Hitler's writings.

Bell comments on the close interdependence of domestic and foreign policy. Policies pursued within Germany were meant to serve German foreign policy objectives. Bell emphasises the importance of Hitler's *völkisch* ideas and his obsessive antisemitism. A recurring theme in Hitler's writings was the notion of *Drang nach Osten* (the drive towards expansion in the East) against Germany's racial enemies. Notice also Hitler's attempt in the early period of Nazi rule to disown some of the more explicit statements in *Mein Kampf* in an attempt to make his régime appear more acceptable to the international community.

While suggesting that Hitler's foreign policy aims flow quite logically from his writings and are easily identified, Bell also argues that it simply is not possible to extrapolate from Hitler's writings to explain how future events unfolded. Bell asks whether contemporary European politicians could take Hitler at his word. Nazi foreign policy did not appear radically different from that pursued by Germany immediately prior to the outbreak of the First World War.

Importantly, Bell cautions against assuming too strong a link between Hitler's expressed will and the actual outcomes of his policies. This is partly because of the impossibility of any individual ever successfully achieving all of his or her goals, but also because Hitler was deceitful about his ambitions. Hitler's failure to pursue an agreement with Britain, while concluding an agreement with the Soviet Union in August 1939 (the Nazi-Soviet Pact), illustrates both his flexibility and the unpredictability of his actions. Hitler's actions often contradicted his statements of intent. Nonetheless, Bell concludes that it is naive to separate (racial) ideology from the formulation of foreign policy in Hitler's Germany.

### **b) The Foreign Policy Background**

You are not required to develop expert knowledge and understanding of Nazi foreign policy for the purposes of this unit. Nonetheless, you need to understand the key principles behind German expansionism under Hitler.

The table below lists key developments in Nazi foreign policy leading up to the outbreak of the Second World War.

<b>MILESTONES IN NAZI FOREIGN POLICY</b>	
October 1933	Germany withdraws from the League of Nations
1935	Plebiscite in the Saar results in the Saarland voting to join Germany, meaning a wealthy mineral area came under Nazi control. This helps rearmament.
March 1936	Germany reoccupies the Rhineland.
September 1936	Rearmament program commences as part of the development of the Nazis' Four Year Plan.
1936	Consolidation of the Rome-Berlin axis led by Mussolini and Hitler.
March 1938	German <i>Anschluss</i> (annexation) of Austria.
September 1938	The Munich Agreement. Joint Anglo-German declaration that Nazi Germany's ambitions had been met after the Sudetenland was taken from Czechoslovakia and handed over to neighbouring Germany.
March 1939	Hitler renounces the Munich Agreement and invades the remainder of Czechoslovakia.
March- April 1939	Britain and France sign a pact of mutual protection with Poland.
August 1939	The Nazi-Soviet Pact.
September 1939	Nazi invasion of Poland. Britain and France declare war on Germany. The Soviet Union invades Poland.

### c) Race, Antisemitism and War

As you can imagine, historians disagree about the relationship between Hitler's racial ideology and his foreign policy. Some emphasise the single-minded nature of Hitler's determination, from the 1920s onwards, to go to war as soon as it was viable. These scholars typically contend that the main purpose of Hitler's war was to fulfil

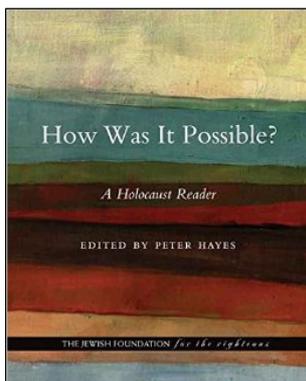
Germany's racial mission.

German historian Eberhard Jäckel, in his influential study translated into English as *Hitler in History*, puts this position succinctly:

Hitler's ultimate goal was the establishment of a greater Germany than had ever existed before in history. The way to this greater Germany was a war of conquest fought mainly at the expense of Soviet Russia. It was in the east of the European continent that the German nation was to gain living space (*Lebensraum*) for generations to come. This expansion would in turn provide the foundations for Germany's renewed position as a world power. Militarily the war would be easy because Germany would be opposed only by a disorganized country of Jewish Bolsheviks and incompetent Slavs.<sup>1</sup>

While Jäckel argues that Hitler followed a clear plan in order to achieve ideologically preordained goals, he characterises Hitler's scheme in very broad terms. Jäckel further writes: "Hitler drew Germany into war; he had a plan and carried it out."<sup>2</sup> The purpose of Hitler's war, according to Jäckel, was to assert the primacy of the German race.

Lucy Dawidowicz is equally convinced that Hitler planned a racial war. Compared to Jäckel's interpretation, however, Dawidowicz's analysis is far more specific about the implications of such a war for Europe's Jews. She concludes that the destruction of European Jewry was Hitler's main motivation for embarking on war. Indeed, Dawidowicz is so convinced the antisemitism shaped Hitler's foreign policy objectives that she entitled her book *The War against the Jews*.<sup>3</sup>

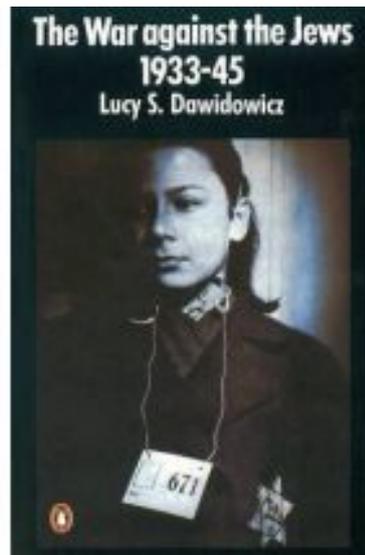


**PRESCRIBED TEXT:** Please read "Hitler's Reichstag Speech, January 30, 1939," p. 173. Both Dawidowicz and Jäckel stress the significance of this speech in considering Hitler's motivations for war against Poland.

<sup>1</sup> Eberhard Jäckel, *Hitler in History*. (Brandeis University Press, Hanover, 1984). pp. 24-25.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.* p. 43.

<sup>3</sup> Lucy Dawidowicz, *The War against the Jews, 1933-45*, Tenth Anniversary Edition. (Penguin, London, 1990)



*Front cover of Penguin's 10th anniversary edition of Dawidowicz's highly influential account.*

Source: "The War Against the Jews, 1933-45 (Paperback)," Book Depository UK.

<http://www.bookdepository.co.uk/War-Against-Jews-1933-45-Lucy-Dawidowicz/9780140134636>

[Accessed 1 March 2017]

Pointing out a strong correlation between Hitler's foreign policy becoming increasingly belligerent and the treatment of Jews becoming harsher, Dawidowicz asserts: "War, the Jews and racial utopia were all interrelated in Hitler's mind."<sup>4</sup> She argues that Hitler's intentions clearly were to embark on a campaign of destruction against Europe's Jews. Dawidowicz's most important and telling point is that war provided a pretext under which normal moral convictions could be suspended. Under conditions of war, atrocities could be committed that otherwise were completely unthinkable. In this sense, to quote Dawidowicz: "War, the Jews and racial utopia were all inter-related in Hitler's mind."<sup>5</sup>

Dawidowicz's position typifies the intentionalist school of historical interpretation mentioned in the previous learning module. Intentionalists emphasise the planned and ideologically-determined nature of the Holocaust. For intentionalists, the Holocaust was the direct outcome of Hitler's intentions that were apparent from the beginning of his political career.

Despite the attractiveness and simplicity of the intentionalist position, it can result in some curious distortions of evidence. In his very useful study *The Holocaust in History*, the esteemed historian Michael Marrus suggests that a detailed examination of the events surrounding the German invasion of Poland does not support the theory that the war against Poland was specifically directed against Poland's Jews.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *ibid.* p. 126.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Michael Marrus, *The Holocaust in History*. (Penguin, London, 1987). pp. 58-59.

Marrus agrees that the war was racially motivated, but he points out that the Nazis initially directed their efforts far more strongly against the majority ethnic Polish population rather than Poland's large minority of Jews. Marrus draws a distinction between the planning behind the later invasion of the Soviet Union, which certainly incorporated specific measures to be taken against Jews, and the invasion of Poland. According to Marrus, instead of being guided by some master plan, Nazi actions against Jews following the outbreak of war and occupation of Poland were improvised and inconsistent in their execution.

It remains questionable whether there is sufficient evidence of the step-by-step implementation of a planned strategy to wage a war alongside a central program to destroy Jews. While no one can deny the broad racial thrust of Hitler's foreign policy, what remains less certain is whether Hitler's antisemitism was the primary motivation for war.



*Heinrich Himmler, as head of the SS the chief architect of the "Final Solution," walking with Hitler in 1944.*

Source: "Entstehung und Entwicklung der Nazi-Diktatur in Deutschland, Geschichtsthemen."  
[http://www.geschichtsthemen.de/nazidiktatur03\\_krieg.htm](http://www.geschichtsthemen.de/nazidiktatur03_krieg.htm) [Accessed 1 March 2017]

### d) "Conventional" Reasons for Nazi Invasion of Poland

Historians continue to grapple with the relative importance of foreign policy and (racial) ideology in shaping the Nazi decision to invade Poland. Accordingly, increasingly sophisticated arguments have been developed. The views of prominent historians Ian Kershaw, Jürgen Förster, and Christopher Browning among others differ quite significantly from the intentionalist interpretations presented by the likes of Jäckel and Dawidowicz – and, in some important respects, they differ from each other, too.

#### Ian Kershaw: The Primacy of Foreign Policy

According to Sir Ian Kershaw, what is most striking about a speech given by Hitler on 23 May 1939, outlining his thinking on the imminent invasion of Poland, is the distinct lack of reference to Jews.



**Sir Ian Kershaw, FBA, one of the world's leading authorities on Hitler and Nazism.**

Source: "Ian Kershaw Pictures and Images," Getty Images. <http://www.gettyimages.co.uk/photos/ian-kershaw?excludenudity=true&sort=mostpopular&mediatype=photography&phrase=ian%20kershaw>  
[Accessed 1 March 2017]



**READING EXCERPT:** In the extract "[The Decision to Invade Poland](#)," Kershaw provides a multi-dimensional picture of Hitler's motivations. Notice the parallels with the points put forward in your earlier reading from Bell.

Whereas some familiar themes emerged in Hitler's speech, it included some new developments, too: the idea that German expansion in "the East" would solve its economic problems by creating *Lebensraum*; the importance of German expansion to ensure its status as a world power; and concern that starting a conflict with Poland invariably would embroil Germany in war with France and Britain. All of these themes were consistent with Hitler's general ideology. Acceptance of impending war with Britain and France represented a recognition that Germany would not be able to reach an understanding with Britain as Hitler had previously hoped.

Kershaw paints a picture of a man totally engrossed in the day-to-day minutiae of the diplomacy associated with the escalating international crises that preceded the outbreak of war. Kershaw agrees with Dawidowicz that the reality of the occupation of Poland created new opportunities to commit barbaric acts against racial enemies. Unlike Dawidowicz, however, Kershaw contends that the impetus for persecution came from the SS, not Hitler:

As before the war, Hitler set the tone for the escalating barbarism, approved of it, and sanctioned it. But his own actions provide an inadequate explanation of such escalation. The accelerated disintegration of any semblance of collective government, the undermining of legality by an ever-encroaching and ever-expanding police executive, and the power-ambitions of an increasingly autonomous SS leadership all played important parts. These processes had developed between 1933 and 1939 in the Reich itself. They were now, once the occupation of Poland opened up new vistas, to acquire a new momentum altogether. The planners and organizers, theoreticians of domination, and technocrats of power in the SS leadership saw Poland as an experimental playground. They were granted a *tabula rasa* to undertake more or less what they wanted.<sup>7</sup>

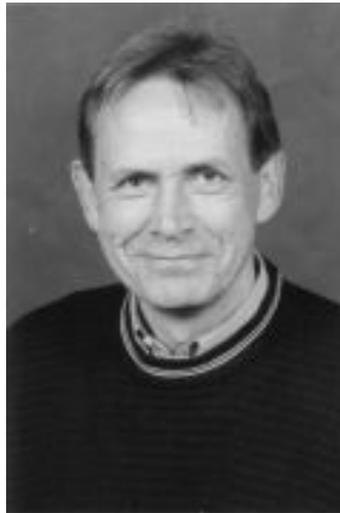
Kershaw concludes that German expansionism and the consequences for relations with other states, and not the desire to exterminate Jews, drove Hitler to invade Poland.

### **Jürgen Förster: Racial Motivations**

Jürgen Förster, a German professor specialising in military history, examines some other speeches by Hitler and reaches a different conclusion about the relationship between antisemitism and planning for war.

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<sup>7</sup> Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: Nemesis, 1936-1945*. (Penguin, London, 2000). pp. 234-35.



*Jürgen Förster.*

Source: "Prof. Dr. Jürgen Förster," Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg.  
[http://portal.uni-freiburg.de/herbert/mitarbeiter/foerster\\_juergen](http://portal.uni-freiburg.de/herbert/mitarbeiter/foerster_juergen) [Accessed 1 March 2017]



- **READING EXCERPT:** In "[\*The Army's Jewish Policies\*](#)," Förster explores how, prior to the invasion of Poland, Hitler conflated the threat posed domestically and internationally by Germany's supposed racial enemies.

While Förster suggests that ideology permeated Hitler's foreign policy aims, in the case of the invasion of Poland Jews were not the sole focus of ideological attention. This point is taken up by one of the world's leading authorities on the Holocaust, the American historian Christopher R. Browning.

### **The Browning Thesis: Beyond "Intentionalism" and "Structuralism/Functionalism"**

Intentionalist and structuralist interpretations polarised Holocaust historiography throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Commencing his 2000 study *Nazi Policy, Jewish Workers, German Killers*, Christopher R. Browning reflected on the intentional/structuralist controversy and observed that, while it was no longer "at the center of Holocaust research, nonetheless a much more nuanced debate over Hitler and the origins of the Final Solution" has emerged in its wake.<sup>8</sup> Interpretations that synthesise the two dominant schools of thought have emerged in the last decade. These studies focus on decision-making in 1941 rather than the events immediately preceding the invasion of Poland two years earlier.

<sup>8</sup> Christopher R. Browning, *Nazi Policy, Jewish Workers, German Killers*. (Cambridge University Press, New York, 2000). p. 1.



**Christopher R. Browning.**

Source: "Kristallnacht Commemoration Lecture by Christopher Browning & Annamaria Orla-Bukowska," Holocaust and Human Rights Education Center.  
<http://www.hhrecny.org//index.php?src=events&srctype=detail&category=Kristallnacht%20Commemoration&refno=114> [Accessed 1 March 2017]

Browning, like Förster, locates the invasion of Poland within a broad racial framework. Browning then considers how racial assumptions shaped the evolution of Nazi occupation policies (a topic we explore later in the next section of this learning module).

Please watch this extract taken from "The Wrong War," the third part of the series *Nazis: A Warning from History*.



## Section 2. Anti-Jewish Policies in Poland

Germany occupied Poland from September 1939 until late 1944/early 1945. As a result of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, after the Wehrmacht conquered the Polish army within just three weeks Germany occupied western Poland and eastern Poland then came under Soviet rule. Thus, before Germany attacked the Soviet Union in June 1941, two million of prewar Poland's three million Jews came directly under Nazi rule. As the late doyen of Holocaust scholars Raul Hilberg observes in his pioneering study *The Destruction of the European Jews*, the overwhelming majority of Polish Jews survived the first phase of German administration before it was extended into eastern Poland following Operation Barbarossa (the attack on the Soviet Union) launched on 22 June 1941.<sup>9</sup> Michael Marrus points out the intriguing fact that, in the eight-year period from January 1933 until the end of 1940 (i.e. from when Hitler seized power in Germany up to more than a year after the German occupation of Poland), the number of European Jews who had perished at the hands of Nazis was "only" 100,000 victims (a comparatively small number when it is considered that roughly six million more Jews would be murdered within the coming four-and-a-half years).<sup>10</sup> Upon reflection, we can now see that what transpired in the first 22 months of Germany's wartime occupation of Poland (September 1939-June 1941) was remarkably docile when compared to what was unleashed against Jews once Hitler attacked the Soviet Union.

It was not until the second half of 1941 that the decimation of Polish ghettos, through disease and starvation, combined with the organised shootings of Jews during the German advance into Soviet territory, resulted in the deaths of over a million Jews in that year. In 1942, when extermination camps had been commissioned and became fully operational, Jewish deaths peaked at over two million in that year. As Browning notes:

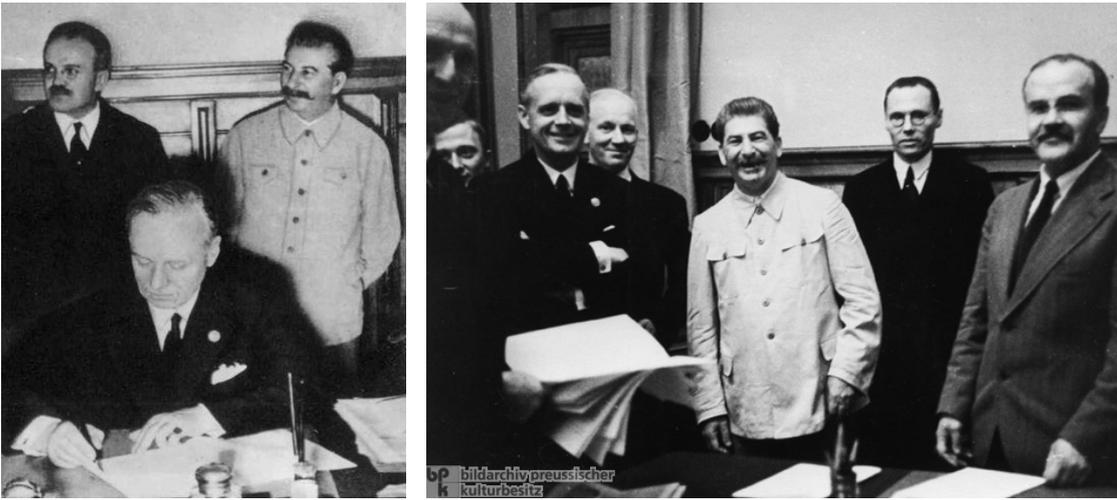
In mid-March 1942 some 75 to 80 percent of all victims of the Holocaust were still alive, while 20 to 25 percent had perished. A mere eleven months later, in mid-February 1943, the percentages were exactly the reverse. At the core of the Holocaust was a short, intense wave of mass murder. The center of gravity of this mass murder was Poland... In short, the German attack on the Jews of Poland was not a gradual or incremental program stretched over a long period of time, but a veritable blitzkrieg.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Rev. and Definitive Edition, Vol. I. (Holmes & Meier, New York, 1985). p. 189.

<sup>10</sup> Marrus, *The Holocaust in History*. p. 55.

<sup>11</sup> Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*. (Penguin, London, 2001). p. xiii.



*German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop signs the Treaty of Non-Aggression between Germany and the Soviet Union (better known as the Nazi-Soviet Pact or the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact) as his Soviet counterpart Molotov and Stalin both look over proceedings, 23 August 1939. The pact included a secret clause in which Stalin agreed not to retaliate when Hitler invaded Poland (less than a fortnight later), and for his “neutrality” the Soviet Union would take control of eastern Poland once the Wehrmacht had obliterated the Polish defence forces. Afterwards, Ribbentrop, Stalin, Molotov and others pose for a photograph to mark the historic occasion when Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union became allies.*

Sources: “The Nazi-Soviet Pact (1939),” The History Guide.

[http://www.historyguide.org/europe/nazi\\_soviet.html](http://www.historyguide.org/europe/nazi_soviet.html) [Accessed 1 March 2017]

“Unterzeichnung des deutsch-sowjetischen Nichtangriffspaktes (23. August 1939),” DGDB.

[http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_image.cfm?image\\_id=1999&language=german](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_image.cfm?image_id=1999&language=german) [Accessed 1 March 2017]



*A Member of the SD (Sicherheitsdienst or Security Service of the SS) cuts the beard of a Warsaw Jew, October 1939. These kinds of scenes of public humiliation and torment were common during the early phases of the German occupation of Poland, but the systematic extermination of Jews did not commence until after the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941.*

Source: “Images - Racial Politics,” GHDI.

[http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_image.cfm?image\\_id=3760](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_image.cfm?image_id=3760) [Accessed 3 March 2017]

### a) The “Heydrich Order,” September 1939

The German attitude towards local Poles – both Jews and non-Jews alike – was made patently clear by the brutal tactics exercised against the civilian Polish population during the invasion. Special SS squads (Einsatzgruppen) attached themselves to the conventional armed forces and committed brutal atrocities against the Polish élite and other civilians, including Jews. Protests by Wehrmacht leaders that such actions contravened established conventions on the treatment of civilians during war resulted in the actions being suspended after only six weeks. The Einsatzgruppen subsequently were disbanded at this time, but would be reformed in early 1941 with devastating consequences (discussed at length later in the unit).



*Reinhard Heydrich, 1942.*

Source: “70 Jahre Wannsee-Konferenz,” Deutsche Welle.

<http://www.dw.de/dw/article/0,,15667975,00.html> [Accessed 1 March 2017]

Plans relating to the relocation of populations in Poland were not finalised until mid-September 1939. Reinhard Heydrich, the deputy to SS chief Heinrich Himmler, was put in charge of administering the relevant orders. Heydrich and Himmler both held multiple responsibilities within the SS – the most violent and ideologically committed organ of the Nazi Party. Although it is unlikely that either Himmler or Heydrich would act other than in accordance with Hitler’s wishes, as the lengthy passage from Kershaw quoted in Section 1 of this module makes clear, they operated with much freedom and were both eager to act in anticipation of their leader’s desires.

“Longer-term” plans were designed on the one hand to accommodate ethnic Germans (*Volksdeutsche*), who were to be “repatriated” from the Soviet-controlled Baltic states (Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia), and on the other hand to shift racially “undesirable”

elements (ethnic Poles and Jews) to settlements in the east. Jews were to be relocated to the Lublin area in the far-east of Nazi-occupied Poland. Heydrich announced these plans on 21 September 1939 in what has become known retrospectively as the so-called “Heydrich Order.”

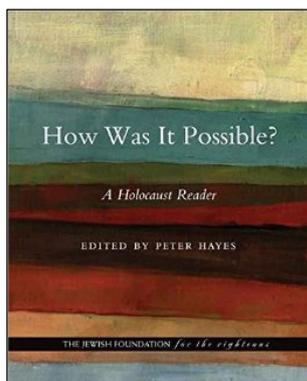


**READING EXCERPT:** Your next extract is a primary document. Retrospectively entitled *“The Heydrich Order”* after its author Reinhard Heydrich, it outlines the policies to be implemented in relation to Jews in newly-occupied Poland.

This order established an agenda for the implementation of policy towards Poland’s Jews. It confirms that, although the intention of Nazi policy was the resettlement of Jews to “the East,” in the meantime temporary “measures” needed to be taken to segregate Jews and to exploit them and their property. A week later, Alfred Rosenberg, Hitler’s chief adviser on racial affairs, recorded in his diary a conversation he had with his *Führer* during which Hitler confided these plans to him.

Despite its authority, the Heydrich blueprint was only implemented in fits and starts. Resettlement plans met with enormous obstacles and were rarely realised. While the policy of concentration was achieved eventually, its implementation occurred slowly and unevenly. The purpose of ghettoisation, furthermore, was strongly contested by competing interest groups within the Nazi administration.

Along with these longer-term plans, Heydrich issued specific orders for the immediate concentration of Jews into cities located in the newly-established Generalgouvernement. Communities of fewer than 500 Jews were to be dissolved throughout Nazi-occupied Poland. In addition, each Jewish community (i.e. ghetto) was required to establish a Jewish Council (Judenrat) made up of prewar community elders. These Judenräte were to be directly responsible for carrying out Nazi policy, including transportation arrangements and the registration of Jews.



**PRESCRIBED TEXT:** Please read Isaiah Trunk’s chapter entitled “Indirect Rule”, pp. 336-42.

## b) Improvising Anti-Jewish Policies

While grand schemes of mass resettlement were being developed, the German occupiers had no specific plans on how to treat Jews in newly-occupied territory. Ultimately, it was decided to concentrate Jews in specific areas where they were separated from other “racial” groups in what were termed “ghettos.” At first, Jews could move back and forth between ghettos and the general community but eventually most ghettos were sealed behind walls. After the invasion of the Soviet Union, ghettos created in the newly-occupied territories were sealed from their inception.

### Preliminary Measures

Before ghettoisation was formalised, a series of “preliminary” measures paved the way for the control and imprisonment of Jews. In a process that Raul Hilberg refers to as “marking, movement restrictions, and the creation of Jewish control organs,” Jewish freedom was significantly restricted even in the period prior to ghettoisation. The preliminary measures to ghettoisation included: marking; movement controls; Jewish control organs; and forced labour. They developed as follows.

- Marking

From November 1939, Jews living in territories under German occupation were required to wear a Star of David on their arms (n.b. Jews still living in Germany were not forced to wear a yellow star in public until September 1941 onwards).

- Movement Controls

From December 1939, Jews were allowed to move house only within the same locality. Also, a strict curfew was imposed from 9 p.m. to 5 a.m.

From January 1940, Jews were forbidden to use railways unless authorised.

- Jewish Control Organs

In November 1939, orders establishing Judenräte (Jewish Councils) were issued. Smaller communities with fewer than 10,000 Jews formed a Jewish Council (the singular form in German is Judenrat) of twelve members; communities with more than 10,000 Jews were required to establish a Judenrat consisting of 24 members.

- Forced Labour

Even before ghettoisation, Jews were subjected to arbitrary seizure for forced labour. A program of forced labour was initiated in the Generalgouvernement as early as October 1939. Jews were seized from the streets at random, forced into work parties for the day, and then returned at night. In November 1939, in an attempt to protect Jews from arbitrary seizure, the Warsaw Judenrat offered to regularise the situation for the German authorities by acting as a labour bureau to recruit workers on their behalf. The meagre wages paid to workers were dispersed to the councils, which then distributed some money back to workers.

### c) Ghettoisation

Although the so-called “Heydrich Order” of 21 September 1939 called for the ghettoisation of Polish Jews, this policy was realised only slowly. Importantly, the construction of [ghettos](#) represented a formal recognition that mass deportations were unlikely in the foreseeable future.

After a tentative beginning in late 1939, the ghettoisation process accelerated through 1940. In total, there were approximately 1,140 Jewish ghettos established throughout Nazi-controlled Europe during the Second World War. There were several well-known and well-researched ghettos in Poland and Lithuania – Warsaw, Lodz, Lublin, Krakow in the former, and Bialystok, Vilna, and Kovno in the latter. According to Dan Michman, there were 750,000 Jews concentrated within these seven ghettos alone.<sup>12</sup> There also were ghettos in Belarus, Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union, Romania, Greece, Hungary and Yugoslavia. According to calculations by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), over two million Jews were deported from ghettos to extermination centres.<sup>13</sup> Though numbers alone fail to capture the horrors, statistically speaking the ghetto experience was endured by around 40 per cent of Holocaust victims.

Upon entering ghettos Jews were stripped of their property and then forced into a very confined living space, usually in the poorest quarters of cities or towns. Contact with surrounding communities was cut off – often by physically sealing the ghetto from the surrounding environs (and some ghettos were even hermetically sealed) – and Jews were permitted only limited, inadequate food rations. These developments led to escalating death rates through factors such as starvation and the spread of infectious diseases (plus harsh European winters also took their toll).

What rationale did the Nazi authorities employ to justify their actions?



**READING EXCERPT:** Please read [“Contradictory Policies towards the Ghettos”](#) also by Christopher R. Browning, pp. 158-68.

<sup>12</sup> Dan Michman, *The Emergence of Jewish Ghettos during the Holocaust*. Trans. Lenn J. Schramm. (Cambridge University Press, New York, 2011). p. xiv.

<sup>13</sup> “Deportations,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, <https://www.ushmm.org/outreach/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007716>. [Accessed 22 February 2017].

Browning gives a cogent account of Nazi policymaking on the run. He highlights the contradictory reasons given for sealing ghettos: on the one hand, to ensure Jews would not hide their “wealth” (as was argued by the Lodz authorities in the Warthegau); or, on the other hand, to protect local populations from epidemics (in the case of Warsaw located in the Generalgouvernement).

Warsaw, the largest ghetto, was not sealed until November 1940. This development possibly coincided with the recognition that a mass deportation of Jews was not imminent. Ghettos grew with the expulsion of Jews from surrounding smaller communities and the influx of deportees from annexed German territories.

Browning shows that, in the case of both the Lodz and Warsaw ghettos, local authorities resisted the “destructive logic” of the ghetto. They did not simply take advantage of the high mortality rates in the ghettos in order to hasten the death of Jews. They recognised that the mass concentration of Jews offered an opportunity for cheap labour, arguing if Jews were able to work then they could pay for the cost of feeding themselves. In Lodz, most notably, this resulted in the establishment of a comprehensive system of factories coordinated through the Judenrat. In the Warsaw ghetto, by contrast, a more *laissez-faire* or “free enterprise” atmosphere prevailed.

The situation also set into motion a contest of policies over Jewish ghettos. Nazi administrators who saw an opportunity to use the available Jewish (slave) labour for the production of goods for the war, and self-sustenance of the ghetto, are labelled by Browning as “productionists.” This group understood that although Jews ultimately would be destined for gas chambers in “the East” they nonetheless should be seen as a source of productive slave labour while they remained alive. On the other hand, the Nazi administrators whom Browning labels as “attritionists” saw the death of Jews in ghettos – whether through starvation, disease, or labour – as a goal in and of itself. Browning argues that the policy contest ultimately was won by the “attritionists” once “Berlin intervened in favor not just of attrition but of immediate and systematic mass murder.”<sup>14</sup>

Nonetheless, such disagreements over ghetto policy between Nazi administrators is indicative of broader questions that historians must consider in examining the significance of ghettos for the extermination of Jews. Namely, what is the relationship between the establishment and functionality of ghettos and the Holocaust? In other words, as you work through this and subsequent learning modules, ask yourself whether ghettos were established with the ultimate goal of mass murder, or in the very least expulsion to the east, in mind. Alternately, you may consider the argument that ghettos were established simply as a response by Nazi administrators to local pressures and growing Jewish populations within isolated areas. Moreover, think

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<sup>14</sup> Christopher R. Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939-March 1942*. (University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 2004). p. 113.

about whether Heydrich's Order of September 1939 fits into the former or the latter interpretation. For historians such as Browning, to cite one example, the formation of ghettos represented neither a stepping stone to genocide nor evidence of a gradual radicalisation in policy. Rather, in his view "ghettoization was in fact carried out at different times in different ways on the initiative of local authorities."<sup>15</sup>

Had ghettos not been able to engage in economic enterprises they would have been doomed to catastrophic collapse within months of their establishment. The Nazis required ghetto communities to pay for their food, and, once the internal resources of a ghetto had been exhausted payment was impossible. Even with payment, however, the level of nutrition permitted was inhumane. Conditions remained appalling in ghettos and Nazi administrators could easily adjust their policies against Jews from economic exploitation to extermination once the external policymaking environment changed.

Ghettoisation resulted from the failure of repeated attempts to deport Jews to a single reservation outside of the Nazis' sphere of influence. Scholars including Philippe Burrin and Christopher Browning agree that initiatives to implement deportation policies were characterised by incompetence and confusion.<sup>16</sup>

To visually complement the above passages on ghettoisation, you may wish to view this extract from Steven Spielberg's classic *Schindler's List*.



<sup>15</sup> Christopher R. Browning, "Nazi Ghettoization Policy in Poland: 1939-41," *Central European History*, vol. 19, no. 4, December 1986, pp. 343-368. Here pp. 344-345.

<sup>16</sup> Philippe Burrin, *Hitler and the Jews: Genesis of the Holocaust*. (Hodder Arnold, London, 1994). See especially the chapter entitled "The Quest for a Territorial Solution." Christopher R. Browning, *The Path to Genocide: Essays on Launching the Final Solution*. (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995). pp. 3-27.

### **d) Ad Hoc Violence**

While conditions may have varied from one ghetto to another, all ghetto experiences were marked by terror and hunger. Jews had been expelled from their homes, lost their livelihoods, were stripped of their property, forced to live in a confined space in the poorest part of a city or town, with inadequate food rations, virtually no heating in winter, and no access to medicine. Disease spread rampantly, and death rates escalated – worsening once ghettos were sealed off from the outside world.

It is important to note, though, throughout this period from 1940 to mid-1941, there were few instances of organised violence against ghettoised Jews. Conditions invariably were horrific and led to many deaths. Where violence occurred, however, it was *ad hoc* in nature and perpetrated by individuals in contravention of Heydrich's Order, as opposed to being part of some coordinated policy of violence ordered by superiors. Jews may have been subjected to ghetto life, and forced to work as slave labourers (typically in appalling conditions), and spontaneous acts of violence. Even so, they were not deported to their deaths until the end of 1941 at the very earliest.

### **e) The Nisko Project: Lublin**

#### **Formal deportations**

From September to October 1939, it seemed that the blueprint for resettlement as outlined by Heydrich was to be followed to the letter:

- detailed planning was initiated for the deportations of Jews to eastern Poland from the Incorporated Territories and Austria;
- In October 1939, Adolf Eichmann, a mid-level SS bureaucrat, was charged with organising the deportation of several thousand Jews from Upper Silesia to Nisko (in the Lublin district of the Generalgouvernement) as part of a pilot run for a more comprehensive program of deportations.

Eichmann's unnamed "Nisko project" was formally cancelled after the deportation of just one transport of Jews, stranding several thousands of Jews in an isolated area with no facilities. Himmler had to acknowledge that the resettlement of large numbers of ethnic Germans (*Volksdeutsche*) from the Russian sphere of influence in Poland and the Baltic states was of greater priority, and there simply were insufficient resources (rolling stock etc.) to undertake both policies at once during wartime.

#### **Informal deportations**

The abandonment of Lublin as a formal destination did not stop further organised deportations of Jews (and other "racial undesirables") from the Incorporated Territories into the Generalgouvernement to a variety of destinations where no serious preparations had been made to receive deportees.

From December 1939, according to Burrin, tens of thousands of Jews and ethnic Poles

were crammed into freight cars, stripped of everything except a small suitcase, and unloaded several hours or sometimes even days later in the Generalgouvernement, where no provisions had been made for their food or shelter from the rigours of winter.<sup>17</sup> Hundreds of people died during this process due to the harsh (and often bitterly cold) conditions.

The impetus for these actions also came from Eichmann who, in December 1939, was appointed by his superior Heydrich as “special adviser for evacuations and Jewish affairs.”<sup>18</sup>



*Adolf Eichmann.*

Source: “Adolf Eichmann,” USHMM. <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007412>  
[Accessed 1 March 2017]

- In January 1940, Eichmann convened a meeting in Berlin where he proclaimed his intention was to “urgently” deport all Jews from the Incorporated Territories into the Generalgouvernement.
- In February 1940, with the cooperation of the high-ranking Nazi Hermann Göring the General Governor of the Generalgouvernement Hans Frank achieved a pause to deportations, with SS chief Himmler reluctantly agreeing to suspend further actions until August 1940. Frank had been horrified by the stresses placed on his administration by the first wave of deportees to the Generalgouvernement.
- By mid-March 1940, Hitler appears to have lost interest in the Lublin proposal. According to Browning, Hitler reportedly confided that the “Jewish problem” still remained insoluble because there was insufficient space in Lublin for Jews, and not enough space in the occupied territories to accommodate incoming *Volksdeutsche*.

Hitler’s pessimistic outlook changed in May 1940, following the successful invasion of

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<sup>17</sup> Burrin, *Hitler and the Jews*. p. 73.

<sup>18</sup> Browning, *The Path to Genocide*. p. 12.

France and the prospect of acquiring French colonial territories.

### f) The Madagascar Proposal Revisited

In May 1940, Hitler declared his intention to facilitate “the emigration of all Jews to a colony in Africa or elsewhere.”<sup>19</sup> The intended destination was the large island of Madagascar, located in the Indian Ocean off the coast of Africa. European antisemites had flirted with the idea of expelling Jews to Madagascar for several decades prior to Hitler seizing power in Germany, and the Nazis first discussed this issue in the 1930s before war broke out. Implicit in the [Madagascar proposal](#) was the notion that conditions would be so dreadful that Jews would be unable to survive. When the Nazis revisited the Madagascar idea during wartime, the success of such a plan depended on either the defeat of Britain or British withdrawal from the war. As long as Britain remained actively at war with Germany the strength of the Royal Navy prevented German mastery of the seas. Despite intensive bombardment by the Luftwaffe (Germany’s air force) in the northern summer of 1940, Britain resisted German invasion. The Battle of Britain was won, and in September 1940 the Nazis were forced to abandon the Madagascar proposal once and for all.

Hitler turned his attention to the Soviet Union, and invasion was planned for the autumn of 1941 (though ultimately it was postponed to June 1941 because of the German invasion of the Balkans and Greece in support of Italy). In January 1941, Hitler reaffirmed his “prophecy” to destroy Jewry in the context of planning for war against the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, as late as mid-1941 – immediately before the invasion of the Soviet Union was launched on 22 June 1941 – Hitler still talked in terms of the *expulsion* of Jews, rather than *extermination*.

Policy towards Jews in Poland followed a convoluted path. It appears to have evolved as part of a broader, racially-motivated plan to redistribute population groups in Poland. Anti-Jewish measures therefore should not be considered to be the sole focus of Nazi concerns. Resettlement plans developed on an *ad hoc* basis in response to successive crises. As each attempt to deport Jews failed to materialise, its successor became progressively more radical (even genocidal) in orientation. As conditions for Jews who were “temporarily” imprisoned in ghettos deteriorated, Nazi ideologues squabbled over their fate until a consensus emerged that Jews too ill to work would be better off dead (not necessarily for the Jews themselves, of course, but rather from the perspective of Nazis who did not want the hassle of looking after them). In the shadows of the impending invasion of the Soviet Union, policy towards Polish Jews became increasingly genocidal.

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<sup>19</sup> Burrin, *Hitler and the Jews*. p. 79.

### Section 3. “Ethnic Cleansing” and Demographic Engineering in Nazi-Occupied Poland: Competing Interpretations

Poland’s Jews suffered terribly under Nazi occupation. It is important, however, to distinguish between how policies against Jews in Poland were conceived and implemented *prior* to the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 and the *systematic* extermination that emerged afterwards.

There are some important and fundamental differences between “ethnic cleansing” and genocide that should be established here. “Ethnic cleansing” policies involve vast population reconfigurations as groups are *relocated* from one area to another – in other words, the region in question is “cleansed” of an ethnic group by removing them (but without exterminating them). Genocide is based on the *intent* to destroy a group in whole or in part – with the key terms here being “intent” and “destroy” (in other words, the deliberate destruction of members of a group as opposed to transferring them somewhere else). Did the Nazis initially focus on a wide demographic engineering project in occupied Poland that was based on “ethnic cleansing” and transferring several population groups including Jews, and only turn their attention to genocide at a later stage in the war? Or were their actions always geared towards laying the groundwork required to perpetrate genocide when conditions would allow? There are competing interpretations, and here we give consideration to Browning’s version of events.

Browning argues that initial Nazi policies towards Jews in Poland developed as part of a broader process of “ethnic cleansing” involving massive population movements. He distinguishes between Nazi policies pursued in Poland *prior* to June 1941 – which he argues constituted “ethnic cleansing” – and *later* genocidal policies.

This broader demographic project required that Polish territories bordering and occupied by Germany be “cleansed” of all “non-Aryans” to create space for incoming *Volksdeutsche*. The result was an enormous shift in populations throughout central and eastern Europe. Jews and ethnic Poles living in the eastern parts of their country that were incorporated into neighbouring Germany – Danzig West-Prussia and the Warthegau – were expelled into the Generalgouvernement (what Hans Frank, the Governor of Occupied Poland, referred to as the “racial dustbin”). In their place, *Volksdeutsche* were “repatriated” from the Soviet-controlled Baltic states (Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia) and other regions of eastern Europe.



*Governor of Occupied Poland, renamed the Generalgouvernement, Hans Frank.*

Source: "Bild 121-0270," Bundesarchiv.

[http://www.bild.bundesarchiv.de/archives/barchpic/search/\\_1331894879/?search\[view\]=detail&search\[focus\]=1](http://www.bild.bundesarchiv.de/archives/barchpic/search/_1331894879/?search[view]=detail&search[focus]=1) [accessed 1 March 2017]

Before proceeding any further, you may wish to view a video extract relating to Nazi anti-Jewish policies in Poland. It is taken from "The Wild East," the fourth episode in the series *Nazis: A Warning from History*.



Remember that Jews were a sizable minority of Poland's population, but a minority nonetheless. Far more space could be created by focusing on ethnic Poles. Accordingly, although Jews comprised a significant element in the Nazis' resettlement policies, the planning authorities were preoccupied by the need to relocate the Polish peasantry eastwards to free agricultural lands for incoming *Volksdeutsche*. Isolated attempts were made specifically to deport Jews, too, but such plans were quickly abandoned. In part, this was due to the stiff opposition from the Governor General of the newly-established Generalgouvernement Hans Frank who resented the imposition of additional Jews in his territory. Furthermore, these early deportation plans were stopped promptly because resources were more urgently needed elsewhere (remember that Germany was at war). In any case, as Marrus observes, Jews living within the newly-incorporated territories were concentrated in urban centres, meaning their expulsion would not have created extra space for farming.<sup>20</sup>

In the case of Jews, resettlement to the eastern-most parts of Poland, as well as segregation and concentration, were the policies pursued by the Nazis. Because these policies were hastily improvised as developments during the war created new situations, their immediate implementation usually proved impossible. Impetus for policy came from both the Nazi régime itself back in Berlin and from German occupational authorities located in Poland, and these policies regularly changed over time.

Were Jews the primary focus of Nazi policy in Poland? Were policies developed specifically with the extermination of Jews in mind? Or were these policies designed to remove Jews from where Germans were to be (re)located within an expanded Greater German Reich?

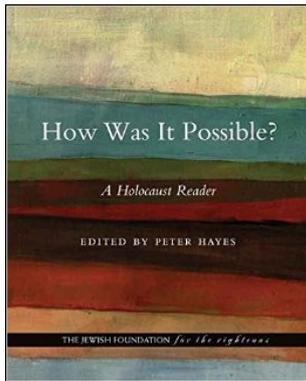


**READING EXCERPT:** Please read another Browning extract, entitled ["Ethnic Cleansing in Poland."](#)

Browning argues that Jews were removed from parts of western Poland not because they were being targeted specifically, but rather as part of a broader bilateral relocation program of population transfers.

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<sup>20</sup> Marrus, *The Holocaust in History*. pp. 60-63.



**PRESCRIBED TEXT:** Please read Götz Aly and Suzanne Heim's chapter "Rearranging Populations," pp. 271-77.

As Aly and Heim argue, and as the previous video extract reveals, there were competing policy interests at play and contested methods suggested where it came to implementing the "Germanisation" of conquered Polish territory. Even with these competing interests, the project saw one million ethnic Poles expelled from their homelands in western Poland to make room for approximately a half-million *Volksdeutsche*. The two million Polish Jews living in the German-occupied part of Poland were forced to move to the area known as the Generalgouvernement, where they were gradually ghettoised.

There is no question that Polish Jews were only one part of a broader demographic project, one that saw the wholesale transfer of millions of people. By the same token, Jews were certainly treated differently to their ethnic Polish counterparts. "Ethnic cleansing" only equated to ghettoisation for Jews, not for ethnic Poles. Why was this the case? Jews were forced into centralised locations, where they could be easily controlled, and frequently sealed off from the outside world. Can such a radical measure be explained simply as part of a broader project of people movements, or as a prelude to a pre-planned treatment of ghettoised Jews – whether it entailed expulsion or extermination?

## Conclusion

The Nazi invasion of Poland in September 1939 signalled both the beginning of the Second World War and a dramatic escalation in Nazi anti-Jewish policies. The conquest of Poland saw over two million Polish Jews fall into Nazi hands more or less overnight. Historians cannot be certain why Hitler launched the invasion of Poland, and they disagree on his primary motivations. Long-held grievances against Polish acquisitions of formerly German territory lost as a result of the Treaty of Versailles gave Hitler a "conventional" reason to invade Poland.

Historians do not disagree, however, about the racial dimension to the conquest and division of Poland. The program of “ethnic cleansing” that led to millions of ethnic Poles, Jews, and *Volksdeutsche* moving across eastern Europe was the realisation of Hitler’s longstanding dream for increased German *Lebensraum*. Whatever the motivations behind it, the consequences for Polish Jews were dire, leading to their ghettoization – and the daily struggle of surviving without adequate food or medical supplies. These ghettos eventually served as the embarkation point for millions of Polish Jews destined for Nazi extermination camps. It is not clear, however, what the relationship is between the German conquest and partition of Poland, the program of “ethnic cleansing” carried out thereafter, and the ghettoisation of Polish Jews. Whether the decision to establish Jewish ghettos was part of this overarching and ambitious demographic engineering project, or whether isolating and incapacitating Polish Jews marked a critical step in their extermination, remains open to interpretation and debate.