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Europe in Crisis: The World Wars in Europe  
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## Slide 2

- **Nazi Occupation:** Nazi occupation varied greatly from country to country. The cruelty of the occupation depended on racial purity and docility of a population. Most of these occupations were handled by harried, confused and greedy bureaucrats. These bureaucrats too often went to the occupied countries to loot and get rich, and were usually incompetent and cruel.

### Nazi Occupation of Poland:

- Hitler considered all Slavs to be subhuman. However, his occupation of Poland was much harsher than that of other Slavic countries, like Slovakia, because the Poles had resisted German dominion.
- Parts of Poland that had been in the old German Empire were annexed to Germany. Poles were treated very harshly in these regions –all Polish clergy and intellectuals were shot, and many Poles were forced to move outside of Germany, to make room for German settlers.
- The rest of Poland was also subject to harsh treatment. Education for Polish children was reduced to a bare minimum, and Poles were expected to work for low wages to produce for the German Reich.
  - Poles were to be made into slaves for the German Reich.
- There was a strong Polish underground movement which aimed to distract the Nazis from their military goals and provide the Polish people with some relief. They would attack Nazi troops as well as hold night schools, so to keep Polish intellectualism alive. Pope John Paul II studied to be a priest at one of these night schools.

### Nazi Occupation of the Soviet Union:

- About 20- 30 million Soviet citizen died during WWII, which is known as “The Great Patriotic War” in Russia. The effect of these deaths was still being felt in 1959, when it was estimated that the Soviet population was 50 million less than it should have been thanks to these deaths.
- **Soviet Prisoners of War:** Soviet POWs were subject to brutal treatment by SS Officers who did not believe the rules of the Geneva Convention applied to Slavs. Only about 10% of the 3.5 million prisoners would survive.

### Nazi Occupation of France:

- Many Frenchmen believed that the Nazis would win the war, and that it was prudent to collaborate with them. Many chose with their wallets – workers wanted to keep their jobs, and businessmen wanted to make money off war contracts.
- The government of Vichy France was run by Phillipe Petain, who believed he should adjust the French people to a German-occupied France. He established authoritarian rule. Many Frenchmen were grateful for authoritarian rule, because they blamed the fall of France on the liberal government that had run France before the war. As time went on, however, German collaboration became less popular. The Germans began forcing Frenchmen to work inside the German Reich. To avoid forced labor, many of the French joined resistance groups in the countryside. The resistance attracted people from all walks of life: communists, anarchists, conservatives, priest and women to name a few. Resistance workers would print newspapers, gather intelligence and sabotage the Germans.
  - **Charles de Gaulle**, a French general who had escaped to London before the fall of France, ran the “Free French” government, and coordinated with resistance groups.

## Slide 3

### The Persecution of the Jews:

- One of the main planks in the Nazi platform was anti-Semitism – Hitler legitimately believed that Jews were the greatest threat facing Germany and European civilization. It is unclear, however, if he intended to kill all the Jews. In his earlier writings, he certainly proposed killing a small portion of the Jewish population, but he seemed content with enslaving the rest. He just wanted to remove them from any position in which they could influence society.
- Hitler's goal was to remove Jews from any position in which they could influence society. Hitler and the Nazis proposed many plans – ranging from shipping all European Jews to Madagascar to establish a Jewish state, or making Poland a Jewish state. Eventually, though, as the war became more difficult, they settled on the **Final Solution** – the systematic destruction of all European Jews.
- However, the majority of Germans were not outright anti-Semites, and anti-Semitic measures were not popular, so Hitler could not pursue his policies immediately. He had to balance public opinion with Nazi clamoring for anti-Semitic laws. Over time, these laws distanced Jews from the rest of the German population, and more Germans began to view Jews as a distinct race.
- As soon as Hitler took power, he began to enact anti-Semitic laws:
  - 1933: The Nazis attempt a boycott on Jewish businesses, but it is unpopular with the people, and is stopped after only one day.
  - 1933: Jews are banned from government jobs, and officially discriminated against in law and medicine.
  - 1935: **The Nuremberg Laws** ban marriage and sex between Jews and Aryans.
  - 1936: Jews are no longer considered German citizens, are denied the right to vote.
  - 1938: Jews are forced to pay extra taxes and Jewish children are banned from going to public schools.
  - November 10, 1938: **Kristallnacht**, or “Night of the Broken Glass.” The Nazis launch massive raids on Jewish businesses and synagogues. About 20,000 Jews are rounded up and sent to concentration camps. Those that remain behind are left with few rights, and are forced to pay for all the damages.
- Poland
  - Poland was home to about 3 million Jews – far more than any other European country.
  - Very shortly after Poland was invaded, many restrictions were placed upon Polish Jews.
    - Ghettos: Small, enclosed regions in Polish cities where Jews were required to live. Ghettos had existed in European cities for hundreds of years. However, the ghettos established by the Nazis were designed to slowly kill their inhabitants.
      - In the Warsaw ghetto, 2.5% of the city's area housed 30% of the city's population.
      - Residents of ghettos were given very little rations – about 1000-1500 calories a day. Many people died of malnutrition and disease.
      - Life in the ghettos was unpredictable. Ghetto residents might be forced to do manual labor or move to another ghetto at a moment's notice. On-the-spot executions for small provocations were common.
      - Some famous ghettos are the Warsaw ghetto and the Lodz ghetto.
- Soviet Union
  - As the Nazi army moved through the Soviet Union, it was followed by the **Einsatzgruppen**, a division of the SS that was designed to quickly and efficiently kill Jews and rebels in conquered territory. Basically, the Einsatzgruppen, sometimes aided by the German army, would round up Jews and other undesirables, force them to dig pits, and

then tell them to stand in front of the pits, at which point the Einsatzgruppen would shoot them. About 1.4 million Jews were killed this way.

- The Final Solution
  - Inside the German Reich, and France, the Nazis wanted to maintain peace and order. They knew that merely shooting German and French Jews would cause public outrage, so they established an elaborate charade in which Jews were sent to the East “to work.” It’s unclear if German and French citizens really knew what was going on.
    - In Poland and the Soviet Union, the Nazis didn’t really care what the people thought of them – the Poles and Russians would be next once the Jews were gone.
  - Concentration camps had existed since the late 1930s. However, in 1941, when the Nazis settled on the final solution, Jews began being sent to concentration camps *en masse*.
  - Jews were rounded up and packed on to trains that were usually used to move cattle. The trains were overcrowded and unheated. Passengers were not usually provided with food and water, and many died on the way.
  - Nazis started sending large numbers of Jews to concentration camps in 1941. Upon arrival, most were sent to the **gas chambers**. These airtight rooms would be flooded with gas (usually hydrogen cyanide). Death would occur within a few minutes.
  - Young, strong, prisoners were sometimes sent to do forced labor. They lived under appalling conditions. Prisoners could expect about 800 calories of food per day. They were forced to work long hours under the shadow of guards who would shoot prisoners if given the slightest provocation.
  - As the war went on, the work in the death camps sped up. The Nazis considered the Jewish genocide their most important task, so as it became clear the Nazis would lose the war, they worked harder to kill more Jews.
  - Other groups were targeted by the Holocaust, such as Roma (Gypsies), homosexuals, Jehovah’s Witnesses and the disabled.
  - Famous concentration camps: Auschwitz- Birkenau., Dachau, Drancy and Treblinka, though there were dozens scattered throughout Europe.

Common Questions About the Holocaust: *The Holocaust is a frightening and reprehensible act. It raises many questions about human nature that are hard to answer. I’ve highlighted a few common questions and done my best to answer them here.*

- Why didn’t the Jews fight back?
  - European Jews had been suffering persecution for centuries. They learned that if they were submissive, the fever of hatred would pass quickly, and they could go on with their day-to-day lives. This was the approach that many European Jews took to the Nazi threat. Some Jews did fight back, but most tried to be submissive until it was too late.
- Why didn’t the Germans, Poles, French, etc, try to help the Jews?
  - Many did try to help! We already discussed how the Danes saved their Jews. However, in other countries, people found reasons not to help:
    - They didn’t understand what was happening. In many countries, Jews were spirited away quickly while the rest of the population was still reeling from the invasion.
    - They didn’t believe what was happening. Such monstrosities were hard to imagine, even at Nazi hands.

- Some Europeans were anti-Semites, and no intention of helping Jews. While few called for mass extermination, they didn't complain when the Jews left their neighborhood.
  - They were scared. The Nazis extracted brutal revenge on civilians who helped Jews.
- Why didn't the Americans and British try to help?
  - By the time they realized what was going on, the war was already underway, and there was little they could do. However, they didn't put much effort into coming up with a solution – they thought the best course of action was a speedy victory – human rights violations could be sorted out after the war.
  - The Americans and British also refused to accept refugees both before and during the war. In part, this was because they didn't understand the horrors that the Jews were facing. Both countries also had poor economies and didn't want to deal with an influx of immigrants.
- How did people work at concentration camps?
  - Some people are just brutal. The Nazis were an unusual murderous political party and attracted similar people.

#### After the Battle of Moscow: The Russian Front and the Siege of Stalingrad

- At this point, Germany has entered a war of attrition. Their blitzkrieg theory failed in Russia: Russia was too big for a blitzkrieg to be effective, and the people were too loyal and determined to let Hitler's invasion bring about the fall of the government.
- Hitler needed to start running on a war economy. Before this point, Hitler had been afraid of the political consequences of food stamps and shortages. However, he didn't have a choice anymore, and converted the German economy to one of efficiency and production.
- If Hitler could win the war quickly, they might be victorious. It would take the USA some time to become effective.
- However, if the war was not won quickly, Hitler would lose. The combined economic strength of Britain, the USSR and the USA was bigger than that of Japan, Italy and Germany. He hoped he could conquer Russia quickly, and take advantage of all her natural resources. In particular, Hitler focused all his efforts on gaining the Caspian Sea, where there were huge oil deposits. Hitler's generals urged caution, but Hitler was determined to press on, and sacked many of his top generals. He pushed his army through Russia.
  - Hitler was starting to become desperate, and therefore sloppy. He ignored information from his top generals that warned that he didn't have the manpower to keep pushing against the Russian army. He ignored information that suggested the Red Army was very large and getting stronger. For Hitler, surrender was impossible.
    - It would be very difficult politically for the German people to accept defeat, especially at the hands of the Russians.
    - Hitler would soon have to fight in the West, he didn't want his hands tied in the East.
- As the Nazis charges across the Ukraine, it becomes clear that he must take the city of Stalingrad to be victorious. Stalingrad begins to become a symbol of absolute victory in the minds of both Hitler and Stalin, and both insist that the city cannot belong to the enemy.
  - One of Stalin's generals also recognizes that Germany's blitzkrieg theory only works well when there are wide, open spaces to plow tanks through. He guesses correctly that the

Germans will not be able to move quickly in a city, and that street-to-street fighting will bog the Germans down.

- The Germans near the city in late August. The German army has been pressing forward for months. Their supply lines are very long, and they are fighting to defend a 1300 mile front. The German air force bombs Stalingrad quickly and efficiently – most of the city is reduced to rubble. Stalin refuses to let civilians flee, though, because he believes his soldiers will fight better if they see women and children dying.
- However, the German army is very strong. By early November, they have taken 90% of the city. But by this point, the front has grown too long for the Germans to adequately protect all of it.
- Germany is also getting tired. By late 1942, Stalin has managed to move much of the USSR's industry from the German-occupied West to the Russian East. These factories begin producing tanks and guns in huge quantities. Also, Russia has a larger supply of manpower than Germany. Germany is scrapping the bottom of the barrel, but Russia hasn't run out of troops yet.
- On November 19, the Russians launch **Operation Uranus**. They attack the weak Russian flanks from both sides, and manage to encircle the 6<sup>th</sup> German Army (about 200,000 well-trained troops).
  - The rest of the German army asks permission to stop attacking Stalingrad, and focus on rescuing the encircled troops. However, Hitler cannot accept any setbacks, and insists that the encircled troops fight their way out. He has the German Air Force airlift food and supplies to the encircled troops, but they cannot deliver enough. Indeed, the general of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army decides to give the limited supplies to fighting troops instead of sick men, because he believes the sick men have not hope of surviving.
  - Hitler wants the troops the encircled troops to fight to the death. However, they eventually surrender in early February. Germany fails to take Stalingrad, wastes a lot of resources trying to do so, and loses many well-trained troops. From this point on, they are on the defensive on the Eastern Front.