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Holocaust Myths & Facts

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Q1. Were Jews the only group singled out for extermination?

Like Jews, Gypsies were singled out for racial persecution and annihilation. There are numerous Nazi policy statements available calling for the total extermination of the Roma population. In a 1939 document Johannes Berhrendt of the Office of Racial Hygiene issued a brief stating that “all Gypsies should be treated as hereditarily sick; the only solution elimination....The aim should therefore be the elimination without hesitation of this defective element in the population.” Heydrich also included the Gypsies in his final solution – Gypsies “should be given the same treatment as the Jews.”

Adolf Eichmann made the recommendation that the ‘Gypsy Question’ be solved simultaneously with the ‘Jewish Question,’ Himmler signed the order dispatching Germany’s Sinti and Roma to Auschwitz on 16th December 1942. The ‘Final Solution’ of the ‘Gypsy Question’ had begun.

(Center for Holocaust & Genocide Studies)

Q2. Were all Jews forced to wear the yellow Star of David badge?

Denmark was the only occupied country where Jews were not forced to wear the yellow star (see above statement regarding King Christian X). In addition, Jews in Central Poland did not wear star badges but white armbands with a

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blue Star of David.

Q3. Was Hitler Jewish?

One of the most frequently asked questions we receive is whether Adolf Hitler was Jewish or had ancestors who were. The idea stems from rumors that Hitler's grandfather was Jewish. Few, if any, historians believe this to be so. Hitler's father, Alois, was registered as an illegitimate child with no father. Thus, Hitler was unable to produce the certificate of origin he required of every German citizen on hazard of death. Alois's mother worked in the home of a wealthy Jew and there is some chance that women in the household (i.e., Hitler's grandmother) became pregnant by a son. Most historians believe, however, that it is more likely Hitler was trying to keep the family secret that he carried a hereditary disposition toward mental illness.

(John Toland, Adolf Hitler (Anchor Books, 1992))

Q4. How did Hitler die and is he still alive?

Since his death on April 30, 1945, much speculation has surrounded how and when Hitler died. If alive today, Hitler would be 116 years old. Prevalent theories include that he ate poison and shot himself, that he ate poison, but did not shoot himself; that he shot himself, but did not take poison; one of Hitler's doubles was killed, creating the illusion Hitler was dead, allowing the "real" Hitler to escape; and that somebody else killed Hitler.

The fact that Hitler died in his bunker is almost certain, despite lack of physical evidence to this effect. We believe that on the morning of April 29, 1945, in a civil ceremony in his bunker, Hitler married his mistress of many years, Eva Braun. The next day, they both bit into thin glass vials of cyanide. As he did so Hitler also shot himself in the head. A handful of remaining Nazi loyalists wrapped his body in a gray army blanket, carried him to the shell-blasted Chancellery garden, saluted in honor and ignited his body.

Q5. Did Nazis make soap from Jews?

Holocaust historian Yehuda Bauer, as well as Yad Vashem, have frequently denied quoted claims that the Nazis used the bodies of Jewish death camp victims to make soap. Bauer believes that the technical possibilities for transforming human fat into soap were not known at that time. Bauer also stated that many Jews believed their murdered families and friends had been turned into soap because the Nazis themselves propagated the idea. "Nazis told the Jews they made soap out of them. It was a sadistic tool for mental torture" (Bauer, 1990). Other historians also believe the soap rumor, although widespread, to be unfounded because no reliable evidence has turned up to support such claims.

(The Daily Telegraph, 1990; Northern California Jewish Bulletin, 1990)

Q6. Did Dr. Joseph Mengele make all selections upon arrival at the camps?

Dr. Josef Mengele was Senior SS physician at Auschwitz-Birkenau from 1943 to 1944. He was one of multiple physicians who carried out "selections" of prisoners upon arrival at the camp. Dr. Mengele did make many of the "selections," but so did other doctors, especially when the prisoners were

regularly forced to parade before the doctors at frequent selections inside the camps.

Q7. Did every concentration camp have gas chambers and crematoria?

This was not true for the majority of the camps which were for slave labor, transit, and political prisoners. By 1945, the Nazis had established 10,004 camps. However, only six of these camps were designated totally to kill the Jews. Nazi camps equipped with gassing facilities, for mass murder of Jews, included Auschwitz-Birkenau, Belzec, Chelmno, Majdanek-Lublin, Sobibor, and Treblinka. Up to 2,700,000 Jews were murdered at these six camps, as were tens of thousands of Gypsies, Soviet prisoners of war, Poles, and others.

Q8. Was Auschwitz-Birkenau the only camp that existed in Auschwitz?

Auschwitz had many satellite camps that surrounded the main camp, accounting for an area of 20 square miles - the area of an average American city. In 1944, more tracks led to Auschwitz than to New York's Penn Station, which at that time was the largest railroad station in the world.

Auschwitz I - original and main Auschwitz camp in southwest Poland. Served first as Polish military barrack, then as concentration camp largely for gentiles.

Auschwitz II - (Birkenau) Largest Nazi Camp, opened in October 1941. It was used particularly for the extermination of Jews and Roma (Gypsies). It was the site of four gas chambers.

Auschwitz III - (Buna-Monowitz) Set aside as a labor camp for chemical giant I.G. Farben. It refers also to 36 subcamps.

Q9. Did All Jews in camps receive tattoo numbers on their arms?

Not all the Jews in the camps were given a tattoo, especially those designated for extermination, and not all camps made use of tattoos for prisoner identification.

Q10. The Legend of King Christian X of Denmark

The legend states that under Nazi occupation, the Jews of Denmark were ordered to identify themselves by wearing armbands with yellow stars. It is thought that King Christian X of Denmark and non-Jewish Danes thwarted the order by putting on the armbands themselves, in a visible showing of solidarity with Jewish citizens. A popular version of the legend also says that King Christian wore an armband as he rode through the streets of Copenhagen on his daily morning horseback ride, explaining to citizens that he wore the Star of David as a demonstration of the principle that all Danes are equal. In addition, it is said non-Jews also wore the armbands to make it virtually impossible to distinguish between Jews and non-Jews.

Although the Danes did undertake heroic efforts to save the Jews, there is no real-life example of the actions described above. Neither Danish non-Jews nor King Christian X wore the yellow badge. In fact, Danish Jews never wore the yellow badge either, nor did German officials ever issue an order requiring Danish Jews to display it. Most Danes partook in symbolic gestures of

defiance against the Nazis, such as wearing four coins tied together with red and white ribbons in their buttonholes. Red and white are the Danish colors and four coins totaling nine ore represented the date of occupation, April 9.

It should be noted that King Christian X became an important figure for the Danish people, making speeches against the occupying force and becoming known as a protector of the Jews. The King made it a routine to ride his horse alone through the streets of Copenhagen to underline his continuing claims for national sovereignty. He became a positive and shining symbol for the ideals of the nation and his people, a stark contrast to the cult of Nazism and militarism.

(The Holocaust: Crimes, Heroes and Villains)

Q11. What did Pastor Niemoeller really say?

One of most misquoted citations of the Holocaust is the "confession of guilt" by Pastor Martin Niemoeller. According to his widow, Sybil Niemoeller, these are his exact words:

First they came for the Communists
and I did not speak out -
because I was not a Communist.

Then they came for the Socialists
and I did not speak out -
because I was not a Socialist.

Then they came for the trade unionists
and I did not speak out -
because I was not a trade unionist.

Then they came for the Jews
and I did not speak out -
because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me
and there was no one left
to speak out for me.

(Liturgies on the Holocaust, An Interfaith Anthology, 1996)

Q12. How many survivors of the Holocaust are alive today?

The exact number of Holocaust survivors that exists in the world today varies. Sergio Della Pergola, a demographer for the Institute of Contemporary Jewry at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, found 1,092,000 survivors worldwide (in a 2003 report). Jacob Ukeles, a policy researcher in Manhattan, found 688,000 (in a 2000 report).

Both demographers relied on the same standard in terms of defining a Holocaust survivor: Any Jew who lived for any period of time in a country that was ruled by the Nazis or their allies is called a Holocaust survivor (by Della Pergola) or a Nazi victim (by Ukeles).

Both surveys found the highest percentage of Jewish survivors are living in Israel. In his updated version (2003 version), Ukeles reported the figure at

265,000, or 38.5 percent of the population of Israel. Della Pergola put the number at 511,000 or 46.8 percent of the population of Israel.

The difference in the studies stems from the fact that Della Pergola included as survivors Jews who lived in Arab countries - Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Syria, Lebanon and Algeria - that passed anti-Jewish law. Ukeles did not.

Today, rough estimates would put the numbers anywhere for 150,000 to 300,000.

Babmili (Tel Aviv, 2004)

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