

Holocaust Revisionism

As one of the most shocking crimes of the 20th Century: the arrest and killing of millions of Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals, Communists, disabled, and other “undesirables” in the name of Nazi German authorities. Names like Auschwitz and Dachau have entered our language as synonyms for unspeakable horror.

There are people who say that the Holocaust never happened: that it was a invention of Allied (or Jewish) propaganda; that there was no organised campaign to destroy Jews; that the gas chambers at Auschwitz are just ruins; that Jews have been cashing in on Holocaust guilt since World War Two. Such people call themselves Holocaust Revisionists, and claim to ask reasonable questions about the reality of the Holocaust.

Most of us think we know something about the Holocaust, but when challenged, most of us are unable to provide more than a few basic facts. In such ignorance, misinformation can spread, furthering the cause of those who would claim that it never happened.

What do we know about the Holocaust?
What of the claims made by revisionists?

The first point which should be made is the distinction between concentration camps and extermination camps. The former were set up in Germany before World War Two, solely for the imprisonment of political enemies of the Nazis. Extermination camps were mostly set up in Poland after the German

occupation. It was in the extermination camps that the vast majority of the killing took place.

Life for Germany's Jews became unpleasant as soon as the Nazis took power in 1933, and many sought safety in emigration. For those who stayed, restrictions and harassment became more severe, culminating with the *Reichskristallnacht* (Night of Broken Glass) in November 1938. Across Germany, Jewish property was looted and burned by mobs, with the police intervening generally only to protect non-Jewish assets. Yet this was only a shadow of what was to come.

When Germany occupied Poland in October 1939, the Nazi authorities rounded up that country's Jews and restricted them to ghettos in the major cities. While the ghettos were self-governing, and to some extent left to themselves, the conditions in these ghettos were squalid, and hundreds of thousands died from disease and malnutrition.

Nazi antipathy moved to another level when Germany invaded the USSR in July 1941. Special Action squads (*Sonderkommando*) followed the armies through occupied lands, collecting and shooting any Jews they found. Bodies were buried in mass graves, such as that at Babi Yar, near Kiev in the Ukraine. An estimated 1.5 million Jews were killed by these means.

But the Final Solution (*Endloesung*) reached its main expression from 1942 onwards. Across Europe, Jews were arrested and transported to the death camps built in occupied Poland.

Germany's allies went along with this with varying levels of enthusiasm. On arrival, those who could work were employed in various industrial facilities. The remainder were killed immediately by gassing. The bodies of the dead were destroyed in crematoriums which operated 24 hours a day.

The work of the death camps was brought to an end by the advance of Soviet armies in 1944 and 1945. In June of 1944, the camp at Maidanek was captured virtually intact, giving the rest of the world its first clear evidence of Nazi atrocities (though some information had reached the outside world in the preceding years). However, when Soviet forces reached Auschwitz in January 1945, the camp had been mostly demolished, and its remaining inmates marched westwards, an action which led to the deaths of most of them. Finally, as Allied armies occupied Germany itself in 1945, the concentration camps were liberated, freeing many survivors.

How many Jews were killed?

The exact figure will never be known, but the latest estimate is between 5 and 6 million Jews were killed by the Nazis. This includes death by shooting, gassing, disease and deliberate neglect. This figure has been reached by a range of means, such as census figures from before and after World War Two, cargo manifests from the trains transporting Jews to the camps and the supply of other materials necessary for the operation of the extermination camps, such as coking coal for the crematoriums and gas for the gas chambers.

How do we know that the buildings alleged to be gas chambers at Auschwitz were what is claimed?

Although the buildings were demolished by the Germans when they retreated, the Allies secured floor plans for both the crematoriums and gas chambers. These match Royal Air Force reconnaissance photos taken in 1944, the descriptions given by prisoners who survived, by guards, and investigations of the site itself.

There is no document signed by Adolf Hitler glorifying the murder of Jews. Can the Holocaust be considered a few excesses by zealous individuals rather than an organised campaign to exterminate the Jews?

It is true that no one has yet uncovered such a document, and it probably doesn't exist anywhere, if it ever did. While the Nazis kept detailed records of their actions, officials also wrote much material with an eye to the future, using a range of euphemisms to mask the brutality of their actions; hence the use of neutral terms such as "Final Solution". However there are also a lot of documents in which they describe exactly what they either have done or intended to do, and these documents leave no doubt that people at all levels of the Nazi Party knew what was occurring, and approved. In addition, Hitler publicly stated his intention to destroy the Jews of Europe on at least three occasions.

Isn't it possible that the missing millions of Jews were deported to the Soviet Union, emigrated to Palestine, or were killed in fighting?

This question ignores the amount of information we have about the movement of Jews to the camps. Trains full of people travelled to the camps and returned containing only personal possessions, and there is no further record anywhere of the movements of these people. Polish people living in the vicinity of the extermination camps noted that the amount of food arriving at the camps was nowhere near enough to feed the people who arrived there. Certainly many of the partisans fighting in occupied Europe were Jewish, and certainly tens or hundreds of thousands of them were killed in action. Likewise, tens of thousands emigrated to Palestine before World War Two. But clearly, these numbers are far less than the millions who went missing during the War. Suggestions that the missing millions might have been imprisoned in the USSR make no sense, and have absolutely no evidence to support them.

Further research: the web-site www.nizkor.org contains a lot of information about the Holocaust and Holocaust revisionism/denial. Among other things, it includes copies of historical documents which help prove the reality of the Holocaust, and links to sites which oppose it.

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Canberra Skeptics