What was the Holocaust?

KS3 KS4 Ages 11-16 ⏰ 2 min read

Between 1941 and 1945, Nazi Germany carried out one of history's most horrific crimes: the deliberate murder of six million Jewish people and millions of others they considered 'undesirable.' This systematic killing is called the **Holocaust**, from a Greek word meaning 'burnt offering.'

How It Began

When Adolf Hitler and his Nazi Party came to power in Germany in 1933, they blamed Jewish people for the country's problems. They spread lies and hatred, claiming Jewish people were dangerous enemies. Gradually, they stripped Jewish families of their rights — banning them from schools, jobs, and public places. Many Jewish people tried to leave Germany, but other countries often refused to let them in.

Think of hatred like a poison that spreads through society. It starts with nasty words, then grows into cruel laws, and finally becomes violence. Once people accept the poison of hatred, it becomes easier to commit terrible acts.

The Final Solution

In 1942, Nazi leaders met to plan what they called the 'Final Solution' — their plan to murder every Jewish person in Europe. They built special camps called **concentration camps** and **extermination camps**, designed specifically for killing. Families were torn apart as people were loaded onto cattle trains and transported to these camps. The largest and most infamous was Auschwitz-Birkenau in Poland.

The Nazis didn't only target Jewish people. They also murdered Roma people, disabled individuals, political prisoners, Jehovah's Witnesses, and others they deemed 'enemies of the state.' In total, the Holocaust claimed around eleven million lives.

Liberation and Memory

When Allied forces liberated the camps in 1945, the world saw the full horror of what had happened. Survivors were often the only remaining members of their families. Many had lost everything — their homes, their communities, their entire way of life.

Today, we remember the Holocaust to honour the victims and to ensure such hatred never takes root again. Survivors have shared their stories to teach us that ordinary people can do extraordinary evil when they choose hatred over compassion. Their courage reminds us that we must always stand up against prejudice and protect the vulnerable, no matter who they are.

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