

A How did the Nazis treat 'outsiders'?

FOCUS ROUTE

- 1 Explain why the Nazis regarded each of the following groups as outsiders:
 - a) the mentally ill
 - b) ASOCIALS
 - c) homosexuals
 - d) members of religious sects
 - e) gypsies.
- 2 How was each of these groups treated by the Nazi regime?
- 3 Explain what the Nazi sterilisation and euthanasia programmes show about the regime and the way it operated.

The Nazis stressed the idea of *Volksgemeinschaft*, a people's community of healthy, vigorous Aryans working for the good of the nation. This concept was reinforced by its opposite: outsiders who did not belong (*gemeinschaftsunfähig*) and who had to be excluded from the people's community. These outsiders were classified on three main grounds:

- Ideological: those threatening the political unity of the nation, such as Communists
- Biological: those whose genes posed a threat to a healthy, pure German race, such as Jews and people with hereditary illnesses
- Social: those whose behaviour conflicted with the norms of the national community, such as the workshy. (Some Nazis would include some of these in the second category, arguing that such behaviour was genetically determined.)

From sterilisation to euthanasia The mentally ill

SOURCE 18.1 A still from *Erbkrank* (Hereditary Illness), a 1935 film made by the Office for Racial Politics with the purpose of building up dislike and fear of the mentally ill. Such films were seen by 40 million people in 1939



SOURCE 18.2 Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Offspring, July 1933

1 (ii) *Anyone is hereditarily ill within the meaning of this law who suffers from one of the following illnesses:*

- (a) *Congenital [hereditary] feeble-mindedness.*
- (b) *Schizophrenia.*
- (c) *Manic depression.*
- (d) *Hereditary epilepsy.*
- (e) *Huntington's chorea.*
- (f) *Hereditary blindness.*
- (g) *Hereditary deafness.*
- (h) *Serious physical deformities.*

(iii) *In addition, anyone who suffers from chronic alcoholism can be sterilised.*

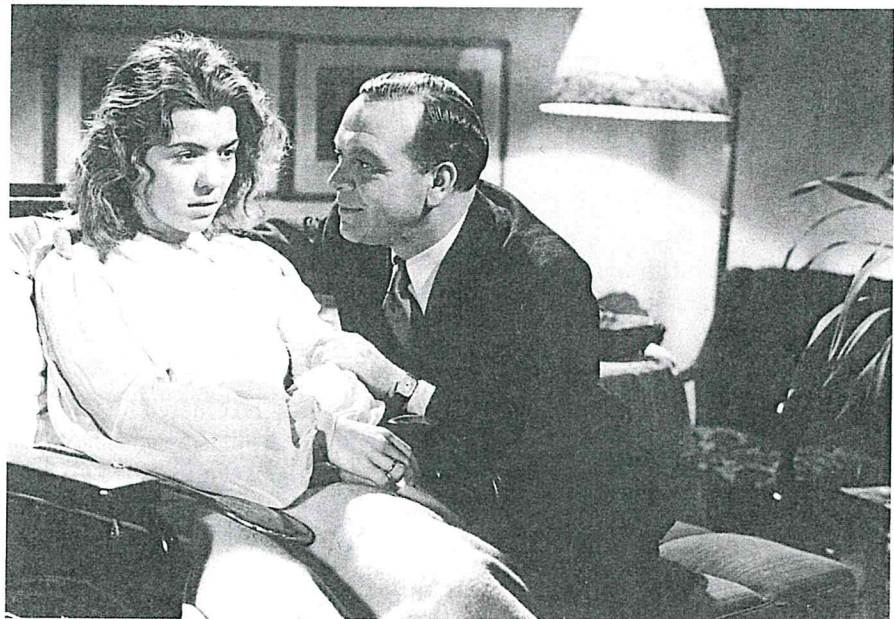
12 *If the [Hereditary Health] Court has decided finally in favour of sterilisation, the sterilisation must be carried out even against the wishes of the person to be sterilised . . . In so far as other measures prove insufficient the use of force is permissible.*

For the Nazis, race, not class, was the key to history. A healthy, pure race would gain mastery in the struggle for survival in the world. Unhealthy genes weakened the race. The mentally ill were 'burdens on the community', 'life without life, worthless life' and 'unworthy of life'. Therefore, one of the first acts of the Nazi regime was a law allowing compulsory sterilisation of the hereditarily ill, to prevent bearers of such genes from passing them on to children. In the next twelve years about 350,000 people were sterilised, with about 100 dying as a result of the 'Hitler cut'. By 1939 the policy of reducing the numbers of the mentally ill by sterilisation developed into one of murder, described as 'mercy killing' or euthanasia.

This policy had been considered early on by Nazi leaders but was not at first adopted. However, in 1939 Hitler used a father's letter requesting that his deformed son be 'put to sleep' to initiate the policy of killing the incurably ill (see page 191). (This was typical of the random way policy decisions could be made in the Third Reich.) A special unit, T4, was established to kill disabled children. The government registered disabled children, and their records were examined by three doctors who marked the files '+' to die, '-' to survive. Children were killed by starvation, by lethal injection or by gas in mobile vans ('killer boxes') or 'shower' gas chambers. The policy was gradually extended to adults. By 1944, 200,000 people deemed mentally and physically disabled had been murdered. Relatives were informed by letter of the victims' sudden death from diseases such as measles or from 'general weakness', and were sent urns of ashes. Administrative errors, with urns of boys containing hair grips and diagnoses of appendicitis on those without an appendix, increased suspicion of what was occurring. The euthanasia programme contributed in several ways to the Holocaust. The T4 staff, and the techniques learnt, were later used in the Holocaust. Many would also argue that the moral degeneration that allowed such actions to occur eventually led to people permitting genocide.

Although the killings were kept secret, the government tried to prepare the German people for such policies by promoting the pro-euthanasia argument, especially through propaganda films. Some of these were aimed at the staff in the 'euthanasia institutions', others at the general public. The deaths of the disabled were justified mainly on the grounds of ending their misery, but this idea was reinforced by stressing the financial cost of keeping them alive (see Source 14.21, page 283) and the adverse effect such people had on the nation.

SOURCE 18.3 A scene from the film *I Accuse*, which was produced partly to counter Bishop Galen's 1941 protest against euthanasia (Source 18.5). The film centred around the decline of a musician suffering from multiple sclerosis who pleaded for her husband to kill her. When he did so, he was prosecuted. At his trial, he made an impassioned defence of his actions and accused the law of being outdated. The film was a great box-office success, being seen by 18 million people. The SS monitored audiences' reactions, finding that some seemed convinced but that others, especially Catholics, were ill at ease



SOURCE 18.4 From the commentary for the 1937 film *Victims of the Past*, ordered by Hitler to be shown in all 5,300 German cinemas before the main film

All life on this earth is a struggle for existence. Everything that is weak [in] life will inevitably be destroyed by nature. In the last few decades, mankind has sinned terribly against the laws of natural selection. We haven't just maintained life unworthy of life, we have allowed it to multiply . . . Whole clans are to be found in asylums. The costs of caring for the hereditarily ill siblings of this one family have so far been 154,000 RM. How many healthy people could have been housed for this sum?

Sterilisation is a simple surgical operation. In the last 70 years our people have increased by 50 per cent while in the same period the number of hereditarily ill has risen by 450 per cent. If this were to continue, there would be one hereditarily ill [person] to four healthy people. An endless column of horror would march into the nation.

SOURCE 18.6 SS officer Greifelt in January 1939

In view of the tight situation on the labour market, national labour discipline dictated that all persons who would not conform to the working life of the nation, and who were vegetating as work-shy and asocial, making the streets of our cities and countryside unsafe, had to be compulsorily registered and set to work . . . More than 10,000 of these asocial forces are currently undertaking a labour training cure in the concentration camps, which are admirably suited for this purpose.

Why do you think the Nazis could not accept that there are things that are entirely up to the individual?

SOURCE 18.5 In August 1941 Bishop Galen, in the most famous public criticism of the Nazi regime, preached a sermon, which was printed and widely circulated, protesting at the euthanasia policy

If you establish and apply the principle that you can kill unproductive fellow human beings then woe betide us all when we become old and frail! . . . Even if it only initially affects the poor defenceless mentally ill . . . as a matter of principle murder is permitted for all unproductive people, in other words for the incurably sick, the people who have become invalids through labour and war, for us all when we become old, frail and therefore unproductive.

. . . Then none of our lives will be safe any more. Some commission can put us on the list of the 'unproductive' who in their opinion have become worthless life . . . Woe to mankind, woe to our German nation if God's holy commandment 'Thou shalt not kill' . . . is not only broken, but if this transgression is actually tolerated and permitted to go unpunished.

Asocials

'Asocial' was a very broad term that could be applied to anyone who did not fit into the *Volksgemeinschaft*. In 1938 asocials were defined as vagabonds, gypsies, beggars, prostitutes, alcoholics, eccentrics, the workshy and juvenile delinquents. The most obvious manifestation of asocial behaviour was unwillingness to work, as this 'gives offence to the community'. In 1933 there was a round-up of half a million vagrants. They were divided into the orderly, who were given work, and the disorderly, who were imprisoned in camps where they were forced to wear black triangles. As unemployment disappeared, pressure on those not working increased. Thousands were sent to concentration camps, where many died. Increasingly, the unemployed were seen as a matter for the police not welfare agencies. The Nazis increasingly stressed the biological origins of asocial behaviour. Thus the asocial became, in the Nazi view, unworthy people who needed to be removed, via sterilisation and murder, in the interests of the community.

Homosexuals

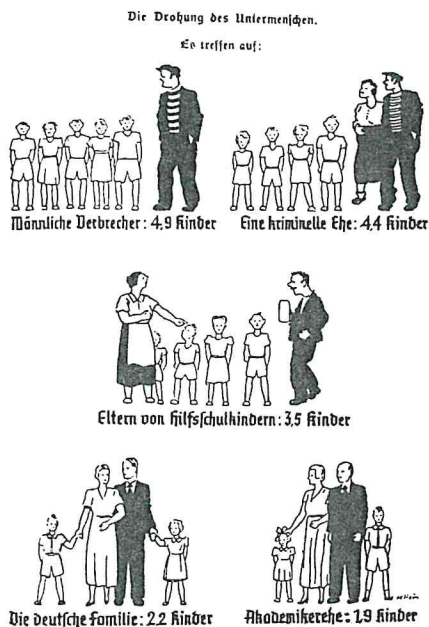
Another group deemed to be asocial were homosexuals. Not only did their behaviour deeply offend traditionally minded Nazis, it was also believed to be against the laws of nature and to threaten Germany's position in the world by reducing the country's birth rate. In 1936 the Reich Central Office for the Combating of Homosexuality and Abortion was created and Himmler tried to establish a register of homosexuals. He was particularly concerned at the discovery of about ten cases a year of homosexuality even in 'the good blood' in the SS. In 1937 he ordered that homosexual SS officers should be sent to concentration camps 'where they will be shot while attempting to escape'. Eventually, between 10,000 and 15,000 homosexuals were arrested and sent to camps where they were forced to wear pink triangles. Some were castrated and became the object of medical experiments designed to correct their 'unnatural' feelings. Lesbians were not subject to formal persecution in the Third Reich since they were not seen as a threat to the nation.

SOURCE 18.7 From a speech by Heinrich Himmler to the SS in February 1937

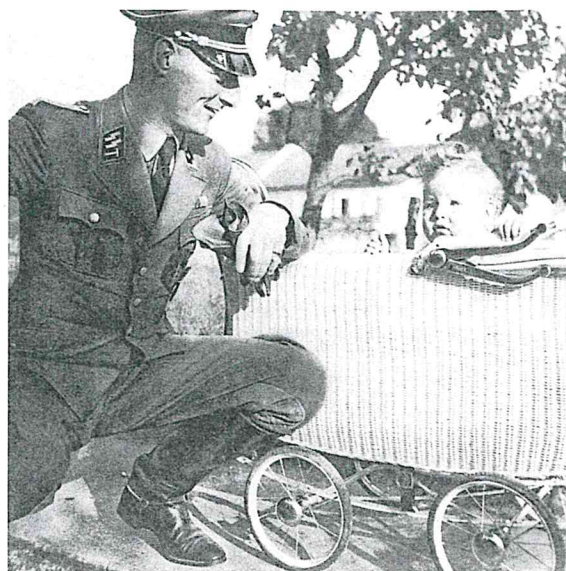
. . . There are those homosexuals who take the view: what I do is my business. However, all things which take place in the sexual sphere are not the private affair of the individual, but signify the life and death of the nation, signify world power or 'SWISSIFICATION'. The people which has many children has the candidature for world power and world domination. A people of good race which has too few children has a one-way ticket to the grave, for insignificance in fifty or a hundred years, for burial in two hundred and fifty years . . .

In olden times homosexuals were thrown in swamps . . . That wasn't a punishment, but simply the extinguishing of abnormal life. It has to be got rid of; just as we pull out weeds, throw them on a heap, and burn them. It was not a feeling of revenge, simply that those affected had to go.

SOURCE 18.8 An illustration from a book, *Nation in Danger*. The top row shows the families of criminals; the middle row families with children who need special education; the bottom row the German family with 2.2 children and the academic couple with 1.9 children



SOURCE 18.9 A picture from an SS calendar entitled: 'A nation stands or falls according to the greater or lesser worth of its blood-bound racial substance.' The Nazi regime believed it was vital to increase the number of children born to Aryan parents. In a speech in 1937 Himmler said: 'If you further take into account the facts I have not yet mentioned, namely that with a static number of women, we have two million men too few on account of those who fell in the war, then you can well imagine how this imbalance of two million homosexuals and two million war dead, or in other words a lack of about four million men capable of having sex, has upset the sexual balance sheet of Germany, and will result in a catastrophe'



Ein Volk steht und fällt mit dem Wert oder Unwert seiner blutgebundenen rassistischen Substanz.

Juni						Brachet
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Sonntag	Montag	Dienstag	Mittwoch	Donnerstag	Freitag	Sonabend

Agencies: "Polaris" 1938
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Religious sects

Although the Nazis were fairly cautious in their dealings with the main Christian Churches (see Chapter 16), they acted fiercely against minority sects, especially Jehovah's Witnesses. These had refused to join the army and to swear allegiance. Whole families were arrested. About one-third of Germany's Jehovah's Witnesses died in concentration camps. Other groups, such as Christian Scientists and Seventh Day Adventists, suffered a similar fate.

Gypsies

The Nazis did not initiate hostility to gypsies. With their distinctive appearance and lifestyle, gypsies had long been objects of suspicion in many countries. As a numerically small group of 30,000, gypsies were not seen as a major threat, provided they did not contaminate the German blood pool; but in the late 1930s they became victims of the general radicalisation. In 1938 Himmler issued a 'Decree for the Struggle against the Gypsy Plague'. In 1939 they were sent to camps, before being expelled to Poland. In December 1942 Himmler ordered them to be transferred to Auschwitz, where there was a special gypsy camp. Eleven thousand of the 20,000 gypsies in Auschwitz were gassed. As German control extended throughout Europe, more gypsies became victims of Nazism, and it has been estimated that half a million gypsies were killed.

SOURCE 18.10 Letter to a Frankfurt newspaper from some citizens about the 'Gypsy nuisance'

... Right opposite properties ... Gypsies have settled themselves ... who represent a heavy burden on the community. The hygienic conditions in this area defy description ... We are worried about the spread of contagious diseases. Also, with regard to sexual conduct, these people, and even the children, have no sense of decency ... Almost daily there are fights and the neighbourhood has become so insecure that one has to worry about walking the streets alone after darkness. Because of the Gypsies our properties have greatly depreciated [fallen in value].

Are the attitudes in Sources 18.6, 18.7 and 18.10 still prevalent today?

Do you consider prejudice against people with different behaviour and lifestyles inevitable?

FOCUS ROUTE

Explain how anti-semitic measures developed between 1933 and 1939, identifying those periods when discrimination escalated.

SOURCE 18.11 Nobel Peace Prize winner and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel

The language to describe the Holocaust does not exist. The more I study, the less I understand.

SOURCE 18.12 The diary entry of Alfred Rosenberg, the Nazi ideologue, for 2 April 1941, after a two-hour meeting with Hitler about the executions of Jews in the east

What I do not write down today, I will none the less never forget.

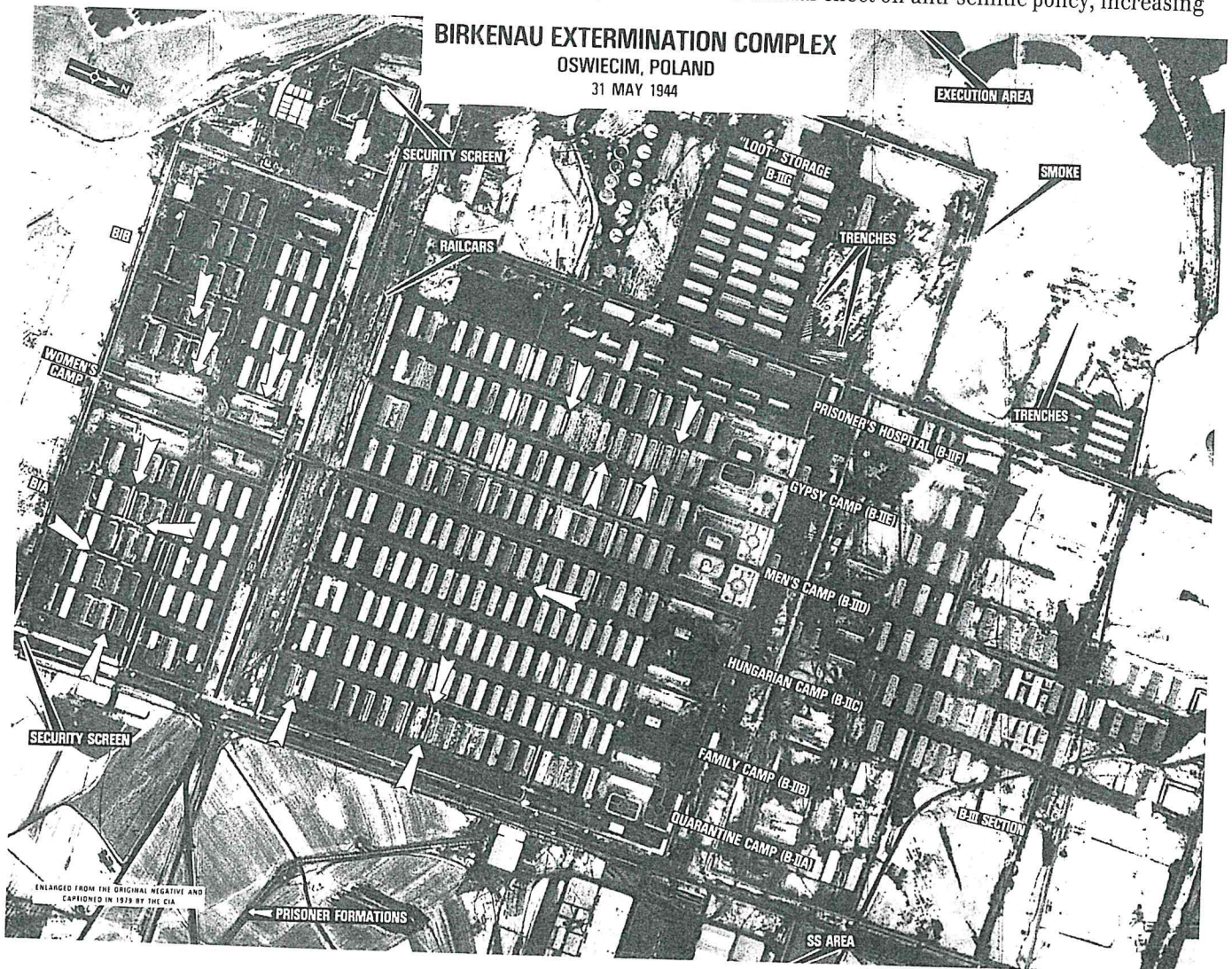
SOURCE 18.13 Aerial photo of Auschwitz–Birkenau camp taken from an Allied plane in December 1944. Oswiecim is the Polish name which the Germans changed to Auschwitz

B What measures were taken against the Jews?

Anti-semitism was not confined to 1930s Germany. Hostility to the Jews, linked to a belief in their responsibility for the killing of Christ, has a long tradition in Christian history. This hostility was reinforced by resentment at the wealth and position of some Jews and the periodic need for scapegoats to blame for problems. In the late nineteenth century an influx of Jews fleeing persecution in Tsarist Russia, combined with the growth of racist views associated with social Darwinism, led to increased anti-semitic feeling in Germany and other European countries. The problems afflicting Germany after 1918 were attributed by some to a worldwide Jewish conspiracy. The Nazis were one of several parties encouraging anti-semitism, although it seems clear that this was not a major reason for their electoral support.

Once the Nazis came to power, Jews were subjected to increased discrimination (see Chart 18A), though anti-semitic policy developed in a typically haphazard manner. In 1933 some Jews were deprived of their jobs and in 1935 all lost their citizenship. The pogroms of *Kristallnacht* (the Night of Broken Glass) in November 1938 symbolised the radicalisation of the regime. The Nazis, by then politically and economically secure, were free to pursue their aim of driving Jews out of German life. Jews' economic position, then their individual freedom and ultimately their lives came under threat.

Until 1939 the Nazis favoured emigration as a way to remove the Jewish presence from Germany, but the outbreak of war made overseas emigration difficult. Indeed, the war had a crucial effect on anti-semitic policy, increasing



Reinhard Heydrich (1904–42): the exterminator

The son of a musician who may have been Jewish, Heydrich later issued many writs for slander over accusations about his ancestry. He served in the navy, but was dismissed over a sexual allegation. Tall, blond and athletic, he thus, unlike many Nazi leaders, typified the ideal Aryan. In 1932 he joined the SS and rose rapidly in its ranks, becoming a close associate of Himmler and playing a major role in the Night of the Long Knives. In 1936 he became Chief of the Security Police and the SD (the Security Service of the SS), organising a vast police network. He became an SS general in 1941 and organised the *EINSATZGRUPPEN* that carried out killings in the USSR in 1941.

Heydrich established the first Jewish ghetto and became the first administrator of the concentration camp system. At the Wannsee Conference in January 1942 he was chosen to administer the Final Solution. In May 1942 he was killed by a grenade thrown by a special Czech hit squad trained in Britain with the support of the British government. The Nazis responded by executing over 1,000 Czechs and massacring the entire village of Lidice which had sheltered the assassins. This fierce repression permanently alienated the Czechs from Nazi rule.

Heydrich, known as the Blond Beast, was one of the least attractive Nazis, being cold, suspicious and sadistic, with a morbid self-hatred. Along with Himmler, he shared the greatest direct responsibility for organising the Holocaust. His savage treatment of Jews may have been partly caused by his fear that he himself had Jewish blood.



the number of Jews within German-controlled territory and provoking a brutalisation of life that reduced objections to mass murder. By winter 1941, an estimated 700,000 Jews had been killed, mainly in unsystematic mass shootings. The SS then decided gassing was more efficient. In January 1942, at the Wannsee Conference, Nazi policy was co-ordinated and the 'Final Solution' adopted, with the euthanasia programme as a model. Between 1942 and 1945 over 5 million Jews were systematically murdered in extermination camps.

SOURCE 18.14 Painting of Auschwitz by a former inmate, W. Sibek. It shows women being selected for the gas chamber



The aftermath

After the defeat of the Third Reich, many Jews met hostility on their return to their homes. Forty-three survivors of the camps were killed in a pogrom at Kielce in Poland in 1946. Some survivors stayed in camps for displaced persons for up to five years.

Two-thirds of Jewish survivors went to Palestine. In 1948 the Jewish state of Israel was created. It faced hostility from surrounding Arab countries in what has been called 'a clash between total justice and total justice'.

In September 1945 the first of a series of war crimes trials began. Several camp guards were hanged. From November 1945 to October 1946, 22 leading Nazis were tried at Nuremberg (see pages 426–7). By 1949 the Allies had convicted 5,025 people. Most were imprisoned, some were hanged. Trials of those involved have continued in various countries into the 1990s.

■ Learning trouble spot

When did the Holocaust happen?

Students often get confused about when the Holocaust actually occurred. Very frequently, they date it too early and believe Jews were being killed in concentration camps before 1939. Most German Jews were still living in their homes in 1939, although increasingly subjected to discrimination and restrictions. They were not deported *en masse* to camps before 1941. The mass killing of Jews began with the invasion of Poland in 1939 and escalated with the invasion of the USSR in 1941 when the true horrors of the Holocaust developed, with random round-ups of innocent civilians.

There has been fierce debate over when the Nazis decided on the Final Solution: the murder of all European Jews. This is complicated by the fact that the euphemism 'final solution' was used in 1940 to refer to the expulsion of Jews to the east and the plan to resettle them in Madagascar. Evidence now suggests that the decision to move from unsystematic mass killings to a systematic programme of elimination of all Jews occurred in either July 1941 or October 1941, and was fully planned at Wannsee in January 1942.

- 1 Do you think the anti-Nazis were right to assassinate Heydrich, given the reaction it provoked from the Nazis?
- 2 Do you think it can ever be justified for the government of one country to arrange the assassination of a foreign leader?