The Genocide of the Poles, 1939-1948

An Information Guide for High School Curricula State of California

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Introduction

The materials we have prepared in this study unit for high school and middle school levels are designed to give students a deeper sense of the meaning and impact of war and genocide in the twentieth century. The unit deals specifically with Poland which was the site of the most terrible genocides in world history. Precisely for that reason it has wide applicability and is useful for any comparative look at the question of genocide elsewhere in the world. Part of the story—the Holocaust of the Jewish People at the hands of the Germans—is presented in excellent materials already widely available to teachers and is therefore only touched on in passing in these materials. The other part of the story - the martyrdom of the Polish nation - is less well known and materials for its study are not as readily available. Yet just as the Poles and Jews shared the same land for almost a millennium, they also shared the experience of genocide during (and for the Poles also after) the Second World War directed against them by some of the same demonic forces. The two stories, which occurred simultaneously, complement each other. In studying them together students get a much fuller understanding of the true horror that was visited on the Polish land in the middle of the last century and a surer grasp of the ideologies and mechanics of the genocidal actions of the Nazis and Soviets.

The Polish experience is unique in a number of ways. It did not end in 1945. It began in 1939 and continued to 1948. Poland was also the victim of two criminal regimes: Nazi Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union. On another level, the Polish experience is almost a paradigm for genocide in several of its main characteristics.

First, it was the result of specific modern ideologies which marked for extinction Poles in general or significant and leading segments of Polish society based on primitive, pseudo-scientific theories of race or socio-economic class. These ideologies served to both identify and stigmatize the victims and to justify their liquidation. The great Polish Poet and Nobel Prize winner, Czesław Miłosz in his Nobel Lecture in 1981 speaks of these as "degenerate ideas of dominion over men, akin to ideas of dominion over Nature" which "led to paroxysms of revolution and war at the expense of millions of human beings destroyed physically or spiritually."

Secondly, these ideologies were bolstered by old, pre-existing, virulently negative stereotypes of the victims, as well as long nursed historical grievances and alleged wrongs done to the perpetrators by their victims.

Third, the genocidal crimes were committed in an area with a long history of colonialism. In fact, the Polish lands had been the site of two recently failed empires: Imperial Germany and Tsarist Russia. As in Poland, recent studies of

genocide in Africa and Asia have shown that genocide often takes place in the wake of colonial collapse and is part of its legacy. Attempts to re-establish an older imperial order and the heritage of divide and conquer policies used by the previous empires to hold their subject peoples in thrall both contributed to genocide in Poland.

Fourth, The genocide against the Polish nation was marked by a determined effort not only to destroy the biological fabric of the people through slavery, forced "labor to extinction", mass deportations, starvation and murder on a massive scale but also by the expropriation of the wealth of the victims and a comprehensive campaign to destroy Polish culture, language, religious faith and institutions. Singled out for special and immediate extinction were the nation's leaders, teachers, clergy and intellectuals.

Those not immediately marked for extinction were to be left stripped of their culture, deprived of learning, and subject to an intensive promotion of pornography and alcohol consumption to complete their debasement. In short, it was a comprehensive, planned effort to wipe out all vestiges of national memory and culture as a prelude to the physical destruction of the Polish people over the course of a generation.

The Poles resisted these efforts to destroy them as best they could in a wide variety of ways. Yet resistance itself carried grave dangers to Polish society and culture. War against pitiless and bestial enemies could in its own way debase or even destroy the values the resistance was seeking to defend.

The rich literature on Soviet Gulags and Nazi Camps to which Poles such as Tadeusz Borowski (*This Way to the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen)* have made notable contributions, points out graphically how victims themselves become as hardened and merciless as their jailors. The resistance against Nazis and Soviets was the story of armed struggle by deception and sanctioned lawlessness often without quarter. The weak had to use every advantage to prevail against the might of powerful and cruel occupiers who recognized no restraint on their own power. In such situations the resistance daily faced the danger of becoming like its adversaries and the temptation to compromise the principles of civilized society. Thus, resistance could itself aid in the destruction of the culture threatened by the occupiers.

The Polish Underground was well aware of these problems and consciously sought to avoid being draw into the trap that the war against genocide presented it. The Home Army, for example, permitted its young soldiers to participate in only three executions of collaborators or particularly cruel Nazi functionaries (who were executed only after a due process trial by a formal underground court.) After the third, the executioners were sent to counseling with a priest and a psychiatrist to

prevent the creation of a post-war generation inured to murder and adept at violence who might be tempted to emulate their enemies at some future date.

Despite the best efforts of Poles to maintain a legitimate and sane order, albeit underground, to preserve the best values of the culture and maintain religious faith, the wartime generation that endured the most terrible military occupation in modern history, who saw its families, contemporaries and leaders slaughtered, its biological, cultural and spiritual heritage of 1,000 years marked for utter extinction and who witnessed the Holocaust of the Jews on its territory faced many difficulties in the post–war period. The difficulties—faced by all survivors of genocide—were compounded for the Poles by the fact that their "liberators" were themselves accomplices of the Nazis in genocide. Thus, the nightmare did not end because Poland was incorporated into the new Communist Empire in East Central Europe.

On the positive side, the experience of genocide and resistance between 1939 and 1948 brought a new awareness to Poles. It was out of this experience that the next wave of resistance would come as a self limiting revolution based on a principled non-violence and drawing on the rich cultural and spiritual heritage of the nation. Solidarity activist, Adam Michnik noted in his prison letters that people who storm Bastilles often end up building their own. Poland's Solidarity Movement thus created a model of nonviolent resistance to evil that has become, in the words of Timothy Garton Ash, the "default model of revolution in our day."

The Solidarity experience and the example it has provided to the World is clearly the product of the spiritual and cultural reflections on the Genocide to which Poland was subjected during nightmare of the Second World War. It gives hope that, however imperfectly and haltingly, the world can yet learn from history. This study guide was prepared with the same hope.

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Poland: War and Genocide 1939-1948

"Poles, we hate instinctively; Jews, we hate in accordance with orders."
Ludwig Fischer
Nazi Governor of the Warsaw District

Background

Modern Poland is the successor of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth which for four hundred years (1384–1795) was the dominant power in East Central Europe. It was the outpost of Latin Catholic culture on the European frontier with Islam and the border with the Orthodox world. Despite its Catholic European ties and institutions, including one of the earliest universities in Central Europe at Kraków, the Commonwealth was a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic state with many religious groups including a significant East Slavic Orthodox and Greek Catholic population. It had a large Armenian population, significant settlements of German, Czech, Flemish, Dutch speaking farmers and Italian, German, English merchants in its cities. It contained the largest Scottish population in Continental Europe. Muslim Tatars also settled in parts of Poland, taking up service with the Polish king and regional princes. Most significantly, it became a haven for Europe's Jews either expelled from Western Europe or fleeing anti-Jewish violence during the Black Death and Crusades.

In 1264, Prince Bolesław of Sandomierz enacted the first legal measure that protected the rights of the Jewish minority, the Statues of Kalisz. This law was later extended to the entire country by King Casimir the Great. By the seventeenth century four-fifths of all of the Jews in the world were living in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. It was this legal tradition of tolerance that led to men such as Paulus Vladimiri who in the fifteenth century proved that religious conversion by force was contrary to Christian teaching and that all peoples had a right to exist regardless of faith or language. His writings laid the cornerstone for our modern notion of universal human rights.

During its four hundred year existence, the Commonwealth served as a bulwark against Tatar and Ottoman invasions and a barrier to Muscovite expansion. Internally, it evolved into a decentralized, parliamentary republic with an electorate of more the 10 percent of the population, an elective kingship and rights for its political class than rivaled or exceeded those won by its western counterparts. Minority groups such as the Jews had significant autonomy and enjoyed official royal protection. Most importantly, the Commonwealth offered considerable religious toleration during a time when Europe was torn by religious wars. In the sixteenth century Polish King Zygmunt August summed up this policy when he proclaimed that he was not the king of his subjects' consciences.

Its historical evolution made the Commonwealth an anomaly in the modern world. In contrast to Poland, its neighbors Prussia, Russia, Austria, and Sweden developed centralized, authoritarian, bureaucratic states with more efficient systems for mobilizing money, resources, and armies. By the end of the seventeenth century, Poland's powerful neighbors began to take advantage of the country's relative weakness and interfered in its internal politics seeking to increase its vulnerability. In 1772, claiming Poland's weaknesses required their intervention, Prussia, Austria, and Russia seized large sections of Polish territories contiguous to their frontiers in what became the first Partition of Poland.

The event shocked Polish society into a major effort at reform. Within a generation significant agricultural, economic, and political changes were made. These were informed not only by the best and most generous traditions of the old Commonwealth, but also by the new ideas of the European Enlightenment which gained wide currency in the country. The reform culminated in a new republican Constitution on May 3, 1791, the second in the world after the American Constitution of 1789. Robert R. Palmer, author of the authoritative study *The Age of Democratic Revolutions*, has noted that only three societies at the end of the eighteenth century had enough internal support to carry off a democratic revolution: the new United States, France, and Poland. Poland's attempt to create a modern democratic republic was, however, thwarted by the second (1793) and third partitions (1795) by its neighbors. By 1795, Poland had disappeared entirely from the map of Europe. In January 1796 Austria, Prussia, and Russia sealed their bargain to complete the dismembering of Poland with a convention which declared their mutual agreement "to abolish everything which can recall the memory of the existence of the kingdom of Poland."

The final partitions came not just because of Poland's weakness, but because of her potential strength and because her reform carried the seeds of the dangerous new democratic ideas that at the same moment were driving the French Revolution. Catherine the Great called the Poles the "Jacobins of the East." Despite the success of the partitions, the memories of her past greatness, the Constitution of May 3, 1791 and Thaddeus Kościuszko's insurrection to try to save the republic in 1794 created a new national tradition that was to sustain resistance to oppression and to keep alive the hope of a reborn Poland for the 123 years of the partitions and then again during the dark night of the Nazi occupation and subsequent Sovietization of Poland.

From Partition to Independence

During the period of the partitions, Poles rose almost every generation in rebellion to liberate their homeland. They raised armies for the French Revolution and Napoleon in the hopes that France would restore Poland's independence. There were insurrections in 1830–31, 1846, 1848 and 1863 in which Poles sacrificed blood and treasure in large amounts in the vain hope of winning independence.

Many of the best and most patriotic young people of several generations ended their lives on the gallows, in Siberia or in exile as a result. The impulse that led to insurrection against their oppressors at home also drove them to join the struggle for freedom abroad. Polish leaders such as cavalryman Casimir Pułaski and military engineer Tadeusz Kościuszko joined the American colonists in their struggle for freedom against Great Britain. Moved by the notion that where there was a fight for freedom there was Poland, they joined revolutions from the German and Italian states to Latin America to the Caucasus under the slogan, "For your freedom and ours." In exasperation, the German chancellor Otto von Bismarck called Poles "the general staff of world revolution."

The partitions of Poland were as much expressions of European colonialism as overseas empires and were justified by similar ideologies. Even liberal democratic elements in those empires could not imagine a Russia or a Germany without their Polish lands. Moreover, the ideology of national grandeur, which supported German claims, also was influenced by the racial ideology that infected all of nineteenth-century imperialism. Poles already a century before Hitler were widely seen by the Germans as an inherently inferior, disorderly people who were unfit to rule themselves. This racial ideology was to acquire even more vicious stereotypes and a murderous energy in the doctrines of the Nazi Party in the post-World War I era.

The internal policies of the partitioning powers, in particular those of Russia and the newly unified Germany sought, in the spirit of the 1796 St. Petersburg Declaration, to erase the memory of Polish culture and to stifle the growing national conscious of the mass of Polish people. Chancellor Bismarck's Kulturkampf in Poland was designed not only to suppress Polishness but also to cripple the Catholic Church, which had become the bastion of Polish memory and culture. The School Strikes in German Poland, in which Polish students and their parents demanded the right to instruction in their own language, brought a violent response from the state leading to long-term imprisonment of protestors and even the death of some students. Economic discrimination by the state against its Polish subjects was accompanied after 1886 by a publicly assisted private initiative to settle German colonists on Polish territories and to actively Germanize these areas.

In Russian Poland, the Tsarist government thoroughly Russianized public life and the administration of its Polish provinces. The Russians also eliminated Polish laws that had protected the Jewish minority. The Russian government was especially vigorous in rooting out all Polish educational, religious, economic, political, or cultural influences in the former eastern parts of the Commonwealth where Poles for centuries had shared a common life with Lithuanians, Ukrainians and Belarussians and where a large part of the Jewish population of the old Republic had lived. In the "Kingdom," the predominantly Polish part of the Russian partition, the primary education system was non-existent and the advanced

and higher education systems that existed since 1795 were systematically dismantled. A nineteenth-century Russian Liberal noted, "it was as if we could only hold Poland by uncivilizing her."

The partitions thus saddled the Polish lands with alien and oppressive governmental structures and an archaic social system and subjected them to deliberate policies of denationalization and religious persecution. The struggles for independence had also for generations diverted the intelligence, energy and resources of the nation's best and brightest away from national development. All of Poland's energies were devoted to surviving as a nation. Russian and Austrian Poland also shared the delayed economic modernization of their colonial overlords.

Polish independence came with the collapse of the German, Austrian, and Russian Empires as a result of World War I and the Russian Revolution. The new Poland was secured only after fighting on the new German frontiers and a victorious war against the new Soviet Union in 1920–21, which had hoped to reconstitute the boundaries of the Tsarist Empire and to carry the revolution into a demoralized post-war Central Europe.

Between Nazis and Soviets

The new Poland faced many problems. A new governmental apparatus and national state had to be created out of three distinct areas which had different histories, governments and development for more than a century. Most of the war on the Eastern Front had been fought in Polish territories. The new nation inherited a devastated landscape and a ravaged economy. Minority groups made up one-third of the population of the new Poland especially Ukrainians, Jews, Germans, and Belarussians. The former multi-cultural Commonwealth emerged after 123 years as a new Polish national state. The neighbors of the new Poland, its former colonial masters, unreconciled to the loss of their Polish colonies, felt humiliated by its very existence. Vyacheslav Molotov, the Soviet Foreign Minister, was to refer to Poland as "that bastard of the Versailles Treaty."

Nevertheless, despite the economic and social problems the new Poland had inherited, the serious minority problems it faced and the devastating effect of the Great Depression in the early thirties, it made remarkable progress in re-integrating the three partitions, creating the beginnings of a new infrastructure including a model port city at Gdynia and laying the basis for modern industry including high-tech production. Its fledgling aircraft industry achieved world-class status. Although agriculture continued to develop at a much slower rate, considerable progress had been made in land reform and the adoption of new production techniques. Still a poor and developing country at the outbreak of the war, Poland was well on the way to modernization. Its population reached almost 35 million by the outbreak of World War II in 1939.

Poland had long viewed the totalitarian regimes of Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union as major threats to its existence. Following Hitler's rise to power, Polish leader Józef Piłsudski had even proposed a joint Polish-French intervention to remove Hitler from office. Sadly, this was rejected by French leaders. Hitler viewed Poland as a major enemy of the new Germany. Poland blocked German expansion to the east, preventing the Nazi state from gaining "living space."

World War II—The September Campaign

World War II began early on September 1, 1939 when the Armed Forces of Nazi Germany launched an unprovoked attack against Poland. The stage for the war had been set by German demands for territorial concessions from Poland after the Munich Conference of September 1938 and the annexation of the Czech lands in March 1939 by Adolph Hitler's regime. The way was cleared for the Nazi invasion by the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact on August 23, 1939 between Germany and the Soviet Union. The treaty contained a secret protocol that outlined a new partition of Poland.

Poland had its own treaties with Britain and France and guarantees of military support should Nazi Germany attack. In particular, the French pledged a full-scale offensive against Germany within fifteen days of the start of hostilities. In the end, the promises of allied assistance did not materialize and Germany was able to concentrate the majority of its army against Poland leaving only light defensive forces on its western front.

On September 1, 1939, Nazi armies attacked Poland, with the Germans throwing almost their entire army and air force into the invasion. On September 17, 1939, Soviet armies joined in and attacked Poland from the east. Although the Poles knew the attack was coming, Poland's French and British allies bullied the Poles into delaying mobilization out of fear of "provoking" Hitler. As a result, only part of the Polish army was ready when the attack came. About one-fourth of Polish army personnel never reached their units. The Polish high command understood what it was up against. Poland could not stop Germany's industrial might alone. Despite heroic sacrifices by Polish society to modernize the military, the budget of the German air force alone was ten times greater than the entire Polish defense budget. Poland's main goal was to force France and Britain into the war and this meant preventing Hitler from scoring a quick victory or taking a piece of Polish territory and declaring the war over.

The Polish campaign lasted from September 1st to early October when the last pockets of resistance were eliminated. Warsaw fell after a brutal two-week siege on September 27th. The fall of Poland was accelerated when on September 17th a Soviet army of a million men spearheaded by 4,000 tanks invaded Poland from the east. Facing the inevitability of defeat, the Polish government fled the country to

Romania where it was interned. Using a special provision of the constitution, the President of Poland, Ignacy Moscicki, transferred his office to Paris where an exile government was formed under General Władysław Sikorski.

Western opinion has regarded the September campaign as a minor affair in which the Germans won an easy victory with few casualties. Part of the reason for this belief was the German propaganda campaign against Poland. Historian Piotr Wróbel wrote: "The best known element of this propaganda war is the legendary *Blitzkrieg* in Poland. The Allies gladly accepted Goebbels' version of the 'quick war' because it justified their betrayal. After the war, many outstanding western historians, such as John Wheeler-Bennett in his *The Nemesis of Power*, used the *Blitzkrieg* interpretation. Several documentary film directors took as authentic material the scenes Goebbels staged for his propaganda film, *Feldzug in Polen*. As a result, many people in the West believe that the Poles did not really fight in 1939, and that the Poles sent the cavalry against the German tanks."

In reality, the opposite is true. For the German army this first test of the war proved to be one of the most difficult and costly it fought until the Russian campaign in 1941. Despite a large superiority in manpower, vehicles of all kinds, armor and aircraft, four times the unit firepower of Polish forces and the support of a Soviet invasion, the German army did not find the Polish campaign an easy affair. The German losses according to an authoritative account of the five-week campaign were 16,000 dead and 32,000 wounded. The material losses were also heavy: 564 aircraft, one ship, 200 guns and mortars, 1,000 tanks and armored cars and 12,000 other vehicles. The German losses amounted to one-fourth of all German tanks and one-fifth of all German aircraft committed to the battle. Post-war research shows that the German military used up 80 percent of all of its available ammunition in the battle against Poland. It was to take Germany more than half a year to repair the damages and replenish its supplies. This was an advantage that the Western Allies did not use. The British military historian John Keegan in his 1995 study *The Battle for History: Refighting World War II* writes: "The Polish army . . . fought more effectively than it has been given credit for. It sustained resistance from September 1st until October 5th, five weeks, which compares highly favorably with the five and a half weeks during which France, Britain, Belgium and Holland kept up the fight in the west the following year."

Polish forces fought with great heroism throughout the campaign. At Westerplatte on the Baltic Coast a small Polish force of 182 men under Major Henryk Sucharski fought off attacks by German aircraft, battleships, and ground force for seven days. Equally dramatic was the battle of Mokra where two Polish cavalry regiments drew a Nazi panzer division into a well prepared tank trap, inflicting heavy

casualties. On September 8th the Polish counteroffensive on the Bzura River led by General Tadeusz Kutrzeba's army group Poznań mauled two German divisions, inflicted heavy losses on a third and took over 1,500 prisoners. In the air the Polish fighter command, despite inferior equipment inflicted heavy losses on German raiders.

The Polish resistance to the Soviet attack, provided largely by lightly armed border guard units, was equally determined. The original Soviet claim that their troops met little resistance and suffered only a few hundred casualties has been seriously challenged by new research. At Sarny a small force commanded by Lt. Jan Bolbot defended makeshift bunkers from tens of thousands of Red Army troops. Bolbot's men cut down thousands of Soviet attackers. Finally, the communists piled debris around the bunkers and set them on fire. The lieutenant telephoned to his commander to report that his bunker was on fire and filled with thick smoke, and his men were surrounded by waves of Soviet soldiers, but that all his men were still at their posts and shooting back. Then the line went dead. Bolbot and his men fought to the last man. The most recent figures available put Soviet losses in Poland at between 8,000 and 10,000 men over a two-week period. Of these 2,500 to 3,000 were killed.

The military losses suffered by Poland in the invasion by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union are heavy: about 67,000 were killed and 134,000 were wounded. More than half a million Polish soldiers were taken prisoner, about two-thirds captured by the German army. Polish civilian losses as a result of military action were considerable.

At the beginning of the war, the Nazi plan was to inflict terror on the population and break Poland's will to resist. As he gathered his generals, Hitler ordered them to "kill without pity or mercy all men, women, and children of Polish descent or language… only in this way can we achieve the living space we need." Mobile killing squads would follow the main body of troops, shooting prisoners and any Poles who might organize resistance. The Soviets planned a similar campaign.

The campaign against Poland was conducted with a cruelty previously unknown in modern European warfare. Polish civilians and prisoners of war were systematically shot by German and Soviet forces. Although the Nazi SS and Einsatzgruppen and the Soviet NKVD committed the worst crimes, regular army and air forces of both totalitarian states were full and willing participants in the slaughter. The German use of Einsatzgruppen or special action units in Poland was a test run. Later these same units would play an even more terrible part in the Holocaust of European Jewry.

The death and destruction carried out deliberately by the Wehrmacht and the police during the period of military control of the country between September 1 and October 25, 1939 was merciless and systematic. Five hundred thirty-one towns and villages were burned and over 714 executions took place with over 16,000 civilian victims, most of them Christian Poles.

The Occupation

From the beginning of the German Occupation of Poland, it was clear that it would differ from every military occupation previously known in modern history. The murderous policies carried out against civilians during the actual military campaign had already signaled the demonic character that it would take. During the first four months of the occupation more than 50,000 civilians were executed by the new Nazi Regime. The majority of these victims—about 43,000—were Christians. Nazi policies in Poland were based primarily on a perverse pseudo-scientific racist ideology that relegated Poles and Jews to sub-human categories. The Nazi views that justified Hitler's genocide against Jews are well-known and covered in most courses on the Holocaust. Less well-known are the racial ideas about Poles that were the engine of Nazi genocidal policies against the Christian population of Poland.

Anti-Polish attitudes common during the period of German colonial domination of Polish lands took on an even more racial and virulent tone during the Weimar Period (1919–33) after the loss of the Polish territories and the rebirth of Poland. These anti-Polish views were incorporated into Nazi ideology, propaganda, and education after Hitler's rise to power in 1933. This ideology was used not only by the regime, but also by individual Germans to justify their murderous and genocidal actions by the alleged inhuman and bestial character of Poles and their allegedly long history of barbaric aggression and treachery vis-à-vis Germans.

Alexander Rossini, a research historian at the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum notes that "In their schooling and social lives there was no lack of opportunity for Germans growing up in the 1920s and 1930s to absorb revanchist sentiments and develop a thorough hatred of Poland and its people." He writes that anti-Polish claims "were expressed in vicious and derogatory terms describing Poles as 'Asiatic' and 'semi-Asians' who inhabited dens and resembled animals. In books and newspaper articles alike, German writers portrayed Polish homes and communities as filthy and decrepit, bereft of culture and barren of prosperity. These were all characteristics of so-called 'Polish decay,' a tenuous state of existence that indicated the alleged backwardness and poor economic management skills of the Poles. According to Nazi scientists and scholars like Albrecht Penck, a Berlin geography professor, Germans had created the only culture that existed in Poland."

These racial stereotypes toward Poles were not only taught in the schools, but teachers were even instructed by textbook authors to encourage active hostility to Poland and Poles in their students. In texts used in German schools a decade before the Nazis took power Poles, in Rossini's words, "were said to be less educated, less cultured, slovenly, and utterly deficient in habits of personal hygiene. Furthermore, Poles were commonly portrayed as dangerous and aggressive, as beasts, thieves, and criminals who stole territory from Germany at its moment of weakness despite all that had been done to bring them to civilizations and culture." Nazi propaganda took over many of the myths of the Weimer period in a more racialized form and underlined that, in addition to their sub-human characteristics, Poles were the mortal enemies of the German Reich. The combination became the warrant for German genocidal policies against Poles during the more than five year occupation of Poland.

The occupation of Poland targeted Jewish and Christian citizens of Poland in different ways. During the first two years it was the Christians who bore more heavily the brunt of Nazi terror as the occupiers sought to exterminate the leadership and intelligentsia, turn ordinary citizenry into slave laborers of the Reich and begin the process of replacing the rural population with German settlers. SS commanders, including Reinhold Heydrich, saw ethnic Poles as their main foe rather than the Jews of Poland during the early part of the occupation.

From the start, Nazi forces did, of course, target Poland's Jews in special ways, burning or desecrating synagogues, killing individual Jews, abusing and humiliating others and eventually relegating them to ghettos. The first task for Hitler's minions, though, was to eliminate any Poles who could be considered leaders. By October, German authorities in western Poland, often aided by local ethnic Germans, rounded up government officials, teachers, clergy, and business people. Victims were either killed or sent to concentration camps. A young priest from Rypin, Stanislaus Grabowski, recalled what happened after his arrest:

> It was 9 P.M. . . . We heard laughing, footsteps, and suddenly very heavy strikes with whips. At the same time a man cried out loudly "Jesus, Mary, Joseph." Looking through the opening in our provisional door, we recognized, lying spread out on the floor, the administrator of an estate, a man well known to us. He was a man of good health, strongly built, about fifty years old. He was flat on the cement floor. Local German boys stood around him, hitting him repeatedly, flogging him mercilessly, beating him to death. Some got tired, others took their place. The murderous flogging continued. . . . Then there was silence, deadly quiet. They grabbed his legs and pulled the body outside. . . . I counted the blows, one hundred, two hundred, four hundred. So many blows were needed to complete the painful tragedy. Then another man, and then the next, and the next,

> and so on. . . . In the silence of the night and the seclusion of a basement people were dying, people we knew and respected. I can still hear that cry of helplessness: "Jesus, Mary, Joseph." . . . Around 3 P.M. [the next day] Fr. Gajewski, a woman school inspector, and several principals were taken away in an open truck to the woods at Skrwilno and shot. Their bodies were placed in a grave where over 10,000 members of the Polish intelligentsia were buried. The Germans planted trees and bushes over the grave to try to hide their crime.

By the beginning of 1942, after the Wannsee Conference and the invasion of the USSR, the direction of Nazi terror and genocidal activities shifted. With the extermination of the Jews now the official state policy of Nazi Germany, the Jewish population of Poland became in an even more terrible way the special victims of the Nazis. Although all Jews in the world were targeted for extermination, a number of historians have noted that the *Ostjuden*, the Jews of Poland were treated far more brutally that those in western countries.

The half of Poland that was taken by Nazi Germany in 1939 was divided into two parts. The Polish Territories which were part of Imperial Germany until 1918, were incorporated directly into the Nazi Reich. Ninety percent of the population of this area, which was slated for thorough Germanization, was ethnically Polish. After the leading citizens, clergy, and intelligentsia of the region were either killed or incarcerated in camps, the Germans began a wholesale deportation of Poles from the area. Over a million Poles had their farms, homes, businesses, and property seized and turned over the Germans and were then deported to Central Poland. Those who were left behind were to be subjected to de-nationalization. They were no longer to speak Polish or consider themselves Polish. All Polish media, cultural, and educational institutions were closed. The young men were subject to being drafted into the German military. The Jews of the region were also forcibly rounded up and shipped to the newly formed ghettos the Nazis were creating in the cities of Central Poland. Between 650,000 and 750,000 ethnic Germans, many from eastern areas taken by the USSR in 1939–40, were resettled in the area.

The mass deportations from the newly annexed territories took place during the winter of 1939–40 in freezing cold and under very difficult conditions. The deportees were shipped in cattle cars. Adequate preparations for this mass influx of people had not been made. At the journey's end there were few accommodations or supplies for the deportees. The suffering and hunger were immense. Many died, especially the elderly, the sick and children. In addition to the deportation eastward many, especially the young and able-bodied, were shipped to Germany proper for labor.

The central part of Poland, with a Polish population of about twelve million, was renamed the General Government ruled by a Nazi functionary in Kraków. In 1941 the Nazis decided that this rump Polish administrative region was to remain in existence for fifteen to twenty years. Any Poles who survived the war and "extermination through labor" and were not subjects for Germanization were to be sent to newly conquered Siberia or liquidated. By 1961 any vestige of the Polish nation would disappear forever. In this region, although the people were allowed to be Poles, Polish culture, music, art and literature was suppressed. No Polish newspapers, except those published by the occupiers, were published. Secondary schools, universities and cultural institutions were closed. As in the annexed western territories, the Germans undertook the systematic extermination of the intelligentsia, clergy and leadership.

In pursuit of that policy in the General Government, most of the professors of the famous Jagiellonian University were rounded up and sent to concentration camps. Politicians, writers, scientists, doctors, artists, teachers, Olympic athletes—none were to be spared. All Polish schools above the grammar school level were closed. "The Poles," Nazi governor Hans Frank proclaimed, "do not need universities or secondary schools; the Polish lands are to be changed into an intellectual desert." In keeping with this ideology, Polish libraries and archives were burned and the country's art treasures systematically looted. In its war on Polish culture the Nazi regime made a determined and cynical effort to debase the people. The sale of alcohol was heavily subsidized and its use encouraged by the occupiers. The film and stage entertainment and popular reading materials made officially available to Polish society were largely cheap and vulgar pornography and virulently anti-Semitic propaganda. The Jewish population, after its separation into ghettos away from Christian neighbors, was also fed a steady diet of anti-Polish materials. The explicit aim of the Nazis was to atomize the society, to set people against each other and to destroy the moral fiber of the nation.

In addition to taking money and works of art, Nazi occupiers treated Poland like an economic colony. Peasants were required to give up a large portion of their produce. Special taxes were instituted. Factories, shops and banks were appropriated by the occupiers. Young, able-bodied men and women were taken to Germany for slave labor on farms and in factories.

Those members of the Polish elite that the Nazis had arrested but not killed were shipped to concentration camps. For example, many of the clergy seized in western Poland were shipped to Stutthoff near the Baltic Sea or to Dachau in Germany. It was soon apparent to the Nazi leadership that the scale of their plans would overwhelm their existing systems of prison and concentration camps, so a series of new camps were created. The most infamous of these was located near Kraków in the town of Oswięcim, known by its German name, Auschwitz. The Auschwitz

camp was designed to house Polish political prisoners, and inmate labor built the initial camp out of an old army base. It opened in June 1940 and remained a place of incarceration and martyrdom, particularly for Christian Poles, until 1942 when it also became the site of the most terrible massacre of Jews during the Holocaust. It remains for both people a pre-eminent symbol of martyrdom and tragedy.

As in Dachau and Stutthof, the camp guards at Auschwitz spent much of their time torturing and abusing prisoners in sadistic ways. Camps were also supposed to add to the Reich's economy. As the war went on and the need for labor grew, prison industries expanded. German businessmen and Nazi officials seeking to make a quick Reichsmark were eager to exploit the free labor of prisoners. Over the course of its existence, Auschwitz alone spawned a score of subcamps located in and around the original camp site.

In the Soviet-controlled sector of Poland, matters were just as bad. The Soviets created their own ideological scale to determine who was to live or to die. It was based not on race, but on social class and consciousness. "Enemies of the people"—those marked for liquidation—were owners of businesses, large farms and estates, managers, officials and civil servants of the Polish State, clergy and intelligentsia. The "toiling masses" of peasants and especially workers were allegedly a favored class, but even they were readily marked for re-education in gulags or even extermination if they failed to exhibit proper consciousness, i.e., they retained loyalty to faith, nation, family, and pre-war social traditions over loyalty to the Soviet fatherland and the class struggle. These primitive sociological categories functioned for the new Soviet administration in the same ways racial stereotypes did for the Nazi regime and they also served to justify terror and mass murder. In addition, the Soviet occupiers favored the non-Polish population of Eastern Poland over the Polish inhabitants and sought by these preferences, bolstered by lies and propaganda, to incite hatreds and to inflame conflicts between groups. At the start of the Soviet invasion, local Ukrainian nationalists were encouraged to attack Poles, resulting in sporadic killings that would presage greater atrocities to come. Captured Polish officers were often executed on the spot by the NKVD. The Soviet authorities' first goal was to destroy the local Polish leadership. As in the German occupied areas, round ups, arrests, executions and deportation to the gulag were all used. Simultaneously, the Soviets moved against the economic elites, especially anyone engaged in private enterprise. Like the Nazis, the Communists also looted the economic resources of the region.

In February 1940, the NKVD began its second phase of occupation, the mass deportation of almost all Poles from the Soviet occupation zone. Over the course of the next 15 months, over 1.5 million Polish men, women, and children were

packed into unheated cattle cars and sent the gulags where many died of hunger, disease, overwork, and execution. They were soon joined by many Jews, Ukrainians, and Belarusans. Polish POWs who had fallen into Soviet hands met an even worse fate. Approximately 20,000 Polish officers, mostly well-educated reservists, were executed on Stalin's orders. The most notorious massacre site was at Katyń in Belarus, but there were many others. Living conditions became so bad in the Soviet occupation zone than many refugees who had fled the German invasion, including some Jews, petitioned to return to the Nazi-run part of Poland. As heinous as these acts were, however, much worse was to come.

Genocide

As the German authorities began to formulate their plans to exterminate the Jews they continued their parallel plan for the Christian Poles. While all Jews were slated for extermination, the Nazis decided to kill only a portion of the Poles and leave the rest for the time being as slaves. The Germans never ceased their efforts against the leadership of Polish society, but as the war continued new methods were used.

Large numbers of Poles were rounded up, often at random, and sent to concentration camps where they were either killed or exploited as slave labor. Slave laborers were treated so brutally that large numbers died. They were starved, beaten, and forced to work until they died. Others were killed by sadistic guards or in mass executions. German authorities, both inside and outside camps, conducted mass shootings or hanging in retaliation for real or perceived offenses against Nazi rule. Many prisoners also died from overwork or diseases brought on by unsanitary conditions and poor diet.

Many Polish prisoners were used in illegal Nazi medical experiments. Prisoners were subjected to freezing conditions, such as ice water baths, for hours to measure the effects of hypothermia. Others were injected with deadly diseases and left untreated so the Nazi doctors could record the progression of illnesses.

The Germans also attempted to create all-German colonies in the General Government part of Poland by deporting or exterminating the local inhabitants and bringing in German settlers. In late 1942 Nazi racial theorists sought to clear part of the region around Zamość of Poles and bring in ethnic Germans to create a German colony. Whole villages were rounded up, inhabitants executed, sent to concentration camps or slave labor. Over 150,000 people (30 percent of the population) were displaced from their homes. A similar attempt on a smaller scale occurred in Białystok where some 40,000 were displaced. Polish partisans launched fierce attacks on Nazi forces as well as on German colonists in an attempt to halt these German experiments in colonization.

An ancillary part of the campaign of deportation and German colonization was the organized kidnapping of Polish children who had “Germanic” characteristics to be raised as Germans. In all, during the course of the war, about 50,000 children were seized and deported to the Reich. Those who were found unsuitable upon subsequent examination were executed at camps such as Auschwitz.

In the final years of Nazi occupation it seemed as if the very gates of hell had opened in Poland. The Germans increasingly resorted to terror and collective responsibility. Their control in the countryside grew less and less certain and depended more on overwhelming force. Chaos and violence rather than order and control marked the final stages of Nazi rule. Polish resistance grew in strength and began to organize increasing attacks on German forces.

The Nazi response was overwhelmingly brutal. More than 115 villages were wiped out for hiding Jews or helping partisans. Villages were surrounded and the inhabitants either shot on the spot or transported to death camps where they shared the fate of the Jews. Areas of partisan activity were surrounded and turned in free-fire zones as German police and military forces, sometimes aided by auxiliaries recruited in Ukraine or among former Soviet soldiers, went on the rampage.

As German control began to slip in areas of eastern Poland with a large Ukrainian population, Ukrainian nationalists initiated an effort to ethnically cleanse the region of Poles. These lands had been captured by the Soviets at the start of the war and the communists had systematically exploited ethnic tensions. When the Germans pushed out the Soviets in 1941, many, especially ethnic Ukrainians, welcomed the new arrivals. The Soviets had committed genocide against the Ukrainians in the 1930s and the bitter fruit of Polish-Ukrainian rivalry in the 1920s and 1930s allowed the Nazis to recruit Ukrainians into police and auxiliary units that were often used to carry out the dirty work of killing. As the war began to turn against the Germans, however, Ukrainians took matters into their own hands. Many Ukrainian auxiliaries began to operate in a semi-independent fashion and used their weapons to further the goals of the most extreme nationalist faction among Ukrainians. With the Jews mostly wiped out, the Ukrainians turned on the Poles, especially in provinces like Volhynia (Wołyn).

Elements of the Ukrainian Partisan Army (UPA) descended on Polish villages across southeast Poland, killing the inhabitants in the most brutal ways possible. Villagers were forced into their churches and burned alive. Killings were often carried out with axes, knives, saws, pitchforks, scythes, and swords. Men were castrated, sawed in half, burned alive. Women were raped, sexually mutilated, hacked apart. The UPA spared no one, not even children. An estimated 60,000 Poles lost their lives, the largest number in Volhynia where the worst violence occurred. As the killings raged, many courageous Ukrainians risked their lives to save Polish neighbors. Ukrainians who were viewed by the UPA as too favorable

toward Poles, or who where caught sheltering Poles, shared their fate. Local Nazi forces had no orders and mostly stood aside while the killings occurred, sometimes sheltering Poles, sometimes aiding the UPA killers.

Resistance

From the earliest days of the Nazi and Soviet occupations, the Poles started to fight back against their brutal occupiers. From September 1939, small bands of Polish soldiers kept on the fighting from the cover of forests and mountains. Among the most famous was the legendary "Major Hubal," the pseudonym of Maj. Henryk Dobrzański. Major Hubal and his band of 70–100 men waged unrelenting guerilla warfare on both occupiers until they were cornered by German forces in April 1940 and wiped out. Hubal's body was burned by the Germans and buried in secret so he would not become a martyr, but others soon took his place.

Resistance cells were frequently organized around political parties and among groups of people who knew each other from before the war. Many of the early local efforts were infiltrated and destroyed by the Gestapo. Efforts to form a central resistance movement began by the end of September 1939. In December 1939, the Union of Armed Struggle was created. In 1942, it was renamed the Home Army, or Armia Krajowa (AK). The right-wing National Democratic party created the National Military Organization, a powerful resistance force that battled both Nazis and communists. It merged with the AK in 1942 though a separate element, the National Armed Forces, remained outside the AK umbrella until 1944. The Peasant party formed the Peasant Battalions that were active in rural areas. This force combined with the AK in 1943. The communists formed their own resistance force after the Nazi-Soviet divorce in 1941 called the People's Guard (later People's Army), but this force was miniscule and relied on Soviet operatives parachuted in from Moscow. Because it was entirely a creature of the Soviets it never joined the mainstream of the Polish resistance.

The AK, which eventually came to encompass almost all Polish resistance activities, was a kind of virtual or secret state. It had a chain of command, military formations, intelligence, education, courts, publishing, manufacturing, radio, and a host of other branches. Early on it became clear that because the occupation was an assault on all levels of society, the response needed to be equally comprehensive. If the enemy tried to destroy Polish culture, the AK sought to preserve it. If the Nazis shut down schools, the AK organized secret courses of study.

The Polish underground infiltrated many aspects of the Nazi occupation regime. In central Poland, there were not enough Germans to operate the administration so the Nazis had to employ Poles, especially in low-level positions. These individuals provided valuable information on German activities, as well as scarce commodities such as blank forms or documents that could be used to forge official identity cards or letters.

To counter German propaganda, the underground developed a vast number of clandestine publications: flyers, news bulletins, and regular newspapers. Teams of boy scouts and girl guides distributed the secret publications while a special unit of scouts called the Grey Ranks painted anti-Nazi graffiti by night. To outwit German radio detection, the AK broadcast coded news to England where it was rebroadcast back to Poland using a powerful transmitter. Information was extremely accurate and up-to-date.

Beginning in 1942, the Polish resistance stepped up attacks on German military targets. Supply lines for the eastern front all ran through Poland and the Poles worked to hasten Germany's defeat through sabotaging communications and supplies. The AK's diversion and sabotage section blew up military transports, derailed trains, wrecked bridges, and burned warehouses. Agents within railroad repair shops delayed or damaged trains and railroad cars. By 1944, there were 10 attacks on railroads every day. German transports and rail installations required additional guards, tying down tens of thousands of additional police and troops. German efforts to seize food in the countryside also came in for sabotage. Food quota offices were attacked and burned and efforts to collect the quota met growing resistance.

A distinctive feature of Polish Resistance was the establishment of the Council for Aid to Jews in 1942. The group was known by its acronym "Żegota". It brought together representatives of Jewish organizations, members of the Polish underground and Polish political parties as well as deeply committed members of Polish society to try to provide assistance to the Jews of Poland after the Nazis began their "final solution". In addition to helping Jews escape from the ghetto and find shelter on the "Aryan" side, Żegota supported many in hiding and even helped Jewish fighting groups purchase arms on the black market. The work of the section headed by Irena Sendler which saved 2,500 Jewish children from extermination is one of the best-known exploits of the organization. Sendler was captured by the Gestapo and brutally tortured but did not betray a single one of the children she had helped to save.

In late 1943, after the bodies of murdered Polish officers were discovered at Katyn, the Soviets who had joined the Allies after Hitler's invasion in 1941, broke off relations with the Polish government in exile. At Stalin's direction, Soviet partisans worked to destroy the Polish underground even as it struggled to resist the Nazis. As the Red Army began to push Hitler's legions back on the Eastern Front, Soviet forces began to enter Polish territory. Despite the tense relations, the Poles tried to work with the Red Army to defeat the common enemy. The Poles also tried to liberate areas from the Germans so they could greet the Red Army as equals and stop any effort by the Soviets to quash Polish independence. In Wilno, the AK played a major role in ousting the Germans from the city and helping the Red

Army. The Soviet reciprocated by executing the leaders of the Polish resistance and conscripting the rank and file into the Red Army's Polish units. This was an ominous beginning, but the real test would be in Warsaw.

Warsaw had already seen an uprising on April 19, 1943 when the Jewish fighting groups rose up against the Nazi attempt to complete the liquidation of the ghetto. Only about 10 percent of the Jewish fighters were armed with weapons they had procured on the Aryan side through the underground and other sources when the battle began. The heroic but terribly unequal struggle, fought under the blue and white Jewish banner and the red and white flag of Poland, lasted several weeks costing the Germans more than one hundred casualties including sixteen dead. It was the single most significant act of Jewish armed struggle against the Nazis in Europe. The armed destruction of the Warsaw ghetto presaged the Warsaw Uprising the following year.

On the evening of August 1, 1944, shots rang out across the city of Warsaw as some 40,000 poorly armed citizen soldiers, including teenagers, men, and women, backed by almost the entire population, attacked the well-equipped, well-fortified German garrison. The first European capital captured by Hitler's armies was fighting back. In the summer of 1944, as the Soviets approached Warsaw, the Poles decided to retake their capital city. Their goal was to drive out the Nazis and welcome the Soviets as masters of their own house, forestalling any effort to impose a Soviet-style puppet regime. As in the Ghetto Uprising, only 1 in 10 Polish fighters had a weapon, but many went into action hoping to use captured arms from the Germans, or from their own fallen comrades. Units of Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, some as young as 12 or 13, attacked Nazi panzers armed only with bottles of gasoline. The Poles seized large sections of the city, but failed to take many key fortified strong points, including the bridges across the Vistula River. Losses were heavy, but the Polish citizen soldiers quickly learned from their mistakes.

Hitler's reaction was furious. He ordered the completed destruction of the city and death of all its inhabitants. Heinrich Himmler confidently predicted "Warsaw will be liquidated; and this city . . . that has blocked our path to the east for seven hundred years . . . will have ceased to exist." The Nazi command sent SS police, units of former Soviet soldiers who had deserted to the Nazi cause, and armed the inmates of German military prisons—murderers, rapists, child molesters, and thieves. Behind them came tanks, aircraft, and heavy artillery. Many Nazi units were sent into purely civilian areas where they murdered, raped, and pillaged for days on end, killing men, women, and children without mercy. German and ex-Soviet troops rampaged through hospitals, even maternity wards, killing every living soul.

Although murdering helpless civilians came easily to the German command, retaking the city did not. Units that were skilled in slaughtering the innocent proved less effective against armed citizenry. Nazi forces seized buildings during the day, only to find that the Poles retook them during the night. Fighting raged house to house, room to room. SS and Gestapo troops who had slaughtered so many innocents during five long years of occupation received no mercy. On August 20, the Home Army attacked the State Telephone Exchange, one of Warsaw's few skyscrapers. Special sapper units made up of young women—called *minerki*—led the attack, detonating homemade explosives in the lower part of the building, driving the defenders into the upper floors. Then teams armed with homemade flamethrowers set the building alight. Most of the Nazis inside jumped to their deaths to avoid the flames, shot themselves, or were killed trying to fight their way back down the staircases. In the ruins of the Jewish Ghetto, a unit of Polish volunteers, using a captured tank, smashed through the walls of the "Goose Farm" death camp, routing the Nazi guards and freeing about 400 Jewish prisoners. Although small, it was the first Nazi death camp to be liberated by Allied forces. Amid scenes of joy, the Polish officer who led the attack saw a file of men standing at attention. A former prisoner stepped forward, saluted, and announced "Jewish volunteer company ready for action!" The former prisoners were enlisted in the ranks. As the officer later recalled the Jewish volunteers were "exceptionally brave, ingenious, and faithful people."

The most savage fighting occurred in the Old Town, Warsaw's historic heart. German heavy weapons smashed building after building, driving the defenders back into an ever smaller area. Civilians were used as human shields for German tanks. The struggle raged around the fifteenth-century cathedral of St. John the Baptist. Its medieval walls resisted even point blank fire from tanks. Assault after assault on the church was thrown back with heavy losses. Nazi commanders, certain that the church was garrisoned by some elite commando unit, packed a small remote-control tank full of explosives and rammed it into the building. The explosion collapsed the walls. As the smoke cleared, the bodies of the defenders could be seen lying amidst the rubble, still wearing their Boy Scout uniforms.

As the city fought desperately and the Germans began to bring in reinforcements, the reaction of the Soviets was silence. Soviet forces, which had advanced confidently throughout the summer, stopped within miles of Warsaw. When Allied planes sought to use Soviet airbases to airdrop supplies to the Polish resistance, the Soviets refused. Allied supply planes were forced to make a dangerous return trip and Allied planes that strayed into Soviet-controlled areas were shot at from the ground or even attacked by Red Air Force fighters. Despite the dangers many American, British, Polish, and South African aircrews volunteered for this mission.

After 63 days of fighting, the defenders of Warsaw, abandoned by their allies and left to face the Nazi army alone, capitulated. The freedom fighters were treated as regular POWs under the Geneva Convention—a concession that showed how badly the Germans wanted to end the Uprising. The civilians were to be evacuated without reprisals. On Hitler's personal orders, Warsaw was systematically leveled, block by block, street by street. By the war's end, one of the great capitals of Europe was a field of rubble, with not a building left standing for miles. In two months some 200,000 civilians had lost their lives due to the mass killings ordered by the German leadership.

In reviewing the Polish record in World War II it is worth remembering that though overwhelmed by two powerful enemies, Polish forces not only never stopped fighting at home but also on all other fronts. Many Poles escaped to France and Britain where they continued their struggle. In the Battle of Britain, Polish fighter pilots played a crucial role in turning back Nazi air attacks on England. The Polish Second Corps, formed in Palestine out of Polish soldiers freed from Soviet captivity, distinguished itself in critical battles in North Africa and Italy in particular the Battle for Monte Casino and the liberation of Bologna. Polish forces trained in Great Britain contributed to the Allied victory in the west including their brilliant and heroic stand at the Falaise Gap. Even those Poles conscripted forcibly into the Polish Army created by the Soviet Union fought with great courage in the great battles that dislodged the Nazi forces from Poland. When Berlin fell, a Polish banner flew from the Brandenburg Gate. One of the greatest contributions to the defeat of Nazism was made by Polish military intelligence which had broken supposedly unbreakable German military codes and discovered the secret of the German coding machine *Enigma*. This secret was passed on to the British and proved vital to the Allied war effort.

The Second Occupation

By the middle of 1945, Soviet forces had driven the Nazis out of Poland. Although the Soviet opened the Nazi death camps, ended the gassing of Jews, Poles, and others, their arrival heralded a new form of oppression. The new Soviet occupation was less horrific than that of the Nazis. However, the living conditions of the population deteriorated. Hunger was rampant and made worse by Soviet food requisitions. Hunger and malnutrition brought on diseases such as typhus that killed and weaken more people. Virtually the entire infrastructure was in ruins and what remained was mostly for the use of Poland's new masters. The Soviets also ended up looting a great deal of Polish property, including artwork that was stolen by the Nazis from Poland and then re-stolen and sent to Russia.

In the face of the Soviet NKVD and its Polish henchmen, the Polish underground quickly abandoned efforts to come out into the open as representatives of Poland's

legal government in London. The repression of the Polish underground was severe. For western consumption, the Soviet proclaimed all non-communist members of the resistance to be "fascists" and "collaborators." Many of the most courageous members of the underground were arrested, tortured, imprisoned, or killed. A couple examples illustrate this.

- Lidia Lwow, a combat nurse with AK's 5th Wilno Brigade, won the Cross of Valor for saving wounded partisans under enemy fire. After the war she was arrested by the secret police and sentenced to life in prison for the "crime" of belonging to the resistance.
- August Emil Fieldorf—known by his code name "General Zero"—was a highly decorated veteran of the Polish army. He directed the AK's diversion and sabotage operations which wreaked havoc on Nazi military and transport facilities. He, too, was arrested after the war, brutalized, and executed in 1953.

Many prisoners of the Nazis were released only to be rearrested by the Soviets and sent to concentration camps in Siberia. Those who had saved the lives of Jews during the Holocaust were especially vulnerable since it was assumed that they were members of the resistance. In some cases, it was necessary for the rescued Jews to come to the rescue of their former rescuers who were brought up on false charges in communist courts by providing testimony in their favor. Many rescuers hid their involvement in saving Jews.

The end of Nazi occupation reduced but did not end the arrests, tortures, and executions. Nor did it end the fighting and the killing. From late 1944 through 1956, elements of the Polish underground continued to resist the communist regime. Although the AK officially disbanded in 1945, a number of successor organizations continued to function. The best known was Freedom and Independence (known by its Polish initials as WiN), but many others existed. None were able to attain the reach or sophisticated conspiratorial infrastructure of the AK, but they were strong in many areas outside of the major cities. In response, the Soviet-directed communist regime mounted a major anti-partisan campaign, committing more troops to the struggle than the U.S committed at the height of the Vietnam War. Communist security forces were especially ruthless, often using summary executions of suspected resistance supporters. In many cases, they simply shot and terrorized people at random. The causalities in the period between 1944 and 1947 in this new war have been estimated at about 50,000 dead. In 1948, the government offered amnesty to resisters and many accepted the offer (although many were later persecuted in contravention of the amnesty agreement). Active resistance, however, continued until 1956 and some individual resisters did not surrender until the late 1960s.

The Cost of the Catastrophe

World War II was a catastrophe for Poland on a scale that few other countries have experienced at any time in human history. A higher percentage of Poles died than in any other country—21 percent, more if one counts fatalities caused by war-related diseases. Six million Polish citizens were killed. Of these, 3 million were Jewish. Poland's ancient Jewish community with a history stretching back to the early Middle Ages, was virtually wiped out. The Nazis killed 2 million Polish Christians, the Soviets perhaps between half a million and a million, and perhaps 100,000 by Ukrainian nationalists. The city of Warsaw alone lost more people than Britain and the U.S.A. put together. Polish military losses were equally appalling—an estimated 360,000 died in battle, of wounds, or as prisoners of war, a number greater than any European country save the USSR and Germany. In addition, a great number of Poles were scattered to all parts of the world. Poland's pre-war population of 35 million dropped to 23 million in 1945.

Cultural and professional elites were the hardest hit: 45 percent of doctors and dentists were killed by the Nazis; 57 percent of attorneys; 30 percent of engineers and technicians; 40 percent of professors; 15 percent of teachers; and 20 percent of clergy. This does not begin to consider the number of professionals and community leaders killed or imprisoned by the Soviets and their Polish puppet government.

The country itself was devastated. Warsaw had been the scene of three major battles and what remained after the fighting was systematically leveled on Hitler's personal orders. Other cities, such as Poznań and Gdańsk were also devastated. Of the main historic centers of Poland only Kraków remained intact. The country's artwork and cultural treasurers were stolen or destroyed. Of all the art and cultural artifacts in Poland at the start of the war, 5 percent remained when it was over. Most major industrial and commercial enterprises were also completely wrecked and what remained was often looted by the Soviets who dismantled whole factories and shipped them to Russia.

Poland itself effectively ceased to be independent. Although the local communist authorities would gain some measure of autonomy after 1956, virtually all major decisions had to be approved from Moscow. The country's borders were shifted drastically and about a quarter of its population internally displaced.

Despite these catastrophes, the Poles remained defiant. The Soviets' treachery and brutality repeatedly ensured that Poles harbored only contempt and disgust for communist rule and repeated resisted efforts to turn "People's Poland" into a model of the socialist rule. The war had shown the Poles, however, that force of arms alone would not secure freedom in face of their massive neighbors and increasingly sought to use non-violent means. It would take 45 years for true freedom to return to Poland. In the 1980s, the Polish Solidarity movement started

the process that led to the fall of Soviet tyranny all over eastern and central Europe and Poland's return to family of free nations.

Study Questions

1. What factors made Poland such an anomaly in Central Europe and led to anti-Polish feelings among its neighbors?

2. The Imperial ambitions of Germany and their long colonial oppression of Poland created the conditions for their genocidal policies in the twentieth century. Have the student define at least two major ways in which the Partitions of Poland contributed to genocide against the Poles.

3. It is clear that the old, virulently anti-Polish stereotypes of the Colonial Period were incorporated into the pseudo-scientific ideologies of the twentieth century and served as part of the argument for unleashing the violence of aggressive war and genocide against Poland. What were these ideologies? How did the Nazis and Soviets use them to justify their oppression and genocidal policies?

4. Because of Nazi propaganda the invasion of Poland is still often widely seen in the United States as an easy victory because the Poles did not fight or because of their backwardness and incompetence could not effectively resist. Such propaganda also allowed Poland's allies to excuse their failure to come to her aid as they had promised. In reality, the Invasion cost the German army heavily. It is worth noting that the German losses in the Polish campaign (16,000 dead from 9/1/39 to 10/5/39) were comparable to U.S. losses in the Battle of Normandy (16,000 dead from 6/6/44 to 7/24/44) or the battle for Okinawa (12,600 dead from 4/1/45 to 6/30/45). Americans consider these among the fiercest battles U.S. forces fought in World War II. What is the true story of the Invasion of Poland and how did it presage the coming genocide that was visited on Poland?

5. Why did the German occupiers divide Poland into two sectors? How did their policies differ in each?

6. Why did the Nazi leadership want to destroy Poland?

7. Why role did the Soviets play in genocide of the Poles and how does this contrast to the view of the Soviets in many U.S. history books?

8. Why was the German occupation of Poland so much harsher than in other parts of Europe? Explain the role that Nazi racial ideas had in forming German policies.

9. A retrospective look at German policies in Poland makes clear that the Nazi regime had evolved comprehensive plans for genocide against the Christian and Jewish citizens of Poland. How did the specifics of each plan and the rhythm of their evolution and implementation differ?

10. How did the Poles work to resist Nazi rule?

11. The bibliography contains works such as Richard Lukas' *Forgotten Survivors: Polish Christians Remember the Nazi Occupation*, which give the individual stories of Poles caught up in the machinery of Soviet and Nazi genocide. Have the students read some of these and compare them with the experience of victims of other genocides.

12. How was Poland treated at the end of World War II? How did this treatment match the ideals for which the Americans, British and other western Allies were fighting?

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Forgotten Odyssey: Polish Deportees to Siberia
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Piast Institute
www.piastinstitute.org

U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, Encyclopedia
http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/

Warsaw Uprising
http://www.warsawuprising.com/

Project in Posterum
http://www.projectinposterum.org

Local Resource for Speakers and Materials

Polish American Congress – Southern California Division
(818) 704-1759