

READING CHECK

What was Kristallnacht?

VOCABULARY STRATEGY

What does the word *restraints* mean in the underlined sentence? Note that the word is a noun, and that it contains the verb *restrain*, which means “hold back.” Use this information to help you figure out what *restraints* means.

READING SKILL

Recognize Sequence What happened to Jews in Germany after Hitler came to power?

In 1945, there was no word for the **Holocaust**, the most horrific event of World War II. It was the Nazi attempt to kill all Jews, as well as other “undesirables,” under their control. This was part of a racist Nazi ideology that considered Aryans—white Northern European gentiles—superior to other people.

Hitler began to persecute the Jews as soon as he came to power. In 1935, the **Nuremberg Laws** denied citizenship to Jews and segregated them at every level of society. Acts of violence against Jews were common. The most serious occurred on November 9, 1938, and is called **Kristallnacht**, the “Night of Broken Glass.” Secret police and military units destroyed more than 200 synagogues and 7,500 Jewish businesses, killed more than 200 Jews, and injured more than 600 others.

Hitler’s “Final Solution to the Jewish question” was **genocide**, the willful annihilation of all Jews living in regions under his control. Jews and other “undesirables” were confined in **concentration camps**. In theory, the camps were designed to turn prisoners into “useful members” of the Third Reich. There were, however, no restraints on guards, who tortured and killed prisoners without fear of reprisals. Doctors conducted bogus experiments that killed prisoners or left them deformed. Many concentration camps were **death camps**, where prisoners were systematically exterminated. The largest death camp was Auschwitz in southern Poland.

Before the war, the United States and other countries could have done more if they had relaxed immigration policies and accepted more Jewish refugees. Once the war started, news of the mass killings began to filter to the West. In early 1944, FDR began to respond and established the **War Refugee Board**, which worked with the Red Cross to save thousands of Eastern European Jews. The enormity of the Nazi crime became real for most Americans only when Allied soldiers began to liberate the concentration camps. The revelation of the Holocaust increased American support for a Jewish homeland. Therefore, when Jewish settlers in Palestine proclaimed the state of Israel, President Truman immediately recognized the new nation.

Review Questions

1. What was the purpose of Hitler’s concentration camps?

2. How did the United States respond to the Holocaust?
