



ILLINOIS HOLOCAUST MUSEUM
& EDUCATION CENTER

An Opening Lesson for a Holocaust Unit

An Initial Challenge

- Students often bring a good deal of prior knowledge to their study of the Holocaust.
- Much of that knowledge comes from commercial sources
- Thus, much of that knowledge is often inaccurate

Response:

- Involves students from the start of the unit
- Helps teachers determine students' prior knowledge
- Helps dispel inaccurate prior knowledge
- Introduces students to the complexity of Holocaust history.
- Includes considerable historical knowledge

Defining the Holocaust

Critical Questions in Defining the Holocaust?

- ❖ What?
- ❖ When?
- ❖ By Whom?
- ❖ How?
- ❖ Against Whom?
- ❖ Why was each group selected for persecution targeted?
- ❖ To what extent (i.e.: What was the Nazis' intended result for each targeted group?)

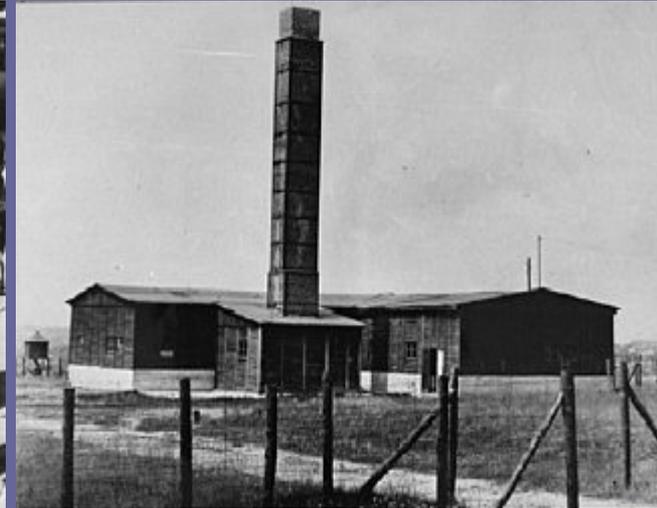
What? When? By Whom?

- A specific genocidal event

Persecution
Annihilation

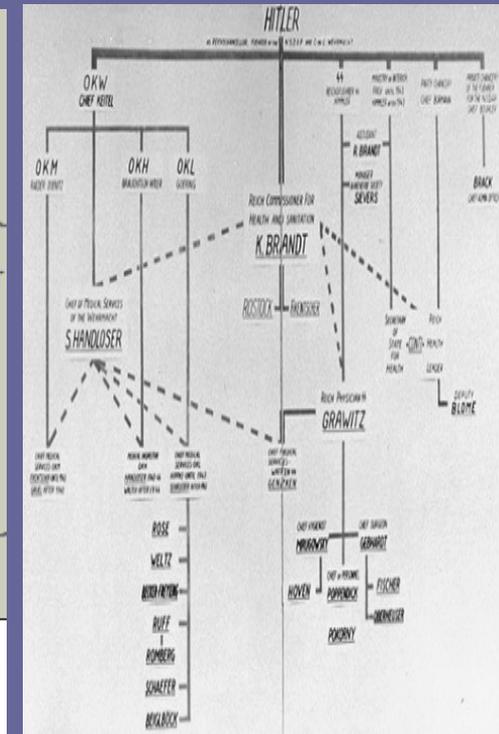
- 1933-1945

- Nazi Germany and its collaborators



How?

- State-sponsored
- Systematic
- Bureaucratic



Against Whom? To What Extent?

- Jews
- Roma (Gypsies)
- People with disabilities
- Poles
- (Soviet POW's)

Destruction
or Decimation

- Homosexuals
- Jehovah's Witnesses
- Political dissidents

Oppression
and
Death

Why?

- Jews
- Roma (Gypsies)
- People with disabilities
- Poles
- (Soviet POW's)

Racial, Ethnic, and
National Reasons

- Homosexuals
- Jehovah's Witnesses
- Political dissidents

Political and
Behavioral
Reasons

The Holocaust was the systematic, bureaucratic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its collaborators. *Holocaust* is a word of Greek origin meaning "sacrifice by fire." The Nazis, who came to power in Germany in January 1933, believed that Germans were "racially superior" and that the Jews, deemed "inferior," were an alien threat to the so-called German racial community.

During the era of the Holocaust, German authorities also targeted other groups because of their perceived "racial inferiority": [Roma](#) (Gypsies), the disabled, and some of the Slavic peoples ([Poles](#), Russians, and others). Other groups were persecuted on political, ideological, and behavioral grounds, among them Communists, Socialists, [Jehovah's Witnesses](#), and [homosexuals](#).

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C.