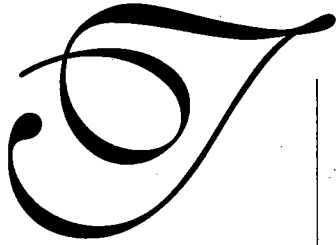


## INTRODUCTION



THE HOLOCAUST was the systematic persecution and mass murder of European Jews, carried out between 1941 and 1945 by the government of Germany under the Nazis in the midst of World War II. In total, between five and six million Jews were murdered as part of the governmental policy of the National Socialist Party (Nazi Party). During this era other racial and political groups that threatened the hegemony of the National Socialists also suffered persecution and, in many cases, imprisonment and death.

This course uses film as a window on the historical events that have come to be known as the Holocaust. Through both written and video materials, the course examines the forces that gave rise to Nazism and permitted it to flourish; the assault on Jews in countries occupied by Germany; and the actions of individuals and governments in occupied lands to assist or, in rare cases, defy the Nazi plan. The underlying question is: How could the Holocaust happen in modern, twentieth-century Europe? Although this question can never be satisfactorily answered, the material will help us explore some of the many factors that contributed to the unprecedented genocidal assault on European Jewry.

Each session in the curriculum provides background on a dimension of the history, while the films illustrate the impact of the Nazi campaign to make Europe *Judenrein* (free of Jews) on individuals, families, communities, and nations. Some of the films are well-known, others are not, but each is powerful in its way. A few of the films focus on the experiences of young people caught up in the machinery of destruction. Other films allow us to see the individuals who risked their own lives and the lives of their families and relatives to shelter Jews. The final film looks at the

motivations and behavior of one of the men who played a key role in the implementation of the mass murder of millions of Jews and other victims.

Although film alone cannot offer a comprehensive picture of the Holocaust, the film selections highlight significant aspects of the era. When viewed in the context of the historical background provided in the study guide, the films help convey the events with immediacy and with a human face. It is our hope that studying the history and viewing the films will constitute a beginning, which can be pursued in the extensive literature and film resources on the subject.

The following films are included in the course:

*Genocide* from *The World at War* series (1975). This documentary provides an overview of the history of the Holocaust. It chronicles the rise of National Socialism in the 1920s and 1930s and the implementation of the "Final Solution to the Jewish Question" during the war years. Discussion leaders are encouraged to view *Genocide* for general background of the period. Due to the graphic images in the documentary, however, course leaders will need to decide whether or not to show it to their groups, depending on the ages of the participants.

*The Camera of My Family* (1979). This short documentary illustrates the history of German Jewry and examines the rise of Nazism through the experience of one German-Jewish family. While some family members were able to emigrate to Australia just months before the outbreak of World War II, others were trapped and prevented from escaping; many of these relatives died in the death camps.

*So Many Miracles* (1987). The vast majority of Poland's three million Jews died during the Holocaust. This film tells the story of the Nazi assault on Jews through the experience of two survivors who found refuge with a courageous peasant woman and her family in the last two years of the war. The film also documents a reunion between the survivors and their rescuers forty-five years after the war, capturing the deep emotional bonds that developed between the two families.

*Au Revoir, Les Enfants* (1987). As the German army occupied more and more countries in Eastern and Western Europe, Jews from many different backgrounds were caught up in the net of arrests, deportations, and death, and many tried to camouflage their identities. This feature film about wartime France tells of one Jewish boy who was hidden in a Catholic boarding school, where his identity and safety were temporarily protected but ultimately at risk.

*Kitty: A Return to Auschwitz* (1979). The great majority of Jews sent to the death camps died there. Yet much of what we know about the Holocaust comes from the minority of Jews who survived. This film records the return visit of survivor Kitty Hart to Auschwitz, where she had been a prisoner for two years during her adolescence. Walking through the camp forty years later, she recalls the living conditions and backbreaking labor, and she describes how luck played a major role in helping her and her mother survive.

*Weapons of the Spirit* (1989). While the majority of people living in Nazi-occupied Europe remained passive bystanders to the persecution of Jews and other enemies of the Third Reich, the residents of one small French village sheltered some five thousand Jews, primarily children, over the course of the war. The "conspiracy of goodness" of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon is explored in this film, as is, by contrast, the indifference of so many others.

*The Devil Is a Gentleman* (1983). As the official in charge of Bureau IV B 4, Adolf Eichmann was responsible for organizing the transportation of millions of Jews to the death camps in Poland. At his trial in Israel during 1961, Eichmann remained proud of his loyal and obedient service to the Nazi administration; he showed no remorse for his role in the Third Reich. This short segment (from the CBS program *60 Minutes*) examines the nature of his character and raises fundamental questions about judgment and responsibility.