

Rescuers and bystanders reacted to the Holocaust very differently.

As you read, think about these questions:

- Under what conditions did non-Jews help rescue Jews from the Holocaust?
- How did bystanders affect the outcome of the Nazi assault against the Jews?

So far, this unit has focused mostly on two broad categories of people from the Holocaust era: perpetrators (the Nazis and their collaborators) and victims (Jews, Gypsies, gay men, the handicapped, Jehovah's Witnesses, etc.). This section will examine the role of those who were neither: the rescuers and the bystanders.

Rescue

While a number of individuals worked to save Jews (see page 122), there were four notable cases of entire countries and communities that banded together to protect Jews from the Nazi assault. Though in none of these cases were the rescuers 100 percent successful (nor was every rescuer always acting out of selflessness), the communities that rescued Jews overcame remarkable adversity. In each case the community was either an ally of the Nazis or considered to be "Aryan" or "semi-Aryan" — which meant the Nazis gave local leaders some independence, unlike in Poland or Russia. Despite overwhelming pressure (including the threat of reprisal) not to save Jews, these communities courageously organized to protect Jews from deportation.

Denmark. Perhaps the most famous case of

rescue of Jews happened in Denmark, which the Nazis had occupied with little fighting in 1940. Considered an Aryan people, the Danes were given considerable freedom to run their own affairs under the Nazi occupation, and the Jews of Denmark were largely untouched. But in the summer of 1943, the Nazis made plans to deport these Jews, and a large number of Danes, who as a people had no history of antisemitism, went into action.

The Jews were warned of the Nazi plans, and hiding places for them were found throughout the country. Then, in September 1943, the Danes smuggled more than 7,000 Jews to nearby neutral Sweden in fishing boats. The 400 remaining Jews were sent to Theresienstadt, the "model camp" in

Contrary to widespread myth, the King of Denmark never wore the yellow star in defiance of the Nazi order that Jews do so. King Christian X did, however, protest the Nazi plans to deport the Jews.

The Axis Powers

While Hitler's Germany was officially allied with a number of other countries, it repeatedly found itself having to fight World War II on its own. Germany allied itself with a number of other countries whose governments shared Nazi Germany's nationalism (see *Connections in World History*, page 72), militarism (glorifying combat and preparing for war) and fascism (see *Connections in World History*, page 95). Nazi Germany allied itself with Italy in 1936. The Italian fascist dictator, **Benito Mussolini**, however, was inept at war and the Germans had to come to his assistance in the Balkans. In the summer of 1943, Mussolini was driven from power and the Nazis occupied most of Italy. The other major Axis power, Japan, was too far away to be of major assistance to the Germans. Finally, several smaller countries in Eastern Europe, including Hungary, Romania, Croatia, and Bulgaria, allied themselves with the Nazis but had little effect in defeating the Allies in battle. Some of the countries, especially Romania and Croatia, did help the Nazis deport and murder Jews, however.

CONNECTIONS WITH WORLD HISTORY

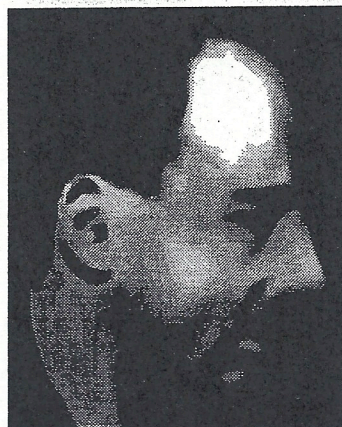
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Czechoslovakia. There, with assistance from the Danish Red Cross and food packages sent by Danish citizens, all but 51 of them survived the Holocaust.

The Danish rescue involved a broad cross-section of Danish society, in which underground resistance fighters were joined by teachers, clergy, union activists, doctors and nurses to protect Jews from the Nazis. Unlike in many other countries, Jewish property in Denmark was held in safe keeping until the Jews could return to claim it, and some Danes even risked their lives to save *Torah* scrolls from synagogues.

Italy. Because Italian Jews were fully emancipated and quite accepted in Italian society, and because as an ally of Germany the Nazis had no direct control over internal Italian affairs, the Jews of Italy were relatively safe. Under pressure from Hitler, Mussolini passed a series of antisemitic laws in 1938, but they were not strongly enforced. When the war began, Italy and the Italian-occupied zones of France, Greece, and Yugoslavia became a kind of safe haven for Jews, out of reach of the Nazi deportations. When Mussolini was overthrown in 1943 and Germany entered Italy, this situation ended, but many Italians continued to warn, hide, and protect Jews.

Bulgaria. Another German ally, Bulgaria, also resisted Nazi pressures to deport Jews. When antisemitic measures were enacted in



Raoul Wallenberg was a Swedish diplomat who saved thousands of Jews by making them citizens of neutral Sweden.

1942, Bulgarian journalists, politicians, and clergy protested. The next year, when the Germans demanded that Bulgaria deport its Jews, the Bulgarians only

handed over Jewish refugees from other countries. The centuries-old Bulgarian Jewish community was largely protected, although Bulgarian fascists confiscated Jewish property and sent Jews from their homes to camps in the countryside. Still, the Germans were never able to deport native Bulgarian Jews to the death camps in Poland.

Le Chambon. While France as a whole has a mixed record of collaboration with and resistance to the Nazis, one city in the southern Vichy zone of France (see page 106) saved thousands of Jews. Le Chambon is a city near Lyon populated largely by Huguenots, who are French Protestants. Having experienced persecution themselves at the hands of France's Catholic majority, and motivated by their Christian faith, the residents of Le Chambon hid 5,000 Jews (many of them children) in farmhouses and cellars.

Righteous Gentiles

Israel's memorial to the Holocaust, *Yad VaShem*, has honored hundreds of European non-Jews who saved lives through their individual efforts to hide, warn, and protect Jewish friends, neighbors, and even strangers. These individuals are known as righteous gentiles, and *Yad VaShem* has planted a tree to honor each of them.

Raoul Wallenberg. The most famous righteous gentile is probably Raoul Wallenberg, a Swedish diplomat who worked tirelessly to save the Jews of Budapest, Hungary. He provided at least 30,000 Jews with Swedish passports and citizenship papers. Since the Germans could not attack citizens of a neutral country, these Jews were rescued. After the war, Wallenberg was taken captive by the Soviet army and was never heard from again.

Oskar Schindler. In recent years Amer-

have learned about the life of another righteous gentile, Oskar Schindler, whose story was dramatized in the film *Schindler's List*. Schindler was a German industrialist who protected more than a thousand Jews by employing them in his factories in Poland. He told the Nazis that these Jews were necessary to the war effort, but then made sure that the Jews in his factories would only make faulty equipment, thereby avoiding helping the Germans win the war.

In addition to the famous cases of Wallenberg and Schindler, thousands of individual righteous gentiles, from every country in Europe, helped rescue Jews in countless ways small and large — from denying knowledge of Jewish whereabouts to raising Jewish children as their own to hiding Jews in attics and cellars.

Bystanders

Other non-Jews in Europe were not perpetrators, victims, or righteous gentiles. These bystanders, who did not actively help the Nazis but did not actively help the Jews either, represent a troublesome truth — that evil can flourish when good people do nothing.

Churches. Most of the Christian churches in Europe failed to protest the Nazi assault against the Jews. Most of them actively cooperated with Nazi demands for baptismal certificates to prove the Aryan status of non-Jews. While there were isolated protests by both Catholics and Protestants, many churches only tried to save Jews who had converted to Christianity. The Vatican avoided many opportunities to condemn the Holocaust, although in his Christmas message of 1942 Pope Pius XII did make an obscure reference to people who were killed only because of their race — for which he blamed both the Nazis and the Communists.

Christian churches were supposed to be the moral conscience of much of Europe's population, yet they generally failed to speak out against the moral outrage of the Nazi Holocaust.

Neutral Countries. During World War II, there were five neutral countries in Europe: Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and Turkey. Some Jews were able to escape to each country, but each country also resisted doing too much to rescue Jews until the end of the war, when it became clear that the Nazis were going to lose. Switzerland was particularly ruthless in turning back Jews at the border. Of course, these nations feared that if they got involved they might have been drawn into the war. But it is clear that neutral countries could have done more to provide a safe haven for Jews during the Holocaust.

Allies. The Allied countries who were fighting Germany have also been faulted for not doing more to stop the Holocaust. Focused on winning victories in the battlefields, the British, Russian, and American troops were unwilling to spend precious military resources in trying to combat Nazi genocide. In response to post-war questions as to why they did not bomb the railways leading to Auschwitz, Allied officials responded that they felt the best way to help the Jews was to win the war as quickly as possible. The United States did make a belated attempt to rescue Jews, starting in 1944. Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, Jr., a Jew, approached President Roosevelt with a proposal for a War Refugee Board to search for refuge for the Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe. Working with European diplomats including Raoul Wallenberg, the War Refugee Board succeeded in saving at least 50,000 Jews in 1944 and 1945. ■

One of the Jews saved by Wallenberg, Tom Lantos, later settled in the San Francisco Bay Area, and was elected to the U.S. Congress, where he sponsored a bill to make Wallenberg an honorary citizen of the United States.

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Could America have done more to stop the Holocaust?

For the past 30 years, several American historians have participated in a heated debate over whether the United States did all it could to stop the Holocaust. Most of these historians agree that accepting more refugees during the 1930s would have saved Jewish lives. But whether America should have done more during the war — by bombing Auschwitz or demanding that Hitler release the Jews — has aroused considerable controversy. David Wyman's book *The Abandonment of the Jews* argues that Roosevelt's indifference to the fate of Jews was the "worst failure of his presidency." Wyman outlines how the State Department avoided dozens of opportunities to disseminate information about the Holocaust, and how America failed to bomb Auschwitz or negotiate with countries like Romania for the release of Jews. But other historians, most notably Lucy Dawidowicz, have defended America's policy of trying to win the war as quickly as possible. Dawidowicz has contested each of Wyman's points, defending Roosevelt as doing the best he could to defeat the Nazis, arguing that there were no practical opportunities to bring Jews out of Nazi-occupied Germany, and suggesting that bombing Auschwitz would have killed more Jews than it would have saved.

CONTROVERSIES IN HISTORY

Terms to Identify

- militarism
- Benito Mussolini
- Huguenots
- *Yad VaShem*
- righteous gentiles
- Raoul Wallenberg
- Oskar Schindler
- Pope Pius XII
- Henry Morgenthau, Jr.
- War Refugee Board

Questions for Understanding

1. How were the Jews of Denmark saved?
2. Why were the Jews of Nazi-allied countries like Italy and Bulgaria safer than the Jews of Nazi-occupied countries like Belgium and Poland?
3. Is it fair to say that bystanders such as churches or neutral countries share the blame for the Holocaust? Why or why not?
4. What human character traits do you think separate rescuers from bystanders, either in connection with Holocaust or in other episodes of history, such as the Underground Railroad in the United States?
5. Based on your reading, do you think David Wyman was right to call his book about American policy during the Holocaust *The Abandonment of the Jews*?
6. Choose a religious faith that you are familiar with. What aspects of that faith's rituals and beliefs would influence the way a follower of that faith tradition might behave in a situation like the Holocaust?

Project

Design, carry out, and analyze the results from a public opinion survey about rescue during the Holocaust. Your survey should explore what people know about the rescue of Jews during the Holocaust, what they think about America's response, and if they think America should be doing more today to stop specific cases of genocide worldwide. Be sure to read up on methods of polling and statistical analysis to be sure your results are reasonably valid. You may want to limit the population you sample to students in your school, members of your synagogue, etc.