

# COLLABORATORS

**To collaborate (collaboration and collaborator):** refers generally to the act of cooperating with or sharing the duties of another person.

This term has many positive applications: for example, two or more individuals may collaborate on a book, play, piece of music, building project, etc. However, in the context of World War II, the term “collaborators” applies to those who aided the Nazis. Collaboration took many forms. There were those who actually assisted the Nazis in the military takeover of their countries, those who fought in various military formations on the side of Germany, those who revealed the names and locations of partisan fighters to the Nazis, those who cooperated in the German governing of their countries, and those who helped directly or indirectly in the murder of Jews.

When the Germans occupied Poland they unleashed a regime of terror that was directed against the Polish people. They put an end to the Polish state and institutions, and caused the death of up to three million Poles, many through outright murder. Terror on various scales was employed by the Nazis throughout their occupied territories. Since the largest group of Jews lived in prewar Poland, because Poland was far away geographically from Western Europe, and because Poland was considered by the Nazis to be beyond the sphere of the civilized world, Poland became the dumping and killing ground for most of European Jewry. Primarily owing to the exceedingly harsh Nazi regime in Poland and prevalent antisemitic attitudes, out of the general Polish population relatively few extended aid to Jews; after the war, those who had were honored with the designation “Righteous Among the Nations.”

## In France

After the German invasion of France in 1940, Marshal Philippe Petain signed a ceasefire with Germany. The Germans occupied northern France; in southern France, an autonomous government that collaborated with Germany was set up with its capital at Vichy. This government and the southern portion of the country came to be known as “Vichy.” The Vichy government strove to assert whatever independence it could. One way it did so was by initiating anti-Jewish measures before the Germans could impose their own on them. In practice, this meant that the Vichy government collaborated with the Germans in the persecution of Jews. Jews were forbidden to participate in public activities and were deprived of their civil rights. Throughout all of France, initially non-French Jews, and later French-born Jews were removed to concentration camps by French police and the camps were administered by French officials. Later these Jews were sent to extermination camps.

To a certain extent, official French collaboration decreased over the years of the war, although some segments of the society actively collaborated until the very end. Much of the French population kept silent and was even favorable toward anti-Jewish measures as long as they were directed against Jewish property. However, those attitudes changed somewhat when the Germans began deporting French-born Jews. Some French people found it difficult to accept that Jews, especially French

citizens, were being deported and began helping Jews, mainly in 1943–1944. At a certain stage, the Germans realized they couldn't necessarily rely on the French authorities, and they became more involved in hunting down Jews, frequently with the help of French citizens who continued to collaborate with them. Deportations continued until France was liberated in the summer of 1944. But after the first wave of deportations of 1942, in which more than half the total number of Jews were dispatched from France to Nazi camps in the East, the number of deportees declined. This decline resulted from many factors, one of which was the growing reluctance of people in France to support the deportations.

### In the Netherlands

The Holocaust in the Netherlands unfolded differently from France. Initially, the Germans offered the Dutch collaboration. They considered the Dutch racially and culturally related to the Germans. There was a significant Dutch Nazi Party, and numerous Dutch officials collaborated with the Nazis. When German authorities realized, however, that many other Dutch were reluctant to cooperate with them, they hardened their approach and, among other things, implemented more severe anti-Jewish steps. Thus, there existed side-by-side a significant movement toward collaboration and a significant movement toward opposing such collaboration. The German occupation of the Netherlands is considered the most ruthless in Western Europe. The percentage of Jews deported to the extermination camps was the highest among Western European countries: 77 percent out of 140,000 were murdered; a considerable number went into hiding; 25,000 Jews were assisted by Dutch citizens, out of which about 8,000 were turned in by Dutch collaborators.

### In Italy

Under the dictator Benito Mussolini, Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany drew closer toward the end of the 1930s. In 1938, Italy, on its own initiative, legislated very harsh racial laws, with no specific demands from Hitler to do so. In

1940, it joined the war and arrested Jews who were not Italian citizens and deported them to concentration camps, though the conditions in these camps were a far cry from the deadly German camps. The Italians refused to deport Jews from their territories. But a series of events in 1943 changed that. Mussolini was ousted and Italy reached an armistice with the Allies in September 1943. In turn, the Germans invaded and put Mussolini back into power. It was at this point that Italian authorities stopped blocking deportations and German occupiers and Italian collaborators began hunting down Jews. With the assistance of the Italian Fascist guard, out of the approximately 44,000 Jews living in Italy in September 1943, more than 8,000 were deported, mostly to the Auschwitz-Burkina extermination camp.

Although Italy was an ally of Nazi Germany throughout most of the war, Italian society was divided between those who championed collaboration with the Germans and those who opposed it. Even among those who embraced collaboration with Nazi Germany, some fully identified with Nazi ideology and its goals whereas others were less supportive and even opposed the Nazis' murderous anti-Jewish policies. To a large extent, the unfolding events of the war, the short-lived German occupation of Italy, the fact that the small and ancient Italian Jewish community was well-integrated, and that helping Jews was considered by many as an act of resistance against both the German occupation and Italian Fascist regime, all combined to disrupt the deportations once they began.

As research has progressed over the years, the characterization of the Vatican as a silent collaborator has changed. Today we understand that the role of the Vatican regarding the persecution of the Jews was not black and white. Some Catholic institutions such as churches, monasteries, convents, and even the Vatican hid Jews from the Nazis. Others were less forthcoming. The stance and actions of Pope Pius XII remain a matter of passionate debate. It is unclear to what extent actions taken by the Church to help Jews were authorized by him, and there is much discussion regarding

his statements about the persecution, especially since his language was not explicit.

### In Other Countries

In most countries, the German occupation fueled ingrained popular antisemitism among some of the population that resulted in enthusiastic cooperation with the Germans in carrying out the “Final Solution.” Frequently there were local issues that contributed to this support as well. Significant collaboration with the Nazis occurred in Croatia, Hungary, Romania, the Baltic countries, and Ukraine, among other places. In some of these countries, government officials worked hand in glove with the Nazis to facilitate the murder of Jews. Local residents served as guards in the concentration

camps, played a role in rounding up Jews for deportations, and also engaged in murder. In the Soviet Union, the Germans established special mobile killing squads, Einsatzgruppen, to carry out executions of Soviet government officials, Communists, partisans, Sinti-Roma, and above all, Jews. These Nazi killing squads were directly aided by Ukrainian, Lithuanian, Estonian, Latvian, and Romanian citizens. At Babi Yar near Kiev in Ukraine, close to 34,000 Jews were murdered by German Einsatzgruppen with the aid of Ukrainian killing squads in only two days. Many Soviet prisoners of war—who had been treated murderously by the Germans—decided to take up German offers to join them; they were trained as fighters and concentration camp guards.

**Though the exact number of people who collaborated with the Germans in the murder of the Jews will never be known, it is clear that without widespread collaboration and silent approval, the Nazis could not have murdered six million Jews from all over Europe.**