

# Misconceptions

(from Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center)

## **Norwegian non-Jews wore paper clips to express solidarity with Norwegian Jewry**

When the Germans occupied Norway in June 1940, between 1700 and 1800 Jews lived there – most of them in Oslo and all but 200 of them Norwegian citizens. Acceding to German demands, the collaborationist government immediately implemented anti-Jewish legislation. In November 1942, in response to further demands, the government rounded up more than 700 Jews, who were subsequently deported to Auschwitz where most were killed. Although the Norwegian resistance managed to smuggle the remaining Jews to neutral Sweden, the wearing of paper clips had nothing to do with demonstrating support for these efforts or solidarity with Norwegian Jewry. Rather, it represented one of many non-violent expressions of Norwegian nationalism and loyalty to King Haakon VII. These included listening secretly to foreign news broadcasts, printing and distributing underground newspapers and wearing pins fashioned from coins with the king's head brightly polished, from various “flowers of loyalty,” from the symbol “H7” (for Haakon VII), and – for a time, after the latter were outlawed – from paper clips (also occasionally worn as bracelets). Why paper clips? Presumably – although some dispute this – because they were invented by a Norwegian named Johan Vaaler in 1899. Although, ironically, he had to patent the device in Germany because Norway had no patent law at the time. Vaaler did nothing more with his invention and, in subsequent years, paper clips would be manufactured and mass-marketed by firms in the United States and Great Britain (most notably, the Gem Company of Great Britain – originators of the familiar “double-U” slide-on clips, which the Norwegians may very well have worn.)

## **The Germans used crushed Jewish bones to pave the Autobahn**

The Germans crushed Jewish bones in two specific contexts only. One was in the Operation Reinhard death camps (Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka) in Poland. The other was in the former Soviet territories (Latvia, Estonia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Lithuania), where SS and police detachments known as Einsatzgruppen conducted mobile killing operations, shooting thousands of Jews and burying them in mass graves. Beginning in 1942, when the Germans were no longer sure they could win the war on the Eastern front, exhumation crews were sent into these territories to open the mass graves, burn the bodies, and crush the bones, in order to destroy all physical evidence. A special machine ground the bones into a powder of dust and very fine pieces, which were then reburied along with the ashes from the burned bodies. However, there is no evidence that ground bone was used in the construction of the Autobahn – the system of highways intended to span Germany. Although Hitler began building the Autobahn in the 1930s, no construction was undertaken during the war years, and it was not resumed in earnest until the 1950s.

## **German Jews were a large proportion of Germany's population**

In 1933, approximately 9.5 million Jews lived in Europe, comprising 1.7% of the total European population. This number represented more than 60 percent of the world's Jewish population at that time, estimated at 15.3 million. Of these, the largest Jewish community was in Poland – about 3,250,000 Jews or 9.8% of the Polish population. Germany's approximately 565,000 Jews made up only 0.8% of its population.

## **Adolf Hitler was Jewish**

One of the most frequently asked questions we receive is whether or Adolf Hitler was Jewish or had ancestors who were. The idea stems from the rumors that Hitler's grandfather was Jewish. Few, if any historians believe this to be so. Hitler's father, Alois, was registered as an illegitimate child with

no father. Thus, Hitler was unable to produce the certificate of origin he required of every German citizen on hazard of death. Alois's mother worked in the home of a wealthy Jew and there is some chance a son in the household got the women (i.e. Hitler's grandmother) pregnant. Most historians believe, however, that it is more likely Hitler was trying to keep a family secret that he carried a hereditary disposition toward mental illness and feeble-mindedness.

### **A Jewish doctor killed Adolf Hitler's mother**

Some, like psycho-historian Rudolf Binion (Hitler Among the Germans, 1976) claim that Hitler's genocidal hatred of the Jews stemmed from the fact that Dr. Eduard Bloch, his family's Jewish physician in Linz, Austria, bungled Klara Hitler's treatment, causing her to die a prolonged and painful death from breast cancer in December 1907. However, according to Bloch's 1943 testimony to the Office of Strategic Services in the United States, Hitler considered Bloch to have treated her well and seemed to harbor no ill will towards him, despite the fact that he had been especially close to his mother. Indeed, Dr. Bloch recalled that, after her death, "He [Hitler] stepped forward and took my hand. Looking into my eyes, he said: 'I shall be grateful to you forever.' Then he bowed." In later years, Hitler demonstrated his gratitude with postcards, warm holiday greetings, gifts of his artwork, and – after he became Führer – with expressions of concern for Bloch's welfare. In 1937, after asking a delegation of Linz Nazis for news of the town, Hitler also "asked for news of me. Was I still alive, still practicing?" adding "Dr. Bloch...is an Edeljude – a noble Jew. If all Jews were like him, there would be no Jewish question." Bloch further testified that "Favors were granted me which I feel sure were accorded no other Jew in all Germany or Austria." Thus, "Berlin" directed the Linz Gestapo to remove the yellow star from Dr. Bloch's apartment and office and to allow the Bloch family to remain in their home. Nor were they prevented from leaving Austria in 1938 – although they were not permitted to keep their life-savings and, as a condition of their leaving, the Gestapo confiscated Hitler's gifts and notes and Dr. Bloch's record book detailing Klara Hitler's treatment (the latter surfaced after the war).

### **The Germans manufactured soap from Jewish bodies**

Leading Holocaust scholars disavow the Nazi manufacture of soap, pointing to the fact that allegations about the Germans making soap from human bodies date back to French propaganda early in World War I and that specific claims regarding Jewish bodies began to surface as early as August 1942 in the concentration camps. They also point out that evidence that would prove it conclusively – such as shipping bills, physical evidence from a manufacturing plant, or receipts for economic transactions – has never been found. Whereas such evidence abounds for shipments of hair and dental gold removed from human bodies.

Moreover, these rumors also disturbed Heinrich Himmler, since the Nazis' extermination plans demanded strict secrecy. On November 30, 1942, after hearing that Rabbi Stephen Wise of New York had mentioned the soap rumors to the American press (November 24), Himmler wrote the following to Heinrich Müller, head of the Gestapo: In view of the large emigration movement of Jews, I do not wonder that such rumors come to circulate in the world. We both know that there is present an increased mortality among the Jews put to work. You have to guarantee to me that the corpses of these deceased Jews are either burned or buried at each location, and that absolutely nothing else can happen with the corpses at any location. Conduct an investigation immediately everywhere whether any kind of misuse [of corpses] has taken place of the sort as listed in point 1, probably strewn about in the world as a lie. Upon the SS-oath I am to be notified of each misuse of this kind.

Nevertheless, over the years, Holocaust survivors have presented small blue-green cakes of soap, claiming that they were made from human fat because they were stamped RIF. Aaron Breitbart, a senior researcher at the Simon Wiesenthal Center explains that this stands for "Reich Industry Fat." However, in the camps, some Jews believed that the I was a J and that the acronym stood for "Pure Jewish Fat." When analyzed, however, the bars turned up no evidence of human DNA. Thus, the RIF soap allegations were a rumor, even though many people believed it at the time.

### **King Christian X of Denmark wore a Jewish Star badge to protest German orders that Danish Jews wear such badges**

This is one of the most enduring and popular Holocaust myths. Some also add that the king urged all Danish non-Jews to wear Jewish star badges, or that they donned them in admiration of his gesture. This never happened, despite the stories about the king's open support of his Jewish subjects that circulated throughout Europe, one of which has him threatening to wear a badge if such an order were given. However, the Germans never required Danish Jews to wear badges, possibly because they realized how much resistance this order would arouse, intensifying the Danes' solidarity and rejection of Nazi thinking. Thus, through most of the occupation, as a gesture of solidarity with all of his subjects, the king continued his daily horseback rides through Copenhagen, alone and unprotected, and these rides became a focus of popular protest as scores of Danes turned out to escort him.

### **Jews were foreigners and aliens who controlled the economy, politics and culture of Germany and other countries**

This myth is part of a persistent negative stereotype that emerged in the late Roman Empire, persisting through the 19th and 20th centuries and into the present. Even though, by 1939, Jews had been an integral part of Western Civilization from its earliest beginnings (5000 years ago in the Fertile Crescent – the area between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in contemporary Iraq) and an integral part of Europe since Roman times (1500 years of continuous settlement by 1939).

However, from the 4th century on, after Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, Jews were vilified as Christ-killers and infidels and regarded as an inassimilable and alien "Other." During the Middle Ages and the early modern period, European Jews were subjected to increasingly punitive measures, physical violence, ghettoization, expulsion and relentless pressure to convert. They were forbidden to own land and prohibited from pursuing most occupations except for certain types of trading (such as peddling second-hand goods), "middle-man" occupations (such as factoring, and dealing in grain, wood, and cattle), and "money trades" (lending money for interest – which the Roman Catholic Church called "usury" and prohibited to Christians – and banking). Thus, Jews became identified with money and with two especially unsavory and persistent stereotypes: the heartless, unethical and exploitative usurer, who lent money at ruinous interest rates; and the shifty, unscrupulous, swindling peddler, who sold shoddy goods at exorbitant prices. So ingrained was this identification that medieval as well as modern depictions of Jews often showed them grasping or sitting on or chasing money.

Adolf Hitler and the Nazis augmented this with a 19th century myth that emerged as a backlash to European Jewry's emancipation and consequent involvement in and numerous contributions to European cultural, social, economic and political life in numbers disproportionate to its numeric presence in the general population. This myth stressed the existence of a "secret" Jewish plot to dominate the world through economic and political control. In the 1890s, this was furthered by the publication of the Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion – a forgery that originated in France and was translated into numerous languages. In Russia, it was found among the papers of Tsar Nicholas II, and in the United States, it was heavily promoted by Henry Ford in his Dearborn Independent. It was alleged to be the minutes of a secret society of Jewish notables described as "learned men [who] decided by peaceful means to conquer the world for Zion with the slyness of the symbolic serpent" – that is, by secret conspiracy. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries (and into the present), this image of the Jews cut across ideological lines, finding adherents on the left (socialists, communists, and anarchists) as well as on the right (conservatives, fascists, monarchists, and chauvinists) and finding expression in the media through cartoons and posters depicting Jews as something slimy (snake, lizard, bug, octopus) and sinister with a stranglehold on the globe.

### **Jews are a race**

Race is a limited biological classification referring to certain shared physical features – such as, skin color, hair color and texture, body shape and size, and eye color – that are inherent in the genes and cannot be changed. Jews are not a race. First and foremost, they are adherents of a religion – Judaism – around which a culture has evolved based on laws and rituals regarding diet, the Sabbath, and customs that can vary from place to place because the Jews live in many parts of the world. Second, Jews are also a “people,” with a national/ethnic identity based on a shared history and historical homeland – Israel – that extends from ancient times to the present.

### **How did Adolf Hitler die and is he still alive?**

Since his death on April 30, 1945, much speculation has surrounded how Hitler died, is he still alive, etc... Even though he would be extremely old if alive today (116 years old) some theories that exist include: He ate poison and shot himself, He ate poison, but did not shoot himself; he shot himself, but did not take poison; one of Hitler’s doubles was killed, creating the illusion Hitler was dead, allowing the “real” Hitler to escape: somebody else killed Hitler.

The fact that Hitler died in his bunker is almost certain, despite lack of physical evidence to this effect. We believe that on the morning of April 29, 1945, in a civil ceremony in his bunker, Hitler married his mistress of many years, Eva Braun. The next day, they both bit into thin glass vials of cyanide. As he did so Hitler also shot himself in the head. The handful of remaining Nazi loyalists, wrapped his body in a gray army blanket, carried him to the shell-blasted Chancellery garden, saluted in honor and ignited his body.

### **Dr. Josef Mengele made all selections upon arrival at the camps**

Dr. Josef Mengele was Senior SS physician at Auschwitz-Birkenau from 1943 to 1944. He was one of multiple physicians who carried out “selections” of prisoners upon arrival at the camp. Dr. Mengele did make many of the “selections,” but so did other doctors, especially when the prisoners were regularly forced to parade before the doctors at frequent selections inside the camps.

### **Every concentration camp had a gas chamber and crematoria**

This was not true for the majority of the camps which were for slave labor, transit, and political prisoners. By 1945, the Nazis had established 10,004 camps. However, only six of these camps were designated to kill the Jews totally. Nazi camps equipped with gassing facilities, for mass murder of Jews included Auschwitz-Birkenau, Belzec, Chelmno, Majdanek-Lublin, Sobibor, and Treblinka. Up to 2,700,000 Jews were murdered at these camps, as were tens of thousands of Gypsies, Soviet prisoners of war, Poles, and others.

### **Auschwitz-Birkenau was the only camp that existed in Auschwitz**

Auschwitz had many satellite camps that surrounded the main camp, accounting for an area of 20 square miles – the area of an average American city. In 1944, more tracks led to Auschwitz than to New York’s Penn. Station, which at the time was the largest railroad station in the world.

Auschwitz I – original and main Auschwitz camp in southwest Poland. Served first as Polish military barrack, then as concentration camp largely for gentiles.

Auschwitz II – (Birkenau) Largest Nazi Camp, opened in October 1941. It was used particularly for the extermination of Jews and Roma (Gypsies). It was the site of four gas chambers.

Auschwitz III – (Buna-Monowitz) Set aside as a labor camp for chemical giant I.G. Farben. It refers also to 36 subcamps.

### **All Jews in camps received tattoo numbers on their arms**

Not all Jews in the camps were given a tattoo, especially those designated for extermination, and not all camps made use of tattoos for prisoner identification.

## **All Jews were forced to wear the yellow Star of David badge**

Denmark was the only occupied country where Jews were not forced to wear the yellow star. In addition, Jews in Central Poland did not wear star badges but white armbands with a blue Star of David.

## **What Pastor Niemoeller really said**

One of the most misquoted citations of the Holocaust is the “confession of guilt” by Pastor Martin Niemoeller. According to his widow, Sybil Niemoeller, these are his exact words:

First they came for the Communists  
and I did not speak out –  
because I was not a Communist.  
Then they came for the Socialists  
and I did not speak out –  
because I was not a Socialist.  
Then they came for the trade unionists  
and I did not speak out –  
because I was not a trade unionist.  
Then they came for the Jews  
and I did not speak out –  
because I was not a Jew.  
Then they came for me –  
and there was no one left  
to speak out for me.

## **There were 11 million victims of the Holocaust**

The number 11 million is a fictitious number on a number of levels. “11 million Jews” is the population census that is mentioned in the 16th copy of the Wannsee Protocol, notes taken by Eichmann (January 20, 1942), only about the Jews. The issue seems to be the differentiation between victims based on NSDAP race policy versus civilian deaths during war (i.e.: victims because of genocide or casualties of war) if the latter, the correct number of probably between 30-35 million deaths, maybe more. If only racial and biological related categories, it should encompass only Jews, Roma Sinti and victims of T-4. This is not to belittle other victims of war and political policies, but other groups had some choices regarding compliance with Nazi domination or resistance, and some, like Jehovah’s Witnesses, Homosexuals and Gypsies have a history of persecution even in democratic countries, although not the end of concentration camps and death.

In Elie Wiesel’s “And the Sea Is Never Full,” Wiesel brings attention to this issue in a meeting with Simon Wiesenthal:

“I answer him that I don’t know where he obtained the figure of eleven million. To my knowledge, no historian has ever cited such a figure. Indeed, the only place I can remember seeing that figure was in Eichmann’s report on the Wannsee Conference, where leaders of the Third Reich decided on the Final Solution. But even there, Eichmann referred to eleven million JEWS, only JEWS—those of Europe and elsewhere—all of whom were targeted...I can explain my position to him, the very same I set forth before President Carter and Congress: Not all the victims of the Holocaust were Jews, but all Jews were victims.”

Conclusion, it is best when referencing the total number of victims of the Holocaust to say 6 million Jews and millions of others. All Holocaust organizations are making a united move to adhere to this message and we must maintain a consistent record as center of Holocaust studies.