

# *Night*, Elie Wiesel, The Holocaust, and Genocide

For Elie Wiesel, darkness and night symbolize a world without God.

# Elie Wiesel

- A Jewish writer, professor, political activist, Nobel price winner, and Holocaust survivor
- Born September 30, 1928 – still living
- The author of 57 books, the best known of which is *Night*
- Wiesel was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986

# Early Life of Elie Wiesel

- Wiesel was born in Sighet, Romania
- His family was of Hungarian-Jewish heritage
- Suffered through WWII and the Holocaust

# Post-War II Wiesel

- Professional journalist
- Still goes around the world to speak
- September 2006, he appeared before the UN Security Council to call attention to the humanitarian crisis in Darfur

# Wiesel's *Night*

- For ten years after the war, Wiesel refused to write about or discuss his experiences during the Holocaust
- His decision changed, however, after a meeting with François Mauriac
- Mauriac is the 1952 Nobel Laureate in Literature, who eventually became Wiesel's close friend
- Mauriac persuaded him to write about his Holocaust experiences

# *Night's* Popularity

- Did not do well at first – sold small numbers of copies around 1955, its publishing date
- Took many years until it was recognized
- Is now recognized as one of the leaders of Holocaust literature
- Wiesel was on Oprah, and the book become a #1 Bestseller that year
- Millions of copies are in print today

# Wiesel's Popularity

- The Elie Wiesel Foundation for Humanity is an organization dedicated to combating indifference, intolerance, and injustice through international dialogues and youth-focused programs that promote acceptance, understanding, and equality.

- The internationally acclaimed *Night* has been published in more than 30 languages
- He has also been awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the U.S. Congressional Gold Medal and the Medal of Liberty Award.
- President Jimmy Carter appointed him as chairman of the President's Commission on the Holocaust.
- He also became the founding chairman of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council.



# *Night's* Style and Themes

- It has been viewed as “a sparse and fragmented narrative style, with frequent shifts in point of view”
  - Represents the “ghetto-speaker”
- Loss of Faith: in God and man’s goodness

# *Night*, continued

## ■ Genre?

- Novel, memoir, historical narrative

## ■ Part of a Trilogy

- *Dawn* and *Day* are the following two

# Nonfiction: Autobiography Vs. Memoir

- An **autobiography** is a sketch of the author's entire life, often from birth up until the time of the writing.
- A **memoir** focuses on one aspect of the writer's life. Memoirs usually cover a relatively short span of time, and their main purpose is to draw the reader's attention to a specific theme or circumstance

# Other Types of Nonfiction

- A biography is the story of a life from another person's perspective.
- An essay is a short nonfiction work that addresses a specific subject.
- A speech is a talk or an address presented to an audience.

# Genocide

- From the UN: “any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life, calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; [and] forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.”
- Our definition: “Mass killings of people based on ethnicity, nation, race, or religion”

# Genocide, continued

- Term coined in reference to the Holocaust
- There have been numerous genocides before then
  - American Indians?
  - Many others
- There are genocides today
  - Darfur

# Holocaust

- Term generally used to describe the genocide of approximately six million European Jews during World War II
- Means: Used many ways, but concentration camps were the largest
  - 3 million died in these camps
  - Virtually the entire Jewish population of Poland died in these camps

# Holocaust

- Jewish people were the largest targets, but there were others:
  - mentally ill
  - handicapped
  - Same-sex people



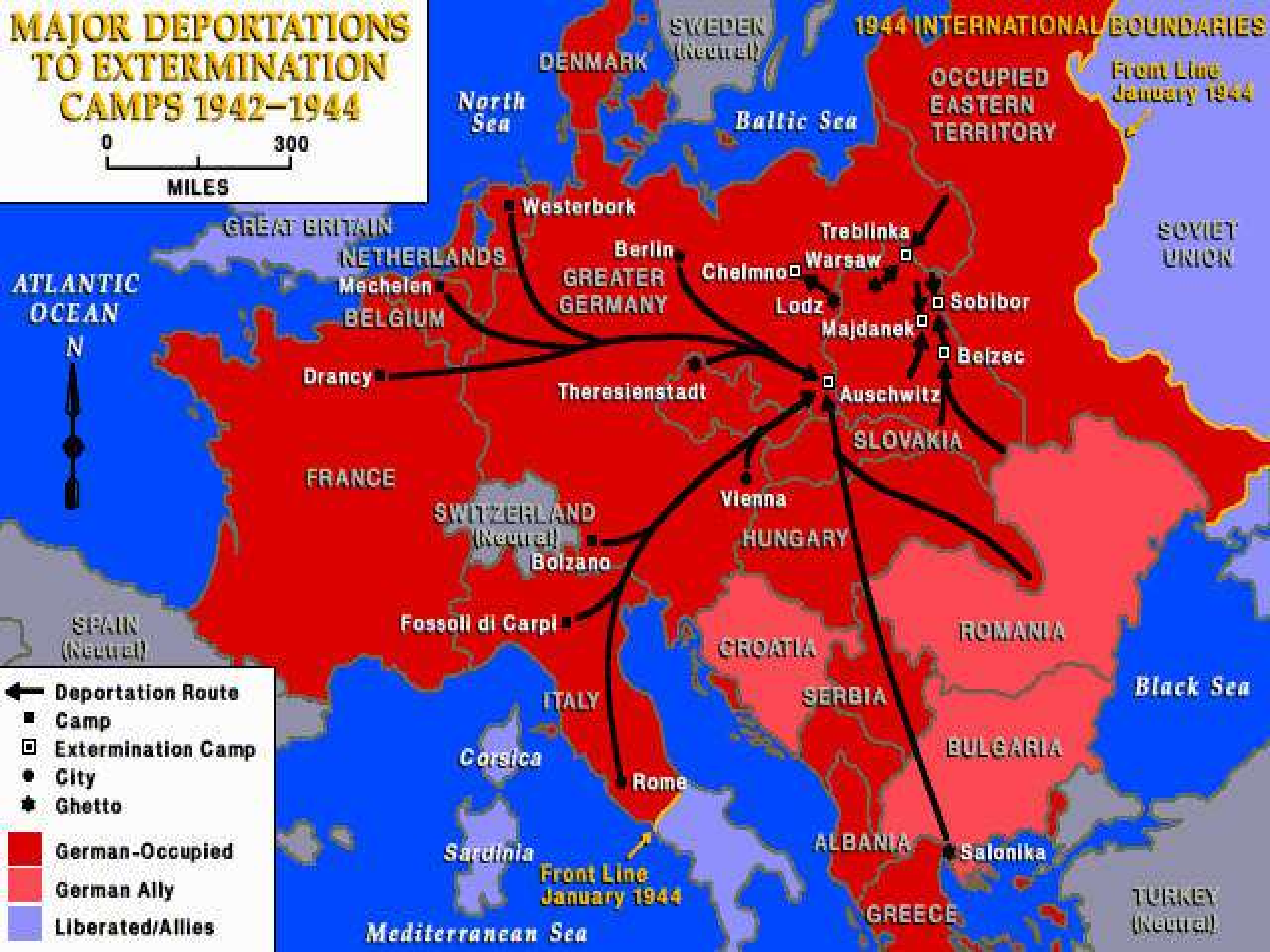
# MAJOR DEPORTATIONS TO EXTERMINATION CAMPS 1942-1944

0 300  
MILES

ATLANTIC  
OCEAN



- ← Deportation Route
- Camp
- Extermination Camp
- City
- ★ Ghetto
- German-Occupied
- German Ally
- Liberated/Allies







# Darkness and Light

- For Elie Wiesel, darkness and night symbolize a world without God.
- Night is always when the suffering is worst, and the presence of darkness reflects Eliezer's belief that his has become a world without the presence of God.

# Vocabulary

- Holocaust means “complete destruction by fire.”
- The term is now associated with the murder of more than six million Jewish people during World War II.

# Genocide

- Genocide is a word that combines the Greek word “genos” (meaning race, people, or nation) and the ending “cide” (meaning to kill).
- Genocide refers to the deliberate and systematic extermination of a national, racial, political, or cultural group.

# Vocabulary

- Ghetto: The confinement of Jews in a set-apart area of the city.
  - Anti-Semitism: Hostility toward or discrimination against Jewish people
  - Euphemism: A mild or vague term that is substituted for one that is harsh or offensive.
- “To pass away” is a euphemism for “to die.”

# Fascism

- A system of government with centralized authority under a dictator, stringent socioeconomic controls, suppression of the opposition through terror and censorship and usually a policy of belligerent nationalism and racism



# Death Camps

- Camps dedicated to the efficient murder of Jews and other victims;
- E.g. Auschwitz-Birkenau, Belzec, Chelmo, Madjanek, Sobibor, Treblinka.
- The terms was also used for concentration camps where thousands died of starvation and disease.

# Aryan Race

- The pure Germanic race, used by the Nazis to suggest a superior, non-Jewish Caucasian typified by height, blonde hair, blue eyes.

# The Final Solution

- The plan devised in 1941 to speed up the system of killing the Jews and “undesirables.”
- The previous method of shooting and burying the dead was too “costly and inefficient.”
- This final method used an efficient system of gas chambers and crematories to kill the Jews. Six of these death camps were built and often were kept working round the clock, killing thousands per day

# The Selection

- Term used when the SS forced prisoners to line up for inspection and decided which prisoners would live and which would be killed.

# Zionism

- Political movement advocating the establishment of a Jewish state.

# Essential Questions to Consider

1. Why do writers write about such atrocious things as the Holocaust?
2. What is the purpose of reading literature about such atrocious things as the Holocaust?
3. How do people justify awful things such as genocide?
4. How did the Nazis justify the Holocaust?