

## HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY ACTIVITY 17



### Jews in Europe

#### In Berlin's Jewish Ghetto

*The entrance to the Wassertorstrasse was a big stone archway, a bit of old Berlin, daubed with hammers and sickles and Nazi crosses and plastered with tattered bills which advertised auctions or crimes. It was a deep shabby cobbled street, littered with sprawling children's tears. . . .*

*Down in the murky pit of the courtyard, where the fog, in this clammy autumn weather, never lifted, the street singers and musicians succeeded each other in a performance which was nearly continuous. There were parties of boys with mandolins, an old man who played the concertina, and a father who sang with his little girls. . . .*

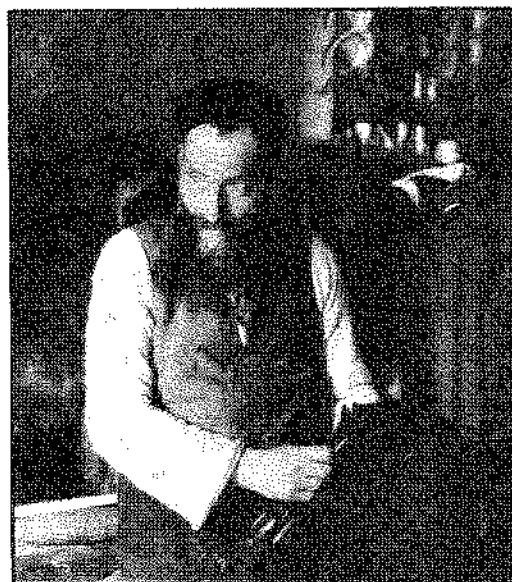
*Another regular visitor was the Jewish tailor and outfitter, who sold clothes of all kinds on the installment plan. He was small and gentle and very persuasive. All day long he made his rounds of the tenements in the district, collecting fifty pfennigs here, a mark there, scratching up his precarious livelihood, like a hen, from this apparently barren soil.*

—From *Goodbye to Berlin* (1935) by Christopher Isherwood

On April 1, 1933, German soldiers in full uniform stood at the entrances of certain department stores and other shops, urging customers not to enter. "This is a Jewish business!" the soldiers shouted. "Remember to boycott the Jews!" Few customers dared to enter and few Jewish stores remained open. That day marked the beginning of Germany's official persecution of the Jews. Why did the German government initiate a policy of persecuting its own citizens?

After World War I, many successful Jews moved in the upper class of European society. In Germany, for example, Jews owned steel mills, railroads, shipping lines, department stores, and banks. The lives of these wealthy Jews closely resembled those of other rich Germans.

Yet for every Jew in the upper class, there were dozens of middle and working class Jews. Beginning in the late 1800s, millions of Jews fled the impoverished villages in Russia and eastern Europe. Some traveled all the way to the United States; others



*Jewish tailors and small-business owners were often confined to the ghettos of central European cities because they were viewed as unwelcome competitors.*

**HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY ACTIVITY 17** (continued)

crowded into ghettos in western European cities such as Berlin, where they eked out a living by toiling in sweatshops or peddling various wares. As their profits grew, they opened small shops and businesses.

German Jews, both rich and poor, seemed destined for success in the 1920s and 1930s. But a rising tide of jealousy and hatred brought a tragic end to their dreams—and, in millions of cases, to their lives.

Location—rural or urban, seaside or mountainside, remote or accessible—exerts a powerful influence on human activities. It

can determine the kind of work people do and shape their way of living. The Jews who fled from eastern to western Europe in the late 1800s and early 1900s had to change their livelihoods. In the east they had survived primarily by farming. Because there were no farms in the western ghettos, the Jews who moved there turned to peddling and factory work. Customers were easy to find in the crowded cities, and the urban factories needed cheap labor. By adapting their lives to their new locations, the Jews were able to succeed.

**APPLYING GEOGRAPHY TO HISTORY**

**DIRECTIONS:** Answer the questions below in the space provided.

1. Why is tailoring well suited to urban locations?  
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2. How did location influence the lives of Jews in eastern Europe?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Describe how location influences human activities in your community.  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Critical Thinking**

4. **Making Inferences** Do you think location plays as great a role in human activities as it did 60 years ago? Use specific examples to explain your answer.  
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\_\_\_\_\_
5. **Making Comparisons** Imagine you can build a new city anywhere in the United States. Which location would you choose? Why?  
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\_\_\_\_\_

**Activity**

6. Brainstorm with your classmates a list of innovative occupational and recreational activities that might be particularly suitable for your community's location.