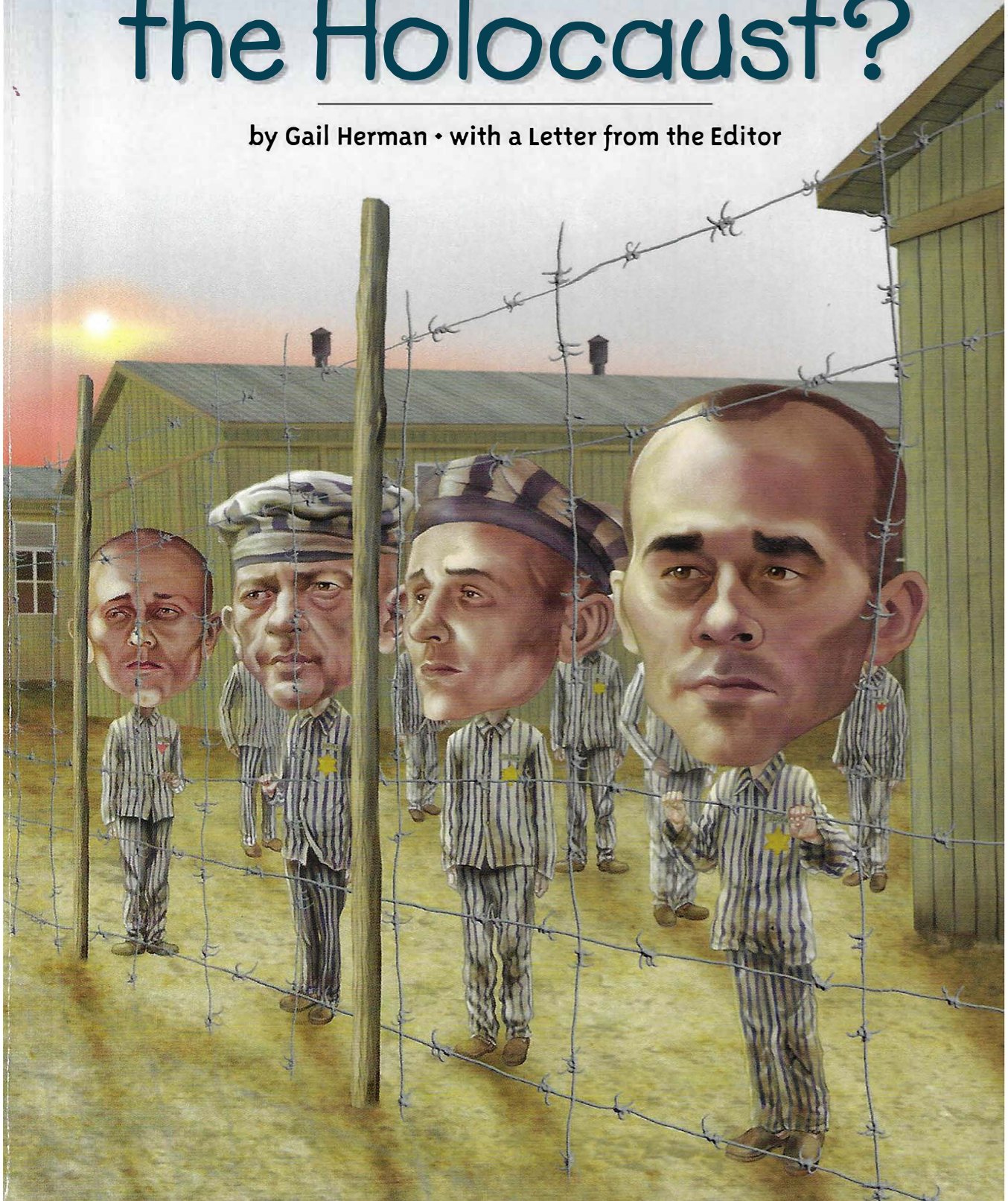


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The *New York Times* Best-Selling Series

# What Was the Holocaust?

by Gail Herman • with a Letter from the Editor



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President von Hindenburg was old and frail by then and agreed to give the chancellor—Adolf Hitler—full power. In the next few months, Hitler made all political parties illegal except his own—the Nazis. From then on, he didn't need approval from the president or the Reichstag to do what he wanted.

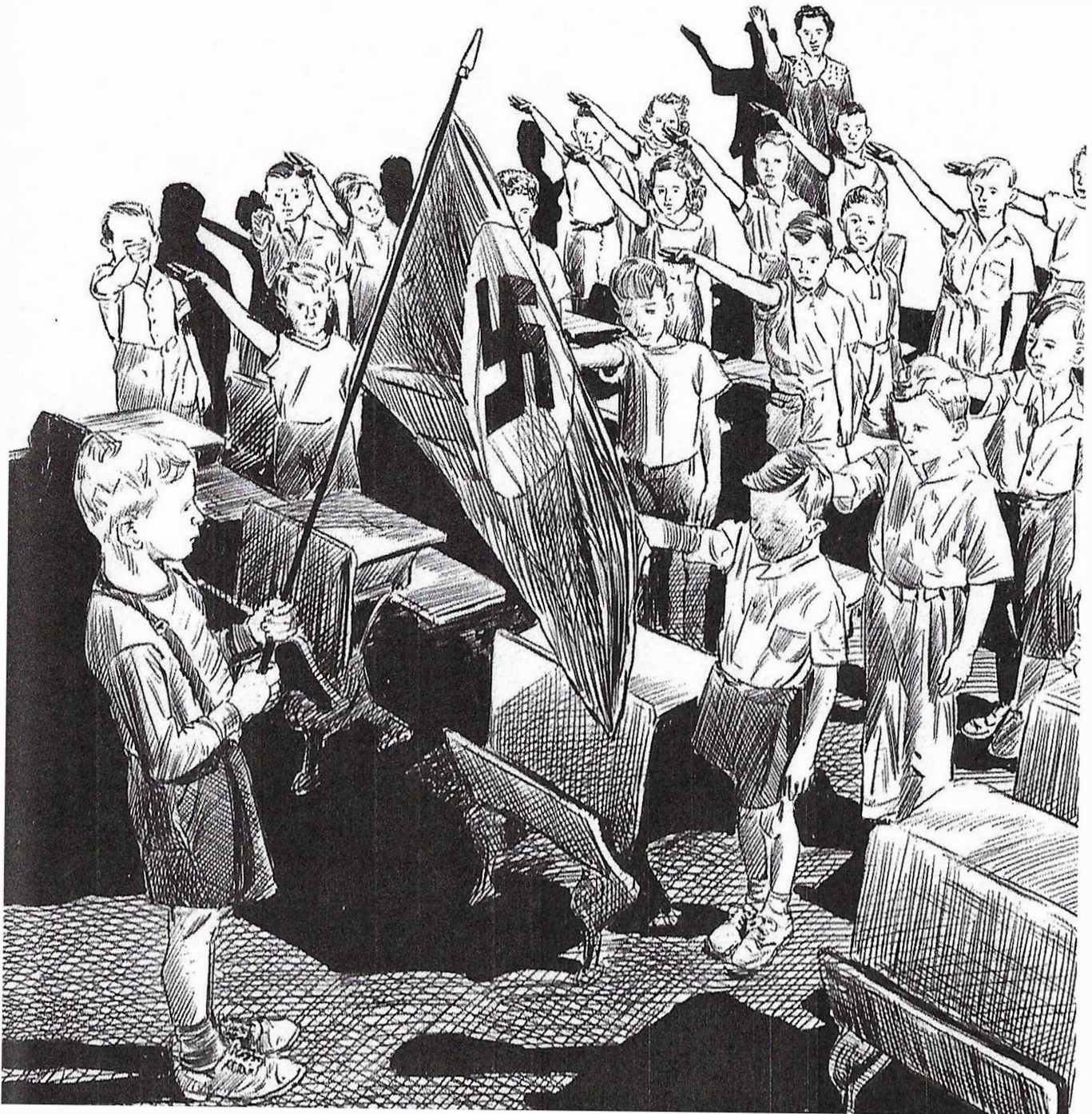
Hitler was free to decide what to do about the Jews.

His first step was to separate them from the rest of society. By doing this, he believed they'd leave Germany once and for all. Hitler began to pass anti-Jewish laws. First he focused on schools.

Students had to say “Heil Hitler” (Hail Hitler) when they arrived, at the start of each class, and at the end of the day. Textbooks were rewritten—every subject needed to praise Hitler and Germany and put down Jews. If teachers didn't teach Nazi beliefs about the Aryan race,

they were fired. Soon there could only be a certain number of Jewish students in public schools. Those students had to sit in the last row.

And this was just the beginning.

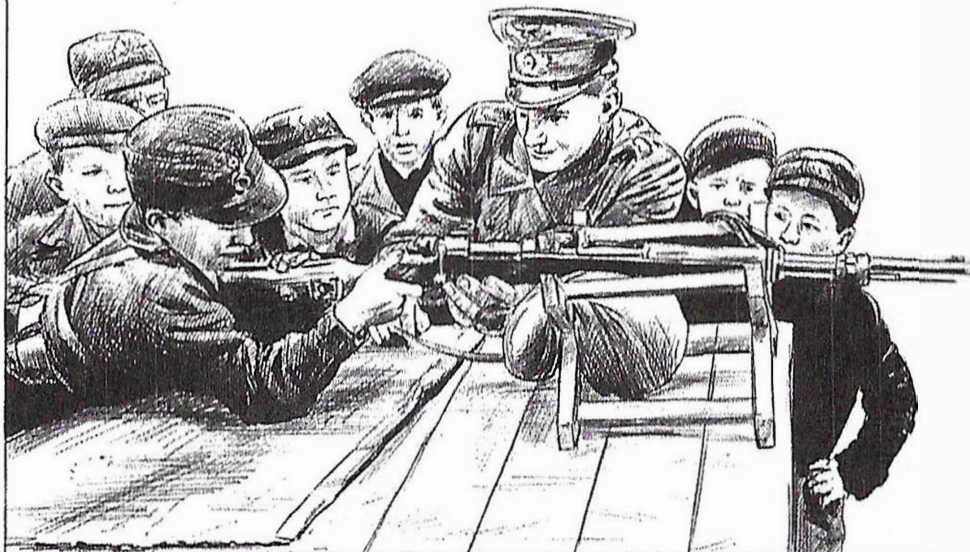




## Hitler Youth

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Hitler thought young Aryans were the future of Germany. He founded the Hitler Youth in the early 1920s—Jews and other “sub-humans” were not allowed. Boys trained to be storm troopers, and girls learned to be good wives and mothers. By 1939, membership was no longer a choice. Boys hiked, camped, and played sports. They practiced marching and shooting, and starting up fights against Jews. Girls ran, swam, and learned to cook. Hitler Youth held large colorful rallies, and the group stayed loyal to Hitler to the end of World War II.



President von Hindenburg died the next year (1934). In short order, Hitler combined von Hindenburg's job with his own. There was no longer a president and a chancellor. There was only Hitler. On August 2, 1934, he named himself führer (say: FYUR-er), which means "leader" in German.

More concentration camps were built. Political opponents were jailed without trials. In 1935, other groups were imprisoned, including gay people.

More anti-Jewish laws were passed, too. But Hitler was careful. He didn't pass all the laws at once. He tested the mood of the country, announcing just a few laws at a time. When non-Jewish citizens didn't object, he took away more rights from the Jews.

In the beginning, Jews couldn't hold certain jobs. They couldn't work for the government. Or practice law or medicine, or teach in public