Nazi Gold Essay, Research Paper

The Story Behind the Nazi Gold Nazi Gold: Hard currency

looted from treasuries of countries occupied by the Axis

powers during World War II. Ingots consisting of gold

melted down from the teeth of murder victims and

weddings bands and jewelry. About two thirds of an

estimated $660 million ($7.8 billion in today’s dollars) in

stolen Nazi gold passed through Switzerland during the

war. And like any sharp businessmen with hot goods, the

Swiss disposed of much of their gold quickly – through

Portugal mainly, but also to Sweden, Spain, and other

central banks (Hirsh 48). Probably no more that $140

million remains unaccounted for, and a good portion of that

was probably sold onward as well. But what remains of the

known Nazi hoard (none of which has been returned to the

Jewish community) is worth no more than about $65 million

according to the Brussels-based Tripartite Gold

Commission, set up after World War II to return stolen

gold to national treasuries. Recently the Clinton

administration created a com! mission to search for any

Nazi funds that might have ended up in U.S. Federal

Reserve vaults. “We have to be willing not only to focus the

spotlight on Switzerland,” says Under Secretary of

Commerce Stuart Eizenstat. “We have to be willing to

follow the trail of assets into our own treasury” (qtd. in

Hirsh 47). This trail though, suggests that there is no huge

stash of Nazi gold in Switzerland. The loot has scattered

worldwide through numerous transactions and is probably

irretrievable. Also, because so many banks were involved,

the amount of gold left in Wieckowski 2 Switzerland is

probably negligible, contrary to what investigators have

until now presumed. At this point the cost or returning the

Nazi Gold to its rightful owners is not worth the trouble and

inconvenience it would create. Documents released in

recent months have made it clear that Swiss banks traded

in looted Nazi-gold, and that Swiss businesses made a

fortune selling arms to the Nazis. In a historical report

published around May 9,1997, it was said that there was

no evidence that the Swiss or other neutral countries knew

that gold from the central banks had been smelted together

with gold fillings, wedding bands, and other jewelry stolen

from Holocaust victims (Sanger). But, Eizenstat found

“incontrovertible evidence” that Swiss bankers knew they

were trading in gold that Germany had looted from the

treasuries of states it occupied, and also a handwritten

ledger sheet from the Reichsbank showed a deposit of

29,996 grams of “dental gold” into a Swiss account (A

harsh…). This confirms that the Nazis melted down and

recirculated gold extracted from the teeth of murdered

Jews and other death camp victims. It also proves the

involvement and knowledge of dealings with gold extracted

from tee! th of murdered victims by the Swiss in that there

were deposits made into their accounts. Germany also sent

Switzerland via diplomatic pouch packages of jewelry,

looted from Jewish persecutees, to be exchanged for

industrial diamonds and foreign currency essential to the

German war effort (Sanders). From this evidence we see

that the Swiss acted as the Nazis’ “principal bankers” and

after the war took a “legalistic” stance to hold onto their

ill-gotten gains, returning only $58 million worth of gold

(Chesnoff). Some argue that the Swiss should have given

up all of the gold, but why should they? It was business

after all. Many Swiss argue that what Switzerland did was

done for survival’s sake, but their critics assert that it was

Wieckowski 3 done of opportunism and amorality and

should be paid for in both moral and financial terms

(Cowell). During WWII, the German threat to Switzerland

was real, not imaginary or exaggerated. After the collapse

of France in 1940, historically neutral Switzerland was

virtually surrounded by axis-dominated territory. After the

Germans occupied Vichy, France in the fall of 1942,

Switzerland was entirely cut off from the outside world.