

THE HOLOCAUST

NAZIS PERPETRATE GENOCIDE



The Holocaust refers to the murder of 6 million Jews, and 6 million other “enemies of the state” by the Nazi regime controlling Germany, from 1938 to 1945. The Holocaust is a dramatic and shocking example of **genocide**. It stands alone in its level of organization and efficiency, and has become the ultimate case study in the history of genocide.

Unit 4 Part 2 Holocaust Notes by A. Pennino

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Parts of these notes were directly adapted from the US Holocaust Memorial Museum <https://www.ushmm.org/>
and Yad Vashem: The World Holocaust Remembrance Center <https://www.yadvashem.org/>

1935: NAZISM ESTABLISHED IN GERMANY

The NAZI Party, step by step, established itself as the sole power in German government. Chancellor Adolf Hitler, granted emergency powers in 1934, became simply “the Leader” – *the Führer*. Now that Germany became a one party totalitarian dictatorship- “**The Third Reich,**”* the nazis could focus on implementing their expressed goals. This generally played out as follows:

1. Rebuild the German economy and German military power.
2. Establish “Aryan” supremacy in Germany through racist laws and policies.
3. Reclaim territory lost after WWI
4. Deal with the “Jewish threat” by establishing ghettos and concentration camps.
5. Expansionism, leading to World War II
6. Genocide against Jews and other perceived “enemy” groups

**The Third Reich, meaning Third Realm or Third Empire, portrayed Nazi Germany as the successor of the medieval Holy Roman Empire, and the German Empire 1871-1918.*

HOW DID THE HOLOCAUST BEGIN?

1. THE NURENBERG LAWS 1935

These laws stripped Jewish Germans of citizenship, and put in place restrictions preventing dating, marriage, and physical relations between “Aryans” and others. Strict codes required **identification** and **segregation**. **Anti-Semitism, hatred, and discrimination were now law.**



PUBLIC SHAMING: The young woman's sign reads 'I am fit for the greatest swine and only get involved with Jews' and the young man's 'As a Jew, I only take German girls to my room'.



BUY GERMAN: Nazis promoting boycotts of Jewish owned businesses. This began even before German Jews were made “unGerman” by the Nuremberg race laws

STAGES OF GENOCIDE on full display: **classification, symbolization, polarization, dehumanization...**

<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-nuremberg-race-laws>

2. NOV. 9-10, 1938: KRISTALLNACHT

Persecution: the Nazis had been promoting boycotts of Jewish stores for a decade. By 1935 these boycotts were officially encouraged by the government. "Aryans" were told to "buy German." In the November 1938 "**Night of Broken Glass**" campaign, the Nazi regime called for mass violence against Jews. On these nights, Jewish shops, synagogues, schools, homes, and entire communities were ransacked, burned, and destroyed across the Reich. **This pogrom against the Jews is seen by many historians as the beginning of The Holocaust.** Damaged or destroyed: 267 synagogues, 7,000 Jewish businesses, and thousands of homes. 30,000 Jewish men were arrested and sent to concentration camps. Hundreds were killed or commit suicide.



3. THE GHETTOS

Organization, preparation, separation. "Ghettos" had already been common in many European cities for centuries. The term refers to sections of a city designated as areas Jews, or other minorities, were told they must live.

During World War II, the Nazis used existing ghettos or created new ones to **concentrate** cities' and regions' Jewish populations, and force them to live under miserable conditions. Ghettos isolated Jews by separating Jewish communities from the non-Jewish population and from other Jewish communities. The nazis established at least **1,000 ghettos in German-occupied and annexed Poland and the Soviet Union alone.** German occupation authorities established the first ghetto in Poland in Piotrków Trybunalski in October 1939.

These Ghettos were meant as a temporary way to control and segregate Jews while the Nazi leadership in Berlin decided how to achieve the next step: removing the entire Jewish population from nazi controlled territory. Some ghettos existed for only a few days, others for months or years. With the "Final Solution" (the plan to murder all European Jews) beginning in late 1941, the nazis and their allies systematically destroyed the ghettos. They either shot ghetto residents in mass graves located nearby, or deported them, usually by train, to concentration camps or killing centers where they were murdered.

There were three types of ghettos:

Closed ghettos were closed off by walls, or by fences with barbed wire.

Open ghettos had no walls or fences, but there were restrictions on entering and leaving.

Destruction ghettos were tightly sealed off and existed for between two and six weeks before the Germans and/or their collaborators deported or shot the Jewish population concentrated in them.

The largest ghetto in Poland was the Warsaw ghetto, where more than 400,000 Jews were crowded into an area of 1.3 square miles.



Children eating in the ghetto streets. Warsaw, Poland, between 1940 and 1943.

— US Holocaust Memorial Museum



THE ŁÓDŹ GHETTO, POLAND

4. CONCENTRATION CAMPS

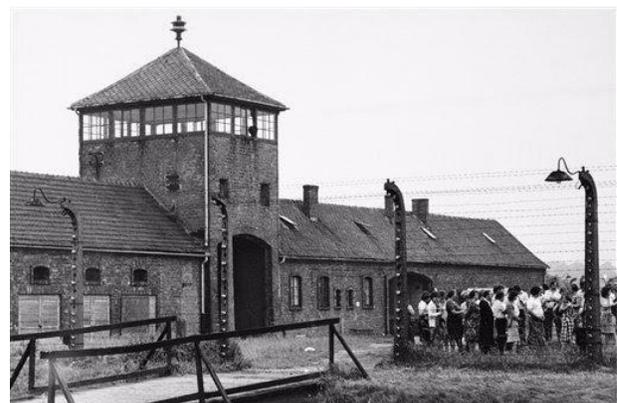
Organization, preparation, separation. The first camps were built in 1933, as the Nazi Party was consolidating power in Germany. So-called "**enemies of the state**" were arrested and imprisoned in the early concentration camps for being German Communists, Socialists, Social Democrats, Roma (Gypsies), Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals, and persons accused of "asocial" or socially deviant behavior. These facilities were called "**concentration camps**" because those imprisoned there were physically "concentrated" in one location.

Between 1933 and 1945, Nazi Germany established about 20,000 camps to imprison its many millions of victims. These camps were used for many purposes including forced-labor camps, temporary way stations, and later as extermination camps built primarily or exclusively for mass murder.

Jews become the main target of arrest. After Germany's annexation of Austria in March 1938, the Nazis arrested German and Austrian Jews and imprisoned them in the Dachau, Buchenwald, and Sachsenhausen concentration camps, all located in Germany. After the violent Kristallnacht ("Night of Broken Glass") pogroms in November 1938, the Nazis conducted mass arrests of adult male Jews and incarcerated them in camps for brief periods.



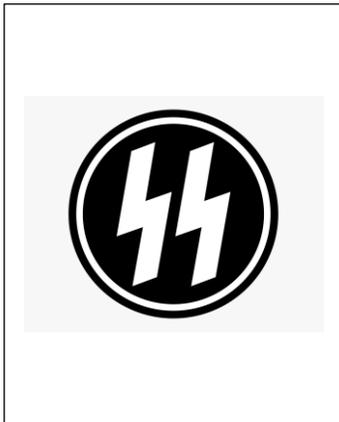
Jews bound for concentration camp, being loaded onto train cattle cars



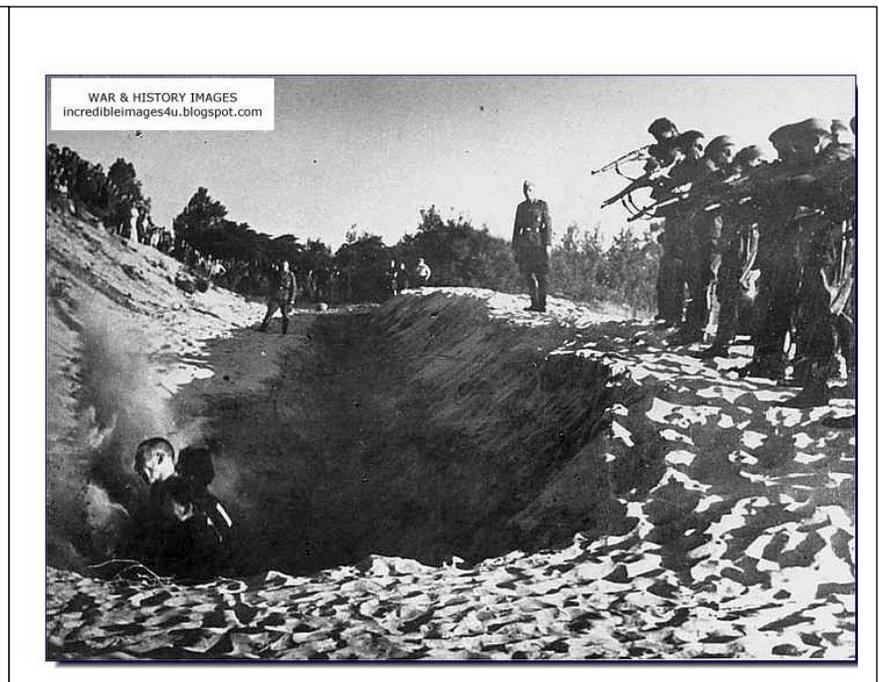
Camp at Oranienburg outside of Berlin.

WORLD WAR II UNLEASHES GENOCIDE

EXTERMINATION. Following the German invasion of Poland in September 1939, the Nazis focused on two goals: military defeat of enemy combatants, and destruction of “racial enemies.” The German Army was accompanied by the **SS: *Schutzstaffel*** meaning race “protection squads.” The SS began as paramilitary units of the Nazi Party back in the 1920s, and became central **perpetrators** of the Holocaust. **Heinrich HIMMLER** was the SS chief and one of the most important Nazi leaders. The SS led a genocide that had two approaches: **mass executions** and **relocation to concentration camps** where millions were murdered.



Einsatzgruppen. These “**mobile killing units**” of SS followed the regular German military to occupy conquered territory, identify Jews and other “race enemies”, and murder them or ship them to camps. In towns and cities across Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, Einsatzgruppen shot hundreds of thousands of unarmed people. Many were women, children, and elderly. Often the victims were forced to dig their own mass graves. Some were not yet dead when they were buried. To improve efficiency and conserve ammunition, **mobile poison gas vans** were developed. These would inspire the gas chambers soon to be used at the death camps.



Forced-labor and prisoner-of-war camps become Death Camps. As the war progressed, the Nazis multiplied their system of concentration camps where thousands of prisoners died from exhaustion, starvation, and exposure. SS units guarded the camps. In some camps, Nazi doctors such as **Josef Mengele** performed medical experiments on prisoners.

Following the June 1941 German invasion of the Soviet Union, the Nazis increased the number of prisoner-of-war (POW) camps. Some new camps were built at existing concentration camp complexes (such as Auschwitz) in occupied Poland. The camp at Lublin, later known as Majdanek, was established in the autumn of 1941 as a POW camp and became a concentration camp in 1943. Thousands of Soviet POWs were shot or gassed there.

THE FINAL SOLUTION

WANNSEE CONFERENCE, January 20, 1942 outside Berlin. Top Nazi leaders met to discuss the “final solution to the Jewish Question.” It was determined that **all European Jews must be exterminated.** A lead architect of this decision, and how it would be carried out, was **Adolf EICHMANN.** The Nazis concluded that beyond the efforts of the Einsatzgruppen and existing camps, concentration camps must be improved and designed for mass killing. All extermination camps were located in Poland. A poison gas, **Zyclon B,** was mass produced and used as a more efficient and effective tool of large scale execution. Other methods of mass murder included extreme work and starvation. ***The degree of planning, organization, and efficiency after the Final Solution was decided sets the Nazi perpetrated Holocaust apart from any other genocide.***



THE SIX EXTERMINATION CAMPS:

Chelmno
Belzec
Sobibor
Treblinka
Majdanek
Auschwitz-Birkenau



Auschwitz-Birkenau was the deadliest camp. In total, 1.3 million people were sent to Auschwitz, and 1.1 million died there. When allied soviet forces neared the camp in 1945, the Nazis actually tried to evacuate the camp and move 60,000 people to the west. 15,000 of those died during the move. Only 7,000 people, most of them near death due to disease and starvation, were liberated at Auschwitz. <https://www.history.com/news/auschwitz-concentration-camp-numbers>

RESISTANCE

Some disobeyed. In ghettos, in the cities and country sides, and even in camps, some people were able to resist the Nazis. This took many forms. Some forged new identities and tried to hide in plain sight. Some, like the family of **Anne Frank**, fled the Nazis and hid in attics, basements, or where they could. *Learn more about Anne Frank at <https://www.annefrank.org/en/>*

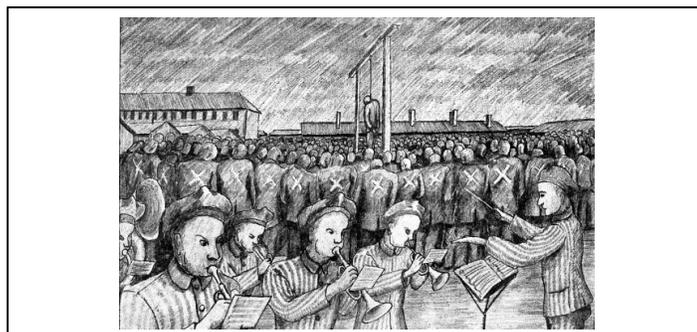


Others fought. Resistance groups used guerilla tactics to hit the Nazis and flee back into hiding. Some Jews were able to form **Jewish Combat Organizations (ZOB)**. When the Nazis in 1943 planned to liquidate the **Warsaw Ghetto**, Jewish resistance fighters made a last stand and fought as best they could. The **Warsaw Ghetto Uprising** was an important example that if people knew what was about to happen to them, they were willing to die fighting rather than submit. *Here is a good article on the uprising: <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/holocaust/peoplevents/pandeAMEX103.html>*



The Nazis were masters of manipulation. Resistance was greatly reduced by Nazi tactics. In the camps, **deception** was used to control the prisoners. **Euphemisms** disguised the meaning of words. “Showers” could actually mean gas chambers. “Special Treatment” meant death. “Selection” separated those able to work from the “useless,” who would be killed. Often, the Nazis had comforting music playing during Selection, and told those who were about to die to label their belongings for retrieval later, or that their clothes would be kept safe until their return from showers...

In occupied territory (and in camps), horrific Nazi **reprisals** after acts of resistance forced many to refrain from opposing the Nazis.



COLLABORATORS, BYSTANDERS AND UPSTANDERS

1. Anti-Semites or opportunists. The Nazis had won the support of much of the German population as World War II began, and had also successfully promoted the scape-goating and hatred of Jews. The Holocaust could not have happened unless a large number of German citizens went along. But the overwhelming majority of Jews murdered in the Holocaust did not live in Germany. As the German military conquered Europe, many **collaborated** with their conquerors. In occupied countries, some helped the Nazis simply as a means of survival. This included betraying their Jewish countrymen. Others cooperated with the Nazis because they shared the Nazi hatred of Jews. This is a source of national embarrassment and controversy today in many countries. Recently Poland passed legislation to encourage a “cleansed” national memory of the Holocaust there. You can read about an example of that ongoing controversy here: <https://www.haaretz.com/world-news/europe/.premium-wild-card-at-poland-s-first-holocaust-museum-the-polish-narrative-1.6745386>

The truth is, in Nazi occupied territory from France to Russia, many individuals cooperated with and even assisted in the Holocaust.

2. “All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.” Edmund Burke’s warning in the 18th century can be seen by students of genocide to be a prophesy. Most people in Germany, Austria, France, and the Eastern European occupied countries, home to most European Jews, **stood by** out of fear, indifference, or agreement, and did not help the victims of the Nazis.

3. Righteous Gentiles. Some Germans, and people in occupied countries, risked themselves to save victims of the Nazis. **Oscar Schindler** is probably the most famous, but by no means the only example. Non-Jewish rescuers or **upstanders**, also called The Righteous, hid people, provided fake identification, or smuggled people to safety. Read more about the Righteous Among the Nations: <https://www.yadvashem.org/righteous.html>



I hated the brutality, the sadism, and the insanity of Nazism. I just couldn't stand by and see people destroyed. I did what I could, what I had to do, what my conscience told me I must do. That's all there is to it. Really, nothing more.

— Oskar Schindler —

AZ QUOTES

ALLIED VICTORY ENDS THE HOLOCAUST

Most camps were located in Eastern Europe, so were liberated by the Soviet Army. American, British, and other Allied forces liberated camps in the West. The success of the Allied forces in 1944-1945 gradually reduced, and finally ended, the Nazi ability to carry out genocide. Two important things to remember. First, the Nazis continued to focus resources and efforts on the Holocaust, even though they were losing the war and needed all available material and personnel for national defense. Think about that! Second, even though the goal of the Allies was to defeat Germany, not specifically to rescue Holocaust victims, the genocide was ended by the invading armies. This will not be the last time we see genocide continue until military intervention stops it.

THE END:

April 30, 1945: suicide of Hitler. Some Nazi leaders are captured; others escape.

May 7-9, 1945: Germany surrenders.

V-E DAY: Victory in Europe: Peace in Europe is celebrated every May 8.

RESULTS OF THE HOLOCAUST:

- **12 million deaths by genocide** (6 million Jews, 6 million other “enemies of the state”)
- 1933 European Jewish population: 9 million. 1945 European Jewish population: 3 million
- Over 1 million children murdered

THE NUREMBERG TRIALS

<http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007271>

The best known of the war crimes trials held after World War II was the trial of “major” German war criminals held in Nuremberg, Germany from Nov. 20, 1945 to Oct. 1, 1946. Leading officials of the Nazi regime were tried before the **International Military Tribunal (IMT) at Nuremberg**, before judges from Great Britain, France, the Soviet Union, and the United States. The IMT tried 22 Germans as major war criminals on charges of conspiracy, crimes against peace, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.

But the Nuremberg trial did more than just try leading Nazi officials in government, the armed forces, and the economy. Its lasting legacy included the deliberate assembly of a public record of the horrific crimes, including those of the Holocaust, committed by the Germans and their collaborators during World War II.

Taken together, the documents, photographs, film, and perpetrator and survivor testimony at postwar trials provided an inescapable and undeniable documentation of the Holocaust.



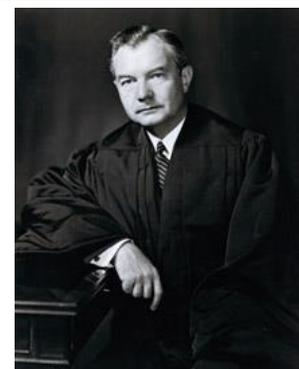
LEFT:

The accused and their defense attorneys at the International Military Tribunal courtroom.

— *National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Md.*

RIGHT:

USSC Justice Robert Jackson, chief American prosecutor



DENIAL

International recognition. The governments of virtually all countries recognize the historical veracity of the Holocaust as a genocide. The governments of Iran and Syria are exceptions; government officials in those countries have made comments that imply doubt about what happened. On the other hand, some nations, especially Germany, go so far as prohibit Holocaust denial by law.

Denial. Terrorist groups such as Hamas, al Qaeda, and ISIS deny the Holocaust and promote anti-Semitism. Holocaust denial and anti-Semitism are central to the views of neo-nazi and white supremacist groups, Islamic supremacists, and various fringe groups worldwide. Some people are simply misinformed, or attracted to what they see as non-conformist or shocking positions like Holocaust denial. Often, anti-Jewish bigotry or hatred of Israel fuels historical conspiracy theories that claim the Holocaust is a Jewish myth.

Ignorance. Lack of education is a serious problem in many developing nations; people in such places may not have learned about the Holocaust (and many other important subjects) in school. But even in wealthy nations with strong public school systems, many are ignorant of the basic facts of history, including the Holocaust. For example, recent surveys of American students have shown that most don't know what Auschwitz was. There are many reports like this one:

<https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/survey-exposes-american-ignorance-about-holocaust-549567>

NEVER FORGET, NEVER AGAIN.

The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide was unanimously adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 9 December 1948. National leaders, education curriculums, and civil society organizations have all promised that the lessons of the Holocaust must be learned. That we will remember what happened, how it happened, and that nothing like the holocaust will be allowed to happen again...

