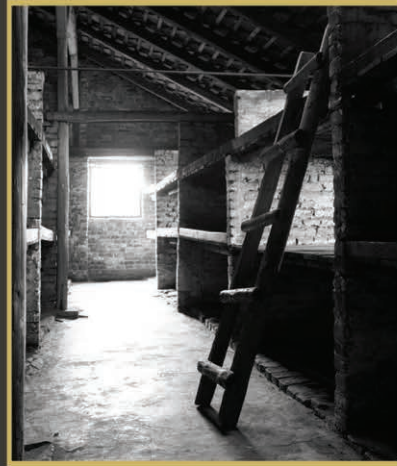


THE CONCENTRATION CAMPS:

Inside the Nazi System of Incarceration and Genocide



KUPFERBERG
HOLOCAUST CENTER

QUEENSBOROUGH COMMUNITY COLLEGE | CUNY

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Dedication: *Dr. Geoffrey P. Megargee (1959–2020) was a mentor and friend of the Kupferberg Holocaust Center for many years. His status as one of world's leading Holocaust and World War II historians never prevented him from taking the time to support small organizations such as ours, including generously sharing his extensive scholarship, fact-checking our exhibits, and mentoring our staff. It is for all these reasons that we humbly dedicate this exhibit to him.*

Cover Photo Credits: *Upper Left: Prisoner barracks at Birkenau (Auschwitz II), postwar. Photo credit: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum / Bottom Left: Main entrance at Auschwitz I, postwar. Photo credit: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum / Upper Right: The burning of the Boemestrasse Synagogue in Frankfurt, Germany, November 10, 1938. Photo credit: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum / Bottom Right: Block 11 in Auschwitz I, postwar. Photo credit: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum.*

THE CONCENTRATION CAMPS:

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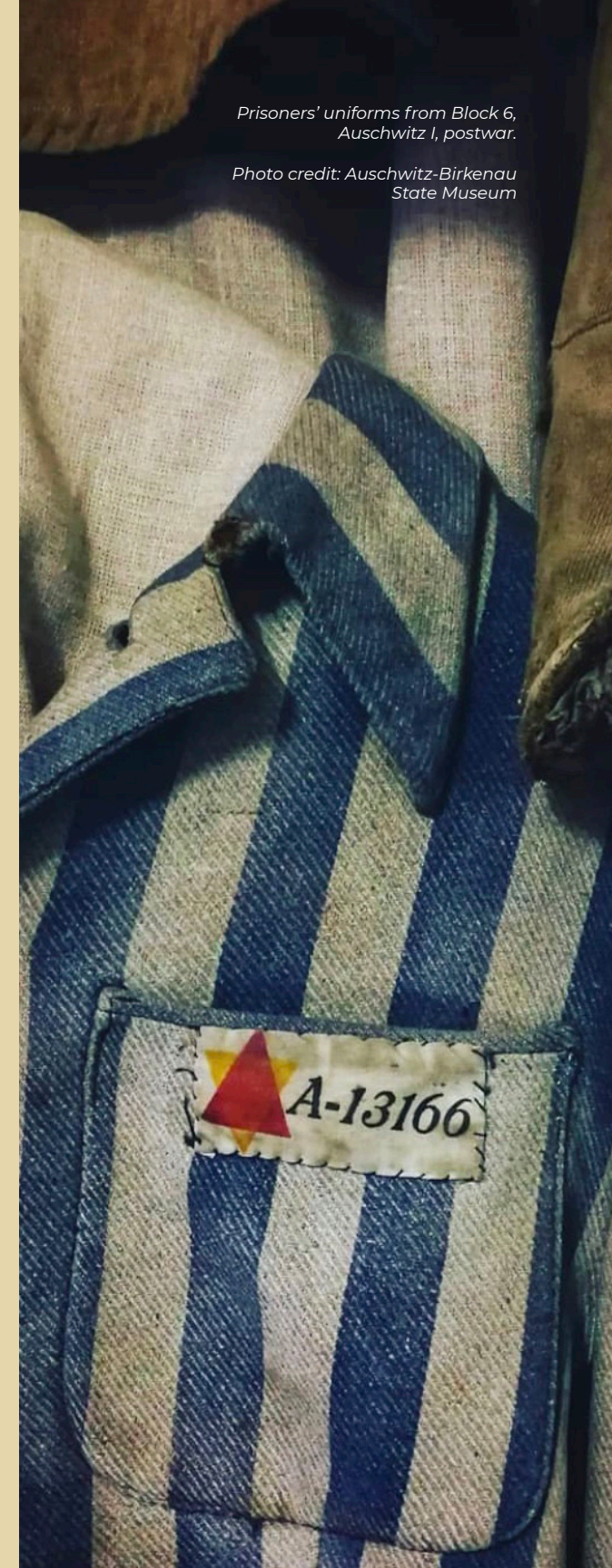
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Prisoners' uniforms from Block 6,
Auschwitz I, postwar.

Photo credit: Auschwitz-Birkenau
State Museum





Introduction to the Exhibit

This original exhibition at the Harriet and Kenneth Kupferberg Holocaust Center surveys the scope and brutality of the Nazi system of incarceration and genocide, underscoring the horrific consequences of intolerance, racism, and authoritarianism. Approximately 44,000 concentration camps and ghettos existed across Nazi-occupied Europe and North Africa during World War II. These incarceration sites, which Adolf Hitler used as a mechanism to terrorize and eliminate non-Aryan groups (those seen as “subhuman,” “useless eaters,” and not part of the pure, white, Germanic race), ranged from small barns to compounds with populations of a medium-sized city. These extensive networks of ghettos, transit camps, women’s camps, forced labor camps, and extermination camps, to name a few, played a central role in the Holocaust—the annihilation of six million Jews—as well as the mass murder of millions more Poles, Roma and Sinti, homosexuals, people with disabilities, social outcasts, Jehovah’s Witnesses, as well as other political and religious opponents. In addition to the exhibit’s text, images, and artifacts, personal testimonies from local Holocaust survivors offer painful insights into these excruciating landscapes of degradation and dehumanization.

Nazi SA troops march past Adolf Hitler's car during a Reichsparteitag ceremony (Reich Party Day) in Nuremberg, Germany, November 1935.

Photo credit: United States National Archives and Records Administration #558779



PART 1:

The Nazi Strategy of Concentrating People

Part 1: The Nazi Strategy of Concentrating People

The origins of Nazi concentration camps began with Adolf Hitler's political rise and eventual consolidation of power in 1933. Hitler, who first was appointed as chancellor before declaring himself the supreme leader of Germany ("Führer"), was obsessed with racial purity—partially inspired by the United States' racist history and its eugenics movement—and believed that it was Germany's destiny to rule the world. At first, few people took him seriously, but things drastically changed during a global depression in the 1930s that left millions of Germans unemployed after their defeat in World War I. Hitler and the National Socialist German Workers' Party (also known as the Nazis), gained popularity by promising a better life and restoring Germany's greatness with a new empire, the "Third Reich."



Nazi party leaders fill Weimarhalle (Weimar Hall) after the 1932 presidential election. Weimar, Germany, August 1932.

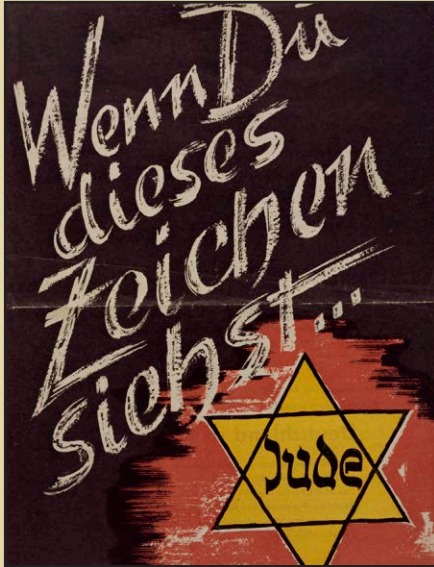
Photo credit: USHMM #02407A

Hitler blamed Germany's problems on Jews and other so-called "racial enemies." The Nazis were racists, believing that each person's traits and characteristics were biologically determined. They believed that the white Germanic race (Aryans) was innately superior to other races, and had been weakened by disloyal and foreign elements. Jews in particular were seen as a "parasitic race," who grifted off other people and did not belong in Germany. Once Hitler took power, these hateful ideas were taught in German classrooms and spread through newspapers and other media outlets, including flyers, radio programs, and propaganda films. This public campaign of discrimination and harassment effectively marked the beginning of the Holocaust—the state-sponsored persecution of the Jewish people (also known as "the Shoah").



Adolf Hitler and Nazi SS Chief Heinrich Himmler review the SS at a Reichsparteitag (Reich Party Day) ceremony in Nuremberg, Germany, September 1935.

Photo credit: USHMM #11775



Nazi propaganda pamphlet from the 1930s that reads, "When you see this sign...Jew."

Jews suffered daily persecution after Hitler gained power, enduring economic boycotts and the repercussions of the 1935 Nuremberg Race Laws. These discriminatory laws defined a Jew as someone with three or four Jewish grandparents (blood relations) rather than by their religious beliefs. Additionally, the Nuremberg Race Laws revoked the citizenship of German Jews, depriving them of their political rights, and criminalizing sexual relations between Jews and Aryans. These restrictions were also extended to other non-Aryan groups, such as Roma and Sinti, Black people, and the developmentally disabled. The Nazis also began viewing Slavic peoples (Poles, Russians, Ukrainians, and Belorussians, to name a few) as racially inferior, frequently labeling them as "subhuman."

Nazi ideology claimed that races were engaged in a struggle for global domination. To wage this "total war," as the Nazis conceived it, they decided to group their enemies in close quarters—literally "concentrate" them—by building an extensive network of camps and ghettos. They did this for three reasons:

1. to purify the German race and promote Aryanism;
2. to conquer and colonize lands outside of German borders; and,
3. to use non-Aryans for forced labor.

Between 1933 and 1945, Hitler's regime and its European allies imprisoned approximately 22 million people in a system of 44,000 camps and ghettos across the European continent. None of these sites were exactly the same, and each prisoner's experience could be radically different, but all were a result of the Nazi's drive to dominate Europe and turn it into a supreme Aryan state—one devoid of Jews.

Although similar camps were previously organized in the nineteenth century by Great Britain, Spain, and even the United States, the camps and ghettos devised by the Third Reich were distinct in terms of their scale and deliberate purpose of forced labor, brutalization, and extermination.



A Nazi German antisemitic poster that reads, "Behind the Enemy Powers: The Jew," circa 1933–1939.

Die Nürnberger Gesetze

Photo credit: USHMM #60445



Nazi SS Chief Heinrich Himmler (center) sits in the audience with other high ranking Nazi officers during a Reichsparteitag (Reich Party Day) ceremony in Nuremberg, Germany, September 1935.

Photo credit: USHMM #80821



Members of the SA drive through the streets of Recklinghausen, Germany with anti-Jewish banners during a propaganda parade. One banner reads, "He who knows the Jew knows the Devil." The banner in front depicts a German man using a swastika to crush Jews who are shown with snakes coming out of their heads. August 18, 1935.

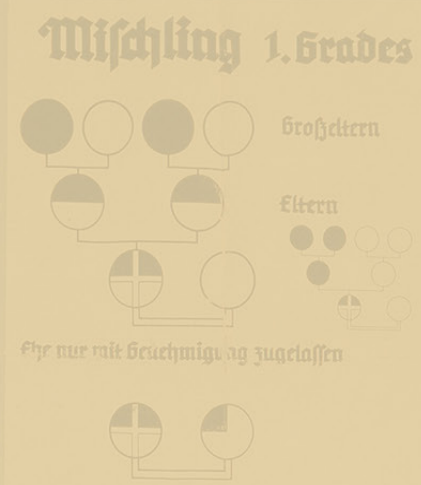


Photo credit: USHMM #74595



An antisemitic sign in Enzendorf, Germany that reads, "Keine Gesundung der Voelker vor der Ausscheidung des Judentums!" ("There Will Be No Health for the People Until the Removal of the Jews"), circa 1933-1945.

Photo credit: USHMM #78589

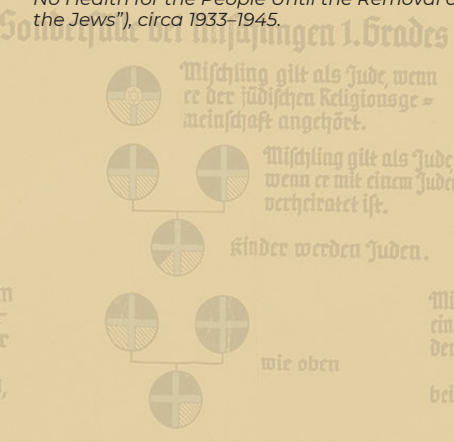


Germans gathered in front of a Jewish-owned department store in Berlin on the first day of the Jewish boycott, April 1, 1933. Signs exhorting Germans not to buy from Jews are posted on the storefront.

Photo credit: USHMM #08358



Adolf Hitler salutes spectators upon his arrival at the Zeppelinfeld (Zeppelin Field) in Nuremberg, Germany for the Reichsparteitag (Reich Party Day) ceremonies in September 1935.



1. Verordnung vom 14. 11. 1935

Bestehende Ehen bleiben unberührt

Photo credit for background image: USHMM #N13862

Reichsgesetzblätter I
Nr. 100 vom 14.11.1935
Nr. 125 vom 14.11.1935



A group of political prisoners at a roll call at the Dachau concentration camp near Munich, Germany, June 28, 1938.

Photo credit: Yad Vashem #4DO9

PART 2: *Early Nazi Incarceration Sites (1933–1939)*

Part 2: Early Nazi Incarceration Sites (1933–1939)

Approximately 100,000 to 200,000 political opponents and critics of the Nazi party were seized within a year of Hitler's election, while many other groups were targeted in later years, including Jews, Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals, Roma and Sinti, and so-called "asocial" people. These people were held in concentration camps, sites that operated outside of normal laws, as the Third Reich perfected a system of permanent terror.

The first wave of arrests started on February 28, 1933, when the Nazis exploited the arson attack on the German parliament (Reichstag) to cement their political control. State police and Nazi paramilitaries—the Sturmabteilung, also known as the SA, and the Schutzstaffel, also known as the SS—apprehended communists, Social Democrats, and trade unionists. The majority of prisoners were men, but women activists were also taken into custody.

Regular prisons did not have enough space for the flood of inmates, so more than 100 makeshift camps appeared all over Germany. Old hotels, rundown factories, sports stadiums, and ships became sites of detainment. Most camps were opened by local or state officials, and many even lacked barbed wire. After 1934, the camps were overseen by Heinrich Himmler, who by 1936 became the head of the SS and chief of German

police (Chef der deutschen Polizei). Himmler closed most of the primitive sites and instead organized an incarceration system with the purpose of controlling Nazi enemies and using them for forced labor. Dachau (near Munich) was one of the first concentration camps and served as a model incarceration site.



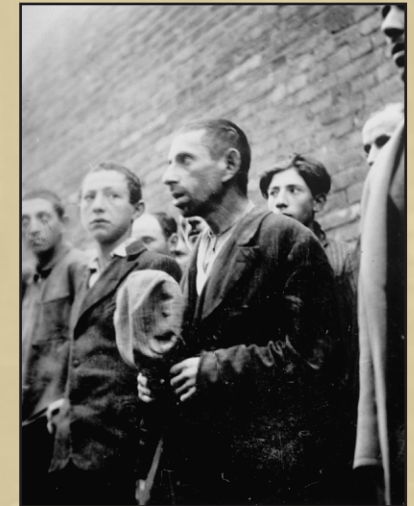
Nazi German soldiers arresting Jews in Sosnowiec, Poland, date unknown.

Photo credit: Yad Vashem #2656/55



Polish and Jewish citizens of Aleksandrów Kujawski, Poland hold their arms in the air during their arrest by Nazi German soldiers, September 1939.

Photo credit: USHMM #08765



Jewish men and youth are lined up against a wall during a Nazi action in Płońsk, Poland, circa 1939.

Photo credit: USHMM #18778

Later, other non-Aryan groups were targeted as the Nazis attempted to “purify” the German race. An estimated 100,000 gay men were arrested, deemed to be degenerates who hindered population growth, in addition to many Jehovah’s Witnesses who were arrested for refusing military service. In the spring of 1938, some 10,000 Roma and Sinti, as well as homeless people were also sent to various concentration camps within Germany.

Thousands of Jews were taken to concentration camps throughout the 1930s, but those arrested were mostly critics of the Nazi party. Following Kristallnacht (the “Night of Broken Glass”)—the November 1938 pogrom, or anti-Jewish riot—nearly 30,000 Jewish men were taken to concentration camps, marking the first time that German Jews were imprisoned on a mass scale. Most were released within a few months, but only after agreeing, through a signed declaration, to leave Germany forever.

Prisoners were treated horribly during their captivity. Although killing remained uncommon at that point, most inmates endured some form of abuse, with Jews being singled out for the most brutal treatment. Floggings, where prisoners were tied down and struck with a heavy stick or whip, occurred frequently, while forced labor was also a method of punishment. Prisoners often had to perform pointless and strenuous tasks, such as hauling heavy rocks back and forth.

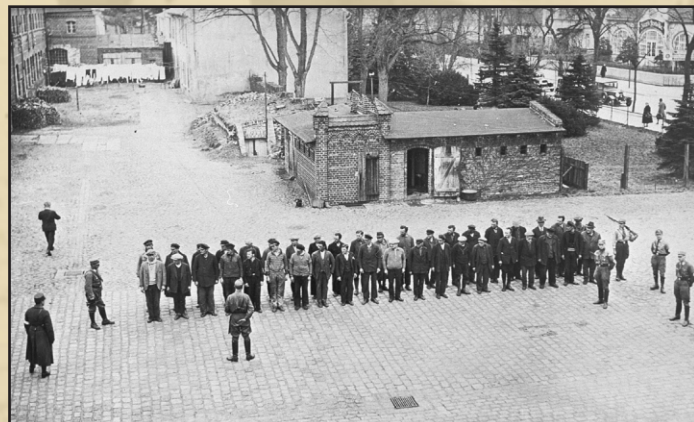
In later years, prisoners were forced to build roads, construct new camps, and help the Nazi war effort.

After Himmler centralized the concentration camp system, he also standardized how prisoners were processed and branded as enemies based on their identity, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or political affiliation. Prisoners had their heads shaved and were outfitted with standardized uniforms. The “triangle system,” where the SS identified the reason for a prisoner’s arrest by color-coded badges, was instituted across the camp system by 1938.



Uniformed prisoners are assembled in front of a Nazi guard at the Sachsenhausen concentration camp near Oranienburg, Germany, 1938.

Photo credit: USHMM #76278



Prisoners guarded by SA men line up in the yard of the Oranienburg concentration camp in Germany, April 6, 1933.

Photo credit: USHMM #7759A

Photo credit for background image: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum

Photo credit: USHMM, courtesy of Staatsarchiv Bremen



Many of the early concentration camps were improvised. Here, roll call is held for political prisoners aboard the Ochstumsand ship that was used as a floating concentration camp near Bremen, Germany, circa 1933-1934.



Photo credit: USHMM #13131

Newly arrived Czech prisoners still in their civilian clothes, as well as a Franciscan monk, stand at roll call in the Buchenwald concentration camp, Germany, 1939.



Photo credit: USHMM #96945

Children examine the ruins of the Peter-Gemeinder-Strasse Synagogue in Beerfelden, Germany that was destroyed during Kristallnacht, November 1938.

Photo credit: Yad Vashem #6604



Group of inmates carrying stones from a quarry returns to the Buchenwald concentration camp in Germany, date unknown.

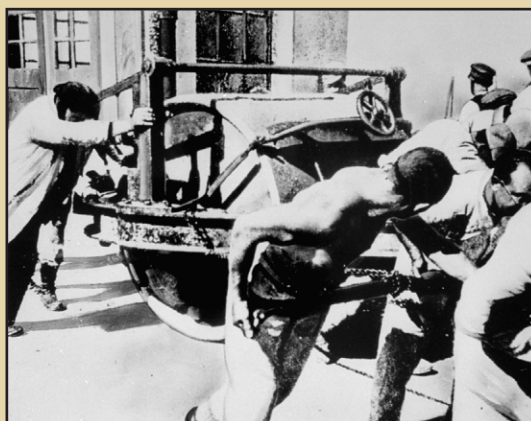


Photo credit: USHMM #16008

Jewish prisoners in the Dachau concentration camp harnessed to a steam roller. Dachau, Germany, 1933.



Photo credit: USHMM #65543

Female prisoners gather at the barbed wire fence surrounding the Gurs concentration camp in southern France, circa 1939-1940.

PART 2A:

The Murder of Children and the Developmentally Disabled

The Nazis considered people with disabilities to be “useless eaters” and a burden on the Aryan race. In order to purify German society, Hitler authorized the secret killing of psychiatric patients beginning in October 1939. The Nazi Euthanasia Program became known as Aktion T4 (named after the coordinating Chancellery office at Tiergartenstrasse 4 in Berlin) and marked Nazi Germany’s first campaign of mass murder. T4 initially targeted developmentally disabled infants and toddlers in Germany, but later included adults with disabilities all across Europe.

German doctors and nurses played key roles, killing 250,000 people in a program that was euphemistically labeled as euthanasia. Many of these murders occurred even after Hitler publicly suspended the operation in August 1941. Physicians evaluated patients in asylums, hospitals, and nursing homes where anyone deemed unable to work or harmful to German society was taken to remote killing stations. Many were murdered in specially constructed gas chambers, while others were killed by lethal injection and systematic starvation. In Nazi-occupied Eastern Europe, thousands of people with psychiatric illnesses were killed on the spot by Nazi police. Many officials and functionaries involved in the euthanasia program later helped carry out the larger genocide of European Jewry.

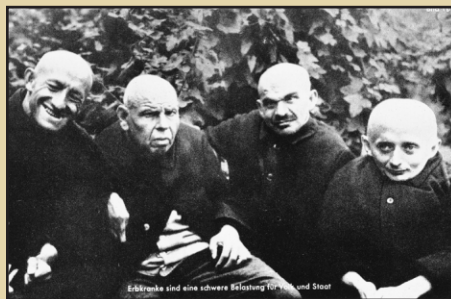


Photo credit: USHMM #62930

Nazi propaganda showing four disabled German men. The caption reads, “Hereditary illnesses are a heavy burden for the people and the state,” circa 1933–1943.



Photo credit: USHMM #13132, courtesy of Robert A. Schmuhi

Developmentally disabled Jewish prisoners, photographed for propaganda purposes, who arrived in the Buchenwald concentration camp in Germany after Kristallnacht, 1938.

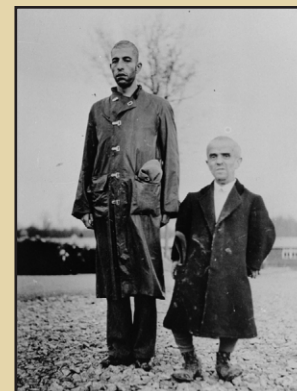


Photo credit: USHMM #13133, courtesy of Robert A. Schmuhi

Developmentally disabled Jewish prisoners, photographed for propaganda purposes, who arrived in the Buchenwald concentration camp in Germany after Kristallnacht, 1938.

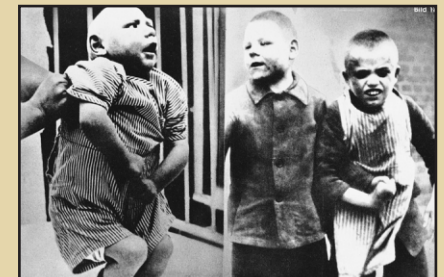


Photo credit: USHMM #62928

Nazi propaganda composite photograph showing developmentally disabled German children. The caption reads, “The National Socialist State in the future will prevent people whose lives are not worth living from being born,” circa 1933–1943.

PART 3:
*Creation of Ghettos and
Expansion of Camps (1939–1942)*



An emaciated Jewish man in the Łódź ghetto awaits deportation to the Chelmno extermination camp in Nazi-occupied Poland, circa January–May 1942. Chelmno (and four other extermination camps) used carbon monoxide from engine exhaust to murder their victims, while the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp used prussic acid from a cyanide-based pesticide (Zyklon B).

Photo credit: USHMM #37344

Part 3: Creation of Ghettos and Expansion of Camps (1939–1942)

In September 1939, after the Nazis started World War II with the invasion of Poland, the Nazi system of incarceration became increasingly deadly. The Germans began by targeting Polish politicians, military officials, Catholic clergy, and intellectuals. Over the next few years, particularly after the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, the Third Reich brutalized millions of Slavic and Jewish civilians as they sought to colonize Eastern Europe.

Soon, the Nazis began murdering their enemies en masse. Over two million people, the majority of whom were Jews as well as Roma and Sinti, were killed by Nazi mobile killing squads (Einsatzgruppen) and by Nazi-sympathetic militias. The Nazis



Poles waiting at an assembly point during a resettlement action in Sosnowiec, Poland, circa 1939–1940.

Photo credit: USHMM #19356

also relied heavily on their concentration camp system to subjugate conquered populations. Existing camps were expanded while several new ones were established, including Mauthausen (Austria), Natzweiler-Struthof (France), and Stutthof (Poland). Large numbers of prisoners came from Germany, Poland, France, the Netherlands, the Czech lands, and other Nazi-controlled areas, including Yugoslavia. Some were taken as hostages and threatened with execution if their communities defied the Nazis. All told, the number of camp inmates tripled between 1939 and 1942.

During this time, Nazi Germany controlled the greater part of the European continent. Across German-occupied Europe, Jews lost their jobs and frequently had to wear distinctive yellow badges or armbands with the Star of David identifying them as Jewish. Millions of Jewish people were also confined into 1,144 enclosed neighborhoods called ghettos in Nazi-occupied Eastern Europe.



Children in the Warsaw ghetto in Nazi-occupied Poland, date unknown.

Photo credit: Yad Vashem #4613/468

Photo credit: USHMM #45838



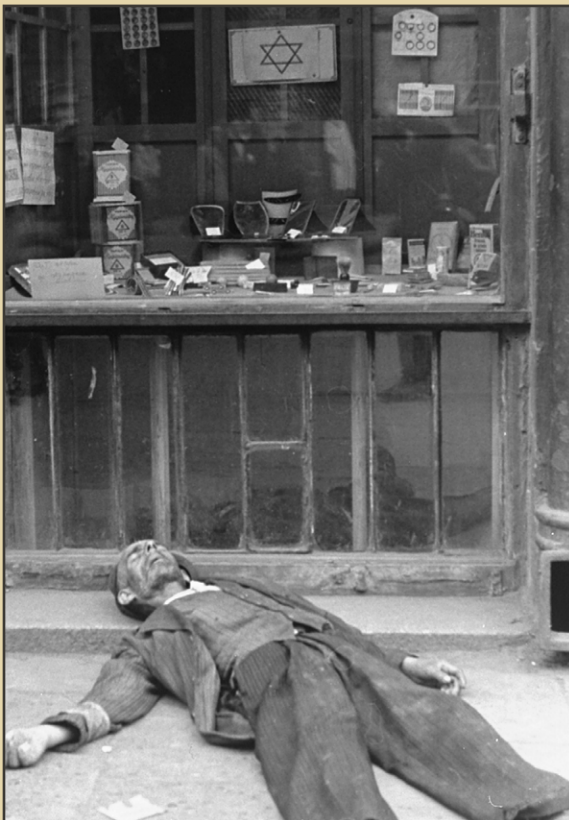
Jewish men and women from Vienna, Austria in a crowded barrack in the Lublin ghetto in Nazi-occupied Poland, June 1941.

Two of the largest ghettos were in the Polish cities of Warsaw and Łódź, where approximately 400,000 and 200,000 Jewish people were concentrated, respectively. The Germans did not supply enough food or medicine to the ghettos, causing tens of thousands to die from hunger, thirst, and rampant disease.

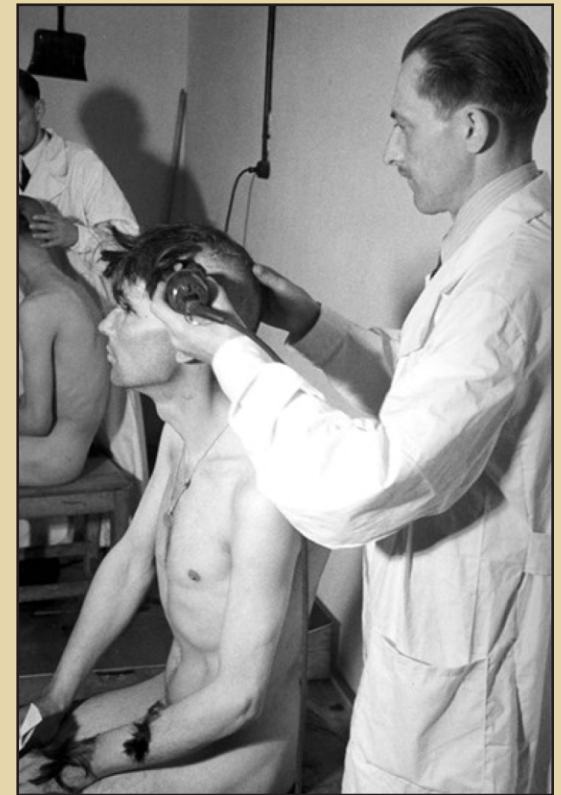
Each year, more people were deported from ghettos to various kinds of concentration camps, and the scale of Nazi violence continued to grow in intensity. More and more prisoners died in the camps from starvation, being worked to death, or by execution.

One of the largest groups to fall victim to German brutality were Soviet prisoners of war (POWs), of whom an estimated 3.5 million died in Nazi-controlled concentration camps.

Photo credit: USHMM #20614



A man lies dead in front of a shop in the Warsaw ghetto in Nazi-occupied Poland, circa June-August 1941.



Two men getting their heads shaved before entering the Kraków ghetto in Nazi-occupied Poland, May 1940.



Jewish people in Kaunas, Lithuania move their household possessions to new quarters following the Nazis' "Small Ghetto Action" of October 4, 1941.

Photo credit: USHMM #81066

Photo credit: Yad Vashem #1014/377



Photo credit: USHMM #73012A

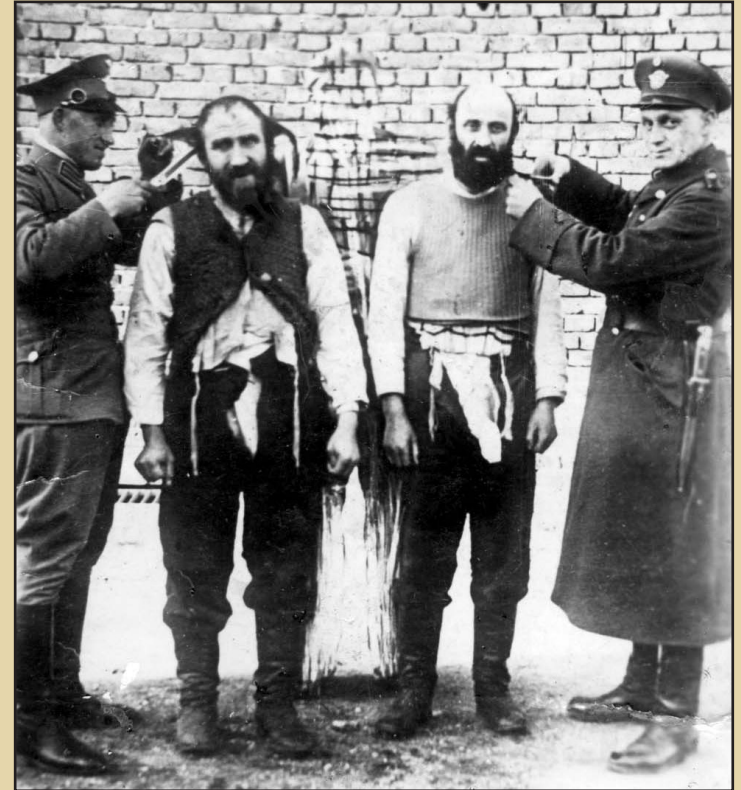
The Warsaw ghetto in Poland was the largest ghetto in Nazi-occupied Europe, 1942. At one time, there were 460,000 Jews living in an area of just 1.3 square miles with an average of 9.2 people per room.



Photo credit: USHMM #05540

A workshop in the Warsaw ghetto in Nazi-occupied Poland, circa 1942.

Photo credit: Yad Vashem #32B05



Nazi police cutting off the beard and peyot (religious hair locks) of two Jewish men in Nazi-occupied Poland, date unknown.



Photo credit: USHMM #01343

Members of the Ordedienst (Jewish police) supervise the deportation of Jews from the Westerbork transit camp in Holland, 1943-1944. Between July 1942 and September 1944, the Germans deported 97,776 Jews from the camp. Nearly 55,000 of these prisoners were sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau, 34,000 to Sobibor, 5,000 to Theresienstadt, and 4,000 to Bergen-Belsen.



Two women bid each other farewell at an assembly point in the Kovno (Kaunas) ghetto during a deportation action to Estonia. Kaunas, Lithuania, October 26, 1942.

Photo credit: USHMM #81088

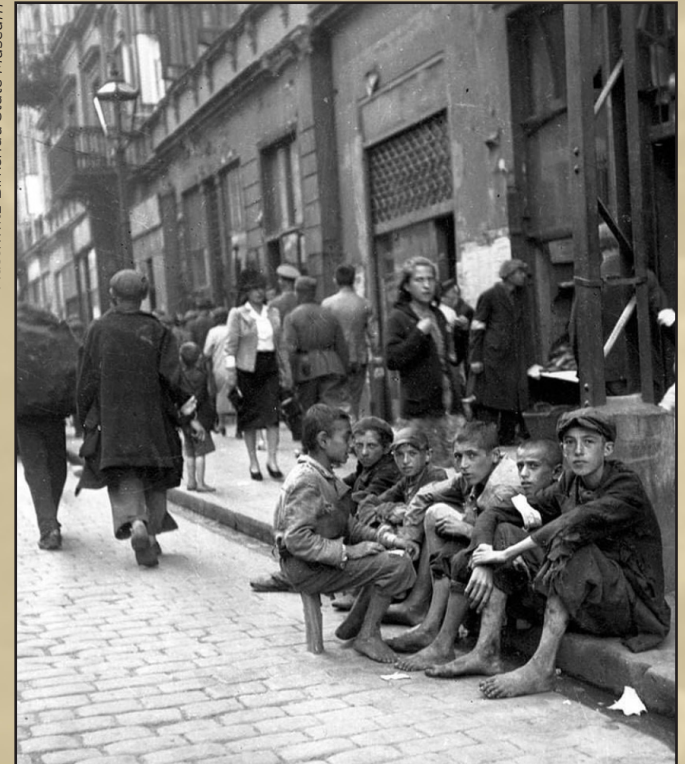


Photo credit: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum

Children on the street in the Warsaw ghetto in Nazi-occupied Poland, November 16, 1940.

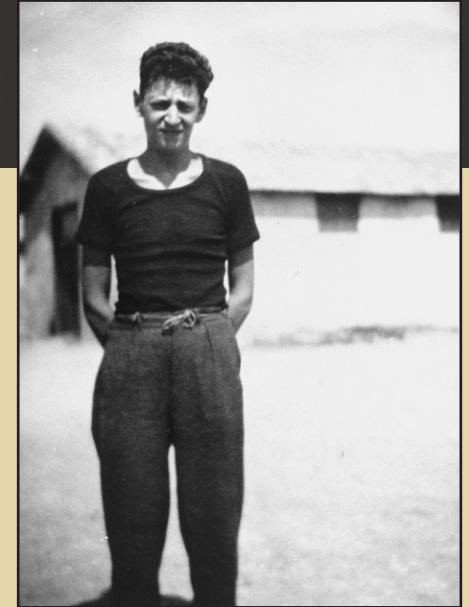
Photo credit for background image: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum

PART 3A:

The Final Solution

The Nazis were driven to make Germany free of Jews—what they called the “Final Solution to the Jewish Question.” Initially, they harassed and intimidated the Jews after first taking power in the 1930s, but their plans became increasingly violent over time. After the outbreak of World War II, the Nazis began conceiving of ways to deport Europe’s Jews to remote locations, including Madagascar and Siberia. Hundreds of ghettos were created between 1939 and 1941 to help concentrate Jews for their eventual expulsion, which was originally planned for after the war.

In 1941, after growing impatient with the duration of the war up to that point, Hitler and other Nazi leaders decided to murder all Jews under their control. Some scholars think that this decision was made because the Nazis felt emboldened by a (false) perception that they were winning the war. Other historians hypothesize that the Germans knew that they were losing the war and believed that killing all the Jews would improve their war efforts. Regardless, the annihilation of the Jews quickly became a top priority for Nazi leaders, who now considered the “Final Solution” to be a central part of the war for Aryan supremacy.



A young prisoner in the Rivesaltes transit camp in France, 1942.

Photo credit: USHMM #80173



Members of a Nazi-sympathetic Lithuanian militia force a group of Jewish women from Panevėžys, Lithuania to undress before their execution, circa July–August 1941.

Photo credit: USHMM #25737



Prisoners in the Le Vernet concentration camp in France, 1942.

Photo credit: USHMM #45976

Photo credit: USHMM #26829



Hundreds of children and elderly Jews were killed by Nazi soldiers and collected in the public square in the Częstochowa ghetto in Nazi-occupied Poland, September 1939. More than 39,000 Jews were sent to the Treblinka extermination camp when the ghetto was liquidated in September 1942.

Nazi police began slaughtering hundreds of thousands of Jews after the invasion of the Soviet Union and then expanded the genocide into Poland and the rest of Europe after 1941.

Nazi leaders notoriously discussed the fate of European Jewry during the Wannsee Conference in January 1942. The conference was convened by SS General Reinhard Heydrich, one of Hitler's top deputies. The primary purpose of the Wannsee Conference was to coordinate and implement the murder of the entire Jewish population, particularly the process by which Jews would be sent to extermination camps.

Photo credit: USHMM #60454



Nazi SS leaders Heinrich Himmler (front) and Reinhard Heydrich (center rear) during a trip to Estonia.

Photo credit: USHMM #26824



Nazi German soldiers round up a group of Jewish men on Strażacka Street in Częstochowa before their murder in September 1939.

Photo credit: USHMM #60389



SS Chief Heinrich Himmler reviews a unit of SS police in Kraków, Poland, March 13, 1942.

Photo credit for background image: USHMM #26829

This original map surveys the extent of Nazi German control in 1942, as well as the location of approximately 2,000 select ghettos and concentration camps during World War II. The map uses contemporary borders in Europe and North Africa to better communicate the breadth of Nazi-controlled territory during the war. It also pinpoints various kinds of Nazi incarceration sites, including ghettos, concentration camps, satellite camps, subcamps, labor camps, transit camps, and extermination camps. The transit routes from locations across the continent to killing centers are also visualized. The number of incarceration sites plotted on this map accounts for less than 5% of the approximately 44,000 Nazi-controlled ghettos and camps that were known to exist during the war.

CONTEMPORARY MAP OF EUROPE SHOWING THE EXTENT OF NAZI GERMAN CONTROL IN 1942 WITH SELECT GHETTO AND CONCENTRATION CAMP LOCATIONS





RUSSIAN FEDERATION

MOSCOW

FINLAND

HELSINKI

NORWAY

LILLEHAMMER

SWEDEN

STOCKHOLM

DENMARK

COPENHAGEN

ESTONIA

TALLINN

LAIVIA

LITHUANIA

KALININGRAD

BELARUS

MINSK

POLAND

WARSAW

UKRAINE

KYIV

Nazi-Controlled Russian Territory

UNITED KINGDOM

LONDON

THE NETHERLANDS

AMSTERDAM

BRUSSELS

BELGIUM

GERMANY

BERLIN

CZECH REPUBLIC

PRAGUE

SLOVAKIA

BRATISLAVA

AUSTRIA

VIENNA

HUNGARY

BUDAPEST

ROMANIA

BUCHAREST

BULGARIA

SOFIA

TURKEY

ANKARA

FRANCE

PARIS

SWITZERLAND

BERN

ITALY

ROME

CROATIA

ZAGREB

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

SARAJEVO

SERBIA

BELGRADE

KOSOVO

PRISTINA

MACEDONIA

SKOPJE

ALBANIA

TIRANA

GREECE

ATHENS

ODESSA

CHISINAU

KHARKOV

MINNITS

ODIJEV PODOLSKI

SICHETU KARMAIERI

EDINETI

TARUTINO

SLOBOZIA

SMYADOVO

SCMOVETI

GARA BOV

CORNA DZUMAYA

KRUSTOPOLE

SALONIKA

IOANNINA

TRIPALIA

KALAVRYTA

NIKOSIA

PART 3B:

Transit Camps

Millions of non-Aryans were forcibly displaced through transit camps as part of Nazi Germany's extensive program of population control and mass murder. The Nazis used transit camps as holding pens and transportation hubs near major railway lines. These camps played a particularly prominent role in killing the Jewish population. In Eastern Europe, Jews were largely forced into ghettos prior to their deportation, but in Central and Western Europe, transit camps were used to transport Jews long distances to extermination camps.

One of the largest transit camps was in Westerbork, Holland, where approximately 100,000 Jewish people were processed between 1942 and 1944. The majority of prisoners in Westerbork were transported to the extermination camps of Auschwitz-Birkenau or Sobibor in Nazi-occupied Poland. Other major transit camps included Drancy (France), Theresienstadt (Czech Republic), Salonika (Greece), and Fossoli (Italy).

Transit camps were also used to expel other groups of people, particularly in Eastern Europe. Hundreds of thousands of Poles, Ukrainians, and other groups underwent a screening process, where anyone deemed physically fit was transported—against their will—to forced labor sites. Prisoners were also examined for their “racial characteristics.” Children who had ideal Aryan features, such as blonde hair, blue eyes, and fair skin, were abducted from their families and sent to “Germanization” camps.



Children wait in the food distribution line at the Secours Suisse building in the Rivesaltes transit camp in France, circa 1941-1942.

Photo credit: USHMM #32280

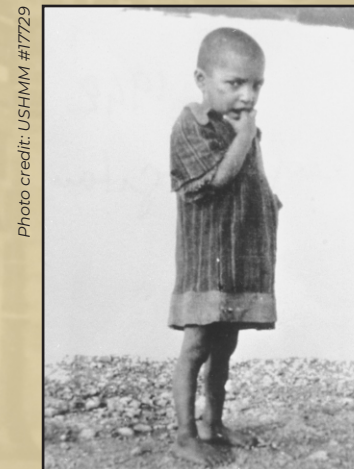


Photo credit: USHMM #17729

A Romani child interned in the Rivesaltes transit camp in France. The original caption reads, “A Gypsy child who loves to dance on tables,” circa 1941-1942.



Photo credit: USHMM #77659

An elderly Jewish couple on their way from Hooghalen to the Westerbork transit camp in Holland. A member of the Dutch constabulary stands behind them, October 1942.

PART 3C:

Resistance and Rebellion in Ghettos and Camps

Photo credit: USHMM #26542



SS troops walk past a block of burning housing during the suppression of the Warsaw ghetto uprising in Nazi-occupied Poland, circa April 19–May 16, 1943. The original caption (translated from German) reads, "An assault squad."

Resistance to Nazi terror occurred throughout the system of camps and ghettos, as it did across Nazi-occupied Europe. Many prisoners engaged in remarkable acts of defiance while under the constant watch of Nazi guards. Prisoners with the same political, religious, or national backgrounds often worked together to thwart Nazi terror. Resistance came in many forms, including armed resistance, spiritual resistance, covert communications, sabotage, or defiance of Nazi orders.

Jewish resistance movements developed in nearly 100 ghettos in Nazi-occupied Eastern Europe. The largest single uprising by Jews occurred in the Warsaw ghetto in the spring of 1943, when hundreds of Jewish civilians rose up in the face of imminent deportation. Despite being vastly outnumbered and outgunned, the Jewish fighters fought Nazi SS and German police units in the streets for nearly a month, before the Nazis successfully quelled the uprising. Ultimately, Warsaw's 57,000 remaining Jews were killed within a month.

Despite harrowing odds and threat of certain death, Jewish prisoners also revolted in the extermination camps, including daring escapes from Sobibor and Treblinka. There were also numerous acts of rebellion in Auschwitz-Birkenau, including when Jewish workers set fire to one of the gas chambers and crematoria.



Photo credit: USHMM #26547

The bodies of Jewish resisters lie in front of the ruins of a building where they were shot by the SS during the Warsaw ghetto uprising in Nazi-occupied Poland, circa April 19–May 16, 1943. The original caption (translated from German) reads, "Bandits killed in battle."



Photo credit: USHMM #26559

A Jewish man emerges from his hiding place below the floor of a bunker prepared for the Warsaw ghetto uprising in Nazi-occupied Poland, April 1943.



Photo credit: USHMM #446193

SS troops guard members of the Jewish resistance captured during the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto, April 1943. The original caption (translated from German) reads, "These bandits offered armed resistance."

Forced laborers hauling cartloads of earth for the construction of the "Russian camp" at the Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria, circa April–May 1942.

Photo credit: USHMM #12352



PART 4:

*Mass Incarceration and Extermination
(1941–1945)*

Part 4: Mass Incarceration and Extermination (1941–1945)

The mechanization of Nazi mass murder dramatically increased beginning in 1941, as the Third Reich fought to establish Aryan supremacy and bring a new political order to Europe. This included the liquidation of ghettos, mass deportations, and slaughter of millions. All Jewish people—whom the Nazis considered an existential threat—were singled out for total extermination, which defined the Holocaust. The subjugation of other groups, including Poles, political opponents, and other Slavic peoples, also continued with widespread arrests and mass executions.

The deportation of Jewish people to extermination camps in Poland was a quintessential aspect of the Holocaust. Jews usually arrived by trains consisting of up to 50 cattle cars and came from distances of up to 1,000 miles. During transit, scores of prisoners were tightly packed into the cars

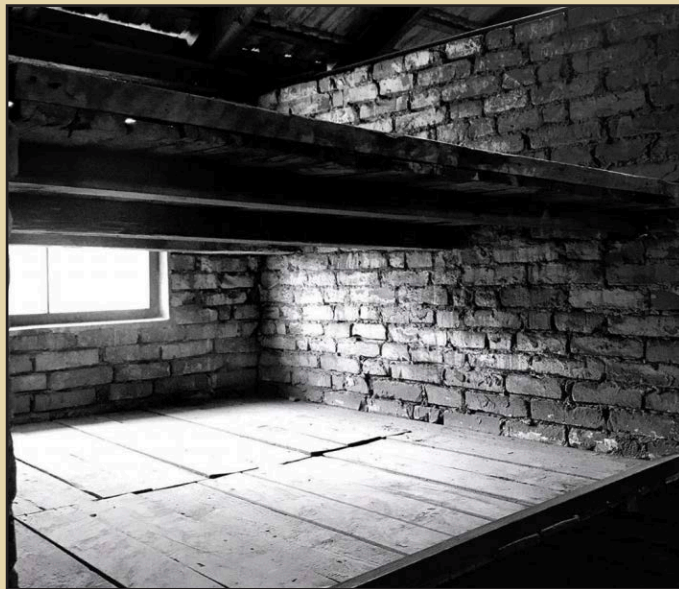
for days—shoulder to shoulder—with little food or water, standing in their own urine and feces, and often alongside corpses of those who died along the way.

Those who survived the transports underwent “selection” upon arrival. First, families were separated as men and older boys were put into one column, while women and children of both sexes were put in another.



The main entrance gate of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration and extermination camp reads, “Arbeit Macht Frei” (frequently defined as “Work Shall Set You Free”). Auschwitz I, postwar.

Photo credit: Yad Vashem #8EO3



Prisoner barracks at Birkenau (Auschwitz II), postwar. Between four and seven people were typically assigned to one bunk.

Photo credit: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum



View of the cemetery at the Hadamar Institute in Hesse, Germany, where victims of the Nazi Euthanasia Program (Aktion T4) were buried in mass graves. The photograph was taken by an American military photographer soon after the liberation on April 15, 1945.

Photo credit: USHMM #73719

Then, upon a quickly made decision of Nazi doctors and other camp functionaries, people deemed healthy and fit were designated for forced labor, whereas mothers, children, the elderly, and the weak were selected for immediate murder. Within a couple of hours, the grim process of extermination unfolded: people were usually stripped of their clothing, with their valuables stolen, and immediately sent to gas chambers.

At Auschwitz-Birkenau, the selection process was often led by Nazi officer and physician Dr. Josef Mengele (referred to as “The Angel of Death”), who made these decisions using the flick of his thumb: right meant life, while left meant death. Over time, the Nazis murdered so many people that they were forced to construct crematoria (large industrial ovens) to burn and conceal the corpses.



Jewish men from Subcarpathian Rus await selection on the ramp at the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp in Nazi-occupied Poland, May 1944.

Photo credit: USHMM #77297



A section of the prisoners' barracks in Majdanek, a major extermination camp near the city of Lublin in Nazi-occupied Poland, photograph taken sometime after July 24, 1944. On November 3, 1943, approximately 18,000 Jews were murdered at Majdanek. This was the largest single-day massacre by the Nazis in any concentration camp.

Photo credit: USHMM #73996

Photo credit: USHMM #77319



Jews from Subcarpathian Rus await selection on the ramp at the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp in Nazi-occupied Poland, May 1944.

Photo credit: USHMM #50689



View of the kitchen barracks, the electrified fence, and the gate at the main camp of Auschwitz I, postwar. Approximately 1.1 million Jews, Poles, Roma and Sinti, homosexuals, and Jehovah's Witnesses were killed by the Nazis at the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration and extermination camp in Nazi-occupied Poland, which first emerged as a camp to persecute Poles in 1940. The writing on the main gate (lower left) reads, "Arbeit Macht Frei" (frequently defined as "Work Shall Set You Free").

Photo credit: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum



The post and hook on which prisoners were punished in the execution yard of Block 11 in the main camp of Auschwitz I, postwar. Prisoners were usually hanged on this metal hook with their hands tied in the back. This brutal torture could last up to an hour.

Photo credit for background image: USHMM #73996

PART 4A:

Forced Labor Camps

Forced labor was one of the central components of Nazi occupation. Millions of prisoners were required—against their will—to work for the Third Reich’s war effort, and frequently left to starve in order to ensure that Germans could eat. For the Nazis, the people living in occupied territories only mattered if they served Germany’s interests and strengthened the country’s military might. To this end, Himmler cruelly pointed out, “Whether 10,000 Russian women collapse from exhaustion while digging an antitank ditch only interests me insofar as the antitank ditch is dug for Germany.”

Nazi Germany conscripted civilians living in occupied territories to fill its labor shortage during World War II, and created approximately 35,000 forced labor camps in order to help the Nazi war machine. The majority of workers were Poles and Slavs, but included people from across Europe. Altogether, some 12 million people from 20 countries were deported to Germany and forced to work in farms and factories to replace Germans fighting at the front. Meanwhile, the SS oversaw construction of hundreds of satellite and subcamps that were used specifically for war-related needs. Many German companies, including Siemens and BMW, used and profited from forced labor.



Jewish forced laborers from the Mogilev ghetto on the way to work in Belarus, 1941. In the summer of 1941, the Nazis concentrated about 7,500 Jewish people in the Mogilev ghetto; 113 who tried to flee were murdered. Many of the inhabitants were skilled workers and were summarily used for forced labor.

Photo credit: Yad Vashem #3955/360

Photo credit: Yad Vashem #69D05



Many of the entrances to the most infamous camps had signage bearing the phrase, “Arbeit Macht Frei” (“Work Shall Set You Free”), emblazoned overhead. The Nazis used this as a cynical ploy to give prisoners hope even though they were often intentionally and literally worked to death—a practice known as “annihilation through work.” At some extermination camps, however, the ability to work temporarily increased a prisoner’s chances of survival. Inmates also underwent regular examinations by Nazi doctors. Prisoners who were considered too old, sick, or otherwise unfit for work were executed. Many of these same physicians were also involved in the murder of psychiatric patients.

Left image: Jewish prisoners in the Wlodawa labor camp near Lublin in Nazi-occupied Poland, date unknown.

PART 4B:

Women's Camps and Brothels

Photo credit: USHMM #62979



Jewish female forced laborers in the Plaszow concentration camp near Kraków, Poland, 1943. Women were subject to forced labor under conditions that often led to their deaths. German physicians and medical researchers used Jewish and Roma women as subjects for unethical human experiments. In both camps and ghettos, women were particularly vulnerable to beatings and rape. Additionally, pregnant Jewish women often tried to conceal their pregnancies or were forced to submit to abortions.

Separate camps and compounds were set up exclusively for female prisoners who were considered strong enough for labor projects and menial chores. The largest women's camp was Ravensbrück (near Berlin), where nearly 120,000 women from across Europe were sent. An estimated 50,000 women died there between 1939 and 1945. A special women's section was also created in Auschwitz-Birkenau, where 34,000 women died between 1942 and 1943.

The Nazis established more than 500 brothels across occupied Europe, including in concentration and extermination camps. More than 34,000 girls and women were trafficked and raped at these sites, mostly by German soldiers and Nazi police. The brothels also served as a "reward" for forced laborers and prison leaders, as well as a cruel mechanism to attempt to "cure" gay men, who were forced to make compulsory visits. Such gender-based violence and dehumanization occurred at every level of the Nazi camp system, with female inmates being subjected to frequent strip searches as well as forced abortions and sterilization.

Photo credit: USHMM, Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz



Female Romani forced laborers stand at attention during an inspection of the weaving mill in the Ravensbrück concentration camp in Germany, circa 1943.

Photo credit: USHMM #75838, courtesy of Moshe Berry



An armed Nazi soldier searches a woman by pulling down her underwear in Nazi-occupied Poland, circa 1939-1944.

Photo credit: USHMM #77367



Jewish women from Subcarpathian Rus who have been selected for forced labor march toward their barracks after disinfection and headshaving in the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration and extermination camp in Nazi-occupied Poland, May 1944.

Photo credit: USHMM #38067



Young female survivors look out from behind the barbed wire fence enclosing the women's section of the Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria, May 1945.

Photo credit for background image: Yad Vashem #3955/360

PART 4C:

Medical Experiments

German doctors and scientists conducted a series of cruel experiments on at least 7,000 people including Jews, Poles, Roma and Sinti, homosexuals, and other incarcerated groups. Nazi scientists used prisoners' bodies to test the limits of human physiology, practice surgical treatments, attempt to prove their racist theories, and advance the science of the German war effort.

Nearly 200 German doctors were stationed across the camps to conduct the tests, without regard for the safety or suffering of the prisoners. In Dachau, prisoners were immersed in near-freezing water to study the physical effects of hypothermia. Dr. Mengele preferred to experiment on twins (usually children) in Auschwitz-Birkenau, seeing them as an ideal control group. Some of Dr. Mengele's more infamous experiments included sewing twins together or studying the effects of disease when transfusing blood between twins.

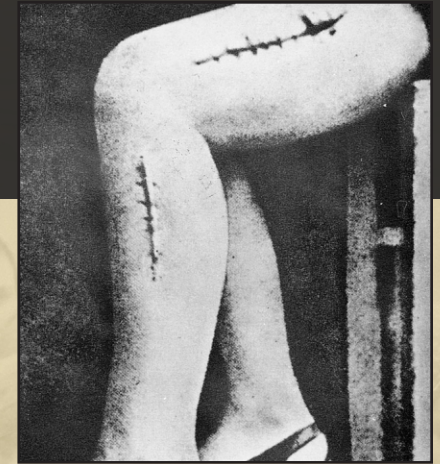
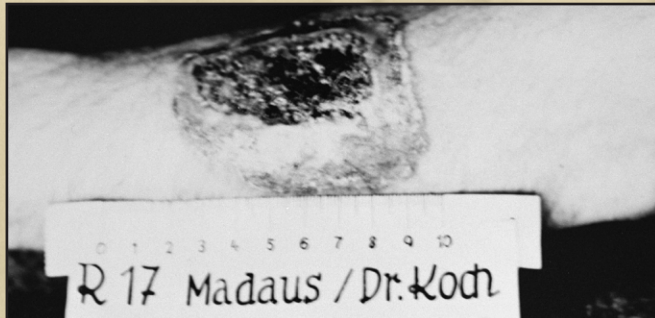


Photo credit: Yad Vashem #138FO2

Nazi experiments led to the death, disfigurement, and traumatization of thousands of concentration camp prisoners. The framework and purpose of these "medical experiments" was to treat war injuries. The experimentation consisted of breaking bones, as well as transplants of the bone, muscle, and nerves. During the medical experimentation prisoners' legs were broken, whole bones and tissue were removed and subsequently sent for transplants in SS patients. This photograph was submitted in the trial of 23 German doctors at the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg, Germany between 1945 and 1949.

Photo credit: USHMM #78784



Results of a medical experiment carried out by doctors at the Ravensbrück concentration camp in Germany, November 19–December 29, 1943. In the experiment, a mixture of phosphorus and rubber was applied to the skin and was ignited. After twenty seconds, the fire was extinguished with water and then wiped with R17. After three days, the burn was treated with Echinacin in liquid form to test its healing properties. In this case, the wound healed after two weeks. This photograph, taken by a camp physician, was entered as evidence during the Doctors Trial at the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg, Germany between 1945 and 1949.

Photo credit: USHMM #78619A



A Dachau concentration camp prisoner in a special chamber loses consciousness in response to changing air pressure during high-altitude experiments, circa March–August 1942. For the benefit of the Luftwaffe (German Air Force), conditions comparable to those found at 15,000 meters in altitude were created in an effort to determine if German pilots might survive at that height.



Photo credit: Life Magazine

A cold water immersion/hypothermia experiment at the Dachau concentration camp in Germany presided over by Nazi physicians Ernst Holzlöhner (left) and Sigmund Rascher (right), date unknown. The subject is wearing an experimental Luftwaffe garment. This photograph was submitted in the trial of 23 German doctors at the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg, Germany between 1945 and 1949.

PART 4D:

Extermination Camps

Photo credit: USHMM #50575



A warehouse filled with containers of Zyklon B (poison gas pellets) at the Majdanek extermination camp near Lublin in Nazi-occupied Poland, photograph taken sometime after July 22, 1944.

Photo credit: Yad Vashem #6507



The construction of Crematorium IV in Birkenau (Auschwitz II) at the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp in Nazi-occupied Poland, date unknown.

Photo credit: USHMM #77234



Jews from Subcarpathian Rus undergo a selection on the ramp at the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp in Nazi-occupied Poland, May 1944. Pictured in front holding a riding crop may be either SS Unterscharführer Wilhelm Emmerich or SS Hauptsturmführer Georg Hoecker, who was assisted by the Jewish prisoner Hans Schorr.

To more efficiently kill all Jews living in Europe as part of the Final Solution, Nazi Germany created six specialized extermination camps in occupied Poland. These camps functioned as death factories, where millions of people were shot, hanged, starved, tortured, raped, and poisoned in gas chambers through an assembly-line style of mass murder. Nazi-occupied Poland was selected as the location for these camps because of its large native Jewish population, but Jews from across German-ruled Europe were brought there to be killed.

The first killing center opened in December 1941 near the village of Chelmno, where the Nazis used mobile gassing vans to murder more than 172,000 Jews, Poles, and Roma and Sinti. Other camps were built with large gas chambers, including Treblinka (about 925,000 victims), Belzec (about 435,000 victims), Sobibor (about 200,000 victims), and Majdanek (about 78,000 victims).

Auschwitz-Birkenau, the largest and most notorious extermination camp, was a massive complex with three main sites (Auschwitz, Birkenau, and Monowitz) that included concentration, extermination, labor, and satellite camps. It initially began as a camp to detain Polish prisoners, but as Nazi brutality increased, it ultimately became a central site for the genocide of Jews because of its location along important railway lines. Approximately 1.1 million people (including about 960,000 Jews and 74,000 Poles) were murdered at Auschwitz-Birkenau. In total, at least 2.7 million Jews were killed in Nazi death camps between 1941 and 1945. These deaths account for nearly half of the 6 million Jewish people killed by Nazi Germany during the Holocaust.

Photo credit: Yad Vashem #5318/234



Jewish prisoners standing at the entrance to the gas chambers in Birkenau (Auschwitz II) at the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp in Nazi-occupied Poland, date unknown.

Photo credit: USHMM #77225



Jewish prisoners await selection on the ramp at the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp in Nazi-occupied Poland, May 1944. In a span of 56 days (May 15–July 9, 1944), more than 434,000 Hungarian Jews were crowded onto 147 trains and sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Approximately 320,000 of these prisoners were gassed upon arrival.

Photo credit: USHMM #77305



Jewish women and children from Subcarpathian Rus selected for death at the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp in Nazi-occupied Poland, May 1944. Auschwitz-Birkenau was the largest extermination camp complex during the Holocaust. It had five large crematoria, each with a gas chamber, undressing room, and dozens of crematory ovens. At the height of deportations in May 1944, more than 6,000 Jews were gassed each day in Birkenau (Auschwitz II).

Photo credit: USHMM #77217



A Jewish woman walks towards the gas chambers with three young children and a baby in her arms after going through the selection process on the ramp at the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp in Nazi-occupied Poland, May 1944. The survival rate of Western European Jews deported to Nazi death camps was extremely low. Jewish men had a higher rate of survival (4.3%) compared to women (2.7%).

Photo credit: Yad Vashem #1495/29



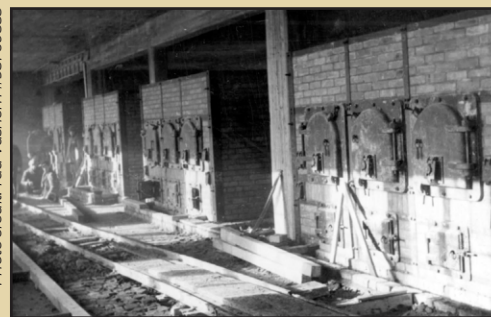
Prisoners sleeping on the floor at the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp in Nazi-occupied Poland, date unknown.

Photo credit: USHMM #77294



Jewish women and children from Subcarpathian Rus await selection on the ramp at the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp in Nazi-occupied Poland, May 1944.

Photo credit: Yad Vashem #951 60835



Incinerators in Crematorium III at the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp in Nazi-occupied Poland, 1943.

PART 5:
*Death Marches, Liberation and
Displaced Persons Camps (1944–1957)*



Former prisoners of the "little camp" in the Buchenwald concentration camp in Germany stare out from the wooden bunks in which they slept three to a "bed." Elie Wiesel is pictured in the second row of bunks, sixth from the left, next to the vertical beam, April 16, 1945.

Photo credit: USHMM #74607

Part 5: Death Marches, Liberation and Displaced Persons Camps (1944–1957)

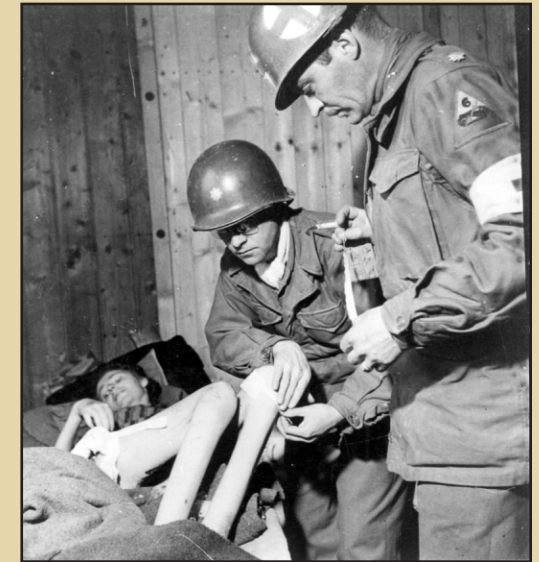
After several major military defeats, and in a desperate effort to conceal their crimes, Nazi Germany began the process of evacuating concentration and extermination camps during the winter and spring of 1945. The Nazis forced hundreds of thousands of prisoners on marches over long distances with little rest, food, or warm clothing. These evacuations came to be known as “death marches,” since those who could not keep pace were frequently shot or died of exhaustion. Prisoners from camps in western Poland were forced to march back to the German homeland, while other death marches attempted to move prisoners from one camp to another via trains (referred to as “death trains”). Approximately 250,000 prisoners perished in this final phase of Nazi terror.

As Allied troops (American, British, and Soviet forces) began liberating the continent of Europe, they encountered—firsthand—the cruelty of the Nazi concentration camp system. Majdanek was the first extermination camp discovered by Soviet forces in July 1944, who also freed prisoners at Auschwitz-Birkenau in January 1945.

Photo credit: Yad Vashem #2EO8



American medics helping a young survivor in Penig, Germany, 1945.



US army orderlies treating a survivor in Penig, Germany, 1945.

Photo credit: Yad Vashem #3EO9



A pile of corpses in the Dachau concentration camp in Germany after liberation, 1945.

Photo credit: Yad Vashem #2EO7



Survivors in the latrine barracks after the Dachau concentration camp's liberation in Germany, April 29, 1945.

Photo credit: USHMM #85558

Photo credit: Yad Vashem #1BO1



Corpses of prisoners in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in Germany after liberation, April 1945.

American and British forces liberated the German camps of Dachau, Buchenwald, Bergen-Belsen and hundreds of others later that spring. There, Allied troops discovered emaciated prisoners in severely overcrowded conditions, with rampant disease and starvation.

Horrific sights of human degradation and death shocked the soldiers. Piles of corpses were stacked high, while the bodies of living prisoners were skeletal and emaciated. Allied soldiers gave meals to the hungry prisoners, but many were too weak to digest food and died within days of being freed. In Bergen-Belsen, nearly 14,000 inmates perished after liberation despite the rescue efforts of the British military and Red Cross.

After Nazi Germany's surrender in May 1945, Allied authorities and the United Nations (UN) organized hundreds of Displaced Persons camps (DP camps) to care for the approximately 7 million former prisoners and slave laborers who were now free, but homeless, jobless, and penniless. The UN and other humanitarian organizations tried to reunite lost survivors with their relatives, while the newly liberated prisoners attempted to rebuild their lives and form new families. The DP camps offered survivors a wide range of cultural and religious activities, where ethnic communities organized their own vocational schools, synagogues, churches, newspapers, theaters, and recreational activities.

More than 250,000 Jews lived in the network of DP camps between 1945 and as late as 1957.

Photo credit: USHMM #31450B



Women in the barracks of the newly liberated Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp in Nazi-occupied Poland, January 27, 1945.

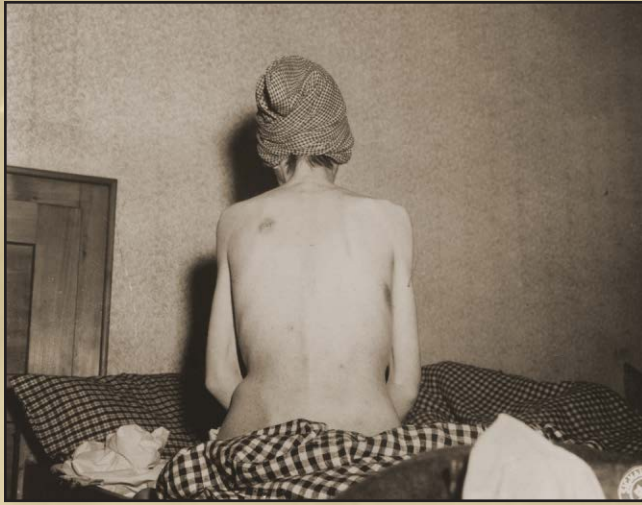


Prisoners' bodies in a mass grave at the Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria, May 10-15, 1945.

Photo credit: USHMM #06362

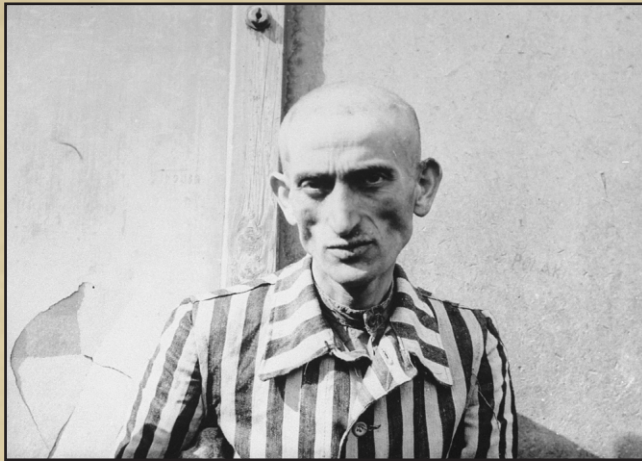
Photo credit for background image: Yad Vashem #3845/1

Photo credit: USHMM #24701



Nineteen-year-old Marika Rot, a Jewish death march survivor, sits up in bed at an American military field hospital in Volary, Czechoslovakia, May 8, 1945.

Photo credit: USHMM #83834



A survivor of the Dachau concentration camp in Germany on the day of liberation, April 30, 1945. The original caption reads, "One of the living dead. Dachau concentration camp is filled with men like these."

this day continue to experience widespread prejudice and economic discrimination in their daily lives.

Photo credit for background image: Yad Vashem #1279/3

Many Jewish homes had been "Aryanized," or taken over by their Christian neighbors, during the war. Jewish survivors also struggled with living in a place where they had experienced great trauma, and where they still felt hated, as antisemitism remained prevalent across much of postwar Europe. Instead, many Jewish people chose to immigrate to the United States or Israel, while smaller numbers settled in other countries, including Canada, Australia, South America, and South Africa in the late 1940s.

Poles, Ukrainians, Romanians, Hungarians, Belorussians, Czechs, and many other non-Jewish survivors from Central and Eastern Europe were repatriated to their countries of origin, but nearly 1 million people remained displaced for years after the end of World War II. Most of these Central and Eastern Europeans were reluctant to return to their home countries, which now were under communist rule and experienced Soviet oppression. The exception are Roma and Sinti survivors who were frequently left without support, and to



Corpse of a prisoner who was murdered during a death march near Flossenbürg, Germany, 1945.

Photo credit: Yad Vashem #4029



A warehouse full of shoes and clothing confiscated from the prisoners and deportees who were gassed upon their arrival at the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp in Nazi-occupied Poland, circa February 1945. The Nazis usually shipped these goods back to Germany.

Photo credit: USHMM #15330

Photo credit: USHMM #28147



Group portrait of youth at the OSE (Oeuvre de Secours aux Enfants) home for displaced Orthodox Jewish children in Ambloy, France, circa 1945. Elie Wiesel is among those pictured.

Photo credit: USHMM #58412



The corpse of a female prisoner lies in the snow outside a barrack at the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp in Nazi-occupied Poland immediately after its liberation, January 1945. The original caption reads, "One of the bodies which did not reach the ovens (the crematorium was blown up on the day preceding evacuation)."

Photo credit: USHMM #69158



A transport of child survivors from Buchenwald filing out of the camp's main gate and escorted by American soldiers, April 17, 1945. After the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp was liberated by Soviet troops in January 1945, thousands of Jewish prisoners, including children, were deported to the Buchenwald concentration camp in Germany. Once at Buchenwald, they were housed in a special tent camp called "Children's Block 66."

Photo credit: USHMM #71850



Children at play in the Bindermichl displaced persons (DP) camp in Linz, Austria, 1947.

Photo credit: Yad Vashem #384571



With the advancement of the United States armed forces in April 1945, the Nazis forced 7,000 prisoners from the Dachau concentration camp to evacuate in what was termed a "death march." Weak prisoners were killed for falling behind, while others died from hunger or hypothermia. Survivors of this march were liberated by American troops when SS guards retreated in late April and early May 1945.

EPILOGUE:

Looking Back as We Move Forward

On June 26, 1945, after the Allied liberation of the concentration camps and the defeat of the Nazis, 51 countries came together to form the United Nations (UN). The establishment of the UN was a catalyst for building human rights protections, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. Additionally, Raphael Lemkin, a Polish Jewish lawyer and a Holocaust survivor who coined the term “genocide,” conceived of and drafted the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Genocide Convention).

Germany was also held responsible for its murder and brutalization of millions in the years after the war ended.

Between November 1945 and October 1946, the Allies prosecuted Nazi military leaders, camp officers, doctors, propagandists, and German business leaders during the Nuremberg Trials. Civilians were also forced to expunge Nazi party members from all layers of German society. This program, titled “Denazification,” included comprehensive reeducation programs, institutional reforms, the renaming of streets, parks, and buildings, as well as the removal of Nazi monuments and symbols from civic life. Justice for victims was also sought and gained from the German government (in the form of monetary reparations) during the postwar years.



The Dachau concentration camp near Munich, Germany had approximately 140 satellites and subcamps. Here, prisoners from the Allach concentration camp, the largest subcamp of Dachau, celebrate their liberation by American soldiers, April 30, 1945.

Photo credit: USHMM #49653

In the 1950s and 1960s, the Holocaust's philosophical and religious implications came to the fore, with a scholarly focus on the discovery and documentation of Nazi crimes. Since then, the field has expanded to include the study of other genocides, inspiring a new generation of educators, practitioners, and policy-makers to work towards the prevention of mass atrocities. Researchers also continue to unearth new data about what happened in small towns across the European continent, as well as learn more about the Nazis' motivations.

In the decades since the end of World War II, survivors, activists, community groups, and non-governmental organizations have been working to preserve the history, lessons, and collective memory of the Holocaust. These include museums, memorials, and educational outreach programs that are emphasizing the importance of empathy and tolerance in promoting human rights. In addition, social justice organizations are actively tracking and combating the rise in Holocaust denial, antisemitism, and hate crimes.

More work remains as the moral mantra of "Never Again" has not deterred other genocides and mass atrocities from occurring around the world.

The mission of the Harriet and Kenneth Kupferberg Holocaust Center at Queensborough Community College is to draw upon the Holocaust's lessons and to identify contemporary forms of hate, racism, and stereotyping.

By sharing our local community members' stories of survival, we can vividly show how antisemitism, intolerance, and othering continue to impact our society. Our hope is to empower a new generation of activists and global citizens to create more empathy and positive change in the world.



A Passover Seder in the displaced persons (DP) camp in Selb, Germany, September 4, 1946.

Photo credit: Yad Vashem #1486/1490

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United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: Holocaust Encyclopedia

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- "Chelmno." <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/chelmno>
- "Euthanasia Program and Aktion T4." <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/euthanasia-program>
- "Lublin/Majdanek: Key Dates." <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/lublin-majdanek-key-dates>
- "Major Nazi Camps in Europe, January 1944." <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/gallery/concentration-camps-1942-45-maps>
- "Map: European Rail System, 1939." <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/map/european-rail-system-1939>
- "Map: German Administration of Europe, 1942." <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/map/german-administration-of-europe-1942>
- "Map: Killing Centers in Occupied Poland, 1942." <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/map/killing-centers-in-occupied-poland-1942>
- "Map: Major Deportations to Killing Centers, 1942–1944." <http://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/map/major-deportations-to-killing-centers-1942-1944>
- "Map: Major Ghettos in Occupied Europe." <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/map/major-ghettos-in-occupied-europe>
- "Polish Victims." <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/polish-victims>
- "Sobibor." <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/sobibor>
- "Treblinka." <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/treblinka>

Yad Vashem: Educational Resources

- "Belzec." https://www.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%205981.pdf
- "Chelmno." https://www.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/microsoft%20word%20-%205915.pdf
- "Majdanek." https://www.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%206622.pdf
- "Sobibor." https://www.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%206030.pdf
- "Treblinka." https://www.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%205886.pdf

Additional Links

- Educational Resources of the Federal Ministry of Justice and Consumer Protection. "Anlage zu § 1 Verzeichnis der Konzentrationslager und ihrer Außenkommandos gemäß" (1967). https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/begdv_6/BJNR002330967.html
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- Museum of the Former German Kulmhof Death Camp in Chelmno on Ner. "Kulmhof 1941–1945." <https://www.chelmno-muzeum.eu/en/kulmhof-1941-1946>
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