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# The Holocaust

**The Holocaust** (from Greek *λόκαυστος* [holókaustos]: *hólos*, "whole" and *kaustós*, "burnt")<sup>[2]</sup>, also known as **the Shoah** (**Hebrew**): *השואה*, Romanized *ha'shoah*;

**Yiddish**: *גברות*, Romanized *churban* or *hurban*<sup>[3]</sup> is the term generally used to

describe the **genocide** of approximately six million European Jews during **World War II**, a programme of systematic state-sponsored extermination by **Nazi Germany**.<sup>[4]</sup>

Some scholars maintain that the definition of the Holocaust should also include the

Nazis' systematic murder of millions of people in other groups, including **ethnic Poles**, **Romani**, **Soviet civilians**, Soviet prisoners of war, **people with disabilities**, homosexuals, **Jehovah's Witnesses**, and other **political and religious opponents**.<sup>[5]</sup> By this definition,

the total number of **Holocaust victims** would be between 11 million and 17 million people.<sup>[6]</sup>

The persecution and genocide were carried out in stages. **Legislation to remove the Jews from civil society** was enacted years before the outbreak of World War II. **Concentration camps** were established in which inmates were used as slave labor until they died of exhaustion or disease. Where the Third Reich conquered new territory in eastern Europe, specialized units called **Einsatzgruppen** murdered Jews and political opponents in mass shootings. Jews and Romani were confined in overcrowded ghettos before being transported by freight train to **extermination camps** where, if they survived the journey, the majority of them were systematically killed in **gas chambers**. Every arm of **Nazi Germany's** bureaucracy was involved in the logistics of the mass murder, turning the country into what one Holocaust scholar has called "a genocidal state".<sup>[7]</sup>

## Etymology and use of the term

Main article: [Names of the Holocaust](#)

The term *holocaust* originally derived from the **Greek** word *holókauston*, meaning a "whole (*holos*) burnt (*kaustos*)" sacrificial offering to a god.<sup>[8]</sup> Its **Latin** form (*holocaustum*) was first used with specific reference to a **massacre of Jews** by the chroniclers Roger of Howden<sup>[9]</sup> and **Richard of Devizes** in the 1190s. For hundreds of years, the word *holocaust* was used in English to denote massive sacrifices and great slaughters or massacres. During World War II, the word was used to describe Nazi atrocities regardless of whether the victims were Jews or non-Jews. Since the 1960s, the term has come to be used by scholars and popular writers to refer exclusively to the genocide of Jews.<sup>[4]</sup>

The term entered common parlance after 1978, the year that the popular *Holocaust (TV miniseries)* was broadcast on the American NBC television network. With a cast of dozens, including a young **Meryl Streep**, this miniseries was sometimes accused of "trivializing" the concentration camps. However, the series proved that the subject matter could have popular appeal, as well as providing a convenient and enduring term.<sup>[10]</sup>

The **biblical** word **Shoah** (שואה) (also spelled **Sho'ah** and **Shoa**), meaning "calamity," became the standard **Hebrew** term for the Holocaust as early as the 1940s.<sup>[11]</sup> *Shoah* is preferred by many Jews for a number of reasons, including the **theologically** offensive nature of the word *holocaust*, as a Greek pagan custom.<sup>[12]</sup>

## Historical usage of *Holocaust*, *Shoah*, and *Final Solution*

The word *holocaust* has been used since the 18th century to refer to the violent deaths of a large number of people.<sup>[13]</sup> For example, **Winston Churchill** and other contemporaneous writers used it before World War II to describe the **Armenian Genocide** of



[World War I](#).<sup>[14]</sup> Since the 1950s its use has increasingly been restricted, with its usage now mainly used as a proper noun to describe the Holocaust perpetrated by Nazi Germany.

*Holocaust* was adopted as a translation of *Shoah*—a Hebrew word connoting catastrophe, calamity, disaster, and destruction<sup>[15]</sup>—

which was used in 1940 in [Jerusalem](#) in a booklet called *Sho'at Yehudei Polin*, and translated as *The Holocaust of the Jews of Poland*. *Shoah* had earlier been used in the context of the Nazis as a translation of *catastrophe*. For example, in 1934, when [Chaim Weizmann](#) told the Zionist Action Committee that Hitler's rise to power was an "unvorhergesehene Katastrophe, etwa ein neuer Weltkrieg" ("an unforeseen catastrophe, comparable to another [world war](#)"), the Hebrew press translated *Katastrophe* as *Shoah*.<sup>[16]</sup>

In the spring of 1942, the Jerusalem historian BenZion Dinur (Dinaburg) used *Shoah* in a book published by the United Aid Committee for the Jews in Poland to describe the extermination of Europe's Jews, calling it a "catastrophe" that symbolized the unique situation of the Jewish people.<sup>[15][17]</sup> The word *Shoah* was chosen in [Israel](#) to describe the Holocaust, the term institutionalized by the

[Knesset](#) on April 12, 1951, when it established *Yom Ha-Shoah Ve Mered Ha-Getaot*, the national day of remembrance. In the 1950s, [Yad Vashem](#), the Israel "Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority" was routinely translating this into English as "the Disaster". At that time, *holocaust* was often used to mean the conflagration of much of humanity in a nuclear war.<sup>[18]</sup> Since then,

Yad Vashem has changed its practice; the word *Holocaust*, usually now capitalized, has come to refer principally to the genocide of the European Jews.<sup>[11][16]</sup>

The usual German term for the extermination of the Jews during the Nazi period was the [euphemistic phrase](#) *Endlösung der Judenfrage* (the "[Final Solution of the Jewish Question](#)"). In both English and German, "Final Solution" is widely used as an alternative to "Holocaust".<sup>[19]</sup> For a time after World War II, German historians also used the term *Völkermord* ("genocide"), or in full, *der*

*Völkermord an den Juden* ("the genocide of the Jewish people"), while the prevalent term in Germany today is either *Holocaust* or increasingly *Shoah*.

Use of the term *Holocaust* for Jewish and non-Jewish victims

While the terms "*Shoah*" and "*Final Solution*" always refer to the fate of the [Jews](#) during the [Nazi rule](#), the term "*Holocaust*" is sometimes used in a wider sense to describe other [genocides](#) of the Nazi and other regimes.

The [Columbia Encyclopedia](#) defines "*Holocaust*" as "name given to the period of persecution and extermination of European Jews by Nazi Germany".<sup>[20]</sup> The [Compact Oxford English Dictionary](#)<sup>[21]</sup> and Microsoft Encarta<sup>[22]</sup> give similar definitions. The

Encyclopaedia Britannica defines "*Holocaust*" as "the systematic state-sponsored killing of six million Jewish men, women, and children and millions of others by Nazi Germany and its collaborators during World War II"<sup>[3]</sup>, although the article goes on to say,

"The Nazis also singled out the Roma (Gypsies). They were the only other group that the Nazis systematically killed in gas chambers alongside the Jews."<sup>[3]</sup>

Scholars are divided on whether the term Holocaust should be applied to all victims of the Nazi mass murder campaign, with some using it synonymously with "*Shoah*" or "*Final Solution of the Jewish Question*", and others including the killing of [Romani peoples](#) ([Roma](#) and [Sinti](#)), [Poles](#), the deaths of Soviet prisoners of war, Slavs, gay men, [Jehovah's Witnesses](#), the disabled, and political opponents.<sup>[23]</sup>

[Yehuda Bauer](#) contends that the Holocaust should include only Jews because it was the intent of the Nazis to exterminate all Jews, while the other groups were not to be totally annihilated.<sup>[24]</sup> Inclusion of non-Jewish victims of the Nazis in the Holocaust is objected

to by many persons including [Elie Wiesel](#), and by organizations such as [Yad Vashem](#) established to commemorate the victims of the

Holocaust.<sup>[25]</sup> They say that the word was originally meant to describe the extermination of the Jews, and that the Jewish Holocaust was a crime on such a scale, and of such totality and specificity, as the culmination of the long history of European [antisemitism](#), that it should not be subsumed into a general category with the other crimes of the Nazis.<sup>[25]</sup>

[Michael Burleigh](#) and Wolfgang Wippermann maintain that although all Jews were victims, the Holocaust transcended the confines of the Jewish community – other people shared the tragic fate of victimhood.<sup>[26]</sup> [László Teleki](#) applies the term "*Holocaust*" to both the murder of [Jews](#) and [Romani peoples](#) by the Nazis.<sup>[27]</sup> In *The Columbia Guide to the Holocaust*, Donald Niewyk and Francis Nicosia use the term to include Jews, Gypsies and the disabled.<sup>[28]</sup> Dennis Reinhartz has claimed that Gypsies were the main victims of genocide in Croatia and Serbia during the Second World War, and has called this "the Balkan Holocaust 1941-1945".<sup>[29]</sup>

Sometimes, the term "*Holocaust*" is used to describe events that have no connection with [Europe](#) or [World War II](#). According to [David Stannard](#), the "*American Holocaust*" involved killing of an estimated 50–100 million aboriginal people, and continues on a smaller scale throughout the Americas.<sup>[30]</sup> From a [Chinese](#) perspective, the [Japanese](#) occupation of parts of [China](#) from 1931 to 1945 which occasioned the killings of 30 million Chinese, has been called a "Super Holocaust".<sup>[31]</sup> The "*Rwandan Holocaust*" refers to the Rwanda genocide of 1994. The "*Cambodian Holocaust*" comprises the mass killings by the [Khmer Rouge](#) regime in Cambodia. "*African Holocaust*" describes the slave trade and the colonization of Africa, also known as the *Maafa*.<sup>[32]</sup> Then there is the prospect of "*Nuclear Armageddon*", also known as "*Nuclear Holocaust*".

### Distinctive features

#### Compliance of Germany's institutions

[Michael Berenbaum](#) writes that Germany became a "genocidal state."<sup>[7]</sup> Every arm of the country's sophisticated bureaucracy was involved in the killing process. Parish churches and the Interior Ministry supplied birth records showing who was Jewish; the Post Office delivered the [deportation](#) and denaturalization orders; the Finance Ministry confiscated Jewish property; German firms fired Jewish workers and disenfranchised Jewish stockholders; the universities refused to admit Jews, denied degrees to those already studying, and fired Jewish academics; government transport offices arranged the trains for deportation to the camps; German pharmaceutical companies tested drugs on camp prisoners; companies bid for the contracts to build the crematoria; detailed lists of victims were drawn up using the [Dehomag](#) (IBM Germany) company's [punch card](#) machines, producing meticulous records of the killings. As prisoners entered the death camps, they were made to surrender all personal property, which was carefully catalogued and tagged before being sent to Germany to be reused or recycled. Berenbaum writes that the Final Solution of the Jewish question was "in the eyes of the perpetrators ... Germany's greatest achievement."<sup>[33]</sup>

[Saul Friedländer](#) writes that: "Not one social group, not one religious community, not one scholarly institution or professional association in Germany and throughout Europe declared its solidarity with the Jews."<sup>[34]</sup> He writes that some Christian churches declared that *converted* Jews should be regarded as part of the flock, but even then only up to a point.

Friedländer argues that this makes the Holocaust distinctive because antisemitic policies were able to unfold without the interference of countervailing forces of the kind normally found in advanced societies, such as industry, small businesses, churches, and other vested interests and [lobby](#) groups.<sup>[34]</sup>

#### Dominance of ideology and the scale of the genocide

In other genocides, pragmatic considerations such as control of territory and resources were central to the genocide policy. [Yehuda Bauer](#) argues that:

Responding to the German philosopher [Ernst Nolte](#) who claimed that the Holocaust was not unique, the German historian [Eberhard Jäckel](#) wrote in 1986 that the Holocaust was unique because:

"the National Socialist killing of the Jews was unique in that never before had a state with the authority of its responsible leader decided and announced that a specific human group, including its aged, its women and its children and infants, would be killed as quickly as possible, and then carried through this resolution using every possible means of state power".<sup>[36]</sup>

The slaughter was systematically conducted in virtually all areas of Nazi-occupied territory in what are now 35 separate European countries.<sup>[37]</sup> It was at its worst in Central and Eastern Europe, which had more than seven million Jews in 1939. About five million Jews were killed there, including three million in occupied Poland and over one million in the [Soviet Union](#). Hundreds of thousands also died in the Netherlands, France, Belgium, [Yugoslavia](#) and Greece. The [Wannsee Protocol](#) makes clear that the Nazis also intended to carry out their "final solution of the Jewish question" in England and Ireland.<sup>[38]</sup>

Anyone with three or four Jewish grandparents was to be exterminated without exception. In other genocides, people were able to escape death by [converting](#) to another religion or in some other way [assimilating](#). This option was not available to the Jews of occupied Europe,<sup>[39]</sup> unless their grandparents had converted prior to January 18, 1871. All persons of recent Jewish ancestry were to be exterminated in lands controlled by Germany.<sup>[40]</sup>

#### Medical experiments

Further information: [Nazi human experimentation](#)

Another distinctive feature of the Holocaust was the extensive use of human subjects in medical experiments. German physicians carried out such experiments at Auschwitz, [Dachau](#), Buchenwald, Ravensbrück, [Sachsenhausen](#) and Natzweiler concentration camps.<sup>[41]</sup>

The most notorious of these physicians was Dr. [Josef Mengele](#), who worked in Auschwitz. His experiments included placing subjects in pressure chambers, testing drugs on them, freezing them, attempting to change eye color by injecting chemicals into children's eyes and various amputations and other brutal surgeries.<sup>[41]</sup> The full extent of his work will never be known because the truckload of records he sent to Dr. Otmar von Verschuer at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute were destroyed by von Verschuer.<sup>[42]</sup> Subjects who survived Mengele's experiments were almost always killed and dissected shortly afterwards.

He seemed particularly keen on working with Romani children. He would bring them sweets and toys, and personally take them to the gas chamber. They would call him "Onkel Mengele".<sup>[43]</sup> Vera Alexander was a Jewish inmate at Auschwitz who looked after 50 sets of Romani twins:

#### Development and execution

##### Origins

See also: [Antisemitism](#), [Christianity and antisemitism](#), [Martin Luther and antisemitism](#), and [Nazi boycott of Jewish businesses](#)

[Yehuda Bauer](#), [Raul Hilberg](#) and [Lucy Dawidowicz](#) maintained that from the Middle Ages onward, German society and culture were suffused with anti-Semitism and there was a direct link from medieval pogroms to the Nazi death camps of the 1940s.<sup>[45][46][47]</sup> [Hans](#)

[Küng](#) has written that "Nazi anti-Judaism was the work of godless, anti-Christian criminals. But it would not have been possible without the almost two thousand years' pre-history of 'Christian' anti-Judaism..."<sup>[48]</sup> The [Nazi Party](#) under Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany on January 30, 1933, and the persecution and exodus of Germany's 525,000 Jews began almost immediately. In *Mein Kampf* (1925), Hitler had been open about his hatred of Jews, and gave ample warning of his intention to drive them from Germany's

political, intellectual, and cultural life. He did not write that he would attempt to exterminate them, but he is reported to have been more explicit in private. As early as 1922, he allegedly told Major Joseph Hell, at the time a journalist:

Legal repression and emigration

Further information: [Anti-Jewish legislation in prewar Nazi Germany](#), [Racial policy of Nazi Germany](#), and [Nuremberg Laws](#)

Throughout the 1930s, the legal, economic, and social rights of Jews were steadily restricted. In legally defining "who is Jew", the Nazis considered anyone of Jewish descent, even the descendents of converts who converted from Judaism after January 18, 1871, (the founding of the [German Empire](#)) were still considered Jews. Friedländer writes that, for the Nazis, Germany drew its strength for its "purity of blood" and its "rootedness in the sacred German earth."<sup>[50]</sup> In 1933, a series of laws were passed which contained "[Aryan paragraphs](#)" to exclude Jews from key areas: the [Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service](#); the physicians' law; and the farm law, forbidding Jews from owning farms or taking part in [agriculture](#). Jewish lawyers were [disbarred](#), and in [Dresden](#), Jewish lawyers and judges were dragged out of their offices and courtrooms, and beaten.<sup>[51]</sup> At the insistence of then president [Hindenburg](#), Hitler added an exemption allowing Jewish civil servants who were veterans of the first world war, or whose fathers or sons had served, to remain in office. (Hindenburg was disturbed that people who had fought and bled for Germany would be forced from their state jobs.) Hitler revoked this exemption in 1937. Jews were excluded from schools and universities, (Law to prevent overcrowding in schools) and from belonging to the Journalists' Association, or from being owners or editors of newspapers.<sup>[50]</sup>

The *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* of April 27, 1933 wrote:

In 1935, Hitler introduced the [Nuremberg Laws](#), which: prohibited Jews from marrying Aryans, annulled existing marriages between Jews and Aryans (the Law for the protection of German blood and German honor,) prohibited Jews from serving as civil servants, stripped German Jews of their citizenship and deprived them of all civil rights. In his speech introducing the laws, Hitler said that if the "Jewish problem" cannot be solved by these laws, it "must then be handed over by law to the National-Socialist Party for a final solution (*Endlösung*)."<sup>[53]</sup> The expression "*Endlösung*" became the standard Nazi [euphemism](#) for the extermination of the Jews. In January 1939, he said in a public speech: "If international-finance Jewry inside and outside Europe should succeed once more in plunging the nations into yet another world war, the consequences will not be the Bolshevization of the earth and thereby the victory of Jewry, but the annihilation (*vernichtung*) of the Jewish race in Europe."<sup>[54]</sup>

Jewish intellectuals were among the first to leave. The philosopher [Walter Benjamin](#) left for Paris on March 18, 1933. Novelist Leon Feuchtwanger went to Switzerland. The conductor [Bruno Walter](#) fled after being told that the hall of the [Berlin Philharmonic](#) would be burned down if he conducted a concert there: the *Frankfurter Zeitung* explained on April 6 that Walter and fellow conductor [Otto Klemperer](#) had been forced to flee because the government was unable to protect them against the "mood" of the German public, which had been provoked by "Jewish artistic liquidators."<sup>[55]</sup> [Albert Einstein](#) was visiting the U.S. on January 30, 1933. He returned

to Ostende in Belgium, never to set foot in Germany again, and calling events there a "psychic illness of the masses"; he was expelled from the Kaiser Wilhelm Society and the Prussian Academy of Sciences, and his citizenship was rescinded.<sup>[56]</sup> [Saul](#)

[Friedländer](#) writes that when [Max Liebermann](#), honorary president of the Prussian Academy of Arts, resigned his position, not one of his colleagues expressed a word of sympathy, and he died ostracized two years later. When the police arrived in 1943 with a stretcher to deport his 85-year-old bedridden widow, she committed [suicide](#) with an [overdose](#) of [barbiturates](#) rather than be taken.<sup>[56]</sup>

Kristallnacht (1938)

Main article: [Kristallnacht](#)

On November 7, 1938, Jewish minor Herschel Grünsplan assassinated [Nazi German](#) diplomat [Ernst vom Rath](#) in [Paris](#).<sup>[57]</sup> This incident was used by the Nazis to initiate the transition from legal repression to large-scale outright violence against Jewish Germans.<sup>[57]</sup> What the Nazis claimed to be spontaneous "public outrage", was a concerted action of Nazi party and [SA](#) members and affiliates, who after a [Joseph Goebbels](#) hate speech started mass pogroms throughout [Nazi Germany](#), then consisting of Germany proper, [Austria](#) and [Sudetenland](#).<sup>[57]</sup> The pogroms became known as *Reichskristallnacht* ("the Night of Broken Glass", literally "*Crystal Night*"), or *November pogroms*.<sup>[57]</sup> Jews were attacked and Jewish property was vandalized,<sup>[57]</sup> over 7,000 Jewish shops and 1,668 synagogues (almost every synagogue in Germany) were damaged or destroyed. The death toll is assumed to be much higher than the official number of 91 dead.<sup>[57]</sup> 30,000<sup>[58]</sup> were sent to concentration camps, including [Dachau](#), [Sachsenhausen](#),<sup>[57]</sup> [Buchenwald](#),<sup>[57]</sup> and [Oranienburg concentration camp](#),<sup>[59]</sup> where they were kept for several weeks.<sup>[59]</sup> and released when they could either prove that they were about to emigrate in the near future, or after property transfers to the Nazis.<sup>[57]</sup> The German Jewry was collectively made responsible for restitution of the material damage of the pogrom, amounting to several hundreds of thousand Reichsmark, and furthermore had to pay collectively an "atonement tax" of more than a billion Reichsmark.<sup>[57]</sup>

After these pogroms, Jewish emigration from [Nazi Germany](#) accelerated, while public Jewish life in Germany ceased to exist.<sup>[57]</sup>

Early measures in German occupied Poland

Main article: [The Holocaust in Poland](#)

Further information: [Invasion of Poland \(1939\)](#), [Occupation of Poland \(1939–1945\)](#), and [History of the Jews in Poland](#)

The question of the treatment of the Jews became an urgent one for the Nazis after September 1939, when they invaded the western half of Poland, home to about two million Jews. The pre-war [Second Polish Republic](#) had been split between [Nazi Germany](#) and the [Soviet Union](#), in the preceding Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Of the German share of Poland, [the northwestern parts were annexed](#), while the southeastern parts were made the [Generalgouvernement](#) led by [Hans Frank](#). The invasion led Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, South Africa, and France to declare war - [World War II](#) had started.

Himmler's right-hand man, [Reinhard Heydrich](#), recommended concentrating all the Polish Jews in [ghettos](#) in major cities, where they would be put to work for the German war industry. The ghettos would be in cities located on railway junctions, so that, in Heydrich's words, "future measures can be accomplished more easily."<sup>[60]</sup> During his interrogation in 1961, [Adolf Eichmann](#) testified that the expression "future measures" was understood to mean "physical extermination."<sup>[60]</sup>

In September, Himmler appointed [Reinhard Heydrich](#) head of the Reich Main Security Office (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt* or RSHA, not be to confused with the RuSHA), a body overseeing the work of the [SS](#), the [Security Police](#) (SD), and the [Gestapo](#) in occupied Poland and charged with carrying out the policy towards the Jews described in Heydrich's report. The first organized murders of Jews by German forces occurred during [Operation Tannenberg](#) and through [Selbstschutz](#) units. Later, the Jews were herded into ghettos, mostly in the [General Government](#) area of central Poland, where they were put to work under the Reich Labor Office headed by Fritz Saukel. Here many thousands were killed in various ways, and many more died of disease, starvation, and exhaustion, but there was still no program of systematic killing. There is no doubt, however, that the Nazis saw forced labor as a form of extermination. The expression *Vernichtung durch Arbeit* ("destruction through work") was frequently used.

Although it was clear by 1941 that the SS hierarchy, led by Himmler, was determined to embark on a policy of killing all the Jews under German control, there were important centers of opposition to this policy within the Nazi regime. The grounds for the opposition were mainly economic, not humanitarian. [Hermann Göring](#), who had overall control of the German war industry, and the German army's Economics Department, representing the armaments industry, argued that the enormous Jewish labor force assembled in the General Government area (more than a million able-bodied workers) was an asset too valuable to waste while Germany was preparing to invade the Soviet Union.

#### Early measures in other occupied countries

When [Nazi Germany](#) occupied Norway, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Belgium, and France in 1940, and Yugoslavia and Greece in 1941, anti-Semitic measures were also introduced into these countries, although the pace and severity varied greatly from country to country according to local political circumstances. Jews were removed from economic and cultural life and were subject to various restrictive laws, but physical deportation did not occur in most places before 1942. The [Vichy](#) regime in occupied France actively collaborated in persecuting French Jews. Germany's allies Italy, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Finland were pressured to introduce antisemitic measures, but for the most part they did not comply until compelled to do so. The German puppet regime in Croatia, on the other hand, began actively persecuting Jews on its own initiative.

#### Resettlement and deportation to colonies and reservations

##### Madagascar and similar plans

Further information: [Madagascar Plan](#)

Before the war, the Nazis had thought of mass resettlements of the German (and subsequently the European) Jewry to areas outside Europe. Because Germany had lost her colonies in [World War I](#), diplomatic efforts were undertaken to negotiate arrangements with the colonial powers, primarily the [United Kingdom](#) and [France](#).<sup>[62]</sup> These efforts included plans to resettle Jews to British [Palestine](#),<sup>[63]</sup> Italian [Abyssinia](#),<sup>[63]</sup> British [Guinea](#),<sup>[64]</sup> British [Rhodesia](#),<sup>[64]</sup> French [Madagascar](#),<sup>[63]</sup> and [Australia](#).<sup>[65]</sup>

Plans to reclaim former German colonies like [Tanganyika](#) and South West Africa as a place to resettle Jews were halted by [Adolf Hitler](#), who argued that no place where "so much blood of heroic Germans had been spilled" should be made available as a residence for the "worst enemies of the Germans".<sup>[66]</sup>

Of the envisioned resettlement areas, [Madagascar](#) was the most seriously discussed. While Jews had been murdered on mass scale since 1939, in 1940 some Nazis considered eliminating Jews by the unrealistic [Madagascar Plan](#) which, however futile, in retrospect did constitute an important psychological step on the path to the Holocaust.<sup>[67]</sup> The planning was carried out by Eichmann's office;

Heydrich called it a "territorial final solution". The plan was to ship all European Jews to [Madagascar](#). In view of the difficulties of supporting more population in the General Government in July 1940, Hitler, still hoping for success with the Madagascar plan, stopped the deportation of Jews there.<sup>[68]</sup> This was temporary, however, as the military situation offered no possibility to conquer [Britain](#). The plan may have been foreseen as a remote and slower genocide through the unfavorable conditions on the island.<sup>[69]</sup>

Although the Final Solution was already in place and Jews were being exterminated, the formal declaration of the Plan's end was abandoned on February 10, 1942, when the German Foreign Office was given an official explanation that due to the war with the Soviet Union Jews are going to be "sent to the east".<sup>[70]</sup>

##### General Government and Lublin reservation (Nisko plan)

Main articles: [Nisko Plan](#) and [General Government](#)

On September 28, 1939, Germany gained control over the Lublin area through the [German-Soviet agreement](#) in exchange for [Lithuania](#).<sup>[71]</sup> According to the [Nisko Plan](#), they set up the Lublin-Lipowa Reservation in the area. The reservation was designated by [Adolf Eichmann](#), who was assigned the task of removing all Jews from Germany, [Austria](#) and the [Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia](#).<sup>[72]</sup> They shipped the first Jews to Lublin less than three weeks later on October 18, 1939. The first train loads consisted of Jews deported from [Austria](#) and the [Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia](#).<sup>[73]</sup> By January 30, 1940, historians estimate a total of 78,000 Jews had been deported to Lublin from Germany, [Austria](#) and [Czechoslovakia](#).<sup>[74]</sup> On 12 and February 13, 1940, the Pomeranian Jews were deported to the Lublin reservation, resulting in [Pomeranian Gauleiter](#) Franz Schwede-Coburg to be the first to declare his [Gau "judenrein"](#) ("free of Jews").<sup>[75]</sup> On March 24, 1940 [Hermann Göring](#) put a hold on the Nisko Plan, and by the end of April, abandoned it entirely.<sup>[76]</sup> By the time the Nisko Plan was stopped, the total number of Jews who had been transported to Nisko had reached 95,000, many of whom had died due to starvation.<sup>[77]</sup>

During 1940 and 1941, the murder of large numbers of Jews in German occupied Poland continued, and the deportation of Jews were deported to the General Gouvrenment was undertaken. The deportation of Jews from Germany, particularly Berlin, was not officially completed until 1943. (Many Berlin Jews were able to survive in hiding.) By December 1939, 3.5 million Jews were crowded into the General Government area.

Concentration and labor camps (1933–1945)

Main article: [Nazi concentration camps](#)

Further information: [Extermination through labour](#) and [List of Nazi German concentration camps](#)

*Major concentration and extermination camps: [Auschwitz](#), [Belzec](#), [Bergen-Belsen](#), [Chelmno](#), [Dachau](#), [Flossenbürg](#), [Grini](#), [Jasenovac](#), [Klooga](#), [Majdanek](#), [Maly Trostinets](#), [Mauthausen-Gusen](#), [Ravensbrück](#), and [Treblinka](#)*

*Nazi concentration camp badges: [Black triangle](#), [Pink triangle](#), [Purple triangle](#), and [Yellow badge](#)*

Leading up to the 1933 elections, the Nazis began intensifying acts of violence to wreak havoc among the opposition. With the cooperation of local authorities, they set up camps as concentration centers within Germany. One of the first was [Dachau](#), which opened in March 1933. These early camps were meant to hold, torture, or kill only political prisoners, such as Communists and Social Democrats.<sup>[78]</sup>

These early prisons – usually basements and storehouses – were eventually consolidated into full-blown, centrally run camps outside the cities. By 1942, six large extermination camps had been established in Nazi-occupied Poland.<sup>[78]</sup>

After 1939, the camps increasingly became places where Jews and POWs were either killed or forced to live as slave laborers, undernourished and tortured.<sup>[79]</sup> It is estimated that the Germans established 15,000 camps in the occupied countries, many of them in Poland.<sup>[80][81]</sup>

New camps were focused on areas with large Jewish, Polish intelligentsia, communist, or Roma and Sinti populations, including inside Germany. The transportation of prisoners was often carried out under horrifying conditions using rail freight cars, in which many died before reaching their destination.

Extermination through labour, a means whereby camp inmates would literally be worked to death – or frequently worked until they could no longer perform work tasks, followed by their selection for extermination – was invoked as a further systematic extermination policy. Furthermore, while not designed as a method for systematic extermination, many camp

prisoners died because of harsh overall conditions or from executions carried out on a whim after being allowed to live for days or months.

Upon admission, some camps tattooed prisoners with a prisoner ID.<sup>[82]</sup> Those fit for work were dispatched for 12 to 14 hour shifts. Before and after, there were roll calls that could sometimes last for hours, with prisoners regularly dying of exposure.<sup>[83]</sup>

Ghettos (1940–1945)

Main articles: Ghettos in occupied Europe 1939-1944 and [List of Nazi-era ghettos](#)

Main ghettos: [Kraków Ghetto](#), [Łódź Ghetto](#), [Lwów Ghetto](#), [Warsaw Ghetto](#), [Vilna Ghetto](#) and [Riga ghetto](#)

After the invasion of Poland, the German Nazis established [ghettos](#) in which Jews and some Romani were confined, until they were eventually shipped to death camps to be murdered. The [Warsaw Ghetto](#) was the largest, with 380,000 people, and the [Łódź Ghetto](#) the second largest, holding 160,000. They were, in effect, immensely crowded prisons, described by Michael Berenbaum as instruments of "slow, passive murder."<sup>[84]</sup> Though the Warsaw Ghetto contained 400,000 people<sup>[85]</sup>—30% of the population of Warsaw—it occupied only 2.4% of the city's area, averaging 9.2 people per room.

From 1940 through 1942, starvation and disease, especially [typhoid](#), killed hundreds of thousands. Over 43,000 residents of the Warsaw ghetto died there in 1941,<sup>[85]</sup> more than one in ten; in Theresienstadt, more than half the residents died in 1942.<sup>[84]</sup>

Each ghetto was run by a [Judenrat](#) (Jewish council) of German-appointed Jewish community leaders, who were responsible for the day-to-day running of the ghetto, including the provision of food, water, heat, medicine, and shelter, and who were also expected to make arrangements for deportations to extermination camps. [Heinrich Himmler](#) ordered the start of the deportations on July 19, 1942, and three days later, on July 22, the deportations from the Warsaw Ghetto began; over the next 52 days, until September 12, 300,000 people from Warsaw alone were transported in freight trains to the [Treblinka extermination camp](#). Many other ghettos were completely depopulated.

Berenbaum writes that the defining moment that tested the courage and character of each *Judenrat* came when they were asked to provide a list of names of the next group to be deported. The *Judenrat* members went through the tried and tested methods of delay, bribery, stonewalling, pleading, and argumentation, until finally a decision had to be made. Some argued that their responsibility was to save the Jews who *could* be saved, and that therefore others had to be sacrificed; others argued, following [Maimonides](#), that not a single individual should be handed over who had not committed a capital crime. *Judenrat* leaders such as Dr. Joseph Parnas in [Lviv](#), who refused to compile a list, were shot. On October 14, 1942, the entire *Judenrat* of Byaroza committed suicide rather than cooperate with the deportations.<sup>[87]</sup>

The first [ghetto uprising](#) occurred in September 1942 in the small town of [Łachwa](#) in southeast Poland. Though there were armed resistance attempts in the larger ghettos in 1943, such as the [Warsaw Ghetto Uprising](#) and the [Białystok Ghetto Uprising](#), in every case they failed against the unmatched Nazi military force, and the remaining

Jews were either killed or deported to the death camps, which the Germans euphemistically called "resettlement in the East."<sup>[88]</sup>

Pogroms (1939–1942)

Main articles: [Pogrom](#), [Dorohoi Pogrom](#), [Iași pogrom](#), [Jedwabne Massacre](#), [Legionnaires' Rebellion and Bucharest Pogrom](#), [History of Lviv#Lviv pogroms and the Holocaust](#), and [Odessa massacre](#)

A number of deadly [pogroms](#) by local populations occurred during the Second World War, some with Nazi encouragement, and some spontaneously. This included the [Iași pogrom](#) in Romania on June 30, 1941, in which as many 14,000 Jews were killed by Romanian residents and police, and the [Jedwabne pogrom](#), in which between 380 and 1,600 Jews were killed by local Poles in July 1941.<sup>[89]</sup>

Death squads (1941–1943)

Main articles: [Einsatzgruppen](#) and [Mass graves in the Soviet Union](#)

See also: [Babi Yar](#), [Rumbula massacre](#), and [Ponary massacre](#)

The German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 opened a new phase. The Holocaust intensified after the Nazis occupied Lithuania, where close to 80 percent of [Lithuanian Jews](#) were exterminated before the end of the year.<sup>[91][92]</sup> The Soviet territories occupied by early 1942, including all of Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine, and [Moldova](#) and most Russian territory west of the line Leningrad-Moscow-[Rostov](#), contained about three million Jews, including hundreds of thousands who had fled Poland in 1939. Despite the chaos of the Soviet retreat, some effort was made to evacuate Jews, and about a million succeeded in escaping further east. The remaining three million were left at the mercy of the Nazis.

Members of the local populations in certain occupied Soviet territories participated substantially in the killings of Jews and others.<sup>[93]</sup> In Lithuania, Latvia and western Ukraine,<sup>[93]</sup> locals were deeply involved in the murder of Jews from the very beginning of the German occupation.<sup>[93]</sup> The Latvian [Arajs Kommando](#) was an example of such an operation.<sup>[93]</sup> To the south, Ukrainians killed approximately 24,000 Jews.<sup>[93]</sup> In addition, Latvian and Lithuanian units left their own countries, and committed murders of Jews in Belarus, and Ukrainians served as concentration and death camp guards in Poland.<sup>[93]</sup> Many of the mass killings were carried out in public, a change from previous practice.<sup>[93]</sup> German witnesses to these killings emphasized the participation of the locals.<sup>[93]</sup> Ultimately it was the Germans who organized and channelled the local participants in The Holocaust.<sup>[93]</sup>

[Raul Hilberg](#) writes that the German Einsatzgruppen commanders were ordinary citizens; the great majority were university-educated professionals.<sup>[94]</sup> They used their skills to become efficient killers, according to [Michael Berenbaum](#).<sup>[90]</sup>

The large-scale killings of Jews in the occupied Soviet territories was assigned to SS formations called [Einsatzgruppen](#) ("task groups"), under the overall command of Heydrich. These had been used on a limited scale in Poland in 1939, but were now organized on a much larger scale. *Einsatzgruppe A* (commanded by SS-*Brigadeführer* [Dr. Franz Stahlecker](#)) was assigned to the Baltic area, *Einsatzgruppe B* (SS-*Brigadeführer* [Artur Nebe](#)) to Belarus, *Einsatzgruppe C* (SS-*Gruppenführer* [Dr. Otto Rasch](#)) to north and central Ukraine, and *Einsatzgruppe D* (SS-*Gruppenführer* [Dr. Otto Ohlendorf](#)) to Moldova, south Ukraine, the [Crimea](#), and, during 1942,

the north [Caucasus](#). Of the four *Einsatzgruppen*, three were commanded by holders of [doctorate](#) degrees, of whom one (Rasch) held a double doctorate. <sup>[95]</sup>

According to Ohlendorf at [his trial](#), "the *Einsatzgruppen* had the mission to protect the rear of the troops by killing the Jews, Gypsies, Communist functionaries, active Communists, and all persons who would endanger the security." In practice, their victims were nearly all defenseless Jewish civilians (not a single *Einsatzgruppe* member was killed in action during these operations). By December 1941, the four *Einsatzgruppen* listed above had killed, respectively, 125,000, 45,000, 75,000, and 55,000 people—a total of 300,000 people—mainly by shooting or with hand grenades at mass killing sites outside the major towns.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum tells the story of one survivor of the *Einsatzgruppen* in Piryatin, [Ukraine](#), when they killed 1,600 Jews on April 6, 1942, the second day of [Passover](#):

The most notorious massacre of Jews in the Soviet Union was at a ravine called [Babi Yar](#) outside [Kiev](#), where 33,771 Jews were killed in a single operation on September 29–30, 1941. The killing of all the Jews in Kiev was decided on by the military governor (Major-General Friedrich Eberhardt), the Police Commander for Army Group South (SS-*Obergruppenführer* [Friedrich Jeckeln](#)) and the *Einsatzgruppe* C Commander Otto Rasch. It was carried out by a mixture of SS, SD and Security Police, assisted by Ukrainian police.

On Monday the Jews of Kiev gathered by the [cemetery](#), expecting to be loaded onto trains. The crowd was large enough that most of the men, women, and children could not have known what was happening until it was too late: by the time they heard the machine-gun fire, there was no chance to escape. All were driven down a corridor of soldiers, in groups of ten, and then shot. A truck driver described the scene:

In August 1941 Himmler travelled to [Minsk](#), where he personally witnessed 100 Jews being shot in a ditch outside the town, an event described by SS-*Obergruppenführer* [Karl Wolff](#) in his diary. "Himmler's face was green. He took out his handkerchief and wiped his cheek where a piece of brain had squirted up on to it. Then he vomited." After recovering his composure, he lectured the SS men on the need to follow the "highest moral law of the Party" in carrying out their tasks.

#### New methods of mass murder

Starting in December 1939, the Nazis introduced new methods of mass murder by using gas. <sup>[98]</sup> First

experimental vans, equipped with gas cylinders and a sealed trunk compartment, were used to kill mental care clients of sanatoria in [Pomerania](#), [East Prussia](#), and [occupied Poland](#) since 1939, as part of an operation termed Aktion T4. <sup>[98]</sup> In the [Sachsenhausen concentration camp](#), larger vans holding up to 100 people were used in a similar way since November 1941, yet the gas did not come from a cylinder but directly from the engine's exhaust. <sup>[98]</sup> These vans were introduced to the Chelmno concentration camp in December 1941, and another 15 of them were used by the death squads in the occupied Soviet Union. <sup>[98]</sup> These gas vans were developed and run under supervision of the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* (Reich Main Security Bureau), and were used to kill about 500,000 people, primarily Jews, but also [Romani](#) and others. <sup>[98]</sup> The vans were carefully monitored and month

later a report stated that 'ninety seven thousand have been processed using three vans, without any defects showing up in the machines' [99].

A need for new mass murder techniques was also expressed by [Hans Frank](#), governor of the [General Government](#), who noted that this many people could not be simply shot. "We shall have to take steps, however, designed in some way to eliminate them." It was this dilemma which led the SS to experiment with large-scale killings using poison gas. Finally, SS *Obersturmführer* [Christian Wirth](#) seems to have been the inventor of the gas chamber.

Wannsee Conference and the Final Solution (1942–1945)

Further information: [Operation Reinhard](#) and [Wannsee Conference](#)

By the end of 1941, Himmler was becoming increasingly impatient with the progress of the Final Solution. His main opponent was Göring, who had succeeded in exempting Jewish industrial workers from the orders to deport all Jews to the General Government and who had allied himself with the Army commanders who were opposing the extermination of the Jews out of a mixture of economic calculation, distaste for the SS and humanitarian sentiment. Although Göring's power had declined since the defeat of his *Luftwaffe* in the [Battle of Britain](#), he still had privileged access to Hitler.

Heydrich therefore convened the [Wannsee Conference](#) on January 20, 1942 at a villa, *Am Großen Wannsee* No. 56-58, in the suburbs of Berlin to finalize a plan for the extermination of the Jews. [103] The plan became known (after Heydrich) as *Aktion Reinhard* (Operation Reinhard). Present were Heydrich, Eichmann, [Heinrich Müller](#) (head of the Gestapo), and representatives of the Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories, the Ministry for the Interior, the Four Year Plan Office, the Ministry of Justice, the General Government in Poland (where over two million Jews still lived), the Foreign Office, the Race and Resettlement Office, and the Nazi Party, and the office responsible for distributing Jewish property. [101] Also present was SS-*Sturmbannführer* [Rudolf Lange](#), the SD commander in [Riga](#), who, with [Friedrich Jeckeln](#) had recently carried out the liquidation of 24,000 Latvian Jews from the Riga ghetto in the [Rumbula massacre](#). [103]

[Michael Berenbaum](#) writes that the 15 men seated at the table were considered the best and the brightest; more than half of them held doctorates from German universities. [101]

A plan was presented for killing all the Jews in Europe, including 330,000 Jews in England and 4,000 in Ireland, [103] although the minutes taken by Eichmann refer to this only through euphemisms, such as " ...

emigration has now been replaced by evacuation to the East. This operation should be regarded only as a provisional option, though in view of the coming final solution of the Jewish question it is already supplying practical experience of vital importance." [103]

The officials were told there were 2.3 million Jews in the General Government, 850,000 in Hungary, 1.1 million in the other occupied countries, and up to 5 million in the Soviet Union (although only 3 million of these were in areas under German occupation) —a total of about 6.5 million. These would all be transported by train to extermination camps (*Vernichtungslager*) in Poland, where those unfit for work would be gassed at once. In some camps, such as Auschwitz, those fit for work would be kept alive for a while, but eventually all would be killed. Göring's representative, Dr. [Erich Neumann](#), gained a limited exemption for some classes of industrial workers.

## Extermination camps

During 1942, in addition to Auschwitz, five other camps were designated as extermination camps (*Vernichtungslager*) for the carrying out of the [Reinhard plan](#).<sup>[122][123]</sup> Two of these, [Chelmno](#) (also known as Kulmhof) and Majdanek were already functioning as labor camps: these now had extermination facilities added to them. Three new camps were built for the sole purpose of killing large numbers of Jews as quickly as possible, at Belzec, [Sobibór](#) and Treblinka. A seventh camp, at Maly Trostinets in Belarus, was also used for this purpose. [Jasenovac](#) was an extermination camp where mostly ethnic [Serbs](#) were killed.

Extermination camps are frequently confused with concentration camps such as [Dachau](#) and Belsen, which were mostly located in Germany and intended as places of incarceration and forced labor for a variety of enemies of the Nazi regime (such as Communists and gays). They should also be distinguished from slave labor camps, which were set up in all German-occupied countries to exploit the labor of prisoners of various kinds, including prisoners of war. In all Nazi camps there were very high death rates as a result of starvation, disease and exhaustion, but only the extermination camps were designed specifically for mass killing.

The extermination camps were run by SS officers, but most of the guards were Ukrainian or Baltic auxiliaries. Regular German soldiers were kept well away.

## Gas chambers

At the extermination camps with gas chambers all the prisoners arrived by train. Sometimes entire trainloads were sent straight to the gas chambers, but usually the camp doctor on duty subjected individuals to selections, where a small percentage were deemed fit to work in the slave labor camps; the majority were taken directly from the platforms to a reception area where all their clothes and other possessions were seized by the Nazis to help fund the war. They were then herded naked into the gas chambers. Usually they were told these were showers or delousing chambers, and there were signs outside saying "baths" and "sauna." They were sometimes given a small piece of soap and a towel so as to avoid panic, and were told to remember where they had put their belongings for the same reason. When they asked for water because they were thirsty after the long journey in the cattle trains, they were told to hurry up, because coffee was waiting for them in the camp, and it was getting cold.<sup>[125]</sup>

According to Rudolf Höß, commandant of Auschwitz, bunker 1 held 800 people, and bunker 2 held 1,200.<sup>[126]</sup>

Once the chamber was full, the doors were screwed shut and solid pellets of Zyklon-B were dropped into the chambers through vents in the side walls, releasing toxic HCN, or [hydrogen cyanide](#). Those inside died within 20 minutes; the speed of death depended on how close the inmate was standing to a gas vent, according to Höß, who estimated that about one third of the victims died immediately.<sup>[127]</sup> Joann Kremer, an SS doctor who oversaw the gassings, testified that: "Shouting and screaming of the victims could be heard through the opening and it was clear that they fought for their lives."<sup>[128]</sup> When they were removed, if the chamber had been very congested, as they often were, the victims were found half-squatting, their skin colored pink with red and green spots, some foaming at the mouth or bleeding from the ears.<sup>[127]</sup>

The gas was then pumped out, the bodies were removed (which would take up to four hours), gold fillings in their teeth were extracted with pliers by dentist prisoners, and women's hair was cut.<sup>[129]</sup> The floor of the gas chamber

was cleaned, and the walls whitewashed.<sup>[128]</sup> The work was done by the *Sonderkommando* prisoners, Jews who hoped to buy themselves a few extra months of life. In crematoria 1 and 2, the *Sonderkommando* lived in an attic above the crematoria; in crematoria 3 and 4, they lived inside the gas chambers.<sup>[130]</sup> When the *Sonderkommando* had finished with the bodies, the SS conducted spot checks to make sure all the gold had been removed from the victims' mouths. If a check revealed that gold had been missed, the *Sonderkommando* prisoner responsible was thrown into the furnace alive as punishment.<sup>[131]</sup>

At first, the bodies were buried in deep pits and covered with lime, but between September and November 1942, on the orders of Himmler, they were dug up and burned. In the spring of 1943, new gas chambers and crematoria were built to accommodate the numbers.<sup>[132]</sup>

#### Jewish resistance

[Yehuda Bauer](#) and other historians argue that resistance consisted not only of physical opposition, but of any activity that gave the Jews dignity and humanity in humiliating and inhumane conditions.<sup>[134]</sup>

There are many examples of Jewish resistance, most notably the [Warsaw Ghetto Uprising](#) of January 1943, when thousands of poorly armed Jewish fighters held the SS at bay for four weeks, and killed several hundred Germans before being crushed by overwhelmingly superior forces. This was followed by the uprising in the Treblinka extermination camp in May 1943, when about 200 inmates escaped from the camp after overpowering the guards. Two weeks later, there was an uprising in the Bialystok ghetto. In September, there was a short-lived uprising in the [Vilnius](#) ghetto. In October, 600 Jewish and Russian prisoners attempted an escape at the Sobibór death camp. About 60 survived and joined the Soviet partisans. On October 7, 1944, the Jewish *Sonderkommandos* at Auschwitz staged an uprising. Female prisoners had smuggled in explosives from a weapons factory, and Crematorium IV was partly destroyed by an explosion. The prisoners then attempted a mass escape, but all 250 were killed soon after.

An estimated 20,000 to 30,000 [Jewish partisans](#) (see the list at the top of this section) actively fought the Nazis and their collaborators in Eastern Europe.<sup>[136]</sup> As many as 1.4 million Jewish soldiers fought in the [Allied](#) armies.<sup>[137]</sup> Of these, approximately 40% served in the [Red Army](#).<sup>[137]</sup> The [Jewish Brigade](#), a unit of 5,000 volunteers from the [British Mandate of Palestine](#) fought in the British Army. German-speaking volunteers from the [Special Interrogation Group](#) performed commando and sabotage operations against the Nazis behind front lines in the [Western Desert Campaign](#).

In occupied Poland and Soviet territories, thousands of Jews fled into the swamps or forests and joined the partisans, although the partisan movements did not always welcome them. In Lithuania and Belarus, an area with a heavy concentration of Jews, and also an area which suited partisan operations, Jewish partisan groups saved thousands of Jewish civilians from extermination. No such opportunities existed for the Jewish populations of cities such as [Budapest](#). However in [Amsterdam](#), and other parts of the Netherlands, many Jews were active in the Dutch Resistance.<sup>[138]</sup> Joining the partisans was an option only for the young and the fit who were willing to leave their families. Many Jewish families preferred to die together rather than be separated.

For the great majority of Jews resistance could take only the passive forms of delay, evasion, negotiation, bargaining and, where possible, bribery of German officials. The Nazis encouraged this by forcing the Jewish communities to police themselves, through bodies such as the Reich Association of Jews (*Reichsvereinigung der Juden*) in Germany and the Jewish Councils (*Judenrate*) in the urban ghettos in occupied Poland. They held out the promise of concessions in exchange for each surrender, enmeshing the Jewish leadership so deeply in well-intentioned compromise that a decision to stand and fight was never possible. Holocaust survivor Alexander Kimel wrote: "The youth in the Ghettos dreamed about fighting. I believe that although there were many factors that inhibited our responses, the most important factors were isolation and historical conditioning to accepting martyrdom."<sup>[140]</sup>

The historical conditioning of the Jewish communities of Europe to accept persecution and avert disaster through compromise and negotiation was the most important factor in the failure to resist until the very end. The Warsaw Ghetto uprising took place only when the Jewish population had been reduced from 500,000 to 100,000, and it was obvious that no further compromise was possible. [Paul Johnson](#) writes: "The Jews had been persecuted for a millennium and a half and had learned from long experience that resistance cost lives rather than saved them. Their history, their theology, their folklore, their social structure, even their vocabulary trained them to negotiate, to pay, to plead, to protest, not to fight."<sup>[141]</sup>

The Jewish communities were also systematically deceived about German intentions, and were cut off from most sources of news from the outside world. The Germans told the Jews that they were being deported to work camps – euphemistically calling it "resettlement in the East" – and maintained this illusion through elaborate deceptions all the way to the gas chamber doors (which were marked with labels stating that the chambers were for removal of lice) to avoid uprisings. As photographs testify, Jews disembarked at the railway stations at Auschwitz and other extermination camps carrying sacks and suitcases, clearly having no idea of the fate that awaited them. Rumours of the reality of the extermination camps filtered back only slowly to the ghettos, and were usually not believed, just as they were not believed when couriers such as [Jan Karski](#), the Polish resistance fighter, conveyed them to the western Allies.<sup>[142]</sup>

Climax

Heydrich was assassinated in [Prague](#) in June 1942. He was succeeded as head of the RSHA by [Ernst Kaltenbrunner](#). Kaltenbrunner and Eichmann, under Himmler's close supervision, oversaw the climax of the Final Solution. During 1943 and 1944, the extermination camps worked at a furious rate to kill the hundreds of thousands of people shipped to them by rail from almost every country within the German sphere of influence. By the spring of 1944, up to 8,000 people were being gassed every day at Auschwitz.<sup>[143]</sup>

Despite the high productivity of the war industries based in the Jewish ghettos in the General Government, during 1943 they were liquidated, and their populations shipped to the camps for extermination. The largest of these operations, the deportation of 100,000 people from the [Warsaw Ghetto](#) in early 1943, provoked the [Warsaw Ghetto Uprising](#), which was suppressed with great brutality. At the same time, rail shipments arrived regularly from western and southern Europe. Few Jews were shipped from the occupied Soviet territories to the camps: the killing of Jews in this zone was left in the hands of the SS, aided by locally recruited auxiliaries. In any case, by the end of 1943 the Germans had been driven from most Soviet territory.

Shipments of Jews to the camps had priority on the German railways, and continued even in the face of the increasingly dire military situation after the [Battle of Stalingrad](#) at the end of 1942 and the escalating Allied air attacks on German industry and transport. Army leaders and economic managers complained at this diversion of resources and at the killing of irreplaceable skilled Jewish workers. By 1944, moreover, it was evident to most Germans not blinded by Nazi fanaticism that Germany was losing the war. Many senior officials began to fear the retribution that might await Germany and them personally for the crimes being committed in their name. But the power of Himmler and the SS within the German Reich was too great to resist, and Himmler could always evoke Hitler's authority for his demands.

In October 1943, Himmler gave a speech to senior Nazi Party officials gathered in [Posen](#) (Poznan in western Poland). Here he came closer than ever before to stating explicitly that he was intent on exterminating the Jews of Europe:

The audience for this speech included Admiral [Karl Dönitz](#) and Armaments Minister [Albert Speer](#), both of whom successfully claimed at the Nuremberg trials that they had had no knowledge of the Final Solution. The text of this speech was not known at the time of their trials.

The scale of extermination slackened somewhat at the beginning of 1944 once the ghettos in occupied Poland were emptied, but in March 19, 1944, Hitler ordered the military occupation of Hungary, and Eichmann was dispatched to [Budapest](#) to supervise the deportation of Hungary's 800,000 Jews. Hitler had personally complained to the Hungarian regent Admiral Miklos Horthy on the previous day, March 18, 1944, that:

More than half of them were shipped to Auschwitz in the course of the year. The commandant, Rudolf Höß, said at his trial that he killed 400,000 Hungarian Jews in three months. This operation met strong opposition within the Nazi hierarchy, and there were some suggestions that Hitler should offer the Allies a deal under which the Hungarian Jews would be spared in exchange for a favorable peace settlement. There were unofficial negotiations in [Istanbul](#) between Himmler's agents, British agents, and representatives of Jewish organizations, and at one point an attempt by Eichmann to exchange one million Jews for 10,000 trucks—the so-called "[blood for goods](#)" proposal—but there was no real possibility of such a deal being struck (see [Joel Brand](#) and [Rudolf Kastner](#)).

Escapes, publication of news of the death camps (April–June 1944)

Escapes from the camps were few, but not unknown. The few Auschwitz escapes that succeeded were made possible by the Polish underground inside the camp and local people outside. <sup>[146]</sup> In 1940, the Auschwitz commandant reported that "the local population is fanatically Polish and ... prepared to take any action against the hated SS camp personnel. Every prisoner who managed to escape can count on help the moment he reaches the wall of a first Polish farmstead." <sup>[147]</sup>

In February 1942, an escaped inmate from the [Chelmno extermination camp](#), Jacob Grojanowski, reached the [Warsaw Ghetto](#), where he gave detailed information about the Chelmno camp to the [Oneg Shabbat](#) group. His report, which became known as the [Grojanowski Report](#), was smuggled out of the ghetto through the channels of the Polish underground to the Delegatura, and reached London by June 1942. It is unclear what was done with the report at that point. <sup>[110][148][149][150]</sup> In the meantime, by the 1st of February, the [United States Office of War](#)

[Information](#) had decided not to release information about the extermination of the Jews because it was felt that it would mislead the public into thinking the war was simply a Jewish problem. <sup>[151]</sup>

In December 1942, the [western Allies](#) released a declaration, publicized on the *New York Times* front page, that described how "Hitler's oft-repeated intention to exterminate the Jewish people in Europe" was being carried out and which declared that they "condemn in the strongest possible terms this bestial policy of cold-blooded extermination." <sup>[152][153]</sup>

In 1942 [Jan Karski](#) reported to the Polish, British and U.S. governments on the situation in Poland, especially the destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto and the Holocaust of the Jews. He met with Polish politicians in exile including the prime minister, as well as members of political parties such as the PPS, SN, SP, SL, [Jewish Bund](#) and Poalei Zion. He also spoke to [Anthony Eden](#), the British foreign secretary, and included a detailed statement on what he had seen in Warsaw and Belzec. <sup>[154]</sup>

In 1943 in London he met the then-well-known journalist [Arthur Koestler](#). He then traveled to the United States and reported to President [Franklin D. Roosevelt](#). His report was a major factor in informing the West.

In July 1943, Karski again personally reported to Roosevelt about the situation in Poland. During their meeting Roosevelt suddenly interrupted his report and asked about the condition of horses in occupied Poland. <sup>[155][156][157]</sup>

He also met with many other government and civic leaders in the United States, including [Felix Frankfurter](#), [Cordell Hull](#), [William Joseph Donovan](#), Samuel Cardinal Stritch, and [Stephen Wise](#). Karski also presented his report to media, bishops of various denominations, members of the Hollywood film industry and artists, but without success. Many of those he spoke to did not believe him, or supposed that his testimony was much exaggerated or was propaganda from the Polish government in exile. <sup>[158]</sup>

In 1943 the news about gassing Jews was broadcast from London to The Netherlands. It was also published in illegal newspapers of the [Dutch resistance](#), like in the issue of [Het Parool](#) of September 27, 1943. However, the news was so unbelievable that many assumed it was merely war propaganda. The publications were halted because they were counter-productive for the Dutch resistance. Nevertheless, many Jews were warned that they would be murdered, but as escape was impossible for most of them, they preferred to believe that the warnings were false. <sup>[159][160]</sup>

In September 1940, Captain [Witold Pilecki](#), a member of the Polish underground and a soldier of the Home Army, worked out a plan to enter Auschwitz and volunteered to be sent there, the only known person to volunteer to be imprisoned at Auschwitz. He organized an underground network [Związek Organizacji Wojskowej](#) (*translation: "Union of Military Organizations"*) that was ready to initiate an uprising but it was decided that the probability of success was too low for the uprising to succeed. UMO's numerous and detailed reports became later a principal source of intelligence on Auschwitz for the Western Allies. Pilecki escaped from Auschwitz with information that became the basis of a two-part report in August 1943 that was sent to the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) in London. The report included details about the gas chambers, about "selection," and about the sterilization experiments. It stated that there were three crematoria in Birkenau able to burn 10,000 people daily, and that 30,000 people had been gassed in one day. The author wrote: "History knows no parallel of such destruction of human life." [Raul Hilberg](#) writes that the report was filed away with a note that there was no indication as to the

reliability of the source.<sup>[161]</sup> When Pilecki returned to Poland after the war the communist authorities arrested and accused him of spying for the Polish government in exile. He was sentenced to death in a show trial and was executed on May 25, 1948.

[Rudolf Vrba](#) and Alfred Wetzler, Jewish inmates, escaped from Auschwitz in April 1944, eventually reaching [Slovakia](#). The 32-page document they dictated to Jewish officials about the mass murder at Auschwitz became known as the [Vrba-Wetzler report](#). Vrba had an [eidetic memory](#) and had worked on the *Judenrampe*, where Jews disembarked from the trains to be "selected" either for the gas chamber or slave labor. The level of detail with which he described the transports allowed Slovakian officials to compare his account with their own deportation records, and the corroboration convinced the Allies to take the report seriously.<sup>[145][162]</sup>

Two other Auschwitz inmates, Arnost Rosin and Czesław Mordowicz escaped on May 27, 1944, arriving in Slovakia on June 6, the day of the [Normandy landing](#) (D-Day). Hearing about Normandy, they believed the war was over and got drunk to celebrate, using dollars they'd smuggled out of the camp. They were arrested for violating currency laws, and spent eight days in prison, before the *Judenrat* paid their fines. The additional information they offered the *Judenrat* was added to Vrba and Wetzler's report and became known as the Auschwitz Protocols. They reported that, between May 15 and May 27, 1944, 100,000 Hungarian Jews had arrived at Birkenau, and had been killed at an unprecedented rate, with human fat being used to accelerate the burning.<sup>[163]</sup>

The BBC and *The New York Times* published material from the Vrba-Wetzler report on June 15<sup>[164]</sup> and June 20, 1944. The subsequent pressure from world leaders persuaded Miklos Horthy to bring the mass deportations of Jews from Hungary to Auschwitz to a halt on July 9, saving up to 200,000 Jews from the extermination camps.<sup>[163]</sup>

Death marches (1944–1945)

Main article: [Death marches \(Holocaust\)](#)

By mid 1944, the Final Solution had largely run its course. Those Jewish communities within easy reach of the Nazi regime had been largely exterminated, in proportions ranging from more than 90 percent in Poland to about 25 percent in France. In May, Himmler claimed in a speech that "The Jewish question in Germany and the occupied countries has been solved."<sup>[165]</sup> During 1944, in any case, the task became steadily more difficult. German armies were evicted from the Soviet Union, the Balkans and Italy, and German allies were either defeated or were switching sides to the Allies. In June, the western Allies landed in France. Allied air attacks and the operations of partisans made rail transport increasingly difficult, and the objections of the military to the diversion of rail transport for carrying Jews to Poland more urgent and harder to ignore.

At this time, as the Soviet armed forces approached, the camps in eastern Poland were closed down, any surviving inmates being shipped west to camps closer to Germany, first to Auschwitz and later to Gross Rosen in [Silesia](#). Auschwitz itself was closed as the Soviets advanced through Poland. The last 13 prisoners, all women, were killed in Auschwitz II on November 25, 1944; records show they were "*unmittelbar getötet*" ("killed outright"), leaving open whether they were gassed or otherwise disposed of.<sup>[166]</sup>

Despite the desperate military situation, great efforts were made to conceal evidence of what had happened in the camps. The gas chambers were dismantled, the crematoria dynamited, mass graves dug up and the corpses

cremated, and Polish farmers were induced to plant crops on the sites to give the impression that they had never existed. In October 1944, Himmler, who is believed to have been negotiating a secret deal with the Allies behind Hitler's back, ordered an end to the Final Solution. But the hatred of the Jews in the ranks of the SS was so strong that Himmler's order was generally ignored. Local commanders continued to kill Jews, and to shuttle them from camp to camp by forced "death marches" until the last weeks of the war. <sup>[167]</sup>

Already sick after months or years of violence and starvation, prisoners were forced to march for tens of miles in the snow to train stations; then transported for days at a time without food or shelter in freight trains with open carriages; and forced to march again at the other end to the new camp. Those who lagged behind or fell were shot. Around 250,000 Jews died during these marches. <sup>[168]</sup>

The largest and best-known of the death marches took place in January 1945, when the Soviet army advanced on Poland. Nine days before the Soviets arrived at Auschwitz, the SS marched 60,000 prisoners out of the camp toward Wodzislaw, 56 km (35 miles) away, where they were put on freight trains to other camps. Around 15,000 died on the way. [Elie Wiesel](#) and his father, Shlomo, were among the marchers:

#### Liberation

Main articles: [Battle of Berlin](#), [Death of Adolf Hitler](#), [Prague Offensive](#), and [Victory in Europe Day](#)

The first major camp, Majdanek, was discovered by the advancing Soviets on July 23, 1944. Auschwitz was liberated, also by the Soviets, on January 27, 1945; Buchenwald by the Americans on April 11; [Bergen-Belsen](#) by the British on April 15; [Dachau](#) by the Americans on April 29; Ravensbrück by the Soviets on the same day; [Mauthausen](#) by the Americans on May 5; and Theresienstadt by the Soviets on May 8. <sup>[170]</sup> Treblinka, [Sobibor](#), and Belzec were never liberated, but were destroyed by the Nazis in 1943. Colonel William W. Quinn of the U.S. 7th Army said of Dachau: "There our troops found sights, sounds, and stenches horrible beyond belief, cruelties so enormous as to be incomprehensible to the normal mind." <sup>[171][172]</sup>

In most of the camps discovered by the Soviets, almost all the prisoners had already been removed, leaving only a few thousand alive—7,000 inmates were found in Auschwitz, including 180 children who had been experimented on by doctors. <sup>[174]</sup> Some 60,000 prisoners were discovered at Bergen-Belsen by the British 11th Armoured Division, <sup>[175]</sup> 13,000 corpses lay unburied, and another 10,000 died from [typhus](#) or malnutrition over the following weeks. <sup>[176]</sup> The British forced the remaining SS guards to gather up the corpses and place them in mass graves. <sup>[177]</sup>

The BBC's [Richard Dimbleby](#) described the scenes that greeted him and the British Army at Belsen: <sup>[178]</sup>

*Here over an acre of ground lay dead and dying people. You could not see which was which ... The living lay with their heads against the corpses and around them moved the awful, ghostly procession of emaciated, aimless people, with nothing to do and with no hope of life, unable to move out of your way, unable to look at the terrible sights around them ... Babies had been born here, tiny wizened things that could not live ... A mother, driven mad, screamed at a British sentry to give her milk for her child, and thrust*

*the tiny mite into his arms ... He opened the bundle and found the baby had been dead for days. This day at Belsen was the most horrible of my life.*

## Victims and death toll

Further information: [The Destruction of the European Jews](#) and [The War Against the Jews](#)

The number of victims depends on which definition of "the Holocaust" is used. Donald Niewyk and Francis Nicosia write in *The Columbia Guide to the Holocaust* that the term is commonly defined<sup>[5]</sup> as the mass murder, and attempt to wipe out, European Jewry, which would bring the total number of victims to just under six million—around 78 percent of the 7.3 million Jews in occupied Europe at the time.<sup>[190]</sup>

Broader definitions include approximately 2 to 3 million Soviet POWs, 2 million ethnic Poles, up to 1,500,000 Romani, 200,000 handicapped, political and religious dissenters, 15,000 homosexuals and 5,000 Jehovah's Witnesses, bringing the death toll to around 11 million. The broadest definition would include 6 million Soviet civilians, raising the death toll to 17 million.<sup>[5]</sup> R.J. Rummel estimates the total [democide](#) death toll of Nazi Germany to be 21 million. Other estimates put total casualties of Soviet Union's citizens alone to about 26 million.<sup>[191]</sup>

Since 1945, the most commonly cited figure for the total number of Jews killed has been six million. The [Yad Vashem](#) Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority in [Jerusalem](#), writes that there is no precise figure for the number of Jews killed. The figure most commonly used is the six million attributed to [Adolf Eichmann](#), a senior SS official.<sup>[192]</sup> Early calculations range from 5.1 million from [Raul Hilberg](#), to 5.95 million from Jacob Leschinsky. Yisrael Gutman and Robert Rozett in the *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust* estimate 5.59–5.86 million.<sup>[193]</sup> A study led by Wolfgang Benz of the Technical University of Berlin suggests 5.29–6.2 million.<sup>[194][195]</sup> Yad Vashem writes that the main sources for these statistics are comparisons of prewar and postwar censuses and population estimates, and Nazi documentation on deportations and murders.<sup>[194]</sup> Its Central Database of Shoah Victims' Names currently holds close to 3 million names of Holocaust victims, all accessible online. Yad Vashem continues its project of collecting names of Jewish victims from historical documents and individual memories.<sup>[196]</sup>

## Jews

Hilberg's estimate of 5.1 million, in the third edition of *The Destruction of the European Jews*, includes over 800,000 who died from "ghettoization and general privation"; 1,400,000 killed in open-air shootings; and up to 2,900,000 who perished in camps. Hilberg estimates the death toll of Jews in Poland as up to 3,000,000.<sup>[197]</sup> Hilberg's numbers are generally considered to be a conservative estimate, as they typically include only those deaths for which records are available, avoiding statistical adjustment.<sup>[198]</sup>

British historian [Martin Gilbert](#) used a similar approach in his *Atlas of the Holocaust*, but arrived at a number of 5.75 million Jewish victims, since he estimated higher numbers of Jews killed in Russia and other locations.<sup>[199]</sup> [Lucy S. Dawidowicz](#) used pre-war census figures to estimate that 5.934 million Jews died (see table below).<sup>[200]</sup>

There were about 8 to 10 million Jews in the territories controlled directly or indirectly by the Nazis (the uncertainty arises from the lack of knowledge about how many Jews there were in the Soviet Union). The six million killed in the

Holocaust thus represent 60 to 75 percent of these Jews. Of Poland's 3.3 million Jews, over 90 percent were killed. The same proportion were killed in [Latvia](#) and [Lithuania](#), but most of [Estonia](#)'s Jews were evacuated in time. Of the 750,000 Jews in Germany and Austria in 1933, only about a quarter survived. Although many German Jews emigrated before 1939, the majority of these fled to [Czechoslovakia](#), France or the Netherlands, from where they were later deported to their deaths. In Czechoslovakia, Greece, the Netherlands, and Yugoslavia, over 70 percent were killed. More than 50 percent were killed in Belgium, Hungary, and [Romania](#). It is likely that a similar proportion were killed in [Belarus](#) and [Ukraine](#), but these figures are less certain. Countries with notably lower proportions of deaths include [Bulgaria](#), Denmark, France, Italy, and Norway.

The number of people killed at the major [extermination camps](#) is estimated as: [Auschwitz-Birkenau](#): 1.4 million; <sup>[105]</sup> [Treblinka](#): 870,000; <sup>[120]</sup> [Belzec](#): 600,000; <sup>[108]</sup> [Majdanek](#): 360,000; <sup>[114]</sup> [Chelmno](#): 320,000; <sup>[110]</sup> [Sobibór](#): 250,000. <sup>[118]</sup> This gives a total of over 3.8 million; of these, 80–90% were estimated to be Jews. These seven camps thus accounted for half the total number of Jews killed in the entire Nazi Holocaust. Virtually the entire Jewish population of Poland died in these camps. <sup>[180]</sup>

In addition to those who died in the above extermination camps, at least half a million Jews died in other camps, including the major concentration camps in Germany. These were not extermination camps, but had large numbers of Jewish prisoners at various times, particularly in the last year of the war as the Nazis withdrew from Poland. About a million people died in these camps, and although the proportion of Jews is not known with certainty, it was estimated to be at least 50 percent. Another 800,000 to one million Jews were killed by the *Einsatzgruppen* in the occupied Soviet territories (an approximate figure, since the *Einsatzgruppen* killings were frequently undocumented). <sup>[202]</sup> Many more died through execution or of disease and malnutrition in the ghettos of Poland before they could be deported.

By country

The following figures from [Lucy Dawidowicz](#) show the annihilation of the Jewish population of Europe by (pre-war) country: <sup>[180]</sup>

Non Jewish victims

Slavs

Main article: [Generalplan Ost](#)

One of Hitler's ambitions at the start of the war was to exterminate, expel, or enslave most or all Slavs from their native lands so as to make [living space](#) for German settlers. This plan of genocide <sup>[203]</sup> was to be carried into effect gradually over a period of 25–30 years. <sup>[204]</sup>

Ethnic Poles

Further information: [Nazi crimes against ethnic Poles](#), [Occupation of Poland \(1939–1945\)](#), and [Pacification operations in German-occupied Poland](#)

The actions taken against ethnic Poles were not on the scale of the genocide of the Jews. Most Polish Jews (90%) perished during the Holocaust, while most Christian Poles (94%) survived the brutal German occupation. <sup>[205]</sup>

German Nazi planners in November 1939 called for nothing less than "the complete destruction" of the Polish

people.<sup>[206]</sup> "All Poles", [Heinrich Himmler](#) swore, "will disappear from the world". The Polish state under German occupation was to be cleared of ethnic Poles and settled by German colonists.<sup>[207]</sup> Of the Poles, by 1952 only about 3–4 million of them were supposed to be left residing in the former Poland, and then only to serve as slaves for German settlers. They were to be forbidden to marry, the existing ban on any medical help to Poles in Germany would be extended, and eventually Poles would cease to exist. On August 22, 1939, about one week before the onset of the war, Hitler "prepared, for the moment only in the East, my '[Death's Head](#)' formations with orders to kill without pity or mercy all men, women and children of Polish descent or [language](#). Only in this way can we obtain the living space we need."<sup>[208]</sup>

Nazi planners decided against a genocide of ethnic Poles on the same scale as against ethnic Jews, it could not proceed in the short run since "such a solution to the Polish question would represent a burden to the German people into the distant future, and everywhere rob us of all understanding, not least in that neighbouring peoples would have to reckon at some appropriate time, with a similar fate".<sup>[206]</sup> Between 1.8 and 2.1 million non-Jewish Polish citizens perished in German hands during the course of the war, about four-fifths of whom were ethnic [Poles](#) with the remaining fifth being ethnic minorities of [Ukrainians](#) and [Belarusians](#), the vast majority of them civilians.<sup>[182][183]</sup> At least 200,000 of these victims died in concentration camps with about 146,000 being killed in [Auschwitz](#). Many others died as a result of general massacres such as in the [Warsaw Uprising](#) where between 120,000 and 200,000 civilians were killed.<sup>[209]</sup> The policy of the Germans in Poland included diminishing food rations, conscious lowering of the state of hygiene and depriving the population of medical services. The general mortality rate rose from 13 to 18 per thousand.<sup>[210]</sup> Overall, about 5.6 million of the victims WW2 were Polish citizens,<sup>[183]</sup> both Jewish and non-Jewish, and over the course of the war Poland lost 16 percent of its pre-war population; approximately 3.1 million of the 3.3 million Polish Jews and approximately 2 million of the 31.7 million non-Jewish Polish citizens died at German hands during the war.<sup>[211]</sup> Over 90 percent of the death toll came through non-military losses, as most of the civilians were targeted by various deliberate actions by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union.<sup>[209]</sup>

Ethnic Yugoslavs

Main article: [World War II persecution of Serbs](#)

In the [Balkans](#), up to 581,000 Yugoslavs were killed by the Nazis and their [Ustaše](#) fascist allies in [Yugoslavia](#).<sup>[212][213]</sup> German forces, under express orders from Hitler, fought with a special vengeance against the Serbs, who were considered [Untermensch](#).<sup>[214]</sup> The [Ustaše](#) collaborators conducted a systematic extermination of large numbers of people for political, religious or racial reasons. The most numerous victims were [Serbs](#). [Bosniaks](#) and [Croats](#) were also victims of [Jasenovac](#). According to the U.S. Holocaust Museum:

"The Ustaša authorities established numerous concentration camps in Croatia between 1941 and 1945. These camps were used to isolate and murder Serbs, Jews, Roma, Muslims [[Bosniaks](#)], and other non-Catholic minorities, as well as Croatian political and religious opponents of the regime."

The USHMM and [Jewish Virtual Library](#) report between 56,000 and 97,000 persons were killed at the [Jasenovac concentration camp](#).<sup>[215][216][217]</sup> However, [Yad Vashem](#) reports 600,000 deaths at [Jasenovac](#).<sup>[218]</sup>

As per the most recent study, *Bosnjaci u Jasenovackom logoru* ("Bosniaks in Jasenovac concentration camp") by the author Nihad Halilbegovic, at least 103,000 [Bosniaks](#) (Bosnian Muslim Slavs) perished during Holocaust at the hands of the Nazi regime and Croatian Ustaše. According to the study "unknown is the full number of Bosniaks who were murdered under Serb or Croat alias or national name" and "large numbers of Bosniaks were killed and listed under [Roma](#) populations", therefore in advance sentenced to death and extermination.<sup>[219][220]</sup>

#### East Slavs

Main articles: [Occupation of Belarus by Nazi Germany](#) and [Reichskommissariat Ukraine](#)

In [Belarus](#), Nazi Germany imposed a regime in the country that was responsible for burning down some 9,000 villages, deporting some 380,000 people for slave labour, and killing hundreds of thousands of civilians. More than 600 villages, like Khatyn, were burned along with their entire population and at least 5,295 [Belarusian](#) settlements were destroyed by the Nazis and some or all of their inhabitants killed. Altogether, 1,670,000 civilians (18 percent of the population) were killed during the three years of German occupation,<sup>[221]</sup> including 245,000 Jews killed by the [Einsatzgruppen](#).<sup>[200]</sup>

#### Soviet POWs

Main article: [Nazi crimes against Soviet POWs](#)

According to [Michael Berenbaum](#), between two and three million Soviet prisoners-of-war—or around 57 percent of all Soviet POWs—died of starvation, mistreatment, or executions between June 1941 and May 1945, and most those during their first year of captivity. According to other estimates by [Daniel Goldhagen](#), an estimated 2.8 million Soviet POWs died in eight months in 1941–42, with a total of 3.5 million by mid-1944.<sup>[222]</sup> The [USHMM](#) has estimated that 3.3 million of the 5.7 million Soviet POWs died in German custody—compared to 8,300 of 231,000 British and American prisoners.<sup>[223]</sup> The death rates decreased as the POWs were needed to work as slaves to help the German war effort; by 1943, half a million of them had been deployed as slave labor.<sup>[181]</sup>

#### Romani people

Main article: [Porajmos](#)

Because the Roma and Sinti are traditionally a secretive people with a culture based on [oral history](#), less is known about their experience of the genocide than about that of any other group.<sup>[224][225]</sup> [Yehuda Bauer](#) writes that the lack of information can be attributed to the Roma's distrust and suspicion, and to their humiliation, because some of the basic [taboos](#) of Romani culture regarding hygiene and sexual contact were violated at Auschwitz. Bauer writes that "most [Roma] could not relate their stories involving these [tortures](#); as a result, most kept silent and thus increased the effects of the massive [trauma](#) they had undergone."<sup>[226]</sup>

The treatment of Romanis was not consistent in the different areas that Nazi Germany conquered. In some areas (e.g. Luxembourg and the Baltic countries), the Nazis killed virtually the entire Romani population. In other areas (e.g. Denmark, Greece, Norway), there is no record of Romanis being subjected to mass killings.<sup>[227]</sup>

Donald Niewyk and Frances Nicosia write that the death toll was at least 130,000 of the nearly one million Roma and Sinti in Nazi-controlled Europe.<sup>[224]</sup> Michael Berenbaum writes that serious scholarly estimates lie between 90,000 and 220,000.<sup>[228]</sup> A detailed study by the late Sybil Milton, formerly senior historian at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, calculated a death toll of at least 220,000 and possibly closer to 500,000, but this study explicitly excluded the [Independent State of Croatia](#) where the genocide of Romanies was intense.<sup>[229][230]</sup> [Martin Gilbert](#) estimates a total of more than 220,000 of the 700,000 Romani in Europe.<sup>[231]</sup> [Ian Hancock](#), Director of the Program of Romani Studies and the Romani Archives and Documentation Center at the University of Texas at Austin, has argued in favour of a higher figure of between 500,000 and 1,500,000.<sup>[232]</sup> Hancock writes that, proportionately, the death toll equaled "and almost certainly exceed[ed], that of Jewish victims."<sup>[233]</sup>

Before being sent to the camps, the victims were herded into [ghettos](#), including several hundred into the [Warsaw Ghetto](#).<sup>[85]</sup> Further east, teams of [Einsatzgruppen](#) tracked down Romani encampments and murdered the inhabitants on the spot, leaving no records of the victims. They were also targeted by the puppet regimes that cooperated with the Nazis, e.g. the [Ustaše](#) regime in [Croatia](#), where a large number of Romani were killed in the [Jasenovac concentration camp](#). The genocide analyst [Helen Fein](#) has stated that the Ustashe killed virtually every Romani in Croatia.<sup>[235]</sup>

In May 1942, the Romani were placed under the same labor and social laws as the Jews. On December 16, 1942, [Heinrich Himmler](#), Commander of the [SS](#) and regarded as the "architect" of the Nazi genocide,<sup>[236]</sup> issued a decree that "Gypsy *Mischlinge* (mixed breeds), Romani, and members of the clans of Balkan origins who are not of German blood" should be sent to Auschwitz, unless they had served in the [Wehrmacht](#).<sup>[237]</sup> On January 29, 1943, another decree ordered the deportation of all German Romani to Auschwitz.

This was adjusted on November 15, 1943, when Himmler ordered that, in the occupied Soviet areas, "sedentary Gypsies and part-Gypsies (*Mischlinge*) are to be treated as citizens of the country. Nomadic Gypsies and part-Gypsies are to be placed on the same level as Jews and placed in concentration camps."<sup>[238]</sup> Bauer argues that this adjustment reflected Nazi ideology that the Roma, originally an Aryan population, had been "spoiled" by non-Romani blood.<sup>[239]</sup>

Disabled and mentally ill

Main articles: [Nazi eugenics](#), [Action T4](#), [Erbkrank](#), [Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Offspring](#), [Rhineland Bastard](#), and [Schloss Hartheim](#)

*Action T4* was a program established in 1939 to maintain the [genetic](#) purity of the German population by killing or [sterilizing](#) German and Austrian citizens who were judged to be disabled or suffering from [mental disorder](#).<sup>[243]</sup>

Between 1939 and 1941, 80,000 to 100,000 mentally ill adults in institutions were killed; 5,000 children in institutions; and 1,000 Jews in institutions.<sup>[244]</sup> Outside the mental health institutions, the figures are estimated as 20,000 (according to Dr. Georg Renno, the deputy director of [Schloss Hartheim](#), one of the euthanasia centers) or 400,000 (according to Frank Zeireis, the commandant of Mauthausen concentration camp).<sup>[244]</sup> Another 300,000 were forcibly sterilized.<sup>[245]</sup> Overall it has been estimated that over 200,000 individuals with mental disorders of all

kinds were put to death, although their mass murder has received relatively little historical attention. Despite not being formally ordered to take part, [psychiatrists](#) and psychiatric institutions were at the center of justifying, planning and carrying out the atrocities at every stage, and "constituted the connection" to the later annihilation of Jews and other "undesirables" in the Holocaust.<sup>[246]</sup> After strong protests by the German Catholic and Protestant churches on August 24, 1941 Hitler ordered the cancellation of the T4 program.<sup>[247]</sup>

The program was named after [Tiergartenstraße 4](#), the address of a villa in the Berlin borough of [Tiergarten](#), the headquarters of the *Gemeinnützige Stiftung für Heil und Anstaltspflege* (General Foundation for Welfare and Institutional Care),<sup>[248]</sup> led by [Philipp Bouhler](#), head of Hitler's private chancellery (*Kanzlei des Führer der NSDAP*) and Karl Brandt, Hitler's personal physician.

Brandt was tried in December 1946 at [Nuremberg](#), along with 22 others, in a case known as *United States of America vs. Karl Brandt et al.*, also known as the [Doctors' Trial](#). He was [hanged](#) at [Landsberg Prison](#) on June 2, 1948.

## Homosexuals

Main articles: [Institut für Sexualwissenschaft](#), [Pink triangle](#), and [Persecution of homosexuals in Nazi Germany and the Holocaust](#)

Between 5,000 and 15,000 homosexuals of German nationality are estimated to have been sent to concentration camps.<sup>[188]</sup> James D. Steakley writes that what mattered in Germany was criminal intent or character, rather than criminal acts, and the "*gesundes Volksempfinden*" ("healthy sensibility of the people") became the leading normative legal principle.<sup>[249]</sup> In 1936, Himmler created the "Reichszentrale zur Bekämpfung der Homosexualität und Abtreibung" ("Reich Central Office for the Combating of Homosexuality and Abortion").<sup>[250]</sup> Homosexuality was declared contrary to "wholesome popular sentiment,"<sup>[188]</sup> and homosexuals were consequently regarded as "defilers of German blood." The Gestapo raided [gay bars](#), tracked individuals using the address books of those they arrested, used the subscription lists of gay magazines to find others, and encouraged people to report suspected homosexual behavior and to scrutinize the behavior of their neighbours.<sup>[188][249]</sup>

Tens of thousands were convicted between 1933 and 1944 and sent to camps for "rehabilitation", where they were identified by yellow armbands<sup>[251]</sup> and later pink triangles worn on the left side of the jacket and the right trouser leg, which singled them out for [sexual abuse](#).<sup>[249]</sup> Hundreds were [castrated](#) by [court order](#).<sup>[252]</sup> They were humiliated, tortured, used in [hormone](#) experiments conducted by SS doctors, and killed.<sup>[188]</sup> Steakley writes that the full extent of gay suffering was slow to emerge after the war. Many victims kept their stories to themselves because homosexuality remained criminalized in postwar Germany. Around two percent of German homosexuals were persecuted by Nazis.<sup>[249]</sup>

## The political left

German [communists](#), socialists and [trade unionists](#) were among the earliest domestic opponents of Nazism<sup>[253]</sup> and were also among the first to be sent to concentration camps. Hitler claimed that communism was a Jewish ideology which the Nazis termed "Judeo-Bolshevism". Fear of communist agitation was used as justification for the

[Enabling Act of 1933](#), the law which gave Hitler his original [dictatorial](#) powers. [Hermann Göring](#) later testified at the [Nuremberg Trials](#) that the Nazis' willingness to repress German communists prompted President [Paul von Hindenburg](#) and the German elite to cooperate with the Nazis. The first concentration camp was built at Dachau, in March 1933, to imprison German communists, socialists, trade unionists and others opposed to the Nazis. <sup>[254]</sup>

Communists, social democrats and other [political prisoners](#) were forced to wear a [red triangle](#).

Hitler and the Nazis also hated German leftists because of their resistance to the party's racism. Many leaders of German leftist groups were Jews, and Jews were especially prominent among the leaders of the [Spartacist uprising](#) in 1919. Hitler already referred to [Marxism](#) and "Bolshevism" as a means of "the international Jew" to undermine "racial purity" and survival of the [Nordics](#) or Aryans, as well to stir up socioeconomic [class](#) tension and labor unions against the government or state-owned businesses. Within the concentration camps such as Buchenwald, German communists were privileged in comparison to Jews because of their "racial purity". <sup>[255]</sup>

Whenever the Nazis occupied a new territory, members of communist, socialist, or [anarchist](#) groups were normally to be the first persons detained or executed. Evidence of this is found in Hitler's infamous [Commissar Order](#), in which he ordered the summary execution of all political [commissars](#) captured among Soviet soldiers, as well as the execution of all Communist Party members in German held territory. <sup>[256][257]</sup> [Einsatzgruppen](#) carried out these executions in the east. <sup>[258]</sup>

[Nacht und Nebel](#) (German for "Night and Fog") was a directive ([German: \*Erlass\*](#)) of Hitler on December 7, 1941 signed and implemented by Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces [Wilhelm Keitel](#), resulting in [kidnapping](#) and [disappearance](#) of many political activists throughout Nazi Germany's occupied territories.

Freemasons

Main articles: [Suppression of Freemasonry#Nazi Germany and Occupied Europe](#) and [Nacht und Nebel](#)

In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler wrote that [Freemasonry](#) had "succumbed" to the Jews: "The general pacifistic paralysis of the national instinct of self-preservation begun by Freemasonry is then transmitted to the masses of society by the Jewish press." <sup>[259]</sup>

Freemasons were sent to concentration camps as political prisoners, and forced to wear an inverted [red triangle](#). <sup>[260]</sup> The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum believes "because many of the

Freemasons who were arrested were also Jews and/or members of the political opposition, it is not known how many individuals were placed in Nazi concentration camps and/or were targeted only because they were Freemasons." <sup>[261]</sup> However, the Grand Lodge of Scotland estimates the number of Freemasons executed

between 80,000 and 200,000 <sup>[262]</sup>

Jehovah's Witnesses

Main article: [Persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses in Nazi Germany](#)

Refusing to pledge allegiance to the Nazi party or to serve in the military, roughly 12,000 [Jehovah's Witnesses](#) were forced to wear a purple triangle and were placed in camps where they were given the option of renouncing their faith and submitting to the state's authority. Between 2,500 and 5,000 were killed. <sup>[189]</sup> Historian Detlef Garbe,

director at the Neuengamme (Hamburg) Memorial, writes that "no other religious movement resisted the pressure to conform to National Socialism with comparable unanimity and steadfastness." <sup>[263]</sup>

### Uniqueness of the Nazi Holocaust

Dr. Shimon Samuels, director for International Liaison of the Simon Wiesenthal Centre, describes the acrimonious debate that exists between "specificists" and "universalists". The former fear [debasement](#) of the *Holocaust* by invidious comparisons, while the latter places the *Holocaust* alongside non-Jewish experiences of mass extermination as part and parcel of the global context of [genocide](#). Dr. Samuels considers the debate, *ipso facto*, to dishonour the memory of the respective victims of *each* genocide. In his words, "Each case is specific as a threshold phenomenon, while each also adds its unique memory as signposts along an incremental continuum of horror." [264]

**See also**

Involvement of other countries and nationals

**General:**

[Évian Conference](#)

[Bermuda Conference](#)

[International response to the Holocaust](#)

[Struma](#)

[Voyage of the Damned](#)

**Collaborators:** The response of individual states.

**Rescuers:**

[Ángel Sanz Briz](#)

[Aristides de Sousa Mendes](#)

[Chiune Sugihara](#)

[Corrie ten Boom](#)

[Folke Bernadotte](#)

[Henryk Slawik](#)

[Ho Feng Shan](#)

[Hugh O'Flaherty](#)

[Irena Sendler](#)

[Jan Karski](#)

[Jorge Pelasca](#)

[List of people who assisted Jews during the Holocaust](#)

[List of Righteous Among the Nations by country](#)

[Luiz Martins de Souza Dantas](#)

[Oskar Schindler](#)

[Raoul Wallenberg](#)

[Rescue of the Danish Jews](#)

[Rescue of Jews by Poles during the Holocaust](#)

[Resistance during the Holocaust](#)

[Righteous Among the Nations](#)

[Witold Pilecki](#)

[Żegota](#)

[Związek Organizacji Wojskowej](#)

Aftermath and historiography

**General discussion:**

[Aftermath of the Holocaust](#)  
[Aftermath of World War II](#)  
[Denazification](#)

**Legal response:**

[Command responsibility](#)  
[Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide](#)  
[Doctors' Trial](#)  
[German war crimes](#)  
[Nuremberg Trials](#)  
[Trial of Adolf Eichmann](#)  
[War crimes of the Wehrmacht](#)

**Victims:** [List of victims of Nazism.](#)

**Survivors:** [List of famous Holocaust survivors](#)

[Sh'erit ha-Pletah](#)  
[Wiedergutmachung](#)

**Memorials:**

[Holocaust memorials](#)  
[Yom HaShoah](#)  
[Yad Vashem](#)

**Cultural, political, and scholarly responses:**

[Holocaust research](#)  
[Holocaust theology](#)  
[The Holocaust in art and literature](#)  
[Holocaust denial](#)  
[Criticism of Holocaust denial](#)  
[Days of Remembrance of the Victims of the Holocaust](#)

**For the issue of where responsibility for the Holocaust lies:**

[The Holocaust \(responsibility\)](#)  
[Command responsibility](#)  
For an account of the [historiographical](#) positions: [Functionalism versus intentionalism](#) and [Historikerstreit](#).

**For further resources:** [Holocaust \(resources\)](#)

Miscellaneous

[Animal rights and the Holocaust](#)

Anti-Semitism

[Antiziganism](#)

[Aryanization](#)

[Bereavement in Judaism](#)

Jews outside Europe under Nazi occupation

Related links

Armenian genocide

Bosnian genocide

Darfur genocide

[Genocide](#)

[Holodomor](#)

Katyn Massacre

[Maafa](#)

Rwandan genocide

[The Killing Fields](#)

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3. ^ <sup>a b c</sup> "Holocaust," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2009: "the systematic state-sponsored killing of six million Jewish men, women, and children and millions of others by Nazi Germany and its collaborators during World War II. The Germans called this "the final solution to the Jewish question ..."
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108. ^ <sup>a b</sup> Belzec, Yad Vashem.
109. ^ Coordinates from: Belzec extermination camp
110. ^ <sup>a b c</sup> Chelmno, Yad Vashem.

111. ^ Coordinates from: [Chelmno extermination camp](#)
112. ^ Jasenovac, Yad Vashem.
113. ^ Coordinates from: [Jasenovac concentration camp](#)
114. ^ <sup>a b</sup> Majdanek, Yad Vashem.
115. ^ Coordinates from: Majdanek
116. ^ Maly Trostinets, Yad Vashem.
117. ^ Coordinates from: [Maly Trostenets extermination camp](#)
118. ^ <sup>a b</sup> Sobibór, Yad Vashem.
119. ^ Coordinates from: [Sobibor extermination camp](#)
120. ^ <sup>a b</sup> Treblinka, Yad Vashem.
121. ^ Coordinates from: [Treblinka extermination camp](#)
122. ^ "Aktion Reinhard" (PDF). Yad Vashem. [http://www1.yadvashem.org/odot\\_pdf/microsoft%20word%20-%205724.pdf](http://www1.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/microsoft%20word%20-%205724.pdf).
123. ^ Although [Chelmno](#) was not technically part of [Aktion Reinhard](#), it began functioning as an extermination camp in December 1941. [Yadvashem.org](#)
124. ^ [Rudolf Vrba](#) cited in [Berenbaum, Michael](#) (1993). *The world must know: the history of the Holocaust as told in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*. Boston: Little, Brown. pp. 114. ISBN 0-316-09134-0.
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127. ^ <sup>a b</sup> [Piper, Franciszek](#). "Gas chambers and Crematoria," in Berenbaum, Michael & Gutman, Yisrael (eds). *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp*, Indiana University Press and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 1994, p. 170.
128. ^ <sup>a b</sup> [Piper, Franciszek](#). "Gas chambers and Crematoria," in Berenbaum, Michael & Gutman, Yisrael (eds). *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp*, Indiana University Press and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 1994, p. 163.
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130. ^ [Piper, Franciszek](#). "Gas chambers and Crematoria," in Berenbaum, Michael & Gutman, Yisrael (eds). *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp*, Indiana University Press and the United States Holocaust

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### Further reading

External links, references, and other resources are listed at [Holocaust \(resources\)](#).