

Phases of the Holocaust

Source: materials supplied by the Milwaukee Jewish Council

Phase I: Exclusion 1933-1939

On March 23, 1933, The Enabling Act was forced through the Reichstag, Germany's governing body, giving dictatorial powers to Adolf Hitler, leader of the Nazi party.

The Nazis immediately put into practice their racial ideology that Germans were "racially superior" to all other races. Jews, who numbered nearly 600,000 in Germany, were the principal target of Nazi hatred. Jews were identified as an "inferior race". Nazis spewed hate-mongering propaganda that unfairly blamed Jews for Germany's economic depression and the country's defeat in WWI.

First measures of exclusion and discrimination against the Jews in 1933 included:

- April 1: A boycott of Jewish shops and businesses
- April 7: The law for the Re-establishment of the Civil Service
- April 11: Definition of a Jew – anyone with Jewish parents or grandparents Mischling or hybrid: determined by religion of one's grandparent
- April 22: Germans were not to consult Jewish doctors
- April 25: The law against the overcrowding of German schools
- May 10: Books published by or about Jews are burnt in public
- Spring: Jewish professors are expelled from the universities
- Summer: Jewish writers and artists are prohibited from practicing their craft

Further measures of exclusion and discrimination included the Nuremburg Laws (400) of September 15, 1935

- Laws for the Protection of German Blood and Honor
- German citizenship restricted to those of "German or Kindred Blood"
- Jews cannot display the German flag
- Jews prohibited from marrying or having sexual relations with persons of German blood
- Jews could not attend public schools, go to theaters, cinemas, or vacation resorts, or reside, or even walk, in certain sections of German cities
- Jewish property and businesses were seized outright or sold to Germans at bargain prices.

Additional measures of exclusion and discrimination were passed in 1938

- Jews must register all property
- Any Jew convicted of any offense, including traffic violations, was arrested
- All Jews over 15 had to carry identification
- Any street names in Germany that had Jewish origins are replaced
- Newly born Jewish children are to be named from an approved list of names
- Jewish curfew is imposed
- Jews cannot own radios or have a driver's license

Kristallnacht: November 9 and 10, 1938

The Night of Broken Glass

- 200 synagogues destroyed
- 7500 shops looted
- 30,000 Jews sent to concentration camps
- 1000 Jews killed
- 6 million dollars of broken glass

Phase II: Separation and Ghettoization 1939-1944

(Source: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum)

The Nazis did many things they thought would humiliate and shame the Jews. An example of this is when they forced the Jews to wear a symbol of their Judaism; a yellow six-pointed star, outlined in black, with the word JUDE on it.

- Those wearing the star could not travel on trains, walk certain streets, sit in the park, and if caught without it – you were arrested
- Any Jew or anyone defined as a Jew over the age of 6 had to wear the star
- Right sleeved arm band – 4 inches high or firmly sewed to the left breast of clothing

During WWII, ghettos were city districts in which the Germans concentrated the Jewish population and forced them to live under miserable conditions.

- 800 Ghettos established over the course of the war
- Over 1 million Jews occupied the ghettos
- Some existed for a few days, others for months or years



- Closed off by walls, or barbed wire fences
- Extremely crowded and unsanitary
- Chronic food shortages and starvation
- Not enough supplies; such as adequate clothing in severe weather
- Outbreaks of disease; typhoid
- Thousands do not survive the ghettos

Largest Ghetto was located in Warsaw, Poland (See map above)

Established on October 12, 1940

- 450,000 Jews crowded into an area of 1.3 square miles with 11 miles of walls
- Judenrat has authority – Jewish Councils
- Underground organizations: smuggling food or weapons, youth movements, cultural events

German SS and police units carried out the first deportations from the Warsaw ghetto to the Treblinka extermination camp in July, 1942. By September, 300,000 Jews had been deported. A second deportation was carried out in January, 1943, in which 5,000 more Jews left. The third stage was carried out in the spring of 1943 and some 50,000 more Jews were sent to Treblinka.

Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

- January, 1943
- Led by an armed self-defense unit known as the Jewish Fighting Organization
- Commanded by Mordecai Anielewicz
- Attacked German escorts who were deporting a column of Jews
- Germans suspended deportations; but resumed in April, 1943
- Jewish fighters constructed bunkers, manufactured Molotov cocktails
- Jews continued to fight the Germans until May, 1943
- Germans burned the ghetto building by building and reduced it to rubble
- Largest, most significant Jewish uprising

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Phase III: Extermination 1941-1945

Einsatzgruppen (mobile killing units) were squads of German SS and police personnel who murdered over one million Jews and other victims, usually through mass shootings. They also employed carbon monoxide gas as a means of extermination.

On September 19, 1941, the advancing German army captured Kiev, the capital of the Ukraine. Soon afterward, Jews were required to appear at a Jewish Cemetery. From there they were marched to Babi Yar, a ravine two miles from the city. Forced to remove all their clothing and surrender all their belongings, the Jews were then shot. The bodies fell into the ravine. The next group would be forced to lie down on top of the corpses; a police marksman would then shoot each Jew in the neck with a submachine gun. 33,771 Jews were murdered in two days.

Concentration Camps / Labor Camps (established as early as 1933):

- Authority and Management: S.S. Officers led by Himmler
- Worked 10-14 hours per day
- Very little food provided
- Crowded barracks
- Resistance led to death
- Dehumanizing practices
 - Stripped
 - Shaved
 - Numbered
 - Prison clothing
 - Selection
- Medical experiments
- Many died of exhaustion, starvation or exposure



Abraham Lewent, who had been sent from the Warsaw ghetto to Majdanek and later transferred to several concentration camps in Germany, wore this jacket as part of the uniform issued to him upon his arrival in the Buchenwald concentration camp in 1944.

Wannsee Conference, January 20, 1942

- Held in a suburb of Berlin
- Reinhard Heydrich: Head of SS Security
- Fifteen total participants / Government officials
- Responsible for carrying out “The Final Solution” – the deliberate, carefully planned destruction of European Jewry



Extermination Camps / “Death Factories”

- Auschwitz (Leader: Hoess)
 - Largest camp – 19 square miles / 6,000 guards
 - Concentration camp
 - Slave labor camp
 - Killing center (Birkenau)
 - 1,100,000 killed
- Majdanek – 500,000 killed
- Chelmnno – 150,000 killed
- Sobibor – 250,000 killed
- Belzec – 600,000 killed
- Treblinka – 870,000 killed
- Gas Chambers
 - At the height – 8,000 gassed each day
 - Deceptive practices used
 - Teeth extracted / hair shaved
 - Procedure took 30 – 45 minutes
 - Zyklon B (poisonous gas)
 - Sonderkommandos
 - Ovens could accommodate 3-5 bodies at a time

Phase IV: Liberation 1945

Soviet soldiers were the first to enter a concentration camp. On July 23, 1944, Soviet troops arrived at the death camp, Majdanek. The soldiers were shocked by what they saw.

The SS tried to hide, bury and burn the evidence of their crime; but they ran out of time.

Death Marches: When they realized the war was lost, SS officials evacuated the camps.

- Winter of 1944/45
- Eliminate eye witnesses
- Conceal war crimes
- 59 Separate marches / Hundreds of thousands of prisoners
- Moved westward in the dead of winter
- January 1945, Auschwitz
 - 66,000 prisoners evacuated
 - Put on freight trains / marched
 - 25% Died en route / shot, exposure, starvation
- Some lasted over a month covering hundreds of miles

What was left behind?

- Auschwitz
 - Only those too ill to walk were left
 - 29 Store rooms burned / 6 remained
 - 348,820 Men's suits
 - 836,255 Women's coats
 - 14,000 lbs of human hair
 - 13,964 Carpets
- Bergen Belsen
 - 60,000 Still alive
 - Typhus
 - 14,000 die in first days of Liberation
 - Had to be burned to the ground
- Over-eating could be fatal
- Feelings of emptiness and guilt
- SS guards turned over to prisoners
- Community members force to view the camps

April 30, 1945: Hitler commits suicide

May 7, 1945: Germany surrenders

Nuremberg Trials (November 20, 1945 – October 1, 1946)

3 Types of Crimes

1. Crimes against Peace
2. War Crimes (violated customs of warfare: slave labor, killing of POWs, plunder of private property)
3. Crimes against Humanity (murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation, persecution on political or racial grounds)

Series #1:

- 22 Stand trial
- 12 Sentenced to death by hanging
- 3 Life imprisonment
- 4 Prison terms 10-20 years
- 3 Acquitted



Survivors of Buchenwald, 1945

Series #2

- 185 Stand trial (12 groups)
 - Physicians
 - Officers of mobile killing units
 - Camp administration
 - Judges
 - Generals
 - Business executives (Zyklon B)
 - Companies who uses slave labor (Krupp)
- 35 Acquitted
- 37 Death sentences (all but 5 later commuted)
- 6 Death sentences
- 77 Free

Most denied responsibility stating they were just “following directions.”

Many fled to South America; some assisted by the Vatican

ODESSA – secret route from Austria to Italy to S. America (organization of SS men)

Approximately 10,000 end up in the United States (disguised as anti-communists)

What happened to the SS officers?

Goebbels: killed wife, six children and himself

Himmler: tried to buy freedom; committed suicide

Goring: committed suicide; took poison in his cell

Mengele: drowned in 1979; lived for over 30 years under an assumed name in South America

Eichmann: escaped to Argentina in 1946; discovered by Nazi hunters in 1960 in Buenos Aires; brought back to Israel; tried, convicted, hanged, cremated, ashes spread over the sea

Hoss: hanged in Auschwitz next to gas chambers

What happened to the Jews?

Jewish survivors could not return home. Their communities were shattered, their homes destroyed or occupied by strangers. With nowhere to go, they were forced to live in camps set up on the sites where they had been imprisoned.

From 1945 to 1952 more than 250,000 displaced Jewish persons lived in (DP) camps in Germany, Austria and Italy.

- Attempts to reunite families
- Schools established
- Weddings
- Jewish holidays were celebrated
- Cultural rebirth
- Zionist movement – emigration to British occupied Palestine (some illegal) 136,000
- Emigration to the United States 80,000
- Emigration to other countries 20,000

On May 14, 1948, the United States and the Soviet Union recognized the state of Israel.