

Important Terms Defined

Aktion (German): The term used for anti-Jewish operations carried out against Jews under Nazi orders. It most commonly was used for deportation and killing operations.

Allies: The nations fighting Nazi Germany, Italy, and Japan during World War II, primarily Great Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union.

Antisemitism: Hostility toward or hatred of Jews as a religious or ethnic group, often accompanied by social, economic, or political discrimination.

Appellplatz: German word for roll call square where prisoners were forced to assemble.

Aryan: Term used in Nazi Germany to refer to non-Jewish and non-Roma (Gypsy) Caucasians. Northern Europeans with especially “Nordic” features such as blond hair and blue eyes were considered by so-called race scientists to be the most superior of Aryans, members of a “master race.”

Auschwitz: The largest Nazi concentration camp complex, located 37 miles west of Krakow, Poland. The Auschwitz main camp (Auschwitz I) was established in 1940. In 1942, a killing center was established at Auschwitz-Birkenau (Auschwitz II). In 1941, Auschwitz-Monowitz (Auschwitz III) was established as a forced labor camp. More than 100 subcamps and labor detachments were administratively connected to Auschwitz III.

Bystander: The person who is aware of a crime or a negative act but chooses to do nothing to help or try to stop it.

Concentration camp: Throughout German-occupied Europe, the Nazis established camps to detain and, if necessary, kill so-called enemies of the state, including Jews, Gypsies, political and religious opponents, members of the national resistance movements, homosexuals, and others. In addition to concentration camps, the Nazi regime ran several other kinds of camps including labor camps, transit camps, prisoner-of-war camps, and killing centers.

Death march: A forced march of Nazi camp prisoners toward the German interior at the end of World War II. Such marches began when the German armed forces, trapped between the Soviets to the east and the advancing Allied troops from the west, attempted to prevent the liberation of camp inmates. Treated with tremendous brutality during the forced marches, thousands were shot or died of starvation or exhaustion.

Dehumanization: As a political or social measure, it is intended to change the manner in which a person or group of people are perceived, reducing the target group to objects not worthy of human rights.

Deportation: Removal of people from their areas of residency for purposes of resettlement elsewhere. With regard to the Jews of Europe during the Holocaust, deportation by the Nazis meant removal to another city, ghetto, concentration camp, or killing center.

Einsatzgruppen: Mobile units of the German Security Police and SD augmented by Order Police and Waffen-SS personnel that followed the German army as it invaded the nations of central and eastern Europe and responsible for the mass executions of Jews and other perceived “racial” and ideological enemies.

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Euthanasia: Usually refers to the inducement of a painless death for a chronically or terminally ill individual. In Nazi usage, however, “euthanasia” was a euphemistic term for a clandestine program which targeted for systematic killing institutionalized mentally and physically disabled patients, without the consent of themselves or their families.

Evian Conference: A conference convened by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in July 1938 to discuss the problem of refugees. Thirty-two countries met in Evian-les-Bains. However, not much was accomplished, since most western countries were reluctant to accept Jewish refugees.

Fascism: A political movement that exalts the collective nation, and often race, above the individual. It advocates for: a centralized totalitarian state headed by a charismatic leader; expansion of the nation, preferably by military force; forcible suppression and sometimes physical annihilation of opponents both real and perceived.

“Final Solution”: The Nazi plan to annihilate the European Jews.

Generalgouvernement (General Government): The part of German-occupied Poland not directly annexed to Germany, attached to German East Prussia, or incorporated into the German occupied Soviet Union.

Genocide: The destruction of an ethnic or national group of people to the extent that they no longer exist as a defined unit. Genocide includes mass murder and the destruction of culture and political institutions.

Gestapo: The German Secret State Police, which was under SS control. It was responsible for investigating political crimes and opposition activities and was directly involved in implementing the murder of Jews and other Nazi victims during the Holocaust.

Ghetto: A confined area of the city in which members of a minority group are compelled to live.

Gypsy: A traditional term, sometimes perceived as pejorative, for Roma, a nomadic people whose ancestors migrated to Europe from India. Nazi Germany and its Axis partners persecuted and killed large numbers of Roma during the era of the Holocaust.

Holocaust: The state-sponsored, systematic persecution and annihilation of six million European Jews by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945.

Jewish Council (Judenrat) - a Jewish council established in many of the German or Axis occupied Jewish communities in Europe. These councils were appointed by the Germans to implement various occupier/persecutorial directives within the ghettos.

Kapo: A concentration camp prisoner selected to oversee other prisoners on labor details. The term is often used generically for any concentration camp prisoner to whom the SS gave authority over other prisoners.

Killing centers: Unlike concentration camps, which served primarily as detention and labor centers, killing centers (also referred to as “extermination camps” or “death camps”) were almost exclusively “death factories.” German SS and police murdered nearly 2,700,000 Jews in the killing centers at Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka, Auschwitz-Birkenau, and Majdanek.

Important Terms Defined

Kindertransport: The name given to a rescue operation carried out by British citizens for Jewish children from Greater Germany, following the Kristallnacht Pogrom, and the British government's declared willingness to allow 10,000 children, under the age of 17, to enter Great Britain.

Kristallnacht: Usually referred to as the "Night of Broken Glass." It is the name given to the violent anti-Jewish pogrom of November 9 and 10, 1938. Instigated primarily by Nazi Party officials and the Nazi Storm Troopers, the pogrom occurred throughout Germany, annexed Austria, and the Sudetenland region of Czechoslovakia.

Nuremberg Laws: Racial laws put into effect by the German parliament on September 15, 1935 in Nuremberg. These laws became the legal basis for the racist anti-Jewish policy. The first, the Reich Citizenship Law, deprived German Jews of their citizenship and pertinent rights. The second, the Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor, outlawed marriages of Jews and non-Jews, forbade Jews from employing German females of childbearing age, and prohibited Jews from displaying the German flag. Many additional regulations were attached to the two main statutes.

Nuremberg Trials: The trials of major Nazi figures in Nuremberg, Germany in 1945 and 1946 before the International Military Tribunal.

Perpetrator: Someone who does something that is morally wrong or criminal.

Pogrom: A Yiddish word meaning "devastation" used to describe large-scale acts of violence against Jewish communities.

Prejudice: Prejudging or making a decision about a person or group of people without sufficient knowledge. Prejudicial thinking is frequently based on stereotypes.

Propaganda: False or partly false information used by a government or political party intended to sway the opinions of the population.

"Resettlement": A Nazi euphemism for deportation and murder.

Refugee: One who flees in search of safety, as in times of war, political oppression, or religious persecution.

SS: German abbreviation for Schutzstaffel (literally, protection squads). A paramilitary formation of the Nazi party initially created to serve as bodyguards to Hitler and other Nazi leaders. It later took charge of political intelligence gathering, the German police and the central security apparatus, the concentration camps, and the systematic mass murder of Jews and other victims.

Scapegoat: To blame an individual or group for something based on that person or group's identity when, in reality, the person or group is not responsible. Prejudicial thinking and discriminatory acts can lead to scapegoating. The individual or group blamed is the "scapegoat."

Stereotype: An oversimplified generalization about a person or group of people without regard for individual differences. Even seemingly positive stereotypes that link a person or group to a specific positive trait can have negative consequences.

Important Terms Defined

Sonderkommandos (special detachments): In killing centers, Sonderkommandos consisted of those prisoners selected to remain alive as forced laborers to facilitate the killing process, particularly the disposal of corpses. Those selected were only allowed to live a short time before being murdered as potential witnesses and replaced by newly-arrived prisoners.

Synagogue: In Judaism, a house of worship and learning.

Swastika: An ancient eastern symbol appropriated by the Nazis as their emblem.

Wannsee Conference: A conference held on January 20, 1942 beside Lake Wannsee in Berlin. At this conference, the apparatus was coordinated to carry out the “Final Solution.”

Weimar Republic: Name of the parliamentary democracy established in Germany from 1919-1933, following the collapse of Imperial Germany and preceding Nazi rule.

Victim: One who is targeted for persecution or death by another.

Yellow star: A badge featuring the Star of David (a symbol of Judaism) used by the Nazi regime during the Holocaust as a method of visibly identifying Jews.

*The vocabulary list and definitions are adapted from the glossary of terms created by USC Shoah Foundation (<https://iwitness.usc.edu/sfi/>), the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/glossary>), and from previous glossaries used for The FHM's *Speak Up, Speak Now!* ® program.

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