WITNESS TO HISTORY
The Holocaust Remembered by Florida Survivors
An original exhibition of The Florida Holocaust Museum

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The Holocaust was the systematic, bureaucratic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of six million Jews by the Nazi regime and their collaborators over a twelve-year period between 1933 and 1945.

The socio-economic destruction following World War I combined with harsh reparations demanded from Germany, contributed to the country’s depression. With the political changes following the Treaty of Versailles, Germany became a democracy with a constitution and elections. Many political parties competed for seats and several extreme groups were formed. The Nazi Party, a right-wing extremist group, was approached by President Paul von Hindenburg to create a coalition government in 1933, and Adolf Hitler was appointed as the new chancellor. The persecution of Jews began immediately and continued to grow into genocide.

Throughout World War II, governments, community leaders, and ordinary people made choices based on their circumstances, personal ethics, morality, or political forces. The Nazis carried out their plans to murder European Jews and others, while some individuals, groups, and governments chose, at great risk, to protect and rescue those who were targeted. Thousands of others chose to participate in the Nazis’ racial schemes. Most people did nothing. Although they were aware of what was happening, the majority of victims had no one to turn to for help.

The choices people made affected their behaviors under specific circumstances. Throughout this exhibition there are examples of perpetrators, bystanders, victims, and upstanders (people who speak or act in support of an individual or cause).

Witness to History examines how the actions of individuals, groups, and governments contributed to the Holocaust and explores the reactions of Florida Survivors to events as they unfolded.

January 30th, 1933
Adolf Hitler is appointed chancellor of Germany.

February 27th, 1933
The Reichstag (Germany’s parliament building) is burned down. German President von Hindenburg signs the emergency decree allowing the government to arrest political opponents without a specific charge.

March 22nd, 1933
Dachau concentration camp is established for political prisoners.

April 1st, 1933
Members of the Nazi Party organize a nationwide boycott of Jewish-owned businesses.

August 19th, 1934
Hitler abolishes the office of president and assumes the role of dictator of Germany.

September 15th, 1935
The Nuremberg Race Laws strip German Jews of their citizenship and criminalize “enterracial” marriage.

September 1st, 1939
Germany invades Poland, beginning World War II. Britain and France declare war on Germany two days later. German authorities immediately require Jews in Poland to wear an identifying symbol on their clothing and enforce other racial policies.

November 15th, 1940
The Warsaw ghetto is established and sealed, confining 350,000 Jews. Over the course of the war, the Germans established at least 1,000 ghettos in which to separate Jewish communities from non-Jewish populations in Nazi-occupied Poland and the Soviet Union.

October 15th, 1941
German authorities begin deportations of Jews from Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia to ghettos in occupied Eastern Europe.

December 8th, 1941
The first mass killing operation begins at Chelmno, located in Nazi-occupied Poland.

January 20th, 1942
The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising begins when German forces enter the ghetto to begin its liquidation. Organized Jewish fighters led the revolt against German troops while other residents went into hiding. Lasting almost a month, the rebellion was the largest Jewish act of resistance during the war and inspired others held in ghettos and killing centers.

June 6th, 1944
Allied forces land in Normandy, France (“D-Day”).

Summer of 1944 – April 1945
Prisoners are forced to evacuate several concentration camps, in what are now known as death marches.

January 27th, 1945
Soviet forces liberate approximately 7,000 prisoners from Auschwitz concentration camp. Later that spring advancing American and British troops liberate other camps in Western Europe.
Antisemitism

Antisemitism existed long before World War II. Jews have been falsely blamed for many misfortunes, including the death of Christ and even the Black Death. This woodcut from 1493 depicts the murder of Jews over their “involvement” with the Black Death.

The term antisemitism was coined in 1879 by Wilhelm Marr to describe the hatred of Jews, not only because of their religion but also because of perceived racial differences.

Often placed on the fringe of society, Jews were not permitted to join most professions. Frequently, their only options were to take jobs forbidden to Christians and, as a result, they worked as tax-collectors, peddlers, and money-lenders. This contributed to the negative stereotypes of Jews as money-focused and greedy.

Jews were forced into segregated ghettos and required to wear identifying symbols as early as the 13th century. During the Middle Ages and beyond, institutionalized discrimination and pogroms (violent attacks) became prominent and the Jewish community at large was subjected to targeted assaults. In most of Europe, Jews were not permitted to hold positions in the government and marriages between Jews and non-Jews were illegal.

Beginning with the French Revolution, conditions for the Jewish diaspora (those involuntarily sent away from their homelands) began to improve. Diasporic Jewish communities were emancipated and began to acculturate with those of their adoptive nations, and eventually seen as citizens in their own right. German Jews became an integral part of the nation’s commercial and cultural landscape just as any other Germans. Assimilation did not mean acceptance, however. The rise of the eugenics (racial purity) movement led to a reframing of Jewish communities as a homogenous group, and religious oppression evolved into racism.

Persecution of the Jews did not begin with the Holocaust. Jews were seen as the “other” because of their monotheism (belief in only one god). Once Christianity became prominent, rumors of Jewish complicity in the death of Jesus Christ arose. By the fourth century, the responsibility of Jews for the crucifixion of Christ had been codified into the Gospels.

The Nazis used propaganda to spread their party’s agenda and, under Hitler, created a government agency to incite hatred of the Jews. “The Reich Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda” regulated culture and enforced ideology through the use and control of art, books, film production, the national and foreign press, radio, and other forms of mass communication.

The美誉 of Jews vanished. 1879: Antisemitism was coined by Wilhelm Marr to describe the hatred of Jews, not only because of their religion but also because of perceived racial differences.

University of Chicago, Special Collections

The Florida Holocaust Museum, courtesy of Dr. David Shapiro

The book "Trust No Fox in the Green Meadow and No Jew on His Oath!" by kindergarten teacher Elvira Bauer is emblematic of modern antisemitism. Specifically targeting children, the book demonizes Jews by depicting them as monstrous and was used to indoctrinate youth in Nazi ideology.

The Nazi propaganda poster advertising a special issue of Der Stürmer on "Rassenschande" ("race pollution")

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

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The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

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Jewish communities across the globe were no different from any other community. Western European Jews were assimilated into society and saw themselves as citizens first and Jews second. Some Jewish men served in the German Army during World War I, making it especially difficult for them to acknowledge the gradual changes in how they were treated. Many believed they would be exempt from anti-Jewish laws and persecution because they were war veterans.

Though Jews consisted of less than 1% of the population after World War I, as a group they held a significant number of jobs in law, medicine, trade, banking, commerce, publishing, and print media. In 1933, Jews made up 16% of Germany's lawyers, 11% of its doctors, and owned 60% of all retail and wholesale clothing stores. Many were even involved in government service positions.

While there was some assimilation and acculturation, many Eastern European Jews lived differently from their western counterparts. In Poland, Hungary, Romania, and the Soviet Union, many chose or were forced to distance themselves from the general populace. Living separately in shtetls (predominantly Jewish towns or villages), most Eastern European Jews were not assimilated, spoke their own language (Yiddish), had their own district, traditional manner of dress, and were religiously observant.
Persecution of Non-Jews

“Persecution of Non-Jews” specifically refers to Jews targeted by the Nazis, but they were not the only victims of the Nazi regime. Other minority groups were also persecuted in a similar fashion, either as biological threats to the growth of the “Aryan” race or as political threats in their defiance of Nazi authority.

The Nazis invaded Poland on September 1st, 1939, to expand their Lebensraum (“living space”) in preparation for the projected growth of their “Aryan” population. Nazi officials targeted cultural and religious institutions as well as leaders throughout Poland in an attempt to prevent any resistance, resulting in the imprisonment of hundreds of thousands. Approximately one million people were sent to forced labor camps and hundreds of thousands to concentration camps. It is estimated that at least one million Polish citizens were murdered by the Germans during World War II.

Jehovah’s Witnesses were among those who faced religious persecution by the Nazi regime. For refusing to obey Nazi authorities, approximately 6,000 Jehovah’s Witnesses were incarcerated and 2,000 were sent to concentration camps. Another 250 were executed and nearly 1,000 perished in camps and prisons.

The Nazis deemed Roma and Sinti (Gypsies) as racially inferior, and subjected them to forced labor, internment, and murder under the Nazi regime. Many Roma were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau where authorities had organized a special “Gypsy family camp.” They were specifically selected for medical experimentation. Some were exempt from forced deportations by having “pure Gypsy blood,” becoming assimilated, or having served in the military, but often these exemptions were simply ignored. Approximately 220,000 (25% of their entire population) were killed during World War II.

Operation T4 was a secret euthanasia program that targeted individuals with disabilities, as they were seen as a “biological threat” to the Nazi vision of a “master race.” The target population was so large in scope that officials used gas chambers and crematoria for these mass killings. A pile of random ashes would be collected and sent to victims’ family members, alongside a forged death certificate. In spite of public outcry, the program discreetly persisted, ultimately claiming approximately 200,000 to 250,000 lives.

In 1939, disabled children became the euthanasia program’s first victims, murdered by lethal injection or starvation. Later that year the program was expanded to include adults with disabilities. By the end of 1941, it was estimated that at least 30,000 persons with disabilities had been killed. The program continued to claim more victims. Hitler secretly signed an authorization that protected participating medical staff from prosecution. The name “T4” came from the street name of the program’s office, die Euthanasieanstalt für Kinder mit Behinderungen in Berlin (Euthanasia Institute for Children with Disabilities).
Nazis in Power
Adolf Hitler and the Third Reich

“Before Hitler came to power, my parents were very highly regarded from all the other people, we had a very nice business. But once they [the Nazis] came there, the whole situation changed.” — Testimony of Herbert Kohlher, Survivor

The stock market crash in 1929 caused a worldwide economic crisis and Germany greatly suffered. Many German businesses went bankrupt and millions were unemployed. The Treaty of Versailles ended World War I. After Germany’s surrender (lost) was considered by many Germans to be unjust and vindictive. Germany had been forced to give up land, reduce the size of its military, and pay reparations totaling 33 billion gold marks. The atmosphere was ripe to exploit a growing sense of resentment among the German people.

Although the views outlined by Hitler’s manifesto Mein Kampf (‘My Struggle’) did not gain much traction, crowds were won over by his ideology, promises, and charisma. On February 27, 1933, a month after he was appointed chancellor of Germany, the Reichstag (German parliament building) burned down, a consequence Hitler and the civilian government convinced President von Hindenburg to grant their emergency powers over Germany. This gave them rights to confiscate property and persecute political opponents, and to suspend basic freedoms. The following month, Hitler established the first concentration camps. In the years that followed, he declared the Nazi Party to be the only legal political party. After President von Hindenburg died in 1934, he proclaimed himself Führer. Hitler called for an end to the Versailles Treaty and ultimately set off the events of World War II with the invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939.

**Timeline**

- September 1919
  - Adolf Hitler joins the German Workers’ Party.
- February 24th, 1920
  - The German Workers’ Party is renamed the National Socialist German Workers’ Party (NSDAP, “Nazi” for short).
- 1930
  - Hitler becomes chairman of the NSDAP.
- January 30th, 1933
  - Hitler is appointed chancellor of Germany.
- March, 1933
  - Hitler gives himself the title of Führer (‘Leader’).
- July of 1941
  - “New Chief of Security Reinhard Heydrich is authorized to plan the Final Solution of the Jewish Question.”
- January 27th, 1943
  - The Auschwitz-Birkenau camp is liberated by the Soviet Army, while concentration camps in western Europe are liberated by Allied forces later that spring.
- April 8th, 1945
  - Hitler commits suicide.
- May 7th, 1945
  - Germany surrenders.
- November 20th, 1945
  - The Nuremberg Trials begin.
On November 9, 1938, anti-Jewish demonstrations erupted across Germany. Jewish-owned businesses and synagogues were ransacked nationwide over the span of two days. These riots were not as "spontaneous" as was alleged. In reality, they were part of a state-sponsored sanction of the nation's Jewry. The resulting chaos of what is now known as Kristallnacht ("Night of Broken Glass")

On November 7th, 1938, Herschel Grynszpan, angered by the forced deportation of his parents and thousands of other Polish Jews from Germany, shot and killed Ernst vom Rath, third secretary of the German embassy in Paris. The resulting riots in the streets of Paris, on November 9, 1938, were described by some Germans as a "spontaneous" outpouring of anti-Semitic anger. However, the actual violent activities were planned and organized by Heinrich Himmler and other Nazi leaders. The pogroms were part of a broader Nazi policy of persecution, known as the "Sanctions Law," which was implemented on November 5, 1938. The law, which was passed by the German parliament, the Reichstag, on November 5, 1938, was designed to punish the Jewish community for the alleged assassination of Ernst vom Rath, the German diplomat, by a Polish Jew.

Herschel Grynszpan was born in Lwów, Poland, in 1923. His family moved to Frankfurt, Germany, in 1932, to escape the Nazi regime. He became an apprentice in a Jewish bakery by age 15. On Kristallnacht, his family left the city to escape the violence. Herschel was detained by the German police later that day. Immediately following his arrest, he was released and returned home. The next day, he arrived at the German embassy in Paris and shot and killed Ernst vom Rath. He was arrested and tried in Germany, where he was convicted of murder and sentenced to death. The case of Herschel Grynszpan was widely publicized and became a symbol of the violence and persecution that the Jewish community experienced during the Nazi era.

Walter Loebenberg was born in Wächtersbach, Germany, in 1936, his family moved to Frankfurt in 1937 due to antisemitism. He became an apprentice in a Jewish bakery at age 14. On Kristallnacht, he arrived to find the bakery ransacked and destroyed. He fled to Switzerland to escape the violence. He became a political refugee and eventually settled in the United States. He attended college and became a citizen of the United States. In 1992, the couple founded The Florida Holocaust Museum in St. Petersburg.

On the day of Kristallnacht, the family made plans to leave the country. Walter and his family arrived at Ellis Island in New York but were forced to remain there. His older brother, who was drafted into the U.S. Army, became a citizen of the United States. He returned to Germany and eventually settled in the United States. Walter’s recollection of Kristallnacht can be heard by scanning the QR Code.

Take a photo of this QR Code to hear Walter’s recollection of Kristallnacht.
“Life was not pleasant, but we will survive if we just follow the rules. This was until all of the rules were implemented such as the Star of David, public transport bans, phone bans, and other rules to make life more miserable for the Jews. But after a while we found that we could live without the phones and all of that stuff. And we did...”

- Sabine van Dam, Holocaust Survivor from Naples, Florida

Germany did not erupt with antisemitic fervor over the course of a single night. With Hitler’s appointment to the position of chancellor in 1933, the Nazi Party ratified hundreds of anti-Jewish laws. These laws were insidious, slowly excluding all Jews (practicing Judaism or not) from German public life by 1941. A number of economic sanctions were enforced, and Jews were barred from certain professions and from operating their own businesses. They were also required to declare assets and turn over valuables. Effectively ostracized from the rest of society, Jews were not allowed to visit most public institutions or belong to organizations. Jews were forced to identify themselves by using “Israel” (males) or “Sarah” (females) as middle names, required to use marked passports, and to wear a Star of David patch on their clothing at all times.

The most condemning of these laws were passed on September 15th, 1935, during a special session of the Reichstag held in Nuremberg. Collectively known as the Nuremberg Laws, the Reich Citizenship Law and the Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor simultaneously stripped Jews of most of their rights and standardized the racialization of Nazi antisemitic rhetoric. The Reich Citizenship Law revoked German Jews’ citizenship, while the Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor defined a “Jew” as someone with three or four Jewish grandparents, regardless of whether or not they practiced Judaism. There were also other individuals who were neither German nor Jew but known as Mischlinge. These were people with one or two grandparents born into the Jewish community. “Interracial” relationships or relations between Jews and non-Jews were outlawed. Later addendums forbid relationships with black Germans, Roma, and those with biological or communicable diseases.
Anti-Jewish laws and violence prompted many of Germany’s 600,000 Jews to leave the country. Over 150,000 had fled Germany by 1938. When Germany annexed Austria, the number of Jews living under Nazi rule rose by 185,000 people. Many sought out opportunities to leave but were unable to find countries that would accept them.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt called for an international conference to discuss the refugee crisis. In the summer of 1938, representatives from 32 countries and non-governmental aid organizations met in Evian-les-Bains, France. While the participants of the Evian Conference expressed sympathy for the refugees, most only offered excuses for not accepting more Jewish refugees into their countries. The conference ended with no resolution and most of the participating countries enforced even stricter immigration policies in the aftermath.
More than 400,000 Jews emigrated from Germany between 1933 and 1938. Forced deportation of Jews from Germany began in October of 1941, and by May of 1943 the authorities declared that the Reich was "judenrein" ("free of Jews"). The onset of war, German occupation of territory, and the reluctance of most countries to raise immigration quotas meant that most Jews who were deported were sent to ghettos and concentration camps.

In May 1939, the ocean liner MS St. Louis left Hamburg, Germany, for Havana, Cuba. Almost all of the 937 passengers on board were Jewish refugees seeking asylum. The passengers possessed landing certificates issued by the Cuban government, but a week before the ship set sail, the Cuban president issued a decree invalidating the documents.

It was not until the ship arrived at the port of Havana that passengers learned of the decree denying them entry. The St. Louis was soon ordered out of Cuban waters. It was then sailed near Florida with the hope that its passengers would receive permission from the U.S. government to disembark. The ship was once again prohibited to land and forced to return to Europe. Instead of returning to Germany, 288 passengers were allowed to disembark in Great Britain, the Netherlands accepted 181, Belgium another 214, and the remainder disembarked in France. When Germany invaded Western Europe, those passengers still in Belgium, France, and the Netherlands found themselves under Nazi rule. Only 278 of the St. Louis refugees living in those countries survived.

Miriam Klein Kassenoff, née Klein, was born in 1936 in Košice, Czechoslovakia. After the Nazis occupied Czechoslovakia, her family received papers from Miriam's aunt in Chicago, allowing them to emigrate to the U.S. However, it was not until her father was arrested and interned in a labor camp that her mother made plans for the family to leave. The family left their home and most of their belongings and together with her younger brother and parents, Miriam arrived in New York in 1941.
The Ghettos

Ghettos were created long before the Nazi era, with the first established in 1516 in Venice, Italy. Over 1,000 ghettos were established throughout Nazi-occupied Europe between 1939 and 1945. The ghettos were usually located in the poorest areas of cities and towns and enabled the Nazis to separate Jews from local non-Jews. Some ghettos were closed and others were open, but Jews were forbidden to leave. Ghettos became hugely overcrowded as the Nazis liquidated smaller Jewish communities and forced people into them. The severe lack of basic human necessities contributed to the spread of diseases and high mortality. Ghetto dwellers were plagued by hunger, inhumane living conditions, and hard labor.

In spite of the terror and deprivation, Jews showed bravery in trying to survive one more day. They helped one another within families, organized self-help with communal soup kitchens, and arranged for the clandestine schooling of students. Doctors and nurses continued to provide care for patients. Artists continued to create art and to perform in order to defy dehumanization at the hands of the perpetrators. There were also different kinds of religious responses.

Ghettos were intended to be temporary. In some cases they existed for only a few days, while others were inhabited for years. When the “Final Solution” was implemented in 1941, ghettos were eventually destroyed. Some ghetto inhabitants were rounded up and shot in mass graves nearby. Other Jews were deported to killing centers and a small number were deported to concentration camps and forced-labor camps.

removal&confinement

The Lvov ghetto

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

While the father of Yetti Sterensis was placed in a concentration camp, Yetti and the rest of her family were sent to a ghetto. She was shocked to find her closet empty one day. Her mother confessed to having traded everything, save for one dress. As they no longer had a stable source of income, she had to provide for the family. Yetti lived in St. Petersburg, Florida.

Scan the QR Code to hear Yetti’s recollections of her family’s move into the ghetto.

Holocaust by Bullets

As part of what is now known as the “Holocaust by Bullets”, between 1.5 and over 2 million Jews were murdered by the Einsatzgruppen, German mobile killing squads following the German army with the goal of murdering “the enemy”: communists, partisans, Sinti and Roma, and Jews. These victims were not deported to camps but taken from their homes, marched to the execution sites, and murdered in broad daylight close to their homes. The Einsatzgruppen were helped by local collaborators. Entire Jewish communities were destroyed in this manner.

The Warsaw ghetto

Jews purchase produce from street vendors in the Warsaw ghetto. The Warsaw ghetto was the largest with more than 400,000 Jews crowded into an area of only 1.3 square miles.

The Lodz ghetto

Benjamin Frankel, father of artifact donor and Survivor Solomon Frankel, sketched this map of the Lodz ghetto from memory shortly after liberation. Father and son were confined to the Lodz ghetto after the Germans occupied Poland and were later deported on the same transport to Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Authorized by Rafael Scharf

The Lodz ghetto

Removal & Confinement

The Ghetto

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Before World War II, America was recovering from the Great Depression and many feared the prospect of having to compete with immigrants for already scarce employment opportunities. These looming anxieties eventually honed in on the coming Jewish refugees, leading to the rise of American antisemitism and strict immigration quotas.

With the United States forced into World War II when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941, the U.S. military and other Allied powers worked to defeat the Nazis. Reports of the Nazis’ plan to murder all European Jews reached the U.S. State Department by 1942, and was reported on in the American press, yet no effort was made to aid Europe’s Jewish community.

Despite public outcry and pleas for action made to President Roosevelt, winning the war was prioritized over providing humanitarian aid. It wasn’t until January 22, 1944, that Roosevelt signed an executive order to create the War Refugee Board to rescue and aid Jews and others persecuted by the Nazis. By the war’s end, the United States accepted only 982 refugees from Europe, who were interned at Fort Ontario in Oswego, New York.

Rabbi Stephen S. Wise
Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, an American reform rabbi and Jewish political leader, met with President Roosevelt as early as 1942 to report the existence of the Final Solution. One of the founders of the World Jewish Congress, he was present at the Bermuda Conference in 1943 and presented “A Program for the Rescue of Jews from Nazi Occupied Europe,” which received an agreement by Great Britain to open Palestine for Jewish refugees. Despite this agreement, Wise’s inability to present a strong, unified voice to the government was a major reason for the slow response to the Holocaust.

who knew?
U.S. Response to the Holocaust

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Eric Saul

Refugees crowd outside the U.S. Consulate in Marseilles, France, ca. 1941
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

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United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Fort Ontario Emergency Refugee Shelter, Oswego, New York
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

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“I always emphasize that the reason I’m here is because there were people that helped us.”

- Jacqueline Albin, Survivor, of St. Petersburg, Florida

In spite of its reluctance to deal with the Jewish refugee crisis as a political actor, Great Britain did take some action to rescue Jewish refugee children. Known as the Kindertransport, the British government arranged for 10,000 Jewish children to be transported from Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland into British foster homes, hostels, and families. While these children were spared the fate some suffered, very few ever made their way back home.

Shanghai, China

Although allied with the Nazi regime, Japanese authorities in China allowed exiled Jews to emigrate to Shanghai without a visa. However, pressure from the Nazis eventually led these authorities to separate the growing Jewish community into their own ghetto. Despite their poor living conditions, ghetto residents managed to send information about Japanese troops to Allied officials.

“...and so much noise everywhere... They ate, drank, argued, and washed their children outdoors... People just walked around them as if it were nothing out of the ordinary. Instead, we were the ones who had come from a different planet... It was a long way from our carefully nurtured, sanitized existence in Berlin.”

- Betty Grebenschikoff, of St. Petersburg, Florida
Swedish diplomat and businessman Raoul Wallenberg was recruited by the United States War Refugee Board (WRB) and appointed as the secretary to the Swedish Embassy in Budapest, Hungary. He was sought out to help further the efforts of Sweden’s campaign to rescue the Jews of Nazi-occupied Hungary. Wallenberg was assigned to grant protective passports to those on a specific list, but he went out of his way to hire Jews, bribe officials, and arrange for aid to be given to death march prisoners. Wallenberg saved thousands of Jews before his capture by the Soviets in 1945.

Miep Gies (Netherlands)
After being laid off from her job as a typist, a neighbor arranged for Miep Gies to work for Otto Frank as a customer service representative for his business, Opekta. In return, Gies readily agreed to help Frank hide his family for the duration of the war, tending to the family’s needs while continuing her regular work with the company. Gies managed to retrieve her daughter Anne’s diary after the family’s discovery and arrest, and she gave it to Frank when he returned after liberation as the sole survivor of his family.

Sir Nicholas Winton (Great Britain)
In 1938, 29-year-old stockbroker Nicholas Winton went to Prague at the urging of his friend Martin Blake, a member of the Committee for Refugees from Czechoslovakia (present-day Czech Republic). The committee provided assistance for the thousands of people who became refugees once the Germans annexed the region. Upon his arrival, Winton was asked to help with the cause. After visiting refugee camps and reading reports about the violence against Jews during Kristallnacht, he took leave of the efforts of British organizations to rescue Jewish children on the Kindertransport. He became determined to organize a similar initiative for Czechoslovakian youth. Winton began this endeavor in 1938 and rescued hundreds of children. His personal scrapbooks indicate that over 650 were brought to safety in Great Britain, though the total number is unknown.

Oskar Schindler (Germany)
A businessman from the former Czechoslovakia (present-day Czech Republic), Oskar Schindler initially intended to take advantage of the war’s victims by employing residents of the Cracow ghetto in his enamelware factory, due to the low cost of their maintenance. Upon discovering what happened to those who were deported, however, Schindler made use of his connections to ensure the safety of his workers. Schindler kept 1,200 of his workers safe from certain death when the ghettos were liquidated.

Irena Sendler (Poland)
A senior administrator at the Warsaw Social Welfare Department, Irena Sendler used her position to provide aid in the form of clothing and medicine to Polish Jews, avoiding suspicion by having them register under fake names and with fake illnesses. Sendler worked with Zegota, the Council for Aid to Jews, to bring food, medicine, and clothing to those confined in the Warsaw ghetto. She assisted with smuggling children out of the ghetto and helped to secure hiding places for them. Sendler was eventually arrested and tortured, but she refused to betray her comrades. She was eventually sentenced to death but later released when activists bribed officials.

Chiune Sugihara (Japan)
Upon Germany’s invasion of Poland, thousands of Polish refugees found themselves at the office of the Japanese Vice Consul, Chiune “Sempo” Sugihara, located in Kaunas, Lithuania, as Japan was the only transit country available to those seeking asylum through the Soviet Union. Without explicit instruction, Sugihara issued upwards of 1,800 visas to these asylum seekers, regardless of whether or not they had proper documentation. Sugihara issued at least 2,140 visas before his office was ordered to close.
The Nazis established different types of camps including forced-labor camps, transit camps, prisoner-of-war camps, concentration camps, and killing centers (death camps). Between 1933 and 1945, Nazi prisons were forced into thousands of concentration camps in Europe. Inmates of the camps lived under extremely poor conditions. Meals consisted of watery coffee, meager bread scraps, and “soup” that was little more than watery broth. The barracks were overcrowded and the lack of sanitation and proper medical care resulted in widespread cases of disease. This was in addition to grueling ten to fifteen hour days of forced labor on factory floors or out in the elements. Those too weak to work were punished or killed outright, and those who were deemed unfit to work during initial selections were never given the chance to survive.

The “Final Solution of the Jewish Question” meant the planned murder of European Jews. Six killing centers were established in the occupied territories: Auschwitz-Birkenau, Belzec, Chelmno, Majdanek, Sobibor, and Treblinka. Chelmno and Auschwitz were located in the area of Poland annexed to Germany. Majdanek became the first of these camps to be liberated during the Soviet advance on Poland on July 24th, 1944. The Nazis established different types of camps including forced-labor camps, transit camps, prisoner-of-war camps, concentration camps, and killing centers (death camps). Between 1933 and 1945, Nazi prisons were forced into thousands of concentration camps in Europe. Inmates of the camps lived under extremely poor conditions. Meals consisted of watery coffee, meager bread scraps, and “soup” that was little more than watery broth. The barracks were overcrowded and the lack of sanitation and proper medical care resulted in widespread cases of disease. This was in addition to grueling ten to fifteen hour days of forced labor on factory floors or out in the elements. Those too weak to work were punished or killed outright, and those who were deemed unfit to work during initial selections were never given the chance to survive.

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Throughout Nazi-occupied Europe, large resistance groups coordinated efforts for the defense and sabotage against the Nazis and for the rescue of persecuted people. Underground resistance groups sprang up in Jewish ghettos in Eastern Europe with the goal of organizing uprisings and escapes. Other groups sprouted throughout Belgium, Denmark, and beyond. One notable example is the French Resistance. In addition to providing Allied troops with military intelligence and coordinating sabotage attempts, the Free French Forces fought alongside Allied troops during the invasion of Normandy, eventually liberating Paris on August 25, 1944.

Under the command of Charles de Gaulle, the Free French Forces (FFL) numbered at over 400,000 strong. As the Resistance’s ground unit, they fought the Nazis for the entirety of France’s surrender and occupation.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Pearl Tubiash

Lillian Bielski, née Ticktin, escaped the Lida ghetto in Belarus with her father, brother, and stepmother before joining the Bielski partisan detachment and living in the surrounding forest. She married Tuvia Bielski in the woods where they remained until the end of the war. Under the leadership of the Bielski brothers, over 1,200 men, women, and children were saved.

After the war, Lillian and Tuvia emigrated to Palestine and, in 1956, came to the United States.

Scan the QR Code to hear Lillian describe her husband Tuvia Bielski’s leadership in this 2001 interview.
By January 27th, 1945, Auschwitz had been liberated, and within the next few months, so were most of the remaining camps and subcamps. The Germans intended to hide their crimes by removing surviving prisoners, but in their hasty escape they left behind thousands of dead bodies and emaciated inmates. Allied troops and relief workers attempted to recuperate survivors through medical treatment and much-needed food, yet many died. Allied soldiers finally grasped the full extent of the atrocities that had been committed over the war years and began to collect evidence of crimes against humanity in preparation for the upcoming trials of the perpetrators.

“...The things I saw beggar description. ...The visual evidence and the verbal testimony of starvation, cruelty and bestiality were...overpowering...I made the visit deliberately in order to be in a position to give firsthand evidence of these things if ever, in the future, there develops a tendency to charge these allegations merely to ‘propaganda.’”

- General Dwight D. Eisenhower, in a letter to Chief of Staff George C. Marshall, April 15, 1945
In the aftermath of the war, over 200 Nazi war criminals were indicted on charges of conspiracy, crimes against peace, war crimes, and/or crimes against humanity as defined by the London Charter. The first trial of the Nuremberg Trials, the International Military Tribunal (IMT), tried major Nazi war criminals from November 20th, 1945, to October 1st, 1946. The remaining war criminals were tried for their involvement in Nazi political, economic, and social endeavors over the course of twelve subsequent trials. These tribunals included the Medical Trials from December 9th, 1946, to August 20th, 1947, for physicians charged with enacting the Euthanasia Program and for performing medical experiments on prisoners of war without consent. Subsequent trials were held for the leading officials of major industrial companies for the forced labor of prisoners of war, former Einsatzgruppen, and German armed forces.

The atrocities of the war and the visibility of its perpetrators during subsequent trials finally spurred the international community to action. On December 9th, 1948, the United Nations General Assembly convened to formally outlaw genocide in the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in an effort to prevent such a tragedy from ever happening again.
At the end of World War II, the Allies classified an estimated 11 million people as “displaced persons” (DPs). The United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), founded in November 1943, assisted in the repatriation of millions of refugees. By the end of 1945, more than six million DPs had returned to their home countries. Between 1.5 and 2 million people did not have atome to return to and did not want to return to countries that had become Soviet-controlled.

Assembly centers, known as displaced persons camps, were established in Germany, Italy, and Austria as a means of caring for DPs during their resettlement. Poles constituted the largest group of DPs with an estimated population of 842,000, many of them former forced laborers. A number of DPs from Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, and Ukraine feared returning home due to their collaboration with the Nazis during the war. Nearly 250,000 Jews, mostly survivors from Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, as well as others liberated from concentration camps and killing centers, lived in Jewish DP camps as they had no home to which they could return.

With the establishment of the state of Israel in May 1948, all limitations on Jewish immigration were immediately lifted. Each country had its own immigration quotas. The plight of Holocaust Survivors attempting to emigrate to the U.S. changed after the Displaced Persons Act of 1948, and ultimately 96,000 Survivors were admitted by 1952. Others emigrated to Australia, Canada, Mexico, New Zealand, South Africa, and South America.

In an undated DP camp...

A play performed in Pocking DP camp in Germany under Judy's name in Yiddish, 1946. From left: Magda Quittner, Mickey Quittner, and a fellow DP. The Florida Holocaust Museum, donated by Survivors Magda and Mickey Quittner, photo by Judy Quittner.

Agricultural training farms to prepare DPs for life in Palestine were set up in many DP camps. Kibbutz Nili was built on the former estate of Julius Streicher, publisher of the Nazi antisemitic newspaper Der Stürmer. Survivors were given the farm along with supplies by authorities in the U.S.-controlled zone of Pleikershof, adjacent to Ruchana Medine White of Parrish, Florida. Kibbutz Nili was the birthplace of her daughter Ruchana while living on the kibbutz.

In a Jewish DP camp in Austria. In this and many other DP camps located in close Jewish neighborhoods, the Jewish faith took on new significance. Survivors participated in worship services and received the Torah, the religious text, for their first time. The sanctuary of the Nordico Museum in Linz, Austria.

A play performed in Pocking DP camp in Germany under Judy's name in Yiddish, 1946. From left: Magda Quittner, Mickey Quittner, and a fellow DP. The Florida Holocaust Museum, donated by Survivors Magda and Mickey Quittner, photo by Judy Quittner.

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Lessons For Today

Holocaust education leaves room for us to reflect on the subject and take responsibility for the kind of hate that produced it. Studying history also facilitates awareness of the fact that Ingeborg-like this have and will continue to happen over and over again unless we take action. It is important to remember that prejudice is not a thing of the past. It continues to affect our world today. We must take a stand and set a precedent of zero tolerance for acts of injustice and learn to accept and celebrate the diversity of others.

As a member of civil society, your actions matter.

The history of the Holocaust raises difficult questions about human behavior. By learning about the individual human beings who suffered and died, you can ensure that the Holocaust and its lessons will never be forgotten. It is essential that future generations understand the terrible consequences of unchecked hatred, so they are prepared to stand up and speak out against it. If we are able to integrate the lessons of the Holocaust into our lives, we can help build a better and safer world for future generations.