

Violins of Hope

Richmond



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Overview of Music During the Holocaust

During the Holocaust, music played many different roles. From the rise of Nazi power in Germany to the end of World War II, governments and individuals used music for a variety of reasons. Here are four prominent main themes of music during Nazi Germany and the Holocaust:

- Politics and Propaganda
- Resistance
- Responses
- Memory

Source: <http://holocaustmusic.org/>

Politics & Propaganda

For the Nazis, music was not only a source of national pride, but also a tool for propaganda to influence German society. They felt music had a unique significance and power to seduce and sway the masses. Shortly after the Third Reich gained power in 1933, orchestras and conservatories were nationalized and funded by the state, and popular performers were recruited to serve as propaganda outlets for the Reich. The Nazi Party made widespread use of music in its publicity, and music featured prominently at rallies and other public events. *The Horst Wessel Lied* (Horst Wessel song) was popular and widely sung. Many of the propaganda songs were aimed at the youth, and the Hitlerjugend (Hitler Youth) developed an elaborate music program.

Source: <http://holocaustmusic.org/>



Nazi Party Military Parade

According to an internal Hitler Youth memo, it was
...precisely during celebrations and singing events [that] we have an excellent opportunity to have a political effect wide beyond the typical formation ... Songs possess the strongest community-building power. Thus we use them deliberately at those moments when we want to waken the consciousness of being part of a community, in order to deepen the power of such an experience.

Another Hitler Youth remembers:
...in the songs that we sang, in the poems that we recited, everything was bright, shiny and clear, the sun and earth were ours, and tomorrow so, too, would be the whole world.

Politics & Propaganda (continued)

In 1938, the Entartete Musik (Degenerate Music) exhibition was established in order to identify to the German public what music was ‘degenerate’, to demonstrate its dangers, and celebrate its purging from German society. The Nazis considered “degenerate music” to be music written by or associated with groups they considered “degenerate” such as Jews, LGBT people, Black people, and communists. Author and historian James A. Grymes writes, “To assist with the restoration of Germany’s musical supremacy, the Chamber of Music made sure that only ‘good German music’ such as the compositions of Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Haydn, Mozart, and Wagner were performed.” The Nazi leadership put great effort into removing ‘undesirables’ from Germany’s musical world, and early on jazz and ‘Jewish’ music (and musicians) in particular were a target of attack and censorship.

Jewish musicians were stripped of their positions, and individuals who chose or were forced to remain in Germany formed the Jewish Culture Association (“Jüdischer Kulturbund”) to operate an orchestra, theater, and opera company composed of Jewish performers. This group was dedicated to supplying incomes for Jewish musicians, providing entertainment for Jewish audiences, and preserving Jewish culture. Following the Kristallnacht pogroms on November 1938, the Kulturbund was allowed to continue its activities; however, the discrimination and persecution of Jews had driven many into impoverishment. The number of venues and of ensemble members was reduced and on 11 September 1941, the Kulturbund was officially dissolved.

Source: <http://holocaustmusic.ort.org/>

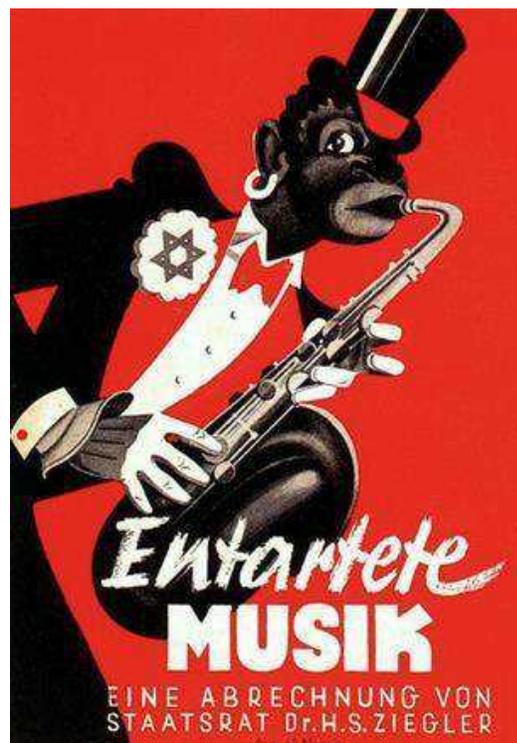
Student Critical Thinking: Politics & Propaganda

- Why do you think the Nazis banned certain types of music? Austrian composer Ernst Krenek’s opera *Jonny Spielt Auf* (Jonny Strikes Up), premiered in 1927 and was one of the most prominent musical icons of the Weimar Republic. This piece of music was considered “entartete,” or “degenerate.”

CONTENT WARNING: Nazi propaganda, anti-Black imagery.

🔊 <http://holocaustmusic.ort.org/politics-and-propaganda/third-reich/jonny-spielt-auf/>.

- Play an excerpt from this song and ask and discuss the following questions:
 - What STYLE of music is this?
 - What CHARACTERISTICS does the music have?
 - Students should describe what they hear (MELODY, HARMONY, TEMPO, TONE, DYNAMICS).
 - How does this music make them feel?
 - Why would the Nazis consider this type of music “degenerate?”
 - How does this song compare to *The Horst Wessel Lied*?



Poster of the Entartete Musik Exhibition (1938).

Source: <http://holocaustmusic.ort.org/>

NOTES TO TEACHER:

Politics & Propaganda

Define *propaganda*, *pogrom*, and *Kristallnacht*.

Give students background on life in Germany after World War I and Hitler’s rise to power.

Resistance

For the vast majority of people living under the Nazis, armed resistance was impossible. When armed resistance was impossible, many people engaged in something called spiritual resistance, which is a form of resistance which focuses on actions that preserve social and spiritual strength within a system of violent oppression. Things like writing, playing, and performing music was an important part of spiritual resistance because it maintained both personal human dignity, and fostered community. But some groups were able to engage in organized resistance and they also often used music to support their cause. These resistance fighters were also called partisans.

Partisan warfare was carried out by clandestine, irregular forces operating inside enemy territory, and was particularly widespread in the dense forests and nearly impassable marshlands of Eastern Europe. Both in ghettos, in hiding places, and in the forests, the partisans often lived communally in hiding, and often lived in close quarters. The partisans shared music and poetry to keep each other's spirits up, and to give voice to the partisan's anger, fears, and grief.

Lyrics focused mainly on themes such as homesickness, concern for family still in the ghettos, grief for murdered loved ones, the desire to take revenge, companionship with their partisan brothers and sisters, and the hope for victory over the Nazis.

The lyrics of one partisan song read; “*zog nit keyn mol az du geyst dem letstn veg,*” (Never say that you have reached the final road). This song was written by the Vilna poet and underground fighter Hirsh Glik, and later became the general anthem of the Jewish partisans. Hirsch Glik was imprisoned in the Vilna ghetto when he wrote this, and worked closely with other Vilna based poets and partisans. Hirsch Glik escaped the ghetto, after which he disappeared, it is presumed he was murdered by the Nazis sometime in August of 1944. Partisan songs were written by groups across Europe, and were often almost in conversation with each other. For example, though there were partisans active in Vilna, and Glik also wrote about them, *Zog Nit Keyn Mol* was actually about the partisan fighters in Warsaw. Glik had heard about the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising during the spring of 1943, and he wrote the song in support of the Warsaw partisans, and to help encourage resistance in the Vilna Ghetto as well.



A Jewish partisan song and dance group, in the Naroch forest in Belorussia, Soviet Union

The songs were often very political, and many of the resistance groups were galvanized first by politics. Political and religious youth movements were incredibly popular in interwar Eastern Europe. These political movements fought for worker's rights like the Jewish Labor Bund, they fought against antisemitism, some were Zionist and fought for Jewish self-determination in the British Mandate in Palestine, and some were religious like the Mizrahi Movement. Importantly, these groups trained young people to organize politically and for their own protection, to be self-reliant, to help others, and some even taught combat skills. All of which would prove incredibly useful for organizing partisan resistance, especially in ghettos. In order to organize, to create bonds between people, and to keep their spirits up in dark times, many of the partisans in these fighting organizations turned to music. Popular Yiddish songs like the Bund's *Di Shvue* (The Oath) and other songs, particularly about worker's rights, such as *Mayn Rue Platz*, and *Di Arbetslozer Marsh* have similar musical styling to the music of the partisans.

NOTES TO TEACHER:

Resistance

Define *partisan*, *resistance*, and *political prisoner*.

Student Critical Thinking: Resistance

Watch the following video, "Introduction to the Jewish Partisans,"

http://www.jewishpartisans.org/t_switch.php?pageName=student+films

- What and why were the Jewish partisans resisting?
- What obstacles and risks did the partisans have to overcome?

Read the following quote from Holocaust Survivor Roman Kent: "Resistance does not have to be with a gun and a bullet." What does this mean? What are other forms of resistance?

Listen to "*Zog nit keynmol az du geyst dem letstn veg*," and read the English translation

<http://holocaustmusic.ort.org/places/ghettos/vilna/zog-nit-keynmol/>

<https://www.ushmm.org/collections/the-museums-collections/collections-highlights/music-of-the-holocaust-highlights-from-the-collection/music-of-the-holocaust/never-say-that-you-have-reached-the-final-road>.

- What is the tone of this song?
- How does it make you feel?
- What makes the words and message of the song so powerful?
- Why were songs like these important to the Jewish partisans?

Listen to Hirsch Glik's songs *Shtil di Nakht* and *Zog Nit Keyn Mol*

- How are these songs similar and different?

Sources: <http://holocaustmusic.ort.org/> and <http://www.jewishpartisans.org/>



Young boy playing his violin in the Warsaw Ghetto, Poland

Responses

As the Nuremberg Laws were enforced in 1935, millions of men, women, and children of the most divergent ancestries and nationalities were locked up in various camps for political, religious, ethnic, social, and ideological reasons. Places of incarceration ranged from jails to work camps and relocation camps, internment camps to forced labor camps and penal camps, to ghettos and concentration camps. Orchestras, choirs, and other musical groups were formed in many ghettos and music-making was rarely occurring as a result of a direct command of the perpetrators. Ghetto songs served three major purposes: documentation of ghetto life, a diversion from reality, and the upholding of community and tradition.

After mass deportations began, Jewish musicians formed orchestras in concentration camps. When Nazi officials forced prisoners to hold concerts, performing music became “a form of ‘useful work’ that could help guarantee survival.” Official orchestras were established at some of the camps and they would perform at the camp gates in the mornings and evenings and weekly concerts. These orchestras would occasionally be the first thing prisoners would see and hear as they arrived at the camps, creating a false sense of security and optimism. Prisoners also continued their own secret music-making away from the watchful eyes of the SS, playing and singing for hope and encouragement.

Source: <http://holocaustmusic.ort.org/>

In the “Violins of Hope” documentary, Hedy Milgrom, Senior VP, Jewish Federation of Cleveland and daughter of a survivor, shares,

“When my mom and her twin sister and her father and other siblings and nieces arrived at Auschwitz, and they tumbled off of this horrible cattle car that had been on for, I think, eight days, whatever length of time it was, the first thing that they heard and saw was this orchestra.

And my mother turned to her twin sister and said — you know, took her by the arm, ‘See? It can’t be all that bad. Right? There’s music here.’”

Some songs such as *Babi Yar*, *Treblinka Dort*, and poet Shmerke Kaczerginski’s *Shtiler, Shtiler*, recalled specific places of extermination. These songs acted both as a warning and as a method of grieving.

Sources:

<https://www.ushmm.org/exhibition/music/detail.php?content=treblinka>

https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Kaczerginski_Shmerke

<https://www.yiddishglory.com/music>

Although many songs were composed and played or sung in camps and ghettos, Jewish prisoners also found solace in older songs. Songs like *Es Brent* (It is Burning) was incredibly popular among Jews during the Holocaust, but was written in 1936 about the Przytyk. Today this song is closely associated with the Holocaust, partially because it was popular among Jews as they were experiencing the Holocaust.

It was common for the Nazi officials to use prisoner musicians for their own purposes and to consciously use music to further break the wills of the prisoners, dehumanizing them through forced music-making. They ordered concentration camp inmates to sing during roll call or while working. Historian Guido Fackler writes, “The guards used singing on command to intimidate insecure prisoners: it frightened, humiliated, and degraded them.” A favorite song choice among guards was the “*Horst-Wessel-Lied*,” the Nazi party anthem. In concentration and death camps, music fluctuated between its use as legitimate survival strategy and necessary diversion of the victims, and its misappropriation and misuse by the perpetrators.



Members of the Mauthausen Concentration Camp orchestra accompany prisoners to the gas chambers

Source: <http://holocaustmusic.ort.org/places/camps/death-camps/auschwitz/camp-orchestras/>

NOTES TO TEACHER:

Responses

Give your students more information about the daily life in ghettos using the articles and photos in the links from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum:

- Łódź Ghetto: <https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005071>
- Warsaw Ghetto: <https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005069>

Student Critical Thinking: Responses

Read the background information on each of the following songs below. Then play the songs from the Łódź Ghetto and read their English translations:

-  • Łódź Ghetto, 1943 I”
<http://holocaustmusic.ort.org/places/ghettos/lodz/d-ghetto-1943-i/>
-  • “Łódź Ghetto, 1943 II”
<http://holocaustmusic.ort.org/places/ghettos/lodz/lodz-ghetto-1943/>
-  • “Łódź Ghetto, 1944”
<http://holocaustmusic.ort.org/places/ghettos/lodz/lodz-ghetto-1944/>

- What do you think of the child-like melody of each song? How does the melody of the song contrast with the lyrics of the song? How are the songs similar/different?
- What are the prominent themes of the three pieces of music? What is their purpose?
- What do the lyrics tell us about the daily life in the ghetto, and the morale of the people that lived there?
- What do you feel is the tone or overall mood of these three songs? Are they the same or do they portray different feelings?

Read and listen to *Babi Yar* (on Yiddish Glory), *Treblinka Dort*, and *Shtiler, Shtiler*

- Why would music be an important tool for grieving during the Holocaust?
Ex. • Normal rituals for grieving like caring for the dying, and burying the dead were impossible.
- Jewish communities were experiencing vast communal violence, and needed ways to grieve communally
What and why were the Jewish partisans resisting?



Anita Lasker-Wallfisch pictured with her cello



The Women's Orchestra at Auschwitz

NOTES TO TEACHER:

Responses

Give your students more information about life in a few of the concentration camps using the articles and photos in the links from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum:

- Dachau: <https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005263>
- Auschwitz: <https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005189>
- Nordhausen https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/media_fi.php?ModuleId=0&MediaId=5685
- Buchenwald <https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005198>

Student Critical Thinking: Responses

Read Anita Lasker-Wallfisch's story: Why would music be an important tool for grieving during the Holocaust?

<http://holocaustmusic.org/places/camps/death-camps/birkenau/anita-lasker-wallfisch/>

- What were a few of the benefits of Anita joining the Birkenau women's orchestra?
 - What advantages did musicians in the camps have over the other prisoners?
 - What other skills or talents do you think made certain prisoners valuable to SS officers and camp officials?
-

Memory

Music has played an integral role in Holocaust commemoration since the immediate post-war period. In the late 1940s, displaced persons camps were established for Jewish refugees. In and outside of these camps many of the survivors of the Nazi genocide used music as a means to record what they had experienced, chronicling mourning and loss, to raise morale, and to imagine their futures after tragedy. Music also formed an integral part of early Holocaust commemoration ceremonies among survivors.

Classical composers have used the Holocaust as subject matter since the immediate post-war years. Their artistic representations and memorials not only commemorate the events but also argue for the relevance of art as a viable tool for social commentary and protest. The decades since 1945 have also seen a growing interest in, and engagement with, the music produced during the Nazi era itself.

Yiddish song in particular has undergone an astonishing revival, despite the impact of the Holocaust and the virtual destruction of Yiddish culture in Europe. Particularly since the 1960s, klezmer, Yiddish protest songs, and other kinds of Yiddish music have become increasingly popular and have continued to grow and change with the times. In 2018 a Yiddish revival of the popular musical "Fiddler on the Roof" (*Fidler afn Dakh*) premiered at the Museum of Jewish Heritage's stage and after several extensions moved uptown to 42nd Street where it remained until January of 2020. Just before, in 2016, Paula Vogel's Tony Award winning play "Indecent" began.

Source: <http://holocaustmusic.org/>



Read more about Kiev & Babi Yar:

<https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005421>

<http://holocaustmusic.ort.org/memory/memorials/babi-yar/>

Play an excerpt of “*Babi Yar*” and read the translation as it plays. Ask the following questions:

Translation: <http://shostakovich.hilwin.nl/works/ds1130.html>

“Babi Yar” <http://holocaustmusic.ort.org/memory/memorials/babi-yar/>

- What STYLE of music is this?
- What CHARACTERISTICS does the music have?
- Describe what you hear (MELODY, HARMONY, TEMPO, TONE, DYNAMICS).
- How does this music make you feel?
- How does this song capture the memory of Babi Yar?

Violins of Hope

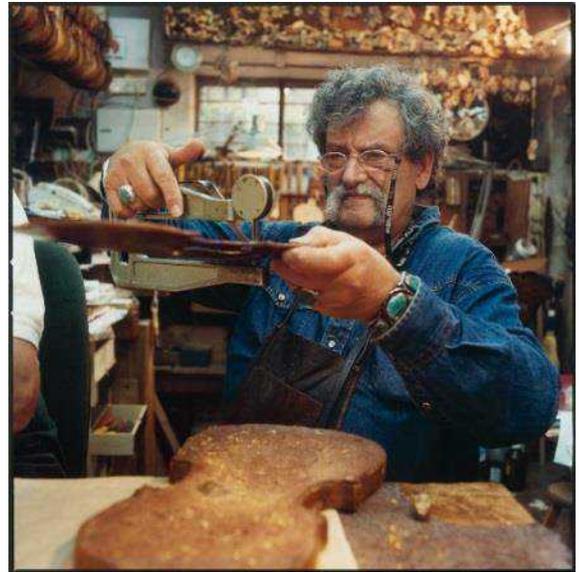
Amnon Weinstein – Founder of the Violins of Hope

Amnon Weinstein has spent the last two decades locating and restoring violins that were played by Jewish musicians during the Holocaust. He dedicates this important work to 400 relatives he never knew. These grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins stayed behind in Eastern Europe when Amnon’s parents, Moshe and Golda, immigrated in 1938 to Palestine, where Moshe opened a violin shop. After the war, Moshe learned that his entire family—400 in all—had been murdered during the Holocaust. The pain of this discovery led to his first heart attack. Moshe never spoke of his family again.

When young Amnon would ask Golda about their relatives, she would show him a book about the Holocaust. Pointing to the photos of the dead, she would say, “This is our family.” She would break down in tears, unable to explain further.

After growing up to become one of the most respected violin makers in the world, Amnon became determined to reclaim his lost heritage. Five decades after his family had been destroyed, he started reflecting not only on the Holocaust but on the role that music - specifically the violin - played in Jewish lives throughout that dark period. He started locating violins that were played by Jews in the camps and ghettos, painstakingly piecing them back together so they could be brought to life again on the concert stage. Although most of the musicians who originally played the instruments were silenced by the Holocaust, their voices and spirits live on through the violins that Amnon has lovingly restored. He calls these instruments the “Violins of Hope.”

Amnon Weinstein’s wife, Asaela Belski Weinstein — or Assi, as she is known — is the daughter of Asael Bielski, the second of the three Bielski brothers (made famous by Edward Zwick’s recent film “Defiance”) who saved 1,200 Jews in the occupied Soviet Union during World War II.



Source: <http://www.violinsofhopecle.org/>



Group portrait of former Bielski partisans from Nowogrodek, taken in the Fohrenwald displaced persons camp

Read more about Amnon Weinstein and the “Violins of Hope” at <https://violinsofhoperva.com/>

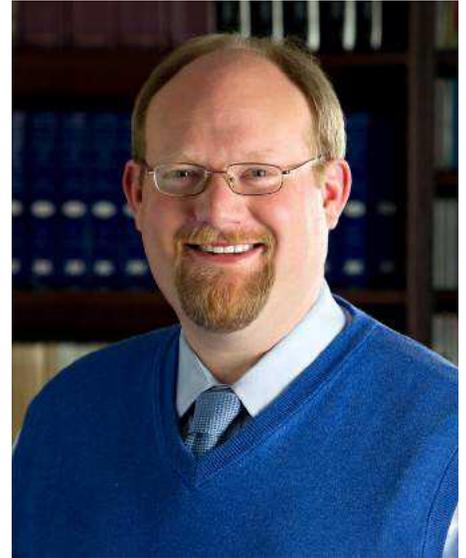
James A. Grymes – Author of *Violins of Hope*

James A. Grymes is an internationally respected musicologist, a critically acclaimed author, and a dynamic speaker who has addressed audiences at significant public venues such as Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall. Dr. Grymes has been featured in interviews by *The New York Times*, ABC News, and CNN, and has written essays for *The Huffington Post* and the Israeli music magazine *Opus*.

He is the author of *Violins of Hope: Instruments of Hope and Liberation in Mankind's Darkest Hour* (Harper Perennial, 2014). A stirring testament to the strength of the human spirit and the power of music, *Violins of Hope* tells the remarkable stories of violins played by Jewish musicians during the Holocaust, and of the Israeli violin maker dedicated to bringing these inspirational instruments back to life. *Violins of Hope* is the winner of the 2014 National Jewish Book Award in the Holocaust category.

Dr. Grymes is Professor of Musicology and Chair of the Department of Music at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

Source: <http://holocaustmusic.ort.org/>

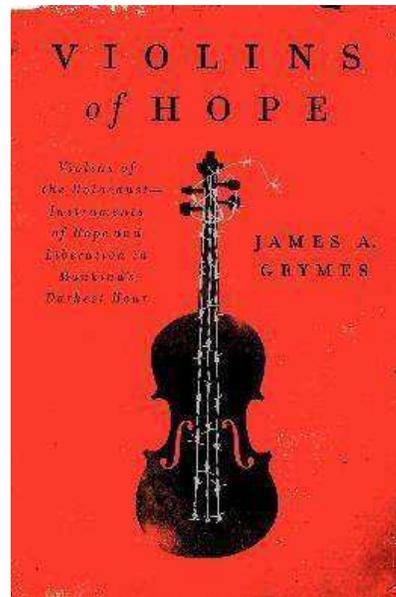


About *Violins of Hope: Instruments of Hope and Liberation in Mankind's Darkest Hour*

The violin has formed an important aspect of Jewish culture for centuries, both as a popular instrument with classical Jewish musicians and as a central factor of social life, as in the Klezmer tradition. But during the Holocaust, the violin assumed extraordinary roles within the Jewish community. For some musicians, the instrument was a liberator; for others, it was a savior that spared their lives. For many, the violin provided comfort in mankind's darkest hour, and in at least one case, helped avenge murdered family members. Above all, the violins of the Holocaust represented strength and optimism for the future.

Today, these instruments serve as powerful reminders of an unimaginable experience— they are memorials to those who perished and testaments to those who survived. In this spirit, renowned Israeli violin maker, Amnon Weinstein, has devoted the past twenty years to restoring the violins of the Holocaust as a tribute to those who were lost, including 400 of his own relatives. Behind each of these violins is a uniquely fascinating and inspiring story. Juxtaposing these narratives against one man's harrowing struggle to reconcile his own family's history and the history of his people, this insightful, moving, and achingly human book presents a new way of understanding the Holocaust.

<http://www.jamesagrymes.com/>



Introduction to Violin Descriptions & Student Discussion Questions

Discuss the following with your students:

- The violin was central to many forms of music popular in pre-Holocaust European Jewish communities, particularly Klezmer, a form of Jewish folk music
- During the Holocaust, the violin assumed extraordinary new roles within the Jewish community. The instruments featured in the “Violins of Hope” exhibit and teacher’s guide chronicle just a few of those functions.
- In the following pages, we will identify 7 of the violins travelling with the “Violins of Hope” exhibit. Each of the stories connect to different aspects of the Holocaust. Learn the stories of each of the violins and use the additional resources to give context to the time and place in Holocaust history.
- When listening to the music, ask your students to consider the following questions:
 - What **STYLE** of music is this?
 - What **CHARACTERISTICS** does the music have? Students should describe:
 - What they hear (**MELODY, HARMONY, DURATION, TEMPO, TONE, PITCH, TIMBRE, DYNAMICS**). Encourage the class to try and start describing sounds with words – brash, soft, harsh, gentle, soothing, wispy, free, clashing notes, dissonance, sharp, etc.
 - How does it make them feel? There are no right or wrong answers to this question – encourage students to try and explain why/how the music provokes those feelings. What kind of modern music does it remind them of? What music inspires them to think about resistance, memory, grief, etc.?
- Using the historical content about music in the Holocaust, try to identify the song’s purpose:
 - Politics & Propaganda?
 - Resistance?
 - A Response?
 - Memory or Commemoration?
- Behind each of these violins is a uniquely fascinating and inspiring story. One of the main ways we preserve the stories and experiences of the Holocaust is through recording survivor testimonies. You can find local Virginia survivor testimony here: <https://www.vaholocaust.org/oral-histories/> choose a survivor testimony from the website, or from those connected to the violin stories and view portions of it together. Discuss how survivor testimony differs from other types of sources they have used in history classes. Discuss how the survivor testimonies can expand our understanding of the stories illustrated by the violins in the exhibition.



Quotes from “Violins of Hope: Strings of the Holocaust” Documentary

Watch the documentary here:

<http://www.ideastream.org/programs/violins-of-hope/watch-violins-of-hope-strings-of-the-holocaust>

Roman Frayman: “The Holocaust happened 70 years ago-it’s ancient history. Hopefully this will be a connection to the young people. Hopefully the music, the violins produce memories of those people who perished, who tried to hide their instruments, who made beautiful music.”

Hedy Milgrom: “There is a power in music that is — that breeds resilience that gives people hope.”

Stanley Bernath: “I think it’s a great thing. The violins, they were saved... It means a hell of a lot. It means that [Hitler] did not win everything he wanted to win... Hitler lost, [we] won.”

David C. Barnett: “The Violins of Hope’ are Holocaust survivors. Scarred by the war years, they were silent for decades. But now they have music to play. And Amnon Weinstein says each one has a story to tell.”

Amnon Weinstein: “This violin is alive, is existing, and is going to talk to all the world. Each violin like that that you are going to play, it’s for millions of people that are dead. That is victory. And each concert is a victory.”

Violin Descriptions and Discussion Questions



The Feivel Winger Violin (JHV 7)

Feivel Winger lived in Romania with his elderly parents, wife, and baby daughter, Helen. In October 1941, Feivel and thousands of other Jews were deported by train to the swamp land of Transnistria and further into the Ukraine. The suffering and horrors of this exodus was harsh, but Feivel never gave up.

Finally, in the Ukrainian ghetto of Shargorod, he found a way to survive. A famous judge who was an amateur violinist recognized Feivel as the gifted child-violinist he was years ago and gave him his Italian Amati violin. Feivel, who labored chopping wood for local Ukrainians, played the violin and his life changed. All of a sudden there was music - and hope.

A local Ukrainian peasant let him play at weddings and holidays in exchange for food and leftovers. Feivel lost his precious violin a short while later, but found a way to bring food to his family and some 17 people by playing Ukrainian and Romanian music on another violin.

Many years later, in Israel, Helen brought her father's violin to be repaired in the Weinstein's workshop in Tel Aviv so that her father could play again. Upon hearing this incredible story, the Weinstains repaired the violin. The violin has been a part of "Violins of Hope" collection since then and serves as a memorial to a man of courage and industry, a man of vision and kindness.

Source: <http://www.jamesagrymes.com/>

Information about Transnistria:

Following the invasion of the Soviet Union, Romania re-annexed Bessarabia and northern Bukovina, which had been seized by the Soviets a year earlier. After the conquest of the Ukraine by German and Romanian troops in July and August 1941, Romania was given the territory between the Dniester and Bug Rivers.

Romanian authorities established a military administration there and dubbed the region "Transnistria." Between 1941 and 1944, German and Romanian authorities murdered or caused the deaths of between 150,000 and 250,000 Romanian and Ukrainian Jews in Transnistria. At least 270,000 Romanian Jews were killed or died from mistreatment during the Holocaust.

Discuss the following with your students:

The persecution of the Jewish community in Romania was quite different than in other nations during World War II. Read the following article from the USHMM website:

<https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005472>.

- What were a few factors that made the experience for Romanian Jews different?
- Like Feivel Winger, Miriam Korber was living in Romania during the Holocaust. Read Miriam Korber's diary entries on life in Atachi, Romania. Write an essay citing significant historical details that you believe may be particular to the Romanian experience:

<https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/text/miriam-korbers-diary-entries-life-atachi-romania>.

Discuss the following with your students:

Although many aspects of the Romanian Jewish Holocaust experience were unique, Feivel's experience of being imprisoned in the Shargorod Ghetto connects his experience to the experience of Jews imprisoned in ghettos across Europe.

🔊 **Listen to this song from the Vilna Ghetto**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mbR-6EjozMI>

Read some more about Shmerke Kacerginski and other artists who participated in the resistance group The Paper Brigade

https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Kacerginski_Shmerke

- How did Shmerke Kacerginski use poetry and music as a way of resisting dehumanization? How is this connected to his later participation in partisan warfare?
- In what ways would music like this help support people imprisoned in the ghetto?
- How did organizing around music and the arts become a form of resistance?

PROFILE:

Romanian-born Richmond survivor Miriam “Margaret” Shuman

Miriam “Margaret” Shuman nee Grunstein was born in Lechinta, Romania. In 1944, the entire family was deported to Auschwitz where Miriam’s parents, Rafuel and Chaya, and younger brother and sister, Uzher and Edith, were sent straight to the crematorium. Her elder brother and sister, Shmiel Yitzhak and Channa were spared. Miriam and Channa spent the next year working at Riga, Stolp, and Stutthof.

As the Allies approached, Miriam and Channa were put aboard a tugboat in the Baltic where the Germans eventually abandoned them. Aboard the ship, Channa, who was already ill, died and her body was thrown overboard. She was liberated in May of 1945 by the British. She spent some time in Feldafing Displaced Persons Camp where she met her husband, Ruben Schuchmacher. Ruben had been deported to Auschwitz where he worked in the “Kanada” barracks. He was later deported to Theresienstadt. They changed their name to Shuman upon immigration to the United States in 1949.



Violin Descriptions and Discussion Questions



The Haftel Violin (JHV 39)

This violin belonged to Heinrich “Zvi” Haftel, the first concert master of the Palestine Orchestra, later to become the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, IPO. It is a French instrument made by a famous maker: August Dartre in the town of Mirecourt around 1870.

Haftel was one of about 100 musicians gathered by Bronislaw Hubermann all over Europe in 1936 and brought to Palestine. Haftel was a distinguished violinist before the war and joined Hubermann after he lost his job in a German orchestra. Hubermann’s vision to create an all-Jewish orchestra in Palestine saved the lives of many musicians and their families. Haftel’s violin is one of the best in the “Violins of Hope” collection.

Source: <http://www.jamesagrymes.com/>

Discuss the following concepts with your students:

Read about the Polish violinist Bronislaw Hubermann and how he was able to save many Jewish musicians during the Holocaust:

<http://www.npr.org/sections/deceptivecadence/2013/04/02/176018068/hubermans-list-how-a-violinist-saved-jews-in-world-war-ii>

🔊 Listen to Bronislaw playing “Nocturne Op.9 No.2” (Chopin)
<https://youtu.be/ByhwHJ5nRv0>

- How did Hubermann help the Jewish escape Nazi persecution?
- What did Hubermann risk to help save these people?
- Why do you think Hubermann was not deported to a concentration camp or ghetto? Did his musical talent save him?



Violinist and Founder of the Palestine Symphony Orchestra
Bronislaw Hubermann



The members of the Palestine orchestra with their family members. Dated around 1938-1937, in Tel-Aviv Gani Hataarucha. Photo taken behind the orchestra’s rehearsal space.



Violin Descriptions and Discussion Questions

The Auschwitz Violin (JHV 23)

This violin was owned by an unnamed inmate who performed in the men’s orchestra at the concentration camp in Auschwitz, and survived the war. Abraham Davidowitz, who fled from Poland to Russia in 1939, later returned to postwar Germany and worked for the Joint near Munich, Germany- helping Jews living in displaced person’s camps. One day, a former inmate - sad and impoverished – approached Abraham and offered him this violin. Abraham paid \$50 for the instrument, hoping his son in Israel, Freddy, would play it when he grew up.

Many years later Freddy heard about the “Violins of Hope” project and donated it to be fully restored and brought back to life. Since then this violin - which is now in perfect condition - has become a symbol of “Violins of Hope” and has been played in concerts by the best musicians all over the world. These kinds of instruments were very popular amongst many Jews in Eastern Europe, as they were relatively cheap and made mainly for amateurs. They were made in Saxony or Tirol 150 years ago in a German workshop. The false label reads: J.B. Schweitzer, who was a famous maker in his day.

Source: <http://www.jamesagrymes.com/>

Discuss the following concepts with your students:

Read more about life in the concentration camp orchestra here:

<http://holocaustmusic.org/places/camps/death-camps/auschwitz/camp-orchestras/>

- Auschwitz/Birkenau alone featured six different orchestras, one of which contained no less than 100-120 musicians. Watch the eyewitness account from Anita Lasker-Wallfisch, a member of the woman’s orchestra of Auschwitz:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ibZyQA0HUo>

- What were the advantages of being in the camp orchestra? Disadvantages?
- What were some of the purposes of having an orchestra at a concentration camp?

The orchestra had a high turnover rate. In addition to the generally high death rate in Auschwitz - musicians were not freed from their daily labor assignments - there was also a high suicide rate, potentially due to the emotional pressure of the context. Over the years, the orchestra acquired more instruments and sheet music.

In addition to the orchestra, there was a variety of other SS-sponsored music at Auschwitz. Some SS officers employed individual ‘musical slaves’ who were required to play or sing whenever commanded. Coco Schumann, a musician and prisoner of Auschwitz recalled years later that, “the music could save you: if not your life, then at least the day. The images that I saw every day were impossible to live with, and yet we held on. We played music to them, for our basic survival. We made music in hell.”

Most voluntary music in Auschwitz was vocal rather than instrumental. There was much group singing in various barracks, and even a camp choir made up primarily of Polish inmates.

Source: <http://holocaustmusic.org/places/camps/death-camps/auschwitz/>.

More information about the role of music at Auschwitz:

The orchestra’s primary task was to accompany prisoners marching to and from work, so that the marching rhythm would allow ease of control over the prisoners. The musicians were originally required to play outside regardless of the weather, although in later years, they were allowed to play indoors during rain and snow. The orchestra was also required to play for the SS guards on Saturdays, and to perform long Sunday concerts for the pleasure of camp commander Hoess and his family and friends.

Quotes about the Auschwitz Violin from the documentary “Violins of Hope”

Stanley Bernath, Holocaust Survivor: “The huge gate with a name on top in German, ‘Arbeit Macht Frei,’ meaning work will make you free. As we entered, there is an orchestra playing Beethoven. It was an unbelievable sight. People were being killed and beaten, and there’s an orchestra playing.”

Amnon Weinstein, Founder, Violins of Hope : “I was very afraid of it, because that’s the point. When I opened this violin, there was a black powder inside, which, for me, was from the ashes. And I know it from the man who played on it. He played on the way to the gas chamber.”



PROFILE:

Polish-born Richmond survivor Boleslaw “Bud” Brodecki

Born in Poland in 1921, Boleslaw (Bud) Brodecki grew up in Warsaw with his father and Roma, an older sister. When Nazi Germany invaded Poland in September 1939, his family took shelter. Eventually his family decided to attempt an escape to the Russian side of Poland. Bud and his sister were separated from their father in the crowds and chaos of a Warsaw train station. They never saw their father again. While aboard a train heading to Eastern Poland, he heard many rumors of Jews being rounded up and killed. When they reached the last station before the Russian side, they found a farmer who agreed to take a group of refugees across the border in a wagon.

Once in the Russian controlled region of Poland, Bud and Roma made their way to Pruzana. Bud eventually left the town and his sister to stay at a nearby farmhouse. Because he was living in a Russian controlled region, Bud was drafted into the Russian Army. He was made a Lieutenant in the Russian army, but escaped during a battle with the Germans. Bud made his way back to Pruzana; by this time the town had been occupied by the German Army and made into a ghetto.

Eventually Bud and his family were rounded up with many others and put on a train to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Once arriving at the camp, he was separated from his sister and never saw her again. Bud was marched from camp to camp, never knowing where he would be taken to next. By the time he reached Theresienstadt, he was ill from Typhus, so weak he could hardly stand. After Theresienstadt was liberated in May 1945, Bud was relocated to the Lansberg Displaced Persons Camp where he got a job as a policeman.



Boleslaw “Bud” Brodecki
Source: Virginia Holocaust Museum



Violin Descriptions and Discussion Questions

Violin from Lyon, France (JHV 33)

In July 1942, thousands of Jews were arrested in Paris and sent by cattle trains to concentration camps in the East- most of them to Auschwitz. On one of the packed trains was a man holding a violin. When the train stopped somewhere along the side roads of Lyon, France, the man heard voices speaking French. A few men were working on the railways and others walking at leisure.

The man in the train cried out: “To the place where I now go - I don’t need a violin. Here, take my violin so it may live!” The man threw his violin out the narrow window and one of the train workers caught it and took it home. For many years, the violin had no life. No one played it or had any use for it. Years later, the worker passed away and his children found the abandoned violin in the attic. They soon looked to sell it to a local luthier, (someone who builds or repairs string instruments), in the South of France and told him the story they heard from their father. The French violin maker heard about “Violins of Hope” and gave it to Amnon, so that the violin would live.

Source: <http://www.jamesagrymes.com/>

Discuss the information below detailing music and life in France during the Holocaust with your students:

Read the link below for information about when the Germans invaded France, including the persecution and deportation of Jews:

<https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005453>

- “*Les Amis du Maquis*” (The Friends of the Maquis) was one of a number of songs written by French musicians and then sent secretly to London so that it could be played as an act of resistance on Radio-Londres. This radio station became a lifeline to people in France, reminding them that others were there in spirit with them, in their hatred of the Nazis and desire for national freedom. The lyrics were written by Blanche Gabrielle, a French musician who wanted to show support for the Maquis Resistance fighters.

🔊 Listen and read the English translation of “*Les Amis du Maquis*.” What do you think was the message or purpose of this song? How could this song be a form of resistance against the Nazi regime?

<http://holocaustmusic.ort.org/resistance-and-exile/french-resistance/role-of-radio-in-wartime-france-x266b/>

🔊 Listen to Leonard Cohen’s “The Partisan” which was adapted from an anti-facist song called “*La Complainte du Partisan*” which was written for the French Resistance during WWII.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hs5hOhI4pEE>

- Cohen included this song in an album he released in 1969. Why might someone want to make sure that WWII era resistance songs remain relevant throughout time?
- How might that connect to the reasons we want to preserve Holocaust era musical instruments?

🔊 Listen to the songs “*Zog Nit Keyn Mol*” and “*Shtil di Nakht*” which were both written by Hirsch Glik, a young Jewish man imprisoned in the Vilna Ghetto. Hirsch Glik was murdered in the Holocaust.

• *Zog Nit Keyn Mol*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-wgYnYSg3Zs>

• *Shtil di Nakht*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tAKcy7yAoyU>

Bonus:

🔊 Listen to the album “Yiddish Glory” to learn more about resistance songs

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=OLAK5uy_nw4RJ0GuYLkoejY4sndL0MeoAlsPw8z6o

- How are the French resistance songs similar and different from the Jewish partisan songs?
- What are some reasons for the similarities? How about the differences?
- What are some common themes regarding resistance that these songs share?
- What modern songs might you label as “resistance songs”?



Hitler pictured with Nazi officers in France

Source: <http://holocaustmusic.ort.org/resistance-and-exile/french-resistance/role-of-radio-in-wartime-france-x266b>

ORIGINAL FRENCH: “*Les Amis du Maquis*”

*Sur l’aile de la liberté
Par les cités et les campagnes.
Nos pas, nos coeurs sont emportés
Au loin de nos cheres compagnes,
Mais on les reverra,
L’heure H arrivera
Car nous sauvons la France
Nous les amis, nous les amis,
Car nous sauvons la France
Nous les amis Du maquis.*

ENGLISH TRANSLATION: “*Friends of the Maquis*”

On the wings of Freedom
By the cities and the countryside
Our feet, our hearts are carried
Far away by our dear friends
But we see them again
Zero hour arrives
Because we are saving France
Us friends of the Maquis.



PROFILES: Two French Women

Two French born women, one a rescuer and the other a survivor of the Holocaust. Both women eventually made their way to the United States and lived in Richmond.

To learn more about their stories visit:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J7PGpj-G0Dc> and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xQJ3i_7pr40



Nicole DeVizcaya Hylton
Source: Virginia Holocaust Museum

Nicole DeVizcaya Hylton

Nicole Hylton (née de Vizcaya) was born on March 7, 1921 in Paris, France to Marie Jean-Pierre and Madeleine Marchal. She was 19 when the Germans invaded France on May 10, 1940. Shortly after, her mother announced they would be helping the French Underground in safehousing Jews and escaped refugees. Refugees came after dark, washed, ate, and slept as best they could until they left before dawn through the Bois de Boulogne forest. In order to find food for the additional mouths, Hylton often biked into the countryside to purchase food from black market farmers. In 1944, she met U.S. Army Sgt. Thomas Hylton, and they were married a year later. In 1946, she immigrated to the United States aboard the USAT Zebulon B. Vance.



Ruth Marcus and her daughter Yvonne
Source: Virginia Holocaust Museum

Ruth Marcus

Ruth was born on May 19, 1915 in Strasburg, France to Samuel Wolf and Selma Benjamin. In 1918, her father decided to live in Germany after the Upper Silesia plebiscite. She married in 1938 and went to Brussels, Belgium in an illegal border crossing.

May 10, 1940 in the early morning Germany invaded Belgium. Her husband went to work that morning and that was the last she saw of him for six years. She was three months pregnant. In 1940 she went to Marseilles, France and had no identification papers and did not wear the Jewish star. She rented a room with a friend by selling their jewelry. After German occupation her friend contacted the French underground and offered service. The underground insisted that to save Ruth's daughter, Yvonne, she should give her to a French family and a convent. Three weeks later she was arrested and sent to Rivesaltes.

While in Rivesaltes, she helped the underground smuggle out children by placing them in potato sacks in wheelbarrows. She was eventually betrayed by a man whose son she was unable to smuggle out. She was beaten by the commandant. The underground pulled her out of the camp and she continued working with them until liberation in 1945. Ruth's parents and sister were killed in concentration camps. Her husband was in Portugal and did not think she had survived. He didn't know he had a daughter.

Ruth was reunited with her daughter after the war on June 6, 1945. They came to the United States in 1946 via the Gaza, a Portuguese ship, from Lisbon to New York. She remarried after meeting an American Army veteran who'd served in France.

You Can Make a Difference

- **Learn** the facts about the Holocaust and other genocides and talk with others about this history. The following websites will help you do this.
 - The Committee on Conscience at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum
 - Teacher’s Guide to the Holocaust
 - Genocide Intervention Network
 - Save Darfur
 - Student Anti-Genocide Coalition
 - Enough: The Project to End Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity
 - <https://www.vaholocaust.org/>
 - <https://www.ushmm.org/>
 - <https://www.facinghistory.org/>
- **Keep informed** about what is happening in places facing genocide threats. Many of the sites above include an opportunity to receive weekly updates via e-mail.
- **Read** the “Report of the Genocide Prevention Task Force,” which sets out a blueprint for U.S. policymakers on genocide and mass atrocity prevention.
- **Write** to your representatives in Congress about what you want them to do in terms of preventing genocide. Many of the websites listed above provide advocacy advice you may want to read and use.
- **Write** an op-ed article or letter to the editor of your local newspaper.
- **Raise** funds for an organization providing relief for those facing humanitarian crises in the face of genocide.
- **Start** a STAND: Students Against Genocide Chapter at your school. www.standnow.org
- **Encourage** your school to adopt anti-genocide curricular materials for both its library and classrooms.
- **Ask** your local bookseller and library to display books about genocide and mass atrocities.

The Holocaust: A Glossary

AKTION (German)

Operation involving the mass assembly, deportation, and murder of Jews by the Nazis during the Holocaust.

AKTION REINHARD

The code name for the destruction of European Jews, it was named for Heydrich Reinhard, Nazi official who had been tasked with implementing the “Final Solution” and who was assassinated by Czech partisans in May 1942.

ALLIES

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

ANTISEMITISM

Hatred of Jews

ANSCHLUSS (German)

Annexation of Austria by Germany on March 13, 1938.

ARYAN RACE

“Aryan” as the Nazis applied the term was to mean people of Northern European racial background. Their aim was to avoid what they considered the polluting of the German race” and to preserve the purity of European blood.

AXIS

The Axis powers originally included Nazi Germany, Italy, and Japan who signed a pact in Berlin on September 27, 1940. They were later joined by Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, and Slovakia.

CONCENTRATION CAMPS

Immediately upon their assumption of power on January 30, 1933, the Nazis established concentration camps for the imprisonment of all “enemies” of their regime: actual and potential political opponents (e.g. communists, socialists, and monarchists), Jehovah’s Witnesses, gypsies, homosexuals, and other “asocials.” Beginning in 1938, Jews were targeted for internment solely because they were Jews. Before then, only Jews who fit one of the earlier categories were interned in camps. The first three concentration camps established were Dachau (near Munich), Buchenwald (near Weimar) and Sachsenhausen (near Berlin).

EINSATZGRUPPEN (German)

Mobile killing units of the Security Police and SS Security Service that followed the German armies into the Soviet Union in June 1941. These units were supported by units of the uniformed German Order Police and auxiliaries of volunteers (Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, and Ukrainian). Their victims, primarily Jews, were executed by shooting and were buried in mass graves from which they were later exhumed and burned. At least a million Jews were killed in this manner. There were four Einsatzgruppen (A,B,C,D) which were subdivided into company-sized Einsatzkommandos.

EXTERMINATION CAMPS

Nazi camps for the mass killing of Jews and others (e.g. Gypsies, Russian prisoners-of-war, ill prisoners). Known as “death camps,” these included: Auschwitz-Birkenau, Belzec, Chelmno, Majdanek, Sobibor, and Treblinka. All were located in occupied Poland.

EUTHANASIA

The original meaning of this term was an easy and painless death for the terminally ill. However, the Nazi euthanasia program took on quite a different meaning: the taking of eugenic measures to improve the quality of the German “race.” This program culminated in enforced “mercy” deaths for the incurably insane, permanently disabled, deformed and “superfluous.” Three major classifications were developed: 1) euthanasia for incurables; 2) direct extermination by “special treatment”; and 3) experiments in mass sterilization.

FINAL SOLUTION

The “Final Solution of the Jewish Question” was the code name for the plan to destroy the Jews of Europe. Beginning in December 1941, Jews were rounded up and sent to extermination camps in the East. The program was deceptively disguised as “resettlement in the East.”

GENOCIDE

The deliberate and systematic destruction of a religious, racial, national, or cultural group.

GHETTO

The Nazis revived the medieval ghetto in creating their compulsory “Jewish Quarter” (Wohnbezirk). The ghetto was a section of a city where all Jews from the surrounding areas were forced to reside. Surrounded by barbed wire or walls, the ghettos were often sealed so that people were prevented from leaving or entering. Established mostly in Eastern Europe (e.g. Lodz, Warsaw, Vilna, Riga, Minsk), the ghettos were characterized by overcrowding, starvation and forced labor. All were eventually destroyed as the Jews were deported to death camps.

HOLOCAUST

Holocaust: The systematic destruction of six million Jews as perpetrated by the Nazis and their collaborators between 1933 and 1945.

During this time period millions of other innocent individuals and groups were persecuted because of Nazi racial and social ideology. These individuals and groups are sometimes referred to as other victims and include; Roma (Gypsies), Jehovah Witnesses, Homosexuals, the Handicapped and Poles. The Nazis also persecuted anyone who defied them politically, such as Communists and Socialists, and anyone they saw as a threat to their authority and power.

The term “Holocaust” - literally meaning “a completely burned sacrifice” - tends to suggest a sacrificial connotation to what occurred. The word Shoah, originally a Biblical term meaning widespread disaster, is the Modern Hebrew equivalent.

JUDENRAT (PLURAL: JUDENRÄTE)

Council of Jewish representatives in communities and ghettos set up by the Nazis to carry out their instructions.

JUDENREIN

“Cleansed of Jews,” denoting areas where all Jews had been either murdered or deported.

KAPO

Prisoner in charge of a group of inmates in Nazi concentration camps.

The Holocaust: A Glossary

MADAGASCAR PLAN

A Nazi policy seriously considered during the late 1930s and 1940s which would have sent Jews to Madagascar, an island off the southeast coast of Africa. At that time Madagascar was a French colony. Ultimately, it was considered impractical and the plan was abandoned.

MEIN KAMPF (German)

(My Struggle) by Hitler was written while he was imprisoned in the Landsberg fortress. In this book, Hitler propounds his ideas, beliefs, and plans for the future of Germany. Everything, including his foreign policy, is permeated by his “racial ideology.” The Germans, belonging to the “superior” Aryan race, have a right to “living space” (Lebensraum) in the East, which is inhabited by the “inferior” Slavs. Throughout, he accuses Jews of being the source of all evil, equating them with Bolshevism and, at the same time, with international capitalism. Unfortunately, those people who read the book (except for his admirers) did not take it seriously but considered it the ravings of a maniac.

NIGHT AND FOG DECREE (Nacht und Nebel)

Secret order issued by Hitler on December 7, 1941, to seize “persons endangering German security” who were to vanish without a trace into night and fog.

NUREMBERG LAWS

Two anti-Jewish statutes enacted September 1935 during the Nazi party’s national convention in Nuremberg. The first, the Reich Citizenship Law, deprived German Jews of their citizenship and all pertinent, related rights. The second, the Law for the Protection of German Blood and 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, which provided the basis for removing Jews from all spheres of German political, social, and economic life. The Nuremberg Laws carefully established definitions of Jewishness based on bloodlines. Thus, many Germans of mixed ancestry, called “Mischlinge,” faced anti-Semitic discrimination if they had a Jewish grandparent.

MUSSELMANN

Concentration camp slang word for a prisoner who had given up fighting for life.

PARTISANS

Irregular troops engaged in guerrilla warfare, often behind enemy lines. During World War II, this term was applied to resistance fighters in Nazi-occupied countries.

POGROM

From the Russian word for “devastation”; an unprovoked attack or series of attacks upon a Jewish community.

PROTOCOLS OF THE ELDERS OF ZION

A major piece of anti-Semitic propaganda, compiled at the turn of the century by members of the Russian Secret Police. Essentially adapted from a nineteenth century French polemical satire directed against Emperor Napoleon III, substituting Jewish leaders, the Protocols maintained that Jews were plotting world dominion by setting Christian against Christian, corrupting Christian morals and attempting to destroy the economic and political viability of the West. It gained great popularity after World War I and was translated into many languages, encouraging anti-Semitism in France, Germany, Great Britain, and the United States. Long repudiated as an absurd and hateful lie, the book currently has been reprinted and is widely distributed by Neo-Nazis and others who are committed to the destruction of the State of Israel.

RIGHTEOUS AMONG THE NATIONS

Term applied to those non-Jews who, at the risk of their own lives, saved Jews from their Nazi persecutors.

ROSH HASHANAH (Heb., “beginning of the year”)

Jewish New Year celebration in the fall of the year, the month of Tishri.

SA (abbreviation of Stürmabteilung)

The storm troops of the early Nazi party; organized in 1921.

SELECTION

Euphemism for the process of choosing victims for the gas chambers in the Nazi camps by separating them from those considered fit to work.

SHTETL

A small Jewish village, mostly in Eastern Europe prior to World War II.

SONDERKOMMANDO

The Sonderkommandos were groups of Jewish male prisoners picked to dispose of corpses from the gas chambers or crematoria. The Sonderkommando had better physical conditions than other inmates; they had decent food, slept on straw mattresses and could wear normal clothing. Despite the better conditions in which the Sonderkommando lived at the camps, most were eventually gassed after three to six months. The Nazis did not want any evidence of their horrific acts to remain, and therefore decided to kill those prisoners who witnessed their actions.

SS

Abbreviation usually written with two lightning symbols for Schutzstaffel (Defense Protective Units), originally organized as Hitler’s personal bodyguard, the SS was transformed into a giant organization by Heinrich Himmler. Although various SS units fought on the battlefield, the organization is best known for carrying out the destruction of European Jewry.

STAR OF DAVID

The six-pointed star emblem commonly associated with Judaism. During the Holocaust, Jews throughout Europe were required to wear Stars of David on their sleeves or fronts and backs of their shirts and jackets.

SWASTIKA

An ancient symbol used in India, Persia, Greece, and elsewhere as a religious emblem to ward off evil spirits. Using it as the official symbol of the Nazis, Hitler corrupted the meaning of the holy insignia to denote Aryan racial superiority.

UMSCHLAGPLATZ

The Umschlagplatz, or “gathering square” was a square in the Warsaw Ghetto where Jews were rounded up for deportation to Treblinka.

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YIDDISH

Is a language which blends elements of medieval German, Hebrew and some Slavic languages. Yiddish was the vernacular language of East European and Russian Jews.

YIZKOR (“Remembrance”)

It is the name of the Memorial Service on Yom Kippur, and a prayer in that service in which Jews specify those whom they are remembering.

YOM KIPPUR (Heb., “Day of Atonement”)

Annual day of fasting and atonement, occurring in the fall on Tishri 10 (just after Rosh Hashanah); the most solemn and important occasion of the Jewish religious year.

ZIONISM

The goal of Zionism is the political and spiritual renewal of the Jewish people in its ancestral homeland.

Holocaust History Timeline

1933

JANUARY 30, 1933

German President Paul von Hindenburg appointed Adolf Hitler chancellor of Germany. At the time, Hitler was leader of the National Socialist German Workers' Party (Nazi party).

FEBRUARY 27–28, 1933

The German parliament (Reichstag) building burned down under mysterious circumstances. The government treated it as an act of terrorism.

FEBRUARY 28, 1933

Hitler convinced President von Hindenburg to invoke an emergency clause in the Weimar Constitution. The German parliament then passed the Decree of the Reich President for the Protection of Nation (Volk) and State, popularly known as the Reichstag Fire Decree. The decree suspended the civil rights provisions in the existing German constitution, including freedom of speech, assembly, and press, and formed the basis for the incarceration of potential opponents of the Nazis without benefit of trial or judicial proceeding.

MARCH 22, 1933

The SS (Schutzstaffel), Hitler's "elite guard," established a concentration camp outside the town of Dachau, Germany, for political opponents of the regime. It was the only concentration camp to remain in operation from 1933 until 1945. By 1934, the SS had taken over administration of the entire Nazi concentration camp system.

MARCH 23, 1933

The German parliament passed the Enabling Act, which empowered Hitler to establish a dictatorship in Germany.

APRIL 1, 1933

The Nazis organized a nationwide boycott of Jewish-owned businesses in Germany. Many local boycotts continued throughout much of the 1930s.

APRIL 7, 1933

The Nazi government passed the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service, which excluded Jews and political opponents from university and governmental positions. Similar laws enacted in the following weeks affected Jewish lawyers, judges, doctors, and teachers.

MAY 10, 1933

Nazi party members, students, teachers, and others burned books written by Jews, political opponents of Nazis, and the intellectual avant-garde during public rallies across Germany.

JULY 14, 1933

The Nazi government enacted the Law on the Revocation of Naturalization, which deprived foreign and stateless Jews as well as Roma (Gypsies) of German citizenship. The Nazi government enacted the Law for the Prevention of Offspring with Hereditary Diseases, which mandated the forced sterilization of certain physically or mentally impaired individuals.

The law institutionalized the eugenic concept of "life undeserving of life" and provided the basis for the involuntary sterilization of the disabled, Roma (Gypsies), "social misfits," and black people residing in Germany.

1934

JUNE 30–JULY 1, 1934

In what came to be called "the Night of the Long Knives," on Hitler's orders members of the Nazi party and police murdered members of the Nazi leadership, army, and others. Hitler declared the killings legal and necessary to achieve the Nazi party's aims. The murders were reported throughout Germany and in other countries.

AUGUST 2, 1934

German President von Hindenburg died. Hitler became Führer in addition to his position as chancellor. Because there was no legal or constitutional limit to Hitler's power as Führer, he became absolute dictator of Germany.

Holocaust History Timeline

OCTOBER 7, 1934

In standardized letters sent to the government, Jehovah's Witness congregations from all over Germany declared their political neutrality but also affirmed defiance of Nazi restrictions on the practice of their religion.

1935

APRIL 1, 1935

The Nazi government banned the Jehovah's Witness organization. The Nazis persecuted Jehovah's Witnesses because of their religious refusal to swear allegiance to the state.

JUNE 28, 1935

The German Ministry of Justice revised Paragraphs 175 and 175a of the criminal code to criminalize all homosexual acts between men. The revision provided the police broader means for prosecuting homosexual men.

SEPTEMBER 15, 1935

The Nazi government decreed the Reich Citizenship Law and the Law for the Protection of the German Blood and Honor. These Nuremberg "racial laws" made Jews second-class citizens. They prohibited sexual relations and intermarriage between Jews and "persons of German or related blood." The Nazi government later applied the laws to Roma (Gypsies) and to black people residing in Germany.

1936

JULY 12, 1936

Prisoners and civilian workers began construction of the concentration camp Sachsenhausen at Oranienburg near Berlin. By September, German authorities had imprisoned about 1,000 people in the camp.

AUGUST 1–16, 1936

Athletes and spectators from countries around the world attended the Summer Olympic Games in Berlin, Germany. The Olympic Games were a propaganda success for the Nazi state. The Nazis made every effort to portray Germany as a respectable member of the international community and soft pedaled their persecution of the Jews. They removed anti-Jewish signs from public display and restrained anti-Jewish activities. In response to pressure from foreign Olympic delegations, Germany also included Jews or part-Jews on its Olympic team.

1938

MARCH 12–13, 1938

German troops invaded Austria, and Germany incorporated Austria into the German Reich in what was called the Anschluss.

JULY 6–15, 1938

Delegates from 32 countries and representatives from refugee aid organizations attended the Evian Conference at Evian, France, to discuss immigration quotas for refugees fleeing Nazi Germany. However, the United States and most other countries were unwilling to ease their immigration restrictions.

SEPTEMBER 30, 1938

Britain, France, Italy, and Germany signed the Munich Pact, forcing Czechoslovakia to cede its border areas to the German Reich.

OCTOBER 1–10, 1938

German troops occupied the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia under the stipulations of the Munich Pact.

NOVEMBER 9–10, 1938

In a nationwide pogrom called Kristallnacht ("Night of Broken Glass"), the Nazis and their collaborators burned synagogues, looted Jewish homes and businesses, and killed at least 91 Jews. The Gestapo, supported by local uniformed police, arrested approximately 30,000 Jewish men and imprisoned them in the Dachau, Sachsenhausen, Buchenwald, and Mauthausen concentration camps. Several hundred Jewish women also were imprisoned in local jails.

Holocaust History Timeline

1939

MARCH 15, 1939

German troops occupied the Czech lands and established the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.

MAY 13–JUNE 17, 1939

Cuba and the United States refused to accept more than 900 refugees—almost all of whom were Jewish—aboard the ocean liner *St. Louis*, forcing its return to Europe.

AUGUST 23, 1939

The Soviet and German governments signed the Molotov-Ribbentrop Non-Aggression Pact in which they agreed to divide up eastern Europe, including Poland; the Baltic states of Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia; and parts of Romania.

SEPTEMBER 1, 1939

German troops invaded Poland, marking the beginning of World War II.

SEPTEMBER 3, 1939

Britain and France fulfilled their promise to protect Poland's border and declared war on Germany.

OCTOBER 1939

Hitler initiated an order to kill those Germans whom the Nazis deemed “incurable” and hence “unworthy of life.” Health care professionals sent tens of thousands of institutionalized mentally and physically disabled people to central “euthanasia” killing centers where they killed them by lethal injection or in gas chambers.

NOVEMBER 12, 1939

German authorities began the forced deportation of Jews from West Prussia, Poznan, Danzig, and Lodz (also in annexed Poland) to locations in the General Government.

NOVEMBER 23, 1939

German authorities required that, by December 1, 1939, all Jews residing in the General Government wear white badges with a blue Star of David.

1940

APRIL 30, 1940

German authorities ordered the first major Jewish ghetto, in Lodz, to be sealed off, confining at least 160,000 people in the ghetto. Henceforth, all Jews living in Lodz had to reside in the ghetto and could not leave without German authorization.

MAY 10, 1940

German troops invaded the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, and France. By June 22, Germany occupied all of these regions except for southern (Vichy) France.

MAY 20, 1940

SS authorities established the Auschwitz concentration camp (Auschwitz I) outside the Polish city of Oswiecim.

JUNE 9–JUNE 10, 1940

German troops invaded, defeated, and occupied Denmark and Norway.

NOVEMBER 15, 1940

German authorities ordered the Warsaw Ghetto in the General Government sealed off. It was the largest ghetto in both area and population. The Germans confined more than 350,000 Jews—about 30 percent of the city's population—in about 2.4 percent of the city's total area, approximately 1.3 square miles.

Holocaust History Timeline

1941

APRIL 6, 1941

German and other Axis forces (Italy, Bulgaria, and Hungary) invaded Yugoslavia and Greece.

JUNE 22, 1941

Germany and its Axis forces invaded the Soviet Union in Operation Barbarossa. German mobile killing squads called Einsatzgruppen were assigned to identify, concentrate, and kill Jews behind the front lines. By the spring of 1943, the Einsatzgruppen had killed more than a million Jews and an undetermined number of partisans, Roma (Gypsies), and officials of the Soviet state and the Soviet Communist party. In 1941–42, some 70,000–80,000 Jews fled eastward, evading the first wave of murder perpetrated by the German invaders.

JULY 31, 1941

Reich Marshal Hermann Göring charged SS-Gruppenführer Reinhard Heydrich, head of the Security Police and the SD (Security Service), to take measures for the implementation of the “final solution of the Jewish question.” The “Final Solution” was a euphemism for the mass murder of the Jewish population of Europe.

AUGUST 15, 1941

By order of German authorities, the Kovno Ghetto, with approximately 30,000 Jewish inhabitants, was sealed off.

SEPTEMBER 3, 1941

At the Auschwitz concentration camp, SS functionaries performed their first gassing experiments using Zyklon B. The victims were Soviet prisoners of war and non-Jewish Polish inmates.

SEPTEMBER 6, 1941

German authorities established two ghettos in Vilna in German-occupied Lithuania. German and Lithuanian units killed tens of thousands of Jews in the nearby Ponary woods.

SEPTEMBER 15, 1941

The Nazi government decreed that Jews over the age of six who resided in Germany had to wear a yellow Star of David on their outer clothing in public at all times.

SEPTEMBER 29–30, 1941

German SS, police, and military units shot an estimated 33,000 persons, mostly Jews, at Babi Yar, a ravine on the outskirts of Kiev (in Ukraine). In the following months, German units shot thousands of Jews, Roma (Gypsies), and Soviet prisoners of war at Babi Yar.

OCTOBER 15, 1941

German authorities began the deportation of Jews from the German Reich to the ghettos of Lodz, Riga, and Minsk.

OCTOBER–NOVEMBER 1941

SS functionaries began preparations for Einsatz Reinhard (Operation Reinhard; often referred to as Aktion Reinhard), with the goal of murdering the Jews in the General Government. Preparations included construction of the killing centers Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka in the territory of the General Government.

NOVEMBER 24, 1941

German authorities established the Theresienstadt (also known as Terezin) Ghetto, in the German controlled Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.

NOVEMBER 26, 1941

SS authorities established a second camp at Auschwitz, called Auschwitz-Birkenau or Auschwitz II. The camp was originally designated for the incarceration of large numbers of Soviet prisoners of war but later was used as a killing center.

DECEMBER 7, 1941

Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. The next morning, the United States declared war on Japan.

Holocaust History Timeline

DECEMBER 8, 1941

Gassing operations began at Chelmno, one of six Nazi killing centers. Situated in the Polish territory annexed by Germany, Chelmno closed in March 1943 and resumed its killing operations during two months in the early summer of 1944. SS and German civilian officials killed at least 152,000 Jews and an undetermined number of Roma (Gypsies) and Poles at Chelmno using special mobile gas vans.

DECEMBER 11, 1941

Germany and Italy declared war on the United States.

1942

JANUARY 16, 1942

German authorities began the deportation of Jews from the Lodz Ghetto to Chelmno.

JANUARY 20, 1942

Senior Nazi officials met at a villa in the outskirts of Berlin at the Wannsee Conference to discuss and coordinate implementation of the “Final Solution.”

MARCH 17, 1942

At the Belzec killing center, an SS special detachment began using gas chambers to kill people. Between March 17 and December 1942, approximately 600,000 people, mostly Jews but also an undetermined number of Roma (Gypsies), were killed at Belzec.

MARCH 27, 1942

German authorities began systematic deportations of Jews from France. By the end of August 1944, the Germans had deported more than 75,000 Jews from France to camps in the East, above all, to the Auschwitz-Birkenau killing center in occupied Poland, where most of them perished.

MARCH–APRIL 1942

German SS and police units deported Jews from Lublin, in the General Government, to Belzec, where they were killed. The Lublin deportations were the first major deportations carried out under Operation Reinhard, the code name for the German plan to kill more than 2 million Jews living in the General Government of occupied Poland.

MAY 1942

After trial gassings in April, an SS special detachment began gassing operations at the Sobibor killing center in early May. By November 1943, the special detachment had killed approximately 250,000 Jews at Sobibor.

MAY 4, 1942

SS officials performed the first selection of victims for gassing at the Auschwitz-Birkenau killing center. Weak, sick, and “unfit” prisoners were selected and housed in an isolation ward prior to being killed in the gas chambers. Between May 1940 and January 1945, more than one million people were killed or died at the Auschwitz camp complex. Close to 865,000 were never registered and most likely were selected for gassing immediately upon arrival. Nine out of ten of those who died at the Auschwitz complex were Jewish.

MAY 31, 1942

German authorities opened the I.G. Farben labor camp at Auschwitz III (also known as Monowitz or Buna), situated near the main camp complex at Auschwitz.

JULY 15, 1942

German authorities began deportations of Dutch Jews from the Westerbork transit camp in the Netherlands to Auschwitz. By September 13, 1944, over 100 trains had carried more than 100,000 people to killing centers and concentration camps in the German Reich and the General Government.

JULY 22, 1942

Between July 22 and September 12, German SS and police authorities, assisted by auxiliaries, deported approximately 300,000 Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto to killing centers and concentration camps. Of that number, about 265,000 Jews were sent to the Treblinka killing center where they were murdered.

Holocaust History Timeline

JULY 23, 1942

Gasping operations began at the Treblinka killing center. Between July 1942 and November 1943, SS special detachments at Treblinka murdered an estimated 750,000 Jews and at least 2,000 Roma (Gypsies).

AUGUST 4, 1942

German authorities began systematic deportations of Jews from Belgium. The deportations continued until the end of July 1944. The Germans deported more than 25,000 Jews, about half of Belgium's Jewish population, to the Auschwitz-Birkenau killing center in occupied Poland, where most of them perished.

1943

JANUARY 18–22, 1943

SS and police units deported more than 5,000 Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto to the Treblinka killing center. Members of the Jewish Fighting Organization (Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa, or ŻOB) fought against the Germans in armed revolt as Jews were rounded up for deportation.

MARCH 15, 1943

German SS, police, and military units began the deportation of Jews from Salonika, Greece to Auschwitz. Between March 20 and August 18, more than 50,000 Greek Jews arrived at the Auschwitz camp complex. SS staff killed most of the deportees in the gas chambers at Birkenau.

APRIL 19–MAY 16, 1943

In what is called the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, Jewish fighters resisted the German attempt to liquidate the ghetto.

JUNE 21, 1943

Heinrich Himmler, leader of the SS, ordered the liquidation of all ghettos in the Baltic States and Belorussia (Reich Commissariat Ostland) and the deportation of all Jews to concentration camps.

AUGUST 2, 1943

Jewish prisoners revolted at the Treblinka killing center. Although more than 300 prisoners escaped, most were caught and killed by German SS and police units assisted by army troops. The SS special detachment forced surviving prisoners to remove all remaining traces of the camp's existence. After the killing center was dismantled in November 1943, the special detachment shot the remaining prisoners.

SEPTEMBER 23, 1943

SS authorities ordered the final deportation of Jews from the Vilna Ghetto. SS and police units in Vilna deported 4,000 Jews to the Sobibor killing center and evacuated approximately 3,700 to labor camps in German-occupied Estonia.

OCTOBER 14, 1943

Jewish prisoners at the Sobibor killing center began an armed revolt. Approximately 300 escaped. German SS and police units, with assistance from German military units, recaptured more than 100 and killed them. After the revolt, SS special detachments closed and dismantled the killing center.

1944

MARCH 19, 1944

German military units occupied Hungary.

MAY 15–JULY 9, 1944

Hungarian gendarmerie (rural police units), under the guidance of German SS officials, deported nearly 430,000 Jews from Hungary. Most were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau where SS staff immediately killed about half of them in gas chambers.

JUNE 6, 1944

D-Day. British and American troops launched an invasion of France.

Holocaust History Timeline

JULY 23, 1944

Soviet troops liberated Majdanek. Surprised by the rapid Soviet advance, the Germans failed to destroy the camp and the evidence of mass murder.

AUGUST 7–30, 1944

SS and police officials liquidated the Lodz Ghetto and deported approximately 60,000 Jews and an undetermined number of Roma (Gypsies) to Auschwitz-Birkenau.

OCTOBER 7, 1944

Prisoners at Auschwitz-Birkenau revolt and blow up a crematorium.

OCTOBER 30, 1944

The last transport of Jews from Theresienstadt (Terezin) arrived at Auschwitz. During October, SS officials deported approximately 18,000 Jews to the Auschwitz camp complex. Most of them were killed in the gas chambers at Birkenau.

NOVEMBER 25, 1944

The SS began to demolish the gas chambers and crematoria at Auschwitz-Birkenau.

1945

JANUARY 17, 1945

As Soviet troops approached, SS units evacuated prisoners in the Auschwitz camp complex, marching them on foot toward the interior of the German Reich. The forced evacuations came to be called “death marches.”

JANUARY 27, 1945

Soviet troops liberated about 8,000 prisoners left behind at the Auschwitz camp complex.

APRIL 11, 1945

U.S. troops liberated more than 20,000 prisoners at Buchenwald.

APRIL 29, 1945

U.S. troops liberated approximately 32,000 prisoners at Dachau.

APRIL 30, 1945

Hitler committed suicide in his bunker in Berlin.

MAY 2, 1945

German units in Berlin surrendered to Soviet forces.

MAY 5, 1945

U.S. troops liberated more than 17,000 prisoners at Mauthausen concentration camp and more than 20,000 prisoners at the Gusen concentration camps in the annexed Austrian territory of the German Reich.

MAY 7–9, 1945

German armed forces surrendered unconditionally in the West on May 7 and in the East on May 9. Allied and Soviet forces proclaimed May 8, 1945, to be Victory in Europe Day (V-E Day).

AUGUST 3, 1945

United States special envoy Earl Harrison made public a report to President Truman on the treatment of Jewish displaced persons (DPs) in Germany. Following World War II, several hundred thousand Jewish survivors were unable or unwilling to return to their home countries. Harrison’s report contained a strong indictment of Allied military policies, underscored the plight of Jewish DPs, and led eventually to improved conditions for them in the American zone of occupied Germany.

SEPTEMBER 2, 1945

Japan surrendered. World War II officially ended.

Holocaust History Timeline

NOVEMBER 20, 1945

The International Military Tribunal (IMT), made up of American, British, French, and Soviet judges, began a trial of 21 major Nazi leaders at Nuremberg, Germany.

DECEMBER 22, 1945

President Truman issued a directive giving DPs preference in receiving visas under the existing quota restrictions on immigration to the United States.

1946

JULY 4, 1946

Mob attack against Jewish survivors in Kielce, Poland following a ritual murder accusation, a Polish mob killed more than 40 Jews and wounded dozens of others. This attack sparked a second mass migration of Jews from Poland and Eastern Europe to DP camps in Germany, Austria, and Italy.

AUGUST 1, 1946

The IMT passed judgment on the major Nazi war criminals on trial in Nuremberg, Germany. Eighteen were convicted, and three were acquitted. Eleven of the defendants were sentenced to death.

OCTOBER 16, 1946

In accordance with the sentences handed down after the convictions, ten defendants were executed by hanging. One defendant, Hermann Göring, escaped the hangman by committing suicide in his cell.

1948

MAY 14, 1948

The United States and the Soviet Union recognize the State of Israel.

JUNE 1948

Congress passed the Displaced Persons Act, authorizing 200,000 DPs to enter the United States in 1949 and 1950. Though at first the law's stipulations made it unfavorable to Jewish DPs, Congress amended the bill, and by 1952, thousands of Jewish DPs entered the United States. An estimated 80,000 Jewish DPs immigrated to the United States with the aid of American Jewish agencies between 1945 and 1952.

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