



# TREBLINKA'S LAST WITNESS



## STUDY GUIDE FOR THE FILM

Written by

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A PRODUCTION OF



Foreword and  
Historical Overview by  
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# Foreword

by Dr. Michael Berenbaum

The systematic state-sponsored murder of six million Jews, which Americans commonly call the Holocaust (Israelis the “Shoah” and Germans the “Final Solution to the Jewish Question”) is an enormously large event that darkens the landscape of twentieth-century humanity and continues to haunt us beyond the first decade of the new millennium. Auschwitz redefined the moral landscape of our common humanity.

The history of this event can be written in many ways and in many disciplines and genres: history—Jewish history, German history, American history, European history—and sociology, religion, psychology, political science, art, music, literature, film, and theater, to name but a few.

It can be outlined in stages and processes. The great historian Raul Hilberg spoke of *definition, expropriation, concentration, deportation, mobile killing units and death camps*.

German law defined the Jews in 1935, declaring that all those of Jewish ancestry, even two generations back, were Jews, no matter what religion they practiced, what traditions they embraced, or the identity they maintained. This held true throughout, even in the territories the Germans later conquered.

From 1933 onward, German law and society expropriated Jewish property and business, possessions and holdings, reversing a 150-year process of emancipation that saw the Jews gain rights as citizens of the country, denying them civil liberties and rights, introducing apartheid. Over the past decades we learned that even neutral powers such as Switzerland and supposedly neutral industries such as banking and insurance—even distinguished museums and trend-setting art collectors—participated in the processes of expropriation and enjoyed its fruits. All of these decrees were designed to get the Jews to leave, to make Germany and its conquered lands *Judenrein—free of Jews*.

These laws and decrees, business practices, and social norms were designed to give an incentive and to provide a reward for discrimination. Expropriation did not end in 1945 but continues even in our time.

Jews were concentrated first in ghettos and later in concentration and slave labor camps, kept together pending a decision on what to do about the “Jewish question,” what to do about these Jews. They were deported from small communities to larger ghettos in the East and from cities to transit camps in Western Europe. All the while, the German Reich expanded, and more and more Jews came under its control.

Then the decision was taken, a policy implemented.

It was large and bold even though some scholars contend that it began locally and only then was implemented regionally. It was truthfully, albeit euphemistically, called “the Final Solution to the Jewish Question”; in simple terms, the murder of all Jews the Germans could get their hands on. At first, mobile troops were sent to stationary victims; Jews were shot one by one in the towns and villages of captured Soviet territory in 1941.

Later, when this process proved cumbersome both for the killers and the bystanders—no consideration was given to their victims—a new method was developed. The victims would be made mobile and the killing would be conducted in killing centers, where an economy of scale could be achieved and an assembly-line process introduced. Bullets would no longer be required. Gas chambers—first developed by the Germans, to kill mentally retarded, physically handicapped and emotionally disturbed Germans who were an embarrassment to the claim of Aryan supremacy—were employed. Gassing was followed by cremation so that the bodies of the murdered would disappear. Deportation was again employed, taking the Jews from the ghettos and transit camps of their incarceration to the death camps of their annihilation.

Although historians may talk about processes, times, and dates, history is shaped by—and imposed upon—real people, people like you and me.

Who were these people? Who were the victims and what was their story? Who were the killers and what was their story? Who were the bystanders and what was their story?

If only it were that simple.

Within each category of participant—yes, even the bystanders, the onlookers were participants—there were a wide variety of people whose age, background, and experience differed so widely and so greatly, even within the same community and even within the same family.

What was their story and how are we to learn of it?

Ancient people told stories, transmitted from one generation to another to recount their history. The Hebrew Bible’s books of Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, and Kings are a prime example; the Christian Scriptures another; so too The Iliad and The Odyssey, classic works of Greek literature. Preachers would tell their stories, ballads would be used, so too drawings. This process continues in our time.

There are two major ways of telling stories in our time that engage the public—books and movies. In books, words dominate, and in movies, including television, visual images are combined with words to tell a story that engages the eyes, the ears, and the mind.

This study guide enables us to better understand the story of Samuel Willenberg, a survivor of Treblinka. Samuel now entering his 10th decade is the last known survivor of Treblinka, a death camp opened on July 22, 1942 and closed shortly after the Uprising of August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1943. During those 13 months some 870,000-900,000 Jews were murdered, less than 100 survived and Samuel Willenberg is the very last of those survivors. So every word he utters is precious.

After he is gone, Treblinka will no longer be a living memory, merely a historical memory.

Let me describe the externals in one or two brief sentences. The third of the three Aktion Reinhard camps — Belzec and Sobibor were the other two—Treblinka was the most lethal and efficient of the three killing centers, staffed by some 120 guards of whom 30 were SS and 90 Ukrainians. It was situated in rural German-occupied Poland along the Warsaw-Bialystok railway line in a region densely populated by Jews.

We enter into the gates of Treblinka with an eyewitness, Sam Willenberg as our guide, and we travel between his world and our world through his testimony and his artistic recreations of that death camp in sculpture. This Study Guide poses carefully chosen questions posed for critical thinking. Dr. Miriam Klein Kassenoff gives us the tools to become active researchers, guided in our research but given the freedom to explore individually as well as to work jointly, collectively. We are given room to reflect and the opportunity, if taken, will lead us to many important places.

Anyone who has taught the Holocaust knows that students—and their teachers—are reflective about this material. They speak of it at home and in the classrooms, when they are walking with their friends and talking with their parents. They inquire of their grandparents, and they sit and listen with rapt and unusually respectful attention to survivors.

Questions are posed. Questions can be pursued together, and after each viewing our questions become deeper, more intense and we rightfully reject the all too facile answers. Premature answers are usually immature answers. There is room for creativity in this study guide, space for reflection and an opportunity to learn.

The filmmaker has given us a powerful work, visually compelling, intellectually informative and emotionally moving. He understood that Samuel Willenberg is a masterful storyteller and allowed him to shape the film, to bear witness. The author of this study guide has given us an important means by which to get the most out of this film both in the classroom and in private viewing. Remember, we can only approximate that world, approach its outer perimeters, but even from our safe vantage point, the questions it raises, the challenges it poses, are critical to twenty-first century humanity.

You are about to begin a journey of learning and teaching, of teaching for the sake of learning. Begin it with confidence but also with humility. At the other end of the journey, something within you will have changed, for one does not approach this material easily, and one does not emerge unscathed. Still, almost all of us who have begun this journey regard it as essential to our moral development and critical thinking as well as to our common humanity.

## Dr. Michael Berenbaum

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# TREBLINKA'S LAST WITNESS

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## SYNOPSIS

Samuel Willenberg, now 92 years old, is the last living survivor of the Treblinka death camp in Nazi-occupied Poland where an estimated 900,000 Jews were murdered in a period of just 13 months at the height of World War II. Still haunted 70 years later by the horrors he witnessed as a young forced laborer, Samuel has immortalized the Treblinka story in a series of bronze sculptures of the tragic victims who dwell indelibly in his memory like ghosts.

The sculptures, together with archival footage and photographs from the period, illustrate Samuel's riveting narrative, telling a singularly powerful and personal story of the annihilation of Polish Jewry in the death camps built by the Germans to carry out Hitler's infamous Final Solution.

As a prisoner at Treblinka, Samuel witnessed the death in the gas chambers of his two beloved sisters, Itta and Tamara, among countless others. In his sculptures, the most poignant of these individual tragedies are brought back vividly to life.

Like Polansky's "The Pianist", the film focuses on one man's personal odyssey to reflect the enormity of the genocide inflicted upon Poland's 3.5 million Jews, at the time the world's largest Jewish community, seven times greater than the Jewish population of pre-war Germany.

The story begins in Czestochowa, Poland, where Samuel grew up as the son of an eminent Jewish painter. When the Germans marched into Poland in 1939, the family went into hiding, but when Samuel's sisters were arrested by the Gestapo in 1942 he fled to nearby Opatow where he was rounded up along with the town's entire Jewish population of 6,000 people and herded aboard a cattle train bound for Treblinka.

The Nazi death camps were very different from the work camps, like Auschwitz and Dachau. They were, in the words of holocaust historian Yehuda Bauer, "factories whose end product was dead Jews, a first in human history where people were exterminated on an industrial basis". At Treblinka the devastation was complete.

Within hours of the train's arrival, all 6,000 of Samuel's fellow deportees were dead. By a stroke of unimaginable luck, Samuel was recognized by a member of the small Jewish work crew at the camp and selected to join the labor force. "It took me several days to realize where I was," he says. "I was in hell."

The sculptures tell the stories from the rest of his time at Treblinka. There is the disabled Jewish veteran of World War One whose German medals of valor could not save him; the mad girl from Warsaw who arrived at the camp in a ball gown and high-heeled shoes; a 19-year-old student named Ruth Dorfman whose flowing head of beautiful hair Samuel is forced to harvest for the Nazi war effort;

the synagogue cantor reduced to overseeing the camp latrines; and the trio of Jewish violinists pressed by the SS guards to accompany the slaughter with classical music.

The largest of these sculptures depicts the prisoner revolt at Treblinka in August 1943 as the Germans, the tide of war turning against them, set about eradicating all evidence of their crimes by destroying the death camps. Samuel was one of about 100 inmates who escaped amid a fierce firefight. By the war's end only 67 remained alive. The others have all since died in the intervening decades, leaving Samuel as the last witness.

After his escape, he made his way to Warsaw where he took part in the ill-fated Polish Uprising of 1944. Once again, he somehow managed to escape when the Polish resistance collapsed amid some of the bloodiest street fighting of the war.

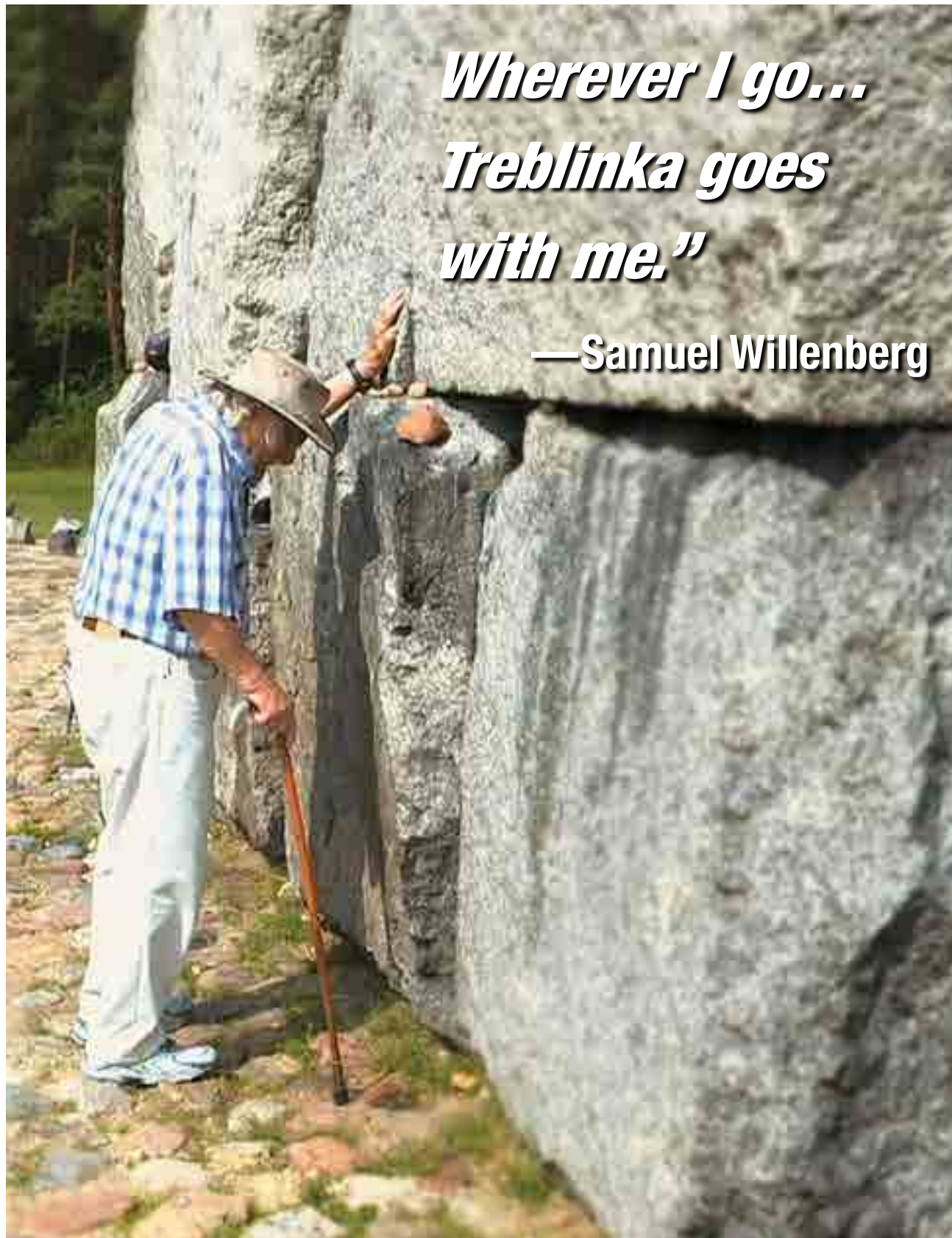
Samuel's story is one of survival against staggering odds and, though heart-rending and horrifying, it is ultimately one of triumph. At the end of the war, he met Ada, a survivor of the Warsaw ghetto whose mother perished at Treblinka. The couple married and went on to rebuild their lives in Israel where they reside today. Their daughter Orit is a successful architect and in the film the family visits Berlin to see the new Israeli Embassy which she designed on land once occupied by Hitler's Third Reich. Orit has also designed a museum for the Treblinka memorial site and Samuel's dream is to see it built with his sculptures on permanent display there before he dies.

Told without dramatization, *Treblinka's Last Witness* is an unvarnished tale of extraordinary intensity, a true page-turner carried along on its own raw power. Says producer/director Alan Tomlinson: "Rarely, once in a lifetime if one is lucky, does a documentary filmmaker find a subject whose story is so vivid and whose manner of telling it so full of passion and unveiled emotion. To travel with Samuel on this astonishing journey is not simply to hear again about the horrors of the Holocaust, but to experience them with him, as though it were all happening in one's very presence."



*“Wherever I go...  
Treblinka goes  
with me.”*

—Samuel Willenberg



# PART I

## HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE



*Only guard yourself and guard your soul  
carefully, lest you forget the things your eyes saw  
and lest these things depart your heart all the days of  
your life, and you shall make them known  
to your children and your children's children*

— Deuteronomy 4:9

## Introduction

*by Dr. Miriam Klein Kassenoff and Dr. Anita Meyer Meinbach*

*Reprinted with permission from "Studying the Holocaust through Film and Literature" (pub. 2004)*

### The Ashes Of Auschwitz Are Everywhere.

*—Elie Wiesel*

Why teach the past? Why teach about something that happened in the last century?  
Why teach about the Nazi Holocaust in the twenty-first century?

Lessons of the past are even more compelling today as we continue sadly seeing genocide occurring around the world. The lessons of the past will help us to deal with the tragedies of today and inspire us as we build tomorrow. The lessons of the past offer hope as we invite a new generation to guide their lives with a deep regard for humanity, a commitment to the values of caring and respect for others, and the development of a strong moral and ethical fiber that will enable them to stand up for what they believe in and speak out against injustice.

At the cornerstone of education is history. Only as we become aware of how the past has shaped the present can we build a more positive future. Today more than ever, the study of the events of the Holocaust and its lessons are vital. As the Holocaust is studied, students discover significant truths about human nature and the importance of compassion and the courage of the human spirit.

At the core of Holocaust education are lessons for life, lessons that will guide generations of students as they establish goals and take responsibility for themselves and one another in building a community that celebrates the diversity that exists among us. Every day the news is filled with accounts of racial hatred and genocide. Yet these acts of prejudice and persecution continue, and the world watches. Students must become aware of the devastating effects of prejudice, indifference, and apathy. Students must be guided in the ideals of human decency and moral courage.

Through a study of the Holocaust, students are inspired to take a stand for what they believe in and to recognize that certain universal values of right and wrong must be upheld. Most important, they need to recognize that each individual has the potential to effect change.

This study guide bridges the past, present, and future. We must teach the history and events of the Holocaust first. Students must know what occurred during the years 1933-1945 that almost destroyed an entire culture, the Jewish people of Eastern Europe, as well as millions of other innocent people. Yehuda Bauer, the esteemed Holocaust scholar, has said, "The Holocaust can either be a precedent or a warning." It is the intention of this guide to teach the events of the Holocaust as a warning. A knowledge of the history is not enough. We must teach the moral and ethical lessons that have evolved from the Holocaust so that students can connect these with the moral dilemmas they face in their own lives.

*Dr. Anita Meyer Meinbach is the co-author of "Studying the Holocaust Through Film and Literature".*

# Historical Overview

Written by Dr. Michael Berenbaum

“The Holocaust,” which has come to mean the systematic, state-sponsored murder of six million Jews and millions of non-Jews by the Nazis and their collaborators during World War II. The word is Greek in origin, a translation of the Hebrew word *olah*, meaning a burnt offering offered whole unto the Lord. The Nazis called the murder of the Jews “The Final Solution to the Jewish Problem.” It was their way of speaking euphemistically. Defining Jews as a problem or a question demands a solution. The word “final” was only all too accurate. Their intention was to totally end Jewish history, to eliminate all Jewish blood once and for all.

Yiddish-speaking Jews used the word *churban*, destruction, to signify the Holocaust. More recently, the word *Shoah* has been used alone, to signify a whirlwind of destruction. Historian Lucy Dawidowicz called the Holocaust “The War Against the Jews,” and perhaps she is right. The planned destruction of an entire people was a war the Nazis came close to winning.

The destruction of the Jews was at the center of Nazi ideology, at the center of Hitler’s vision, but Jews were not the Nazi’s only victims. Nazi racism was directed against a mosaic of victims.

Some were targeted for what they did. Trade unionists and political dissidents were sent to concentration camps. Some were victimized for what they refused to do. Jehovah’s Witnesses would not swear allegiance to the State; they would not register for the draft. German and after the 1938 annexation of Austria, Austrian male homosexuals were arrested because they would not breed the master race; they were an insult to the Nazi macho image. Permit me not to use the politically correct language of today but the language that was used then to describe the victims.

In addition to Jews, the Germans systematically killed three groups. The first, mentally retarded, physically handicapped or emotionally disturbed Germans were murdered in a so-called “euthanasia” program. They were considered “life unworthy of living.” Gas chambers and crematoria were developed to kill these Germans. As many as 200,000 Germans were killed in the euthanasia program.

Roma and Sinti (Gypsies) were also killed. Their fate most closely paralleled the Jews. They died in the gas chambers as families—men, women, and children. Perhaps as many as 250,000 Gypsies were murdered by the Germans.

During the early days of the war against the Soviet Union in 1941, Soviet prisoners of war were put to death mostly by starvation and exposure without shelter. Later, they were allowed to live, to be used in forced labor. But some 3.3 million Soviet POWs died under German rule. Slavic nations, most especially, were decimated.

## Why Jews?

Antisemitism, the hatred of Jews, has existed throughout history. Jews play a special role in Christianity. Jesus was born a Jew and preached to the Jews, but his followers broke with Judaism and became his followers, Christians, and developed a rival religion. They believed that Christianity had come to fulfill and replace Judaism and did not understand why the Jews remained faithful to their traditions and refused to convert. Religious antisemitism persisted throughout the centuries. The sixteenth century religious reformer Martin Luther admonished the Jews for not embracing his new religion and called for violence against them. He referred to Jews as venomous.

In addition, some interpretations of the Gospel—which were only changed by the Vatican in the 1960s—blamed the Jews for the death of Jesus; not only the Jews of those days but all Jews were considered guilty of the murder of Christ. Thus, the early origin of antisemitism is religious.

Until the French Revolution of 1789, the status of Jews in Europe was tenuous. Treated as outsiders, they had few civil rights. They were taxed as a community, not as individuals. Exclusion from the larger society reinforced their religious identity and strengthened their communal institutions, which served judicial and quasi-governmental functions. In the French Revolution, with its promise of liberty, equality and fraternity, the rights of citizenship were extended to Jews. Still, Jewish freedoms were conditioned on the willingness of Jews to abandon their age-old customs and their communal identity.

In the nineteenth century a new form of antisemitism developed—political antisemitism. The term “antisemitism” was coined by a German journalist to refer to this type of prejudice. Hatred of the Jews was used for political purposes to elect candidates to office, to oppose policies that would grant minorities including Jews equal rights and greater freedom. One such antisemitic incident divided France. A Jewish Captain on the French General Staff, Alfred Dreyfuss was falsely accused of spying for the enemy. In the streets his opponents chanted “death to the Jews.” Even when the fraudulent charges were discovered, there were many who still refused to believe that Dreyfuss was innocent. They refused to accept the Jew as a member of society. But the lesson was clear: Jews were not secure even in the most advanced nation in Europe.

A document was forged by the Russian Secret Police entitled the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, which described a Jewish conspiracy to dominate the world. Despite undeniable proof of its falsehood it was widely believed and circulated throughout Europe.

As the nineteenth century ended, Jewish life was in ferment throughout the East. In Eastern Europe, many Jews lived in shtetls, villages that were predominantly Jewish. They spoke Yiddish, read Yiddish books, both sacred and secular, and attended Yiddish theaters and movies. Many wore traditional black caftans and continued to observe the practices of their grandparents. Jewish religious life in all its forms was fervent. Yet many a young Jew left the Yeshiva to enter a German university, casting aside traditional garb and practice and ardently embracing the teachings of the West. Despite antisemitism and cultural constraints, Germany was the place where Jews were best able to participate in intellectual and cultural life. They assimilated rapidly. Inter-marriage was widespread; so was conversion.

Jewish life was caught up in radical change. In 1881, Czar Alexander II was assassinated by revolutionaries. Jews were blamed and an era of promise came to an end in Russia. Pogroms and persecutions erupted that set off a massive migration to the West as millions of Jews migrated to the New World. The Jewish population of the United States increased from 250,000 in 1881 to some 4 million in 1919 as waves of immigrants came to escape antisemitism, poverty and despair. The shores of the United States were open to receive those needing a haven, those yearning to be free.

At times of economic insecurity or rapid cultural change, at times of defeat or dislocation Jews were scapegoats, blamed for all that was happening. People could be united by turning against a common enemy.

In Germany, in the century preceding the Nazi rise of power, antisemitism was linked to German nationalism and culture. Intellectuals, artists, and composers, such as Richard Wagner, believed that Jews were innately incapable of being part of the true German nation. This idea directly impacted on Hitler.

Adolph Hitler and his followers built on this long tradition of antisemitism, but transformed it into racial antisemitism. The enemy was Jewish blood, conversion was impossible. Only the complete elimination of Jews would do. A Jew was guilty not because of the religious beliefs he practiced, or the identity he affirmed, but because of blood. And they joined racial antisemitism with an even more lethal brew. Redemptive antisemitism, the elimination of the Jews—not initially but eventually by murder, which they termed extermination—was essential to the national well being of the German people. Jews were regarded as a cancer, a tumor. Invasive surgery was required for the health of the nation.



## The Nazi Persecution

The Nazis came to power in Germany legally; they were elected to the Reichstag. Adolph Hitler assumed office in 1933 as head of a coalition government with his opponents gambling that once in power he would be forced to the center, to moderate or mute the antisemitic, racist and dictatorial aspects of his platform. He spent the first two years of his regime consolidating power, eliminating political opposition and solidifying his dictatorship.

German law defined the Jews in the Nuremberg legislation of 1935; Jews were identified not by the religion they professed, the values they avowed, the beliefs they practiced, or the identity they affirmed, but biologically, based on the religion of their grandparents. The enemy was all Jews, religious and secular, ardent or assimilationist, Zionists or German nationalists. Since Jewish blood was the target, even those who had converted to Christianity, even those whose parents had been converts, including priests and nuns, ministers and pastors, were defined as Jews. Once established, this definition of Jews was applied in country after country as the Reich expanded its borders and occupied other lands from 1938 onward.

Over the next three years, property was confiscated, civil liberties were abridged, then violated, and ultimately cancelled; homes, businesses, possessions, synagogues, public institutions and private property were all taken from the Jews. Jewish students were not allowed to attend schools or universities; they could not sit on park benches or swim in public pools. At first, this discrimination was an effort to force them to emigrate, to make Germany Judenrein [free of Jews]; and later confiscation and expropriation of personal property, homes and businesses became an essential part of the “Final Solution.”

In Germany this policy evolved slowly from 1933-39; the first stage, eliminating Jews from German society and forcing them to leave Germany in acts of “self deportation” reached its crescendo in the November 9-11 pogroms of 1938 known as Kristallnacht, in which the synagogues of Germany and Austria were burned, Jewish businesses were looted, Jewish homes were invaded and 30,000 Jewish men—almost all between the ages of 16 and 60—were arrested and sent to concentration camps.

The process of eliminating the Jews from society, which had taken years in Germany, took only months in Austria after its incorporation into the Reich in March 1938, and oftentimes only weeks in territories to be later occupied due to German expansionism.

David Marwell, the director of New York’s Museum of Jewish Heritage, has said that just because Jews were simply overpowered, did not mean that they were passive. Jews responded to the Nazi onslaught by trying to emigrate. There were hurdles to overcome, but they were persistent. More than one in two left Germany and Austria before the onset of war. They trained themselves in mobile professions. They became electricians and plumbers, agricultural workers and nurses rather than lawyers and writers. Musicians and architects “spoke” a universal language. Jews turned inward, turning toward Jewish history and Jewish spirituality to face the onslaught.

Within a month of the beginning of World War II, in September 1939, more than two million Jews came under German domination as the Germans conquered Poland. Forced emigration of a population so vast became an ever more distant fantasy. Shortly afterwards the first systematic killings began, not of Jews but of the mentally retarded and physically disabled Germans. Hitler personally ordered, “that patients considered incurable according to the best available human judgment of their state of health, can be granted a mercy killing.” Within two years, six killing centers were established with gas chambers and crematoria. The physicians who began their service at these centers would later be moved to the death camps. During the German occupation tens of thousands of Poles, including priests, the intelligentsia and opponents of Nazism were murdered.

## Ghettoization and War

Jews in German-occupied Poland were forced to live together in confined areas, ghettos in the East; and with the German invasion of Western Europe in 1940, transit camps were established in the West. To the killers, these were temporary measures, pending a determination of some final policy. The victims thought that the ghettos would endure. They were wrong.

Just as German policy toward Jews did not remain static so too German control of Europe evolved. In his 1925 book, *Mein Kampf* [My struggle] Hitler articulated a vision of German expansionism, German “living space.” Once in power, his vision became state policy. The German Reich increased in size by incorporating former territories; in 1938 Austria and the Sudetenland, and then from the fall of 1939 onward expansion by war. Poland fell in September; Western Europe, Holland, France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Denmark and other countries in the spring and summer of 1940 and the Balkans and the Soviet Union in 1941. With each expansion, the number of Jews under German control increased and immediately anti-Jewish policies were imposed.

Emigration was not possible. There were too many Jews and they were unwanted everywhere. Allied countries refused to receive large numbers of Jews even in peacetime. This position was confirmed at the 1938 conference in Evian; reaffirmed at the Bermuda Conference of 1943. The Germans looked upon Allied reluctance to receive immigrants as tacit consent. They were confident that the Allies were equally reticent towards implementing rescue.

## Implementing The Final Solution—*Einsatzgruppen*

Sometime in the winter of 1940-41 a policy decision was made and crowned with a proper name—“The Final Solution to the Jewish Problem.” The “solution” envisioned was all too final, the murder of all Jews under German domination—men, women and children. Those who acted on this policy were certain that they were implementing the Fuhrer’s [Adolph Hitler’s] will.

With the invasion of the Soviet Union in June of 1941, the slaughter began by mobile killing units, *Einsatzgruppen*, that accompanied advancing German forces. They entered town after town, village after village, hamlets and even large cities, rounded up the Jews, Gypsies and Soviet Commissars and shot them one by one, bullet by bullet, person after person. This process continued as the army advanced to the East and when the military situation stabilized the killing units returned to finish off what had been left undone. Once again, they were to return in 1943, this time to dig up the bodies and burn them to wipe out all evidence of their crime. Killing was difficult, even for the killers. The killers drank heavily. Alcohol somehow made the work more bearable. They spoke in euphemisms—of special actions, special treatment, executive measures, cleansing, resettlements, liquidation, finishing off, “appropriate” treatment.

The killers themselves were marked. If post-war testimony is to be believed, one of the key SS officers told Heinrich Himmler, the leader of the SS, “Look at the eyes of the men in this kommando, how deeply shaken they are...These men are finished for the rest of their lives. What kind of followers are we training here? Either neurotics or savages.”

The German killers did not operate alone. The *Wehrmacht*, the German Army also participated. Local gendarmerie, native antisemites and even neighbors who had previously worked with their local Jews participated in the killing. One of the most painful documents of the Holocaust is to read of a German complaint against the venomous cruelty of the Romanian army who tortured the Jews before killing them. And in recent years, a Roman Catholic Priest, Father Patrick Desbois, has been interviewing older inhabitants, eyewitnesses to the killing and unearthing the mass graves. He has made some important forensic discoveries. The SS and the Wehrmacht used different bullets than the local police or the native citizens so he can identify who performed the killing. He has also discovered bodies without bullets and thus the stories of fathers and mothers who took a bullet for their child and threw them into the mass graves in the hopes that they would survive. He has also found keys, which indicates that when the victims left home that morning, they fully expected to return to their homes again. We all carry keys; they represent security and safety.

To deal with this type of killing, a more impersonal method of killing was sought. If the killers could no longer be brought to the victims in order to slaughter them face to face, the victims must be brought to the killers and disposed of in a way that kept the victims at a distance. Thus a second form of killing was developed: the death camp, where the victims were gassed, and the bodies were then burned.

### From *Einsatzgruppen* to Death Camps

Railroads were *the* essential link to the killing process. And deportation transformed the ghetto into a transit camp, a way station to contain the captive population until the killing centers were developed and opened for business. Deportation meant the loss of home, the collapse of families, the beginning of a journey to death. Deportation also meant that there was no tomorrow, no hope. It was then—and only then—that several ghettos, Warsaw, Vilna, Bialystok and many others, rose in revolt.

The time table was swift. The policy was announced in January 1942 at the Wannsee Conference where 15 men—seven of whom held doctorates from German universities—gathered to learn of the “Final Solution.” They spoke of killing 11 million Jews in Europe, assuming that they would conquer Great Britain and all of the Soviet Union. After this meeting three death camps that were under development since November 1941—months prior to the conference—came on line in the winter and the spring; by the summer of 1942 deportations to death had begun; by 1943 most of the Jews to be killed in the Holocaust were already dead.

At the time of the Wannsee Conference between 75-80% of the Jews who were to be murdered in the Holocaust were still alive. By the spring of 1943 four of five of the Jews were dead.

Three camps were reserved exclusively for killing Jews; Sobibor, Treblinka and Belzec. Auschwitz and Majdanek served three functions; killing centers, slave labor camps, concentration camps. At Auschwitz, the largest and most lethal of the camps, some 1.25 million people were murdered, mostly Jews. Twenty thousand Roma and Sinti (Gypsies) were killed as well as tens of thousands of Poles and Soviet prisoners of war. A German map of 1945 lists 3,000 camps, but there may have been more. Recent United States Holocaust Memorial Museum research indicates that there may have been some 42,000 [forty-two thousand] camps of varying types. These other camps were not solely dedicated to killing though conditions were so harsh, slave labor so intense, food so scarce that hundreds of thousands of inmates died or were killed.

Nazi doctors, such as Josef Mengele, MD, Ph.D. who was both a physician and a researcher stationed at Auschwitz, performed medical experiments on the inmates. They were forcibly sterilized or frozen. Tests were painful, exhausting, and traumatic for the frightened and hungry children who made up the bulk of Mengele’s subjects. When the research was completed some subjects were killed by phenol injections and their organs were autopsied and analyzed. Scientifically interesting anatomical specimens were preserved and shipped out to the Institute in Berlin-Dahlem for further research.

Upon arrival, Jews were separated in a process known as “selektion” whereby an SS physician would divide the young and the able bodied from other prisoners. Those chosen to die would be sent directly to the gas chambers. Their personal possessions were confiscated, and hair shorn; as many as two thousand would be sent into the sealed gas chambers at one time. SS personnel would pour two canisters of Zyklon B down an opening and within 20-30 minutes the new arrivals would be dead. Their bodies would then be sent to the crematoria where gold teeth were removed, and private parts examined before cremation. Sometimes when the crematoria could not handle the volume of killings, bodies would be burned in open fields.

The able bodied who passed the first selektion would then be processed. They too would be shaven, their personal possessions confiscated, and a number was tattooed on their forearm; they would be referred to by number not by name. They were forced to work for long hours, under harsh conditions. Prisoners were neither adequately fed nor kept warm. They too, faced periodic selektion. Only the few able to withstand these horrible conditions could survive. Weakened or sick prisoners were sent back to Birkenau and gassed.

The fate of Jews differed country by country, region by region. What evolved slowly in Germany over twelve years or in Poland over three, took less than three months in Hungary. The Germans invaded Hungary in March 1944. Jews were defined immediately and their property was confiscated; by April they were ghettoized; on May 15<sup>th</sup>, the deportation began and by the 8<sup>th</sup> of July 437,402 Jews had been deported primarily to Birkenau, the death camp at the Auschwitz complex on 147 trains. Eight in ten were gassed upon arrival.

### World War II and the War Against the Jews

The progress of World War II impacted the Holocaust. With each German advance more Jews came under German domination; impending German losses often intensified the pace of destruction; each area liberated from German control brought relief to its endangered population—none more endangered than the Jews. And in the final months of the war, as camps in the East were being overrun, the Nazis instituted a series of forced evacuations by foot and by rail, hasty retreats of incarcerated concentration camps populations. Few if any provisions were provided; the marches took place in the dead of winter. They were known as death marches, the last ditch effort to keep the living witnesses from being captured by the Allies. For the victims, the struggle was no longer against the Nazis, but against death itself as they were forced to draw upon reservoirs of strength, pushed beyond the limits of endurance.

### Resistance

Jews fought the Nazis in the forests of Eastern Europe and in the ghettos of German-occupied Poland; they fought as part of the Marquis in France and with Tito in Yugoslavia; they took up arms alone in occupied Poland, and resisted alongside Soviet partisans.

Even in the death camps of Birkenau, Treblinka, and Sobibor, Jews resisted with arms; crematoria were blown up, escapes were organized.

Armed resistance was not the first response. Jews were more practiced in the art of spiritual resistance, thwarting Nazi intentions by non-violent means, by less than all out confrontation. Courage in the face of death—and valor—took many forms.

Jews fought against impossible odds. Unlike classical guerilla fighters, Jews were often immobile. Confined to ghettos, they were captive and vulnerable for retaliation. Antisemitism was widespread, therefore Jewish resistance did not enjoy popular support. The Jewish fighters could not disappear among the Polish population. They were subject to betrayal. The ghettos in which they fought were subject to collective reprisals, collective responsibility. All could be killed for the decisions of a few.

Arms were difficult and dangerous to obtain; they had to be purchased and smuggled, pistol by pistol, rifle by rifle. Material assistance was not available from the Allies, the underground armies in German-occupied Poland were reluctant to supply weapons against a common enemy; they did not believe that Jews would fight. Armed resistance was an act of desperation. It erupted when Jews understood Nazi intentions, when hope of survival had been abandoned. The motivation of the fighters was to protect Jewish honor, to avenge Jewish death.

### Liberation and Its Aftermath

As the Allied armies swept through Europe in 1944 and 1945, they found 7 to 9 million displaced people living in countries that were not their own. More than six million returned to their native lands. But more than one million refused repatriation. Victims became displaced persons, stateless, in search of new homes and new lands.

For Jews, there was nowhere to go. Their homes had been destroyed, their families murdered and they were unwanted everywhere. The presence of so many Jews on German soil, living among

their former killers, pressured world leaders to find a place where the Jews could go. Most wanted to rebuild their lives in an independent Jewish state in Palestine. They demonstrated their determination by trying two types of illegal migration, *Bricha*, the escape from Soviet-held territories to American or British-held territories, and *Aliyah Bet*, efforts to bring displaced persons to Palestine in violation of British policy. Only in 1948, when the State of Israel was proclaimed and opened its shores to receive the Jews, did most find a home, a place to rebuild their lives.

In the winter of 1943, Franklin Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, and Josef Stalin, leaders of the United States, Great Britain and the USSR declared their determination to bring the Nazi leaders to justice. Allied outrage at Nazi wartime behavior only intensified after the discovery of killing centers.

Just after the war ended, agreement was reached to conduct joint trials. President Truman, who replaced FDR on April 12, 1945, took the unusual step of asking Supreme Court Justice Robert Jackson to lead the American effort. Nuremberg, the site of annual Nazi party pageants was chosen for the trials.

### Three forms of crimes were specified in the indictment

**Crimes against the Peace** — Planning, preparation, initiation or waging of a war of aggression.

**War Crimes** — Violations of laws and customs of war such as the murder, ill-treatment, or deportation of slave labor or for any other purpose of civilian populations...killing of hostages, prisoners of war, plunder of private property, destruction of towns and cities.

**Crimes Against Humanity** — Murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation...against any civilian population...persecution on political, racial, or religious grounds...whether or not in violation of domestic laws of the country where perpetrated.

There were two series of trials at Nuremberg and over the past 68 years the trials of Nazi war criminals have continued because of the specialness of this crime. In 1948, the United Nations passed the Genocide Convention, which was designed to overcome the claims of Nuremberg defendants that they had violated no law. The Convention specifically defines the various aspects of Nazi genocide as criminal. It prohibits the killing of persons belonging to a group (the final solution); causing grievous bodily or spiritual harm to members of a group; deliberately enforcing upon the group living conditions which could lead to complete or partial extermination (ghettoization and starvation); enforcing measures to prevent births among the group (sterilization); forcibly removing children from the group and transferring them to another group (the "Aryanization" of Polish children). The adoption of the Convention was followed the next day by the adoption of a Universal Declaration of Human Rights. And in the years since, survivors have borne witness to the events they experienced.

The world tried to rebuild the scaffolding of justice by trying a few perpetrators; it tried to learn the lessons of the Holocaust and to outlaw genocide, hoping against hope that naming the crime and outlawing it would somehow end it.

As to the Holocaust survivors, who were a small minority of the victims—many more were murdered than survived—the question they faced was what to do with the accident of their survival. They too had to rebuild their lives in its aftermath. Over time they came to answer the question: "Why did I survive?" not by a statement about the past but by what they did with their lives in the aftermath.

Because they have faced death many will have learned what is most important in life. Life itself,

love, family and community, and what Holocaust survivor and Academy Award Winner Gerda Klein called "a boring evening at home." The small things, the simple things we have all taken for granted, cannot be taken for granted but must be treasured and appreciated anew. For Jewish survivors, the survival of the Jewish people became paramount. The final statement of Jewish history and Jewish memory must be about life and not death, no matter how pervasive that death.

For many survivors, bearing witness conferred a sense of meaning in the aftermath of atrocity. They have told the story of the past, to keep a promise they made to those they left behind. More importantly, in the hope—however slim—that it can transform the future.

### What of the role of Holocaust memory in the contemporary world?

In a world of relativism, it has taken its place as the Absolute. We don't know what is good. We don't know what is bad. But we do know that the Holocaust is evil, absolute evil. It is for that reason that people use the word in the plural as they attempt to call attention to their suffering—the Black Holocaust, the Holocaust of the American Indians, the Holocaust in Kosovo, Rwanda, Bosnia. The Holocaust is the nuclear bomb of moral epithets. It is an event of such magnitude that the more we sense the relativism of values, the more we require the Holocaust as the Foundation for a negative absolute—absolute evil. This may well be the reason why the leaders of European nations have rediscovered the importance of the Holocaust for contemporary moral education. This may also be the reason why it becomes the focal point for Papal visits to Israel, for German society and for American society.

It may also be why Holocaust deniers deny an event that all reason, all standards of rationality demonstrate cannot be denied. It is in this function as negative absolute that the Holocaust may loom largest in the coming years.

Consciousness of the Holocaust has moved way beyond the Jewish community. In the past half century the bereaved memories of a parochial community have been transformed into an act of conscience. *Survivors have responded in the most deeply Jewish way of all: remembering suffering and transmitting that memory in order to fortify conscience, to plead for decency, to strengthen values and thus to intensify a commitment to human dignity.* That is how the Biblical Jews taught us to remember that we were slaves in Egypt and that is why the Biblical experience has framed the struggle for freedom ever since.

One cannot undo what has happened. Historians can answer the question *how* only in the most technical sense detailing event after event; as you shall read, theologians, writers, poets, philosophers, psychologists and artists have not answered the question *why*.

Yet we can answer the question of what to do with this history. Embrace it, study it, wrestle with it and ultimately transform it into a weapon for the human spirit to enlarge our sense of responsibility, to alleviate human suffering and strengthen our moral resolve.

## TIME LINE

### 1933

<b>January 30</b>	Hitler appointed Chancellor of Germany
<b>March 23</b>	First concentration camp established at Dachau
<b>March 23</b>	German parliament empowers Hitler to enact all laws on its behalf
<b>April 1</b>	Hitler proclaims one-day boycott of all Jewish shops/businesses
<b>April 7</b>	Jews are expelled from the civil service, including judges and professors, teachers, lawyers and physicians
<b>April 26</b>	Establishment of the Gestapo
<b>May 10</b>	Public burning of books deemed unGermanic, written by Jews and presumed opponents of Nazism throughout Germany
<b>Spring/Summer</b>	Jewish professors are expelled from Universities; Jewish writers and artists are prohibited from pursuing their work
<b>July 14</b>	Nazi Party proclaimed by law to be only legal political party in Germany
<b>October 19</b>	Germany withdraws from the League of Nations

### 1934

<b>August 2</b>	Hitler named Fuhrer and Reich Chancellor [President and Prime Minister] after the death of German President von Hindenburg
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### 1935

<b>March 16</b>	Compulsory military service reinstated in Germany in violation of Treaty of Versailles
<b>May 31</b>	Jews barred from military service
<b>September 14</b>	Nuremberg Laws passed depriving Jews of German citizenship

### 1936

<b>March 7</b>	German Army occupies the Rhineland in violation of the Treaty of Versailles.
<b>June 17</b>	Heinrich Himmler appointed Chief of German Police
<b>October 25</b>	Hitler and Benito Mussolini of Italy form Rome-Berlin Axis
<b>November 25</b>	Germany and Japan sign military pact

### 1937

<b>July 16</b>	Buchenwald Concentration Camp, near Weimar, is opened
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### 1938

<b>March 13</b>	Germany annexes Austria
<b>July 6-16</b>	Evian Conference produces no result in helping provide refuge for Jews
<b>September 29-30</b>	Munich Conference—England and France yield part of Czechoslovakia to Germany with the promise that this was Hitler's final territorial demand; English Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain proclaims that he has brought "peace in our time"
<b>October 5</b>	At the request of the Swiss government Jewish passports are marked with a "J"
<b>October 28</b>	Approximately 15,000 Polish citizens living in Germany, many for decades, are resettled in Poland; Poland refuses to admit them and they are stranded on the border
<b>November 9-10</b>	Kristallnacht (Night of Broken Glass)—Pogroms against Jews throughout Germany and Austria; Jewish shops and businesses are burned, looted, and synagogues are destroyed; 30,000 Jewish men aged 16-60 are arrested and sent to concentration camps
<b>November 12</b>	Jews are forced to turn over all retail businesses to Aryans
<b>November 15</b>	Jewish students are expelled from schools in Germany
<b>December 3</b>	Jews must hand in their drivers' licenses and car registrations
<b>December 8</b>	Jews can no longer attend universities

### 1939

<b>January 1</b>	Jewish men must have a middle name of Israel and Jewish women have had Sara added to their identity card
<b>January 30</b>	At 6 <sup>th</sup> anniversary address to the German Reichstag, Hitler threatens that if war erupts the Jews will be annihilated
<b>March 15</b>	German troops occupy remainder of Czechoslovakia
<b>May 13</b>	The M.S. St. Louis sets sail from Hamburg, Germany for Cuba
<b>August 23</b>	Soviets and Germans sign nonaggression pact secretly agreeing to divide Poland
<b>September 1</b>	Germany invades Poland; World War II begins as France and Britain declare war two days later
<b>September 17</b>	Soviets invade and occupy Eastern Poland
<b>September 23</b>	Jews must turn in all radios
<b>November 28</b>	First ghetto established in Poland

### 1940

<b>February 12</b>	German Jews begin to be deported to concentration camps
<b>April 9</b>	Germany invades Denmark and Norway
<b>May 7</b>	Lodz ghetto established in German-occupied Poland
<b>May 10</b>	Germany invades Holland, Belgium, and France
<b>May 20</b>	Auschwitz Concentration Camp is established
<b>June 22</b>	France surrenders to Germany
<b>November 15</b>	Warsaw Ghetto is established

### 1941

<b>February 22</b>	Deportation of Dutch Jews begins; Holland's workers strike in sympathy for Jews
<b>March</b>	Adolf Eichmann made head of Gestapo section for Jewish affairs
<b>April 6</b>	Germany occupies Greece and Yugoslavia
<b>June 22</b>	Germany invades Soviet Union
<b>June-December</b>	Nazi Einsatzgruppen (special mobile killing units) carry out mass murder of Jews in areas of Soviet Union occupied by German Army
<b>July 31</b>	Reinhard Heydrich appointed by Hermann Göring to carry out "Final Solution"
<b>September 1</b>	Every Jew in areas occupied by Germans must wear yellow Star of David
<b>September 28</b>	Massacre of Jews at Babi Yar; 33,771 Jews are murdered
<b>October 14</b>	Large-scale deportations of Jews to concentration camps begin
<b>October</b>	Establishment of Birkenau
<b>December 7</b>	Japan attacks US fleet at Pearl Harbor, triggering American entry into World War II
<b>December 8</b>	Chelmno concentration camp begins operation
<b>December 11</b>	Germany and Italy declare war on the United States

### 1942

<b>January 20</b>	Wannsee Conference—plans for "Final Solution" are coordinated
<b>March 17</b>	Murder by gas "Extermination" begins in Belzec
<b>March</b>	Deportations to Auschwitz begin
<b>April</b>	Murder by gas "Extermination" begins in Sobibor
<b>Summer</b>	Deportation of Jews to extermination camps from Holland, Poland, France, Belgium, Croatia; armed resistance by Jews in several ghettos
<b>July 22</b>	<b>Treblinka is opened</b>
<b>July 23</b>	Large-scale deportation of Jews from Warsaw Ghetto; at least 265,000 Jews are sent to Treblinka by September 21 <sup>st</sup>
<b>July 28</b>	Jewish Fighting Organization (Z.O.B.) organized in Warsaw Ghetto
<b>October 4</b>	Jews still in concentration camps in Germany to be transferred to Auschwitz for murder

## 1943

- January 18-21** Armed Jewish resistance to Nazi attempt to “liquidate”—the German term for sending Jews to the death camps—Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto
- February 2** Germany’s Sixth Army surrenders at Stalingrad
- March** “Liquidation” of Kracow Ghetto
- April 19** On the eve of Passover the Jews attacked German troops attempting to deport them to Treblinka, they continue their resistance for weeks
- May 16** German General Stropp reports to his superiors “The Jewish Quarter in Warsaw [the Warsaw Ghetto] is no longer.”
- June 11** Himmler orders “liquidation” of all ghettos in German-occupied Poland and Soviet Union
- August 2** Armed Uprising in Treblinka; 300 Jews escape and in the aftermath the death camp ceases to operate
- October 14** Revolt in Sobibor

## 1944

- January 22** War Refugee Board is formed by Executive Order of US President Roosevelt
- March 19** Germany invades Hungary
- April** Jews in Hungary are ghettoized prior to deportation
- May 15** Germans begin deporting Hungarian Jews; 437,402 Jews are deported overwhelmingly to Auschwitz on 147 trains in 54 days
- June 6** Allied invasion of Normandy—D-Day
- July 7** Deportations from Hungary end; only the Jews of Budapest, Hungary’s capital are still alive.
- July 8** Raoul Wallenberg, the Swedish diplomat arrives in Budapest to help rescue Jews
- July 20** Attempt to assassinate Hitler fails
- July 24** Soviet troops liberate Majdanek death camp
- August 6** SS begins to drive concentration camp prisoners into Germany in advance of Soviet troops
- August 25** Paris is liberated
- November** Last deportation from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz
- November 8** Beginning of death march of Jews from Budapest to Austria
- November 24** Himmler orders destruction of Auschwitz crematoriums to conceal evidence of death camps

## 1945

- January 17** Evacuation of Auschwitz—beginning of death march from there
- January 27** Soviet troops liberate Auschwitz/Birkenau
- February 4-11** Yalta Conference plans post-war world
- April 11** American troops liberate Buchenwald
- April 12** US President Roosevelt dies in Warm Springs, Georgia; Harry S. Truman becomes President
- April 15** British troops liberate Bergen-Belsen
- April 29** American troops liberate Dachau
- April 30** Hitler is believed to have committed suicide
- May 7** Germany surrenders—reign of the Third Reich is over; World War II ends in Europe
- August 6** US drops first atomic bomb over Hiroshima
- August 9** US drops second atomic bomb over Nagasaki
- August 15** Japan surrenders; World War II is over
- November 22** Nuremberg Trials begin

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## GLOSSARY

**ANTISEMITISM:** prejudice against the Jewish people

**ARYAN:** term used by the Nazis to describe a “race” of people they viewed as being racially superior; originally, the term used to classify an Indo-European language group

**AUSCHWITZ-BIRKENAU:** located in Poland, largest death camp built by the Nazis; over 2,000,000 people died here by means of starvation, disease, and gassing; Birkenau is often referred to as Auschwitz II

**BABI YAR:** the site of a mass grave inside the Soviet border, near Kiev, where more than 100,000 Jews were shot and buried by the Nazis with the support of the Ukrainian militia

**BALFOUR DECLARATION:** a British government document issued in 1917 that dealt with the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine

**BERMUDA CONFERENCE:** the 1943 meeting between representatives from the United States and Britain in which the problems of refugees of Nazi persecution were discussed

**BUCHENWALD:** one of the first concentration camps, located in central Germany

**BERICHA:** Hebrew for “flight;” name given to the organized underground assistance given to the Jews who were trying to reach Palestine after the Holocaust

**CONCENTRATION CAMPS:** work and death camps located in Germany and Poland to incarcerate and exterminate Jews, Gypsies, political dissidents, and others deemed “undesirable” by the Nazis

**CREMATORIUM:** a furnace used in the death camps to cremate the bodies of victims

**DACHAU:** one of the first concentration camps built by the Nazis, located in southwestern Germany

**DEATH CAMPS:** camps built to exterminate Jews and other “enemies” of the Nazi regime

**DEATH MARCHES:** forced marches of concentration camp prisoners as the Nazis tried to keep ahead of the Allied forces; approximately one third of those in the death marches died as a result of either disease, starvation, overexposure to the elements, or being shot by their guards

**DEPORTATION:** forced removal of Jews from their homes in Nazi-occupied lands; under the pretense of resettlement, victims were sent to death and labor camps

**DISPLACED PERSON CAMPS:** camps set up after World War II as temporary living quarters for survivors of the Holocaust who now had no home or country to which they could return

**EINSATZGRUPPEN:** special German mobile death squads estimated to have killed millions of Jews. Victims were executed in mass shootings and buried in unmarked graves—usually the ditches they were forced to dig

**EVIAN CONFERENCE:** conference organized by President Franklin Roosevelt and held at Evian-les-Ban in France, in 1938, to discuss the plight of Jews trying to escape Nazi persecution; 32 nations were represented but the conference did little to solve the problem

**FINAL SOLUTION:** Nazi code word for the physical extermination of European Jews

**GAS CHAMBER:** a sealed and airtight room where death was induced through the use of poisonous gases

**GENOCIDE:** the systematic killing of a nation or race of people

**GESTAPO:** the Nazi Secret State Police

**GHETTO:** an area of a city to which the Jews were restricted and from which they were forbidden to leave

**HOLOCAUST:** term used to describe the systematic annihilation of the Jewish people of Eastern Europe by the Nazi regime; by the end of World War II, approximately 6,000,000 Jewish men, women, and children had been killed

**KAPO:** a prisoner appointed by the Nazis to oversee labor details in the concentration camps

**KOVNO GHETTO:** one of the most well-known of the Jewish Ghettos, located in the capital of Lithuania

**GYPSIES:** a group of people also singled out for extermination by the Nazi regime; by the end of World War II, approximately one quarter of a million Gypsies had been killed

**KRISTALLNACHT:** Night of Broken Glass, the organized pogrom against Jews in Germany and Austria on November 9-10, 1938

**LABOR CAMP:** a Nazi concentration camp predominately designed for slave labor

**LIBERATORS:** soldiers who freed the prisoners of the concentration camps

**MAJDANEK:** death camp located outside Lublin, one of the largest cities of Poland; most of the camp still remains today since the Nazis did not have time to dismantle it before the Russian troops arrived

**NAZI:** acronym for the National Socialist German Workers’ Party

**NUREMBERG LAWS:** issued in 1935, laws which were designed to exclude the Jews from Germany both socially and politically

**NUREMBERG TRIALS:** the trial of 22 major Nazi figures held in Nuremberg, Germany, before an international military tribunal

**PARTISANS:** patriotic civilians who banded together to fight Nazi rule, usually operating in the forests in Russia, Poland, and Lithuania

**POGROMS:** organized acts of discrimination and violence aimed at a specific group of people

**PREJUDICE:** an attitude toward a person, group of people, or idea formed without adequate information

**RACISM:** practice of discrimination, segregation, persecution, and domination on the basis of race

**REICHSTAG:** the central legislative body of Germany, its Parliament

**RESISTANCE:** physical and spiritual opposition to the Nazi regime

**RIGHTEOUS AMONG THE NATIONS:** the term used for non-Jews who risked their lives to save Jews from Nazi persecution

**RIGHTEOUS GENTILES:** non-Jews who helped save Jewish lives

**SA:** storm troopers or Brown Shirts; organized to protect Nazi rallies

**SCAPEGOAT:** an innocent person or persons blamed for the problems or troubles of another

**S.D. (SICHERHEITSDIENST):** the Security Service of the Nazi regime; headed by Reinhard Heydrich and responsible for security of the high-ranking members of the Nazi party

**SHTETL:** a small Jewish village in Poland

**SS (SCHUTZSTAFFEL):** elite guard, under the command of Heinrich Himmler, responsible for the administration of the concentration camps and for carrying out the "Final Solution"

**SOBIBOR:** death camp in Poland where a quarter of a million people were gassed; setting for a famous uprising by prisoners in October 1943

**SONDERKOMMANDOS:** prisoners in the death camps whose jobs were to clear away the bodies of gas chamber victims

**M.S. ST. LOUIS:** ship carrying Jewish refugees to Cuba and the United States in June 1939; denied safe harbor, it eventually was forced back to Europe where many of its passengers met their deaths; immortalized in the movie *Voyage of the Damned*

**SWASTIKA:** symbol of the Nazi party, it was originally an ancient religious symbol

**TALMUD:** the body of Jewish laws and prayers

**THERESIENSTADT:** Nazi ghetto located in Czechoslovakia; frequently called a "Model Ghetto" to show the outside world, including the Red Cross, how well the Jews were being treated; prisoners were kept here briefly before being transported to the death camps

**THIRD REICH:** official name of the Nazi regime; ruled from 1933 to 1945 under command of Adolf Hitler

**TOTALITARIANISM:** a government or doctrine in which one political party or group maintains complete control and makes all others illegal

**TREATY OF VERSAILLES:** peace treaty that was signed at the end of World War I in Versailles, France; its conditions imposed economic hardships on Germany, weakened and humiliated the nation, and led to the popularity of the Nazi movement

**TREBLINKA:** one of the Nazi death camps established in Poland; between 1940 and 1943, approximately 870,000 to 900,000 people, many from Warsaw, were gassed there; site of a 1943 revolt in which about one-fourth of the prisoners there at the time escaped but ultimately were recaptured

**WANNSEE CONFERENCE:** held in Wannsee, a suburb of Berlin, on January 20, 1942, to coordinate the Nazi plans for a "Final Solution"

**WAR REFUGEE BOARD:** U.S. agency established in January 1944, by order of President Roosevelt to rescue people from German-occupied territories

**WARSAW GHETTO (AND UPRISING):** the largest ghetto in Europe, established in November 1940; at one time it held over 350,000 people in an area of approximately 3.5 square miles; between January and April 1943, a small group, the Jewish Fighting Organization, with few weapons, were able to hold off the German soldiers

**THE WHITE PAPER:** British mandate of 1939 which limited Jewish immigration to Palestine

**YELLOW STAR:** the six-pointed Star of David made of yellow cloth and sewn to the clothing of European Jews so Nazis could easily identify them

**ZIONISM:** the movement to establish a Jewish homeland in Israel

**Z.O.B.:** the Jewish Fighting Organization which led the uprising of the Warsaw Ghetto

**ZYKLON-B:** the gas used in the gas chambers of the death camps

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# PART II

## GETTING STARTED



# Getting Started

## Suggestions for the Teacher

### *Setting Up the Classroom and Finding the Right Resources*

Fill your room with appropriate maps, news articles, encyclopedias, and reference books to help students in their research. Additional resources that correlate to the history as well as to each of the issues developed in Appendix are listed in the appendixes.

### Organizing the Lessons

Introduce your students first to the material in Part I, “Historical Perspectives,” which was written by Dr. Michael Berenbaum. Supplement this information with selections from the various films, literature, and websites listed in the appendixes. Select questions, writing prompts, and activities that best fit student levels and abilities to help them extend their understanding. Be careful to select materials and related activities that best meet student needs, interests, and abilities.

### Journal Writing

All students should keep a journal to record their reactions and reflections as they take part in the study of the Holocaust and the moral and ethical issues involved. Journal writing is often cathartic, allowing students to sort out their feelings and express their emotions. In addition, it gives them the opportunity to search for their own meanings and draw conclusions.

### Viewing the Film *Treblinka’s Last Witness*

Since this study guide was specifically prepared as a teaching guide for the film *Treblinka’s Last Witness* please refer to PART V for specific teaching guide lessons related to the film.

### Interdisciplinary Teaching

Because of the nature of this guide and its extensive topics on the Holocaust, teachers representing various disciplines may wish to plan the unit together. When possible, involve teachers in the humanities departments.

*With permission from the authors of “Studying the Holocaust Through Film and Literature”  
by Dr. Miriam Klein Kassenoff and Dr. Anita Meyer Meinbach*

## Moral and ethical implications of studying the Holocaust through the film *Treblinka's Last Witness*

Yehuda Bauer, Israel's most distinguished teacher/scholar of the Holocaust, teaches three main lessons to be learned from the Holocaust that address moral and ethical issues. These three lessons can be connected to any aspect of life and are the threads that run through the issues explored in this study guide. These three lessons must be considered as we reflect on the choices we make in our daily lives:

- 1 Thou shalt not be a victim.
- 2 Thou shalt not be a perpetrator.
- 3 Thou shalt not be a bystander.

### Character Education and Core Values

In addition to dealing with major ethical and moral issues of human rights and social responsibility, this study guide will address the issues of courage, compassion, character, and civility that determine an individual's behavior on a daily basis and include the core values of citizenship, cooperation, fairness, honesty, integrity, kindness, empathy, respect, and responsibility.

Excerpts from *Studying The Holocaust Through Film and Literature* permission from authors  
Dr. Miriam Klein Kassenoff and Dr. Anita Meyer Meinbach

## How To Use This Study Guide—An Overview

This study guide contains a wide variety of suggested research questions that invite students to explore all aspects of the Holocaust. Each part of the study guide is developed to encourage students to think critically, explore choices, and make decisions based on a code of conduct that reflects a commitment to humanity.

The film, memoirs, and questions in this study guide were selected based on the following specific criteria for each:

- It provides a framework for exploring various aspects of the Holocaust.
- It is thought-provoking, enabling the reader or viewer to reach deeper levels of understanding.
- It helps students to consider the ramifications of the Holocaust in terms of who they are and how they will conduct their lives.
- It encourages discussion on human rights and social responsibility for today's world.
- It is easily accessible.
- It has the ability to motivate, enrich, and illuminate.

This study guide is divided into specific topics, each based on the Holocaust and society's attempt today to learn from the past.



## Definitions on “What was the Holocaust of 1933-1945”

### Imperial War Museum, London, UK

Under the cover of the Second World War, for the sake of their “new order,” the Nazis sought to destroy all the Jews of Europe. For the first time in history, industrial methods were used for the mass extermination of a whole people. Six million were murdered, including 1,500,000 children. This event is called the Holocaust.

The Nazis enslaved and murdered millions of others as well. Gypsies, people with physical and mental disabilities, Poles, Soviet prisoners of war, trade unionists, political opponents, prisoners of conscience, homosexuals, and others were killed in vast numbers.

### United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC, USA

The Holocaust refers to a specific genocidal event in twentieth-century history: the state-sponsored, systematic persecution and annihilation of European Jewry by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945. Jews were the primary victims—6 million were murdered; Gypsies, the handicapped, and Poles were also targeted for destruction or decimation for racial, ethnic, or national reasons. Millions more, including homosexuals, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Soviet prisoners of war, and political dissidents, also suffered grievous oppression and death under Nazi tyranny.

### Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, Israel

The Holocaust was the murder of approximately six million Jews by the Nazis and their collaborators. Between the German invasion of the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941 and the end of the war in Europe in May 1945, Nazi Germany and its accomplices strove to murder every Jew under their domination. Because Nazi discrimination against the Jews began with Hitler’s accession to power in January 1933, many historians consider this the start of the Holocaust era. The Jews were not the only victims of Hitler’s regime, but they were the only group that the Nazis sought to destroy entirely.

## Common Student Questions about the Holocaust

Source: [USHMM.org](http://USHMM.org) Reprinted with Permission and Adapted by Dr. Michael Berenbaum

### 1 How could Hitler make the Holocaust happen by himself?

Hitler did not make the Holocaust happen himself. Many, many Germans and non-Germans were involved in the Final Solution. Besides the SS, German government, and Nazi party officials who helped to plan and carry out the deportation, concentration, and murder of European Jews, many other “ordinary” people—such as civil servants, doctors, lawyers, judges, soldiers, and railroad workers—played a role in the Holocaust. The Germans were assisted by the Axis armies, collaborators, local Gendarmerie, ethnic Germans living in occupied countries, as well as local antisemites in their task. They were also assisted by those who remained silent, as silence helps the perpetrators and not their victims.

### 2 Why didn’t they all leave?

Frequently this question refers to German Jews before the start of 1939. Consider what is involved in leaving one’s homeland as well as what sacrifices must be made. German Jews were in most cases patriotic citizens. Over 10,000 died fighting for Germany in World War I, and countless others were wounded and received medals for their valor and service. Jews, whether in the lower, middle, or upper classes, had lived in Germany for centuries and were well assimilated in the early twentieth century.

It is important to consider how the oppressive measures targeting Jews in the pre-war period were passed and enforced gradually. These types of pre-war measures and laws had been experienced throughout the history of the Jewish people in earlier periods and in other countries as well. No one at the time could foresee or predict killing squads and killing centers.

Once the difficult decision was made to try to leave the country, a prospective emigrant had to find a country willing to admit them and their family. This was very difficult, considering world immigration policies, as demonstrated by the results of the Evian Conference of 1938. If a haven could be found, consider other things that would be needed to get there. The United States had a quota system. Britain imposed restrictions on immigration to Palestine. The very difference between life and death was a stamp in a passport.

### 3 Why wasn’t there more resistance?

The impression that Jews did not fight back against the Nazis is a myth. Jews carried out acts of resistance in every country of Europe that the Germans occupied, as well as in satellite states. They even resisted in ghettos, concentration camps and killing centers, under the most harrowing of circumstances. Why is it then that the myth endures? Period photographs and contemporary feature films may serve to perpetuate it because they often depict large numbers of Jews boarding trains under the watchful eyes of a few lightly armed guards. Not seen in these images, yet key to understanding Jewish response to Nazi terror, are the obstacles to resistance. There were natural hesitations to resist as the Germans practiced disproportionate punishment. The random execution of many was imposed as a penalty for the escape of one. Fathers would not leave their children or abandon their wives; youth were hesitant to leave their parents behind in danger.

The Swiss historian Werner Rings has taught that there were four forms of resistance in all countries under German-occupation: Symbolic and personal resistance such as maintaining dignity, identity and continuity; Polemical resistance such as disseminating information regarding the

German crimes both among Jews, among other occupied people and to neutral and Allied nations; Defensive resistance, protecting and aiding fellow Jews; and Offensive and armed resistance whether offered by the individual or the collective. Such behavior was found throughout German-occupied European populations, including the Jews.

#### 4 How did they know who was Jewish?

Eventually, Jews in Germany were locatable through census records. In other countries, Jews might be found via synagogue membership lists, municipal lists or more likely through mandatory registration and information from neighbors or local civilians and officials.



#### 5 What happened if you disobeyed an order to participate?

Contrary to popular assumption, those who decided to stop or not participate in atrocities were usually given other responsibilities, such as guard duty or crowd control. Quiet non-compliance was widely tolerated, but public denunciation of Nazi anti-Jewish policy was not.

#### 6 Wasn't one of Hitler's relatives Jewish?

There is no historical evidence to suggest that Hitler was Jewish. Recent scholarship suggests that the rumors about Hitler's ancestry were circulated by political opponents as a way of discrediting the leader of an antisemitic party. These rumors persist primarily because the identity of Hitler's paternal grandfather is unknown; rumors that this grandfather was Jewish have never been proven. There were no Jews living in the town where Hitler's grandmother lived.

#### 7 Why were the Jews singled out for extermination?

The explanation of the Nazis' hatred of Jews rests on their distorted worldview, which saw history as a racial struggle. They considered the Jews a race whose goal was world domination and who, therefore, were an obstruction to "Aryan" dominance. They believed that all of history was a fight between races, which should culminate in the triumph of the superior "Aryan" race. Therefore, they considered it their duty to eliminate the Jews, whom they regarded as a threat. In their eyes, the Jews' racial origin made them habitual criminals who could never be rehabilitated and were hopelessly corrupt and inferior. Hitler defined the Jews as a "cancer" on German society: their elimination was therefore essential and also therapeutic.

There is no doubt that other factors contributed toward Nazi hatred of Jews and their distorted image of the Jewish people. These included the centuries-old tradition of Christian antisemitism, which propagated a negative stereotype of Jews as murderers of Christ, agents of the devil, and practitioners of witchcraft. Also significant was the political antisemitism of the latter half of the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries, which singled out Jews as a threat to the established order of society. These combined to point to Jews as a target for persecution and ultimate destruction by the Nazis.

More information can be found in several Holocaust Encyclopedia articles. Start with the overview of antisemitism, and then read the related articles on antisemitism through the centuries.

#### 8 What did the United States know and do?

Despite a history of providing sanctuary to persecuted peoples, the United States grappled with many issues during the 1930s that made staying true to this legacy difficult, among them wide-spread antisemitism, xenophobia, isolationism, and a sustained economic depression. Unfortunately for those fleeing from Nazi persecution, these issues greatly impacted this nation's refugee policy, resulting in tighter restrictions and limited quotas at a time when open doors might have saved lives.

Over the years, scholarly investigation into the American reaction to the Holocaust has raised a number of questions, such as: What did America know? What did government officials and civilians do with this knowledge? Could more have been done? Scholars have gauged America's culpability through the government's restrictive immigration measures, its indifference to reported atrocities, and its sluggish efforts to save European Jews. Scholars have also distinguished between "information" and "knowledge." Much information was available regarding what the Nazis were doing to the Jews and for various people, including Government officials, such information became "knowledge" at different points in time, knowledge upon which they were prepared to act and to respond. Many dismissed the "information" they had as unconfirmed rumors. And even some who "knew" felt that little could be done. As one scholar said, "The pessimist said little could be done and little was done. The optimists believed that something must be done—almost anything."

Debates have sparked over key events, including the M.S. St. Louis tragedy, the establishment of the War Refugee Board, the role of the American Jewish community, the media's coverage of Nazi violence, and the proposed, but abandoned, bombing of Auschwitz death camp—an adjacent slave labor complex was bombed in late summer 1944. The topic continues to evolve with the introduction of new documentation and revised hypotheses.



## Methodological Considerations

From: *Teaching About the Holocaust: A Resource Book for Educators*

Reprinted with Permission from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C.  
and Adapted by Dr. Michael Berenbaum

The teaching of Holocaust history demands of educators a high level of sensitivity and a keen awareness of the complexity of the subject matter. The recommendations that follow, while reflecting methodological approaches that would be appropriate to effective teaching in general, are particularly relevant in the context of Holocaust education.

### 1 Define the term “Holocaust.”

The Holocaust refers to a specific genocidal event in twentieth-century history: the state-sponsored, systematic persecution and annihilation of European Jewry by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945. Jews were the primary victims—6 million were murdered; Gypsies, the handicapped, and Poles were also targeted for destruction or decimation for racial, ethnic, or national reasons. Millions more, including homosexuals, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Soviet prisoners of war, and political dissidents, also suffered grievous oppression and death under Nazi tyranny.

### 2 Avoid comparisons of pain.

A study of the Holocaust should always highlight the different policies carried out by the Nazi regime toward various groups of people; however, these distinctions should not be presented as a basis for comparison of suffering between those groups. Similarly, one cannot presume that the horror of an individual, family, or community destroyed by the Nazis was any greater than that experienced by victims of other genocides. Avoid generalizations that suggest exclusivity, such as “the victims of the Holocaust suffered the most cruelty ever faced by a people in the history of humanity.” Suffering is deeply personal. As one survivor said, “The pain of my toothache is not helped by you describing your broken arm. An aspirin might help; so too, a hug.”

### 3 Avoid simple answers to complex history.

A study of the Holocaust raises difficult questions about human behavior, and it often involves complicated answers as to why events occurred. Be wary of oversimplifications. Allow students to contemplate the various factors that contributed to the Holocaust; do not attempt to reduce Holocaust history to one or two catalysts in isolation from the other factors that came into play. For example, the Holocaust was not simply the logical and inevitable consequence of unbridled racism.

Rather, racism combined with centuries-old bigotry and antisemitism; renewed by a nationalistic fervor that emerged in Europe in the latter half of the nineteenth century; fueled by Germany’s defeat in World War I and its national humiliation following the Treaty of Versailles; exacerbated by worldwide economic hard times, the ineffectiveness of the Weimar Republic, and international indifference; and catalyzed by the political charisma and manipulative propaganda of Adolf Hitler’s Nazi regime contributed to the occurrence of the Holocaust.

### 4 Just because it happened does not mean it was inevitable.

Too often students have the simplistic impression that the Holocaust was inevitable. Just because a historical event took place, and it was documented in textbooks and on film, does not mean that it had to happen. This seemingly obvious concept is often overlooked by students and teachers alike. The Holocaust took place because individuals, groups, and nations made decisions

to act or not to act. By focusing on those decisions, you gain insight into history and human nature and can better help your students to become critical thinkers.

### 5 Strive for precision of language.

Any study of the Holocaust touches upon nuances of human behavior. Because of the complexity of the history, there is a temptation to over generalize and thus to distort the facts (e.g., “all concentration camps were killing centers” or “all Germans were collaborators”). Rather, you must strive to help your students clarify the information presented and encourage them to distinguish the differences between prejudice and discrimination, collaborators and bystanders, armed and spiritual resistance, direct orders and assumed orders, concentration camps and killing centers, and guilt and responsibility.

Words that describe human behavior often have multiple meanings. Resistance, for example, usually refers to a physical act of armed revolt. During the Holocaust, it also encompassed partisan activity; the smuggling of messages, food, and weapons; and actual military engagement. But resistance also embraced willful disobedience such as continuing to practice religious and cultural traditions in defiance of the rules or creating fine art, music, and poetry inside ghettos and concentration camps. For many, simply maintaining the will to remain alive in the face of abject brutality was an act of spiritual resistance.

### 6 Make careful distinctions about sources of information.

Students need practice in distinguishing among fact, opinion, and fiction; between primary and secondary sources; and among types of evidence such as court testimonies, oral histories, and other written documents. Hermeneutics—the science of interpretation—should be called into play to help guide your students in their analysis of sources. Students should be encouraged to consider why a particular text was written, who wrote it, who the intended audience was, whether there were any biases inherent in the information, whether any gaps occurred in discussion, whether omissions in certain passages were inadvertent or not, and how the information has been used to interpret various events.

Because scholars often base their research on different bodies of information, varying interpretations of history can emerge. Consequently, all interpretations are subject to analytical evaluation. Only by refining their own “hermeneutic of suspicion” can students mature into readers who discern the difference between legitimate scholars who present competing historical interpretations and those who distort or deny historical fact for personal or political gain.

### 7 Try to avoid stereotypical descriptions.

Though all Jews were targeted for destruction by the Nazis, the experiences of all Jews were not the same. Simplistic views and stereotyping take place when groups of people are viewed as monolithic in attitudes and actions. How ethnic groups or social clusters are labeled and portrayed in school curricula has a direct impact on how students perceive groups in their daily lives. Remind your students that although members of a group may share common experiences and beliefs, generalizations about them, without benefit of modifying or qualifying terms (e.g., “sometimes,” “usually,” “in many cases but not all”) tend to stereotype group behavior and distort historical reality. Thus, all Germans cannot be characterized as Nazis nor should any nationality be reduced to a singular or one-dimensional description. Remember the experiences of people varied by geography, by time, by place and by circumstances. The perpetrators behaved one way in 1940-41 before the killing had started, another way in 1941-42 when it was assumed that Germany would win the war and the master race would rule the earth, and still another way in 1944-45 when the German armies were retreating and facing defeat. So too, did the local populations. The situation of Jews differed in the countries that Germany occupied: different in Denmark than in France, in Holland than in Poland.

## 8 Do not romanticize history to engage students' interest.

People who risked their lives to rescue victims of Nazi oppression provide useful, important, and compelling role models for students. However, given that only a small fraction of non-Jews under German occupation helped to rescue Jews, an overemphasis on heroic tales in a unit on the Holocaust can result in an inaccurate and unbalanced account of the history. Similarly, in exposing students to the worst aspects of human nature as revealed in the history of the Holocaust, you run the risk of fostering cynicism in your students. Accuracy of fact along with a balanced perspective on the history must be priorities for any teacher. Still, students need positive role models.

## 9 Contextualize the history you are teaching.

Events of the Holocaust and, particularly, how individuals and organizations behaved at that time, should be placed in historical context. The occurrence of the Holocaust must be studied in the context of European history as a whole to give students a perspective on the precedents and circumstances that may have contributed to it.

Similarly, study of the Holocaust should be viewed within a contemporaneous context, so students can begin to comprehend the circumstances that encouraged or discouraged particular actions or events. Frame your approach to specific events and acts of complicity or defiance by considering when and where an act took place; the immediate consequences to oneself and one's family of one's actions; the impact of contemporaneous events; the degree of control the Nazis had on a country or local population; the cultural attitudes of particular native populations historically toward different victim groups; and the availability, effectiveness, and risk of potential hiding places.

Students should be reminded that individuals and groups do not always fit neatly into categories of behavior. The very same people did not always act consistently as “bystanders,” “collaborators,” “perpetrators,” or “rescuers.” Individuals and groups often behaved differently depending upon changing events and circumstances. The same person who in 1933 might have stood by and remained uninvolved while witnessing social discrimination of Jews might later have joined up with the SA and become a collaborator or have been moved to dissent vocally or act in defense of Jewish friends and neighbors.

*Before they were victims, they were people.* Encourage your students not to categorize groups of people only on the basis of their experiences during the Holocaust: contextualization is critical so that victims are not perceived only as victims. The fact that Jews were the central victims of the Nazi regime should not obscure the vibrant culture and long history of Jews in Europe prior to the Nazi era. By exposing students to some of the cultural contributions and achievements of 2,000 years of European Jewish life, you help them to balance their perception of Jews as victims and to better appreciate the traumatic disruption in Jewish history caused by the Holocaust.

Similarly, students may know very little about Gypsies (Roma and Sinti) except for the negative images and derogatory descriptions promulgated by the Nazis. Students would benefit from a broader viewpoint, learning something about Gypsy history and culture as well as understanding the diverse ways of life among different Gypsy groups.

## 10 Translate statistics into people.

In any study of the Holocaust, the sheer number of victims challenges easy comprehension. You need to show that individual people—families of grandparents, parents, and children—are behind the statistics and to emphasize that within the larger historical narrative is a diversity of personal experience. Precisely because they portray people in the fullness of their lives and not just as victims, first-person accounts and memoir literature provide students with a way of making meaning out of collective numbers and give individual voices to a collective experience. Although

students should be careful about over generalizing from first-person accounts, such as those from survivors, journalists, relief workers, bystanders, and liberators, personal accounts help students get beyond statistics and make historical events of the Holocaust more immediate and more personal.

## 11 Be sensitive to appropriate written and audiovisual content.

One of the primary concerns of educators teaching the history of the Holocaust is how to present horrific images in a sensitive and appropriate manner. Graphic material should be used judiciously and only to the extent necessary to achieve the objective of the lesson. You should remind yourself that each student and each class is different and that what seems appropriate for one may not be appropriate for all. Students are essentially a “captive audience.” There was enough horror in the Holocaust so there is no need to use horror for horror's sake. When you assault them with images of horror for which they are unprepared, you violate a basic trust: the obligation of a teacher to provide a “safe” learning environment. The assumption that all students will seek to understand human behavior after being exposed to horrible images is fallacious. Some students may be so appalled by images of brutality and mass murder that they are discouraged from studying the subject further. Others may become fascinated in a more voyeuristic fashion, subordinating further critical analysis of the history to the superficial titillation of looking at images of starvation, disfigurement, and death. Though they can be powerful tools, shocking images of mass killings and barbarisms should not overwhelm a student's awareness of the broader scope of events within Holocaust history. Try to select images and texts that do not exploit the students' emotional vulnerability or that might be construed as disrespectful of the victims themselves.

## 12 Strive for balance in establishing whose perspective informs your study of the Holocaust.

Often, too great an emphasis is placed on the victims of Nazi aggression rather than on the victimizers who forced people to make impossible choices or simply left them with no choice to make. Most students express empathy for victims of mass murder. But it is not uncommon for students to assume that the victims may have done something to justify the actions against them and, thus, to place inappropriate blame on the victims themselves.

There is also a tendency among students to glorify power, even when it is used to kill innocent people. Many teachers indicate that their students are intrigued and, in some cases, intellectually seduced by the symbols of power that pervaded Nazi propaganda (e.g., the swastika and/or Nazi flags, regalia, slogans, rituals, and music). Rather than highlight the trappings of Nazi power, you should ask your students to evaluate how such elements are used by governments (including our own) to build, protect, and mobilize a society. Students should also be encouraged to contemplate how such elements can be abused and manipulated by governments to implement and legitimize acts of terror and even genocide.

In any review of the propaganda used to promote Nazi ideology—Nazi stereotypes of targeted victim groups and the Hitler regime's justifications for persecution and murder—you need to remind your students that just because such policies and beliefs are under discussion in class does not mean they are acceptable. Furthermore, any study of the Holocaust should attempt to portray all individuals, especially the victims and the perpetrators of violence, as human beings who are capable of moral judgment and independent decision making.

### 13 Select appropriate learning activities.

Word scrambles, crossword puzzles, and other gimmicky exercises tend not to encourage critical analysis but lead instead to low-level types of thinking and, in the case of Holocaust curricula, trivialize the history. When the effects of a particular activity, even when popular with you and your students, run counter to the rationale for studying the history, then that activity should not be used.

Similarly, activities that encourage students to construct models of killing centers should also be reconsidered because any assignment along this line will almost inevitably end up being simplistic, time-consuming, and tangential to the educational objectives for studying the history of the Holocaust.

Avoid simulation activities: thankfully we cannot replicate the living situation and the “choiceless choices” faced by people in ghettos, trains, concentration camps and death camps and we shouldn’t try. Also don’t ask students: what would you have done? The choice of heroic acts of self sacrifice or moral acts of rescue are simple to make in a classroom, far more difficult in life.

Thought-provoking learning activities are preferred, but even here; there are pitfalls to avoid. In studying complex human behavior, many teachers rely upon simulation exercises meant to help students “experience” unfamiliar situations. Even when great care is taken to prepare a class for such an activity, simulating experiences from the Holocaust remains pedagogically unsound. The activity may engage students, but they often forget the purpose of the lesson and, even worse, they are left with the impression at the conclusion of the activity that they now know what it was like during the Holocaust. Holocaust survivors and eyewitnesses are among the first to indicate the grave difficulty of finding words to describe their experiences. It is virtually impossible to simulate accurately what it was like to live on a daily basis with fear, hunger, disease, unfathomable loss, and the unrelenting threat of abject brutality and death.

An additional problem with trying to simulate situations from the Holocaust is that complex events and actions are oversimplified, and students are left with a skewed view of history. Because there are numerous primary source accounts, both written and visual, as well as survivors and eyewitnesses who can describe actual choices faced and made by individuals, groups, and nations during this period, you should draw upon these resources and refrain from simulation games that lead to a trivialization of the subject matter.

Rather than use simulation activities that attempt to re-create situations from the Holocaust, teachers can, through the use of reflective writing assignments or in-class discussion, ask students to empathize with the experiences of those who lived through the Holocaust era. Students can be encouraged to explore varying aspects of human behavior such as fear, scapegoating, conflict resolution, and difficult decision-making or to consider various perspectives on a particular event or historical experience.

### 14 Reinforce the objectives of your lesson plan.

As in all teaching situations, the opening and closing lessons are critically important. A strong opening should serve to dispel misinformation students may have prior to studying the Holocaust. It should set a reflective tone, move students from passive to active learning, indicate to students that their ideas and opinions matter, and establish that this history has multiple ramifications for them as individuals and as members of society as a whole.

Your closing lesson should encourage further examination of Holocaust history, literature, and art. A strong closing should emphasize synthesis by encouraging students to connect this history to other world events and to the world they live in today. Students should be encouraged to reflect on what they have learned and to consider what this study means to them personally and as citizens of a democracy.

# PART III

## GENERAL RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION TOPICS



## General Research and Discussion

**RESEARCH:** Using the Internet and other resources, research and respond to the following either in writing or discussion groups:

- 1** Look up the definition of the Holocaust on the United States Holocaust Museum's website ([www.ushmm.org](http://www.ushmm.org)). What do you notice about this definition that explains why the Jewish culture was the focus of the Nazi Holocaust from 1933-1945? What information does the definition give about other victims of the Holocaust?
- 2** Research the history of the Jewish people in Eastern Europe during the years 1928-1933, right before the Nazi party came into power and the Holocaust began. Which countries had the largest Jewish population and were later affected by the Nazi regime?
- 3** What was life like for the Jewish populations *before* the Holocaust? Describe specifically how people lead their daily lives i.e. school, work, play and religious activities.
- 4** Beginning in 1933, the Nazis began burning prayer books, books by Jewish writers, along with any other books that they felt contradicted or would corrupt the Nazi racial ideology. What was the significance of book burning, and how did it foreshadow the events to come?
- 5** Research the *Nuremberg Laws* of 1935. How did these laws possibly strengthen and incite antisemitic attitudes? Remember the distinction between the Nuremberg Laws and the Nuremberg trials.
- 6** Research the term *antisemitism*. What are its origins? How did antisemitism encourage Nazi propaganda?
- 7** What other groups besides Jews were targeted by the Nazis? Do any of these groups still suffer from prejudice? If so, who are they, and in what ways do they continue to be subjected to prejudice?
- 8** What is the origin of the term *ghetto*? What is meant by the term ghetto in reference to the Holocaust? Describe the various purposes behind forcing the Jewish people into these ghettos.
- 9** It has been said that "although not all the victims were Jews, all Jews were victims." After reading about the events of the Holocaust, the ghettos, as well as the concentration camps and death camps, discuss this statement.
- 10** Researching the Holocaust of 1933-1945, what does it say about other victims of the Holocaust?
- 11** Research the Olympic Games of 1936. Should America have taken part in the games? How did Jesse Owen's victory in the 1936 Olympics symbolize victory over Nazi racism?
- 12** What is *Kristallnacht*? What is the historical background on how the events occurred? How did the Nazi police react during the two days of Kristallnacht? What did Kristallnacht make clear for German Jews? Why do the Germans now call it the November pogroms?

- 13 Why were the Jewish people required to wear a yellow badge or star? Research the use of badges and labels by the Nazis. Why would the Jewish people see this as a dehumanizing experience? And why did one Jewish journalist tell his people “Wear It with Pride.” How can your attitude toward such dehumanization become a means of spiritual resistance?
- 14 During the Holocaust, other groups such as political dissidents and Gypsies were also identified with assigned badges. Research this identification process and write a brief paper to explain what groups were singled out and why. Describe the badges each group had to wear.
- 15 Research the *M.S. St. Louis* ship. How does the fate of the *M.S. St. Louis* mirror the way most of the world reacted to saving the Jewish people? How does the world’s reaction to the *M.S. St. Louis* show the importance of the often phrased theme of *Never Again: What You Do Matters*?
- 16 Why didn’t most of the German Jews flee in the early years when they could? How was immigration to the United States possible yet impossible for Jewish families in Germany between the years 1936-1941?
- 17 What was the largest ghetto and where was it located? List five significant facts about this ghetto that reflect your knowledge of ghetto life during the Holocaust.
- 18 *The Wannsee Conference* meeting was held on January 20, 1942. Research who attended that conference. Who were these German State and Nazi officials? How many officials were there and what were their educational and professional backgrounds? Why is it important to know this background information? Why were they chosen to attend? Explain how the term “Final Solution” came into being at this conference.
- 19 Research the *Evian Conference of 1938* and the *Bermuda Conference of 1943*. What generalizations can you make based on the results of these conferences?
- 20 Define the term **genocide**. Who coined the term? What are its roots? In 1948, the *Genocide Convention* was adopted by the United Nations and defined specific aspects of Nazi persecutions to be crimes. List five aspects of Nazi persecutions that were defined as crimes, and give specific instances of each.
- 21 Where is *Yad Vashem*? Why was this institution established? Why is it so important to the study, and the history, of the Holocaust? Research the Hebrew term, *Yad Vashem*. What does it mean?
- 22 Elie Wiesel received the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1986. Research this famous author/survivor of the Holocaust. For what major literary work is he best known?
- 23 Research the various levels of prisoner type camps the Nazi devised as imprisonment. Specifically research the differences between a *ghetto*, a *work/labor camp*, a *transit camp*, a *concentration camp*, and finally a *death camp*. There were six major death camps. Locate them and name each camp.

# PART IV

## THE WARSAW GHETTO POLAND



## The Warsaw Ghetto/Poland

- 1 Locate Poland on a classroom map. Research the country during the years of 1939-1945.
- 2 Research a map of Poland during the Holocaust years. Note that the largest population of Jews was in Poland. How did this affect the Nazi plan to establish the six major death camps?
- 3 Define the Warsaw Ghetto? Define the term “ghetto” as used in the term Warsaw Ghetto. Why was it created and where was it located in relation to the city of Warsaw? How many Jews were living there between 1940 and 1943? How many city blocks was the Warsaw Ghetto?
- 4 In every book dealing with the Holocaust, there are explanations for how the Nazis were able to so efficiently kill so many millions of people. What factors do you believe were the most significant in contributing to their ability to destroy?
- 5 Why couldn't the Jewish people in the ghetto believe the horrible truths they were beginning to hear about the gas chambers from victims who had somehow escaped?
- 6 Although it was difficult to resist armed, there was “Spiritual Resistance” in the Warsaw Ghetto. What was the significance of the Oneg Shabbat Archives of the Warsaw Ghetto created by Emanuel Ringelblum? What were they and what did they contain? How is this an example of “Spiritual Resistance”?
- 7 Why was it virtually impossible for those imprisoned in the ghetto to plan an uprising in the early years of the ghetto?
- 8 The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising is the most famous example of Jewish resistance to the Nazis. Research the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Approximately how many Jews lived in the Warsaw Ghetto? What was the size of the ghetto? Explain the significance of the resistance fighters' slogan, “All are ready to die as human beings.”





- 9 Describe the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Why was the fact that the ghetto fighters were able to hold off the Nazis for such a long time so significant?
- 10 As a student, it is important you know that the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was led by young people—the Commander Mordechai Anielewicz was only 24. Research information about the young commander of the resistance, Mordechai Anielewicz. Create a tribute to Anielewicz and the fighters of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.
- 11 Describe the tasks and obstacles the ZOB (Jewish Fighters Organization) had to overcome to plan the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Research Vladka Meed [Feigele Peltel]. What was Vladka’s specific task?
- 12 How do you explain the fact that a small army of untrained, poorly armed youths was able to hold off the German soldiers for a period longer than the Polish resistance to the German invasion?
- 13 What is the legacy of uprisings such as that of the Warsaw Ghetto in the history of the Holocaust?
- 14 How did life in the ghetto serve to dehumanize people? Discuss the conditions that were subhuman including the lack of food, warmth and adequate clothing.
- 15 Author Betty Jean Lifton has authored a book about Janusz Korczak called *The King of The Children*. After researching Korczak, do you agree he was indeed “the king of the children”?
- 16 Do you think Korczak should have told the children that they were headed for the Death Camp Treblinka? Explain your answer defending your reasoning.
- 17 Korczak had many opportunities to escape from the ghetto. Why was he so determined to stay with the children?
- 18 Dr. Janusz Korczak and his orphanage children left the ghetto and were taken to the death camp at Treblinka. Discuss with your class the reasons why they should forever be known as “martyrs” rather than victims.
- 19 Research once again the six major Death Camps in German-occupied Poland: Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka, Chelmno, Majdanek, and Auschwitz-Birkenau. Why do you think these sites were chosen in Poland?
- 20 In preparation for the film viewing of *Treblinka’s Last Witness*, research the Death Camp Treblinka and where it was located. What connection was there between Treblinka and the Jews who were incarcerated from the Warsaw Ghetto? Read the following description *Treblinka: Offered As A Model* written by Dr. Michael Berenbaum, scholar, producer and script writer for the film *Treblinka’s Last Witness*.

# PART V

## CONTENTS

# TREBLINKA



## ESSAY INTRODUCTION

# “Treblinka of History, Treblinka of Memory”

by Dr. Michael Berenbaum

The following is an excerpt from *The Belzec Memorial and Museum*.  
Reprinted with Permission by Dr. Michael Berenbaum.

The memorial at the death camp of Treblinka offered an impressive model. Belzec and Treblinka were two of the three Aktion Reinhard camps developed exclusively for the implementation of the “Final Solution to the Jewish Problem,” the German name for the mass murder of the Jews. The Germans plowed both sites under when the camps were closed and both offered the opportunity to create memorials that outlined the contours of the camp.

The Warsaw Regional Council chose the design for a memorial at Treblinka II in February of 1960. Selected were two Poles, sculptor Franciszek Duszenko and architect Adam Haupt. Their design focused on the experience of the victims and the loss of the Jews who were murdered at Treblinka. They created a field of 17,000 jagged stones, each stone a different shape. Seven hundred of them had the names of the towns, villages and hamlets that had ejected their now anonymous Jews and watched as they trod toward their deaths.

Only one individual was mentioned by name. That was Janusz Korczak, the famed Polish pediatrician, writer and radio personality who might be considered a combination Mr. Rogers/Dr. Benjamin Spock of his time. Korczak, loved by Poland’s children, ran an orphanage in the Warsaw Ghetto. Offered the opportunity to escape to the Aryan side, Korczak valiantly attempted to save his children. When he could not, he marched with them and died with them in Treblinka.

Courage knew many forms in the Holocaust, and Korczak’s principled decision not to abandon his children is the stuff of legend, a perfect example of moral courage. A teacher does not flee from his students; a father does not abandon his children.

Emanuel Ringelblum, the great chronicler of the Warsaw Ghetto, described the procession:  
“This was no march to the train cars, but rather a mute protest against the murderous regime...a process the likes of which no human eye ever witnessed.” The ghetto stood by in silence as the children marched to the Umschlagplatz.

The stones of Treblinka outline the contours of the camp. At the entrance, concrete blocks give an impression of railroad ties that abruptly veer to the left. They move up to an area, which conveys the sense of being a ramp. It leads to a path running straight to the monument—which is built on the ruins of the gas chambers.

The Germans had a macabre sense of humor and called this path the Himmelstrasse, the path to Heaven. Beyond the monument is a pit on the site of one of the burning fields, where they disposed of the corpses. Jews were first buried in mass graves at Treblinka. When it appeared that the Soviet Union might win the war and discover evidence of the crime, the corpses were exhumed by prisoners and burned on pyres to disappear the evidence. No bodies, no evidence, no crime.

The Memorial is brilliantly effective. It evokes the Presence of Absence and seemingly offers visitors to Treblinka a sense that the victims, whose graves were in the sky, now have an earthly burial ground, a final resting place where Jewish visitors leave small stones on some of the jagged stones in the manner in which Jews mark visits to a grave. Memorial candles are lit; Kaddish and El Moleh Rachamim [the Jewish Memorial Prayer] are recited. Treblinka, is, as the architects and sculptor intended it to be, a Jewish cemetery.

Few words are used: the crime is reiterated. The countries from which Jews were shipped to the camps are named. Even though it was created in Communist times, the word Jew is mentioned and there is no possibility of misimpression. The people murdered in Treblinka were Jews. Jewish symbols are used. Visitors to the site whisper; they are unmistakably aware that they are on sacred grounds.

Visitors to Treblinka do not learn the story of what happened there in detail. They visit a Memorial, a memorial that brilliantly conveys the feeling and magnitude of the loss, but nothing about the nature of the crime.

## The Treblinka of History

### A word about that crime.

Fifty or 60 cars bound for the killing center first stopped at the Malkinia station, the reception area for Treblinka. Twenty cars at a time were detached from the train and brought into the killing center so that arrival could be paced for complete annihilation. Jews arrived on transports from Theresienstadt, Greece, and Slovakia as well as Poland. Jews from Bulgarian-occupied zones of Thrace and Macedonia were sent to Treblinka—but no Jews were sent there from Bulgaria itself. There were also Jews from Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, and the occupied Soviet Union. Some 2,000 Roma and Sinti (Gypsies) were also deported there to be murdered.

The greatest number of transports occurred in the late summer and autumn of 1942. In the summer of 1942 beginning on July 23—which coincided with Tisha B'av, the Jewish fast day commemorating the destruction of the first and second Temples in Jerusalem, the exile of the Jews and the Spanish Inquisition—and continuing through September 21, at least 265,000 Jews were transported from the Warsaw Ghetto alone. During the winter, the frequency and number of transports abated.

The deported were forced off the trains. “Deportation square” contained two barracks: men and women were separated; young children went with their mothers to undress. Attempting to deceive them to the end, German SS and police told the newly arrived victims that they had arrived in a transit area and must hand over their valuables, which were held in storerooms.

Ever “sensitive” to the needs of the handicapped, the Germans structured the camp so that those who could not walk were carried to a special area which appeared to be a “hospital” that proudly flew a Red Cross Flag. There they were shot by SS and police personnel and their bodies were sent for disposal with the others. Very young children were offered the same “courteous” treatment.

As for the other victims, they were led down a fenced-in path, known variously as the “tube” or “the highway to heaven,” [the Himmelstrasse] which led from the reception area to the gas chamber entrance in the killing area. They were lined up, ready for the chase, naked and barefoot even on the coldest days of winter. Before them stretched the 150-yard path connecting both sectors of the camp. The condemned ran the gauntlet between the rows of torturers, who shouted, battered them with their whips, and pricked them with bayonets.

The gas chambers were located in two buildings, which, in classic doublespeak, were labeled showers. Three gas chambers were located in the older building, and ten more chambers, twice as large, were in the newer one. The walls were set with tiles and the ceiling had openings fitted with showerheads to give the impression of a bathing area. The openings in the ceilings were connected to pipes leading to diesel engines from Soviet tanks located in the annexes. Once the victims were inside, the doors were sealed and the engines were used to force carbon monoxide into the chamber. (Treblinka was more primitive than Auschwitz, where they employed Zyklon B.)

There were two groups of people who made the camp run. The Germans used about thirty SS men, and 90-120 so-called Ukrainians (that is, members of the auxiliary services) to administrate and guard the camp. Between 1,000-1,500 younger male Jewish prisoners were recruited to work in what was known as the Sonderkommando (Jewish prisoners who worked in the killing area), and after being brought to a state of emaciation, were often replaced by men from new transports. There were also the musicians who played for the “troops.” First came the klezmerim from the surrounding villages and later an excellent chamber orchestra played under the direction of Artur Gold, who was known for his jazz ensemble from Warsaw. In addition there was a choir which every evening sang the idyllic song *Gute Nacht, Gute Nacht, schlaft gut bis der Morgen erwacht* and a marching song composed by one of the prisoners.

The Sonderkommando removed bodies from the gas chambers and when they opened the doors, they found corpses “standing” pressed one against the other (“like basalt pillars”) and who appeared to be staring with the horror of suffocation. Once the bodies were removed, the prisoners washed out the chambers for the next shift, sprinkled the Himmelstrasse with fresh sand, as others ran with the corpses, under a storm of blows and the threat of being shot, to the enormous graves. The gravediggers alternated the corpses’ placement from feet to head, and head to feet to maximize “storage” efficiency. On the way to the graves, the dentists went to work, yanking dentures and gold from the victims’ mouths, while the jewelers checked body orifices for hidden treasure like precious stones or metals and appraised them.

Once the giant graves were filled as much as they could be, and after the German defeat at Stalingrad, knowing they had to retreat from the Eastern front, the Nazi authorities cremated the corpses to eliminate the traces of their crimes. The Sonderkommandos were forced to exhume the bodies and burn them in open air ovens constructed of railroad ties.

Because the Sonderkommandos were the only Jews with somewhat of a life span in Treblinka, in early 1943, amid rumors that the Germans were losing the war, and inspired by the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, they organized a resistance movement to take over the camp before it could be destroyed and abandoned by the Germans. One of those revolutionaries was Chiel Rajchman, a “barber.” A few days after his arrival he sorted his sister’s dress. He had seen the mass graves. He was ordered to disperse the ashes of those who had been burned, remove the bones and pulverize them.

### In his memoir he wrote:

The uprising was planned by Camp 1, the clothes sorting camp with 700 prisoners... Originally, the uprising was planned for May 1943. They prepared gold to bribe the guards, to pay for food. We had duplicate keys to the arsenal, but the same day a train load of soldiers arrived and the plan was postponed. The rifles and the ammunition taken from the arsenal were returned. We informed Camp 1 that if they do not do something, we will not wait any longer and break out ourselves.

Inmates had to make do with the weapons at hand—shovels, picks and a few homemade grenades. The arsenal was opened and a small number of weapons removed and distributed to resistance fighters. A young prisoner substituted gasoline for disinfectant in his sprayer. Late in the afternoon a shot rang out, giving the signal to set the camp on fire. The shot was a half-hour early. It caught the inmates off guard. Grenades were thrown and prisoners dodged bullets as they fled the camp...

We wanted to destroy the gas chambers. But we set on fire the garages, the warehouse chambers. Our plan was to get out of there and free the penal camp, but we were not able to do it. It became so chaotic...After a few moments, the Germans started shooting and killing. They kept shooting and we were running wild. I was screaming, “People save yourself.” Some of them chose not to run and went back to the barracks. I was one of the last to leave. When I left many were laying on the ground, already dead.

A mass of prisoners stormed the gates and more than 300 got away but were later tracked down by the SS, Gestapo and Wehrmacht and were executed. Those left behind in the camp were ordered to dismantle it and were executed by machine gun fire when they were done. None of the musicians survived, either.

Less than 100 lived to see the day of liberation and today in October 2014 only one, Samuel Willenberg is still alive. He is the very last eyewitness.

# Study Questions for the Student

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

### PART 1

#### Viewing the film *TREBLINKA'S LAST WITNESS*



- 1 Locate Treblinka on a map. What exactly was “*Treblinka*”?
- 2 Who was Samuel Willenberg? Who is he today?
- 3 What do the sculptures in the opening scene represent?
- 4 Locate Czestochowa, Poland on a map. Describe this city before the war as Sam remembers it.
- 5 Why is the memory of the synagogue in Czestochowa so personally important to Sam?
- 6 How many Jews were there in Germany in 1933? What was the percentage compared to the rest of the population in Germany? What does “Judenrein” mean?
- 7 What seemed to be a basis of the antisemitism (“Hatred of Jews”) in Germany in 1933 when Hitler came to power?
- 8 By 1939 what percentage of Jews had left Germany?

#### Poland/Warsaw Ghetto

- 1 Locate Warsaw, Poland?
- 2 Research the history of Jews in Poland?
- 3 Why were Jews “outsiders” in Poland and what was it based on: Religion? Custom? Ethnicity?
- 4 What was the irony of Sam suddenly experiencing antisemitism when he had always been “a loyal Pole”?
- 5 Who is Ada Willenberg? Why didn’t Jews in German-occupied Poland flee according to the testimony of Ada Willenberg?
- 6 What was the “Warsaw Ghetto”? Describe life in the ghetto? Why were Jews put there to begin with?

- 7 What was the “Einsatzgruppen”? What was the main task of the “Einsatzgruppen”?
- 8 Approximately how many Jews were shot to death in 1941 by the Einsatzgruppen?
- 9 “My heart still hurts,” says survivor Sam Willenberg. Explain why most Holocaust Survivors might feel that way?
- 10 What was the “reversed process” of killing Jews that made Treblinka possible?
- 11 Define the term “Roundups”. To what does it specifically refer in the Warsaw Ghetto?
- 12 What was the “Jewish Council”? Who appointed them?
- 13 Describe the conditions in the railway cars carrying Sam and the Jews to Treblinka?

#### Arriving at Treblinka

- 1 Describe your reaction to your first view of *Treblinka* in the film?
- 2 What is the contrast of *Treblinka* as shown in the film to the earlier part of the film depicting the *Warsaw Ghetto*? Describe and explain.
- 3 People often ask when studying the Holocaust today “How were men and women separated in the death camps?” Describe how that happened in *Treblinka* noting the Nazi word “*Selektion*” for this process.
- 4 How did Sam save himself at the “*selektion*” in *Treblinka*?
- 5 Explain what Sam means when he says “I was in Hell” a few hours after arriving in *Treblinka*. What was so absolutely shocking to Sam that he now knew about how people were put to death there?
- 6 Yehuda Bauer, the preeminent scholar of Israel, says in the film “The process of murdering Jews at *Treblinka* was unprecedented in history.” Explain.
- 7 Between July 23 and September 21, 1942 how many Jews were transported out of the *Warsaw Ghetto* to *Treblinka*?
- 8 Sam says in the film “Murder AND Plunder happened at *Treblinka*.” Explain.
- 9 How had the Jewish prisoners in *Treblinka* paid homage to *the beautiful girl in the ball gown*?
- 10 Who was Kurt Franz? How does his photo album called “*Good old days*” which was found after the war, show the inhumanity of the Nazi killers.

## PART 2

### Viewing the film *TREBLINKA'S LAST WITNESS*

- 1 Sam says, “These sculptures are the continuation of my life in *Treblinka*.” Why do you think Sam would want to keep these memories?
- 2 What does Sam mean when he says he lived in a “mixed neighborhood” in Czestochowa, Poland before the war?
- 3 Describe Sam’s early memory of his childhood, his family, his sisters and his parents?
- 4 Richard Rhodes, the scholar historian, talks about “Hitler’s Conspiracy Theories Against The Jews”. Name some of these theories and write a paper that disproves each theory as racist, intolerant and homophobic.
- 5 Dr. Michael Berenbaum, the noted scholar and consultant on this film, states that in 1933 there were approximately 525,000 Jews in Germany but by 1939 there were half the number of Jews left in Germany. “They had gotten the message,” says Berenbaum. Explain this statement and what it implies about Jews in Germany understanding their fate by the late 1930’s.
- 6 Identify Ada Willenberg. Who is she and what was her personal family background when the Nazis first entered Warsaw?
- 7 Define the term “Einsatzgruppen”. What was their specific task?
- 8 How did Sam discover the fate of his two sisters?
- 9 How does Ada Willenberg describe life in The Warsaw Ghetto in her first person testimony?
- 10 Why did the Nazis choose TREBLINKA for their killing place?
- 11 Sam says, “In the Ghetto there was no greenery.” Explain this after reading Barbara Wind’s poem *Trees in Treblinka* found on page 39.
- 12 Read Barbara Wind’s poem that was inspired by Sam’s words.
- 13 Describe Sam’s first day in Treblinka and meeting up with Alfred Boehm. Who was Alfred Boehm?
- 14 What do we learn was unique about a “Death Camp” as compared to a “concentration labor camp”?
- 15 What horrific procedures at Treblinka were “unprecedented” according to the Israeli scholar Yehuda Bauer?
- 16 Dr. Michael Berenbaum says, “Treblinka was not just about murder; it was about plunder.”—no question here
- 17 Review the poem *Where Are The Children* written by Dr. Miriam Klein Kassenoff, and comment on how the poem shows Treblinka was about “plunder” and confiscation of a person’s human dignity. Also read Dr. Anita Meyer Meinbach’s reflective words on *Shoes*. Both can be found on page 41 at the end of this unit.
- 18 Research Franz Stangl. What was his role at Treblinka?
- 19 Research the famous interview that journalist Gita Sereny did with Stangl. Review and discuss the important points she made in the interview about Stangl and his perception of his role in the Holocaust.
- 20 How did Ada Willenberg manage to get out of the Warsaw Ghetto?
- 21 How did the Jews in Treblinka manage to plan a rebellion and how did the attempted escape turn into a tragedy?
- 22 When Sam was shot, how did he ultimately flee? Where did he walk to alone and why did he return to the Warsaw Ghetto of all places?
- 23 How did Sam find his father?
- 24 After the Treblinka Uprising, what did the Nazis do to the camp? How were they going to “eradicate all memory of Treblinka”?
- 25 How did Sam become a resistance fighter after he escaped Treblinka?
- 26 What was Ada’s role in the resistance?
- 27 How did Ada ultimately survive? Research *Hidden Children of the Holocaust*.
- 28 What did you learn about this unique group of children?
- 29 What happened in Poland on May 1, 1945?
- 30 How did Ada and Sam finally meet for the first time?
- 31 Sam and Ada ended up going to Israel—why and how?

## The Israel Connection

- 1** Describe Israel in those early years just after statehood (1948) as seen through the eyes of a new immigrant Holocaust survivor, Sam Willenberg.
- 2** Where did Sam ultimately work for a living most of his life in Israel?
- 3** Why did they name their first child, a daughter, ORIT—what does the word mean in Polish and in Hebrew as well? Sam says, “*The best revenge is to live a good life!*” Do you agree? How does Sam exemplify this?
- 4** What honor was bestowed on Orit, Sam and Ada’s daughter in connection with her work on the Israeli Embassy in Berlin?
- 5** Towards the end of the film Sam is visiting the Treblinka site and he says, “*I am fulfilled by passing on to others what happened here.*” Do you feel Sam has indeed accomplished this? How? In how many ways? Explain fully.

## REFLECTIONS AND YOUR MORAL OBLIGATION STATED HERE:

- A** Take this space to comment on the viewing of this film *Treblinka’s Last Witness* and write your response to seeing it.
- B** Include in your response what lessons you have learned about life, about the dangers of racism and prejudice and what your commitment is, to make sure nothing like what happened to Sam will ever happen again.

## TREES IN TREBLINKA

by Barbara Wind

He tries to grasp them with outstretched arms  
And little fingers thin as wire. She has to struggle  
To keep her hold, though she wishes they could  
Rush straight to the woods, free, finally, of the stench  
The maddening sounds of fear and despair  
As the wheels clattered and ground their way here.

How fresh this air, fragrant with rain  
The trees, a sight he’s never seen.  
She will teach her child to not look back  
But define and claim this pastoral landscape.

He repeats the words as she points to an oak  
Trunk, branch, acorn, nest  
Syllables roll off his tongue with ease.  
Wrens chirp, as if to echo his excitement  
A breeze ruffles leaves and they sing along.  
The boy giggles at his newfound power  
And his mother finds delight in his happiness.

She held him close through the long ordeal  
Refusing to admit weariness and thirst  
Singing lullabies to staunch her terror.  
The sight of this forest, such a relief  
It washes over her as the rain that fell  
Like a blessing when they emerged from  
The train, filthy and dark as a medieval close.

She squints as her eyes adjust to the light.  
And breathes deeply, filling her lungs

With air, redolent of earth and pine  
And a scent both familiar and strange.

As ordered, Jews head into the camp.  
Her young child will soon forget the ghetto  
Its countless miseries, the horrible rumors  
More lurid than the tales of the Grimms  
With their savage taste for brutality and blood.

Time will replace those memories  
With images of sunlight and flowers.  
The war will end as all wars do, her husband  
Will return and see the son he never saw  
What a joyous reunion that will be  
And the boy can grow strong, tall as his father  
Now that they’re out of that hellhole in the city  
Where hundreds died of hunger and disease each day.

She’s eager for the promised cup of coffee.  
Food should be plentiful here in the countryside  
Bread, eggs, milk, perhaps even cream.  
How silly to have cried when they boarded the train  
As if they were leaving a paradise.

## Questions on the poem *Trees in Treblinka*

### Discussion Questions:

- 1** In the first paragraph of poem *Trees in Treblinka*, to what or where does the narrator refer in the words “free, finally, of the stench, the maddening sounds of fear and despair as the wheels clattered and ground their way here.” Discuss free from what and where?
- 2** Who is the narrator in the poem and when she says “the trees, a sight he’s never seen” to whom is she referring when she says “he”?
- 3** With air, redolent of earth and pine; And a scent both familiar and strange” Explain this couplet in the poem—What is both familiar and strange to the narrator in “the scent” of the forest?
- 4** How were people deported to the death camp in Treblinka?
- 5** Why were the mother’s fears allayed when she saw the forest?

### Activities:

- A** Have students write it from different perspectives: the child’s, a more sophisticated person on the train, one of the Nazi guards.
- B** Define irony and discuss its use in the poem. Why did the poet choose to use irony in this poem? Why is the statement, “Food should be plentiful here in the countryside” and example of irony?
- C** Read the poem *Trees in Treblinka* and reflect on this page what the poem means to you after viewing the film *Treblinka’s Last Witness*.

## WHERE ARE THE CHILDREN?

by Dr. Miriam Klein Kassenoff

All those shoes  
I’ve never seen so many shoes  
Who were they?  
Where are they?  
Why are they so little?  
Where are the children?  
Who would kill so many little children?  
Who would take such innocents?  
Who were in these shoes?  
Who was Julika? Her name is engraved on her shoes—  
For me to know her  
Where is that little ballerina now?  
Does she cry for her lost dancing shoe?  
I can see the laces and the buckles  
And the bows—  
But  
I can’t see the children...  
Where are they?  
Who are they?  
Where are the children?



## SHOES

by Dr. Anita Meyer Meinbach

Even now, months later, I can still see the shoes, thread-bare, ragged, and torn. There were three rooms of shoes, rooms twelve feet high, packed from floor to ceiling with nothing but shoes. A silent memorial.

They were the shoes of those who had nothing in common and yet everything in common. They were the shoes of the young wife who would never again know a tender touch; they were the shoes of the young boy who knew nothing of play and everything about fear and survival; they were the shoes of the mother who would never sing another lullaby or hear the laughter of her children; they were the shoes of the writer, the teacher, the doctor, the dreamer.

There was a mountain of shoes reaching to forever, the shoes of the millions who lived with hope, and died still believing in tomorrow. In the end, these shoes led to one place, a place with many different names—  
Treblinka; Auschwitz; Birkenau; Majdanek.

I remember the shoes, and I feel a deep emptiness and an overwhelming sadness for what might have been. I wonder what roads might have been traveled, what words might have been written, what pains might have been eased. And I wonder what dreams might have come true.

**Survivors of the concentration camps spoke of their shoes.  
Primo Levi wrote:**

Death begins with the shoes; for most of us, they show themselves to be instruments of torture, which after a few hours of marching cause painful sores which become fatally infected. Whoever has them is forced to walk as if he was dragging a convict's chain. He arrives last everywhere, and everywhere he receives blows. He cannot escape if they run after him; his feet swell and the more they swell, the more the friction with the wood and cloth of the shoes becomes insupportable.

**Viktor Frankl, the doctor who later pioneered logotherapy, basing his healing on the idea that a sense of purpose and meaning is central to the healing process, wrote:**

Like nearly all camp inmates, I was suffering from edema. My legs were so swollen and the skin on them so tightly stretched that I could scarcely bend my knees. I had to leave my shoes unlaced in order to make them fit my swollen feet. There would not have been any space for socks even if I had any...So my partly bare feet were always wet and my shoes always full of snow...Every single step became real torture.

**Gerda Weissman Klein described her shoes on the death march:**

Three years earlier I had worn my ski boots. My father had said to me before I left in June, "Wear your ski boots!" "Ski boots in June? Papa." In those days we did not challenge our fathers. I saw girls breaking off their toes as twigs and I had my ski shoes.

**After reading page 41, comment and discuss why shoes were so important to the inmates in the concentration camps.**



# PART VI

## POLAND TODAY



**Museum of the History of the Polish Jews**  
*Sigmund Rolat*  
*Chairman, North American Council*



## Poland Today 2014-2015

**POPULATION:** 38,115,000  
**JEWISH POPULATION:** 5,000-20,000

On the eve of the Shoah, Poland was home to over three million Jews, the second-largest Jewish community in the world at the time. Warsaw, the capital, had a population of over 300,000 Jews, more than 30% of the population of the city—and a larger Jewish community than in most European countries. Following the German onslaught in 1939, about 90% of Polish Jewry was wiped out. Many Jews from other countries were deported to Nazi death camps in German-occupied Poland and murdered there.

After World War II, most of the survivors refused to return to, or remain in, Poland, which was convulsed by civil war and antisemitic violence. Emigration accelerated after pogroms—most especially the July 4, 1946 pogrom in Kielce, Poland in which 42 Jews were murdered—and other outrages, and the Jewish population continued to shrink through successive waves of emigration.

There were two purges of the Jews in Poland in 1957 and in 1968 following the Six Day War. Those Jews who remained in Poland were often reticent to express their Jewish identity and sometimes even to tell their children that they were Jewish as they feared for their safety. The Papacy of Pope John Paul II, “the Polish Pope” who long enjoyed warm personal relations with Jews initiated a shift in attitude toward Jews.

Since the fall of Communism, the small Jewish community in Poland has been able to reassert its identity and today has a very high profile in public life. Most of the country’s Jews live in Warsaw, but smaller communities also exist in Kraków, Wrocław,



*“In Poland, Jewish men were chastised and made to wear fox-tails. They have re-claimed this symbol with pride by wearing these fox-tail hats.” —<http://trishapatton.com>*



*Kazimierz Dolny, Poland. Monument erected from recovered stones. Photo: Samuel D. Gruber (2008)*

Łódź, Katowice, Szczecin, Gdańsk, and several other cities. The vast number of historical Jewish sites has proved a magnet for foreign visitors to Poland. In 2013, the new Museum of the History of Polish Jews was opened to the public.

There is one special category of Jews that have rediscovered their Jewish roots and these were very young children who were given for safekeeping to non-Jews before the deportations from ghettos in German-occupied Poland. During the war, their caretaker parents could not tell them they were Jewish without risking their own lives and the life of their family, because hiding a Jew, even an infant Jew, was punishable by death. Immediately after the war, they were afraid to tell their children the truth of their origins for fear of exposing them to antisemitism and exposing the family to ridicule as “Jew lovers.” As children grew older the conversation grew ever more awkward and some children only discovered their Jewish origins after their caretaker parents—the only parents they knew—died. Thus, they experienced an identity crisis well into middle age and some rescued children still do not know that they were saved and adopted by courageous non-Jews.

## DEMOGRAPHY

An accurate estimate of the number of Jews in Poland has yet to be achieved, though it seems reasonable to put the number at somewhere between 5,000 and 20,000. Most of the country’s Jews live in Warsaw, but there are also communities in Kraków, Łódź, Szczecin, Gdańsk, and in several cities in Upper and Lower Silesia, notably in Katowice and Wrocław. Very few Jews live in the eastern part of the country, including cities and towns that were once great centers of Jewish life, such as Lublin, Białystok, and Przemyśl. Whereas before the war, the majority of Jews spoke Yiddish as their mother tongue, today that language is almost only spoken by a rapidly dwindling elderly population. In the last 25 years, there has been a reawakening of Jewish consciousness, and young people of Jewish origin who had no previous Jewish affiliation are joining the community.

## COMMUNITY LIFE

Today, in addition to the “official” community, there are a plethora of Jewish organizations and institutions catering to virtually every type of Jewish expression. Catering to the needs of Jews, young and old, who are rediscovering their Jewish identity is also a top priority. One Jewish group is composed of persons orphaned in the Holocaust and raised by non-Jews. Many of those orphans only discovered their Jewish origins late in life.

High on the community’s agenda is the preservation of the large number of Jewish historical sites (including cemeteries



Before World War II Poland was renowned for having the largest Jewish population in Europe. —<http://jovwilliams.wordpress.com>

and synagogues) that cover the length and breadth of the country. The Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage administers restituted Jewish property. Among the properties restored to the Jewish communities is the monumental building of the Yeshivat Chachmei Lublin, which, before the war, was one of the world’s greatest institutions of Jewish learning. That building is now being restored and in addition to a vast sanctuary will house a hotel for Jewish travelers. Poland has yet to enact a comprehensive law restoring property to pre-war owners or their heirs or compensating them for its loss. Since Jews constituted 10% of the Polish population and often 25-35% of its urban population such a restoration of property would be an economic upheaval. Poland enjoys warm relations with Israel and many former Polish Jews visit together with their children and grandchildren fascinated by an exploration of their roots. The March of the Living, which coincides with Yom Hashoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day, in April brings more than 10,000 Jewish teenagers, accompanied by survivors, to visit the sites of destruction, death camps and ghettos and sites of once thriving Jewish life.

Antisemitism remains a problem, but no political party that openly espouses an anti-Jewish agenda is in parliament. Still, there are occasional manifestations of antisemitism in the form of vandalism of Jewish sites, graffiti, the publication and distribution of antisemitic literature, and anti-Jewish utterances by public figures, including certain extreme members of the clergy. The antisemitic Catholic radio station Radio Maryja and the newspaper connected with it are influential in the provinces and among the elderly. On the other hand, the Roman Catholic Church sponsors an annual day devoted to the study of Judaism, which is held each year in a different city.



Recently restored Polish Jewish cemetery has been vandalized, in a manner similar to this cemetery outside Minsk, Belarus. Photo: EPA/STRINGER .

*World Jewish Congress, adapted by Dr. Michael Berenbaum*

## MUSEUM OF THE HISTORY OF POLISH JEWS

The Museum of the History of Polish Jews opened its doors to the public in April 2013. It currently functions as a cultural and educational center with a rich cultural program, including temporary exhibitions, films, debates, workshops, performances, concerts, lectures and much more. The opening of the Core Exhibition, presenting the thousand-year history of Polish Jews, is scheduled for autumn of 2014.

Formally founded in 2005 by the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute of Poland, the City of Warsaw and the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, the Museum is a unique and unprecedented initiative, spanning many fields of research and drawing on the expertise of scholars and museum professionals from around the world. They also work with the community at large to create a vibrant place of exchange and dialogue where all have the opportunity to express their views, ask questions and grow.

Occupying around 43,000 sq. ft., the Museum's Core Exhibition will immerse visitors in the world of Polish Jews, from their arrival in Poland as traveling merchants in medieval times until today. The exhibition was developed by an international team of more than 120 scholars, working under the direction of Professor Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett from New York University. It is being produced by the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute of Poland thanks to the support of donors from all over the world. Each of the eight galleries will present a different chapter of the story of Polish Jews, enabling visitors to come into intimate contact with those who lived that story through images, artifacts, first-person accounts and interactive multimedia.

The Museum stands in what was once the heart of Jewish Warsaw—an area that the Nazis turned into the Warsaw Ghetto during World War II. This significant location, coupled with the Museum's proximity to the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes, demanded extreme thoughtfulness on the part of the building's designers, who carefully crafted a structure that has become a symbol of the new face of Warsaw. The design by the Finnish studio Lahdelma & Mahlamäki was selected in an international competition. In 2008, with the building still under construction, it received the prestigious Chicago Athenaeum International Architecture Award (2008).

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[www.jewishmuseum.org.pl/en](http://www.jewishmuseum.org.pl/en)



*The reconstructed ceiling and roof of the seventeenth century synagogue is a key attraction in the Museum of the History of Polish Jews. (AP Photo/Czarek Sokolowski)*

# PART VII

## SOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY



**Israeli Embassy, Berlin**  
Architect: Orit Willenberg-Giladi  
Berlin, Germany

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Excerpts from *Studying The Holocaust Through Film and Literature* permission from authors Klein Kassenoff and Meyer Meinbach

## Webography

[www.annefrank.com](http://www.annefrank.com)

**Anne Frank On-line** is a site dedicated to everything about Anne Frank; her biography, photos, memoirs. Virtual tour of the Anne Frank house and lesson ideas for educators and students.

[www.adl.org](http://www.adl.org)

**Anti-Defamation League** is an organization founded in 1913 to fight antisemitism through programs and services that counteract hatred, prejudice and bigotry. The mission of the ADL is “to stop the defamation of Jewish people, to secure justice and fair treatment to all citizens alike.” Many educational resources can be found on this site by reviewing and visiting the various links noted; particularly The Hidden Child Foundation.

[www.ahoinfo.org](http://www.ahoinfo.org)

**The Association of Holocaust Organizations** was established in 1985 to serve as a network of organizations and individuals for the advancement of Holocaust programming, awareness, education and research.

[www.chgs.umn.edu](http://www.chgs.umn.edu)

**The Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies** was established by the University of Minnesota in the College of Liberal Arts in 1997. This extensive website serves as a resource for teaching and informing the public about the Holocaust and contemporary genocide.

[www.coe.fau.edu/CentersAndPrograms/CHHRE](http://www.coe.fau.edu/CentersAndPrograms/CHHRE)

**The Center for Holocaust and Human Rights Education (CHHRE)** at Florida Atlantic University offers training and resources to teachers involved in Holocaust and genocide education. Its many programs include scholar lectures, teacher seminars and institutes, film programs and educational curricula on the history of the Holocaust.

[www.centropa.org](http://www.centropa.org)

**Centropa** is an Interactive Database of Jewish Memory “Where Jewish History Has A Name, A Face, A Story”. This program has a site with many links to follow which offer historical information, video testimonies and information on application to go to their various summer seminars held each year for teachers.

[www.echoesandreflections.org](http://www.echoesandreflections.org)

**Echoes and Reflection** is a Holocaust education program that includes everything educators need to teach the complex issues of the Holocaust to twenty-first century students. A comprehensive curriculum and extensive teacher training program is available in Israel and all over the United States.

[www.elholocausto.org](http://www.elholocausto.org)

**El Holocausto** is a comprehensive Spanish-language site covering the history of the Holocaust and educational resources as well.

[www.facinghistory.org](http://www.facinghistory.org)

**Facing History and Ourselves** is a national educational and professional development organization whose mission is to engage students of diverse backgrounds in an examination of racism, prejudice, and antisemitism in order to promote the development of a more humane and informed citizenry. Educational resources and books and films are available.

[www.flholocausteducationtaskforce.org](http://www.flholocausteducationtaskforce.org)

**Florida Department of Education Task Force on Holocaust Education** offers Lesson Plan Resources, Film Resources, and the Florida statute for Mandate to Teach The Holocaust. Plus key listing of Florida Teaching institutes. All the information a Florida teacher needs for his/her school district needs.

[www.flholocaustmuseum.org](http://www.flholocaustmuseum.org)

**Florida Holocaust Museum** features a vast collection of works of art, photographs and historical artifacts as well as excellent educational materials and hosts a summer institute for teachers. The programs at the Museum include educational exhibits, teacher seminars throughout the year, teaching trunks and survivor testimonies.

[www.gfh.org.il/eng](http://www.gfh.org.il/eng)

**The Ghetto Fighter's House Museum** in Israel focuses on lessons and projects of Jewish Resistance during the Holocaust. Many ideas, projects and lessons can be found on this website on Physical and Spiritual Resistance During the Holocaust.

[www.jewishpartisans.org](http://www.jewishpartisans.org)

**Jewish Partisan Educational Foundation** is a major resource exploring those who stood up to Nazi tyranny and saved the lives of thousands of Jews. The most comprehensive on-line lesson plans on the subject of the Jewish partisans and especially on Women Partisans are available as well as teacher training.

[www.historychannel.com](http://www.historychannel.com)

**History Channel** offers good resources for Holocaust film documentaries that can be used in 60 minute segments for classroom use and a basis for further research.

[www.hdec.org](http://www.hdec.org)

**The Holocaust Documentation & Education Center** is the largest collection Center in Florida for information on survivor documentation. The Holocaust Documentation Center has many outreach programs including monthly library lectures and readings by Holocaust survivors, year round programs for community and teachers and staff, essay writing contests, film presentations and an annual summer teaching institute.

[www.holocaustresources.org](http://www.holocaustresources.org)

**Holocaust Education Resource Council (HERC)** provides the following resources for educators, students, and the community: educational programs and curricula; Teacher training for educators; Holocaust Teaching Trunks; Speakers Bureau of survivors, witnesses, liberators; second generation online resources and tools; public programs; local writing and art contest; newsletter support and consultation for educators.

[www.holocaustmemorialmiamibeach.org](http://www.holocaustmemorialmiamibeach.org)

**Holocaust Memorial Miami Beach** is a unique outdoor memorial and educational site and resource for *History of the Holocaust*, many on site programs, outreach for cultural and educational programs, and guided student/teacher on site visitations as well as a *Wall of Remembrance*. The Memorial hosts a unique *Holocaust Education Week program annually and hosts Kristallnacht and Yom Hashoah Programs* every year on site.

[www.holocaustedu.org](http://www.holocaustedu.org)

**The Holocaust Memorial Resource and Education Center of Florida** was built by people who believed in the power of knowledge. It focuses on guided tours, lesson plans, year round cultural programs, scholar visits and a summer teaching institute.

[www.holocaustmuseumsfwl.org](http://www.holocaustmuseumsfwl.org)

**The Holocaust Museum & Education Center of Southwest Florida** promotes respect and understanding by teaching the history and lessons of the Holocaust. Lesson plans for teachers, institutes and guided tours of the exhibits in the Museum, as well as a summer teaching institute are offered on a daily basis.

[www.hrusa.org](http://www.hrusa.org)

**Human Rights USA** suggests ideas and tools for advocating and protecting human rights. Encourages community-based actions and student guided projects.

[socialsciences.dadeschools.net](http://socialsciences.dadeschools.net)

**Miami-Dade County Public Schools Department of Social Sciences** is a major Resource for Holocaust Education Study Guides and for Florida Standards on Teaching the Holocaust.

[www.jewishmuseum.org.pl/en](http://www.jewishmuseum.org.pl/en)

**Museum of the History of Polish Jews** is the newest major museum on the history of Polish Jews. The Research and Publications Department documents, researches and disseminates knowledge about the history of Polish Jews. The Education Department offers guided tours and lesson plans.

[www.mjhnyc.org](http://www.mjhnyc.org)

**Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust** honors those who died by celebrating their lives—cherishing the traditions that they embraced, examining their achievements and faith, and affirming the vibrant worldwide Jewish community that is their legacy today. New generations are taught how to recognize and fight contemporary instances of injustice and oppression.

[www.remember.org](http://www.remember.org)

**Remember.org** is the homepage of the Cybrary of the Holocaust. The Cybrary is a website on the Holocaust. It contains a collection of Encyclopedic information, answers to frequently asked questions, survivor testimony, transcripts of Nazi speeches and official documents, artifact photos, historical photos, artwork, poetry, and books written by survivors.

[www.wiesenthal.com](http://www.wiesenthal.com)

**The Simon Wiesenthal Center** is an international center for Holocaust remembrance, and the defense of human rights and the Jewish people headquartered in Los Angeles. The website contains answers to thirty-six frequently asked questions about the Holocaust, biographies of children who were hidden in the Holocaust and many other valuable educational resources.

[www.socialstudies.com](http://www.socialstudies.com)

**Social Studies School Service** is an on-line catalog of Holocaust videos and resources. Teachers and students will find this a user-friendly site from which to order materials including films and memoirs.

[www.ushmm.org](http://www.ushmm.org)

**The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** includes information about the background history of the Holocaust and of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum; how to plan a visit to the museum; community programs, films, lectures; conferences for educators; guidelines for teaching about the Holocaust; a videography for teachers; and answers to frequently asked questions about the Holocaust.

[www.education.miami.edu/holocaust](http://www.education.miami.edu/holocaust)

**University of Miami School of Education and Human Development Holocaust Institute** is the largest Teacher Holocaust Training Institute in South Florida. Film Programs, Curriculum Resources and year round cultural programs hosting major scholars of the Holocaust are held in the Miami area with a following of hundreds of community guests to all programs.

[sfi.usc.edu](http://sfi.usc.edu)

**USC Shoah Foundation—Survivors of the Shoah: The Visual History Foundation** created by Steven Spielberg has recorded more than 50,000 videotaped interviews with Holocaust survivors. These are being recorded electronically for computer CD-ROMs to be distributed for museums and other Holocaust education sites. This site also has lesson plans and access to the unique IWITNESS program.

[www.yadvashem.org.il](http://www.yadvashem.org.il)

**Yad Vashem** is the world center for Holocaust research, education, documentation and commemoration. It includes educational materials; database of Shoah victims' names; visiting the Holocaust History Museum; testimonies about the Righteous Among the Nations; extensive teacher training seminars every month for teachers from all over the world; and a summer international Holocaust conference.

[www.worldjewishcongress.org](http://www.worldjewishcongress.org)

**The World Jewish Congress** is the international organization that represents Jewish communities and organizations in 100 countries around the world. It advocates on their behalf towards governments, parliaments, international organizations and other faiths. The WJC represents the plurality of the Jewish people, and is politically non-partisan.

## Holocaust Educational Program Resources

Meinbach, Anita, & Kassenoff, Miriam Klein. (2003). *Memories of the Night: A Study of the Holocaust*. Available as an e-book from Amazon, on Kindle or Nook.

Kassenoff, Miriam Klein & Meinbach, Anita. (2004). *Studying the Holocaust Through Film and Literature*. Available as an e-book from Amazon, on Kindle or Nook.

Shawn, Karen. (1994). *Dimensions: A Journal of Holocaust Studies*, 8. What should they read and when should they read it? A selective review of Holocaust literature for students in grades 2-12.

Strom, Margot Stern. (1994). *Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior*. Brookline, MA: Facing History and Ourselves National Foundation.

Totten, Samuel (Ed.). (2001). *Teaching Holocaust Literature*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Totten, Samuel, & Feinberg, Stephen (Eds.). (2001). *Teaching and Studying the Holocaust*, Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

- Echoes and Reflection – A Holocaust Education Program  
[www.echoesandreflections.org](http://www.echoesandreflections.org)
- The Florida Department of Education Holocaust Task Force  
<http://flholocausteducationtaskforce.org>
- Holocaust Memorial Miami Beach  
<http://holocaustmemorialmiamibeach.org>
- Jewish Partisan Educational Foundation  
[www.jewishpartisans.org](http://www.jewishpartisans.org)
- United States Holocaust Memorial Museum  
<http://www.ushmm.org>
- University of Miami Holocaust Teacher Institute  
[www.education.miami.edu/holocaust](http://www.education.miami.edu/holocaust)
- USC Shoah Foundation  
<http://sfi.usc.edu>
- Yad Vashem – World Center for Holocaust Research  
<http://www.yadvashem.org>

# PART VIII

## FLORIDA EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS



Holocaust Memorial of the Greater Miami Jewish Federation  
Architect: Kenneth Treister, FAIA  
Miami Beach, Florida.

## Required Public School Instruction on the History of the Holocaust

### FLORIDA STATUTE 1003.42

- 2** Members of the instructional staff of the public schools, subject to the rules and regulations of the commissioner, the state board, and the school board, shall teach efficiently and faithfully, using the books and materials required, following the prescribed courses of study, and employing approved methods of instruction, the following:
  - f** The history of the Holocaust (1933-1945), the systematic, planned annihilation of European Jews and other groups by Nazi Germany, a watershed event in the history of humanity, to be taught in a manner that leads to an investigation of human behavior, an understanding of the ramifications of prejudice, racism, and stereotyping, and an examination of what it means to be a responsible and respectful person, for the purposes of encouraging tolerance of diversity in a pluralistic society and for nurturing and protecting democratic values and institutions.



## How To Use This Study Guide to meet Florida Standards

- The Florida Standards for this Study Guide are in two sections:
  - First those Florida Standards that are met through teaching Parts I, II, VI, & VII.
  - Second those Florida Standards that are met through viewing the film and teaching Parts III, IV, & V.

### Florida Standards that are met through teaching Parts I, II, VI, & VII.

**LAFS.K12.R.2.4** - Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

**LAFS.K12.L.3.4** - Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.

**LAFS.K12.L.3.5** - Demonstrate understanding of word relationships and nuances in word meanings.

**LAFS.K12.L.3.6** - Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression.

**LAFS.910.RH.2.4** - Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social science.

**LAFS.910.RST.2.4** - Determine the meaning of symbols, key terms, and other domain-specific words and phrases as they are used in a specific scientific or technical context relevant to grades 9-10 texts and topics.

**LAFS.1112.RH.2.4** - Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including analyzing how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term over the course of a text.

**LAFS.910.RI.2.4** - Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone.

**LAFS.910.SL.1.2** - Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source.

**LAFS.910.L.3.4** - Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grades 9-10 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

**LAFS.1112.L.2.3** - Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

**LAFS.1112.L.3.4** - Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grades 11-12 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

**LAFS.1112.L.3.5** - Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

**LAFS.1112.L.3.6** - Acquire and use accurately general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.

### Florida Standards that are met through viewing the film and teaching Parts III, IV, & V.

**LAFS.K12.SL.1.2** - Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

**LAFS.K12.SL.1.3** - Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.

**LAFS.910.RH.1.1** - Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

**LAFS.1112.RH.3.7** - Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

**LAFS.910.RL.2.4** - Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone).

**LAFS.910.SL.1.1** - Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

**LAFS.910.SL.1.2** - Integrate multiple sources of information presented in **diverse media** or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source.

**LAFS.1112.RI.3.7** - Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem

**LAFS.1112.SL.1.1** - Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

**LAFS.1112.SL.1.3** - Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, assessing the stance, premises, links among ideas, word choice, points of emphasis, and tone used.

## How To Use This Study Guide to meet the Common Core State Standards

- The Common Core State Standards for this Study Guide are in two sections:
  - First those Common Core State Standards that are met through teaching Parts I, II, VI, & VII.
  - Second those Common Core State Standards that are met through viewing the film and teaching Parts III, IV, & V.

### Common Core State Standards that are met through teaching Parts I, II, VI, & VII.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.Language 9-12.1** - Acquire and use accurately general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression. (Grades 9-12)

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.Language 7-12.4.d** - Verify the preliminary determination of the meaning of a word or phrase (e.g., by checking the inferred meaning in context or in a dictionary). (Grades 7-12)

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.Language 9-12.4.c** - Consult general and specialized reference materials (e.g., dictionaries, glossaries, thesauruses), both print and digital, to find the pronunciation of a word or determine or clarify its precise meaning, its part of speech, its etymology, or its standard usage. (Grades 9-12)

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.Speaking & Listening 9-12.1.d** - Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task. (Grades 9-12)

### Common Core State Standards that are met through viewing the film and teaching Parts III, IV, & V.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy. Speaking & Listening 9-12.1** - Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10, 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively. (Grades 9-12)

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy. Speaking & Listening 9-12.1.c** - Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that probe reasoning and evidence; ensure a hearing for a full range of positions on a topic or issue; clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions; and promote divergent and creative perspectives. (Grades 9-12)

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy. Speaking & Listening 9-12.1.d** - Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task. (Grades 9-12)

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy. Speaking & Listening 9-12.2** - Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data. (Grades 9-12)

A first-hand account by last-known survivor Samuel Willenberg, now 92 years old, about his life during the Holocaust and as a Jewish inmate of the Treblinka death camp in Nazi-occupied Poland. Samuel's story is one of survival against staggering odds, and ultimately one of triumph.

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