

DISPLAY

Holocaust Timeline, 1933

Adolf Hitler and Franklin Roosevelt both came to office in 1933 to lead nations uncertain of their future. In his inaugural address, President Roosevelt told the American people, "We have nothing to fear but fear itself." Jews in Germany were soon to learn the meaning of fear.

Hitler came to power legally. Violence and terror, which had paved the way for his rise, intensified when Hitler was appointed chancellor on Jan. 30.

Within Hitler's first month as chancellor: freedom of speech was suspended; freedom of assembly was restricted; freedom of the press was ended.

On March 22, the Dachau concentration camp opened.

On April 1, Jewish businesses and offices throughout Germany were boycotted.

On April 7, Jews were expelled from the Civil Service.

On April 26, the Gestapo was established.

On May 10, Nazi students stormed universities, libraries and bookstores throughout Germany. Hundreds of thousands of books were cast onto bonfires. Some of these books were by Jewish authors; most were not.

On July 14, East European Jewish immigrants were stripped of German citizenship. On the same day, the Nazi party became the only political party allowed in Germany.

DISPLAY

Holocaust Timeline, 1934

Nazi rule was consolidated and the policies that formed the basis of the German persecution of the Jews were implemented. Before the spring semester concluded, non-Aryan medical students were prohibited from taking state medical examinations, and Jewish students in Germany could not receive tuition exemptions.

By mid-summer, the commandant of Dachau concentration camp was named inspector of concentration camps and commander of SS guard units. Austrian Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss was killed in a failed attempt by Nazis to seize power in Austria.

In August, German President Paul von Hindenburg died; Hitler's dictatorship was firmly set. Within three weeks, all officials and soldiers in the Armed Forces had to swear allegiance to Hitler personally, not to the people or the fatherland, not even to the constitution or the state.

At the September Nazi Party Congress in Nuremberg, Hitler proclaimed to 200,000 political leaders that the National Socialist Revolution was completed and that Germany would not experience another one for the next thousand years.

By December, Bavarian justice minister Hans Frank was named to Hitler's cabinet and assigned to align German law with Nazi goals and ideology.

DISPLAY

Holocaust Timeline, 1935

At the annual Nazi party rally in Nuremberg in September 1935, the German parliament decreed the two laws that became the centerpiece of Hitler's anti-Jewish legislation: The Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor, and the Reich Citizenship Law.

Citizenship in the Reich was restricted to persons of "German or kindred blood." Only citizens — i.e., racial Germans — had full civil and political rights. Jews could no longer be citizens, merely state subjects.

"To protect German blood and honor," marriages and sexual relations between Jews and "citizens of German or related blood" were prohibited as was the employment of women under the age of 45 in Jewish households.

For the first time in history, Jews were persecuted not for the religion they practiced or the beliefs they affirmed, but for the blood of their grandparents.

Under these decrees, Roman Catholic priests and nuns and Protestant ministers who had (or whose parents had) converted to Christianity, lost their rights because they were now defined as Jews.

Later, the Nazis imposed the Nuremberg laws upon the lands they occupied. These regulations served as a "model" for the Nazi treatment of Roma (Gypsies).

DISPLAY

Holocaust Timeline, 1936

The Berlin Olympic Games forced Germany to soften some visible signs of antisemitism in an effort to avoid a Western [American] boycott of the games. Hitler was determined to use the games to enhance his international prestige and his hold on the German people. Still, in March, German forces entered the Rhineland, which had been declared a demilitarized zone and placed under the French sphere of influence in the Treaty of Versailles; the French did not react.

In June, Hitler named Heinrich Himmler SS chief and chief of German Police.

In July, the Sachsenhausen concentration camp was established in Germany.

The summer Olympic games were a smashing success, a propaganda victory for Adolf Hitler despite the four gold medals of American track star Jesse Owens.

Before the school year began, non-Aryan teachers were forbidden to teach. Jews were not allowed even to be private instructors.

By mid-fall, the Berlin-Rome Axis agreement was signed by Hitler and Italian fascist dictator Benito Mussolini.

In December, the Nuremberg laws were expanded: A German married to a non-Aryan could not salute the Nazi flag.

DISPLAY

Holocaust Timeline, 1937

In the spring, Jews were prohibited from giving testimony in courts of law.

In July, a concentration camp at Buchenwald was opened.

Nazi antisemitism spread to neighboring countries. By the fall, anti-Jewish violence broke out in the Free City of Danzig (a League of Nations-declared international city between Germany and Poland), directed mainly against Jewish traders and shopkeepers.

Regulations against Jews intensified. Jewish women were arrested for violations of the Nuremberg law for the protection of German blood and honor that prohibited sexual relations between Germans and Jews. They were sent to concentration camps. By the fall, the German Justice Ministry issued a decree prohibiting Jews from giving the “Nazi salute.”

The Interior Ministry decreed that Jews must carry special identity cards when traveling in Germany.

In November, Germany and Japan signed a military and political pact.

DISPLAY

Holocaust Timeline, 1938

On March 12, Germany entered Austria, welcomed by the native population. Austria was incorporated into the Reich.

In July, representatives from 32 countries gathered at Evian, France, for a conference on the “Jewish problem” convened by President Roosevelt. Pious pronouncements and speeches were made, but no action resulted.

Jews were not welcomed in many places: The United States refugee quotas were rigidly enforced, Britain was unwilling to change its restrictive immigration policies, and French transit camps were set up to contain the refugees.

The Germans concluded: “We wanted to get rid of our Jews but ... no country wished to receive them.”

In September, Neutral Switzerland asked that passports of Jews in Germany be made with the letter J for “Jude.”

The British restricted emigration to Palestine.

On November 9, violence erupted throughout the Reich. Within 48 hours, approximately 1,300 synagogues were burned, along with their Torah scrolls, Bibles and prayer books; 30,000 Jews were arrested and sent to concentration camps; 7,000 businesses were smashed and looted; 236 Jews were killed; and Jewish cemeteries, hospitals, schools and homes were destroyed. This became known euphemistically as *Kristallnacht*, the Night of Broken Glass. In Germany today, it is called the November Reich Pogroms, so that its violence is understood.

In its aftermath, Jews were without illusion: Jewish life in the Reich was no longer possible.

DISPLAY

Holocaust Timeline, 1939

In a speech marking his sixth anniversary in office, Hitler said if war erupts it would mean the annihilation of European Jews.

England opened its country to 10,000 children, mostly Jews, fleeing Germany, which included Austria and Czechoslovakia. It was called the kindertransport. The United States closed its doors to Jewish refugees. The Wagner-Rogers Bill to admit 10,000 refugee children died in Congress.

In May, a ship set sail for Cuba with 936 Jewish refugees. The Cuban government refused to honor their visas. The captain appealed without avail to the United States for a haven. The ship and refugees returned to Europe.

On September 1, Germany invaded Poland. World War II began. The war was needed, Hitler argued, for *Lebensraum*, living space for the German nation.

More than two million Jews came under German control in September.

Mass murder also began in 1939 — not of Jews, but of physically and developmentally disabled Germans, “embarrassments” to the master race. The first killings were by starvation, then injections. Gassing soon became the preferred method of killing. Crematoria were built.

On October 28, the first Polish ghetto, to confine Jews, was established in Piotrkow.

DISPLAY

Holocaust Timeline, 1940

On April 9, Germany invaded Denmark and Norway.

On May 10, German armies approached France through Belgium and the Netherlands in a *Blitzkrieg*, a lightning war. Netherlands and Belgium were conquered. The French army retreated. On June 10, Paris fell.

Throughout Western Europe, the Nazis followed a familiar pattern: Jews were segregated and marked, their businesses were confiscated and they were barred from public schools and public places.

Within weeks of the Nazi conquest, Jews in Poland were forced to wear armbands with yellow stars. Soon their movements were restricted, and local Jewish Councils — *Judenrate* — were formed as instruments of German control.

On May 20, the concentration camp at Auschwitz was established.

Later in the year, the ghettos of Warsaw and Lodz were sealed. Guards were posted at entrances and exits. Permission forms were required to enter or leave. These areas were euphemistically called, “Jewish residential quarters.”

In Lodz, an area housing 62,000 Jews was set aside as the ghetto — then 100,000 more Jews were moved in from other sections of the city. In Warsaw, the Ghetto decree was announced on Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement. The Warsaw Ghetto contained 30 percent of the city’s population on 2.4 percent of its land — an average of 9.2 people per room.

DISPLAY

Holocaust Timeline, 1941

The mass murder of Jews began in 1941. On June 21, the German army invaded Soviet territory, and mobile killing units were dispatched on special assignment to kill Jews.

The invasion was followed immediately by the roundup of Jews, but not only Jews; Communists, Roma (Gypsies), political leaders and intellectuals also were killed. Those rounded up were marched to the outskirts of the city where they were shot. Their bodies were buried in mass graves — large ditches filled with bodies of people who had been shot one by one and buried layer upon layer.

Frequently, local attacks, known as *pogroms*, were encouraged, especially in Lithuania and Latvia. Some local residents, collaborating with the Germans, volunteered for *pogroms*.

On September 19, the German army captured Kiev. Days later, Kiev's Jews were marched to Babi Yar, two miles from the city center. They were forced to strip and their clothing was gathered and folded. Rings were ripped from fingers of the naked. Jews were then shot. The dead fell into the ravine. The sounds could be heard in Kiev.

In the days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, 33,771 Jews were killed at Babi Yar — just one example of the genocide. Before this phase ended, more than 1.2 million Jews were killed.

Meanwhile, a new stage of mass killing was beginning.

In September, there were experiments at Auschwitz with gas chambers and Zyklon B.

On December 7, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor.

By December 8, actual gassing of Jews had begun in mobile vans at Chelmno death camp. Stationary gas chambers were being erected at Auschwitz and Belzec.

On December 11, the United States declared war on Japan and Germany.

DISPLAY

Holocaust Timeline, 1942

In January, Reinhard Heydrich convened a meeting, inviting 15 Nazi leaders. More than half of them held advanced degrees from prominent German universities. He announced a plan for the “Final Solution,” the systematic murder of European Jews.

During the winter and spring, killing centers were created at Sobibor, Belzec and Treblinka. They joined Auschwitz, Chelmno and Majdanek as the six death camps.

On July 22, the death camp of Treblinka opened its gates for “business.” On July 23, deportations began from the Warsaw ghetto to Treblinka. The ghetto was emptied block by block, building by building. By September 21, 310,000 Jews from Warsaw had been sent to Treblinka, where they were soon gassed; in all, some 850,000 Jews were killed at Treblinka during the 18 months it operated.

Later, the Nazis demanded that all children and old people in the Lodz ghetto be surrendered. Ghetto leader Mordecai Rumkowski complied. “The decree cannot be revoked. It can only be slightly lessened by our carrying it out calmly,” he said. In a public speech, he pleaded: “Brothers and sisters, hand them over to me. Fathers and mothers, give me your children.”

Throughout the warm summer days and the cool days of autumn, train after train from ghetto after ghetto arrived at the death camps. At Majdanek and Auschwitz there was a *selection*: The old, the infirm, and mothers and their children were sent to the gas chambers. The able-bodied went to work.

At the death camps in Sobibor, Belzec and Treblinka, the fate of all was equal: There was no reprieve, even for those who could work.

In August, at the height of the deportations from Warsaw, word of the “Final Solution” reached the United States. Dr. Gerhart Riegner, the World Jewish Congress representative in Bern, Switzerland, sent a secret cable on August 11 through secure channels to the State Department and to Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, president of the World Jewish Congress, informing them:

“... there has been and is being considered in Hitler’s headquarters a plan to exterminate all Jews from Germany and German controlled areas in Europe after they have been concentrated in the east. The number involved is said to be between three and a half and four million and the object to permanently settle the Jewish question in Europe.”

The State Department did not pass on the telegram to Rabbi Wise until he inquired. When they did, they asked him to remain silent until the information could be confirmed. In November, they “regretfully confirmed his darkest fear.” This top-secret information was out of date. The plan was not under discussion or consideration, but fully operative. The number of Jews targeted for murder: 11 million.

From Michael Berenbaum, Ed., *Witness to the Holocaust* (New York: Harper/Collins, 1997). Adapted and reprinted with permission of the author.

DISPLAY

Holocaust Timeline, 1943

The violence unleashed in the first two years of the “Final Solution” intensified in 1943.

The Warsaw Ghetto was burned to the ground after a month of fierce resistance fighting. General Jurgen Stropp wrote to his superiors: “The Jewish Residential Quarter of Warsaw is no longer.”

Warsaw was the first ghetto to rise in resistance. By year’s end, Vilna and Bialystock also were to have mass armed public resistance. In August, even in the death camp of Treblinka, the inmates rose in resistance. In the fall, some 300 Sobibor inmates escaped. At Janowska labor and extermination camp, a revolt broke out among those who had the task of collecting and cremating the bodies of victims. Several camp guards were killed and dozens of prisoners escaped; the majority were caught and shot.

It also was a year of deportations: The ghettos of Poland were emptied; Jews were deported from Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Greece and Yugoslavia.

On Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, the order was given to deport the Jews of Denmark, but the Danish population would not consent. In a series of clandestine operations, the Jews of Denmark were ferried to freedom in Sweden.

Bulgaria also protected its own Jews but willingly turned over the Jews of Trace and Macedonia.

In Eastern Europe, the Jews had been annihilated. A special operation was launched to dig up the bodies that had been buried in mass graves and to burn them, so no physical evidence of the crime would remain.

U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill met at Casablanca in early winter; the unconditional surrender of Germany was declared a war aim.

The tide of war had shifted after the German army surrendered to the Soviet army at Stalingrad. Allied forces invaded Sicily.

DISPLAY

Holocaust Timeline, 1944

By the beginning of 1944, one could see the end of the Third Reich. The Soviet army was advancing, and the Allies were marching through Italy. The killing of Jews went on unabated, however, its pace quickened by the looming end.

In March, Germany occupied its ally, Hungary. In 60 days, Hungarian Jewry met the fate of the Jews of Europe — identification, confiscation of property and possession, the yellow star, ghettoization and deportation. Between May 14 and July 8, 437,402 Jews were deported, mainly to Auschwitz, on 147 trains.

The U.S. War Refugee Board sought international help in an attempt to protect Hungarian Jews. Overtures were made to neutral countries, the Vatican and the International Red Cross. Only Sweden answered the call.

Raoul Wallenberg led the rescue operation. He was given a diplomatic passport, a large sum of money, and permission to use whatever methods he wished to rescue Jews. He immediately began giving Jews impressive looking quasi-passports bearing the Swedish seal. The first batch of 5,000 was only the beginning.

In November, Adolf Eichmann ordered the roundup of all Hungarian Jewish men between the ages of 16 and 60. A large group of Jews was marched to the Austrian border in the first of a series of death marches. Wallenberg reacted immediately. He issued thousands of Swedish safe passes, pursued convoys carrying Jews, halted trains about to depart for Auschwitz and badgered German and Hungarian officers to release Jews in their custody.

In the summer of 1944, the War Refugee Board asked that Auschwitz be bombed.

During the summer, Soviet forces overran Belzec, Treblinka and Sobibor, the killing centers that had been closed a year earlier when the annihilation of Polish Jews was virtually complete. The Nazis had burned Treblinka and turned it into a farm. At Belzec, pine trees had been planted to conceal the camp. Still, Soviet soldiers found bones protruding from the ground.

On July 23, Soviet troops arrived at the death camp of Majdanek, just outside the Polish city of Lublin. As the Soviet army advanced to the outskirts of Lublin, the Nazis hastened to hide, bury and burn the evidence of their crime. They simply ran out of time. The Soviets found a storehouse of 800,000 shoes — and survivors ready to testify.

DISPLAY

Holocaust Timeline, 1945

Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin met for a final time in Yalta, in the Soviet Union, to discuss the post-war aim of “de-Nazifying” Germany.

In January, between 10,000 and 20,000 Jews of Budapest, the last Jewish community in Europe, were shot along the banks of the Danube River by Hungarian fascists. Protected Jews — Wallenberg Jews — were forced to move into the city’s central ghetto. The Swedish diplomat traded food to stop the transfer and intervened to halt attempts to burn the ghetto. Tens of thousands of Jewish lives were saved. As the Soviet army entered Budapest, Wallenberg negotiated to ensure proper care of the liberated Jews. Suspected of spying, he disappeared into the Soviet gulags.

At the Birkenau death camp, Nazi demolition squads frantically hid evidence of mass murder by dismantling crematoria and gas chambers. Storehouses and records were burned. To avoid capture of the inmates — living witnesses — 60,000 prisoners were hastily evacuated to concentration camps in the German heartland. In the harsh Polish winter, they walked without food or shelter in what came to be called death marches.

On January 27, Soviet forces entered Auschwitz. They found 348,820 men’s suits, 836,255 woman’s coats, 13,964 carpets and more than seven tons of human hair. Since 1942, between 1.1 million and 1.3 million Jews and thousands of Soviet prisoners of war, Poles and Roma (Gypsies) had been murdered there.

Liberation revealed the magnitude of the loss.

The Soviets found 800 Jews left in Czestochowa, Poland, from the city’s pre-war Jewish population of 28,500. In Kielce, 25 Jews were left from a pre-war Jewish population of 24,000. In Cracow, only a few Jews were alive in what had once been the home of 60,000 Jews. And in Lodz, 877 Jews were found alive — 800 who had been left to clean the ghetto, and 77 in hiding — from a ghetto of 164,000.

The evacuations of concentration camps continued until the end of the war. Forty-thousand prisoners were forced to march from Gross-Rosen and its satellite camps. Thousands were murdered en route; the remainder arrived at numerous concentration camps: Bergen-Belsen, Buchenwald, Dachau, Flossenbug, Mauthausen, Mittelbau, Sachsenhausen and Neuengamme.

As the Soviet army encircled Stutthof concentration camp, the Nazis began the final evacuation of the camp’s 4,500 remaining prisoners. The prisoners were shipped on ferries by way of the Baltic Sea; 200 female Jewish prisoners were the first to be driven to the seashore and shot. Two thousand prisoners drowned or were shot by the Nazis on the open sea.

In April, advancing American and British forces came upon the concentration camps; Buchenwald, Mauthausen and Dachau were liberated by the Americans. The British army liberated Bergen-Belsen concentration camp and found 58,000 prisoners, mostly Jews, all in critical condition; 13,000 corpses also were found. During the next five days, 14,000 prisoners died; in the following few weeks, another 14,000 perished.

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ONE SURVIVOR REMEMBERS

In April, Roosevelt died and Hitler committed suicide.

In May, the Germans surrendered to the Allies. Nazi General Alfred Jodl signed an unconditional surrender at the headquarters of U.S. General Dwight Eisenhower.

On May 8, V-E Day, the war in Europe officially ended.

Some 30 million Europeans, soldiers and civilians, were casualties of World War II. Among these dead were some six million Jews, victims of the Holocaust, along with millions of Soviet prisoners of war, hundreds of thousands of Roma (Gypsies), Poles and disabled people, thousands of Jehovah's Witnesses, gays and lesbians, and others.

The long task of rebuilding began.

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