

# Holocaust





The Holocaust was the systematic annihilation of six million Jews by the Nazi regime during World War 2. In 1933 approximately nine million Jews lived in the 21 countries of Europe that would be occupied by Germany during the war. By 1945 two out of every three European Jews had been killed.

The number of children killed during the Holocaust is not fathomable and full statistics for the tragic fate of children who died will never be known. Some estimates range as high as 1.5 million murdered children.

The European Jews were the primary victims of the Holocaust. But, Jews were not the only group singled out for persecution by Hitler's Nazi regime. As many as one-half million Gypsies, at least 250,000 mentally or physically disabled persons, and more than three million Soviet prisoners-of-war also fell victim to Nazi genocide. Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals, Social Democrats, Communists, partisans, trade unionists, Polish intelligentsia and other *undesirables* were also victims of the hate and aggression carried out by the Nazis.

Confining Jews in ghettos was not Hitler's brainchild. For centuries, Jews had faced persecution, and were often forced to live in designated areas called ghettos . The Nazis' ghettos differed, however, in that they were a preliminary step in the annihilation of the Jews, rather than a method to just isolate them from the rest of society. As the war against the Jews progressed, the ghettos became transition areas, used as collection points for deportation to death camps and concentration camps



- In total, the Nazis established 356 ghettos in Poland, the Soviet Union, the Baltic States, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Hungary between 1939 and 1945. There was no uniformity to these ghettos. The ghettos in small towns were generally not sealed off, which was often a temporary measure used until the residents could be sent to bigger ghettos.

- Larger cities had closed ghettos, with brick or stone walls, wooden fences, and barbed wire defining the boundaries. Guards were placed strategically at gateways and other boundary openings. Jews were not allowed to leave the so-called "Jewish residential districts," under penalty of death.

- All ghettos had the most appalling, inhuman living conditions. The smallest ghetto housed approximately 3,000 people. Warsaw, the largest ghetto, held 400,000 people. Łódź, the second largest, held about 160,000. Other Polish cities with large Jewish ghettos included Białystok, Częstochowa, Kielce, Kraków, Lublin, Lvów, Radom, and Vilna.



**Sealing the Warsaw Ghetto**



- Camps were an essential part of the Nazis' systematic oppression and mass murder of Jews, political adversaries, and others considered socially and racially undesirable. There were concentration camps, forced labor camps, extermination or death camps, transit camps, and prisoner-of-war camps. The living conditions of all camps were brutal.



- Dachau , one of the first Nazi concentration camps, opened in March 1933, and at first interned only known political opponents of the Nazis: Communists, Social Democrats, and others who had been condemned in a court of law. Gradually, a more diverse group was imprisoned, including Jews, Jehovah's Witnesses, Gypsies , dissenting clergy, homosexuals, as well as others who were denounced for making critical remarks about the Nazis.

Six death or extermination camps were constructed in Poland. These so-called death factories were Auschwitz-Birkenau, Treblinka, Belzec, Sobibór, Lublin (also called Majdanek), and Chelmno. The primary purpose of these camps was the methodical killing of millions of innocent people. The first, Chelmno, began operating in late 1941. The others began their operations in 1942.



The Following  
Pictures are  
gruesome

- In the beginning of the systematic mass murder of Jews, Nazis used mobile killing squads called *Einsatzgruppen*. The *Einsatzgruppen* consisted of four units of between 500 and 900 men each which followed the invading German troops into the Soviet Union. By the time Himmler ordered a halt to the shooting in the fall of 1942, they had murdered approximately 1,500,000 Jews. The death camps proved to be a better, faster, less personal method for killing Jews, one that would spare the shooters, not the victims, emotional anguish



# Final Solution

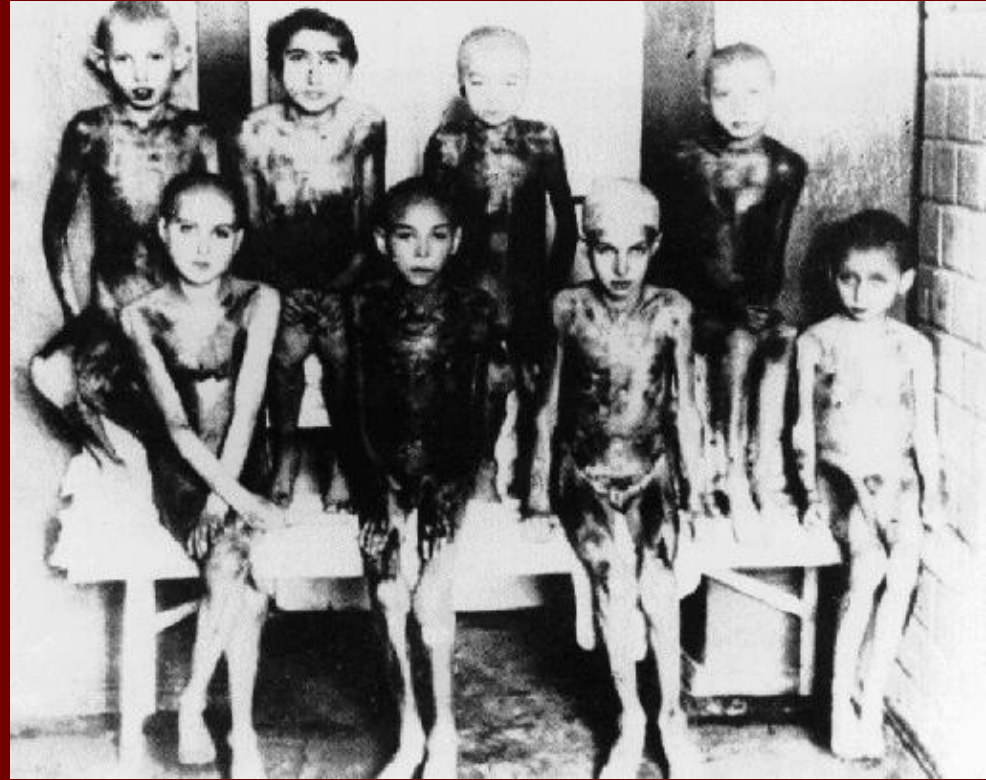
- In January 1942, SS official Reinhard Heydrich held a meeting of Nazi government officials to present the Final Solution. At this meeting, known as the Wannsee Conference, the Nazi officials agreed to SS plans for the transport and destruction of all 11 million Jews of Europe. The Nazis would use the latest in twentieth century technology, cost efficient engineering and mass production techniques for the sole purpose of killing off the following racial groups: Jews, Russian prisoners of war, and Gypsies (Sinti-Roma). Their long-range plans, unrealized, included targeting some 30 million Slavs for death.





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- Starting early in 1942, the Jewish genocide went into full operation. Auschwitz 2 (Birkenau), Treblinka, Belzec, and Sobibór began operations as death camps. There was no selection process; Jews were destroyed upon arrival.
- Ultimately, the Nazis were responsible for the deaths of some 2.7 million Jews in the death camps. These murders were done secretly under the ruse of resettlement. The Germans hid their true plans from citizens and inhabitants of the ghettos by claiming that Jews were being resettled in the East. They went so far as to charge Jews for a one-way train fare and often, just prior to their murder, had the unknowing victims send reassuring postcards back to the ghettos. Thus did millions of Jews go unwittingly to their deaths with little or no resistance.



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- The total figure for the Jewish genocide, including shootings and the camps, was between 5.2 and 5.8 million, roughly half of Europe's Jewish population, the highest percentage of loss of any people in the war. About 5 million other victims perished at the hands of Nazi Germany.

