

# THE HOLOCAUST

On November 1, 2005 the United Nations General Assembly made January 27, the International Holocaust Remembrance Day. On January 27, 1945 soldiers of the Red Army entered the KL Auschwitz German concentration and death camp. Today, this place, where over one million people died, is a symbol of the largest genocide in human history.

Author: Magdalena Zapolska-Downar  
Graphic concept of the series: Aleksandra Kaiper-Miszułowicz  
Graphic design: ARSA  
Reviewers: dr Aleksandra Namysł, dr hab. Filip Musiał



INSTITUTE OF  
NATIONAL  
REMEMBRANCE

# NAZI GERMANY'S ANTI-JEWISH POLICY BEFORE WORLD WAR II

In 1933 the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) won the parliamentary elections in Germany. Its ideologist and leader, Adolf Hitler, was appointed Chancellor. In implementing their racist political agenda, the Nazis soon began to repress the Jewish inhabitants of Germany by means of, for instance, anti-Semitic propaganda and discriminatory legislation. Until the outbreak of World War II German Jews had been deprived of citizenship and positions in public institutions, their enterprises had been taken over, and they had become forbidden from marrying Germans. Adolf Hitler's objective was to force all Jews to leave the country.



Developing at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the science of genes and heredity in nature led to the creation of racial theories which divided the human population into races, to which certain fixed mental and physical characteristics were attributed. The Nazis developed those theories, dividing mankind into humans and subhumans, with the Roma, Slavs, Jews, etc., falling in the latter category. The Jews were blamed for Germany's defeat in World War I and promotion of communism. They were also thought to control the world economy.

1937 propaganda poster of the German exhibition entitled *The Eternal Jew*. Public domain.



NSDAP members putting up a sign in a shop window calling for a boycott of Jewish shops, Berlin, June 1933. Public domain.

Between April and June 1933, the Nazis organized a campaign of public burning of books penned by Jewish authors and political enemies in German cities. The objective was to *cleanse* the German literature and science from hostile influences.



Book burning in the center of Berlin, May 1933. Public domain.



INSTITUTE OF  
NATIONAL  
REMEMBRANCE

In the background: a street in Berlin, 1937. Public domain.



INSTITUTE OF  
NATIONAL  
REMEMBRANCE

When the German troops invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, the country was inhabited by over 3,000,000 Jews. The Wehrmacht soldiers committed atrocities and humiliated the Jewish population. The synagogues were desecrated, the Jewish stores were vandalized, and the Jews were forced to render free and humiliating public works. Soon, the German occupation authorities deprived the Jews of their property and savings and prohibited them from using many public places, such as, parks or restaurants. Segregation was introduced in means of public transport.



The German Reich's anti-Semitic propaganda made use of the image of *Eastern Jews*, who lived in traditional religious communities in the Second Republic of Poland. A frequently used manner of public humiliation of the Jews was cutting off their sideburns and beards, which in Judaism symbolize obedience to God.

*German functionaries cutting off sideburns of a son of a rabbi from Warta. The man was hanged a moment later, April 14, 1942. AIPN.*

In late 1939 Jews in the General Government (the central and south-eastern Polish lands occupied by the Third Reich) were made to wear a white band with the Star of David on their right forearm. On most Polish territories incorporated into the Reich the Jews had to sew a yellow star onto the front or back of their outerwear. In the course of three years that form of marking the Jewish population was introduced in the remaining occupied European countries.



*Łódź ghetto prisoners. AIPN.*

# BEGINNING OF THE WAR

*Burning synagogue in Łęczyca, 1940. AIPN*



INSTITUTE OF  
NATIONAL  
REMEMBRANCE

# ISOLATION IN THE GHETTOS

In the course of several months after capturing Poland the German occupation authorities began to isolate the local Jewish population from other inhabitants. Closed quarters were established in villages, towns, and cities. The total of over 400 ghettos were created on the occupied Polish territory. After the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 the Germans established ghettos in: Lithuania, Latvia, and in the Polish Eastern Borderlands.



Resettlement of Krakow Jews into the ghetto, March 1941. AIPN.



The areas selected for ghettos were often the most run down quarters of towns and cities.

*One of the gates to the ghetto in Łódź. The board reads: "Jewish residential quarter. Entry forbidden." AIPN.*

The German authorities officially claimed that the ghettos were established to prevent the Jews from spreading dangerous infectious diseases. German posters warning Poles against contacts with the disease-spreading Jewish population were posted on the streets on the 'Aryan' side of towns and cities.

*German propaganda poster. AIPN*



*Footbridge joining two parts of the ghetto in Skierniewice. AIPN.*



# LIFE IN THE GHETTOS

The imprisonment of the Jews in the ghettos proved the first step to their extermination. The great congestion, the pitiful food rations, and the horrible living conditions resulted in infectious diseases, such as, typhus and tuberculosis, which lead to very high mortality. It is estimated that 500,000 people died in the ghettos from hunger and diseases.



Warsaw Ghetto Judenrat Chairman Adam Czerniaków. AIPN.

The ghettos were administered by Jewish Councils of Elders (Judenrats), established by the Germans. Their task was to implement German ordinances and maintain order in the closed quarters. They also organized social welfare and supported the religious and cultural life in the ghettos.

## BEKANNTMACHUNG

**Betrifft:**  
Beherbergung von geflüchteten Juden.

Es besteht Anlass zu folgendem Hinweis: Gemäss der 3. Verordnung über Aufenthaltsbeschränkungen im Generalgouvernement vom 15. 10. 1941 (VO. Bl. GG. S. 595) unterliegen Juden, die den jüdischen Wohnbezirk unbefugt verlassen, der Todesstrafe.

Gemäss der gleichen Vorschrift unterliegen Personen, die solchen Juden wasserlich Unterschlupf gewähren, Beköstigung verschaffen oder Nahrungsmittel verkaufen, ebenfalls der Todesstrafe.

Die nichtjüdische Bevölkerung wird daher dringend gewarnt:

- 1) Juden Unterschlupf zu gewähren,
- 2) Juden Beköstigung zu verabfolgen,
- 3) Juden Nahrungsmittel zu verkaufen.

## OGŁOSZENIE

**Dotyczy:**  
przetrzymywania ukrywających się żydów.

Zachodzi potrzeba przypomnienia, że stosownie do § 3 Rozporządzenia o ograniczeniach pobytu w Gen. Gub. z dnia 15. X. 1941 roku (Dz. Rozp. dla GG. str. 595) żydzi, opuszczający dzielnicę żydowską bez zezwolenia, podlegają karze śmierci.

Według tego rozporządzenia, osobom, które takim żydom świadomie udzielają przytułku, dostarczają im jedzenia lub sprzedają artykuły żywnościowe, grozi również kara śmierci.

Niniejszym ostrzegę się stanowczo ludność nieżydowską przed:

- 1) udzielaniem żydom przytułku,
- 2) dostarczaniem im jedzenia,
- 3) sprzedawaniem im artykułów żywnościowych.

German 1942 ordinance reminding about the death penalty for helping Jews. Public domain.

In October 1941 the death penalty for leaving the ghetto without permission was introduced in the General Government. The same punishment awaited those who provided any help to Jews in hiding. Similar ordinances regarding help to Jews were introduced in Serbia.



The footbridge over Chłodna Street, which was excluded from the ghetto, joined the 'Large' and the 'Small' Warsaw Ghetto. Public domain/Bundesarchiv.

The Warsaw Ghetto was the largest one in occupied Europe, with approx. 450,000 people imprisoned within its walls. The ghetto's outer border was patrolled by German policemen and the Polish Police of the General Government (called the blue police), established by the Germans. Inside, order was kept by the Jewish Order Service, also formed by the occupier.



INSTITUTE OF  
NATIONAL  
REMEMBRANCE

In the autumn of 1941 Jews from Czechia, Luxemburg, and the Reich were deported to ghettos on the Polish, Lithuanian, and Latvian territories. The Łódź Ghetto Chronicle read: *Many of them wore the traditional Tyrolese outfits with green hats decorated with a feather, smoked long pipes, were burdened with umbrellas and a battery of thermoses, and wore short highlander fur coats. All elements of that sight were as bizarre, different, and alien to our climate as their internal build-up and the characteristic Viennese dialect.*

*Jews from Western Europe resettled to the Łódź ghetto, 1941. AIPN.*

# FATE OF THE JEWS IN OCCUPIED EUROPE

In mid-1941, after the invasion of Western Europe and the USSR, most European Jews came under German authority. During the war the Germans considered various ways of isolating or eliminating the Jews, for instance, putting them in a reservation near Lublin or deporting them to Madagascar. During the preparations for the war against the USSR a plan was devised to deport all European Jews into the interior of the Soviet Union. When the strategy of instant victory in the USSR proved unfeasible, the top authorities of the Third Reich decided to murder all the Jews in Europe. The deportation of the Jewish population of Western and Southern Europe to the death camps in occupied Poland commenced in the spring of 1942.



*The making of a propaganda film in the Theresienstadt ghetto. Public domain.*

In fear of the public opinion, no ghettos were established in the Third Reich or in the occupied countries in Western Europe. Anti-Jewish legislation modelled on the law in Germany was introduced in the latter. Emigration was banned in 1941. The Germans organized a closed quarter in Thessaloniki, Greece, and in about a dozen Hungarian towns. Established in Theresienstadt, Czechia, the model ghetto was to prove to the international public opinion that the German authorities were treating the Jews in a humanitarian way. Despite their status, over 80 percent of its prisoners died or were murdered.



*Jews without French citizenship in the Drancy internment camp near Paris, from where they were deported to the KL Auschwitz death camp, August 1941. Photograph by Wisch/Bundesarchiv/public domain.*

# FORCED LABOR

In certain ghettos and outside their borders some of the prisoners able to work were employed by the Germans in workshops producing for the Wehrmacht or private enterprises. Moreover, with the beginning of the occupation of Poland, the German authorities began to establish labor camps for Polish Jews, who built roads and railroads or worked in factories. The total number of such camps exceeded 400.

*Child workers in a sewing room in the Łódź ghetto, 1943. APŁ.*



*Group of boys working in a locksmith workshop in the Warsaw Ghetto, 1940. AIPN.*



Many Jewish forced laborers believed that their service to the German economy would save them. An example of that was the slogan repeated by the Łódź Judenrat Chairman: *Work is our only option*. As their defeat was nearing, the Germans murdered those groups of prisoners too.

*Making brushes in the ghetto in Bochnia. AIPN.*



INSTITUTE OF  
NATIONAL  
REMEMBRANCE



INSTITUTE OF  
NATIONAL  
REMEMBRANCE

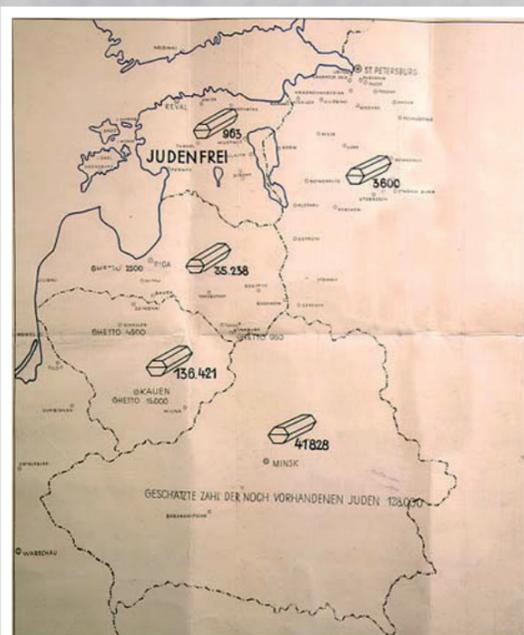
*As civil servant, I was educated in an atmosphere of complete loyalty and obedience to the state authority. That was why I did not try to avoid, evade, or simply refuse to perform orders as far as executions were concerned.*

Josef Uhl, ADC to Battalion 322 commander

*Execution of Jews by Einsatzgruppen in Ukraine, 1942. Public domain.*

# THE OPERATION OF THE EINSATZGRUPPEN IN EASTERN EUROPE

The extermination of Jews began on the territory of the Baltic states, eastern Poland, and north-eastern Romania. On June 22, 1941 those terrains, so far occupied by the USSR, were invaded by the German army, when Germany declared war on the Soviet Union. Following the German army, the Einsatzgruppen formations (special task forces) were ordered to execute all Jewish men. Several weeks later the order was extended onto Jewish women and children. The total number of people who died in the mass executions is estimated at 1,250,000.



December 1942 map illustrating the number of Jews executed on Einsatzgruppe A's operation area (Baltic states, Belarus, and north-western Russia). The word Judenfrei written on Estonia means 'free of Jews'. The map was a part of a report sent by the command to Berlin. Public domain.



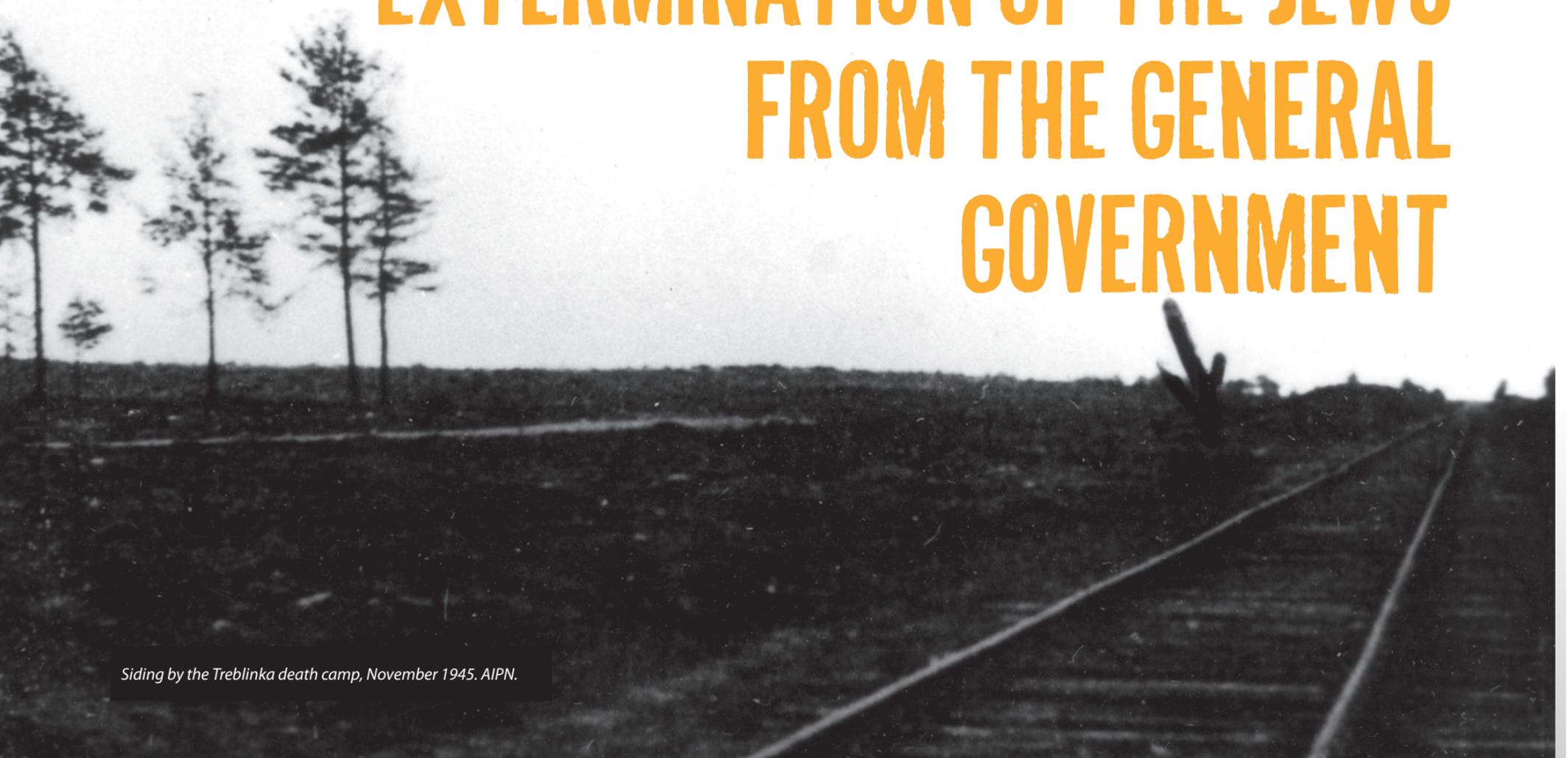
Spread on the territories which in the summer of 1941 came under the German occupation, the Nazi propaganda tried to convince the local inhabitants that Jews were to blame for the communist crimes committed there earlier. The objective was to provoke the locals to act against the Jews. It is estimated that more than 200 pogroms were carried out on those terrains.

Lvov pogrom victim, July 1941. Public domain.



INSTITUTE OF  
NATIONAL  
REMEMBRANCE

# EXTERMINATION OF THE JEWS FROM THE GENERAL GOVERNMENT



Siding by the Treblinka death camp, November 1945. AIPN.

In the spring of 1942 the Germans launched Operation Reinhardt — the extermination of Jews from the ghettos in the General Government. The ghettos were liquidated according to the following scheme: so as not to incite panic among the victims, the Germans announced that the Jews would be deported to work in the east and ordered them to take their most valuable possessions with them. Under threat of beating or execution the Jews were forced to assemble in the designated places in the ghetto, from where they were deported by trains to the extermination centers.

The victims were deported in sealed freight cars. Transported in great congestion and exhausted by living in the ghetto, many people did not survive the journey. Operation Reinhardt in the General Government was concluded in late 1943.



Deportation of Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto to the death camp in Treblinka, July/August 1942. AIPN.



Hideout in the Warsaw Ghetto photographed by the German squad during its liquidation, April/May 1943. AIPN.

Despite the Germans' efforts to keep the deportations actual objective a secret, many people had no doubts that they would die.

A. Altreich	131.800
Ostmark	43.700
Ostgebiete	420.000
Generalgouvernement	2.284.000
Bialystok	400.000
Protektorat Böhmen und Mähren	74.200
Estland - judenfrei -	
Lettland	3.500
Litauen	34.000
Belgien	43.000
Dänemark	5.600
Frankreich / Besetztes Gebiet	165.000
Unbesetztes Gebiet	700.000
Griechenland	69.600
Niederlande	160.800
Norwegen	1.300
B. Bulgarien	48.000
England	330.000
Finnland	2.300
Irland	4.000
Italien einschl. Sardinien	58.000
Albanien	200
Kroatien	40.000
Portugal	3.000
Rumänien einschl. Bessarabien	342.000
Schweden	8.000
Schweiz	18.000
Serbien	10.000
Slowakei	88.000
Spanien	6.000
Türkei (europ. Teil)	55.500
Ungarn	742.800
UdSSR	5.000.000
Ukraine	2.994.684
Weißrußland aus- schl. Bialystok	446.484
Zusammen: über	11.000.000

On January 20, 1942 a conference of high rank Third Reich officials was held in the Berlin quarter of Wannsee. Its objective was to coordinate the German public offices' actions for the purpose of the *final solution to the Jewish question*, that is, the deportation of all Jews from occupied Europe to death camps on Polish lands.

The list of the number of Jews in the individual European countries prepared for the conference. Public domain.



# DEATH CAMPS IN THE GENERAL GOVERNMENT

Planning the mass extermination of Jews from ghettos on Polish territories, the Germans used the experience they had gained during their earlier genocidal campaign, within the framework of which over 70,000 mentally and physically handicapped Germans and Poles were gassed with exhaust fumes. Gas chambers were erected in the newly constructed death camps in Belżec, Sobibór, and Treblinka, and also at the Majdanek concentration camp in Lublin. After the arrival of a transport from a ghetto the prisoners had their baggage taken away and were sent to the 'showers'. Packed in what resembled shower rooms, they died from suffocation with exhaust fumes pumped in by the camp staff.

During the first months the bodies of the victims were buried in mass graves at the camps. With time, to erase the evidence, the bodies were incinerated in crematorium ovens or on special 'grills'.



Crematorium ovens at the Majdanek concentration camp in Lublin, July 1944. Similar facilities were used in other German camps. AIPN.

## Major German concentration camps and death camps in Greater Germany during 1941–1944



Just as the concentration camps, the death camps were administered by the SS — the NSDAP's paramilitary formation, which before the war took command over the German police and security service. Before the war the death camps guards were Soviet POWs, for whom service to the Germans was a survival strategy — 3,000,000 Soviet prisoners of war in German captivity were intentionally starved to death.

The Trawniki training camp for future camp guards. Public domain.



INSTITUTE OF  
NATIONAL  
REMEMBRANCE

Gateway to KL Auschwitz II-Birkenau shortly after the liberation of the camp. AIPN.

# DEATH CAMPS ON THE TERRITORIES INCORPORATED INTO THE THIRD REICH

In the spring of 1940 in Oświęcim (Ger. — Auschwitz), located on the territory incorporated into the Third Reich, the Germans rendered a concentration camp, originally for Polish political prisoners, operative. With the increase in the number of its prisoners in the autumn of 1941, the Germans established a sub-camp in nearby Brzezinka (Birkenau). There, in the spring of 1942, they began to murder Jews from Austria, Belgium, Czechia, France, Greece, Holland, Yugoslavia, Germany, Norway, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and Italy. The extermination was conducted in gas chambers with the use of the Zyklon B pesticide, which was first tested on Soviet prisoners. Several thousand Roma were also murdered at KL Auschwitz in the same way.

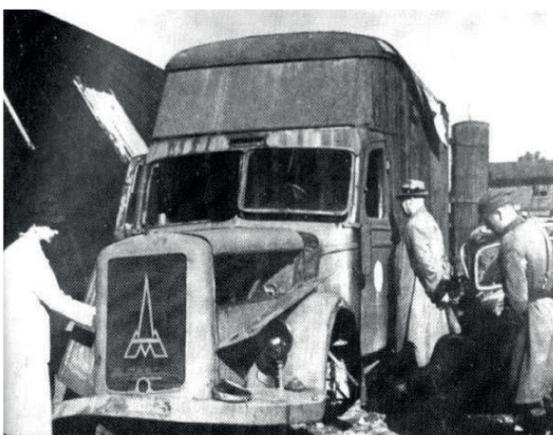


Hungarian Jews undergoing a selection in KL Auschwitz, May 1944. AIPN

The people transported to KL Auschwitz underwent a selection conducted by SS-men right at the platform. The young and healthy-looking adults were sent as prisoners to the concentration camp, while the rest of the people were murdered in gas chambers.

The first death camp became operative in December 1941 in Chełmno nad Nerem (Kulmhof). Its victims were Jews from the nearby ghettos and Łódź and also the Roma from the Austro-Hungarian border. They were murdered in special trucks reequipped as mobile gas chambers, with exhaust fumes diverted into the sealed back compartments using a special installation.

A mobile gas chamber found after the war in the vicinity of Chełmno. Public domain.



Prisoners marching out of the KL Auschwitz concentration camp. AIPN.

With the Allied troops heading for the German Reich, the Germans evacuated the prisoners of the concentration camps. Approximately 250,000 people, including 100,000 Jews, died or were executed during the Death Marches between January and May 1945.



INSTITUTE OF  
NATIONAL  
REMEMBRANCE



*The camp in Treblinka set ablaze by its prisoners during the rebellion, 1943. Public domain.*

Acts of rebellion were also undertaken by Jewish prisoners working in the death camps. Aware of their certain death, groups of prisoners of the Treblinka, Sobibór, and Auschwitz camps decided to escape. Unfortunately, most of them did not survive.



*Photograph taken in secret, depicting the cremation of the remains of the victims murdered in a gas chamber, August 1944. AIPN.*

The collection of evidence for the German crimes was another form of defiance. One example is the photographs taken by KL Auschwitz prisoners from the Sonderkommando.

## DEFIANCE AND RESISTANCE

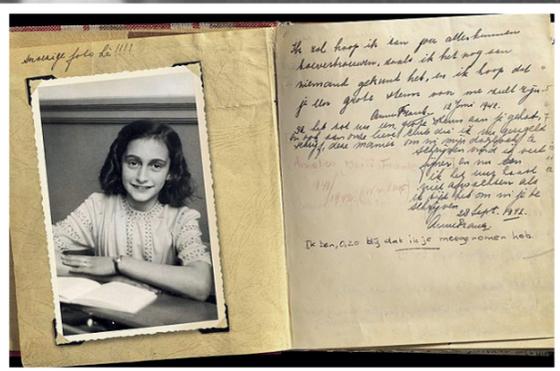
Once everyone knew the destination of the transports from the ghettos, armed resistance was offered in about a dozen of the closed quarters. The largest uprising was staged in the Warsaw Ghetto. On April 19, 1943, when the Germans embarked on the final liquidation of the closed quarter, the Jewish fighters started the uprising. After almost a month of fighting most of the over 50,000 ghetto prisoners were deported to labor camps. The remaining ones were executed on the spot or murdered in the death camp in Treblinka. The ghetto area was levelled to the ground.

*Buildings burning during the pacification of the uprising, Warsaw, May 1943. AIPN.*



# THREE OF THE MILLIONS OF VICTIMS

Ghetto prisoners, Łódź. AIPN



## ANNA FRANK

— came from Germany, kept a journal during the Holocaust. After the NSDAP had taken over power she and her family emigrated to Holland. With the beginning of deportations to death camps, Anne, her parents, and sister went into hiding for two years, which was when she kept her journal. Denounced, the Frank family was arrested and deported to Auschwitz, from where Anne was then deported to the Bergen-Belsen camp, where she died of typhus at the age of 16.

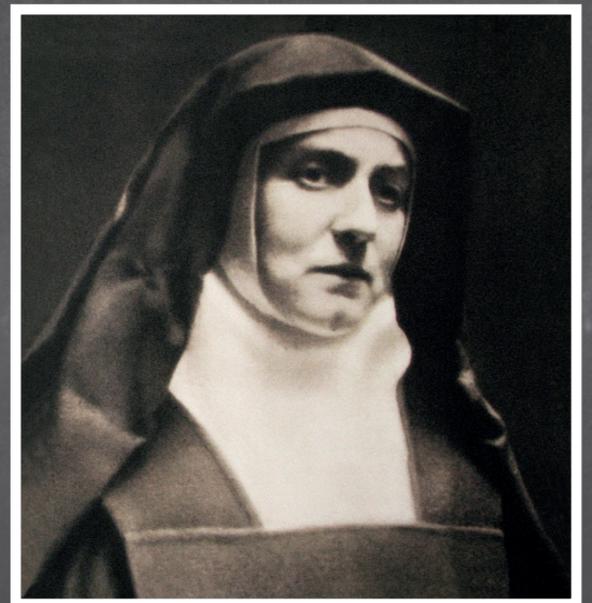
A page from Anne Frank's journal with her photograph and an August 1942 entry. Public domain.



## JANUSZ KORCZAK

— pediatrician, pedagogue, and writer. Devoted his professional life to, for instance, working in orphanages. Created and promoted a new upbringing method. Penned many short stories and novels for children, for instance, King Matt the First. He worked in two orphanages in the Warsaw Ghetto. Died with his wards in the death camp in Treblinka in the summer of 1942.

Janusz Korczak surrounded by his wards and other children, Warsaw, the 1930s. Public domain.



## EDYTA STEIN

— doctor of philosophy, Discalced Carmelite nun, and Catholic saint. Born in a religious Jewish family living in Breslau, Stein studied philosophy in Germany. Research worker and teacher. Baptized as an adult into the Catholic Church. Joined the order, taking the religious name of Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. With the intensifying repressions against Jews in the Third Reich, she was transferred to Holland by her superiors. Murdered in Auschwitz in the summer of 1942.

Edith Stein. Public domain.



INSTITUTE OF  
NATIONAL  
REMEMBRANCE



INSTITUTE OF  
NATIONAL  
REMEMBRANCE

# THE HOLOCAUST IN FIGURES

Warsaw ghetto ruins, July 1945. AIPN.

THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE MURDERED DURING WORLD WAR II:

**5,100,000–5,800,000** JEWS

INCLUDING:

**2,700,000** POLISH JEWS      **1,000,000** CHILDREN

OF EVERY 3 EUROPEAN JEWS 1 SURVIVED.

REMAINING VICTIMS OF THE THIRD REICH GENOCIDE:

APPROX. **90,000–150,000** ROMA AND SINTI

APPROX. **200,000** MENTALLY AND PHYSICALLY HANDICAPPED

APPROXIMATELY 15,000 THIRD REICH FUNCTIONARIES AND THEIR COLLABORATORS FROM EUROPEAN COUNTRIES HAVE BEEN SENTENCED WORLDWIDE FOR THE HOLOCAUST CRIMES. MOST OF THE PERPETRATORS NEVER FACED TRIAL.