

Unit 9 / Lesson 9.1 / Overview

Unit 9: Aftermath

Lesson 9.1: Liberation and Afterwards

Background:

This lesson covers the end of the Holocaust and its aftereffects, the related concepts of liberation and “afterwards.” This included the process by which the concentration camps were liberated after the defeat of Nazi Germany as well as the world of post-liberation Europe, specifically as it related to the surviving Jews. The first part of the lesson will take the student through the narrative of camp liberation by the Allied forces, including General Dwight D. Eisenhower’s reaction to the scenes of horror he saw and his determination to document those horrors so they could never be denied in the future. The second part of the lesson discusses the displaced persons (DP) camps set up after the war, and then moves on to the Nuremberg Trials, including the trials’ rationales, the defendants, the prosecutors, and the verdicts. In a separate coda, the Holocaust’s toll on human life is reviewed, and in a brief embedded video clip, Roman Kent, a Holocaust survivor and the former president of The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous, reflects on his experience and his hope for the future.

Video Running Time: 18:30

Goal:

Students will explain the long process from liberation to life after the Holocaust.

Essential Questions:

- What did liberation show the world about the Holocaust?
- What struggles did Jewish refugees encounter?
- What was the structure and outcome of the Nuremberg Trials?

Learning Goals:

- Students will examine the world’s response to the Holocaust.
- Students will explain Jewish refugees’ struggles with people in and outside of the DP camps.
- Students will explain the roles of people in the Nuremberg Trials.
- Students will critique and analyze the lessons of the Holocaust.

Success Criteria:

- Students will discuss the soldiers’ and local citizens’ responses to the atrocities that happened.
- Students will discuss the structure of the DP camps before and after Earl G. Harrison’s report to President Truman.
- Students will discuss why it was so difficult for survivors to leave the DP camps.
- Students will discuss the Allies’ role during the Nuremberg Trials.

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- Students will debate the effectiveness of the Nuremberg Trials focusing on the rule of law and if justice was served.
- Students will assess the lessons of the Holocaust in modern society.

Topics For Further Discussion:

- Allied leaders knew about the camps and that there were atrocities. There is discussion about how much they did or did not know or could comprehend. How did this affect the Allied Powers view of liberating concentration camps and stopping atrocities?
- Investigate the various Nuremberg Trials, including who was charged, what they were charged with, and the results of selected trials. (The teacher can identify trials and students can choose trials, work in groups or as individuals, and share their findings.)
- Was justice accomplished after WWII?
- What are the lessons of the Holocaust?
- Research the three acquittals at the Nuremberg trials; have a mock trial; are the results the same or different? Why?
- What were the personal, political, economic, and legal consequences of the Holocaust?
- How has the significance of the Holocaust changed over time and what is its meaning for today?

Recommended Background Reading from *How Was It Possible? A Holocaust Reader*

Unit 9 – Lesson 9.1

Chapter 9

- Introduction to **Chapter 9: Aftermath**
- “Survivors” from *DPs: Europe’s Displaced Persons, 1945-51* by Mark Wyman
- “Restitution and its Discontents” from *Some Measure of Justice* by Michael Marrus

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Lesson 9.1: Liberation and Afterwards

Question	
What was the first camp liberated? By whom and when?	
How and when did Hitler die?	
What did the Allied soldiers find when they liberated concentration camps?	
What was General Eisenhower's fear about the future as it relates to the Holocaust?	
What did General Eisenhower do about his fear?	
How long did it take the Allies to liberate the Nazi camps, starting with which camp and ending with which camps?	
How did the Allied Powers address the refugee crisis?	

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Initially, why were conditions in the DP camps difficult for Jewish DPs and what was the solution?	
What did most Jewish refugees desire most?	
When did the last DP camp close and where did the refugees go?	
What were the Nuremberg Trials?	
What were the four charges of the International Military Tribunal?	
Where were the judges from and which judge gave the opening statement?	
Why were the three acquittals considered so important?	
What is the statute of limitations for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide?	

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Why was the Holocaust unprecedented?	
Approximately how many Jewish men, women and children were murdered during the Holocaust and how many were children?	
During what period were most Jews killed?	
In addition to the Jews, who were the other victims?	
What word did Roman Kent's father frequently utter to him during the Holocaust?	

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Answer Key

Question	Possible Answers
What was the first camp liberated? By whom and when?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Majdanek in Poland • Liberated by the Soviet army in July 1944 (Slide 2)
How and when did Hitler die?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • April 30, 1945 • Committed suicide in his bunker in Berlin (Slide 4)
What did the Allied soldiers find when they liberated concentration camps?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Horrible smell of death from decaying bodies • Emaciated, starving prisoners • Lice-infested prisoners • Prisoners infected with typhus • Thousands dying (Slide 5, 6)
What was General Eisenhower's fear about the future as it relates to the Holocaust?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People in the future would say the Holocaust did not happen (Slide 7, 8)
What did General Eisenhower do about his fear?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Required every American soldier in the area of camps liberated by the Americans walk through the camps to bear witness • Eisenhower also made German civilians walk through the camp (Slide 7, 8)
How long did it take the Allies to liberate the Nazi camps, starting with which camp and ending with which camps?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • July 23-24, 1944 to May 9, 1945 • Majdanek - July 23-24, 1944 • Theresienstadt and Stutthof on May 9, 1946 (Slide 9)
How did the Allied Powers address the refugee crisis?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jews and some others became displaced persons or DPs and were placed in emergency shelters because they did not have family (mostly murdered) or homes to go back to (Slide 10)

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Initially, why were conditions in the DP camps difficult for Jewish DPs and what was the solution?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DP camps were organized by country of origin, which put Jews together with Nazis and Nazi collaborators • After the fact-finding mission of Earl G. Harrison, Jews were separated from other DPs (Slide 11)
What did most Jewish refugees desire most?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jewish survivors sought human relationships as most had lost all family members, parents, spouses, children, and siblings (Slide 11)
When did the last DP camp close and where did the refugees go?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Last DP camp in Germany closed in 1957 • From DP camps, refugees went to the United States, Palestine (now Israel), Australia, Canada or several South American countries (Slide 12, 13)
What were the Nuremberg Trials?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Nuremberg Trial tried the main surviving leaders of Nazi Germany • An International Military Tribunal was convened • This was the first tribunal of its kind in history • Following the main trial, the United States held an additional twelve trials, the “subsequent Nuremberg trials” • Trials were held in the Palace of Justice in Nuremberg, Germany Slide (14)
What were the four charges of the International Military Tribunal?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation in a common plan of conspiracy for the accomplishment of a crime against peace • Planning, initiating, and waging war of aggression and other crimes against peace • War crimes • Crimes against humanity (Slide 15)

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Where were the judges from and which judge gave the opening statement?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • America • England • France • Soviet Union • United States Supreme Court Justice, Robert H. Jackson (Slide 15)
Why were the three acquittals considered so important?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It showed that the countries wanted the defendants to have fair and impartial trials, which they all did receive (Slide 15)
What is the statute of limitations for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no statute of limitations (Slide 18)
Why was the Holocaust unprecedented?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This scale of murder has not been seen before or since (Slide 19)
Approximately how many Jewish men, women and children were murdered during the Holocaust and how many were children?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is estimated that the number of Jews murdered during the Holocaust is approximately 6 million, with 1.5 million being children • Two-thirds of all the Jews of Europe were murdered during the Holocaust (Slide 21)
During what period were most Jews killed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three-quarters of the nearly six million victims were killed within only twenty months, from June 1941 to February 1943 • Half of the total victims died within only the last eleven months of that time frame (Slide 21)

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In addition to the Jews, who were the other victims?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Non-Jewish Soviet civilians• Soviet POWs• Non-Jewish Polish civilians• Roma/Sinti• Serb civilians• People with physical and mental disabilities• German political prisoners• “Asocials”• Jehovah’s Witnesses• Homosexuals• Black people (Slide 22)
What word did Roman Kent’s father frequently utter to him during the Holocaust?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Remember!” (Side 23)

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Unit 9: Aftermath

Lesson 9.1: Liberation and Afterwards

Slide 1 – Liberation and Afterwards

Welcome to Lesson 9.1 of *How Was it Possible? A Holocaust Curriculum For and By Teachers™*, from The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous. This presentation will give you an overview of the topic “Liberation and Afterwards.” This lesson was prepared by Doug Cervi, who taught social studies and the Holocaust at Oakcrest High School in Mays Landing, New Jersey, and is the Executive Director of the New Jersey Commission on Holocaust Education and an adjunct professor at Stockton University in New Jersey.

Slide 2 – Liberation and Afterwards

On July 23, 1944, the first concentration camp was liberated by the Soviet army and this long and deadly war was coming to an end. Unfortunately, it would take the Allies another ten months before the war in Europe ended in May 1945. The vast majority of soldiers that had fought this war had no idea that the camps even existed. While the Allied leaders knew about the camps, they could not begin to imagine the atrocities that were being perpetrated by the Germans.

This slide captures the two themes indicated in the title of this lesson, “liberation” and “afterwards.” In the photograph on the left, you see inmates waving a home-made American flag as they greet U.S. Seventh Army troops on their arrival at the Allach concentration camp in Bavaria, southern Germany, in April 1945. Allach was a subcamp of Dachau.

In the photograph on the right, young mothers stroll with their babies in the Landsberg Displaced Persons camp in Germany in 1948.

Slide 3 – Liberation

In July 1944, the Soviet army liberated the first major camp at Majdanek in Poland. Majdanek was captured virtually intact. Soviet officials invited journalists to inspect what they found in the camp. As the Soviet army pushed west and the Americans, British, and Canadians moved east, they liberated many more camps, a number after the war officially ended.

Here is a photograph of Generals Dwight D. Eisenhower, George Patton, and Omar Bradley as they inspect the newly liberated Ohrdruf concentration camp, part of the Buchenwald camp network, on April 12, 1945.

Slide 4 – The End of the War

In early 1945 the Allies advanced towards Germany and the atrocities of the Nazis came to light. Hitler committed suicide to escape capture and accountability for his crimes. The Soviet army entered Berlin and World War II ended on May 8, 1945.

In the photograph, survivors in Allach, greet arriving U.S. troops on April 30, 1945.

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Slide 5 – Liberation of the Camps

When Allied soldiers began the liberation of the camps, they had no idea what they would find. The smell was overpowering, as was the appearance of adult men and women who weighed as little as 68 pounds; many were covered in lice and infected with typhus. Thousands of prisoners were dead and dying.

Here we see a group of former prisoners at the Ebensee concentration camp in the Austrian Alps pose for a US Army Signal Corps photographer the day after their liberation.

Slide 6 – Liberation of the Camps

The dying would not stop at liberation despite the best efforts of Allied medical personnel because of the terrible conditions in the camps. Many of the liberated prisoners died from rapid refeeding, which can be dangerous for severely malnourished people, though this was not known at the time. Masses of people moved about Europe, many making their way to displaced persons camps.

At the end of the war, the United States, France, Britain, and the Soviet Union divided Germany into four zones of occupation.

Slide 7 – Liberation of the Camps by American Forces

The American army liberated its first concentration camp at Ohrdruf, in April of 1945. The officers and soldiers were stunned at what they saw. They found piles of dead bodies, diseased and starving prisoners, some of whom resembled walking skeletons, and the overpowering smell of death.

This photograph shows German civilians, ordered by American liberators to view what took place at Buchenwald concentration camp, less than five miles from the center of the German city of Weimar. They are looking at items made from human skin.

Slide 8 – The World Must Know – “Starvation, Cruelty and Bestiality”

General Eisenhower, appalled at what he saw, made a prophetic statement about how people in the future would say that the Holocaust did not happen. He made every American soldier in the vicinity of the camp as well as German civilians walk through the camp in order to bear witness to the reality of the Holocaust.

The photograph shows General Eisenhower’s words on the walls of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC.

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The things I saw beggar description...

The visual evidence and the verbal testimony of starvation, cruelty and bestiality were so overpowering... I made the visit deliberately, in order to be in a position to give first-hand evidence of these things if ever, in the future, there develops a tendency to charge these allegations to propaganda.

General Dwight David Eisenhower
Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces
Ohrdruf Concentration Camp, April 13, 1945

Slide 9 – Allied Liberation of Nazi Camps

This timeline shows the liberation of some of the major concentration and death camps by Allied forces starting in July of 1944, with the liberation of Majdanek and continuing through Auschwitz in January 1945, Buchenwald, Bergen-Belsen, and Dachau in April 1945, and Theresienstadt, or Terezin, and Stutthof at the end of the war in May 1945.

Slide 10 – Displaced Persons (DP) Camps

At the end of World War II, there were millions of displaced persons who wanted to go home, find relatives, or emigrate to another country. This movement of millions of people required that the Allied nations address this refugee crisis. Those refugees who did not have a home to return to were called displaced persons or DPs.

The photograph is of Helen Berkowitz's United Nations DP identity card, dated February 1948. Helen was born in Dusseldorf in Germany, but as you can see, her nationality is listed as 'Poland Jew.'

Slide 11 – DP Camps

The DP camp system was developed to accommodate the approximately 250,000 displaced persons, mostly Jews, in emergency shelters after the end of the war. Many Jews did not have any family left or a place to go home to and remained in one of the many DP camps in Germany, Austria, and Italy. Some would eventually either return to their home country or emigrate to other countries around the world.

Conditions in many DP camps were very difficult. On June 22, 1945, President Truman sent Earl G. Harrison, dean of the University of Pennsylvania Law School, to Germany as his personal envoy to report on the situation of the Jewish displaced persons in Europe. Harrison was shocked by what he saw during his three-week inspection tour of the DP camps. His report condemned the way Jewish displaced persons were being treated.

One change implemented was the separation of Jews from other displaced persons. The DP camps had been organized by nationality. This forced Jews to live together with displaced Germans and Austrians, many of whom had been Nazi collaborators. Harrison understood that the situation of the Jews was unique.

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More than anything, refugees desired human relationships. Most were entirely alone, having lost parents, spouses, children, and siblings during the Holocaust.

The photograph shows a celebration of a wedding in September 1946 at the Bergen-Belsen DP camp.

Slide 12 – Leaving DP Camps

Not all survivors went to DP camps; some traveled across Europe searching for family.

By the end of 1945, most Jews who were still in DP camps would eventually immigrate to the United States, Palestine (now Israel), Australia, Canada, or several South American countries.

When visas became available, children were sent to Palestine, either to relatives or children's homes. The young boy in this photograph leaving a children's home for Palestine, is Yisrael Meir Lau. He later became the chief rabbi of Israel.

Slide 13 – The End of the Camps

Authorized by the US government, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee focused their attention on assisting orphans and sent staff to work in the DP camps. Three years after the war, Congress authorized the immigration to the United States of 400,000 DPs, twenty percent of whom were Jewish. By the end of 1957, twelve years after the end of the war, the last DP camp in Germany closed.

Slide 14 – Nuremberg Trials

The Allied countries agreed to put on trial those responsible for the atrocities committed by the Nazi regime. They held the Nuremberg trial of 24 leading Nazis under the auspices of the International Military Tribunal. The United States military then held 12 trials, for specific groups, after the International Military Tribunal was completed.

The Nuremberg Trials were the first of their kind in history. The International Military Tribunal and the subsequent US trials were held in the Palace of Justice in Nuremberg, Germany.

In this photograph, you see the main defendants at the International Military Tribunal, the trial of war criminals at Nuremberg.

Slide 15 – International Military Tribunal (IMT)

The Nuremberg Trial conducted by the IMT opened on November 20, 1945. The indictments at the IMT would include four charges:

- Participation in a common plan or conspiracy for the accomplishment of a crime against peace;
- Planning, initiating, and waging war of aggression and other crimes against peace;

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- War crimes; and
- Crimes against humanity.

The indictments used for the first time the word “genocide,” although in a descriptive, not legal, sense, which had been coined only the year before by Raphael Lemkin, a Polish-Jewish lawyer. The presiding judges were American, British, French and Soviet. The photograph is of US Supreme Court Justice Robert H. Jackson, who not only played a prominent role in negotiating the Nuremberg Charter that determined the basis for the proceedings, but also served as the chief American prosecutor giving the opening and closing statements at the International Military Tribunal.

Slide 16 – Verdict Summary

The Trial ran until October 1, 1946. The verdicts, read out on September 30 and October 1, 1946, were as follows:

- 12 sentenced to death;
- 3 to life imprisonment;
- 4 to long prison terms;
- 3 found not guilty; and
- 2 did not stand trial, one due to ill health and 1 committed suicide prior to the trial.

It has been said that the most important verdicts were the three acquittals because it showed that the Allies wanted the defendants to have fair and impartial trials.

Slide 17 – Defendants and Sentences

Initially 24 defendants were to be indicted; however, twenty-one appeared in court to be held accountable for their crimes. Martin Bormann was not captured by the Allies and stood trial in absentia, Robert Ley killed himself before the trial started, and Gustav Krupp was considered too ill to stand trial. He died in 1950.

Slide 18 – Subsequent Nuremberg Trials

Following the International Military Tribunal, trials were held over a number of years to hold members of specific groups accountable for their crimes during World War II. The United States conducted this series of trials in Nuremberg, which included the Doctors Trial, the Judges Trial, and the IG Farben Trial. The list of U.S. trials is seen on this slide.

Trials for war crimes are still being held today to hold those accountable, as there is no statute of limitations for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide.

Slide 19 – Summary – Liberation and Afterwards

In this lesson we have reviewed some of the events accompanying the end of World War II in Europe: the liberation of the concentration camps, the massive refugee crisis, the creation of DP

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camps and their ultimate closing as survivors emigrated, and the holding of the Nuremberg Trials of Nazi war criminals. It is also important to realize that for survivors of the Holocaust, liberation did not occur in a single moment, but sometimes took years or decades, and most survivors coped with significant loss and disruption in their lives.

The Holocaust was unprecedented. This scale of murder has not been seen before or since, and hopefully will never happen again.

Slide 20 – CODA

We have come to the end. You have been presented with much information, and many facts; but facts can be dry.

Let us look at the toll in human life.

Slide 21 – Numbers Murdered

Historians have estimated that the number of Jews murdered during the Holocaust is approximately 6 million, with 1.5 million being children; two-thirds of all the Jews of Europe were murdered during the Holocaust.

As historian Peter Hayes has noted, “Three-quarters of the nearly six million victims were killed within only twenty months, from June 1941 to February 1943, and half of the total victims died within only the last eleven months of that time frame. Moreover, three-quarters of those killed lived before the war in only three countries: Poland, Lithuania, and the USSR...”

“For Jewish children sixteen or younger, the mortality rate was almost nine-tenths.”

Slide 22 – There were Other Victims

In addition to Jewish victims, there were millions of others, non-Jewish Soviet civilians, Soviet POWs, non-Jewish Polish civilians, Roma/Sinti, Serb civilians, people with physical and mental disabilities, German political prisoners, so-called “asocials,” Jehovah’s Witnesses, homosexuals, black people, and many others.

Slide 23 – Roman Kent

Roman Kent, a survivor of the Łódź ghetto, Auschwitz, Gross-Rosen, and Flossenbürg concentration camps, and a death march, was president of The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous. Mr. Kent died in May 2021. We would like to share some of Mr. Kent’s remarks delivered at the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz.

It is strange to hear the bells ringing here, which the bells are usually a sign of peace or something in a place like this, where there was killing and murders every second of the day.

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Remember, this was the word my father frequently uttered to me during the Holocaust. We survivors cannot, dare not to forget the millions who were murdered. We do not want our past to be our children's future.

Thank you for joining us today as we learned about “Liberation and Afterwards.” This concludes our presentation of Lesson 9.1 from *How Was it Possible? A Holocaust Curriculum For and By Teachers™*. We appreciate your attention and participation in this program. On behalf of The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous, thank you.

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Circle the correct answers below.

1. What was General Eisenhower's fear about the future?
 - a. People would forget about the Holocaust
 - b. People would write books about the Holocaust
 - c. People would not care that the Holocaust happened
 - d. People would deny the Holocaust happened and create propaganda to say that the Holocaust never happened
2. Which of the following was not a characteristic of the displaced persons (DP) camps?
 - a. DP camps were located in several countries in Europe
 - b. Jewish refugees were forced to go to DP camps
 - c. DP camp conditions were often difficult and resources were limited
 - d. Some DP camps were converted concentration camps
3. Which of the following aspects of the Nuremberg Trials is true?
 - a. The trials were administered by France, Great Britain, and the United States
 - b. The trials were based around military tribunals from the end of World War I
 - c. The trials included the charge of crimes against humanity and war crimes
 - d. The trials were held together in a single series of meetings
4. What is the statute of limitations for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide?
 - a. 10 years
 - b. 25 years
 - c. 50 years
 - d. There is no statute of limitations
5. Why was the Holocaust unprecedented?
 - a. Many people were rescued
 - b. Jews were the only people murdered
 - c. Very few people collaborated with the Nazis
 - d. This scale of murder has not been seen before or since

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Lesson Quiz with Answers Highlighted and Bolded

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Link to Google Form Quiz (Instructions Available in the Appendix)

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1Mw9iS5yhuY2Kqvdlfies8m0oZYVSjIA3FWoaeDvGjHQ/copy>

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Slide 1 - Yevgeny Khaldei via Getty Images

Slide 2 (Left) - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD

Slide 2 (Right) - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Dorit Mandelbaum

Slide 3 - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Felice Grad

Slide 4 - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD

Slide 5 (Top) - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD

Slide 5 (Bottom) - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Mr. Roy Rodriguez

Slide 6 (Top) - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Stuart McKeever

Slide 6 (Bottom) - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD

Slide 7 - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Rudy Baum

Slide 8 - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Slide 9 - The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous

Slide 9 (Background Image) - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Rudy Baum

Slide 10 - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Florence Fruchter

Slide 11 - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Gedenkstaette Bergen-Belsen

Slide 12 (Left) - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Lilo, Jack and Micha Plaschkes

Slide 12 (Right) - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Robert Waisman

Slide 13 - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Aviva Kempner

Slide 14 - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of John W. Mosenthal

Slide 15 - Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, photograph by Harris & Ewing, LC-USZ62-38828, <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2005687436/>

Slide 16 - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD

Slide 17 - No Image

Slide 18 - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Gerald (Gerd) Schwab

Slide 19 - No Image

Slide 20 - No Image

Slide 21 - Hayes, Peter, *Why? Explaining the Holocaust*, W. W. Norton & Company, page 114

Slide 22 - Hayes, Peter, *Why? Explaining the Holocaust*, W. W. Norton & Company, page 115

Slide 23 - The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous