AN INTRODUCTORY HISTORY
OF THE SHOAH

By Avinoam Patt

Cover Sculpture -- Yaira Singer
Holocaust Library of the KJ Synagogue in New York

The Shoah (*Khurbn* in Yiddish, Holocaust in English) remains an event that defies comprehension. Never before had there been a war of such complete genocidal intent waged against a culture, a religion, and ethnic minority that was not a combatant in the war itself. The annihilation of the Jewish people was meant to be total: as the war expanded from Germany to Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and then to all of Western, Southern and Eastern Europe, no Jew who came under the scope of German rule or that of the Axis collaborators was safe. The Shoah took place in the context of World War II and it was a world war in every sense: while the war began in Europe, it soon spread to Africa, Asia, and even the Americas. Out of approximately 9 million Jews living in Europe before the war, two out of three, or 6 million Jews were murdered, including 1.5 million children. Had the Nazis realized their goal of world domination, every single Jew in the world, 16.9 million by 1939 estimates, would have been a target for annihilation.

During the Second World War and in its aftermath, historians struggled to define what was essentially a crime without precedent in history. In 1944, the Polish Jewish lawyer Raphael Lemkin coined the term "genocide" in an attempt to describe the Nazi policy of systematically destroying national and ethnic groups, especially as reflected in the mass murder of European Jewry. Lemkin defined genocide as "a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves." In the first two decades of historical writing after the Holocaust, historians struggled to explain how the Nazis came to power in Germany or how the Germans organized the Final Solution, relying for the most part on German sources to write the history of the war. Leon Poliakov's *Harvest of Hate: The Third Reich and The Jews* (1951) was among the first books to examine the history of the Holocaust but, published originally in French, did not reach a broad audience. In 1961, Raul Hilberg published *The Destruction of European Jews*, which was based on a reading of a wide array of German documents and was considered to be the first comprehensive study of the Holocaust to reach a much broader audience. In the decades following the Trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961, historians continued to write about the Holocaust, with increased interest not only on the mechanics of the Final Solution, but with a new focus on how Jews responded to Nazi persecution

and in some cases managed to organize resistance. Historians in Israel, such as Yehuda Bauer, Shmuel Krakowski, and Israel Gutman, wrote works examining the nature of Jewish responses to persecution and renewed focus on the role of Jews in a diverse array of resistance activities. In recent years, a newer generation of historians, inspired by the work of Saul Friedlander, has focused on writing an integrated history of the Holocaust that incorporates both German documentation, Jewish source material, and the reactions of surrounding populations to the war and persecution. A vast trove of yet to be examined source material in the form of wartime diaries, underground archives (such as the Oneg Shabbes Archive examined by Sam Kassow), and other forms of wartime documentation, suggest that new and innovative writing on the Shoah will only expand. Interest in the Holocaust has continued to grow beyond the field of historical research, with studies examining the impact of the Holocaust on literature, film, psychology, religion, theology, memorialization, and more. The continued fascination with the Shoah is likewise manifested in the ever-growing production of novels and films that deal with the subject.

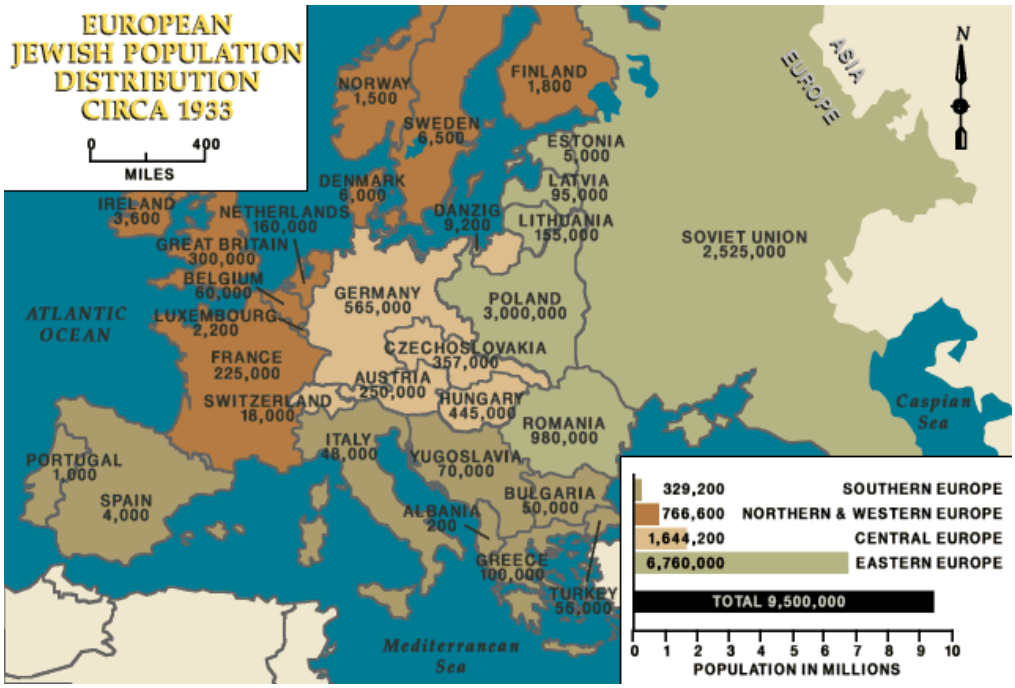
Furthermore, beginning in the 1980s with the work of the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimony at Yale University and expanding with the Shoah Foundation's Visual History Archive's collection of over 50,000 Holocaust survivor testimonies, the voices of Holocaust survivors, heeding Elie Wiesel's call to "bear witness," have contributed to a deeper understanding of the complexity of the event. Only in recent years have historians begun to incorporate survivor testimony in the writing of Holocaust history utilizing testimony as a central source in the history of the unimaginable. Seventy years after the end of WWII, the last living eyewitnesses to the Holocaust continue to share their memories with us; but it is up to us, the current and future generations to make sure these memories are not forgotten. Through their lives and their memories, we can learn the importance of preserving the past to build a better future and the role that all of us can play in building a society dedicated to mutual understanding and respect that celebrates diversity and cares for others.

Jewish Life in Europe before World War II

Many histories of the Holocaust only introduce Jewish life in Europe as a prelude to its destruction. While it is challenging to avoid a predetermined reading of history, there is much to be learned from avoiding this tendency; we can appreciate the lives of those who lived before the war;

beyond such a moral obligation, however, we can also learn about their efforts to face the Nazi threat and the various forms of response Jews undertook.

How did Europe come to be the cradle of Jewish civilization in the thousand years before the 20th century? How did diverse Jewish communities throughout Europe respond to the Nazi onslaught? One of the goals of the Nazi genocide of the Jews was to not only seek out and murder every single Jew living on the European continent, to render the Greater Reich and all lands occupied by the Germans, *judenrein*, it was also to erase any trace of the glorious Jewish civilization that had developed in Europe in the preceding millennium. If we want to fulfill the commandment *Zakhor*, to Remember, therefore, we have an obligation not only to remember the destruction, we have an obligation to remember and appreciate the beauty of the civilization that was destroyed. Beyond the obligation to remember, however, incorporating the Jewish history of the event also allows us to write a more complete history of the Holocaust, or in the words of Saul Friedlander, an "integrated history" of the Holocaust. Over many years of research on the Holocaust, we have learned a great deal about Nazi persecution, about the development of the Final Solution, the mechanics of the Nazi policy, the barbarity of destruction, but surprisingly, we know much less about the Jewish response. By viewing all of the Jews merely as victims of the Nazis, we overlook the great diversity that existed in Europe before the war. We forget that Jews were a highly variegated group, living in countries stretching from France in the West, to Greece in the Southeast; from Italy to the far reaches of the Soviet Union, and everywhere in between.



--Map courtesy United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM)
This population of almost 10 million Jews was composed of individuals and communities representing all shades of cultural, political and social life.

How do we account for the diversity of European Jewish life at the turn of the 20th century? The great Eastern European Jewish historian, Simon Dubnow (who was murdered in the Riga Ghetto in 1941) described the flow of Jewish history in terms of a successive migration of hegemonic cultural centers (from Palestine to Babylonia to Spain to central and eastern Europe), culminating in the creation of an autonomous Jewish center in Eastern Europe focused on Yiddish culture. And indeed, the development of a unique civilization in Eastern Europe, despite the economic upheavals, intermittent pogroms, and religious persecutions of the 19th century under the Czars in the Russian Empire, had been remarkable. For several hundred years, in fact, from the end of the 17th century until the middle of the 19th century, Jewish life in Eastern Europe had been relatively stable, marked by population growth, the growth of Hasidism, and cultural advances that accompanied economic shifts. At the same time, over the course of the two hundred years from 1700-1900, the very definition of what it meant to be a Jew in Europe had evolved in dramatic ways. The Jewish encounter with modernity and the promise of engagement with newly created states and societies led to the dramatic evolution of Jews and Judaism in the 18th and 19th centuries. The promise of citizenship and the advance of enlightenment philosophies, gave rise to the parallel Jewish enlightenment or Haskalah

movement of Moses Mendelssohn and the *maskilim*, who sought to demonstrate that Jews and Judaism were fully capable of participation in the modern world (without the need for conversion to enter and succeed in Christian society). The Haskalah**,** through its project to modernize Jewish culture, also gave rise to religious reform in Judaism, which led to changes in religious worship: the incorporation of the vernacular, less Hebrew, more German, the change in the position of the rabbi, and the sermon. In addition to Reform Judaism, however, we can also see the development of what we know today as Conservative Judaism (the positive-historical Judaism of Zecharias Frankel in 19th century Germany) and modern orthodoxy (developed by Samson Raphael Hirsch in 19th century Germany as well) as a product of this encounter between Judaism and modernity. Finally, as the Haskalah reached eastern Europe over the course of 19th century, in large part because the political conditions under the Russian empire were so vastly different, because the potential for acceptance into the majority society was less likely, and because anti-Semitism and traditional anti-Judaism were so persistent, we see the emergence of modern Jewish politics, of new forms of Jewish identification linked less with religious reform and more with Jewish nationalism (Zionism), Jewish socialism (the Jewish Labor Bund), Folkism, and other movements, which imagined the creation of new political orders better able to accommodate the Jews as a distinct group. Likewise, in the early 20th century, Agudas Yisroel (founded in Kattowice in 1912) emerged to represent Orthodox Judaism and Hasidic Jews before the political challenges that developed, particularly in interwar Europe.

Rosh Hashanah Card, Tree of Life, ca. 1910 (courtesy USHMM photo archives)

As European Jews entered the 20th century, the great cultural center of Dubnow radiated forth from the more traditional east (where over 5 million Jews lived by 1897 in the Russian Empire) to the modernizing west and back. Major Jewish urban centers with large Jewish populations existed in the East: Vilna, the Jerusalem of Lithuania, home of the Vilna Gaon and the great yeshivas of eastern Europe, Warsaw, destined to become the largest Jewish population center in Europe, at the crossroads of the encounter between tradition and modernity, Odessa, the cosmopolitan port city in the Russian empire and home to Russian-Yiddish writers, as well as Lvov, Krakow, Kovno, and more. At the same time, by the beginning of the 20th century, the Jews were a people on the move (as they always had been, but now, even more so), this time reversing the eastward migrations following the expulsion from Spain and moving west: towards Vienna and Berlin in Central Europe; Paris, London, and Amsterdam in western Europe; and even further, with the majority of immigrating Russian Jews making the journey to New York City in America.

The great cataclysm that was the First World War gave pause to these developments; the aftermath of the Great War unleashed both the potential for even further progress forward, and as we will see, the forces that would lead to the ultimate destruction of European Jewry.

<u>The Interwar Period in Jewish History</u>

In the aftermath of the First World War, the political map of Europe was redrawn at the Peace Conference at Versailles, which opened on January 12, 1919. The defeated Central Powers (Germany and Austria-Hungary) were broken up. The Austro-Hungarian Empire was completely dismantled and new countries, with substantial Jewish and other minorities, emerged in Eastern Europe. At Versailles, the Minorities Rights Treaty (1919) had a major impact on the Jewish communities of the newly formed Eastern European states of Poland (over 3 million Jews), Romania (850,000 Jews), Czechoslovakia (375,000 Jews), Lithuania (115,000 Jews), Yugoslavia (68,000 Jews) and Bulgaria (48,000 Jews), which were each obliged to adopt this policy which was intended to ensure the rights of ethnic minorities, including Jews, within their borders. It also involved granting citizenship to minority groups and allowing them to organize and to maintain a cultural identity including establishing *their own schools* and

speaking their own languages, while still remaining a part of the newly formed political state in which they lived. Thus, Jews in Eastern Europe found themselves officially emancipated and enfranchised as citizens of the new postwar republics instead of Empires.

In Eastern Europe and in Western Europe, two main strategies were employed by Jews against anti-Semitism and civil inequality: one was a search to change the society as a whole to create a more equal society and, the second, came in the form of Jewish Nationalism, which promoted Jewish separation from these oppressive societies. As a large number of secular Jews became involved with various Socialist, Communist and Anarchist organizations in their search to create a more equal society, Jews also further developed Zionist nationalist politics. In countries across Europe, however, Jews constituted an extremely diverse population: speaking different languages, living amongst various other religious and cultural majorities and minorities, some Jews attemoting to assimilate, others, particularly in Eastern Europe, continuing to speak Yiddish, read Hebrew for prayers, and living a traditional Jewish life according to Jewish law.

In newly indepent Poland in particular, home to 3.3 million Jews before World War II, a highly diverse and vibrant Jewish society developed that reflected a broad spectrum of Jewish political, cultural, and educational perspectives: In addition to Zionist political parties and the Jewish Labor Bund representing Jewish workers, Agudas Yisroel was the political organization that sought to preserve Orthodox religious life while it adhered strictly to Jewish law. A wide array of Jewish schools flourished in interwar Poland and attached to the various political parties were youth groups from the Socialist *Tsukunft* (Future), the youth group of the Bund; *HeHalutz* (The Pioneer) and *Hashomer Hatzair* (The Young Scout) the largest Zionist socialist groups and *Betar* (the Joseph Trumpledor Association) was a right-wing Zionist, anti-Marxist group, while *HaNoar HaIvri Akiba* (Hebrew Akiva Youth) was the Zionist-religious-socialist option.

Why emphasize the diverse nature of Jewish life as it existed before the war? On the one hand, as suggested above, this helps us to appreciate that which was destroyed; on the other hand, however, in our search to identify *how Jews responded* to the rise of Nazi anti-semitism and new forms of persecution, we can begin to realize just how difficult it is to identify *Jewish responses*. By 1939, the Jews of Europe were a highly varied people reflecting many, many national, cultural, and indeed religious identities.

There was no one single way that would prove effective in countering the Nazi onslaught; when confronted with the Nazi threat, Jews and Jewish communities tended to rely on those tools and tactics that confirmed their individual, family, or group world-view and that had served them well in the past. Whether that meant to flee in the face of the onslaught, to attempt to reach some sort of short-lived accommodation with the authorities, to hope to be able to endure the persecution until it was over, to submit to the Nazi edicts to glorify God's name, or to ultimately attempt to escape or engage in acts of resistance, most Jews did not know the enormity of the destructive forces they faced until it was too late.

The Rise of Hitler and the Nazi Party: Anti-Semitism and Persecution of Jews in Germany

This brief survey of Jewish life in interwar Europe provides some context for the nature of the Jewish community that existed in Europe as Hitler and the Nazis came to power in Germany. When Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of Germany in 1933 and the Nazis completed their rise to power, Jews lived in every country of Europe, with a total of roughly 9 million Jews living in the countries that would be eventually occupied by Germany; by the of the war 2/3 of European Jewry would be destroyed. While the largest Jewish populations were concentrated in Eastern Europe, including Poland, the Soviet Union, Hungary, and Romania, it was the German Jewish community, numbering some 565,000 in 1933, that would be the first target of Hitler and the Nazi party.

Antisemitism and Persecution of the Jews in Prewar Germany

Antisemitism (or prejudice and hatred against Jews) and the persecution of Jews formed a central component of Nazi ideology. While the term "anti-Semitism," connoting hatred of Jews, was coined by the German journalist Wilhelm Marr in 1879, specific hatred of Jews dated back to form of anti-Judaism and religious rivalry that were manifested in pogroms and blood libels of the pre-modern era. In the modern period, however, anti-semitism took on a political component and was combined with nationalism and xenophobia, or anti-immigrant sentiment. From the establishment of the National Socialist Workers Party (NSDAP) in the aftermath of WWI, the Nazi party identified segregation of Jews from "Aryan" society and the elimination of Jews' political, legal, and civil rights as a core part of their future plans for Germany. For Adolf Hitler, the leader of the Nazi party, the

German defeat in the First World War was the result of a conspiracy mounted by foreign powers, capitalists, Marxists, Freemasons, and above all, the Jews. In Hitler's world view, explained in his opus *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle), written after his brief imprisonment in a Munich jail for a failed attempt at revolution in 1923, Jews were behind war-profiteering, the disastrous reparations agreement, hyperinflation, and the economic depression that plagued Germany in the 1920s. He also believed that Marxism was a Jewish invention and that the Communists were the agents of a Jewish world conspiracy. Likewise, internationalism and pacifism were Jewish inventions intended to weaken the German nation. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler made the centrality of Anti-Semitism to his view of the world explicit. He explained that protecting the world from the Jews was a divine mission for him. What was Hitler's ultimate goal? First and foremost, he saw himself as engaged in a historic struggle for the preservation of the Aryan race. In order to achieve this goal, he believed the German *volk* (or people) needed: 1. *lebensraum* (living space to ensure an adequate and secure food supply) and 2. elimination of the Jews to preserve the purity of the Aryan race. Hitler believed that the world was divided into racial groups and that all peoples, like individuals, were governed by the instinct for self-preservation, achieved through food supply and procreation. In order to achieve these goals, every volk in the world needed land, and since the amount of land in the world is finite, this would always result in a conflict over land. For this reason, in Hitler's worldview, every volk would find itself in a state of war with other volk. According to Hitler's racial ideology, the Jews, as a people without a land, had survived throughout history as parasites. Hitler believed that the Jews exploited the labor and social structures of other *volk* to maintain their own survival. Hitler argued, however, that Jews sapped the strength of other peoples and were therefore the enemies of the entire world. For Hitler, the war against the Jews had a messianic element; it was a war to save the world from destruction. Hitler believed that the Jews were not only bent on world domination, but also on world destruction. Thus, he believed, his work was God's mission: to save the world from the Jews. For many years, historians have debated whether the annihilation of European Jewry was always part of Hitler's plan; it seems clear that the outbreak of World War II, and the destructive struggle against Communism and the Soviet Union, presented Hitler with the opportunity to realize the dream of complete destruction of the Jewish people. In this sense, the *Shoah* (or destruction) and the war must be understood together – victory for Hitler would be defined both by conquest of Europe *and* by the eradication of the Jewish and Bolshevik threat.

When Hitler assumed power in January 1933, the Nazis began to fulfill their pledge to persecute German Jews; during the first six years of Hitler's dictatorship, from 1933 until the outbreak of war in 1939, Jews felt the effects of more than 400 decrees and regulations that restricted all aspects of their public and private lives. These decrees were issued on the national, state, regional, and municipal level.

The first wave of laws worked to exclude Jews form German public life. Jews were excluded from government jobs, restricted from schools and universities, prevented from working as doctors and lawyers, removed from the military, forbidden from appearing on stage and screen, and prevented from observing Jewish dietary laws. In September 1935, the "Nuremberg Laws" excluded German Jews from Reich citizenship and prohibited them from marrying or having sexual relations with persons of "German or German-related blood." By defining anyone who had three or four Jewish grandparents as a Jew, regardless of whether that individual recognized himself or herself as a Jew or belonged to the Jewish religious community, this racial definition of Jewishness caught hundreds of thousands of German Jews in the grip of Nazi racial terror; even people with Jewish grandparents who had converted to Christianity could be defined as Jews.

Chart explaining the Nuremberg Laws, 1935

The next stage of persecution involved a formal process of working to seize all Jewish assets and businesses; from April 1933 to April 1938, "Aryanization" effectively reduced the number of Jewish-owned businesses in Germany by approximately two-thirds. Jews living in Germany were

progressively impoverished as they were removed from the German economy.

Sign from Germany, ca. 1935 (USHMM photo archives):
Jews not wanted here.
The Jews are our misfortune!

Jewish Responses to Persecution in Germany

Like their fellow citizens in Germany before the Nazis came to power, German Jews were patriotic citizens. More than 10,000 died fighting for Germany in World War I, and large numbers of German Jews were wounded and received medals for their valor and service. The families of many Jews who held German citizenship, regardless of class or profession, had lived in Germany for centuries and were well assimilated by the early 20th century.

How did different groups of Jews react to the Nazi rise to power? Many German Jews thought the Nazis were a transitory phenomenon. The Central Verein (or Central Association of Jews in Germany) tried to respond to Nazi charges of Jewish disloyalty and "pollution" of Germany Aryan society by emphasizing the Germanness of Jews. Others fled Germany immediately, especially those who were viewed as political opponents of the Nazis. Zionists in Germany tried to make use of the crisis to further the cause of immigration to Palestine, and some 60,000 Jews from Germany indeed emigrated to Palestine between 1933-1939. Jews in Germany had always been divided between Orthodox, Liberal (reform and conservative) and Zionists. The rise of the Nazis served to unite the Jewish community more than ever before. The *Zentralausschuss fur hilfe und aufbau* (Central Committee for Relief and Rehabilitation) was formed to help coordinate welfare and help those Jews who had become unemployed find jobs under its president, Rabbi Leo Baeck. The most important community body was the *Reichsvertretung der deutschen Juden* (Reich Representation of German Jews); after the Nuremberg Laws it of course had to be renamed, now called the Reich Representation of Jews in Germany (Jews could no longer be called "German Jews"). The Reichsvertretung would work to coordinate almost all aspects of Jewish internal life under the Nazi regime.

While the Reichsvertretung tried to make life manageable for Jews in Germany, and as the social isolation and "social death" of Jews in Germany caused them to turn inwards and rely on one another for support, at the same time, a series of restrictions on the migration of Jews from Germany (including a flight tax and an onerous bureaucratic process), coupled with quota laws and a refusal to accept Jewish refugees in the rest of the world, made migration out of Germany exceptionally difficult. Those who made the difficult decision to leave Germany still had to find a country willing to admit them and their family. The Evian Conference of 1938 demonstrated the challenges of finding safe haven as not one of the 32 countries in attendance was willing to change it immigrations policies to admit more Jews. Even when a new country could be found, a great deal of time, paperwork, support, and sometimes money was needed to get there. In many cases, these obstacles could not be overcome. Until Kristallnacht, many Jews remaining in Germany held out hope that the worst had passed and that conditions would improve. The Night of Broken Glass shattered these hopes for a more peaceful future. On November 9-10, 1938,
the *Kristallnacht* (commonly known as "Night of Broken Glass") pogrom destroyed 267 synagogues throughout the German Reich, 7,500 Jewish-

owned businesses, thousands of Jewish homes, and led to the arrest of 30,000 Jewish men and the death of 91 Jews. Significantly, Kristallnacht marked the first mass incarceration of Jews in Germany on the basis of their ethnicity. Furthermore, the German government used the widespread destruction resulting from the pogrom as an excuse to accelerate the process of Aryanization by levying a one billion Reichsmark fine (approximately 400 million US dollars in 1938) on the German Jewish community, confiscating insurance payouts to destroyed Jewish businesses in the process.

German children play among the ruins of the Peter-Gemeinder-Strasse synagogue in Beerfelden that was destroyed during Kristallnacht.
Photo Credit: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Stadtarchiv Beerfelden

After Kristallnacht, the physical isolation of Jews from all aspects of German life increased even further. German authorities decreed that by January 1, 1939, Jewish men and women bearing first names of "non-Jewish" origin had to add "Israel" and "Sara," respectively, to their given names. All Jews were obliged to carry identity cards that indicated their Jewish heritage, and, in the autumn of 1938, all Jewish passports were stamped with an identifying letter "J." After Kristallnacht, the Kindertransport, allowed for the emigration of 10,000 Jewish children from Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia to England, but even this was not

nearly enough. Kristallnacht marked a major turning point in Nazi policy vis-à-vis the Jews; anti-Jewish policy was consolidated in the hands of the SS and the passive response of the German population signaled that the German public would acquiesce to even more radical treatment of the Jews. As the Nazi leaders quickened their preparations for the European war of conquest that they intended to unleash, antisemitic legislation in Germany and Austria paved the way for more radical persecution of Jews. In a speech made on January 30, 1939 to mark the sixth anniversary of the Nazi seizure of power, Hitler made a pronouncement which would take on ominous portent with the outbreak of war, and the invasion of the USSR in the summer of 1941, in particular:

> One thing I should like to say on this day which may be memorable for others as well as for us Germans: In the course of my life I have very often been a prophet, and have usually been ridiculed for it. During the time of my struggle for power it was in the first instance the Jewish race which only received my prophecies with laughter when I said that I would one day take over the leadership of the State, and with it that of the whole nation, and that I would then among many other things settle the Jewish problem. Their laughter was uproarious, but I think that for some time now they have been laughing on the other side of their face. Today I will once more be a prophet: If the international Jewish financiers in and outside Europe should succeed in plunging the nations once more into a world war, then the result will not be the Bolshevization of the earth, and thus the victory of Jewry, but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe!

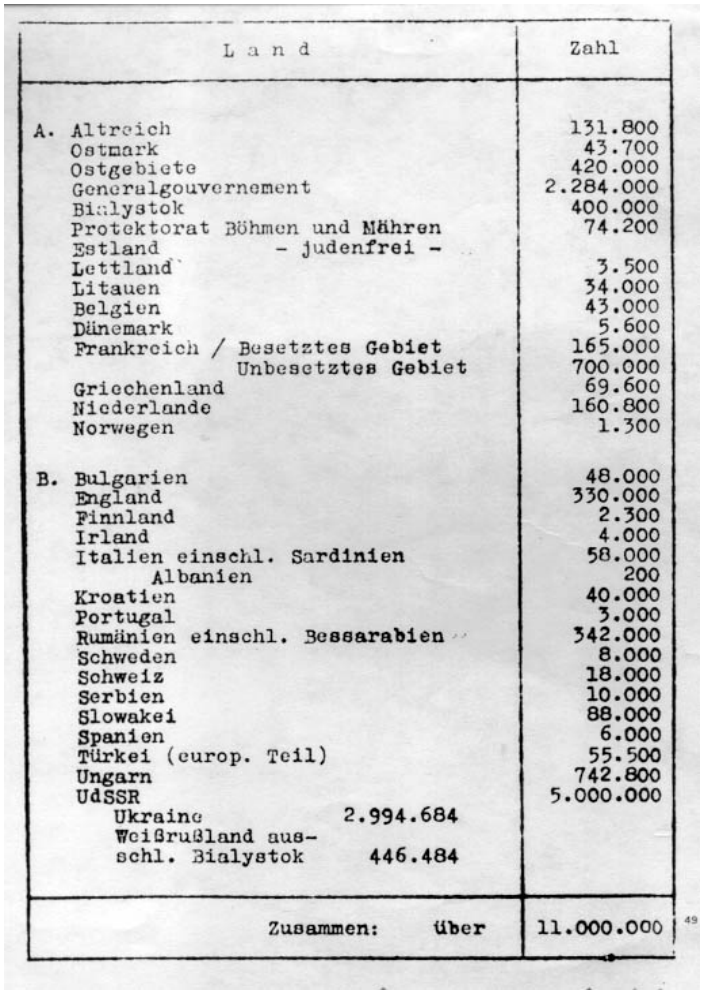
OVERVIEW OF THE HOLOCAUST AND WORLD WAR II IN EUROPE

As explained above, the Holocaust unfolded within the broader context of World War II. After Germany's defeat in the First World War, Hitler and the Nazi Regime envisioned a vast, new empire of "living space" (*Lebensraum*) in Eastern Europe. Before World War II, the German Reich expanded through the annexation of Austria (the *Anschluss*) and occupation of Czechoslovakia, as well as parts of France lost after WWI. But the Germans desired expansion to the East. After securing the neutrality of the Soviet Union (through the August 1939 German-Soviet Pact of nonaggression), Germany started World War II by invading Poland on September 1, 1939. Britain and France declared war on September 3; within a month, Poland was defeated and partitioned between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union.

Approximately 2.2 million Jews in western Poland fell under Nazi rule and were soon identified as targets of persecution and concentrated in ghettos across Poland. Despite the British and French declaration of war, there was a lull in fighting until April 9, 1940, when German forces invaded Norway and Denmark. On May 10, 1940, Germany began its assault on western Europe by invading the Low Countries (Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg), which had taken neutral positions in the war, as well as France. On June 22, 1940, France signed an armistice with Germany, which provided for the German occupation of the northern half of the country and permitted the establishment of a collaborationist regime in the south with its seat in the city of Vichy. From July 10 to October 31, 1940, the Nazis waged, and ultimately lost, an air war over England, known as the Battle of Britain. Together with its ally, Fascist Italy, Germany invaded Yugoslavia and Greece on April 6, 1941. On June 22, 1941, in violation of the German-Soviet Pact, Germany invaded the Soviet Union, unleashing a new stage in the Nazi extermination of European Jewry through the use of Einsatzgruppen, or mobile killing units, that followed the invading German Army (*Wehrmacht*). With the invasion of the Soviet Union, and the issuing of special decrees that allowed for executions of all Soviet officials, Jews, and all elements of the civilian population thought to be showing any resistance to the German occupying forces, the Nazi war against the Jews entered a murderous new phase. In June and July 1941, the Germans also occupied the Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, concentrating Jews in ghettos and beginning mass killing operations there as well.

At the Wannsee Conference on January 20, 1942, held near Berlin, SS, Nazi Party, and German state officials met to coordinate what became known as "The Final Solution," the deportation of European Jews to killing centers (also known as "extermination camps") already in operation or under construction in German-occupied Poland. Between December 1941 and July 1942, the SS and police officials established five killing centers in German-occupied Poland: Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka, and Auschwitz-Birkenau, in addition to Majdanek, which functioned as a concentration camp and extermination camp. German officials and local collaborators deported Jews from Western Europe via transit camps, such as Drancy in France, Westerbork in the Netherlands, and Mechelen (Malines) in Belgium. Of the approximately 75,000 Jews deported from France, more than 65,000 were deported from Drancy to Auschwitz-Birkenau, and approximately 2,000 to Sobibor. The Germans deported over 100,000 Jews from the Netherlands, almost all from Westerbork: about 60,000 to Auschwitz and

over 34,000 to Sobibor. Between August 1942 and July 1944, more than 25,000 Jews were deported from Belgium to Auschwitz-Birkenau. German authorities began to deport Jews from the Greater German Reich in October 1941, while the construction of the killing centers was still in the planning stage. The Germans also deported Jews from Greece, Italy, and Croatia. Between May and July 1944, Hungarian gendarmes, in cooperation with German security police officials, deported nearly 440,000 Jews from Hungary, most of them to Auschwitz-Birkenau. By the end of WWII, two-thirds of the prewar Jewish population of Europe had been annihilated by the Germans and their allies.



L a n d		Zahl
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

List of Jewish populations by country used at the Wannsee Conference in January 1942.

Jewish Responses to Persecution

With the benefit of hindsight, we know what would eventually happen to the majority of the Jewish communities that would come under Germany occupation throughout Europe, from France and Holland in the West, to Poland, the USSR, and the Baltics in the East, as well as Greece, Hungary, Romania, and everywhere in between. But the Jews who encountered the German invaders and their local collaborators could not have known what the "Final Solution" entailed, could not have guessed that Germany, a modern, Enlightened, progressive civilization would unleash a brutal war of extermination bent on the genocide of an entire people. Jews throughout Europe thus encountered Nazi persecution with the tools that had worked in the past, seeking ways to endure Nazi oppression until the war was over.

Jews in Eastern Europe under Nazi Rule

Ghettos

The Jewish residents of Germany suffered from a progressive series of edicts that stripped them of basic rights, citizenship, and inclusion in German economic, political, and cultural life, until they became outcasts in German society. With the Nazi occupation of western Poland in September 1939, the persecution and targeting of Polish Jews was swift and merciless. Following the rapid defeat of the Polish state, Jews lost all civil rights and protections. Beginning in November 1939, in the Nazi-occupied provinces of Poland, Jews were required to wear a yellow badge to identify them as Jews. Jewish males were conscripted for forced labor and any assets possessed by Jews were expropriated by the German authorities. Over the course of 1940 and 1941, Jews in virtually all major Polish cities were herded into urban ghettos, which were sealed off from the surrounding population. The ghetto streets, some wired and enclosed, others open during the day and locked at night, were cramped with massive numbers of displaced families. There were three types of ghettos: closed ghettos, open ghettos, and destruction ghettos. The majority of ghettos were closed ghettos, which were closed off with fences and walls generating extreme overcrowding, starvation, disease, and extremely unsanitary conditions; open ghettos had no fences or walls but Jews' entry and departure were restricted. Destruction ghettos existed for a short period of time (two to six weeks) before the Jewish population was exterminated through either mass shootings of deportations to death camps. According to recent estimates by scholars at the USHMM, there were

perhaps as many as 1,150 ghettos in Eastern Europe. German occupation authorities established the first ghetto in Poland in Piotrków Trybunalski in October 1939. The largest ghetto in Poland was the Warsaw ghetto. In Warsaw, more than 450,000 Jews were crowded into an area of 1.3 square miles. Other major ghettos were established in the cities of Lodz, Krakow, Bialystok, Lvov, Lublin, Vilna, Kovno, Riga, Czestochowa, and Minsk. Tens of thousands of western European Jews were also deported to ghettos in the east. Nazi-appointed Jewish councils (*Judenraete*) administered daily life in the ghettos.[1] A ghetto police force enforced the orders of the German authorities and the ordinances of the Jewish councils. By the spring and summer of 1942, this would also include facilitating deportations to killing centers. Jewish police officials, like Jewish council members, were forced to respond to the German authorities. The Germans frequently killed Jewish policemen who failed to carry out orders.

Jewish Children in the Warsaw Ghetto, ca. 1940 (USHMM, source: *Instytut Pamieci Narodowej*)

The ghettos of Eastern Europe quickly became scenes of mass death, as the majority of the impoverished Jewish population slowly died from hunger and epidemics of disease. The first two years of the war witnessed skyrocketing mortality rates: in two of the largest ghettos, Lodz and

Warsaw, 112,463 people died between 1941 and 1942. Even before systematic mass killings began, 500,000 Jews had died in ghettos. Despite the Nazi effort to restrict Jewish existence in Poland, and to take away their dignity, Jews tried to continue with their lives as best they could. Jews under German occupation demonstrated a resolve to sanctify life (*Kiddush Ha-Chaim*) despite the impossible conditions of almost no food, no water, and no sanitation, and as they suffered from forced labor, disease, the constant specter of death, and senseless and random acts of violence and murder. Despite such persecution and violence, and reduced to the most basic forms of existence, Jews continued to embrace life, while resisting despair and the Nazi death sentence. Resistance to the Nazis did not only mean armed self-defense; the choice to stand up against the Nazis, to embrace survival and refuse acceptance of the Nazi death sentence, both as individuals and for the Jewish people collectively, represented a choice to resist the imposed German fate.

This choice to resist the Nazi regime was reflected in various forms of behavior: the smuggling of food into ghettos; self-sacrifice within the family to avoid starvation and death; setting up soup kitchens despite the minimal food available; organizing cultural, educational, religious, and political activities to strengthen morale; and the work of doctors, nurses, and teachers within the ghettos of Poland. These were all parts of maintaining the health and moral fiber of Jews individually and as a whole. Each of these acts, as well as the later choice to take up arms against the Nazis and their collaborators, constituted a form of resistance against the Nazis.

The historian of the Holocaust, Yehuda Bauer, utilizes the term *amidah*, or standing up against, to characterize these actions that reflected the responses of Jews to maintain the sanctity of life under impossible circumstances. He defines "**Jewish resistance during the Holocaust to be any *group* action consciously taken in opposition to known or surmised laws, actions, or intentions directed against the Jews by the Germans and their supporters."** This broader definition of resistance, expanding far beyond cases of armed resistance, captures the many actions taken by Jews to defy the German edict of death for Jews as individuals and as a people. Actions large and small – continuing Jewish education, cultural activities designed to raise Jewish morale, theatrical performances, the writing of poetry, youth movement activities, political organizing, sharing of food, the underground press, soup kitchens, and more – all of these forms of Jewish resistance or *amidah* represented a conscious effort to resist the Nazi death sentence.

Jewish Life and Death in Nazi Ghettos

Despite the horrific conditions in the ghettos, Jewish councils struggled to maintain order and provide for the basic needs of the Jewish population in the ghettos. Jewish children in the ghetto were still educated, with small groups of children being taught in secret by a teacher whose salary usually consisted of a little food. Zionist youth movements in the Warsaw ghetto also operated two underground high schools. In the Lodz ghetto, where education was permitted, 14,000 students attended 2 kindergartens, 34 secular schools, 6 religious schools, 2 high schools, 2 college-level schools, and one trade school in the period between 1940-1941. One 15-year-old boy in Vilna, Yitzhak Rudashevsky, aged 15, described the importance of having some diversion during the long days in the ghetto:

> "My mood is just like the weather outside. I think to myself: what would happen if we did not go to school, to the club, and did not read books? We would die of dejection inside the ghetto walls."

Despite the hardships inherent in ghetto life, religious Jews continued their observance. The historian of the Warsaw ghetto, Emmanuel Ringelblum, estimated that some 600 *minyanim* regularly met to hold prayer services within the walls of the ghetto.

Emmanuel Ringelblum (1900-1944)

Additional prayers were added to services, with special prayers recited for deliverance, such as Psalms 22 and 23, as well as prayers composed during the persecutions of the Crusades and the Middle Ages, which recalled those who chose martyrdom rather than denying the Jewish faith. Observing religious commandments, such as the keeping of the Sabbath and dietary

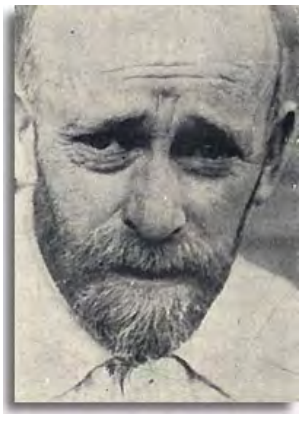
laws (*Kashrut*), became nearly impossible in the ghettos. Jews were forced to work on the Sabbath and holy days; rabbis made special exceptions to permit the consumption of non-kosher food, declaring that the preservation of life for those who were starving was more important than observing religious commandments.

After the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, ghettos were created in eastern Poland and the Baltic States, with large ghettos established in Bialystok, Kiev, Lvov, Vilna, Kovno, and elsewhere. In the first five months after the German invasion of the USSR, however, the mass shootings by the Einsatzgruppen, killed nearly 750,000 Jews from June – November 1941 (by the end of 1942, nearly 1.2 million Jews would be murdered through mass shootings.) In Kiev, the largest city in the Ukraine, 33,000 Jews were murdered at Babi Yar on September 29 and 30, 1941 (approx. 120,000 not killed in the operation remained in the city). In November and December 1941, the Nazis also began to deport Jews from Germany to the East and shootings of Jews arriving in the ghetto from the Reich or those already in the ghetto to make more room were also carried out. In Minsk, 12,000 Jews were shot to make room for the arrival of 1,500 Jews from Hamburg (Germany). In Riga, Latvia, Jews from Germany, Austria, and protectorate were shot along with inhabitants of the ghetto in woods outside of Riga in 10-day period from November 29-December 9, 1941- 38,000 Jews were murdered (28,000 from the ghetto and 10,000 new arrivals). Among those Jews murdered in the Rumbula Forest outside Riga on December 8, 1941 was the great Jewish historian, Simon Dubnow. In his final days he reportedly told the people he met: *"Yidn, shreibt un farshreibt"* -- "Jews, write and Record." And indeed, hidden archives and diaries kept by Jews under impossible conditions, indicate that Jews made every effort to write and record, to preserve evidence of Nazi crimes and the Jewish will to sanctify life, no matter how difficult the circumstances.

In the Kovno ghetto in Lithuania, the young Rabbi Ephraim Oshry attempted to address the new moral and ethical dilemmas of life under Nazi rule, providing answers based on *halakhah* to such unimaginable questions as whether a Jew was allowed to accept a work permit with the knowledge that it would lead to the death of another Jew, or whether it was permissible for a Jew to acquire a forged birth certificate that hid his/her Jewish identity.

Social welfare organizations functioned in the ghettos, trying desperately to prevent the death from starvation and disease of the neediest Jews. Jews

engaged in “self-help” organizing support networks to care for those in the most desperate of circumstances within the ghettos, building on prewar networks of mutual aid and relief. In the Warsaw ghetto over 1,000 “house committees” were organized to provide education for small children and to encourage self-help among the inhabitants of individual apartment buildings. The committees also organized cultural activities for the inhabitants of the buildings and were themselves part of the umbrella group *Zetos* (The Jewish Association for Mutual Aid); prior to December 1941 (until the United States entered the war), the Warsaw branch of the American Joint Distribution Committee (AJDC) headed by the historian, Emmanuel Ringelblum, funded the Jewish Self-Help (*Zydowska Samopomoc Spoleczna*, renamed ZTOS in October 1940, then ZSS in November 1941). The JDC also transferred funds from American contributors to local self-help organizations like TOZ, a health and sanitation organization and CENTOS, which cared for orphans.[2] These welfare organizations also ran soup kitchens, as well as ghetto hospitals, schools for nurses, and a system of orphanages. The great Jewish educator, Janusz Korczak , who was also a physician, writer, and pedagogue, became head of the Warsaw Jewish Orphanage. In the ghetto, he did everything within his power to improve the situation of the children in his orphanage. Although offered the chance, he rejected the opportunity of going into hiding outside the ghetto and instead chose to stand by his orphans. On August 5, 1942, Korczak and the 200 children in his orphanage were deported to the Treblinka death camp where they all perished.



Janusz Korczak (born Henryk Goldszmidt, 1878-1942)

Cultural activities within the ghettos of Poland, and in the concentration camps, also constituted an important element of the continued Jewish affirmation of life. Orchestras were active in the Vilna and Warsaw ghettos

and elsewhere. *YIKOR* (the Jewish Culture Organization) was an illegal group founded in December 1941 in the Warsaw ghetto. It maintained an underground library, held concerts and lectures, and supported the underground schools. Study circles, cabarets, musical and theater performances, and poetry recited from memory all served to preserve Jewish morale. In the concentration camp of Theresienstadt in Czechoslovakia, female inmates created a cookbook with recipes recorded from memory, and inmates organized musical and theatrical performances that included adults and children.

One of the most important acts of cultural resistance within the ghettos was the effort to document Nazi inhumanity and to preserve the history of daily life within the ghettos for future generations. Emmanuel Ringelblum, the young historian, educator, and AJDC activist, founded the *Oneg Shabbes* (Joy of Sabbath) archive in the Warsaw ghetto and persuaded writers, journalists, sociologists, rabbis, and others to contribute to the documentation effort. Doctors studied medical problems within the ghetto, others reported on culture and education, as well as life in the work camps and in other ghettos. His colleague Rabbi Shimon Huberband focused on religious life in the ghetto, while also writing on humor and folklore among ghetto inhabitants. The materials collected in the archive were packed and hidden in milk cans which were then buried in the ghetto; they were recovered following the war. Ringelblum, who was murdered in March 1944 after he was found in hiding, also kept a diary of his experiences during the war.

One of the milk cans used to hide documents. From the Ringelblum "Oneg Shabbes" Archive

Many Jews wrote diaries during the war, and although most were lost, those that survived, such as Herman Kruk's chronicle of the Vilna Ghetto, or Chaim Kaplan's diary from Warsaw, provide some of the only firsthand testimony of what Jews endured in the ghettos during the war. In the Vilna ghetto, a heroic operation (known as the Paper Brigade) to preserve the cultural treasures of the Jerusalem of Lithuania also took place. A special Nazi operation to plunder the treasures of European Jewry, called Einsatzstab Rosenberg (Operational Staff Rosenberg), operated in Vilna, systematically plundering those items deemed to be of value to be shipped back to Berlin. Members of Einsatzstab Rosenberg brought the materials, they had plundered to the YIVO Institute of Jewish Research building in Vilna. Forty Jews worked there, among them members of the intelligentsia and some who were secretly part of the United Partisans Organization, or FPO, including Abraham Sutzkever and Szmerke Kaczerginski. Their role was to catalogue the materials to prepare the materials for transport, painfully observing the desecration of Torah scrolls used as raw material for boots and the lead letter press plates of the Romm printing press, which for centuries had been used to print the words of holy books, melted down for bullets. They smuggled valuable manuscripts, certificates and pictures into the ghetto where they hid most of them. Some of the materials were hidden outside the ghetto with Ona Simaite (a non-Jewish helper) and others. The members of "The Paper Brigade" risked their lives daily by hiding material or smuggling it into the Vilna ghetto. This smuggling operation continued until the liquidation of the Vilna ghetto in September 1943; after the liberation of the city by the Soviets in July 1944, Sutzkever and Kaczerginski recovered whatever hidden material had remained intact and transferred it to the Museum of Jewish Art and Culture that they established in Vilna.

Abraham Sutzkever and Shmerke Kaczerginski seated on a balcony in the Vilna Ghetto, ca. 1943

After the war, Sutzkever and Kaczerginski, who ultimately survived with the partisans, smuggled the materials out from under Soviet control, helping much of it to reach YIVO in New York. Sutzkever testified on behalf of Russian Jewry at the Nuremberg Trials in 1946; he immigrated to Palestine in 1947 and is credited with stimulating the postwar revival of Yiddish creativity in Israel and the Diaspora.

The Last Resort: The Final Solution and Armed Resistance

Armed resistance, often undertaken as a last resort once the full scope of the Nazi plan for annihilation of European Jewry became known, grew out of earlier forms of underground activity and usually signified a choice to determine one's own fate and to die with dignity. It was often clear that fighting against such an overwhelming foe would not mean survival; it would mean a proud death on the Jews' terms, to be remembered as defenders of the Jewish people. Nonetheless, once the decision was made, Jewish underground groups, both in the ghettos and in the forests, engaged in armed resistance in any way they could. Even so, there were a number of practical constraints that tied the hands of the Jewish resistance in implementing their plans, among them:

- Resistance groups sometimes encountered hostility from the Jewish council (*Judenrat*) of a ghetto, which feared that the discovery of arms or the flight of Jews to the forest would provoke harsh reprisals from the Germans.
- The German tactic of "collective responsibility," meant the entire community would be punished for any infractions of German regulations.
- The population of most ghettos was comprised primarily of women, children, and the elderly, such that men of military age formed a very small part of the population of the ghetto, usually less than 30 percent.
- The imposition of forced labor and lack of adequate food sapped the physical ability and sometimes the will even of the young to engage in resistance activities.
- Access to arms was very difficult and dangerous to achieve. Even once arms were obtained, there was still the danger of discovery or

betrayal even within the ghetto and no way to match the superior armed power of the Germans.

- The secrecy and deception of the deportation actions, in which victims were told to pack belongings for "resettlement in the East" led some Jews to believe that, while resistance meant sure death, cooperation might mean eventual survival. While rumors of death camps were widespread, there was no precedent for a state-sponsored annihilation of a whole people and many refused to believe the Germans were capable of such deeds.
- Many leaders of Jewish councils believed that if only their ghetto population could be kept a live a little longer, many would be able to survive until liberation. Likewise, some Jewish council leaders believed that a policy of "rescue through work" would lead the Germans to keep those Jews they deemed "essential to the war effort" alive.

Nonetheless, in ghettos large and small, Jewish fighters (usually affiliated with Zionist and socialist youth movements) organized uprisings and acts of resistance throughout Eastern Europe. The youth movements, which had focused their energies in the first two years of the war on educational activities, relief work, and underground activity began to shift to preparing armed resistance only after receiving reports of systematic slaughters of Jews taking place to the East. In the ghettos under German occupation between 1939-1941, the youth movements transitioned from elitist organizations focused primarily on training the next generation of pioneers for aliyah, into leaders of the public, emerging as an alternative to the Jewish councils. As part of their educational efforts in the ghettos, Zionist youth movements established kibbutz groups, underground schools, and an underground press in ghettos large and small throughout occupied Eastern Europe. In the first part of the war, therefore, youth groups focused on providing relief to the suffering in the ghetto, not on organizing resistance. Still, the underground press of the youth movements also served as a key source of information on events throughout Poland, conveying information gathered by intrepid youth movement members who journeyed secretly between ghettos, offering news that was otherwise denied to the ghetto inhabitants. Access to information about the scope of the Nazi annihilation of the Jews of Eastern Europe after the summer of 1941 and the German invasion of the Soviet Union played a key role in the formation of the resistance groups in the Warsaw Ghetto and elsewhere.

The leaders of the pioneering youth movements who had returned to occupied Poland from Vilna after the start of the war (in the case of *Hashomer Hatzair* – Tosia Altman, Josef Kaplan, Mordecai Anielewicz and Shmuel Breslaw) sought to maintain contact both with the movement in Vilna and the leadership in Israel and the Hehalutz office in Geneva. Female members of the underground, like Tosia Altman, Frumka Plotnicka, or Chajke Grossman, for example, played a key role traveling to the various movement branches in the Generalgouvernement and Galicia to assist in organizing the movement and sharing information between parts of occupied Poland. They risked their lives to smuggle material and information, as well as people, in and out of ghettoes, undermining prevailing gender stereotypes which kept women out of positions of leadership in other domains.[3] Emmanuel Ringelblum included a special song of praise to Chajke Grosman and Frumka Plotnicka, in his diary entry of May 12, 1942,[4]

> The heroic girls, Chajke and Frumke – they are a theme that calls for the pen of a great writer.
>
> Boldly they travel back and forth through the cities and towns of Poland. They carry "Aryan" papers identifying them as Poles or Ukrainians. One of them even wears a cross, which she never parts with except when in the Ghetto. They are in mortal danger every day. They rely entirely on their "Aryan" faces and on the peasant kerchiefs that cover their heads.
>
> Without a murmur, without a second's hesitation they accept and carry out the most dangerous missions. Is someone needed to travel to Vilna, Bialystok, Lemberg, Kowel, Lublin, Czestochowa, or Radom to smuggle in contraband such as illegal publications, goods, money?
>
> The girls volunteer as though it was the most natural thing in the world. Are there comrades who have to be rescued from Vilna, Lublin or some other city?
>
> They undertake the mission. Nothing stands in their way, nothing deters them. Is it necessary to become friendly with engineers of German trains, so as to be to travel beyond the frontiers of the

Government- General of Poland, where people can move with special papers?

They are the ones to do it, simply without fuss, as though it was their profession. They have travelled from city to city, to places no delegate or Jewish institutions had ever reached, such as Wolhynia, Lithuania. They were the first to bring back the tidings about the tragedy of Vilna.

They were the first to offer words of encouragement and moral support to the surviving remnant of that city. How many times have they looked death in the eyes? How many times have they been arrested and searched?

Fortune has smiled on them. They are in the classic idiom, “emissaries of the community to whom no harm can come.” With what simplicity and modesty have they reported what they accomplished on their journeys, on the trains bearing Polish Christians who have been pressed to work in Germany.

The story of the Jewish woman will be a glorious page in the history of Jewry during the present war. And the Chajkes and Frumkes will be the leading figures in this story. For these girls are indefatigable.

Just back from Czestochowa, where they imported contraband, in a few hours they’ll be on the move again. And they’re off without a moment’s hesitation, without a minute of rest.

Frumka Plotnicka, 1914-1943

Abba Kovner, leader of Hashomer Hatzair in Vilna, was among the first to discern that the mass shootings in the Ponary forest outside of the city were not local in nature, but part of an overall systematic plan bent on the total slaughter of the Jews of Europe. As he argued in his December 31, 1941 manifesto calling to organize resistance:

> Vilna is not just Vilna. The shootings at Ponary are not just an episode...we are facing a well-planned system that is hidden from us at the moment. There is no rescue...Is there a way out? Rebellion and armed resistance. We are headed for absolute, total annihilation...Hitler intends to kill all the Jews...the Jews of Lithuania stand at the first place. Let us not go like sheep to the slaughter. We may be weak and defenseless but our only response to the enemy must be resistance.

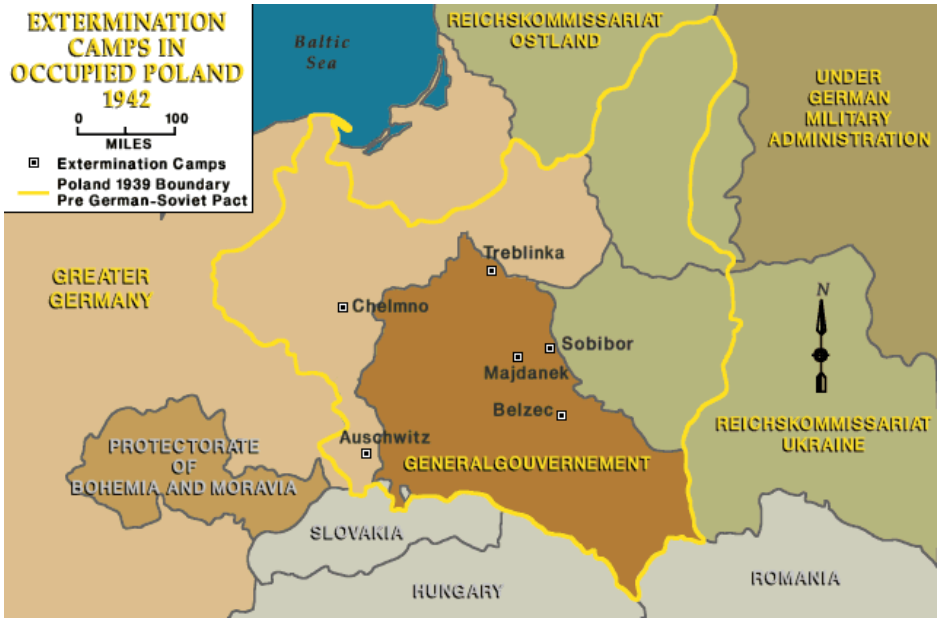
Meanwhile, in the spring of 1942, the Germans had begun to implement the so-called "Final Solution" in the Generalgouvernement within the framework of Operation Reinhard (the code name for the German plan to murder the 2 million Jews living in the Generalgouvernement), sending transports of Jews from the ghettos of Poland to the newly constructed killing centers at Belzec (where killing began in March 1942), Sobibor (May 1942), and Treblinka (July 1942). In his diary, Chaim Kaplan began to report the rumors that hinted at the systematic Nazi policy of extermination:

> It is reported that the Führer has decided to rid Europe of our whole people by simply having them shot to death… You just take thousands of people to the outskirts of a city and shoot to kill; that is all… In Vilna 40,000 Jews were shot to death… Had [Hitler] not stated that if war erupted in Europe, the Jewish race would be annihilated? This process has begun and will continue until the end is achieved." (February 2, 1942). Worse was to come: "I was told by an acquaintance of mine who has seen the official documents that thousands of Jews have been killed by poison gas. It was an experiment to test its effectiveness. (February 23, 1942).[5]

By spring 1942, the details described by Kaplan in his diary became even more specific as he included more detailed rumors regarding transports by rail cars and the execution of Lublin Jews. In June 1942 the news grew even

worse and hinted at a more systematic slaughter of the Jews of the Generalgouvernement:

> …A catastrophe will befall us at the hands of the Nazis and they will wreak their vengeance on us for their final downfall. The process of physical destruction of Polish Jewry has already begun…Not a day goes by that the Nazis do not conduct a slaughter…The rumors that reach us from the provincial towns are worse than the tidings of Job…" (June 16, 1942); "Every day Polish Jewry is being brought to slaughter. It is estimated… that three-quarters of a million Polish Jews have already passed from this earth… Some of them are sent to a labor camp, where they survive for a month at the outside… Some are shot; some are burned; some are poisoned with lethal gas; some are electrocuted." (June 25, 1942)[6]



— Map from US Holocaust Memorial Museum

The killing centers referred to in rumors recorded in Kaplan's diary were the "extermination camps" or "death camps" designed to carry out genocide. Between 1941 and 1945, the Nazis established six killing centers in former Polish territory—Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka, Auschwitz-Birkenau (part of the Auschwitz complex), and Majdanek. The first killing center was Chelmno, which opened in the Warthegau (part of Poland annexed to Germany) in December 1941. Mostly Jews, but also Roma (Gypsies), were

gassed in mobile gas vans there. In 1942, in the Generalgouvernement, the Nazis opened the Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka killing centers (known collectively as the Operation Reinhard camps) to systematically murder the Jews of Poland. In the Operation Reinhard killing centers, the SS and their auxiliaries killed approximately 1,526,500 Jews between March 1942 and November 1943, murdering Jews from Poland and Jews deported from central and western Europe there, too. Both Auschwitz and Majdanek functioned as concentration and forced-labor camps as well as killing centers. The largest killing center was Auschwitz-Birkenau, which by spring 1943 had four gas chambers (using Zyklon B poison gas) in operation. At the height of the deportations, up to 6,000 Jews were gassed each day at Auschwitz-Birkenau in Poland. Jews were deported from as far away as France, Holland, Greece, Italy, and Hungary to the killing centers in Poland. An estimated 3.5 million Jews were killed in these six killing centers as part of the Final Solution. Other victims included Roma (Gypsies) and Soviet prisoners of war.

On July 22, 1942 the great deportation from the Warsaw Ghetto to Treblinka began, as German SS and police authorities initiated the process that led to the deportation of approximately 275,000 – 300,000 Jews from the ghetto by September 12, 1942. Adam Czerniakow, chairman of the Warsaw Ghetto Judenrat, decided to commit suicide on July 23, 1942 rather than comply with the deportation order, writing in his final note, **"They are demanding that I kill the children of my people with my own hands. There is nothing for me to do but die."**[7] While Jewish police forces assisted in the first phase of the deportation, which targeted primarily refugees, the elderly, and the homeless, between July 31 and August 14, German forces raided the ghetto to round up Jews, and soon it became clear that the deportation had become a general liquidation. By mid-September, 35,000 Jews had been selected to remain in the ghetto, while another 25,000 managed to go into hiding.[8] In the context of the great deportation from the Warsaw Ghetto, on July 28, 1942 the Jewish Fighting Organization (Zydowska Organizacja Bojowa - ZOB) was founded by three Zionist youth movements, *Hashomer Hatzair, Dror,* and *Akiva* to organize Jewish self-defense and advocate armed struggle against the Germans. The command of the newly established organization consisted of Shmuel Breslaw, Yitzhak Zuckerman, Zivia Lubtekin, Mordecai Tenenbaum, and Joseph Kaplan.[9] Nonetheless, the Jewish Fighting Organization (Zydowska Organizacja Bojowa--ZOB), which would later include members of the Bund and Communist groups, proved powerless to prevent the Great Deportation of July/August 1942 that

decimated the ghetto.[10] After the decimation of the great deportation, the underground focused on acquiring arms and organizing themselves, planning a retaliation against the Jewish Police six months later for January 22, 1943. They called on the remaining Jews of Warsaw to support the resistance:

> Jewish masses, the hour is drawing near. You must be prepared to resist, not give yourselves up to slaughter like sheep. Not a single Jew should go to the railroad cars. Those who are unable to put up active resistance should resist passively, meaning go into hiding…Our motto should be: All are ready to die as human beings.[11]

Likewise, in September 1943, when the United Partisans Organizations (FPO) in Vilna called for armed resistance, Kovner again framed his call in a such a manner: "Brothers, it is better to fall in battle in the ghetto than to be led like sheep to Ponary…."[12] Even so, in Vilna, no uprising ever took place, as the head of the Jewish Council, Jacob Gens, convinced ghetto in habitants that rebellion would mean certain death.

In the Warsaw Ghetto, the Jewish Fighting Organization organized the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, which broke out with the final German liquidation of Warsaw on the eve of Passover, April 19, 1943, and lasted until May 16, 1943. The uprising was the first mass revolt in a major city in Nazi-occupied Europe, becoming a symbol of Jewish resistance to Nazi oppression, inspiring similar revolts in Bialystok and Minsk, as well as uprisings in Treblinka and Sobibor later in 1943. The Jewish fighters in Warsaw, under-equipped and over-matched, with few weapons and almost no military training, managed to hold off the German forces for as long as the entire Polish Army had in the invasion of Poland at the beginning of the war. Uprisings also took place in many other ghettos when final deportations were announced including:

- Nesvizh (July 22, 1942)
- Mir (August 9, 1942)
- Lachwa (September 3, 1942)
- Kremenets (September 9, 1942)
- Bialystok (August 16, 1943)
- Tarnow (September 1, 1943)
- Czestochowa (October 25, 1943)

All told there were underground groups in over 100 ghettos in eastern Poland. All four ghettos in Lithuania had resistance groups and in Belarus between 6000 and 10,000 managed to flee the ghetto in Minsk; some lived in family camps in the forests (the largest one was run by the Bielski group and contained 1500 people). An estimated 20,000 to 30,000 Jews fought in partisan groups based in the forests of eastern Europe.

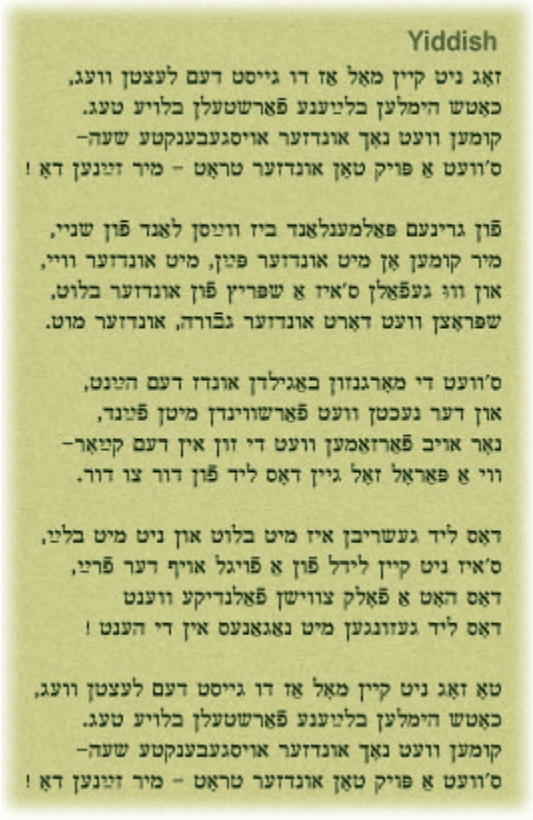
— Map from US Holocaust Memorial Museum

Uprisings in Camps

Despite almost impossibly difficult conditions, uprisings also occurred in death camps and concentrations camps. The most well known uprisings occurred in Treblinka in August 1943, Sobibor in October 1943, and Auschwitz in October 1944. About 1,000 Jewish prisoners took part in the revolt in Treblinka on August 2, 1943 and about 200 managed to escape. The Germans recaptured and killed about half of them almost immediately. On October 14, 1943, prisoners in Sobibor killed 11 SS guards and set the camp on fire. About 300 prisoners escaped, breaking through the barbed wire and risking their lives in the minefield surrounding the camp. Over 100 were recaptured and later shot. On October 7, 1944, prisoners assigned to Crematorium IV at Auschwitz-Birkenau rebelled after learning that they were going to be killed. During the uprising, the prisoners killed three guards and blew up the crematoria and connecting gas chamber using

explosives smuggled into the camp by Jewish women who had been assigned to forced labor in a nearby armaments factory.

Zog Nit Keyn Mol! Hymn of the Partisans
By Hirsh Glik, 1943



Yiddish

זאָג ניט קיין מאָל אַז דו גייסט דעם לעצטן וועג,
כאָטש הימלען בלײַענע פֿאַרשטעלן בלויע טעג.
קומען וועט נאָך אונדזער אויסגעבענקטע שעה–
ס׳וועט אָ פֿויק טאָן אונדזער טראָט – מיר זײַנען דאָ !

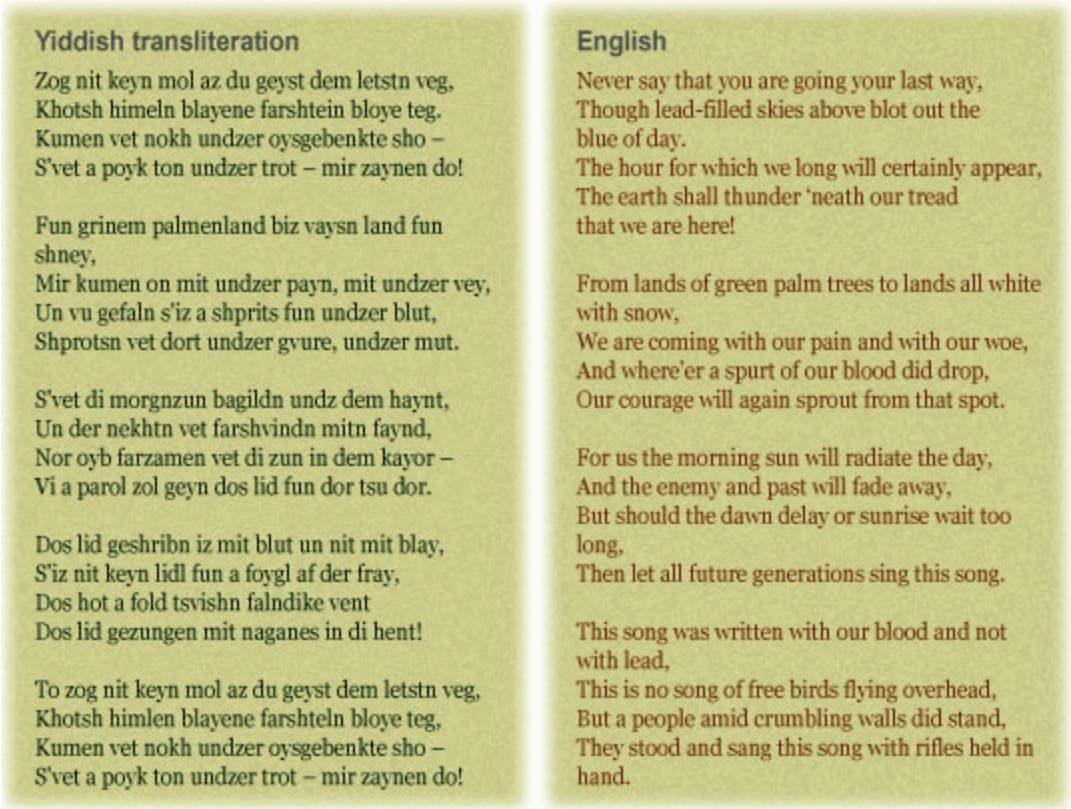
פֿון גרינעם פּאַלמענלאַנד ביז ווײַסן לאַנד פֿון שניי,
מיר קומען אָן מיט אונדזער פּײַן, מיט אונדזער ווי,
און וווּ גענפֿאַלן ס׳איז אָ שפּריץ פֿון אונדזער בלוט,
שפּראָצן וועט דאָרט אונדזער גבֿורה, אונדזער מוט.

ס׳וועט די מאָרגנזון באַגילדן אונדז דעם הײַנט,
און דער נעכטן וועט פֿאַרשווינדן מיטן פֿײַנד,
נאָר אויב פֿאַרזאַמען וועט די זון אין דעם קײַאָר–
ווי אָ פּאָראָל זאָל גיין דאָס ליד פֿון דור צו דור.

דאָס ליד געשריבן איז מיט בלוט און ניט מיט בלײַ,
ס׳איז ניט קיין לידל פֿון אָ פֿויגל אויף דער פֿרײַ,
דאָס האָט אָ פֿאָלק צווישן פֿאַלנדיקע וועלט
דאָס ליד געזונגען מיט נאָגאַנעס אין די הענט !

טאָ זאָג ניט קיין מאָל אַז דו גייסט דעם לעצטן וועג,
כאָטש הימלען בלײַענע פֿאַרשטעלן בלויע טעג.
קומען וועט נאָך אונדזער אויסגעבענקטע שעה–
ס׳וועט אָ פֿויק טאָן אונדזער טראָט – מיר זײַנען דאָ !

Written by a 21-year-old Yiddish poet, Hirsh Glik (1922-1944), Zog Nit Keyn Mol! became the hymn of the United Partisan Organization in 1943. It was sung in all the camps of Eastern Europe as a song of resistance. After the war, it reached Jewish communities around the world, where it has been sung as a memorial for Jews martyred during the war.



Yiddish transliteration

Zog nit keyn mol az du geyst dem letstn veg,
Khotsh himeln blayene farshtein bloye teg.
Kumen vet nokh undzer oysgebenkte sho –
S'vet a poyk ton undzer trot – mir zaynen do!

Fun grinem palmenland biz vaysn land fun shney,
Mir kumen on mit undzer payn, mit undzer vey,
Un vu gefaln s'iz a shprits fun undzer blut,
Shprotsn vet dort undzer gvure, undzer mut.

S'vet di morgnzun bagildn undz dem haynt,
Un der nekhtn vet farshvindn mitn faynd,
Nor oyb farzamen vet di zun in dem kayor –
Vi a parol zol geyn dos lid fun dor tsu dor.

Dos lid geshribn iz mit blut un nit mit blay,
S'iz nit keyn lidl fun a foygl af der fray,
Dos hot a fold tsvishn falndike vent
Dos lid gezungen mit naganes in di hent!

To zog nit keyn mol az du geyst dem letstn veg,
Khotsh himlen blayene farshteln bloye teg,
Kumen vet nokh undzer oysgebenkte sho –
S'vet a poyk ton undzer trot – mir zaynen do!

English

Never say that you are going your last way,
Though lead-filled skies above blot out the blue of day.
The hour for which we long will certainly appear,
The earth shall thunder 'neath our tread that we are here!

From lands of green palm trees to lands all white with snow,
We are coming with our pain and with our woe,
And where'er a spurt of our blood did drop,
Our courage will again sprout from that spot.

For us the morning sun will radiate the day,
And the enemy and past will fade away,
But should the dawn delay or sunrise wait too long,
Then let all future generations sing this song.

This song was written with our blood and not with lead,
This is no song of free birds flying overhead,
But a people amid crumbling walls did stand,
They stood and sang this song with rifles held in hand.

Rescue

Many Jews who managed to survive the war in occupied Europe owed their survival to some form of outside assistance, large or small, rendered by a principled individual who resolved to not stand idly by in the face of evil. Despite the indifference of most Europeans and the collaboration of others in the murder of Jews during the Holocaust, individuals in every European country and from all religious backgrounds risked their lives to help Jews. Rescue efforts ranged from small and isolated acts by individuals and families to organized networks with a broader impact. Since 1963, the State of Israel and Yad Vashem have recognized these people as the Righteous among the Nations. There were no major rescue operations mounted by the Allied forces who prioritized "winning the war" above all else. Individuals willing to help Jews in danger faced severe consequences if they were caught, and faced serious logistical challenges to provide supplies and shelter for those in hiding. Hostility towards Jews among non-Jewish populations, especially in eastern Europe, was also a major obstacle to rescue. Nonetheless, acts of rescue took many forms. In Denmark, where the deportation of the country's Jewish population was planned for October 1943, the Danish resistance organized a rescue operation, in which Danish

fishermen clandestinely ferried some 7,200 Jews (of the country's total Jewish population of 7,800) in small fishing boats, to safety in neutral Sweden. In the Generalgouvernement (German-occupied Poland), Poles affiliated with the Zegota (the code name for the *Rada Pomocy Zydom*, the Council for Aid to Jews), a Polish underground organization that provided for the social welfare needs of Jews, began operations in September 1942. Irena Sendler managed to save 2500 children she smuggled out of the Warsaw ghetto and placed with Aryan families. Rescuers came from every religious background: Protestant and Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Muslim. In various parts of Europe, churches, orphanages, and families provided hiding places for Jews, and in some cases, individuals aided Jews who had gone into hiding on their own (such as Anne Frank and her family in the Netherlands). In France, the (Huguenot) Protestant population of the small village of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon sheltered between 3,000 and 5,000 refugees, most of them Jews. In France, Belgium, and Italy, underground networks run by Catholic clergy and lay Catholics saved thousands of Jews. Such networks were especially active both in southern France, where Jews were hidden and smuggled to safety to Switzerland and Spain, and in northern Italy, where many Jews went into hiding after Germans occupied Italy in September 1943.

Magda and Andre Trocmé, Le Chambon-sur-Lignon

A number of individuals with diplomatic connections also used their personal influence to rescue Jews. In Lithuania, following the Soviet occupation of the country the Japanese diplomat, Chiune Sempo Sugihara and the Dutch counsul, Jan Zwartendik, provided thousands of transit visas to Jews in Lithuania who had fled the German invasion of Poland to aid in their escape via Japan. From mid-July to early September 1940, Sugihara worked twenty hours per day, writing thousands of visas by hand, enabling thousands of Jews to flee before the German invasion of the USSR in June 1941. Among the Jewish refugees that arrived in Vilna were some 2,400 yeshiva students and their teachers, including those of the Mir Yeshiva. The Mir Yeshiva was the only yeshiva that managed to leave Lithuania in its entirety thanks to the assistance of Sugihara and transit visas provided by Zwartendik. Aristide de Sousa Mendes, the Portuguese consul in Bordeaux, France, managed to issue over 1500 visas over the course of one week in June 1940 to assist Jews seeking to escape the Nazi invasion. Asked later to explain his actions: "If thousands of Jews are suffering because of one Christian (Hitler), surely one Christian may suffer for so many Jews." When the Germans occupied Hungary in 1944, the Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg (who was also an agent of the US War Refugee Board), Swiss diplomat Carl Lutz, and Italian citizen Giorgio Perlasca (posing as a Spanish diplomat), provided certificates that offered protection to tens of thousands of Jews in Budapest.

Oskar Schindler, a German industrialist, took over an enamelware factory located outside the Krakow ghetto in German-occupied Poland deemed a "business essential to the war effort." He later protected over a thousand Jewish workers employed there and in the Plaszow work camp, even rescuing a group deported to the Auschwitz concentration camp.

In Bulgaria, the deportation of more than 11,000 Jews from Bulgarian-occupied Thrace, Macedonia, and Pirot to Treblinka in March 1943 by the Bulgarian military and police authorities shocked and shamed key political, intellectual, and religious figures into an open protest against any deportations from Bulgaria proper, leading the Bulgarian King Boris III, to reverse the decision of his government to comply with the German request to deport the Jews of Bulgaria. Other non-Jews, such as Jan Karski, a courier for the Polish government-in-exile, sought to expose Nazi plans to murder the Jews. After sneaking into Nazi-occupied Poland, Karski met with Jewish leaders in the Warsaw ghetto and in the Izbica transit ghetto in late summer of 1942. He transmitted their reports of mass killings in the Belzec killing

center to Allied leaders, including President Franklin D. Roosevelt, with whom he met in July 1943. Some groups based in the United States also engaged in rescue efforts. Among these were the Quakers' American Friends Service Committee and the Unitarians, who coordinated relief activities for Jewish refugees in France, Portugal, and Spain throughout the war. Rescuers of Jews during the Shoah demonstrated the possibility of individual choice under extreme circumstances to resist evil and perform acts of goodness, whether they saved over a thousand people or a single life. Nonetheless, these and other acts of conscience and courage, saved only a tiny percentage of those targeted for destruction.

The End of the War and its Aftermath

In late 1942 and early 1943, the Allied forces achieved a series of significant military triumphs in North Africa and Soviet troops launched a counteroffensive at Stalingrad, beginning a push to recover territory conquered by Germany that would take over two years. In July 1943, the Allies landed in Sicily and in September went ashore on the Italian mainland. On June 6, 1944 (D-Day), as part of a massive military operation, over 150,000 Allied soldiers landed in France, which was liberated by the end of August. On September 11, 1944, the first US troops crossed into Germany, one month after Soviet troops crossed the eastern border. The Soviets liberated most of Poland in late fall 1944 and American troops crossed the Rhine River on March 7, 1945; a final Soviet offensive on April 16, 1945, enabled Soviet forces to encircle the German capital, Berlin. As Soviet troops fought their way towards the Reich Chancellery, Hitler committed suicide on April 30, 1945. On May 7, 1945, Germany surrendered unconditionally to the Western Allies at Reims and on May 9 to the Soviets in Berlin. In August, the war in the Pacific ended soon after the US dropped atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, killing 120,000 civilians. Japan formally surrendered on September 2. World War II resulted in an estimated 55 million deaths worldwide. It was the largest and most destructive conflict in history.

Beginning in the summer and fall of 1944, as Allied troops moved across Europe in a series of offensives against Nazi Germany, they began to encounter tens of thousands of concentration camp prisoners. Soviet forces were the first to approach a major Nazi camp, reaching Majdanek near Lublin, Poland, in July 1944. In the summer of 1944, the Soviets also

overran the sites of the Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka killing centers, which the Germans had already dismantled in 1943 after most of the Jews of Poland had already been killed. When the Soviets liberated Auschwitz, the largest killing center and concentration camp on January 27, 1945, they found only several thousand emaciated prisoners there, as the Nazis had forced the majority of Auschwitz prisoners to march westward (in what would become known as "death marches"). In the months that followed, Soviet forces also liberated camps in the Baltic and Poland, as well as the Stutthof, Sachsenhausen, and Ravensbrueck concentration camps. American forces liberated the Buchenwald concentration camp near Weimar, Germany, on April 11, 1945, a few days after the Nazis began evacuating the camp. They also liberated Dora-Mittelbau, Flossenbürg, Dachau, and Mauthausen. British forces liberated concentration camps in northern Germany, including Neuengamme and Bergen-Belsen, entering the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, near Celle, in mid-April 1945. Some 60,000 prisoners, most in critical condition because of a typhus epidemic, were found alive. More than 10,000 of them died from the effects of malnutrition or disease within a few weeks of liberation.

--Map courtesy USHMM

The *She'erit Hapletah* or Surviving Remnant

The Jewish Displaced Persons, or *She'erit Hapletah* (Surviving Remnant), emerged from the catastrophe of the Holocaust to form a vibrant, active, and fiercely independent community that played a prominent role in diplomatic negotiations leading to the creation of the state of Israel.

Immediately following the liberation of Germany by the victorious Allied forces on May 8, 1945, the country was inundated with up to 10 million forced laborers, POWs, and other displaced persons (DPs) who flooded the roads of Germany in the desire to return home. According to statistics prepared by UNRRA (the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration), there were 1,488,007 DPs in Germany, Austria, and Italy immediately after the war, of which, 53,322 were Jews, or 3.6 percent. According to Allied policy, a displaced person was defined "as any civilian who because of the war was living outside the borders of his or her country and who wanted to but could not return home or find a new home without assistance." Displaced persons were initially divided into categories by place of origin into those from enemy and Allied countries. Germany and Austria were divided into American, British, and Soviet zones of occupation, with a small area in the southwest of Germany made into the French zone of occupation. The majority of the Jewish population, perhaps some 35,000 out of 50,000 liberated, was in the American zone of occupation in Germany, many of them around Munich.

Soon after liberation Jewish survivors began to search for surviving family members, although most Jews found that few had survived. For those Jewish DPs who made the decision to remain in Germany, the majority chose to live in a DP camp (generally hastily erected refugee camps that were often converted German military barracks, former POW and slave labor camps, tent cities, industrial housing, and the like); approximately 15,000 German Jewish survivors chose to rebuild their pre-war communities in German cities. Those survivors who remained in the camps faced deplorable conditions: poor accommodations, no plumbing, no clothing, rampant disease, continuing malnourishment, and a lack of any plan on the part of the American military. And indeed, of the approximately 50,000 Jewish survivors at the time of liberation, within the first weeks following liberation, many thousands perished from complications arising from disease, starvation, and the camp experience.

The Jewish survivors organized quickly amongst themselves to represent the needs of the surviving Jewish population in the summer of 1945, with the Central Committee of Liberated Jews forming in the American zone under the leadership of Samuel Gringauz and Zalman Grinberg, and the Central Committee of Liberated Jews in the British zone, under the leadership of Josef Rosensaft. The reports of continuing deprivation and poor organization of recovery sent by the DPs and Jewish chaplains eventually prompted American officials to take a greater interest in the problem of the displaced persons. President Truman dispatched Earl Harrison (Dean of the University of Pennsylvania Law School and former US Commissioner for Immigration and Naturalization) to survey conditions in the DP camps. In his scathing report back to Truman, Harrison concluded that we are "treating the Jews as the Nazis treated them except that we do not exterminate them." He proposed that Jews be separated in their own camps - until then they had been forced to live with other national groups and former collaborators- and, to resolve their refugee status, he proposed that 100,000 immigration certificates to Palestine be granted immediately to the Jewish DPs. Following Harrison's report, American authorities, under the leadership of General Eisenhower, worked to ameliorate conditions for Jewish DPs, moving Jews to separate camps and agreeing to the appointment of an Adviser for Jewish Affairs.

With the arrival of over 100,000 Jews fleeing continued persecution and anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe with the *Bricha* (lit. "Escape"), the Jewish DP population reached 250,000 in Germany, Italy, and Austria by the beginning of 1947 (approx. 185,000 were in Germany, 45,000 in Austria, and 20,000 in Italy.) The surviving population was characterized by a highly youthful demographic: reports and surveys consistently estimated the proportion of Jewish DPs between the ages of 15-30 at more than half and often above 80 percent of the total Jewish population. In the absence of families, many survivors quickly created new families, as evidenced by the many weddings and the remarkable birthrate among the surviving population in the first year after liberation.

While still living in a transitional situation, hoping for the possibility of emigration, DPs succeeded in creating a vibrant and dynamic community in hundreds of DP camps and communities across Germany, Italy, and Austria. With the assistance of representatives from UNRRA, the AJDC, the Jewish Agency, and other organizations, schools were established throughout the DP camps. The largest camps, including Landsberg, Feldafing, and

Föhrenwald in the American zone of Germany, and Bergen-Belsen in the British zone, boasted a vibrant social and cultural life, with a flourishing DP press, theater life, active Zionist youth movements, athletic clubs, historical commissions, and yeshivot testifying to the rebirth of Orthodox Judaism. The DPs took an active role in representing their own political interests: political parties (mostly Zionist in nature, with the exception of the Orthodox Agudat Israel) administered camp committees and met at annual congresses of the She'erit Hapletah. The Zionist youth movements, with the assistance of emissaries from Palestine, created a network of at least 40 agricultural training farms throughout Germany on the estates of former Nazis and German farmers, demonstrating their ardent desire for immigration to Palestine and performing an act of symbolic revenge against the Germans.

Members of Kibbutz Nili on the way to work in the fields, ca. 1946 (USHMM Photo Archives)

The Harrison Report served to link the resolution of the Jewish DP situation with the situation in Palestine, thereby elevating the diplomatic implications of the Jewish DP political stance. International observers from the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry and the United Nations deemed DP Zionist enthusiasm central to the resolution of the political conflict over the land of Palestine. As their stay dragged on in Europe, DPs staged mass protests condemning the British blockade of Palestine and participated in the illegal immigration (aliyah bet) movement to Palestine, most noticeably in the Exodus Affair of 1947. Eventually, the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) recommended that the problem of the 250,000

Jewish Displaced Persons be dealt with through the partition of Palestine. Following the passage of the UN partition plan (November 29, 1947) and the creation of the state of Israel in May 1948, approximately 2/3 of the DP population immigrated to the new state, with a sizable percentage of the younger segment participating in the fighting in the 1948 war. Most of the remainder immigrated to the United States, which had only become a realistic immigration option following passage of the Displaced Persons Act in 1948 and the amended DP Act of 1950, which authorized 200,000 DPs (Jewish and non-Jewish) to enter the United States. By 1952, over 80,000 Jewish DPs had immigrated to the United States under the terms of the DP Act and with the aid of Jewish agencies. Almost all of the DP camps were closed by 1952.

Museums and Memorials

Already in the DP camps, but even more so once survivors dispersed across Europe, Israel, the Americas, Canada, Australia and elsewhere, they engaged in the production, indeed the collective writing and publication of hundreds of *yizker* (memorial) books commemorating the lives and histories of Jewish communities destroyed in the Holocaust. The proliferation of *yizker* books in the first two decades after World War II represents one of the most poignant expressions of permanent exile from destroyed European homes by Holocaust survivors in their new diaspora. As Jack Kugelmass and Jonathan Boyarin have noted, "the memorial books [were] the fruit of the impulse to write a testament for future generations. They constitute an unprecedented, truly popular labor to record in writing as much as possible of a destroyed world."[13] Indeed, *yizker* books functioned as memorials created by survivors to remember European Jewish communities and with their ability to connect *landsleyt* around the globe, *landsmanshaftn* were the most crucial vehicle in the publication of as many as 700 such books.[14] Usually written in Hebrew or Yiddish, most *yizker* books were compiled by ordinary people who remembered life in their hometown. While the first *yizker* books were published in the late 1940s in Yiddish by survivors in the United States and Canada, by the 1950s, the majority of *yizker* books were published in Israel in Yiddish and Hebrew.

The cover of the Kolomyya Yizkor Book (1957) illustrated by Chaim Gross

Yizker books were generally divided into two sections: life before the war and the destruction of the community during the Shoah. The sections on life before the war often include brief histories of the communities from the time of their establishment, as well as chapters on education, politics, religious life, youth movements, and more, trying to recapture the vitality and diversity of these communities as their survivors and descendants remembered them. Sections on the histories of the town during the war include testimonies by survivors, as well as short histories of resistance groups, escape attempts, ghetto life, and the eventual liquidation of the town.[15]

Among the first Holocaust memorials and museums to be dedicated in Israel in 1949 was the Ghetto Fighters House Kibbutz in Israel, founded in 1949 by surviving ghetto fighters, including prominent members of the Jewish Fighting Organization in Warsaw. (In 1949, a small Holocaust memorial was opened on Mount Zion in Jerusalem, the Holocaust Memorial Chamber). Yad Vashem, Israel's official memorial to the Holocaust, was established in Jerusalem on Mount Herzl in 1953, when Yom Hashoah veha-

Gevurah, Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day, was designated at the 27th of Nisan, to correspond with the timing of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Survivors also began to publish memoirs of their wartime experiences, including *Night* by Elie Wiesel (published as *Un di Velt Hot Geshvign*, "And the World Remained Silent" in 1954 in Yiddish, and as *Night* in 1960 in English) and Primo Levi's *If This is a Man* (published in Italian as *Se questo è un uomo* in 1947 and in English, titled *Survival in Auschwitz* in 1959). The 1960 capture of Adolf Eichmann by Israeli special agents in Argentina and the subsequent trial in Jerusalem led to an even more prominent place for Holocaust survivor testimony in the public eye, as survivors functioned as prosecution witnesses and played a central role in the 1961 trial leading to Eichmann's death sentence. Since the 1980s survivor organizations have been involved in public campaigns leading to the establishment of a great variety of Holocaust memorials and museums. Holocaust survivors and their children came to play a prominent role in the creation of Holocaust museums and memorial institutions in the many countries of their resettlement, spreading the mission of Holocaust education and memorialization worldwide. In the United States, the United States Holocaust Memorial Council was established by Congress in 1980 to "lead the nation in commemorating the Holocaust and to raise private funds for and build the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum" which was officially opened on April 19, 1993.[16] In New York, City, the Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust was opened in 1997. Likewise, survivors have played an important role in confronting Holocaust denial and neo-Nazism. For example, in the late 1970s, when neo-Nazis attempted to organized mass marches in Skokie, Illinois, survivors joined together to form the Holocaust Memorial Foundation of Illinois, first focusing on education to combat hate speech, leading to the 1990 Holocaust Education Mandate in Illinois and eventually the opening of the Illinois Holocaust Museum in 2009.[17] Survivor organizations have also been a significant voice—even if not the only one—leading many European states to create national Holocaust memorial days since the year 2000.[18] The United Nations General Assembly designated January 27 to be International Holocaust Remembrance Day in 2005, commemorating the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz by Soviet troops. The day is observed as Holocaust Remembrance Day in ceremonies around the world, paying tribute to survivors and liberators, and their role in continuing to educate the world about the horrors of the Holocaust.[19]

Conclusion

In the aftermath of the Holocaust, the historical commissions created by survivors in the DP camps, understood the duty to remember after the Shoah as "holy work" (*heylike arbet*) and the fact of having survived the cataclysm made bearing witness a "holy duty" (*heyliker khoyv*), a moral obligation towards the past, present, and future. Commission activists believed that not only would they be able to make the fate of the dead known through the historical record on an individual level, but the act of collecting and recording in itself functioned as a symbolic "gravestone" or "memorial" for the millions of dead of the recent cataclysm. The commissions understood their work as a continuation of the documentation project directed by the Polish Jewish historian Emmanuel Ringelblum in the underground of the Warsaw Ghetto in the years 1940-1943 and as a response to "the last will of the famous Jewish historian, Professor Dubnow, who shouted on his last way: 'Jews, write, record and tell this to the future generations.'" In 1986, at his Nobel Prize Lecture, noted survivor and author Elie Wiesel, extended the imperative to remember beyond an obligation that Jews carried to the dead and the living: "If anything can, "it is **memory** that will save **humanity**." As we listen to the stories of survivors who remain to share their experiences with next generations, we, too, become witnesses to the memory of the Shoah. The Survivors have chosen to share their memories with us, in the hope that the memory of evil, the memory of righteousness, and the memory of the victims, can help us engage in the act of repairing the world. As you learn from their experiences, think about the role you can play in sharing these memories with others – What will you remember? Why will you remember? How will you remember?

Mankind must **remember** that **peace** is not God's gift to his creatures, it is **our gift to each other.**

--Elie Wiesel, Nobel Prize Lecture, 1986

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[1] Outside of Poland, the Jewish communities were more likely to be represented by national councils that coordinated Jewish life in the occupied countries; thus for Germany: Reichsvertretung; France: UGIF (General Union of Israelites of France, founded in November 1941; Belgium: AJB (Association of Jews in Belgium, founded Nov. 1941; Holland: Jewish Council- early 1941; Slovakia: Sept. 1940; Hungary: March 1944; Greece: no central council; several city councils; first one in largest Jewish city: Saloniki.

[2] Martin Dean, ed., The USHMM encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, volume II: Ghettos in German-occupied Eastern Europe, "Warsaw."

[3] For more on the role of women as couriers in occupied Poland and in the resistance more generally, see Dalia Ofer and Lenore Weitzman, eds., *Women in the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), esp. Lenore J. Weitzman, "Living on the Aryan Side in Poland: Gender, Passing and the Nature of Resistance," 187–222; Nechama Tec, *Resilience and Courage: Women, Men, and the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 263-65.

[4] Ringelblum diary, May 12, 1942 (Source: *Notes from the Ghetto*, p. 273-274).

[5] Kaplan, *Scroll of Agony*, 296-299.

[6] Ibid., 351, 370.

[7] For a detailed account of the Deportation, see Engelking and Leociak, p. 698-730.

[8] Gutman, *Jews of* Warsaw, 197.

[9] Gutman, 236.

[10] Gutman, *The Jews of Warsaw, 1939-1943: Ghetto, Underground, Revolt* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 291.

[11] "Call to Resistance by the Jewish Fighting Organization in the Warsaw Ghetto, January 1943," *Archiwum Zydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego w Polsce* (Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute in Poland), ARII/333. (cited in Israel Gutman, *The Jews of Warsaw*, 305.) See also Joseph Kermish, ed., *Mered Geto Varshah be-Einei ha-Oyev* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1966), 589.

[12] "Proclamation by the F.P.O. Calling for Revolt in Vilna, September 1, 1943," in Yitzhak Arad and Israel Gutman, eds., *Documents on the Holocaust* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1981), 459.

[13] Jack Kugelmass and Jonathan Boyarin, *From a Ruined Garden: The Memorial Books of Polish Jewry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 17.

[14] Gali Druker Bar-Am, "Narrating bygone Places: Yizker Bikher between History and Literature," forthcoming; see also Diner, *We Remember*, 46-50.

[15] See Rosemary Horowitz, ed., *Memorial Books of Eastern European Jewry: Essays on the History and Meanings of Yizker Volumes* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company

Publishers, 2011); Rita Horvath, "The role of the survivors in the remembrance of the Holocaust: memorial monuments and 'Yizkor' books," in *The Routledge History of the Holocaust* (2011) 470-481. Yizkor book translations: http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/translations.html

[16] See http://www.ushmm.org/information/about-the-museum/council (accessed February 14, 2016).

[17] See https://www.ilholocaustmuseum.org/pages/about/history/ (accessed February 8, 2016).

[18] Rebecca Clifford, *Commemorating the Holocaust: The Dilemmas of Remembrance in France and Italy* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 182-253.

[19] In 2016, UN secretary general Ban Ki Moon again noted the role of survivors in education: "For more than a decade, the Holocaust and the United Nations Outreach Programme has worked to educate young people about the Holocaust. Many partners – including Holocaust survivors – continue to contribute to this essential work. The memory of the Holocaust is a powerful reminder of what can happen when we stop seeing our common humanity. On this day of Holocaust remembrance, I urge everyone to denounce political and religious ideologies that set people against people. Let us all speak out against anti-Semitism and attacks against religious, ethnic or other groups. Let us create a world where dignity is respected, diversity is celebrated, and peace is permanent." http://www.un.org/en/holocaustremembrance/2016/sg.html