



WHEN
HUMANITY
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Glossary of Holocaust Terms

Glossary

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GLOSSARY OF HOLOCAUST TERMS

Aktion – /ak tsion/: Term used for anti-Jewish operations carried out by the Nazis. This word often refers to deportations and killing operations.

Allies: The group of nations including the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union who during WW II joined in the war against Germany, Italy and Japan.

Antisemitism: Opposition to and discrimination against Jews. Antisemitism is often based on prejudices and hatred towards Jews because of their belief, ethnicity, and false belief that Jews are part of a different “race.” While antisemitism was not a new concept to the Jews of Europe, Nazi antisemitism was different from past prejudices in that it portrayed Jews as racially inferior.

Aryan: A term for peoples speaking the language of Europe and India. In Nazi racial theory, this was a person of pure German “blood.” The term “non-Aryan” was used to designate Jews and others as inferior. In 1933, “non-Aryans” were defined as individuals who had a parent or grandparent who was Jewish.

Assimilation: The process of becoming incorporated into mainstream society. Strict observance of Jewish laws and customs pertaining to dress, food, and religious holidays, tend to keep Jewish people separate and distinct from the culture of the country within which they are living.

Auschwitz - Birkenau /oushvits - bia ke now/: A complex consisting of concentration, extermination, and labor camps in Poland. It was established in 1940 as a concentration camp, and in 1942 it included a killing center. There were several camps within the complex: Auschwitz I was the main camp. Auschwitz II (also known as Birkenau) was the extermination center. Auschwitz III (Monowitz) was the I.G. Farben labor camp, also known as Buna. In addition, there were numerous subsidiary camps.

Babi Yar /bahbi yahr/: A ravine outside of the Ukrainian city, Kiev, where tens of thousands of Ukrainian Jews were systematically massacred. From September 29-30, 1941, close to 34,000 Jews were murdered.

Belzec /bel zets/: Nazi extermination camp in eastern Poland. Erected in 1942. Approximately 550,000 Jews were murdered there in 1942 and 1943. The Nazis dismantled the camp in the fall of 1943.

Bergen-Belsen /bea gen bel zen/: Nazi concentration camp in northwestern Germany that was erected in 1943. Thousands of Jews, political prisoners, and POWs were killed there. The camp was originally designated for prisoners who were supposed to be exchanged for German nationals in Allied countries. At the end of 1944, thousands of prisoners from camps in the east were forcibly marched into the camp. The camp was liberated on April 15, 1945 by British forces, who found nearly all 60,000 inmates in critical condition due to starvation and a typhus outbreak. In the weeks following liberation, close to 28,000 of the liberated inmates died from illness.

Blitzkrieg /blits krieg/: Meaning “lightning war,” Hitler’s offensive tactic using a combination of armored attack and air assault.

Blood Libel: An allegation, recurring during the 13th–16th centuries, that Jews were killing Christian children to use their blood for the ritual of making unleavened bread (matzoh). A red mold, which occasionally appeared on the bread, perpetuated this myth.

Boycott: To abstain from buying or using a specific product as an expression of distaste and protest. The German government initiated boycotts on Jewish-owned businesses and professionals.

B’richa: The organized and illegal mass movement of Jews throughout Europe following World War II.

British White Paper of 1939: British policy of restricting immigration of Jews to Palestine.

Buchenwald /boo khien vald/: Concentration camp in North Central Germany established in 1937 as a labor camp. Many died there from harsh living conditions, overwork and abuse. Jews from other camps were forcibly marched to Buchenwald as the Allies approached in early 1945.

Bund /boond/: The Jewish Socialist Party founded in 1897. It aspired to equal rights for the Jewish population. During World War II, the Bund was active in the underground resistance and some Bund members were also part of some Judenrat councils. They took part in the Warsaw ghetto uprising.

Chancellor: Chief (prime) minister of Germany.

Chelmno /kheim no/: Nazi extermination camp in western Poland, established in 1941 as the first Nazi extermination camp to use carbon monoxide gas vans as the method for murdering Jews. Over 300,000 Jews and other political prisoners were murdered there. The Nazis dismantled the camp in late 1944 and early 1945.

Collaboration: Cooperation between citizens of a country and its occupiers.

Communism: A concept or system of society in which the collective community shares ownership in resources and the means of production. In theory, such societies provide for equal sharing of all work according to ability, and all benefits according to need. In 1848, Karl Marx, in collaboration with Friedrich Engels, published the Communist Manifesto, which provided the theoretical drive for the Russian Bolshevik Revolution in 1917.

Concentration camp (Konzentrationslager, KZ) /kon tsen tra tions lah ga/: Concentration camps were prisons used by the Nazis without regard to accepted norms of arrest and detention. They were an essential part of Nazi systematic oppression. Camps were initially established for political prisoners but were later used for non-political prisoners – members of society deemed “inferior.” Death, disease, starvation, crowded and unsanitary conditions and torture were a daily part of concentration camps.

Dachau /da khou/: Nazi concentration camp in southern Germany. This was the first Nazi concentration camp built in 1933. Nazi doctors and scientists used many prisoners at Dachau as guinea pigs for experiments. Dachau was liberated by American troops in April 1945.

Death camp: Nazi extermination centers where Jews and other victims were brought to be killed as part of Hitler’s Final Solution.

Death marches: Forced marches of Nazi camp prisoners over long distances and under intolerable conditions toward the German interior at the end of WW II. Jews on the marches were brutally treated and thousands were shot or died of starvation, exhaustion and illness. Prisoners were transferred from one ghetto or concentration camp to another ghetto or concentration camp or to a death camp.

Dehumanization: The Nazi policy of denying Jews basic civil rights such as practicing religion, education, and adequate homes.

Displacement: The process, either official or unofficial, of people being involuntarily moved from their homes because of war, government policies, or other societal actions, requiring groups of people to find new places to live.

DP: Displaced Person. WW II left millions of soldiers and civilians homeless. The tens of thousands of Jewish survivors of Nazi camps either could not or did not want to return to their former homes in Germany or Eastern Europe, and many lived in special DP camps while awaiting migration to America or Palestine.

Eichmann, Adolph (1906 - 1962) /aihk mahn ah dolf/: SS Lieutenant Colonel and head of the Gestapo department dealing with Jewish affairs. He was executed in 1962 after a trial in Jerusalem.

Einsatzgruppen /ain zats groop en/: Mobile death squads that followed the German armies to Poland in 1939 and to the Soviet Union in June

1941. Their charge was to kill all Jews, as well as communist functionaries, the handicapped, institutionalized psychiatric patients, Gypsies, and others considered undesirable by the Nazi state. They were supported by units of the uniformed German Order Police and often used auxiliaries (Ukrainian, Latvian, Lithuanian, and Estonian volunteers). The victims were executed by mass shootings and buried in unmarked mass graves.

Eisenhower, Dwight D.: As Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Forces, General Eisenhower commanded all Allied forces in Europe beginning in 1942.

Euthanasia: Nazi euphemism for the deliberate killings of institutionalized physically, mentally, and emotionally handicapped people. The euthanasia program began in 1939, with German non-Jews as the first victims. The program was later extended to Jews.

Evian Conference: A conference initiated by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in July of 1938 to discuss the plight of refugees of Eastern and Western Europe. 32 countries met in Evian-les-Baines, France. Very little was accomplished at the conference due to the reluctance and excuses of most countries to accept Jewish refugees.

Fascism: A social and political ideology with the primary guiding principle that the state or nation is the highest priority, rather than personal or individual freedoms.

Final Solution (The final solution to the Jewish question in Europe): A Nazi euphemism for the plan to exterminate the Jews of Europe.

Flossenburg /flos en boorg/: Bavarian camp established in 1938/39 mainly for political, particularly foreign, prisoners.

Führer /few ra/: Leader. Adolf Hitler's title in Nazi Germany.

Gas chambers: Large chambers in which people were executed by poison gas. These were built and used in Nazi death camps.

Genocide: The deliberate and systematic destruction of an ethnic, religious or national group of people to the point that the unit no longer represents a distinct unit.

Gentile: A person not of the Jewish faith. This term most often refers to a Christian.

Gestapo /geshtapoh/: The Nazi Secret State Police. Prior to the outbreak of war, the Gestapo used brutal methods to investigate and suppress resistance to Nazi rule within Germany. After 1939, the Gestapo expanded its operations into Nazi-occupied Europe. The Gestapo was directly involved in implementing ideology.

Ghettos: Ghettos were usually established in the poor sections of a city, where most of the Jews from the city and surrounding areas were

subsequently forced to reside. Often surrounded by barbed wire or walls, the ghettos were sealed. Established mostly in Eastern Europe (e.g., Lodz, Warsaw, Vilna, Riga, or Minsk), the ghettos were characterized by overcrowding, malnutrition, and heavy labor. All ghettos were eventually dissolved, and the remaining Jews deported and murdered. The Nazis revived the medieval term ghetto to describe their device of concentration and control, the compulsory “Jewish Quarter.”

Guerrilla warfare: Fighting in which small independent bands of soldiers harass an enemy through surprise raids, attacks on communications and the like.

Gypsies: A collective term for Romani and Sinti communities who are believed to have come originally from northwest India. Alternately welcomed and persecuted since the 15th century, they were considered enemies of the state by the Nazis and persecuted relentlessly. Approximately 500,000 Gypsies are believed to have perished in the gas chambers.

Hate group: A group whose worldview is based on intolerance or hatred of specific people based on religious, race, ethnicity or lifestyle. Hate groups often claim superiority to those whom they look down upon and may use violence in an attempt to remove the people they hate from their surroundings.

Himmler, Heinrich (1900-1945) /him la hain rikh/: As head of the SS and the secret police, Himmler had control over the vast network of Nazi concentration and extermination camps, the Einsatzgruppen, and the Gestapo. Himmler committed suicide in 1945, after his arrest.

Von Hindenburg, Paul /fon hin den boorg poul/: General Field Marshal who became a German national hero during World War I and was Reich president from 1925 to 1934.

Hitler, Adolf (1889-1945) /hit la ah dolf/: Nazi party leader, 1919-1945. German Chancellor, 1933-1945. Called Führer, or supreme leader, by the Nazis.

Hitler Youth (Hitler Jugend) /hit la yoo gend/: A Nazi youth auxiliary group established in 1926. Membership became obligatory after 1939. The group emphasized physical training, Nazi ideology and complete obedience and dedication to the Nazi regime. Hitler youth exposure to Nazi propaganda and misrepresentation regarding Jews, resulted in young adults who believed wholeheartedly in racial and national superiority.

Holocaust: Derived from the Greek *holokauston*, which meant a sacrifice totally burned by fire. Today, the term refers to the systematic planned extermination of approximately six million European Jews and millions of Gypsies, Jehovah’s Witnesses, homosexuals, mentally ill and handicapped, by the Nazis and their collaborators between the years 1933-1945.

Holocaust denial: An antisemitic movement that claims the Holocaust never happened or that minimizes or trivializes the experience of Jews during WW II.

International Military Tribunal: A court chartered by the United States, Great Britain, France, and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics to prosecute Nazi war criminals.

Jehovah's Witnesses: Religious sect that originated in the United States and consisted of approximately 20,000 members in Germany in 1933. Their religious beliefs did not allow them to swear allegiance to any worldly power making them enemies of the Nazi state.

Judenrat /yoo den raht/: Council of Jewish "elders" established in many Nazi-occupied Jewish communities. These councils were appointed to implement Nazi directives within the ghettos.

Kippah /kippa/: The head covering worn by Jewish men that reminds a Jewish man that God exists above. It is worn by some Jews all the time and by other Jews during prayers or meals.

Kosher: Food that is permissible to consume under Jewish dietary laws.

Kristallnacht /krish tahl nakht/: A government-organized pogrom against Jews in Germany and Austria. The event is also known as the "Night of the Broken Glass." On this night, November 9, 1938, almost 1,400 synagogues were destroyed, over 7,000 Jewish shops sacked and looted, 100 Jews were killed and 30,000 Jews were taken to concentration camps. This pogrom received its name because of the amount of glass that was smashed during this anti-Jewish riot. Kristallnacht was organized as retaliation for the assassination of a German embassy official by a Jewish teenager.

League of Nations: An international organization to promote world peace and cooperation, created by the Treaty of Versailles in 1919. The league was dissolved in April 1946.

Lodz Ghetto /lo sch/: The first large-scale ghetto established in Poland in May of 1940. 164,000 Jews lived in the ghetto at one time. Jews who were deported from the Lodz ghetto were sent to Chelmno death camp. The ghetto was completely emptied between August and September of 1944 and the remaining 60,000 Jews were deported to Auschwitz.

Majdanek /mai dah nek/: Nazi camp and killing center opened for men and women near Lublin in eastern Poland in 1941. At first a labor camp for Poles and a POW camp for Russians, it was classified as a concentration camp in April 1943. Like Auschwitz, it was also a major killing center. Soviet forces liberated Majdanek in July 1944.

Mein Kampf /mine kahmpf/: Meaning "My Struggle," was the ideological base for the Nazi Party's racist beliefs and murderous plan. The book was published in 1925 and detailed Hitler's radical ideas of German nationalism, antisemitism, anti-Bolshevism, and Social Darwinism.

The Nazi (National Socialist German Workers') Party: NSDAP was the party founded in Germany on January 5, 1919 after WW I. Its platform was based on militaristic, racial, antisemitic and nationalistic policies. The party was taken over by Adolf Hitler in the 1920's and party membership and political power grew dramatically in the 1930's. Popularity within the party was partly based on political propaganda, mass rallies and demonstrations. The swastika was the party symbol.

Nuremberg Trials: Trials of 22 major Nazi figures in Nuremberg, Germany in 1945 and 1946 before the International Military Tribunal.

Nuremberg Laws: A set of laws announced by Hitler at the Nuremberg Party conference on September 15, 1935. The "Reich Citizenship Law" deprived all Jews of their civil rights, and the "Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor" made marriages and extra-marital relationships between Jews and Germans punishable by imprisonment. Jews were no longer allowed to display the German national flag. These laws would be followed by 13 additional decrees over the next eight years.

Partisans: Irregular forces who used guerrilla tactics when operating in enemy-occupied territory. Throughout Europe, partisans joined together in guerilla warfare against the Germans. Jewish partisans played an important role in parts of the Soviet Union and Southern European countries. In Western Europe partisan activity was characterized by "underground" operations.

Perpetrators: Those who do something that is morally wrong or criminal.

Plaszow: Concentration camp near Krakow, Poland, opened in 1942.

Pogrom: The word used to describe an organized and often officially encouraged attack on Jewish communities. The word is derived from the Russian word meaning "devastation" and was originally instigated by authorities in Czarist Russia.

Prejudice: A pre-judgment or opinion of a person or group formed before the facts are known. In most cases, these opinions are founded on suspicion, intolerance, stereotypes and the irrational hatred of other races, religions, creeds, or nationalities.

Propaganda: False or partly false information used by a government or political party intended to sway public opinions on a specific matter.

Reich /raikh/: German word for empire.

Reichstag /raikhs tag/: The German Parliament. On February 27, 1933, a staged fire burned the Reichstag building. A month later, on March 23, 1933, the Reichstag approved the Enabling Act which gave Hitler unlimited dictatorial power.

Resettlement: German term used for the deportation of prisoners to killing centers in Poland. Jews were often told they would be deported for resettlement in the East, when in fact they were being deported to death camps.

Revisionism: Advocating for the revision of an accepted, long lasting view, theory or doctrine. Holocaust revisionists are those who deny that the Holocaust happened.

Righteous Gentiles: Non-Jews who risked their lives or careers to save Jews during the Holocaust. Today, in a field of trees planted in their honor at the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem, Israel commemorates their courage and compassion, and titles them, "Righteous Among the Nations."

Roosevelt, Franklin Delano: 32nd President of the U.S., who served from 1933-1945.

Scapegoating: To blame an individual or group for something based on that individual or group's identity. Scapegoating occurs when someone with prejudices is looking for someone to blame for a larger problem.

Shoah /sho a/: The Hebrew word meaning "catastrophe," denoting the catastrophic destruction of European Jewry during World War II. The term is used in Israel, and the Knesset (the Israeli Parliament) has designated an official day, called *Yom ha-Shoah*, as a day of commemorating the *Shoah* or Holocaust.

Shtetl /shte tl/: A small Jewish town or village in Eastern Europe.

Sobibór /so bi bor/: Extermination camp located in the Lublin district of eastern Poland. Sobibór opened in May 1942 and closed the day after a rebellion by its Jewish prisoners on October 14, 1943. At least 250,000 Jews were killed there.

SS (Schutzstaffel /shoots shtah fl/ or Protection Squad): Guard detachments originally formed in 1925 as Hitler's personal guard. The entire SS organization was transformed under Heinrich Himmler and is most responsible for the destruction of the Holocaust.

S.S. St. Louis: One of the last refugee ships to leave Nazi Germany before WW II officially began, the St. Louis set sail from Hamburg to Havana on May 13, 1939. On board the ship were 937 Jewish refugees fleeing persecution after Kristallnacht. While each passenger carried valid temporary entry visas for Cuba, the Cuban government declared the visas invalid as the ship approached the coast. After several failed attempts to negotiate with Cuba, as well as with the United States, the ship set sail from the coast of Miami back to Europe. Belgium gave the refugees permission to disembark; however, most of the refugees eventually found themselves back under Nazi power as the war progressed.

Star of David: A six-pointed star, which is a symbol of Judaism. During the Holocaust, Jews throughout Europe were required to wear Stars of David on their sleeves or fronts and backs of their shirts and jackets.

Stereotype: Biased generalizations about a group based on hearsay, opinions, and distorted or preconceived ideas.

Der Stürmer /shtoo a ma/: Antisemitic newspaper founded by Hitler's friend, Julius Streicher, which reached a peak circulation of 500,000 in 1927.

Sudetenland /zoo dey ten lahnt/: Formerly Austrian German-speaking territories in Bohemia, which were incorporated into Czechoslovakia after World War I.

Survivor: In the context of the history of the Holocaust, a survivor is someone who escaped death at the hands of the Nazi regime.

Swastika (Hakenkreuz/haa ken kroits/): An ancient symbol appropriated by the Nazis as their emblem.

Synagogue /sin a gog/: Jewish house of worship.

Tallis /tallis/: Jewish prayer shawl with fringes on four sides. These fringes represent the four corners of the world and symbolize God's omnipresence.

Theresienstadt /te rey si en shtat/ (Terezín/te re zeen/): Nazi ghetto located in Czechoslovakia. It was created in late 1941 as a "model Jewish settlement" to deceive the outside world, including International Red Cross investigators, as to the treatment of the Jews. However, conditions in Terezín were difficult, and most Jews held there were later killed in death camps. Theresienstadt is the German name for the town; Terezín is the Czech name.

Third Reich /raich/: Meaning "third regime or empire," the Nazi designation of Germany and its regime from 1933-45. Historically, the First Reich was the medieval Holy Roman Empire, which lasted until 1806. The Second Reich included the German Empire from 1871-1918.

Torah /tora/: A scroll containing the five books of Moses.

Treaty of Versailles /versai/: A peace treaty signed between Germany and the Allies at the end of World War I. The United States, Great Britain, France and Italy negotiated the treaty at the Peace Conference held in Versailles beginning on January 18, 1919. The German Republic government administration was excluded from the deliberations. The treaty created the Covenant of the League of Nations, outlined Germany's disarmament, required massive reparation payments from Germany, and forced Germany to surrender territory to other European nation-states.

Treblinka /tre blin ka/: Extermination camp in Poland that was opened in July 1942. It was the largest of the three Operation Reinhard killing centers. Approximately 870,000 Jews were killed there. Treblinka was closed in November of 1943 after a revolt by the inmates on August 2, 1943 destroyed most of the camp.

Umschlagplatz /oom shlag plats/: Place in Warsaw where freight trains were loaded and unloaded. During the deportation from the Warsaw ghetto, it was used as an assembly point where Jews were loaded onto cattle cars to be taken to Treblinka. It literally means "transfer point."

Underground: Organized group acting in secrecy to oppose government or, during war, to resist occupying enemy forces.

Victim: An individual who is targeted for persecution or death.

Quota: A specific number or percentage of persons of a specified kind permitted to immigrate to a country. Before the outbreak of WW II, immigration quotas prevented Jews from seeking refuge in other countries.

Raoul Wallenberg: A Swedish diplomat who deliberately stationed himself in Hungary during the war to save Hungarian Jews from their deaths.

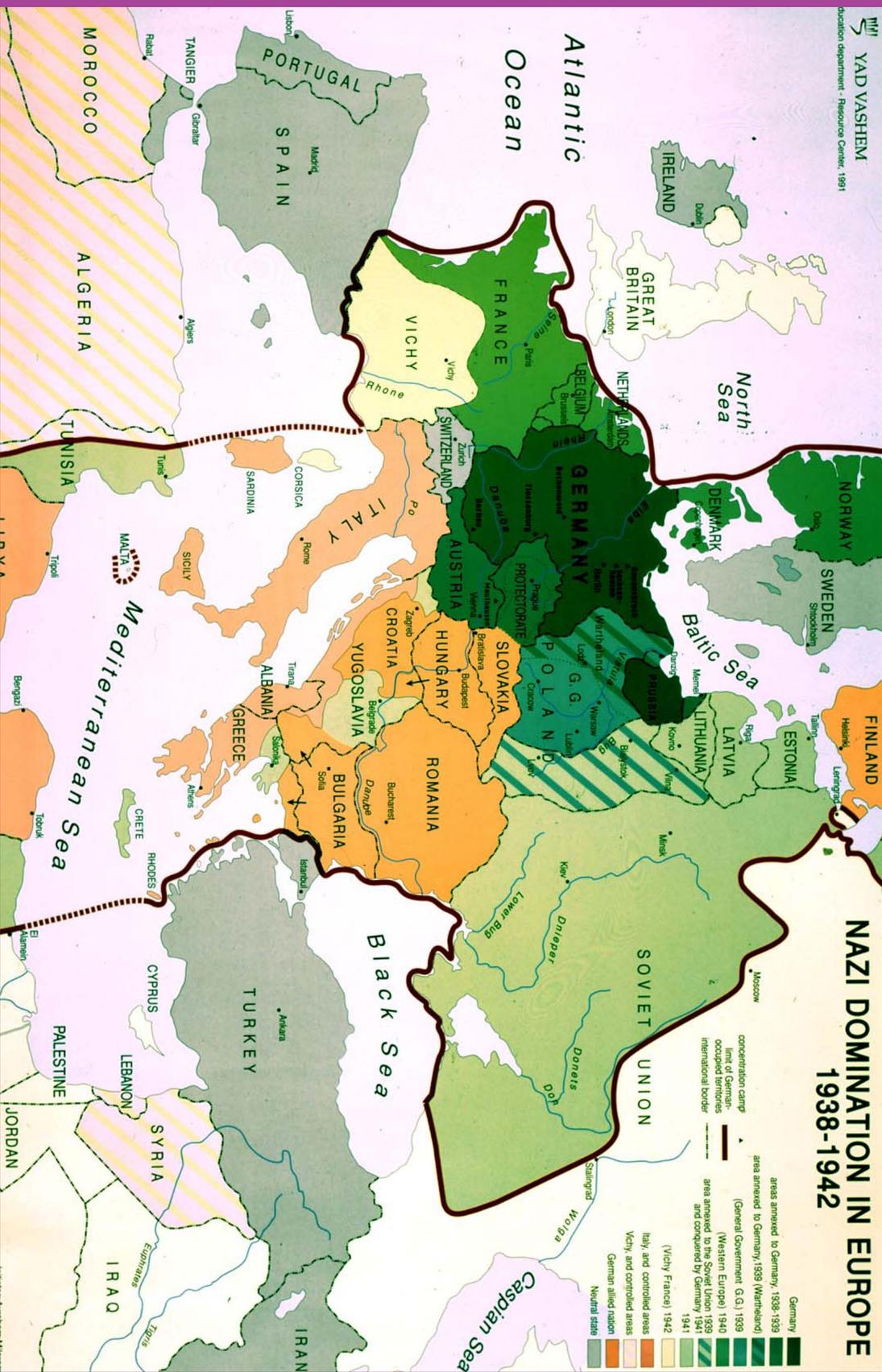
Wannsee Conference /van zey/: The official conference on January 20, 1942 on a lake in Berlin where the SS official, Reinhard Heydrich, helped present and coordinate the Final Solution. This was the meeting where the annihilation of European Jews was officially set into action.

Warsaw Ghetto: Walled-in area of the city of Warsaw where nearly 500,000 Jews lived, beginning in November of 1940. Approximately 45,000 Jews died there in 1941 alone as a result of overcrowding, hard labor, lack of sanitation, insufficient food, starvation and disease. During 1942, most of the ghetto residents were deported to Treblinka, leaving about 60,000 Jews in the ghetto. A revolt took place in April 1943 when the Germans attempted to raze the ghetto and deport the remaining inhabitants to Treblinka. The defense forces, led by Mordecai Anielewicz, included all Jewish political parties. The fighting lasted 28 days and ended with the destruction of the ghetto.

Westerbork: Transit camp in the Netherlands that was originally established by the Danish government for Jewish refugees, and then became a transit camp for Danish Jews awaiting deportation to extermination camps between the years 1942 and 1944.

Z.O.B: Jewish Fighting Organization established in the summer of 1942 when rumors of the mass murder of Jews leaked into the Warsaw ghetto. Mordechai Anielewicz and other young surviving Jews in the Warsaw ghetto led the Z.O.B.. It called upon the Jewish people to resist the deportations and join in the resistance movement within the ghetto.

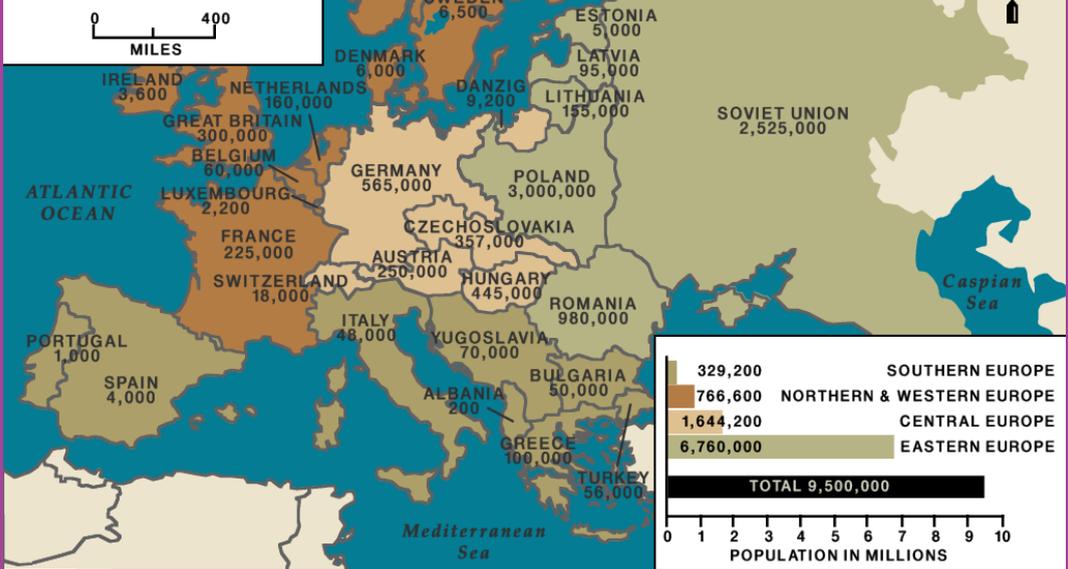
Zyklon B: (Hydrogen cyanide) Pesticide used in some of the gas chambers at the death camps.



Yad Vashem Holocaust Resource Center

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EUROPEAN JEWISH POPULATION DISTRIBUTION CIRCA 1933



USHMM map of Jewish communities in Poland c. 1933

Credit: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC.

EUROPEAN JEWISH POPULATION DISTRIBUTION CIRCA 1950



USHMM map of European Jewish communities c. 1950 depicting the aftermath of the Holocaust.

Credit: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC.

Resources for Glossary and Timeline

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