

TIMELINE OF THE HOLOCAUST

- January 30 German President Paul von Hindenburg appoints Adolf Hitler Chancellor. Hitler is leader of the National Socialist German Workers' Party (Nazi Party).
- February 27-28 The German parliament (Reichstag) building burns down due to arson. The government falsely portrays the fire as part of a Communist effort to overthrow the state.
- In the Decree of the Reich President for the Protection of People and State, President von Hindenburg grants emergency powers to the Nazi/DNVP coalition government under Adolf Hitler. Popularly known as the Reichstag Fire Decree, it suspends civil rights in Germany and allows for imprisonment without trial. It also gives the central government the authority to overrule state and local laws and overthrow state and local governments.
- March 22 Outside the town of Dachau, Germany, the SS establishes the first SS-managed concentration camp to incarcerate political opponents of the regime. Dachau is the only concentration camp to remain in operation from 1933 until 1945.
- March 23 The German parliament passes the Enabling Act, which empowered Hitler to establish a dictatorship.
- April 1 Members of the Nazi Party and its affiliated organizations (such as the SS, SA, and the Hitler Youth) organize and implement a nationwide boycott of Jewish-owned businesses in Germany.
- April 7 The German government issues Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service which excludes Jews and political opponents from all civil service positions. (Similar laws passed in the following weeks affected Jewish lawyers, judges, doctors, and teachers.)
- May 10 German student organizations supported by Nazi Party members organize public rallies across Germany. They burn books written by Jews, political opponents, and liberal intellectuals, and announce that they are "purifying" German libraries of "un-German" books.
- July 14 The German parliament issues the Law against the Founding of New Political Parties, which establishes the Nazi Party as the sole legal political party in Germany. Nazi Germany formally becomes a one-party state.
- The German government also passes the Law for the Prevention of Offspring with

Hereditary Diseases, mandating the forced sterilization of certain individuals with physical and mental disabilities. This new law provides a basis for the involuntary sterilization of people with physical and mental disabilities or mental illness, Roma (Gypsies), “asocial elements,” and Afro-Germans.

The Law on the Revocation of Naturalization is also enacted, which deprives foreign and stateless Jews as well as Roma (Gypsies) of German citizenship.

1934

June 30
– July 1

In what will come to be called “the Night of the Long Knives,” on Hitler’s orders members of the Nazi party and police murder members of the Nazi leadership, army, and others. Hitler declares the killings legal and necessary to achieve the Nazi party’s aims. The murders are reported throughout Germany and in other countries.

August 2

German President von Hindenburg dies. With the support of the German armed forces, Hitler becomes President of Germany. Later that month Hitler abolishes the office of President and declares himself Führer of the German Reich and People, in addition to his position as Chancellor. In this expanded capacity, Hitler now becomes the absolute dictator of Germany; there are no legal or constitutional limits to his authority.

October 7

In standardized letters sent to the government, Jehovah’s Witness congregations from all over Germany declare their political neutrality but also affirm defiance of Nazi restrictions on the practice of their religion.

1935

April 1

The German government bans the Jehovah’s Witness organization. The Nazis persecute Jehovah’s Witnesses because of their religious refusal to swear allegiance to the state.

June 28

The German Ministry of Justice revises Paragraphs 175 and 175a of the criminal code to criminalize all homosexual acts between men. The revision provides the police broader means for prosecuting homosexual men.

September 15

The German parliament passes the Nuremberg Race Laws.

The Nuremberg Race Laws consist of two pieces of legislation: the Reich Citizenship Law and the Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor. A special

session of the Nazi-controlled Reichstag passed both laws at the Party's rally in Nuremberg, Germany. These laws institutionalized many of the racial theories underpinning Nazi ideology and provided the legal framework for the systematic persecution of Jews in Germany. The Nuremberg Race Laws did not identify a "Jew" as someone with particular religious convictions but instead as someone with three or four Jewish grandparents. Many Germans who had not practiced Judaism or who had not done so for many years found themselves still subject to legal persecution under these laws. Even people with Jewish grandparents who had converted to Christianity could be defined as Jews.

1936

- June 6** The Minister of the Interior for the Reich and Prussia issues a decree addressing "the Gypsy plague." The decree officially recognizes many regulations and restrictions already in place at the local level on Roma (Gypsies) residing in Germany. Under its authority, state and local police forces round up Roma as well as other persons who they deem to be behaving in "a Gypsy-like manner."
- July 12** Prisoners and civilian workers begin construction of the concentration camp Sachsenhausen at Oranienburg near Berlin. By September, German authorities will have imprisoned about 1,000 people in the camp.
- July 16** German authorities order the arrest and forcible relocation of all Roma (Gypsies) in the Greater Berlin area to a special camp in the Berlin suburb of Marzahn. Beginning in 1938 the authorities begin to deport Roma from Marzahn to other concentration camps, such as Sachsenhausen and Auschwitz.
- August 1-6** The Summer Olympic Games open in Berlin, attended by athletes and spectators from countries around the world. The Olympic Games are a propaganda success for the Nazi government, as German officials make every effort to portray Germany as a respectable member of the international community. They remove anti-Jewish signs from public display and restrain anti-Jewish activities. In response to pressure from foreign Olympic delegations, Germany also includes one part-Jew, the fencer Helene Mayer, on its Olympic team. Germany also lifts anti-homosexuality laws for foreign visitors for the duration of the games.
- August 28** German authorities implement mass arrests of Jehovah's Witnesses in Germany. Most are sent to concentration camps.

1937

July 15 The Inspectorate of Concentration Camps opens the Buchenwald concentration camp near the city of Weimar, Germany.

1938

March 11-13 German troops invade Austria, and Germany incorporates Austria into the German Reich in what is called the *Anschluss*.

July 6-15 Delegates from 32 countries and representatives from refugee aid organizations attend the Evian Conference at Evian, France, to discuss immigration quotas for refugees fleeing Nazi Germany. The United States and most other countries were unwilling to ease their immigration restrictions.

September 29-30 Germany, Italy, Great Britain, and France sign the Munich agreement, by which Czechoslovakia must surrender its border regions and defenses (the so-called Sudeten region) to Nazi Germany. German troops occupy these regions between October 1 and 10, 1938.

October 5 The Reich Ministry of the Interior invalidates all German passports held by Jews. Jews must surrender their old passports, which will become valid only after the letter "J" has been stamped on them.

November 9-10 In a nationwide pogrom called *Kristallnacht* ("Night of Crystal," more commonly known as the "Night of Broken Glass"), members of the Nazi Party and other Nazi formations burn synagogues, loot Jewish homes and businesses, and kill at least 91 Jews. The Gestapo, supported by local uniformed police, arrests approximately 30,000 Jewish men and imprisons them in the Dachau, Sachsenhausen, and Buchenwald concentration camps.

November 15 German authorities ban the attendance of Jewish children in German public schools. Jewish children can attend only segregated Jewish schools that are financed and managed by the Jewish communities.

December 8 Heinrich Himmler issues the Decree for "Combating the Gypsy Plague." The decree centralizes Nazi Germany's official response to so-called "Gypsy Question"; defines Gypsies as an inferior race; tasks the German Criminal Police with establishing a nationwide database, and identifies all Gypsies residing on the territory of the so-

called Greater German Reich.

1939

- February 9** Senator Robert Wagner of New York and Representative Edith Rogers of Massachusetts introduce a bill to permit the entry of 20,000 refugee children, ages 14 and under, from the Greater German Reich into the United States over the course of two years (1939 and 1940). The children would be granted entry without reference to the quota system. The bill dies in committee in the summer of 1939.
- March 15** German troops enter the remaining territory of Czechoslovakia.
- May 13-17** Over 900 refugees aboard the *S.S. St. Louis*, most of them Jewish, leave Hamburg, Germany, for Cuba, in hope of receiving entry visas to the United States. Cuba and the United States will refuse to accept the refugees, forcing them to return to Europe.
- August 23** The Soviet and German governments sign the Molotov-Ribbentrop Non-Aggression Pact in which they agree to divide up eastern Europe, including Poland; the Baltic states of Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia; and parts of Romania.
- September 1** German troops invade Poland, initiating World War II in Europe.
- September 3** Britain and France fulfill their promise to protect Poland's border and declare war on Germany.
- October** Hitler signs an authorization (later backdated to September 1, 1939) that shields German physicians participating in the so-called "euthanasia" program from future prosecution. "Euthanasia" policy is designed to systematically kill Germans with mental and physical disabilities living in institutions, persons of both genders and all ages who the participating physicians deemed "incurable" and thus "unworthy of life." Health care professionals sent tens of thousands of institutionalized mentally and physically disabled people to central "euthanasia" killing centers where they were murdered by lethal injection or in gas chambers.
- October 26** Germany annexes the former Polish regions of Upper Silesia, West Prussia, Pomerania, Poznan, Ciechanow (Zichenau), part of Lodz, and the Free City of Danzig (Gdansk). German authorities place those areas of occupied Poland not annexed directly by Germany or by the Soviet Union under a German civilian administration called the

General Government.

November 23 German authorities require that, by December 1, 1939, all Jews residing in the General Government wear white badges with a blue Star of David.

1940

April 9-June 10 German troops invade and occupy Denmark and Norway.

May 10 German forces begin their invasion of the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, and France. By June 22, Germany will occupy all of these regions except for southern (Vichy) France.

May 20 SS authorities establish the Auschwitz concentration camp (Auschwitz I) outside the Polish city of Oswiecim.

June 10 Italy enters the war as an ally of Germany.

June 30 German authorities order the first major Jewish ghetto, in Lodz, to be sealed off, confining at least 160,000 people in the ghetto. Henceforth, all Jews living in Lodz have to reside in the ghetto and cannot leave without German authorization.

November 15 German authorities order the Warsaw ghetto in the General Government to be sealed. It is the largest ghetto in both area and population, confining more than 350,000 Jews (about 30 percent of the city's population) in an area of about 1.3 square miles, or 2.4 percent of the city's total area.

1941

April 6 German and other Axis forces (Italy, Bulgaria, and Hungary) invade Yugoslavia and Greece.

June 22 Germany and its Axis forces invade the Soviet Union in Operation Barbarossa. German mobile killing squads called *Einsatzgruppen* are assigned to identify, concentrate, and kill Jews behind the front lines. By the spring of 1943, the *Einsatzgruppen* will have killed more than a million Jews and an undetermined number of partisans, Roma (Gypsies), and officials of the Soviet state and the Soviet Communist party.

- July 31 Reich Marshal Hermann Göring charges SS-Gruppenführer Reinhard Heydrich, head of the Security Police and the SD (Security Service), to take measures for the implementation of the “Final Solution of the Jewish question.” The “Final Solution” is a euphemism for the mass murder of the Jewish population of Europe.
- September 3 At the Auschwitz concentration camp, SS functionaries perform their first gassing experiments using Zyklon B. The victims are Soviet prisoners of war and non-Jewish Polish inmates.
- September 15 The German government decrees that Jews over the age of six who reside in Germany must wear a yellow Star of David on their outer clothing in public at all times.
- September 29-30 German SS, police, and military units shoot an estimated 33,000 persons, mostly Jews, at Babi Yar, a ravine on the outskirts of Kiev (in Ukraine). In the following months, German units will shoot thousands of Jews, Roma (Gypsies), and Soviet prisoners of war at Babi Yar.
- October 15 German authorities begin the deportation of Jews from the German Reich to the ghettos of Lodz, Riga, and Minsk.
- October 23 The German government forbids Jews to emigrate from the Greater German Reich.
- October-November SS functionaries begin preparations for Einsatz Reinhard (Operation Reinhard; often referred to as Aktion Reinhard), with the goal of murdering the Jews in the General Government. Preparations include construction of the killing centers Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka in the territory of the General Government.
- November 24 German authorities establish the Theresienstadt (also known as Terezin) camp/ghetto, in the German controlled Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.
- November 26 SS authorities establish a second camp at Auschwitz, called Auschwitz-Birkenau or Auschwitz II. The camp is originally designated for the incarceration of large numbers of Soviet prisoners of war but later it will be used as a killing center.
- December 1 Einsatzkommando 3, a subunit of Einsatzgruppe A that operates in Lithuania, reports that its members have killed 136,442 Jews since June 1941.
- December 7 Japan bombs Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. The next morning, the United States declares war

on Japan.

December 8 Gassing operations using special mobile gas vans begin at Chelmno, one of six Nazi killing centers. Located about 30 miles northwest of Lodz, the killing center operates from December 1941 until March 1943 and then briefly in June and early July 1944.

December 11 Germany and Italy declare war on the United States.

1942

January 20 Senior Nazi officials meet at a villa in the outskirts of Berlin at the Wannsee Conference to discuss and coordinate implementation of the “Final Solution.”

March 17 At the Belzec killing center, an SS special detachment begins using gas chambers to kill people. Between March 17 and December 1942, approximately 600,000 people, mostly Jews but also an undetermined number of Roma (Gypsies), are killed at Belzec.

March 27 German authorities begin systematic deportations of Jews from France. By the end of August 1944, the Germans will deport more than 75,000 Jews from France to camps in the east, mostly to the Auschwitz-Birkenau killing center. Fewer than 3,000 survive.

May 4 SS officials perform the first selection of victims for gassing at the Auschwitz-Birkenau killing center. Weak, sick, and “unfit” prisoners are selected and housed in an isolation ward prior to being killed in the gas chambers. Between May 1942 and January 1945, more than one million people are killed or die at the Auschwitz camp complex. Close to 865,000 are never registered and most likely are selected for gassing immediately upon arrival. Nine out of ten of those who die at the Auschwitz complex are Jewish.

May 7 After trial gassings in April, an SS special detachment begins gassing operations at the Sobibor killing center. By November 1943, the special detachment will have killed approximately 250,000 Jews at Sobibor.

May 27 In occupied Belgium, German authorities issue a decree requiring all Jews to wear the yellow star.

May 29 German authorities require all Jews residing in France to wear the yellow Star of David on their outer clothing, effective June 7.

- May 31 German authorities open the I.G. Farben labor camp at Auschwitz III (also known as Monowitz or Buna), situated near the main camp complex at Auschwitz.
- July 15 German authorities begin deportation of Dutch Jews from the Westerbork, Amersfoort, and Vught camps in the Netherlands to killing centers and concentration camps in Germany and German-occupied Poland. By September 3, 1944, around 100 trains will have carried more than 100,000 people to Auschwitz, Sobibor, Theresienstadt, and Bergen-Belsen, including about 60,000 Jews to Auschwitz and about 34,000 Jews to Sobibor.
- July 22 Between July 22 and September 12, German SS and police authorities, assisted by auxiliaries, deport approximately 300,000 Jews from the Warsaw ghetto to killing centers and concentration camps. Of that number, about 265,000 Jews are sent to the Treblinka killing center where they are murdered.
- July 23 Gassing operations begin at the Treblinka killing center. Between July 1942 and November 1943, SS special detachments at Treblinka murder an estimated 750,000 Jews and at least 2,000 Roma (Gypsies).
- August 4 German authorities begin systematic deportations of Jews from Belgium. The deportations continue until the end of July 1944. The Germans deport more than 25,000 Jews, about half of Belgium’s Jewish population, to the Auschwitz-Birkenau killing center in occupied Poland, where most of them perish.
- October 26 With the assistance of collaborationist Norwegian officials, the Germans begin rounding up Jews in Norway. The Germans eventually deport approximately 770 Norwegian Jews to killing centers and concentration camps.
- December 17 The Allied nations, including the governments of the United Kingdom and the United States, issue a press release stating explicitly that the German authorities are engaging in mass murder of the European Jews, and that those responsible for this “bestial policy of cold-blooded extermination” will “not escape retribution.”

1943

- January 18-22 SS and police units deport approximately 6,500 Jews from the Warsaw ghetto to the Treblinka killing center, and shoot another nearly 1,400 Jews in the ghetto. Members of

the Jewish Fighting Organization (Zydowska Organizacja Bojowa; ZOB) resist the actions of the SS and police with armed force.

April 19
-May 16

In what is called the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, Jewish fighters resist the German attempt to liquidate the ghetto. German SS and police units shoot approximately 7,000 Jews during the suppression of the uprising and deport another 7,000 of those who survive the armed revolt to Treblinka. The Operation Reinhard deportation coordination office will send approximately 42,000 surviving Warsaw ghetto residents to Lublin/Majdanek concentration camp and to forced-labor camps for Jews. Some resistance fighters escape from the ghetto and join partisan groups in the forests around Warsaw. The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising is the first armed revolt of civilians in German-occupied Europe.

April 30

German authorities establish a “residence camp” at Bergen-Belsen for Jews suitable for prisoner exchanges with the western Allies. This camp is on a portion of an already existing prisoner-of-war camp. The SS Inspectorate of Concentration Camps later designates the “residence camp” as a concentration camp, where over 36,000 prisoners, most of them Jews, eventually die, including Anne Frank and her sister, Margot.

June 21

Heinrich Himmler, leader of the SS, orders the liquidation of all ghettos in the Baltic states and Belorussia (Belarus) and the deportation of all Jews to concentration camps.

August 2

Jewish prisoners revolt at the Treblinka killing center. Although more than 300 prisoners escape, most are caught and killed by German SS and police units assisted by army troops. The SS special detachment forces surviving prisoners to remove all remaining traces of the camp’s existence. After the killing center is dismantled in November 1943, the special detachment shoots the remaining prisoners.

September 8

Italy, Germany's Axis partner, surrenders unconditionally to the Allies. German military and police units quickly occupy northern Italy.

September 20

Approximately 7,200 Danish Jews escape to Sweden with the help of the Danish resistance movement and many individual Danish citizens.

October 14

Jewish prisoners at the Sobibor killing center begin an armed revolt. Approximately 300 escape. German SS and police units, with assistance from German military units, recapture more than 100 and kill them. After the revolt, SS special detachments close

and dismantle the killing center.

1944

- March 19** German troops occupy Hungary.
- April 5** Under German guidance, Hungarian authorities require all Jews to wear the yellow star.
- May 15-July 9** Hungarian gendarmerie (rural police units), under the guidance of German SS officials, deport nearly 430,000 Jews from Hungary. Most are deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau where SS staff killed most of them in gas chambers.
- May 15-18** German authorities deport 7,003 German, Austrian, and Czech Jews from the camp-ghetto Theresienstadt to Auschwitz-Birkenau in order to “thin out” the Jewish population of Theresienstadt in preparation for the upcoming June 23 visit of representatives of the International Red Cross and the Danish Red Cross. Upon arrival in Auschwitz-Birkenau, the prisoners on these transports are incarcerated in a “Theresienstadt family camp” in Birkenau.
- May 16** The SS attempts to liquidate the Gypsy family camp BIIe at Auschwitz. Having been tipped off by a camp official, the inmates, armed with knives, shovels, and other weapons, refuse to leave their barracks. As a result of internal disagreement and in the face of resistance from the prisoners, the SS postpones the liquidation of the family camp until August 1944.
- June 6** D-Day. British and American troops launch an invasion of France.
- June 24 – August 14** War Refugee Board representative John Pehle and several US Jewish organizations including the World Jewish Congress make several requests to the US government to bomb the gas chambers at Birkenau or the rail lines leading to Birkenau. Assistant Secretary of Defense John J. McCloy handles most of these requests. The US government declines the requests on the grounds that Auschwitz-Birkenau is not a military target, that such a mission would divert resources needed to bring the war to a successful conclusion, and that the speedy end of the war would be most effective in saving lives.
- August 2** The SS liquidates the Gypsy family camp BIIe at Auschwitz-Birkenau. The SS authorities transport 1,408 Roma from the family camp and from Auschwitz I to Buchenwald

concentration camp. SS men then murder the remaining 2,897 inmates of the Gypsy family camp in the gas chambers at Birkenau.

October 7 At Auschwitz-Birkenau, the *Sonderkommando* (special detachment of Jewish prisoners deployed to remove corpses from the gas chambers and burn them) blows up Crematorium IV and kills the guards. About 250 participants of the revolt die in battle with the SS and police units. The SS and police units shoot 200 more members of the *Sonderkommando* after the battle ends.

November 25 The SS begin to demolish the gas chambers and crematoria at Auschwitz-Birkenau.

1945

January 17 As Soviet troops approach, SS units begin the final evacuation of prisoners from the Auschwitz camp complex, marching them on foot toward the interior of the German Reich. These forced evacuations come to be called “death marches.”

January 27 Soviet troops liberate Auschwitz, finding approximately 7,000 prisoners left behind in the main camp and its subcamps.

April 11 U.S. troops liberate more than 20,000 prisoners at Buchenwald.

April 15 British troops liberate about 60,000 prisoners at the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp.

April 29 Nordhausen, Ohrdruf, Gunskirchen, Ebensee and Dachau are liberated by U.S. troops. U.S. troops liberate approximately 32,000 prisoners at Dachau.

Hitler commits suicide in his bunker in Berlin.

April 30 Soviet troops liberate over 2,000 prisoners at Ravensbrück. In April, before Soviet troops reached the camp, SS authorities had murdered between 5,000 and 6,000 prisoners in the gas chamber at Ravensbrück.

May 2 German units in Berlin surrender to Soviet forces.

May 5 U.S. troops liberate more than 17,000 prisoners at Mauthausen concentration camp and more than 20,000 prisoners at the Gusen concentration camps in the annexed

Austrian territory of the German Reich.

May 7-9

German armed forces surrender unconditionally in the West on May 7 and in the East on May 9. Allied and Soviet forces proclaim May 8, 1945, to be Victory in Europe Day (V-E Day).

May 9

Soviet forces enter and liberate the camp-ghetto Theresienstadt.

Soviet forces liberate Stutthof concentration camp, near Danzig.

August 3

United States special envoy Earl Harrison makes a public report to President Truman on the treatment of Jewish displaced persons (DPs) in Germany. Following World War II, several hundred thousand Jewish survivors are unable or unwilling to return to their home countries. Harrison's report contains a strong indictment of Allied military policies, underscores the plight of Jewish DPs, and leads eventually to improved conditions for them in the US zone of occupied Germany.

September 2

Japan surrenders. World War II officially ends.

November 20

The International Military Tribunal (IMT), made up of US, British, French, and Soviet judges, begins a trial of 22 major Nazi leaders at Nuremberg, Germany.

December 22

US President Truman issues a directive giving preference to displaced persons for immigrant visas under existing US immigration quota restrictions.

1946

October 1

The International Military Tribunal passes judgment on major Nazi war criminals on trial in Nuremberg, Germany. Eighteen are convicted and three acquitted. Eleven of the defendants are sentenced to death.

October 16

In accordance with sentences handed down after the convictions, ten of the Nuremberg defendants are executed by hanging. One defendant, Hermann Göring, commits suicide in his cell.

1948

June 25

The United States Congress passes the Displaced Persons Act, under which approximately 400,000 displaced persons could immigrate to the United States over

and above quota restrictions. US officials will issue around 80,000 of the DP visas to Jewish displaced persons.