

## Holocaust, Genocide, and Human Rights Glossary

### **Allies**

The nations fighting Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy during World War II, primarily Great Britain, the Soviet Union and the United States.

### **Anschluss**

The German annexation of Austria in March 1938.

### **Antisemitism**

Dislike or hatred of Jewish people.

### **Appell**

The roll call of prisoners that could take hours. Prisoners were forced to stand outside in all types of weather, usually without proper clothing. These were called for by the commandant of the camp to account for all prisoners and/or for the prisoners to witness special punishments or deaths of their fellow prisoners.

### **Arbeit Macht Frei**

“Work makes you free” is emblazoned on the gates at Auschwitz and was intended to deceive prisoners about the camp’s function.

### **Aryan**

Term used by the Nazis to describe northern European physical characteristics (such as blonde hair and blue eyes) as racially “superior.”

### **Auschwitz-Birkenau**

The largest and most notorious concentration, labor, and death camp where 1.6 million died; located near Oswiecim, Poland.

### **Axis**

The Axis powers, originally Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, extended to Japan when it entered the war.

### **Babi Yar**

A ravine near Kiev where almost 34,000 Jews were killed by German soldiers in two days in September 1941.

### **Belzec**

Death camp located in southeastern Poland alongside a main railway line; between 550,000 and 600,000 Jews were killed there.

**Buchenwald**

One of the first major concentration camps on German soil.

**Canada**

The name given to the storage buildings by the prisoners who worked in them. These buildings held the clothing and other possessions of the Jews who had just arrived at the extermination camps and were usually gassed shortly afterward. Much of the most valuable items were “stolen” by guards or went to the remaining ghettos to be “repaired” in the workshops there.

**Chelmno**

First death camp to use gassing and first place located outside Soviet territory in which Jews were systematically killed as part of “Final Solution.”

**Concentration Camp**

Camps in which Jews were imprisoned by the Nazis, located in Germany and Nazi-occupied Europe. There were three different kinds of camps: transit, labor, and extermination. Many prisoners in concentration camps died within months of arriving from violence or starvation.

**Crematorium**

Oven used in concentration camps to burn and dispose of the large number of murdered bodies.

**Dachau**

Himmler’s model camp located outside Munich, opened March 20, 1933; initially designed to hold political prisoners.

**Einsatzgruppen**

Mobile death squad of the SS that followed the German army, executing Jewish residents as the squad moved through the Soviet Union; victims were shot and buried in mass graves.

**Evian Conference**

A meeting of delegates from some 32 countries in the summer of 1938 that met at the French summer resort to discuss the refugee problem caused by Nazi persecution of Jews. Few countries were willing to open their doors, giving a clear message to Adolf Hitler as to the true feelings of many foreign countries toward the Jews.

**Extermination Camp**

Six major camps designed and built for the sole purpose of killing Jews. These were Auschwitz-Birkenau, Belzec, Chelmno, Majdanek, Sobibor and Treblinka.

**Final Solution**

Term used by the Nazis to describe their plan to annihilate the entire Jewish population of Europe.

**Fuhrer**

German word for "leader," it was adopted by Adolf Hitler as his title after Hindenburg's death.

**Gas Chambers**

Large, sealed rooms (usually with shower nozzles) used for murdering prisoners in concentration camps; many people were led into gas chambers with the belief they were going in to take a shower.

**Gestapo**

The secret state police of the German army, organized to stamp out any political opposition.

**Ghetto**

A section of a city where Jews were forced to live, usually with several families living in one house, separated from the rest of the city by walls or wire fences, and used primarily as a station for gathering Jews for deportation to concentration camps.

**Gypsies (Roma/Santi)**

An ethnic group which was made up of two main groups: Roma and Sinti. This group had a long history of persecution in most of Western and Eastern Europe because of its beliefs and lifestyle.

**Havdalah**

The service marking the end of Shabbat (Sabbath) on Saturday at sunset.

**Hollerith Machine**

A machine developed to make the taking of the census much more efficient. The one used by the Nazis was developed by the German branch of IBM. Adolf Eichmann used it to gather data on Jews living in Germany, Austria and later Czechoslovakia.

**Holocaust**

Term first used in the late 1950s to describe the systematic torture and murder of approximately six million European Jews and millions of other "undesirables" by the Nazi regime from 1933 to 1945.

**Jehovah's Witnesses**

Members of a Christian sect who refused, among other things, to recognize Hitler and the Nazis as the supreme force in Germany, and to swear allegiance to Hitler and the Nazis. The program against them was not racial but political. Many Witnesses were imprisoned; a number of them were executed. In some cases, children were taken from their parents with the idea of "re-educating" them to alter their religious beliefs.

**Jews**

Persons identifying themselves with the Jewish community or as followers of the Jewish religion or culture.

**Judenrat**

Jewish councils set up within the ghettos to maintain order and carry out the orders of the German army.

**Judenrein**

"Cleansed of Jews," a German expression for Hitler's plan to rid Europe of Jews.

**Kaddish**

Prayer for the dead.

**Kapo**

A prisoner within the camp who is elevated to a position to oversee work duties in that camp. Many Kapos are remembered negatively.

**Krakow Ghetto**

The ghetto in Krakow, Poland, where Oskar Schindler gave factory jobs to remaining Jews, thus saving them from deportation in March 1943.

**Kiddish**

Sanctification, blessing over wine.

**Kindertransport**

A program that allowed, after many negotiations, and with heavy fees attached, for Jewish children to be sent from Germany, Austria, and parts of Czechoslovakia to Great Britain. Many of these children were housed with foster families, not all of the experiences being positive ones. Others were housed in castles in the countryside. Many of these children, especially the girls, do not remember the experience with great affection since they were anxious to hear news of parents left behind.

**Kristallnacht**

Also referred to as the "Night of Broken Glass," this pogrom occurred on Nov. 9-10, 1938 in Germany and Austria against hundreds of synagogues, Jewish-owned businesses, homes, and Jews themselves. This so-called "spontaneous demonstration" was in reaction to the assassination of a German official by a Jewish student whose parents had been deported to the Polish border.

**Lebensraum**

Meaning "living space," this was the excuse used by Hitler for taking over territories for the "superior" Aryan peoples.

**Lodz Ghetto**

The ghetto in Lodz, Poland completed in 1940.

**Majdanek**

Death camp located in a suburb of Lublin, Poland where 360,000 people were shot, beaten, starved or gassed to death.

**Mauthausen**

Hard labor and concentration camp located near Linz, Austria.

**Mein Kampf**

Hitler's autobiography in which he outlined his ideas, beliefs, and plans for the future of Germany.

**Mezuzah**

A religious object on the door frame of Jewish homes or synagogues to sanctify them.

**Mischlinge**

Derogatory Nazi term meaning "mongrel" in reference to people having both Christian and Jewish ancestors. See Nuremberg Laws.

**Mizrah**

Means sunrise or east; a decorated plate hung on the eastern wall of a house or synagogue to indicate the direction of Jerusalem.

**Nazi**

Name for members of the NSDAP, National Socialist Democratic Workers Party, who believed in the idea of Aryan supremacy.

**Night and Fog**

German term for political prisoners from western Europe who disappeared without leaving a trace.

**Nuremberg Laws**

Anti-Jewish laws enacted in 1935; included denial of German citizenship to those of Jewish heritage and segregation of them from German society; also established "degrees of Jewishness" based on family lines.

**Partisans**

Groups of organized guerilla fighters who aimed to damage the German war effort by attacking military targets, often using the forest for cover.

**Pogrom**

An organized, state-sponsored attack on a group of people.

**Rosh Hashanah**

The Jewish New Year begins the High Holy Days and a time of reflection and soul searching.

**SA**

Sturmabteilungen or storm troopers, the terrorist branch of the Nazi army, was formed in 1923 and was used to help secure Hitler's rise to power.

**Scrip**

Paper currency or tokens used as evidence that the bearer was entitled to receive something in return. Holocaust Museum Houston's archives houses the largest collection of ghetto and camp scrip in the world.

**Shabbat**

The Sabbath day, beginning at sunset on Friday and ending at sunset on Saturday.

**Shoah**

The Hebrew word for Holocaust.

**Shtetl**

Small towns and villages in Poland and Russia that were made up mostly of Jews.

**Sobibor**

Death camp in the Lublin district of Poland where approximately 250,000 Jews were gassed.

**Sonderkommando**

At Auschwitz-Birkenau and other extermination camps, this was a group of prisoners whose job it was to remove bodies from the gas chambers and to burn the bodies in the crematorium. At Auschwitz-Birkenau, this group was successful in blowing up one of the crematoriums.

**SS**

Schutzstaffel; the German army's elite guard, organized to serve as Hitler's personal protectors and to administer the concentration camps.

**Swastika**

Once an ancient symbol used to ward off evil spirits, the Nazis adopted it as their official symbol.

**Synod**

Church council.

**T-4 Program**

The euthanasia program directed against the physically and mentally handicapped persons who were considered "useless" in the new German Reich. The T-4 program served as the training ground for methods of mass murder that would later be used in the death camps, such as gassings and cremation of bodies.

**Tallis**

Shawl worn by men during prayer.

**Tefilin**

Small boxes containing four scriptural passages worn during daily morning prayers, except on Sabbaths and festivals.

**Theresienstadt (a.k.a. Terezin)**

Located near Prague, Czechoslovakia; used as the "model" concentration camp to deceive the world about true nature of Nazi plans for European Jews. Theresienstadt is the German word for this camp; Terezin is the Czech word for this camp.

**Third Reich**

The Third Empire; name given to the Nazi regime in Germany; Hitler boasted that the Third Reich would reign for 1,000 years.

**Torah**

The first five books of the Hebrew Bible.

**Treblinka**

Death camp located in sparsely populated area near Treblinka, Poland, approximately 870,000 Jews killed.

**Untermenschen**

German word meaning "sub-humans," used by Nazis to refer to the groups they deemed "undesirable."

**Versailles Treaty**

Peace treaty ending the First World War, creating tension and bitterness between European countries and, especially, a feeling of resentment by Germans.

**Volkisch**

A movement in Germany that believed in the superiority of the Germanic race. The group feared and hated foreigners, particularly Jews.

**Wagner-Rogers Bill**

A bill to admit some 20,000 Jewish children to the United States. The bill was never passed due to the efforts of some of the antisemitic factions in the U.S. State Department, as well as the fear by some Jewish leaders that pressing this bill would create antisemitic backlash in the United States.

**Wansee Conference**

Conference of high-ranking German officers, held in the Berlin suburb of Wannsee, to finalize plans for the destruction of European Jews.

**Warsaw Ghetto**

Largest ghetto in Poland covering 100 square blocks where approximately 500,000 Jews were contained from 1939 until May 1943.

**Weimar Republic**

The new democratically elected government in Germany following the end of World War I.

**White Rose Movement**

A group of young German students who protested against the Nazi treatment of Jews and others. Most of the members of this group were eventually rounded up and executed.

**Wimple**

Made from swaddling cloth, embroidered with child's name, birthday, and a blessing; used to wrap the Torah scroll on a boy's first trip to synagogue with his father.

**Yiddish**

Language spoken by many Jews in Eastern Europe; a combination of German, Hebrew, and dialects of the countries in which Jews were living.

**Yom Kippur**

Day of Atonement and a time for repenting and fasting.

**Zyklon B**

A chemical developed as an insecticide, the pellets of which were shaken down an opening in the euphemistically called "shower rooms," or gas chambers. The Nazis found this to be a quicker, cheaper, and more reliable method of mass killing than carbon monoxide.