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The Jewish Question

- On July 31, 1941, Hermann Goring ordered Reinhardt Heydrich, head of the Reich Security Office and of the gestapo, to come up with a solution to the Jewish Question. It was apparent that the struggle with Russia was going to continue into 1942.
- The Wehrmacht was stalled at Moscow. British blockage and the poor harvest of 1940 and 1941 left a shortage of food for the Third Reich. The Germans had 11 million Jews in their occupied territories to keep alive.



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Wannsee Conference

- Reinard Heydrich called for a conference in the Berlin suburb of Wannsee to plan the "Final Solution" to the so-called "Jewish Question."
- Fifteen Nazi senior bureaucrats, including Adolf Eichmann, chief of Jewish affairs for the Reich Central Security Office, came from Nazi Party agencies, the SS and police apparatus, civilian occupation administration, and government ministries. The Wannsee Conference was held on **January 20, 1942**.



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Wannsee Conference

- There was chilled water, vintage wines, expensive cognac served in fine crystal glasses, and high quality hors d'oeuvres with lunch while much of Europe was starving.
- Notes were taken by Adolf Eichmann and documents distributed were to be burned. Even the Nazis did not want a record of the detailing of mass murder. Fortunately, one copy failed to be destroyed and survived the war allowing the world to see the horrific mentality of Nazi officials.



- Heydrich planned to make the villa his personal residence after the war.

5

Wannsee Conference

- 15 Nazi officials discussed their plans to destroy an entire people in the space of 90 minutes.
- Over 6 million Jews died in the holocaust. The Nazis intended to kill 11 million, which is basically the population of North Carolina in 2024.
- **Note:** Previously, Adolf Hitler had made the decision to murder every human being of Jewish descent across the European continent. The role of the Wannsee Conference was to coordinate how the genocide would be done.



- The meeting was meant to ensure support and coordinate efforts for mass exterminations.

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Wannsee Conference

- Systematic mass shootings of Soviet Jews began in the summer of 1941, with some 900,000 victims already murdered by the end of 1941.
- Operations started on December 8, 1941, at the Chelmno Extermination Camp where the SS asphyxiated 150,000 – 300,000 Polish Jews in twenty specially-modified gas vans. This sequence of monstrosities provided “lessons” for Heydrich about possible courses of action.



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Wannsee Conference

- Ominously, Heydrich spoke of “looming possibilities in the East” opened up by German military conquests.
- “Emigration has now been replaced by evacuation of the Jews to the East.”
- In one sentence Heydrich disclosed a new, decisive—and genocidal—phase in the Nazi dictatorship’s prosecution of World War II as a race war.
- Heydrich then showcased all the Jews of each country.



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Wannsee Conference

- Heydrich's plan entailed combing Europe from West to East. He prioritized the removal of German, Austrian, and Czech Jews.
- Other Jewish communities would be swept up later in this massive operation of racial expurgation.
- Transit ghettos would function as temporary waystations before the victims were transported to their final, terrible destinations further East.



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Wannsee Conference

- There was some debate on who was considered a genetic Jew.
- The *Mischlinge*, or mixed race, were now disqualified and would be killed. Only if had one Jewish grandparent and married to a full-blooded German with children would be exempt. Exceptions were if born out of wedlock, looked Jewish or acted Jewish.
- Heydrich asked for assent of everyone, and it was given. In 90 minutes, 15 Nazi officials signed the death warrant for over 6 million Jews.



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Wannsee Conference

- After the meeting concluded, Heydrich and Heinrich Müller, head of the Gestapo, asked Eichmann to join them for brandy and a cigarette.
- The three Nazi officials, relishing in their decision, sat around the fireplace in the villa, smoking and drinking for a short while.
- As Eichmann later recounted, it was rare indeed to witness the austere Heydrich enjoying alcohol and a smoke.



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Wannsee Conference

Euphemistic Language	
Final Solution	Nazis overall plan for the complete annihilation of the Jewish people.
Evacuation to the East	Deportation of Jews to extermination camps
Resettlement	Term used to mask the reality of forced deportation to concentration and extermination camps.
Special Treatment	Direct euphemism for mass murder, particularly those deemed unfit for labor upon arrival.
Processing	Cold, industrial term for the entire extermination process, including selection, gassing, burning, and disposal of the bodies.

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Wannsee Conference

“The misuse of language induces evil in the soul.”

~Socrates

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Wannsee Conference

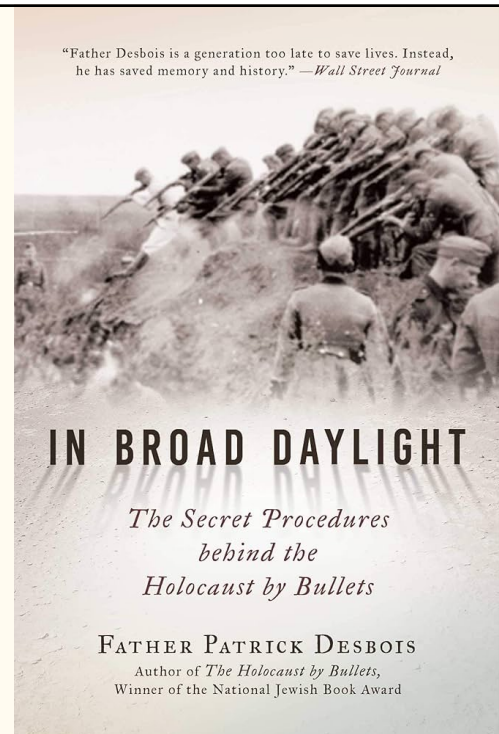
- The Wannsee Conference coordinated a systematic state sponsored effort, administered process of deportations, set up death camps, and coordinated train schedules in a system of divided labor.
- The state-sponsored, systematic and industrialized fashion of unprecedented murder of 6 million Jews by the Nazi regime is what defines the Holocaust.



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Holocaust by Bullets

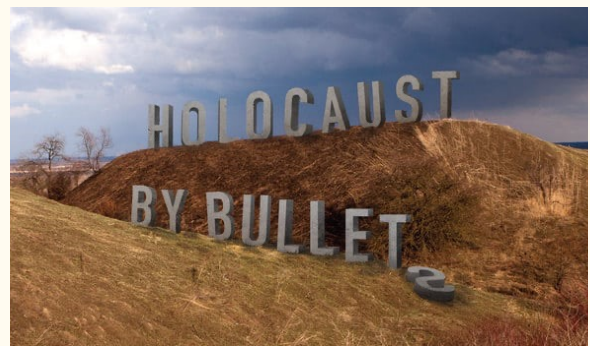
- The “Holocaust by Bullets” refers to the systematic murder of over 2 million Jews and Roma by the Nazi mobile killing squads (*Einsatzgruppen*), other German units (like the Order Police and Wehrmacht), and local collaborators across Eastern Europe, primarily in the occupied Soviet Union (Ukraine, Belarus, Russia, and the Baltic states) between 1941 and 1944.
- This method of mass murder, largely by shootings in unmarked pits, was the initial phase of the “Final Solution” and a precursor to the industrialized killing centers (death camps) like Auschwitz.



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Holocaust by Bullets

- The mass shooting in what is known as the “Holocaust by Bullets” accounted for approximately **one-third** of the 6 million Jewish victims in the Holocaust, before the systematic killing in gas chambers became the primary method.
- The gas chambers were later adopted by the Nazis as a more “efficient” and less psychologically taxing method for the perpetrators than mass shootings.

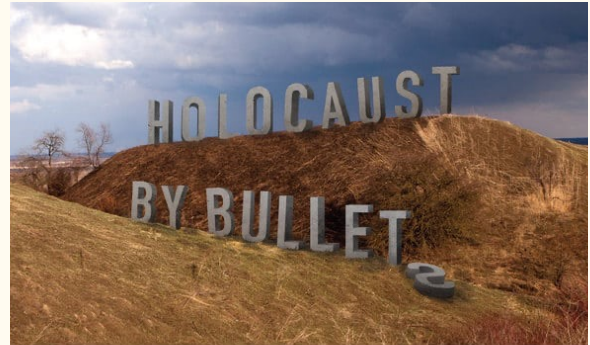


Source: Holocaust by Bullets - <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/ukraine-holocaust>

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Holocaust by Bullets

- Initially, the mobile killing units murdered primarily Jewish men, but by August 1941, the executions expanded to include Jewish women, children, and the elderly.
- Victims were typically rounded up, marched to the outskirts of their communities, forced to dig their own mass graves, strip naked, and were then shot into the pits.



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Holocaust by Bullets

- Some of the most notorious mass shootings occurred at sites like:
- Kamenets-Podolsk:** In Ukraine, where 23,600 Jews were murdered by German and Hungarian forces in a three-day period on August 27– 29, 1941.
- The victims included approximately 14,000–16,000 Jews who had been recently deported from Hungary, as well as a large portion of the local Jewish population.



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Holocaust by Bullets

- The mass killing of Jews at Kamianets-Podilsky represents the largest massacre of Jews in Ukraine during the summer of 1941, and signaled a decisive shift in the Holocaust from targeting certain groups of Jewish males to the indiscriminate murder of entire Jewish communities.
- This transformation continued throughout the fall of 1941, as tens of thousands of men, women, and children were shot to death in ravines, open fields, and forests throughout Ukraine.



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Holocaust by Bullets

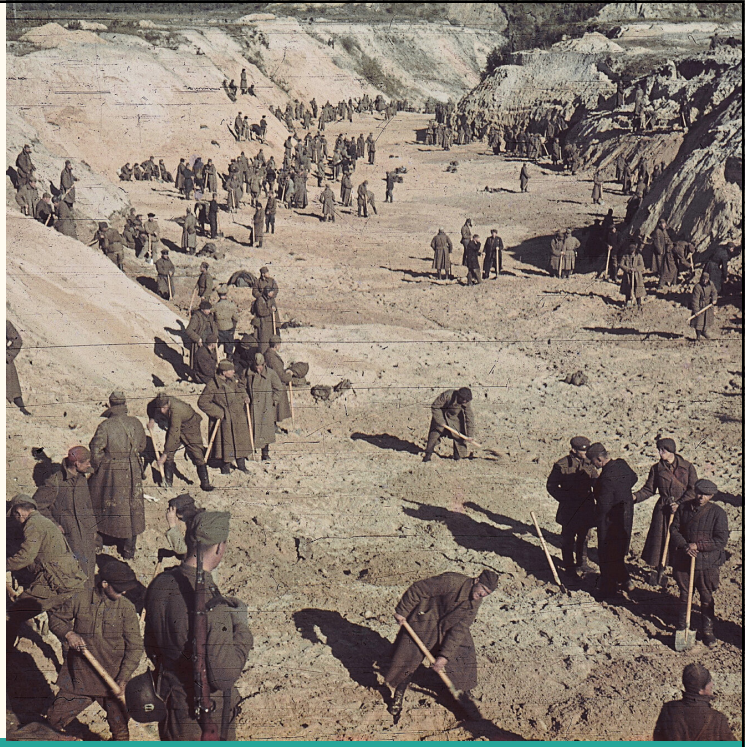
- **Babi Yar:** Near Kyiv, Ukraine, where over 33,771 Jews were murdered in just two days on September 29-30, 1941.
- Shortly after the Nazi occupation of the Soviet city of Kyiv, notices were posted ordering the Jewish population to gather at a specific location near the Jewish cemetery, with their belongings, documents, and valuables, under the guise of "resettlement."



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Holocaust by Bullets

- The Jews who arrived were marched to the Babi Yar ravine, where they were forced to undress, had their papers seized, and were then led in small groups to the edge of the ravine.
- There, they were shot by SS and German police units and their auxiliaries with machine guns. The dead and wounded were covered with layers of dirt.



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Holocaust by Bullets

"There were people of every age—children, old people. They had been told to gather because they were going to be taken to work somewhere and that they should take some food and their children because there would be nurseries in which they would be looked after...The Jews had a sort of armband.

Then they were told to undress and they were thrown into the pits. At the end of the day I went to look; the earth was moving [since many had not died right away]."

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Holocaust by Bullets



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Holocaust by Bullets



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Holocaust by Bullets

The "Commissar Order" issued by the German Armed Forces High Command on June 6, 1941: "When fighting Bolshevism one cannot count on the enemy acting in accordance with the principles of humanity or International Law.

In particular, it must be expected that the treatment of our prisoners by the political commissars of all types who are the true pillars of resistance will be cruel, inhuman, and dictated by hate...Therefore, when captured either in battle or offering resistance, they are to be shot on principle."

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Holocaust by Bullets

- In an order dated July 11, 1941, a commander of a police regiment in Belarus recommended that Jews be shot on the outskirts of towns and villages to shield local residents from the sights and sounds of mass murder.
- In order to "erase the impressions of the day," the order also called for "evenings of comradery" to follow every mass killing incident, which typically included meals prepared by local residents, music, and drinking.

~New Orleans Holocaust Museum

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Holocaust by Bullets

- Victims were often forced to watch their family members and neighbors die before their turn came. In some cases, victims were forced to lie down on top of previously shot corpses before being murdered.
- Local policemen and German officials often requisitioned non-Jewish civilians to dig pits, fill in mass graves, collect Jewish clothing, sort through Jewish valuables, pull out teeth, or transport Jews to pits in their carts.
- The requisitioned were mostly young men, women, children, or adolescents who were not only present at the event, but also "had been forced to participate...depending on the task imposed on them by the Germans."

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Holocaust by Bullets

- Himmler asked to see a shooting demonstration of the SS demonstration at Minsk in August 1941. The victims dug an open grave and then had to jump into it and lie face downwards. Sometimes, they jumped on other bodies already shot. Then, they were shot from the edge of the grave.
- Himmler had never seen dead people before. He had the bad luck of having a man shot near him and the man's brains splattered on his uniform and on his face. Himmler went very green and began heaving.



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Holocaust by Bullets

- After the shooting was over, Himmler gathered the SS around him. He had seen for himself how hard the task was. It must be worse for them.
- They must stand firm and could not be relieved. He appealed to their patriotism, telling them that they must do their duty for the 1,000-year Reich.
- He left the future to sort out for themselves.



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Holocaust by Bullets

- The "Holocaust by Bullets is overlooked or little understood for the following reasons:
 1. Holocaust studies established itself as a field in the 1990s.
 2. Secondly, there is an "Auschwitz syndrome," or a tendency among historians, philosophers, political scientists, and the general public to focus on the killing centers where an estimated 3 million men, women, and children were gassed and cremated in an industrialized, systematic fashion, which drove scholarship in the early stages of Holocaust Studies. The "Holocaust by Bullets" is a neglected field of studies.

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Holocaust by Bullets

- The "Holocaust by Bullets is overlooked or little understood for the following reasons:
- 3. Third, until 1991, scholars lacked access to the regional archives of the former Soviet Union. During the Cold War, Soviet officials sought to repress most discussions of the unique fate of Jews under Nazi rule. Soviet antisemitism guaranteed that the archives in Ukraine remained closed until the Soviet Union collapsed.
- 4. The killing sites in Ukraine are practically undetectable, whereas Auschwitz-Birkenau still has architectural design elements that have been recognizable around the world.

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Holocaust by Bullets

- Sadly, many of the Jewish victims murdered by the Nazis remain invisible. According to the Central Database of Shoah Victims' Names kept by the Holocaust Reembrance Center in Yad Vashem, about 50 percent of the Jewish victims of "the Holocaust by bullets," still remain to be identified.
- The campaign of mass shootings preceded the Nazis' full-scale use of extermination camps with fixed gas chambers, such as Auschwitz, Treblinka, and Belzec. While both methods were part of the "Final Solution," the mass shootings constituted the first phase of the genocide and accounted for a significant portion of the Holocaust's 6 million Jewish victims.

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Holocaust by Bullets

- Moreover, it was after shooting Jewish victims en masse that the German policy towards Jews took a fateful turn. Mass murder by gunfire took a cumulative toll on German soldiers and proved inefficient in achieving goals aimed at exterminating all Jews.
- It was the experience and failures of "Holocaust by bullets" that eventually led to the decision to shift to an organized, systematic murder of Jews in the form of industrial extermination camps.



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Holocaust by Bullets

- The psychological strain of shooting people day after day took a toll on the SS. They knew if they disobeyed the orders, they themselves would be shot. So, they anesthetized themselves with drink. They took snapshots of themselves like they were hunters with their kill and relaxed. They received high pay, safety from the front, and extended home leave.
- In short, Himmler needed a "cleaner" and more impersonal way to kill people to distance his soldiers from the killing.



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Concentration Camps



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Concentration Camps

- The Nazis created at least 44,000 camps, including ghettos, transit camps, POW camps, and other sites of incarceration, between 1933 and 1945.
- The camps served various functions, from imprisoning "enemies of the state" to serving as way stations in larger deportation schemes to murdering people in gas chambers.
- All occupied Europe had a concentration camp system based on the model Dachau. They were not only an instrument of terror, but an important factor in war production, each with a cluster of labor camps attached.
- Now, they became the means of the final solution. New camps were built in the east and old ones equipped with industrial capacity. They were to be the machines to kill human beings by the millions. The Nazis utilized the by-products and disposed of the waste.

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Concentration Camps

- **Main Concentration Camps:** The SS operated about 25 main concentration camps during the Nazi era. The first was Dachau, established in March 1933.
- **Satellite Camps (Subcamps):** Attached to the main camps were over 1,100 satellite or subcamps, which primarily served as forced labor camps. Auschwitz alone had more than 40 subcamps.
- **Killing Centers (Extermination Camps):** Six camps were specifically designed and built primarily for mass murder, mostly through gassing: Auschwitz-Birkenau, Bełżec, Chełmno, Majdanek, Sobibór, and Treblinka.

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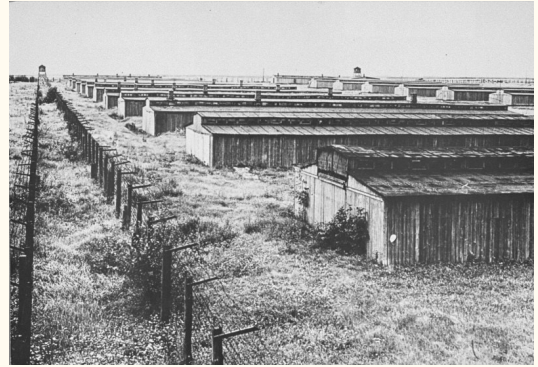
Concentration Camps

- **Aktion T4:** Officially beginning in 1939, this "euthanasia" program was Nazi Germany's first program of state-sponsored mass murder, beginning in September 1939, and it primarily targeted people with **disabilities living in institutions and from the general population**, whom the Nazis deemed "life unworthy of life" based on a Nazi ideology of "racial hygiene." It is estimated that 80,000 to 100,000 adults and 5,000 children in institutions were murdered under the T4 program.
- **Aktion 14f13:** This program targeted **concentration camp prisoners** who were deemed too sick, weak, elderly, or, for other reasons, unfit for forced labor ("ballast"). It also included Jewish prisoners and political opponents, regardless of their health status. It operated from April 1941 to the winter of 1944–1945. An estimated 15,000 to 20,000 concentration camp prisoners were murdered under Aktion 14f13.

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Concentration Camps

- The first Nazi camps were created to hold those deemed as “enemies” or “subversives.” Initially, the population of these concentration camps were not usually Jews, but Communists, socialists, Roma and Sinti, Jehovah’s witnesses, gay men, and “asocial” elements (alcoholics, criminals, people with mental disabilities, the poor).
- Such camps differed from normal prisons because of the harsh conditions and operated “without regard to legal norms of arrest and imprisonment that are acceptable in a constitutional democracy.”
(New Orleans Holocaust Museum)



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Concentration Camps

- Essentially, the concentration camp became a space disconnected from the outside world, within which “justice” was meted out at the whims of the commandant, or much more often, individual camp guards.
- In addition to the lack of due process or semblance of a trial that preceded incarceration, all safeguards, checks, and balances regarding “civil and humane” prisoner treatment vanished inside the gates.



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Forced Labor Camps

- Individual camps rarely fit a distinctive categorization, but many concentration camps included elements of forced labor.
- Millions of people from across Europe were deported and forced to work under horrific conditions, a policy that often amounted to "annihilation through work."
- Reinhard Heydrich stated in the Wannsee Conference said that this annihilation through labor was where "a large number of them will undoubtedly drop out by **natural reduction**."



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Forced Labor Camps

- **Addressing Labor Shortages:** As the war effort intensified and German men were conscripted into the military, the Nazis faced a critical manpower shortage.
- Forced labor filled this gap in agriculture, raw material extraction (like quarrying granite), construction, and arms production for major German companies such as IG Farben, Siemens, and Volkswagen.
- A conscious policy existed to literally work certain categories of prisoners to death through starvation-level diets, inadequate shelter, and relentless labor.



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Forced Labor Camps

- **Inhumane Conditions:** Prisoners endured grueling 12-hour workdays, little to no rest, poor sanitation, severe malnutrition, disease, and constant physical and mental abuse from SS guards and foremen.
- **Dehumanization:** Upon arrival, prisoners were stripped of their identities, assigned numbers, and forced to wear distinguishing badges. The cynical phrase *Arbeit Macht Frei* ("Work Makes You Free") often hung over the camp entrances.



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Forced Labor Camps

- **Mortality:** Death rates were extremely high. Many died from exhaustion, starvation, and disease, while those deemed too weak or ill to work were often sent to extermination camps like Auschwitz-Birkenau to be murdered.
- Historians estimate that, in addition to the millions murdered in the death camps, hundreds of thousands of registered prisoners died within the concentration camp system itself. By the end of the war, approximately 12 million people had been forced into labor for the German war economy.



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Death Camps

- Nazi death camps (also known as killing centers or extermination camps) were facilities built by Nazi Germany during the Holocaust with the primary purpose of carrying out the **systematic mass murder of Jews** and other targeted groups, such as the Roma and Soviet prisoners of war.
- They were specifically designed as "death factories" for efficient, industrial-scale killing.



Treblinka

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Major Camps

- Of the thousands of Nazi camps, only six were extermination, or death camps: Auschwitz, Chełmno, Majdanek, Bełżec, Sobibór, and Treblinka. At these six camps alone, the Nazis murdered over 3 million people, primarily through gassing.
- Majdanek and Auschwitz both had large numbers of forced labor and/or concentration camps either on site or as satellites; the number of survivors of these camps was large in comparison to other death camps.



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Hybrid Camps

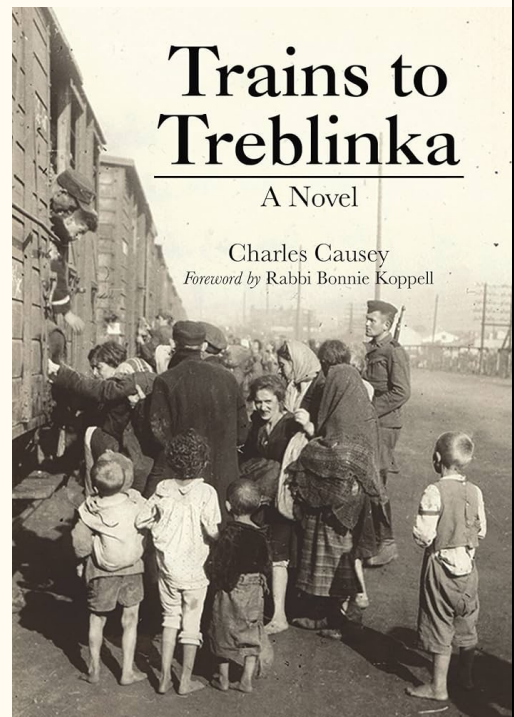
- Majdanek and Auschwitz have often been referred to as “hybrid” concentration-death camps because of their dual purposes in the Nazi system.
- Chelmo is a unique case in that it certainly was a death camp, but before 1942, it was an “experimental” death camp, where the Nazis tried out various versions of mass murder—first with gas vans before switching to static chambers.



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Death Camps

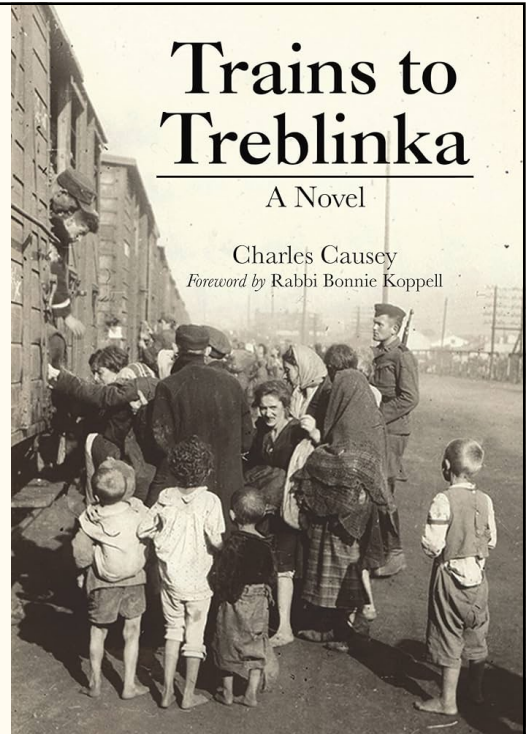
- **Death Camps:** When speaking of death camps, the Nazis had three camps designed solely for that purpose—Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka.
- Here, there were no ramp-side selections where “young, healthy” workers, mostly men, were saved from immediate mass murder in order to work for Germany. Instead, everyone who arrived went straight to their deaths in the gas chambers.
- Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka are often called the Aktion Reinhard (Operation Reinhard) camps because they were all built after the Wannsee Conference on January 20, 1942.



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Death Camps

- At Belżec, Sobibór, and Treblinka, approximately **1.7 million people**, mainly Jews, were murdered in the span of just 18 months.
- **Treblinka**: Over half of this number perished at Treblinka alone, a horrific statistic that has often led to it being classified as the deadliest space of the Third Reich.
- An estimated 800,000 to 974,000 people were murdered at Treblinka, almost all of them Jews. Virtually 100% of those deported to Treblinka were murdered. Most victims were murdered within two hours of their arrival.



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Six Main Camps

Concentration Camp	Jews Murdered	Primary Method of Killing
Auschwitz-Birkenau	~1,100,000	Zyklon B gas chambers
Treblinka	~925,000	Carbon monoxide gas chambers
Belzec	~435,000	Carbon monoxide gas chambers
Sobibor	~167,000	Carbon monoxide gas chambers
Chełmno	~152,000	Gas vans (carbon monoxide exhaust)
Majdanek	~58,000	Zyklon B gas chambers or shooting

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Death Camps

- The few hundred to a thousand prisoners kept alive at any one time were forced to perform tasks such as sorting the victims' belongings, burying and later burning the bodies, and running the unloading areas.
- These groups were regularly "liquidated" and replaced with new arrivals to ensure no witnesses survived. The systematic efficiency of the camp meant that the death rate was as close to total as possible.
- A subgroup, often called the *Sonderkommando* (special command), ran the machinery of the gas chambers and disposed of the dead.

51

Nazi Deceit

"Now the serpent was the most cunning of all the wild animals that the Lord God had made."

~Genesis 3:1

52

Nazi Deceit

- **Nazi Deceit:** The Nazis used elaborate and systematic deception tactics to mislead victims about their impending murder in the death camps, most notably by disguising the gas chambers as **shower rooms**. This ruse was designed to prevent panic and resistance, ensuring the "efficiency" of the mass killing process.
- **False Promises:** Upon arrival at camps like Auschwitz, Treblinka, and Sobibor, victims, often exhausted and confused after long train journeys, were told they were being "resettled" for work and would first need to undergo disinfection and bathe for hygiene reasons to prevent the spread of diseases like typhus.

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Nazi Deceit

- **Deceptive Architecture:** The killing rooms were constructed to resemble large communal bathhouses. They were often labeled "showers" or "bathhouses" and equipped with non-functional shower heads and water pipes on the ceiling to maintain the illusion.
- **Psychological Manipulation:** SS guards and camp personnel were instructed to act normally, sometimes even making small talk and telling the victims to remember where they left their clothes so they could retrieve them after the "shower". This was a crucial part of the psychological manipulation to keep the victims calm and cooperative until the doors were sealed and the gas introduced.
- **Elaborate fake stations:** At extermination camps like Treblinka, fake railway stations were constructed, complete with a clock and ticket window, to maintain the illusion of a normal transit stop.

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Nazi Deceit

- **Euphemisms:** The Nazis used a range of euphemistic language to disguise their actions from the victims, the German public, and the outside world. Terms like the "Final Solution," "evacuation," and "resettlement" were used to mask the true intention of systematic mass murder.
- **Horrific Evil:** In reality, once the victims were sealed in, the doors were locked, and poison gas—typically Zyklon B at camps like Auschwitz, or carbon monoxide at others like Treblinka—was introduced through special openings, killing everyone inside within minutes. The bodies were then quickly processed in nearby crematoria or buried in mass graves to hide the evidence.

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Jewish Revolts

- Two of the three Reinhard camps—Treblinka and Sobibór – saw revolts in 1943 – when Jewish workers fought back, destroyed portions of the camps, and escaped into the nearby woods.
- Approximately 150 people survived these revolts until the end of the war, and their stories have become critical to our understanding of how these camps worked.
- By contrast, at Bełżec, where there was no revolt, there are only two known survivors, out of a death toll as high as half a million Jews (New Orleans Holocaust Museum).



Treblinka Revolt (1943)

56

Jewish Revolts

- Like at Sobibór and Treblinka, *prisoners at Auschwitz also revolted on October 7, 1944.*
- Jewish *Sonderkommando* blew up one of the crematoria and killed or wounded several SS members.
- Though nearly all who participated in the uprising were killed during or immediately after it ended, the revolt stands as a testament of courage in the face of annihilation.



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Auschwitz

- Auschwitz was a vast complex of over 40 concentration, extermination, and forced-labor camps operated by Nazi Germany in occupied Poland
- **Auschwitz-Birkenau** (also known as Auschwitz II) was the largest of these camps and served as the primary **mass extermination center** where over 1.1 million people, mostly European Jews, were murdered.



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Auschwitz

Auschwitz I (Main Camp)

Established first in April 1940, this was the administrative headquarters and a concentration camp for Polish political prisoners, Soviet POWs, and others. It was a place of brutal forced labor, severe punishment (such as in Block 11, the "bunker"), and early, smaller-scale gassings.

Auschwitz II - Birkenau (Extermination Center)

Construction began in October 1941, located about two miles from Auschwitz I. This camp was specifically designed for the "Final Solution," the Nazi plan for the systematic genocide of the Jewish people. It contained large-scale gas chambers using Zyklon B and crematoria. It had labor prisoners, but its primary purpose was for killing.

Auschwitz III - Monowitz (Labo Camp)

Established in October 1942, this was a forced-labor camp (Buna or Monowitz) where prisoners worked at the nearby I.G. Farben synthetic rubber and fuel factory.

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Auschwitz

- **Central Role in the Holocaust:** Auschwitz-Birkenau was the principal and most notorious of the six dedicated extermination camps established by Nazi Germany.
- Approximately 1.1 million people died at the entire Auschwitz complex. Around one million of these victims were Jews, along with tens of thousands of Poles, 21,000 Roma and Sinti, about 15,000 Soviet prisoners of war, and others.
- **Method of Murder:** The majority of victims were murdered in the gas chambers at Birkenau shortly after arrival, without even being registered as prisoners. The camp's commander, Rudolf Höss, stated it was chosen for its capacity for large-scale, long-term extermination.

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Auschwitz

- **Dual Function:** The camp complex uniquely combined the functions of a concentration camp (imprisonment and forced labor) with an immediate, industrial-scale extermination center.
- **Liberation:** As the Soviet Army approached in January 1945, the Nazis abandoned the camp, sending an estimated 60,000 prisoners on brutal "death marches". The Soviets liberated the camp on January 27, 1945, finding thousands of emaciated survivors.



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Auschwitz



62

From Ghettos to Camps

- There were 2.5 million people in the Jewish ghettos. Rations were so small that people were starving. It was not unusual to see naked corpses in the streets as the clothes of dead bodies were taken by others. There were morning round death carts that came to pick up the bodies.
- The Nazi Germans lowered rations still further. Given the living conditions, there was no shortage of volunteers for resettlement. In the minds of those in Jewish ghettos, the concentration camps couldn't be worse than the ghettos. Everyone who volunteered got a little food and drink. People scrambled to get out of the ghetto. Some even paid their own railway fares.
- Camp leaders prepared a list of names that the Germans required – usually about 1,000. If anyone was missing, 50 extra people were rounded up and shoved onto the transport for "resettlement."

63

The Cattle Cars

- They walked to the station where the cattle cars were waiting. Once the Nazis closed the bolt, terrible cries began inside. The Jews pleaded that there was no air. "We are suffocating!" It was hell on wheels.
- After 24 hours, there was very little water. Each cattle truck had one lavatory and a bucket. Elderly, children, and women collapsed first. Transports could carry anywhere from 2,000 to 3,000 prisoners at a time. Some had even more.



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The Cattle Cars

“The trains ran like a dream.”

~Adolf Eichmann

65

Arriving at Auschwitz

“Through the steam, I saw a sign: ‘Auschwitz.’
I didn’t know what it was, but a minute later,
I found out.”

~Henry Meyer, Local Survivor

66

Arriving at Auschwitz

- Arriving at Auschwitz-Birkenau, we saw strange people in clothes that looked like pajamas.
- The wagon was opened and there was a gust of fresh air. They began by throwing out the corpses of the dead.
- "*Jude, schnell, schnell, schnell...aus, aus, aus*"...[Jew, quick, quick quick – out, out, out].
- We could see flames up in the sky and there was a strange smell like burning chicken.



67

Arriving at Auschwitz

- In some sense, Jewish prisoners could smell Auschwitz before they saw it.
- "Don't worry about your property, we will take care of it for you. We will restore the sanitary conditions that you have experienced. We are sorry for the inconvenience." The Nazis did it with humor.
- For the Nazis, it was not a question of gentle technique or brutal technique, but rather about efficiency. People arriving were to enter the gas chamber as soon as possible, without a hitch.



68

Arriving at Auschwitz

- Jewish prisoners were forced to work in every stage of the receiving process. On the baggage squad, they had to clean everything up so that it was spotless before the next load of people came in.
- The new arrivals came in one- or two-hour intervals. They always came to a spot-clean transport. They had no idea what the place was that they were coming to.
- Between 1941 and December 1944, the average was estimated at around 1.5 trains per day.



69

Arriving at Auschwitz



70

Arriving at Auschwitz



71

Arriving at Auschwitz

- Some did sense something sinister was going on. The sick, old, lame, pregnant women, mothers and small children were sent to the left and gassed immediately. Most had no idea what was going to happen.
- One woman complained, "Sir, this man says that my children will be gassed?" "Ma'dam, you think we are barbarians?"
- Those to be gassed were told that they would be deloused before starting work. Then they would rejoin their families.



72

The Selection Process

- **Selections:** At the arrival ramps, SS doctors conducted "selections." Those deemed able to work were registered and sent to the forced labor camps, while the sick, elderly, pregnant women, and most children were immediately killed.
- SS doctors lined up Jews in two separate lines – multitudes of men and older children on one side and women and small children on the other. They decided who would be gassed immediately and who would be forced to work.



73

Selection Process

One arrival asked, "What is this place?" A gentleman started laughing, "You have come to the heaven commander."

He then pointed to the far distance of smoke rising, "There is a chimney, and you will go out that chimney."

74

Road to Extermination

- A lorry (or truck) waited outside to take those selected for the gas chamber.
- The start up of the lorry was like a **death cry**. They were told that they would taken out to the woods and deloused and then take a shower.
- A truck disguised as an "ambulance" contained tins of Zyklon B.



75

Road to Extermination

- The SS forced the Jews to get undressed, then ordered and prepared them for disinfection.
- There were big piles of clothing. The new arrivals had to stand on a big heap of clothes and get undressed. Oftentimes, the children hid under the clothes.
- **Note:** The Jews got out a letter asking for a camera to be smuggled in. A camera was smuggled in under a coat. A secret photographer tried to snap photos of women entering a gas chamber.



Secret photo taken of women going to gas chambers

76

Road to Extermination

- They shouted, “Get ready!” The Jews had to run about 20 yards to a bunker. There were two doors there standing open where they entered. When a certain number went in, the SS shut the doors.
- About 2,000 to 2,500 people could be put in the gas chamber at a time.
- The SS then found the children hiding under the clothes, grabbed them, and threw them on top of the packed Jews in the gas chamber.



77

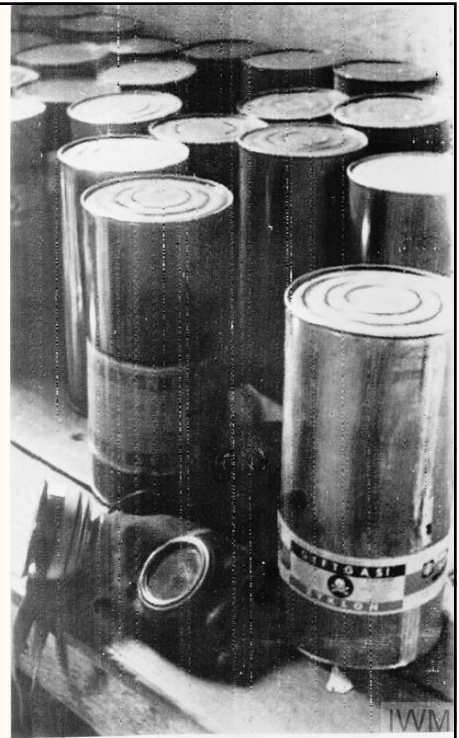
Road to Extermination



78

Road to Extermination

- Zyklon B was transported in vans disguised as ambulances.
- Zyklon B is the commercial name for a highly poisonous, cyanide-based fumigation product whose active ingredient is **hydrogen cyanide (HCN)**.
- It was originally developed as a pesticide and disinfectant but became primarily infamous as an instrument of mass murder in the gas chambers of extermination camps, particularly Auschwitz-Birkenau, during the Holocaust.



79

Road to Extermination

- When they threw the children in, there was a great panic – a terrible scream – as Jews then realized that they were going to be killed.
- An SS soldier climbed the ladder, took out a tin of Zyklon B, opened the iron door in the roof and shook the tin into the hole and shut the door.



80

Road to Extermination

- A fearful screaming started up for about 10 - 15 minutes.
- People scratched and hit each other. They did whatever it took to try to survive before everything slowly went quiet.
- **Quote:** "There were cries in the gas chamber, cries from the bunker, cries from the crematorium... Cries to the sky."



81

Road to Extermination

- After waiting 10-15 minutes, the SS looked through a little hole to see if there was any movement. A doctor present decided when to open the door.
- Opening the doors, a blue haze came billowing out. They used a fan to remove all the poisoned air,
- Looking in, it was not unusual to see a pyramid of dead people as they had tried climbed up on top of each other to get out."



82

Road to Extermination

A gentleman watching the whole process was horrified and asked the driver responsible for carrying the Zyklon B how he could stand it.

The driver replied, "You do get used to anything in time."

~World at War Documentary
Holocaust Episode

83

Road to Extermination

- Next, the prisoner squad took the naked dead bodies up to the ovens.
- Near the ovens, they removed false teeth and gold teeth.
- They shaved the women's hair and looked for valuables on the bodies.
- It took about 15 minutes to burn each body wherein there were only a few ashes left.



84

Road to Extermination



Image: Archiv des Staatlichen Museums Auschwitz-Birkenau in Oświęcim

85

Forced Labor

- Those selected to work before gassing lasted an average of **three months**, which was the normal survival time in Auschwitz.
- They were made to undress and take a shower. They were deloused, their heads were shaved, and numbers were tattooed on their arms.
- They were no longer a name but now known as a number.



86

Forced Labor

- Men and women were separated and each given uniforms.
- Auschwitz had up to 100,000 slave laborers. Poles and Jews worked until they died. They were crammed 300 to a block.
- They were given a few ounces of course bread and gruel. In short, they had to learn how to fight for their own survival.



87

Forced Labor

- **Annihilation through work:** This Nazi policy meant that prisoners were intentionally subjected to brutal conditions that would lead to illness, injury, and death.
- When a prisoner became too weak to work, they were often sent to the gas chamber.
- Prisoners slept four and more to a bunk in huts that were originally designed for horses.



88

Forced Labor

- Work was not organized for productivity, but to inflict the greatest amount of suffering on workers.
- In the heavy labor camps, prisoners were dead after a few days from the heavy labor and heavy beatings.
- Some couldn't take the suffering and ran into the electrified barbed wire. Others asked to have their names put on the roll call list for the gas chambers.



89

Experiments

- **Experiments:** Some Jews were experimented on. Himmler told his doctors that they were no longer inhibited by Christian prejudices.
- For example, to test the effects of high altitude flying, some Jews were put in a simulator, starved of oxygen and put through extremes of decompression.
- Nazi doctors also immersed prisoners in freezing water, while others had limbs amputated without anesthesia.



90

Experiments

- **Joseph Mengele:** In November 1943, Mengele became "Chief Camp Physician" of Auschwitz II (Birkenau).
- Nicknamed the "Angel of Death," his name is by far the best known of all the doctors who served at Auschwitz.
- At Auschwitz, Mengele collected hundreds of pairs of twins from among the Jews who arrived there on transports and from among the Roma imprisoned there. No researcher had ever been able to study and experiment on such a large number of twins (National Holocaust Museum).



91

Experiments



92

Mass Extermination

- **Escalation of Evil:** By 1944, Germans realized that they were losing the war. Therefore, the SS speeded up the killing. The tracks ran right to the gas chambers. The Jews came in from Greece, Italy, and Hungary.
- **The last major deportation:** The Hungarian Jews were among the last large Jewish community targeted for mass extermination, with most of the deportations occurring between May and July 1944. This happened after Germany occupied its former ally, Hungary, in March 1944, and installed a collaborative government.
- **Deportation totals:** In just eight weeks, from May 15 to July 9, 1944, German and Hungarian authorities deported approximately 440,000 Jews from Hungary. Most were sent to the Auschwitz-Birkenau killing center.

93

Mass Extermination

- **Murder upon arrival:** Of the roughly 440,000 Hungarian Jews sent to Auschwitz in 1944, over 75% were sent directly to the gas chambers.
- **Forced labor:** The remaining roughly 100,000 deportees were selected for forced labor within the Auschwitz complex or transferred to other concentration camps in Germany and Austria.
- **Note:** The Nazis hid the crematoriums in the forest to prevent any panic.



94

Mass Extermination

- **Sonderkommando Prisoners:** Some prisoners were selected as sonderkommando. Their job was to assist with the daily operations of the camp, primarily around the gas chambers and crematoria.
- The work was physically and psychologically horrific, and refusal meant immediate execution.



95

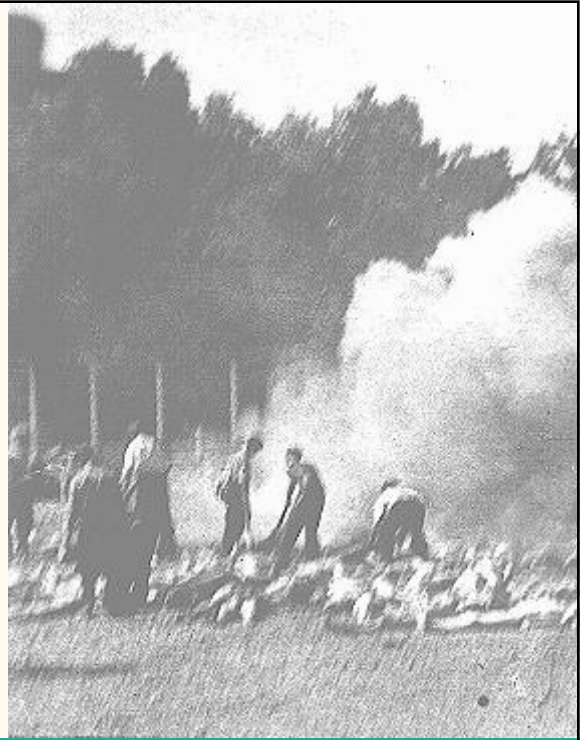
Mass Extermination

Job	Explanation
Guiding victims	Members of the Sonderkommando were forced to greet newly arrived victims and usher them into the gas chambers, often lying to them that they were going to take showers to help maintain order.
Removing bodies	After the victims were gassed by the SS, the Sonderkommando were forced to remove the corpses from the gas chambers.
Processing Remains	They searched the bodies for hidden valuables and removed gold teeth or fillings and women's hair, which were then sent to Germany for the war effort.
Disposing of bodies	They transported the bodies to the crematorium ovens or to mass burial pits and burned them.
Cleaning the scene	They were made to crush bone fragments and scatter or bury the ashes, as well as clean the gas chambers for the next group of victims.
Destroying evidence	In some cases, they were used to exhume bodies from mass graves at other killing sites and burn them to destroy evidence of Nazi crimes.

96

Mass Extermination

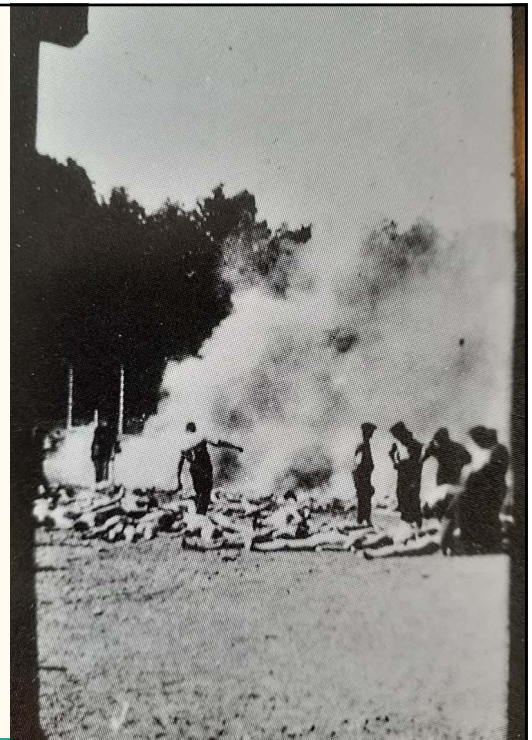
- A Hungarian Jew, serving as a Sonderkommando, upon arriving at Auschwitz, was taken behind the crematorium where he saw "hell on earth."
- There were large piles of dead people, and people dragging them to a pit 30 meters in length and 10 meters in width. There was a huge fire there with trees. The fat from the dead corpses was taken out of the pit with a bucket.



97

Mass Extermination

- He was told that each worker was to take one body. "Use a walking stick, under the chin, and drag the body to the pit like a rag or a piece of wood."
- Prisoners then threw the bodies into the pit. Some threw themselves into the pit thinking it was better to be burned than work in such a job.
- There were two shifts as they worked from 6:00 am to 6:00 pm.



98

Mass Extermination

“Every person, without exception, is capable of doing the worst thing just to live another minute.”

~World at War Documentary
Holocaust Episode

99

By-Products of Victims

Jewish Victims	Explanation
Hair	Victims' hair was shaved, collected, and sent to factories to be processed for industrial use. At Auschwitz alone, the Soviet Army discovered over 15,400 pounds of human hair upon liberation (made into socks, mattresses, etc.).
Ashes	The Nazis sold the ashes of cremated corpses to German firms for use as fertilizer, as well as scattered in nearby fields, dumped in rivers, etc.
Gold Teeth	The gold from teeth was melted down and shipped back to the German Reich to be used or deposited into SS bank accounts.
Human Soap	Evidence from research at the Danzig Anatomical Institute found evidence that Jewish victims produced between 10 and 100 kilograms of soap from corpses for washing autopsy rooms.
Personal Possessions (clothing, eyeglasses, etc.)	Currency, jewelry, and other valuables were sent to Germany to help fund the war. Clothing and eyeglasses were collected and given to Germans.

100

Mass Extermination

- As the Soviet Red Army got closer, the Germans began to retreat.
- Himmler, however, urged the master work to carry on. He was told that 6 million Jews have been killed - 4 million in concentration camps and 2 million by shooting.
- He responded, "Fantastic, really - 6 million? Just imagine, there must be more than that. Set up stats people to check up on it."



101

Mass Extermination

- Germans tried to destroy all the evidence by blowing up the gas chambers and crematoriums. The Russians liberated Auschwitz on January 27, 1945.
- They found approximately 7,000 people remaining alive. Prisoners too old or sick to participate in the "death marches." They were "living skeletons." The SS thought they would just die.
- The SS forced nearly 60,000 prisoners to march westward, away from the advancing front. An estimated 9,000 to 15,000 prisoners died during these forced marches.



102

Post-Liberation Deaths

- Tens of thousands died shortly after liberation due to the devastating effects of starvation and illness, with some estimates suggesting up to 30,000 died within the first few weeks.
- 250,000 – 500,000 Roma and Sinti people
- 1.8 - 1.9 million Poles
- 6 million Jews, and millions of Slavs
- The ruins of Auschwitz are a warning that all have a responsibility that we **never** build another Auschwitz.

103

St. Maxmillian Kolbe

- He was a Polish Franciscan friar and priest known for his strong faith from a young age.
- During the Nazi invasion in Poland, he provided refuge for thousands, including Jews, at his monastery.
- In 1941, he was arrested by the Gestapo and sent to Auschwitz and given prisoner number 16670.



<https://newsletter.companionsofsanctity.org/newsletters/2018-fall/st-maximilian-kolbe-a-reflection/>

104

St. Maxmillian Kolbe

- While in Auschwitz, he continued his priestly work, offering comfort, sharing food, and praying for his fellow prisoners.
- In July 1941, following a prisoner's escape, the SS selected ten men to be starved to death.
- When one of the condemned men, Franciszek Gajowniczek, cried out for his wife and children, Kolbe stepped forward to volunteer to take his place.

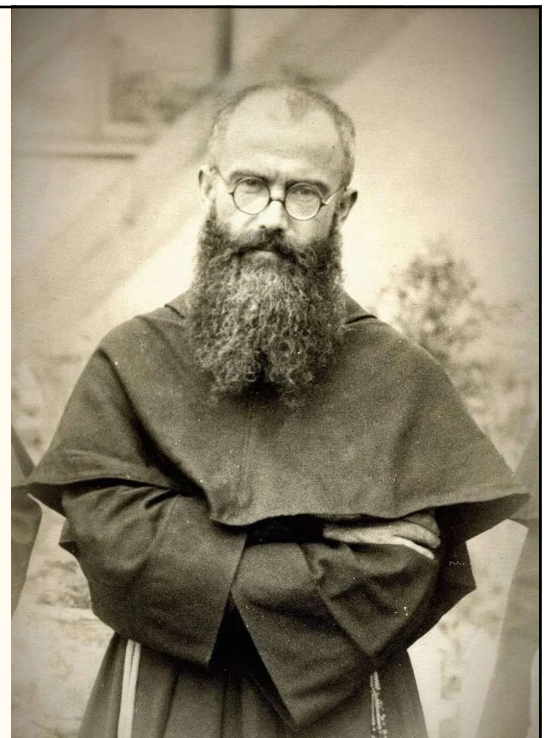


<https://newsletter.companionsofsanctity.org/newsletters/2018-fall/st-maximilian-kolbe-a-reflection/>

105

St. Maxmillian Kolbe

- "The SS officer spoke to Fr. Maximillian using a "formal you" address, Why do you Sir want to die for him?"
- Fr. Kolbe said, "I am a Catholic priest. I am old. He has a wife and children."
- After several seconds passed, the SS officer said "Gut" (Good).



106

St. Maxmillian Kolbe

- Fr. Maximilian and the nine other men were locked in an underground bunker.
- Despite suffering from starvation for two weeks, he led the other prisoners in prayer and hymns. He was the last remaining prisoner alive.
- He died on August 14, 1941, and his remains were cremated the next day, the Solemnity of the Assumption of Mary.



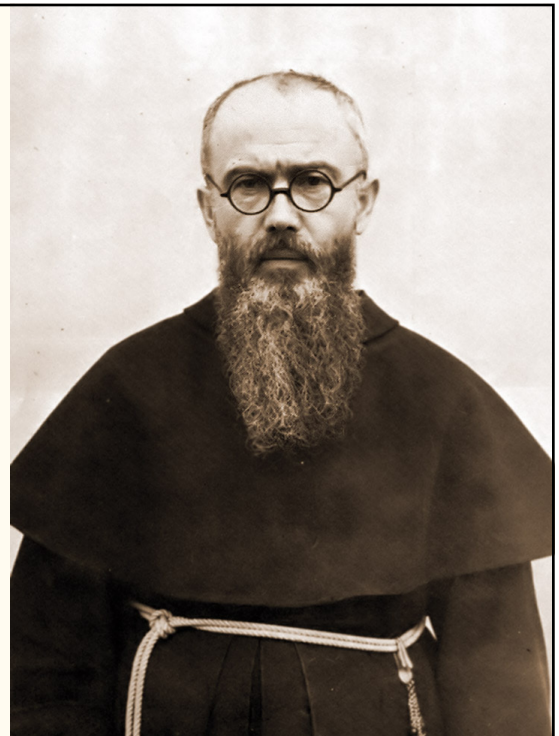
<https://www.taylordailypress.net/the-man-who-carved-jesus-with-his-nails-in-the-dungeon-of-auschwitz/>

- Sacred Heart of Jesus etched in prison wall at Auschwitz.

107

St. Maxmillian Kolbe

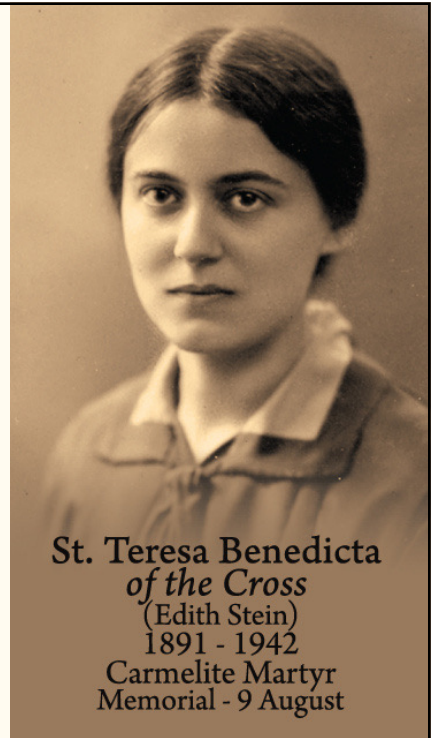
- **Canonization:** St. Maximilian Kolbe was beatified by Pope Paul VI in 1971 and canonized as a saint by Pope John Paul II in 1982, who declared him a "martyr of charity".
- St. Maximilian Kolbe is celebrated as one of the greatest saints in the 20th century.
- He helped bring God's grace and a ray of light and hope to a dark and horrific place with his triumph of self-sacrificial love.



108

St. Teresa Benedicta

- Born into a Jewish family in Breslau, Germany, Edith Stein initially lost her faith but later pursued a deep search for the truth.
- Her conversion to Catholicism in 1922 was promoted by reading St. Theresa of Avila's autobiography, wherein she said, "This is the truth."
- She became a philosopher, earning a doctorate and teaching at various institutions.



109

St. Teresa Benedicta

- In 1933, unable to continue under Nazi rule, Edith entered the Discalced Carmelites in Cologne, Germany.
- She took the name Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. To escape Nazi persecution, she was moved to the convent in the Netherlands.
- In 1942, she and her sister Rosa were arrested and sent to Auschwitz.



110

St. Teresa Benedicta

- Her last words to her sisters in the convent were, "Come, we are going for our people."
- St. Teresa helped provide a peaceful and prayerful presence along the way. She also tended to mothers who stopped caring for their children as they were in a state of shock.
- She was put to death in Auschwitz in the gas chamber on August, 9, 1942. She was canonized by Pope John Paul II in 1998.



111

St. Teresa Benedicta

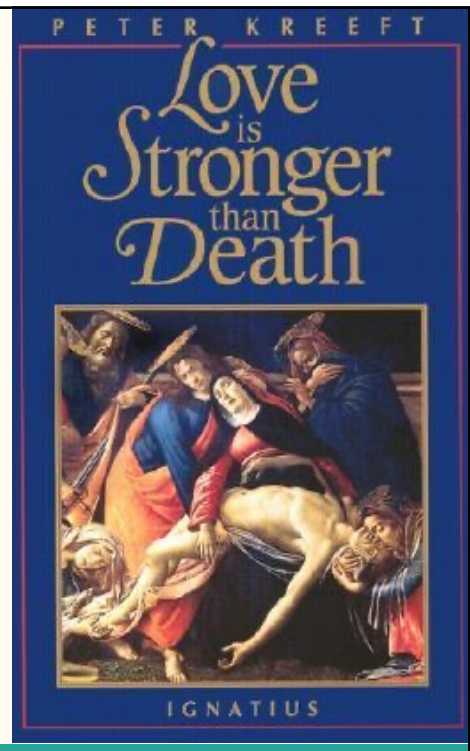
"For by doing what God demands of us with total surrender of our innermost being, we cause the divine life to become our own inner life. Entering into ourselves, we find God in our own selves."

~St. Therese Benedicta of the Cross

112

A Word of Hope

- While the Holocaust with its horrific events of mass shootings and concentration camps was something akin to the antechamber of hell, we must also remember that this most troubled time had countless heroic stories and saints like Maximilian Kolbe and Teresa Benedicta of the Cross who proved that darkness, injustice, and evil are overcome by peace, hope, and selfless acts of giving of oneself for the good of others.
- They remind us that the light of Christ shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it (Jn 1:5).



113

Pope Pius XII

- In 1917, Eugenio Pacelli was appointed the papal nuncio for Bavaria, and in 1920 made nuncio for all of Germany.
- During his time in Germany, he witnessed the rise of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party. He criticized Nazi policies in forty speeches between 1918 and 1929.
- He was created a cardinal in 1929 and appointed Vatican secretary of state by Pope Pius XI.
- Cardinal Pacelli was elected to the papacy on March 2, 1939 (one day – the briefest conclave in 300 years).
- Early in his pontificate, war clouds were looming.

114

Pope Pius XII

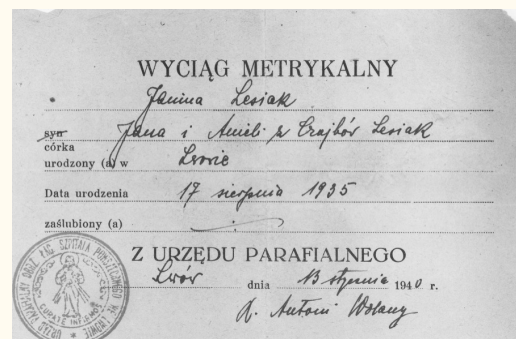
- While Cardinal Nuncio in Germany before the war, Pacelli delivered a total of 44 allocutions. Forty of them contained attacks on Nazism.
- On October 20, 1939, Pius XII promulgated his first encyclical, *Summi Pontificatus*, which attacked Nazi Germany and fascist ideology.
- Pope Pius XII recognized the central problem of a totalitarian form of government is its focus on the state over the individual, and its exaltation of the state and its leader to the level of idolatry. Once again, the Nazis were not pleased with the outspoken criticism of the pope.



115

Pope Pius XII

- When Nazi Germany invaded Poland, Pius XII embraced the wartime policies of his predecessor: neutrality, charity to those affected by the war, and calls for peace at every opportunity.
- Pope Pius XII sent top-secret orders to the nuncio in Poland to assist Jews, and to the nuncio in Turkey (Angelo Roncalli – future Pope Saint John XXIII) to “prepare thousands of baptismal certificates to give the Jews, which will allow them passage through Turkey to the Holy Land.”



<https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/pa1130186>

- False Polish baptismal certificate issued to Jewish child Yona Kunstler during World War II

116

Pope Pius XII

- In Italy itself, where the Pope had the most influence, over 85 percent of the Jewish population was rescued, a higher percentage than in any other country.
- Pius ordered churches, convents, and monasteries to hide Jews, even directing that Jews be hidden in the cloistered areas. At least 200 hid within the Vatican itself, including the Chief Rabbi of Rome, Israel Zolli, and his family.



117

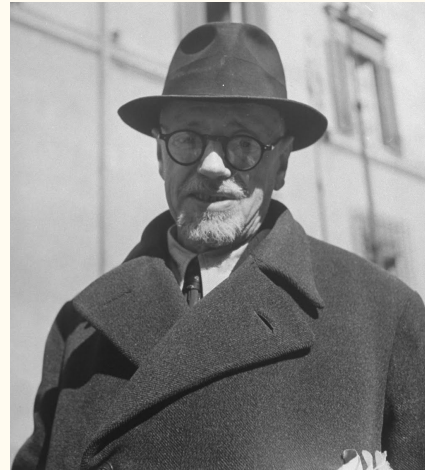
Pope Pius XII

- Pope Pius XII has been criticized for not taking sides or doing more to help the Jews. In reality, it was a delicate situation.
- For example, when the Dutch bishops publicly denounced Nazi mistreatment of Jews in 1942, the Nazis retaliated by increasing the number of Jewish deportations – including some Jews who had converted to the Catholic faith, like the Carmelite, St. Edith Stein (Teresa Benedicta of the Cross), and her sister.
- Holland witnessed the largest percentage of Jews deported during the war (79 percent of the total Jewish population). Bishops in Nazi-controlled territory cautioned Pius XII against speaking too forcefully against the Nazis.

118

Pope Pius XII

- After the war, individual Jews and many Jewish organizations thanked Pius XII and the Church for its heroic activity of the pope and other Catholics.
- Israel Zolli, the chief rabbi of Rome during the war, converted to the Faith and took the baptismal name Eugenio due to the witness of the pope toward the Jews. He said, "No hero in all history was more heroic than Pope Pius and his readiness to defend the children of God."



119

Pope Pius XII

- The Catholic Church, under the pontificate of Pius XII, was instrumental in saving as many as 860,000 Jews from certain death at Nazi hands (37 percent of the Jews who survived the war).... This figure exceeds by far those saved by all other churches and rescue organizations combined.
- Moreover, this achievement stands in startling contrast to the unpardonable foot-dragging and hypocritical lip-service of those outside Hitler's reach, who certainly disposed of far greater means to rescue Jews including the International Red Cross and the Western democracies in general.... No Pope in history has been thanked more heartily by Jews. ~Pinchas Lapide quoted in *The Crisis of Christendom*, pg. 563.

120

Pope Pius XII

- When Nazi Germany invaded Poland in 1939, 700 priests were rounded up, shot, and killed.
- Three million Poles were eventually sent to concentration camps. 3,000 priests from all over Europe were sent to concentration camps, with about 1,000 perishing.
- The Nazis tried to eradicate the faith from Germany through both non-violent methods, including the exaltation of Hitler as supreme leader, and violently, through arrest, torture, and execution of Christians who criticized the government and its nefarious policies.

121

Future Classes

- European & Pacific Theaters

December 2

- Lessons learned from World War II

December 9

122