

***Lessons from Auschwitz* (Holocaust Educational Trust CRGS Ambassadors)**

January 2022

Pre-war Jewish life

Before the war, it's important to note that the Jewish community had normal lives just like everyone else. Moreover, although it is widely known that approximately six million Jewish people were murdered during the Holocaust, Jewish people actually only made up a small percentage of the overall European population:

Country	Pre-war Jewish population of country	Percentage of country's pre-war population that were Jewish	Percentage of those Jews murdered in the Holocaust
Lithuania	150000	7	95
Greece	72000	1	90
France	330000	1	25
Poland	3330000	10	90+
Hungary	1290000	5.5	80+

Both before and after the war, Jews expressed their religion in different ways. A number of Jewish people were not actually religious and did not identify with the Jewish faith, but regardless of this factor they were still targeted.

In towns such as Oswiecim (Poland), Jews were thoroughly integrated into society. Jews and Christians celebrated each other's holidays and Jewish people worked in a range of industries and contributed to all aspects of life. For example, half the members of Oswiecim's town council were Jews. Even in this small town, Jews and Christians lived together in harmony and relationships between Jews and non-Jews were on good terms.

It is important to recognise that before the war Jews had their own lives and occupations, even though there were not as many of them compared to the rest of the population; examples such as Oswiecim highlight the fact that in most cases, Jews were an accepted and celebrated part of society.

The role of victims, collaborators, bystanders and perpetrators

World War 2 was a total war, which meant that every aspect of the population was involved, however, each individual who was involved in the war effort can be potentially associated with one of the above categories. When considering the Holocaust, it is important to be as objective as possible. Each person will have motives and reasons as to why they did what they did, but at face value, one must recognise the definition and role played by victims, collaborators, bystanders and perpetrators.

Victims: An individual person or group of people who were targeted during the Holocaust, for example, Jews, homosexuals, and disabled people, (note: the term victim doesn't just relate to those who were murdered, people who survived were also victims of the Holocaust, just not to as such an extreme degree). Take for instance the Frank family; Otto Frank was the only survivor, but he was still a victim of the Holocaust like his wife and daughters.

Collaborators: A person or group of people who worked either directly or indirectly with Hitler and the Nazis to carry out the Holocaust.

Bystanders: A person or group of people who witnessed the Holocaust but did not actively take part, or do anything directly to stop it.

Perpetrators: Not just those who committed murder directly, such as Nazi soldiers, but anyone who played a role in the complex mechanism of genocide for example, Albert Ganzenmuller, who was responsible for the Nazi occupied rail system would be considered a perpetrator.



Auschwitz Birkenau and the role played by concentration camps

Auschwitz Birkenau is widely considered the most infamous Nazi death camp. 1.3 million people were sent there, and 1.1 million of those perished. 90% of these victims were Jewish from over 12 countries. In total Auschwitz Birkenau had five crematoria and over 300 1-storey barracks. Auschwitz itself had over approximately 50 sub-camps.

The first transport of Jewish people to Birkenau arrived on March 26th 1942. Upon arrival just 1/10 of inmates were selected for work. In addition, lifespans of workers averaged from only 2 weeks – 3 months and at its height the camp held over 90,000 inmates. Living conditions in Auschwitz, and all concentration camps, were unimaginable. Camps were overcrowded, unsanitary (prisoners had only 2 bathroom breaks a day) and rife with death and disease. Prisoners were treated like animals, and in some instances had to survive on little to no sustenance; the average daily intake for prisoners in the camp was around 600 calories.

Following the Wannsee Conference of 1942, Reinhard Heydrich and other leading Nazi officials decided on what is known as 'the final solution' which aimed to eliminate the 'untermenschen' (sub-humans). This referred to mainly Jews but also to other groups such as the Roma, homosexuals, the disabled and Jehovah's Witnesses. The ultimate role of Auschwitz Birkenau, and in essence, all camps under Nazi control, was to achieve that goal.

It is important to note however, that Auschwitz was not the only death camp. There were six death camps, all situated in Poland. Including Auschwitz Birkenau, the other five camps were: Sobibor, Majdanek, Treblinka, Belzec and Chelmo. All of these camps' primary directive was to kill. However, in other concentration camps such as Bergen Belsen, diseases like typhus was so abundant, that people died in mass numbers regardless of Belsen not being a death camp.



The infamous entrance gate at Auschwitz 1

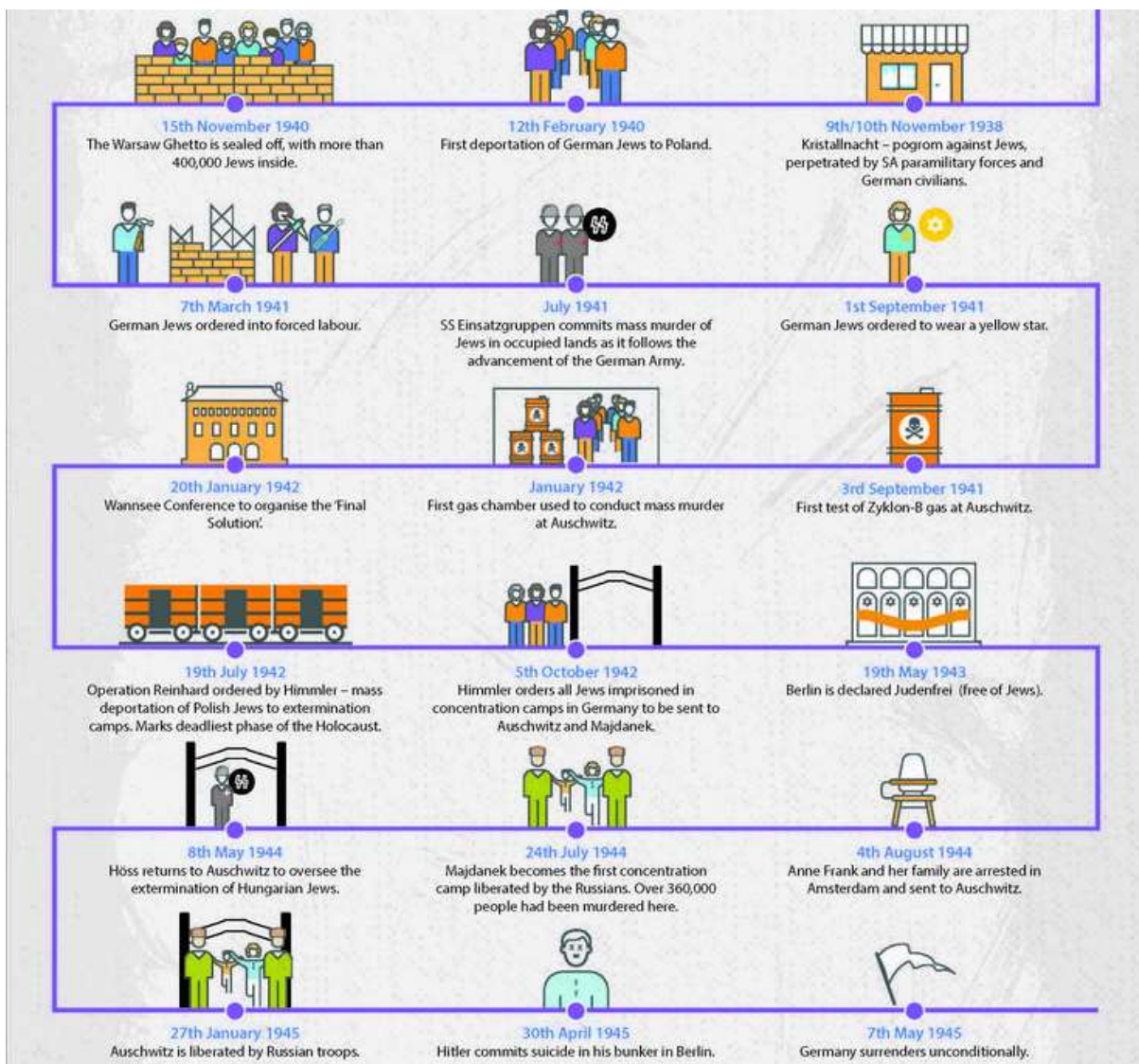


A map of major Nazi concentration and death camps

The events of the Holocaust and the growth of anti-semitism

The Holocaust is made up of a complex timeline of events. It would be impossible to list everything that took place during the Holocaust, but the timeline below highlights moments that were particularly noteworthy when considering the most pivotal moments associated with the Holocaust.

Anti-semitism was not something new in society before the Second World War. Anti-semitism itself, can be traced back many years prior to WW2 and is even referred to as "History's oldest hatred." For example, the 1935 Nuremberg Laws were heavily antisemitic but are not actually part of the Holocaust; anti-semitism has always existed but grew significantly before World War 2 and the Holocaust.



Holocaust Memorial Day

Holocaust Memorial Day occurs annually on 27th January, which marks the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the largest Nazi death camp. Holocaust Memorial Day is a national commemoration day in the United Kingdom dedicated to the remembrance of the Jews and others who suffered in the Holocaust. It was first held in January 2001 and has been on the same date every year since.

The Holocaust Memorial Day Trust (HMDT) champion this cause, and encourage remembrance in a world scarred by genocide. They promote and support Holocaust Memorial Day which remembers the six million Jews murdered during the Holocaust, alongside the millions of other people killed under Nazi persecution and in genocides that followed in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur.

The Holocaust threatened the fabric of civilisation, and genocide must still be resisted every day. Our world often feels fragile and vulnerable, and we cannot be complacent. Even in the UK, prejudice and the language of hatred must be challenged by us all.

Holocaust Memorial Day can be for everyone. Each year across the UK, thousands of people come together to learn more about the past and take action to create a safer future.

Together as a society, we bear witness for those who endured genocide, and honour the survivors and all those whose lives were changed beyond recognition.

As a school we always recognise this important date with a period of silence to remember the atrocities that occurred, those who were lost, and the pain and suffering that was endured by so many people.



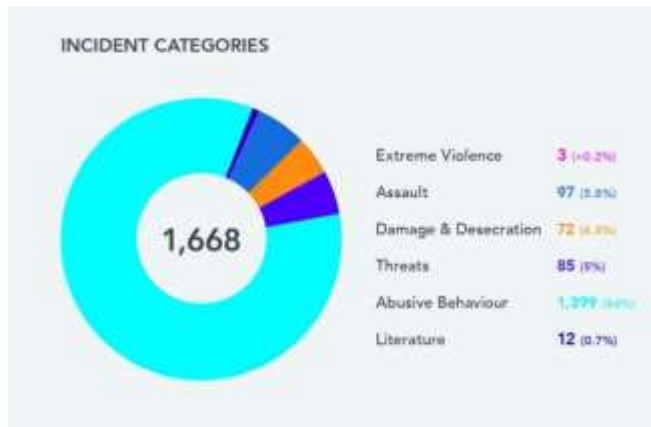
**HOLOCAUST
MEMORIAL
DAY 27/1**

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Contemporary Relevance of the Holocaust

The contemporary relevance of the Holocaust ranges from anti-semitism in everyday life to the continuing persecution and racial hatred many groups continue to experience today.

Anti-semitism did not just end when the Holocaust did, instead it has continued to this day and remains a prevalent issue in contemporary society. This diagram highlights just how big the problem is, especially in relation to Jewish people who make up 0.5% of Britain's population. The Community Security Trust recorded 1,668 anti-semitic incidents across the United Kingdom in 2020, making it the third highest figure recorded by the Community Security Trust in a single year.



Since the end of the Holocaust the amount of racial and religious hatred and intolerance has not decreased. Since the start of 2020 and the Covid pandemic, there has been a rise in the number of hate crimes reported on London buses. These figures show that prejudice of people from different faiths has increased and highlighted that the prejudice is still prevalent in society.

In recent months, the crisis of China's Uighur population has come to light. Though very little is really known about the situation, it is believed that people have been forced on to trains and over one million people have been incarcerated in 're-education camps', similar to those used during the Holocaust.



Commemorating the Holocaust

Even though the Holocaust occurred more than 70 years ago we are lucky to still have a few survivors that can tell their stories and echo their experiences to the generations that followed them.

One such survivor is Manfred Goldberg, who spoke on one of the Live Lessons from Auschwitz sessions, and told us of his experience during his incarceration in multiple camps during the war.





We also were privileged to hear Kitty Hart-Moxon's recorded testimony which gave us a unique insight into her personal experiences that allowed us to commemorate the Holocaust through those who were there at the time, as well as contemporary commemoration such as memorials and services.

<https://www.het.org.uk/survivors-kitty-hart-moxon>

In London, there have been plans put in place to create a memorial to those who lost their lives during the Holocaust, to be placed near the Houses of Parliament as a permanent memorial to those who died.

Humanising the Holocaust



At the Auschwitz camp in Poland there is a book of names that details those people known to have died during the Holocaust. This book of names humanises the Holocaust in many ways, from giving us a true picture of how many people were killed and allowing loved ones and relatives of the dead to find their names and reconnect with those that they lost during this period in history. The vast scale of the book humanises the Holocaust as it demonstrates the scale of the devastation and grief left by the Nazi's after the concentration camps were liberated in 1945.

In Paris, the Wall of Names contains the full names of all 76,000 Jews who were taken from France to Poland during the Holocaust. Significantly, the wall of names contains the full names of all 76,000 as a way of keeping their memories alive, rather than the person being replaced by a number or a single word.

All these memorials and books humanise the Holocaust by using the names of those who suffered rather than just generalising them into a number. By giving them back their identity, it brings home the sheer scale of the Holocaust in terms of human casualties and the impact on the families as well as the victims themselves.



The role of the Holocaust Educational Trust and Lessons from Auschwitz Project

Since its formation in 1988, the Holocaust Education Trust and *Lessons from Auschwitz* has been teaching students the key lessons that we can learn from the events.

The trust gives people an opportunity to hear from survivors and pass on their knowledge to future generations. By giving students the chance to hear from survivors and learn the lessons from the Holocaust, they teach the invaluable lessons that motivates young people to speak out against intolerance and consider their responsibility to their community (<https://www.het.org.uk/about>).