

Welcome to *An Introduction to the Holocaust.*

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www.USHMM.org & www.echoesandreflections.org

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. defines the Holocaust as:
“the systematic, bureaucratic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its collaborators.”



Berta Rosenheim poses with a “Schuktute,” or large cone filled with sweets, stationery, and toys, traditionally given to German children on their first day of school. Leipzig, Germany, 1929. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

A large Hungarian Jewish family, pre-1933, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.



Prior to Nazi leader Adolf Hitler being named Chancellor of Germany in January 1933, there had been 2,000 years of vibrant Jewish life, culture, and contributions. Sixty percent of the world’s Jewish population lived in Europe, comprising only 1.7 percent of the total European population. At the start of WWII in 1939, there were 9,000,000 Jewish men, women, and children in Europe; by war’s end in 1945, 2 out of every 3 European Jews were murdered, including 1.5 million Jewish children.

Close to 5 million others were murdered by the Nazis either for what they did, what they refused to do, or who they were including: Slavic people, Gypsies (the Roma and Sinti), the mentally and physically disabled, homosexuals (males in particular), communists, trade unionists, Soviet prisoners of war, Jehovah’s Witnesses, many church leaders (Protestant and Roman Catholic), people of color (black/afro-German), and other enemies, real or perceived.

The Karshirskiy children, Yad Vashem.



A seventh-grade class, Jewish day school, Bielsko, Poland, 1934.



The Holocaust was not inevitable (It did NOT have to happen)! It occurred because ordinary people made choices that legalized discrimination, allowed prejudice, hatred, and ultimately, led to mass murder.



Photo of both secular and religious Jewish men at an event, Yad Vashem.

Jewish carpentry workshop, a small Jewish town (a shtetl), Vilna, 1922.



Irrational and potentially dangerous, *antisemitism*, known as the “oldest hatred,” is defined as: the hatred of, or prejudice against Jews as individuals, a group, or a concept. Since ancient times, Jews have been used as scapegoats for societies’ ills: falsely accused of the murder of Christ (deicide), the Black Plague (poisoning of wells), the murder of Christian children for their blood in religious rituals (the blood libel), and in modern times, the global financial crisis, and the coronavirus pandemic. Throughout history, these lies have often resulted in massacres, also known as pogroms.

Where Jews were needed, they were tolerated. Since premodern Christianity did not permit usury (moneylending), the Jews played a vital role in commerce and trade. From the Enlightenment period of the 18th century through the constitutionally democratic Weimar Republic, Jews gained emancipation and with it, unprecedented freedoms as equal citizens. This allowed them integration into society, access to higher education, the ability to vote, hold office, sit on the judiciary, boards, and guilds. There were intermarriages and even conversions. Contrary to their image, most Jews were not prominent nor wealthy. They lived in ordinary conditions. Yet, this new status by the German Jewish population angered certain circles of the antisemitic “old-guard” and had to be stopped.



A Jewish soccer team, France, Yad Vashem.

“Once I really am in power, my first and foremost task will be the annihilation of the Jews.”
 - Adolf Hitler, 1922

The humiliation from Germany’s crushing military defeat in WWI, required they find a scapegoat. Known as the Stab-in-the-Back Myth, the military accused the communists, socialists, but most of all, the Jews, for betraying the nation. The signing of the Treaty of Versailles as punishment for Germany’s role in WWI, with its excessive terms and reparation schedule, left the post-war economy destroyed. German society wanted their national pride and military strength back. Violent antisemitism was directed toward this “enemy from within.”

“It’s his fault!”
 Cartoon depicting “the Jew” as losing the war for Germany.



In a short time, Germany went from a democracy to a dictatorship. Hitler was not elected but appointed as Chancellor by President von Hindenburg, with top officials believing they could control him. Yet, within four weeks in office, a fire burned the Reichstag, (equivalent to the US Capitol). A manufactured “state of emergency” brought new elections. Hitler used stormtroopers to intimidate and suppress all opposition parties. Dachau was established (originally) for political opponents. The President signed a decree of emergency powers forming the basis for a dictatorship in Germany. The “Enabling Act” allowed Hitler to propose and sign legislation without consulting parliament.



Otto Frank, a Jew, proudly fought for Germany in WWI and received the Iron Cross for bravery. Close to 100,000 Jews served Germany and 12,000 lost their lives.

Adolf Hitler was a spellbinding orator and leader of the National Socialists (Nazi). Radiating strength, he told the non-Jewish German people that they were of a superior Aryan “Master Race”; that all others were sub-human. This new form of Nazi racial ideology offered them a national reawakening. Soon enough, the endless propaganda would condition them to rid themselves of their internal enemy.



Boycott of Jewish businesses, April 1, 1933.



A book confiscation by Nazi officials.



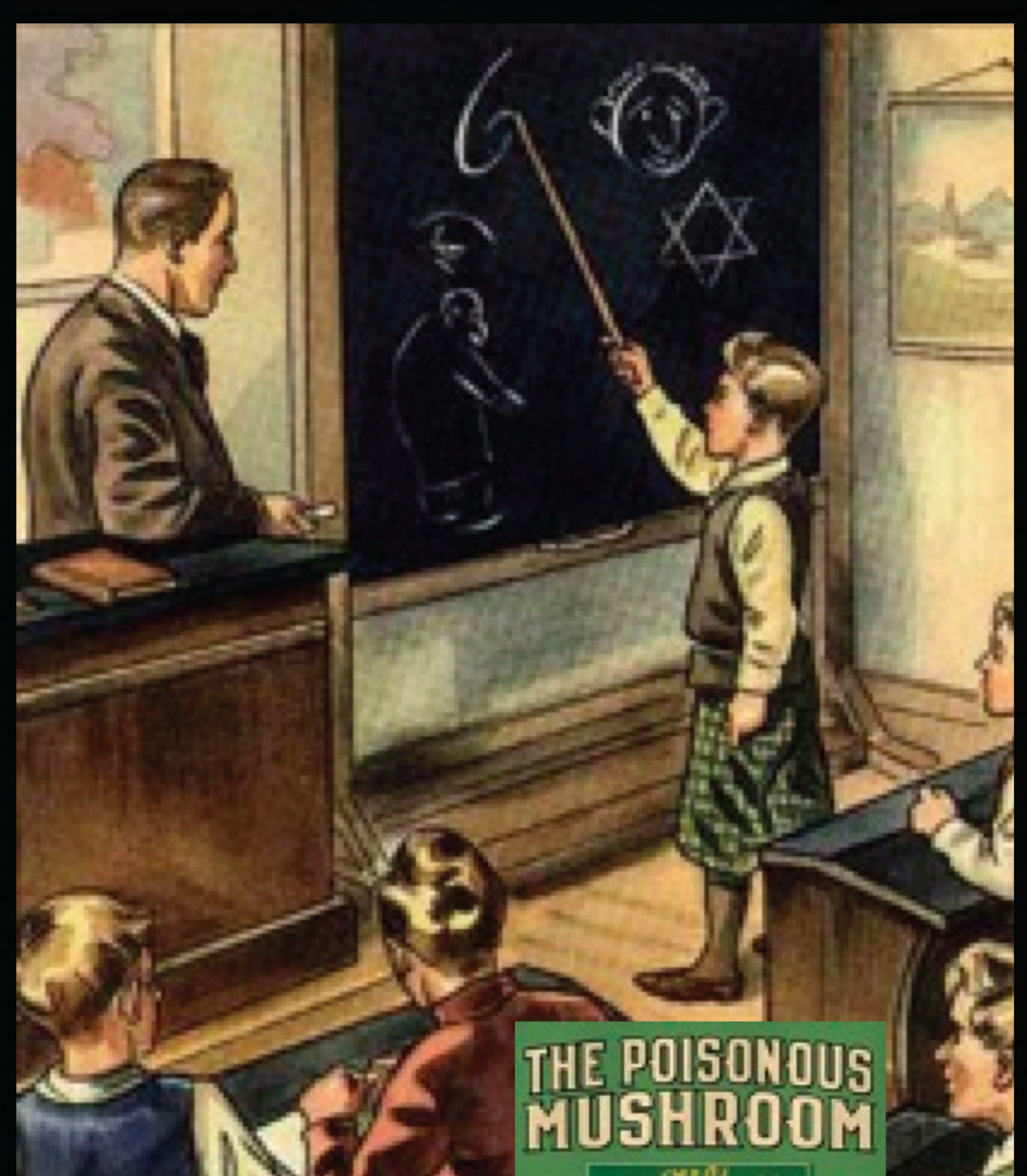
Public book burning of works considered “un-German.”

Immediately Jews started to disappear from society due to restrictive measures including:

- The boycott of Jewish businesses: an effort to begin economic pressure to drive Jews out of Germany.
- Civil Service Law: removed most Jews from positions at schools, universities, government positions, the legal profession.
- Book Burnings: carrying torches in the streets, many Hitler youth and university students enthusiastically burned materials written by Jews, Nobel Peace Prize winning writers, anything “modern,” including a book by blind and deaf teacher, Helen Keller.
- Education Law: forced public schools and universities to limit Jewish enrollment to under 5 percent. German schools taught Nazi racial ideas about “Aryan” superiority and Jewish inferiority.
- Sterilization Law: sterilized 400,000 of their own non-Jewish German people they viewed as a burden on the state, ones with hereditary diseases, those they called “useless eaters.”

In August, 1934, upon the death of Paul von Hindenburg, Hitler became Führer, or Supreme Leader. Educators played a large role in teaching Hitler youth the Nazi ideology of love for Hitler, racism, antisemitism, obedience to state authority, and militarism. Poem read in school:

*My Führer (The child speaks)
 I know you well and love you dearly
 Like father and mother.
 I want to always be obedient to you
 Like I am to father and mother.
 And when I grow up, I will help you,
 Like I will father and mother,
 You should feel joy because of me,
 Like father and mother!*



Teacher reinforcing stereotypical imagery.



Holocaust Survivor Roman Kent, born April 18, 1929 in Lodz, Poland, recalls hate-filled words along with stones being thrown at him after school by some non-Jewish children.

Why do societies seek a scapegoat?
 How was a man like Hitler able to come to power?
 Why is it imperative to maintain a democratic society as opposed to Totalitarianism?

It started with words.

“If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it. The lie can be maintained only for such time as the State can shield the people from political, economic and/or military consequences of the lie. It thus becomes vitally important for the State to use all of its powers to repress dissent, for the truth is the mortal enemy of the lie, and thus by extension, the truth is the greatest enemy of the State.”

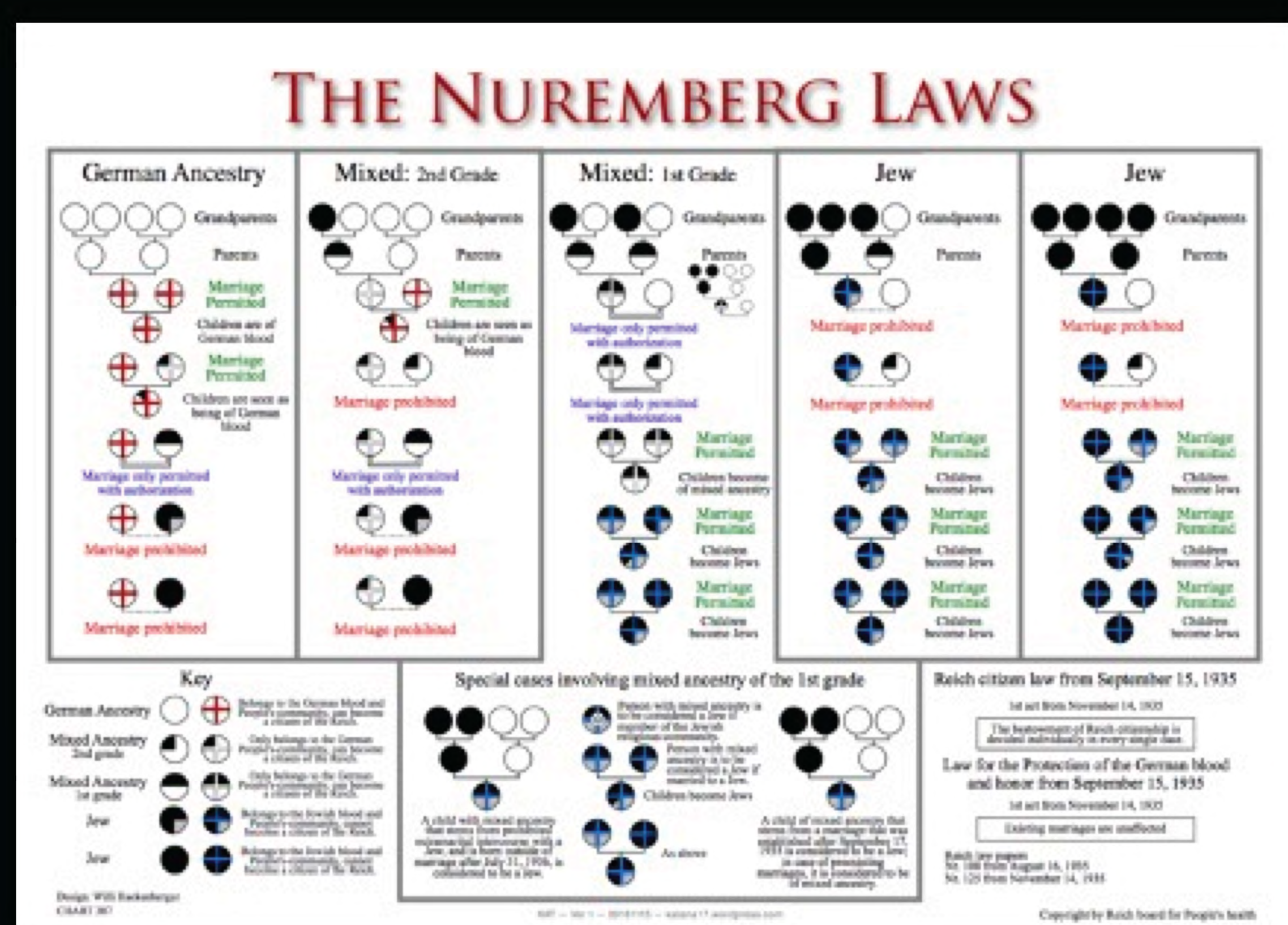
- Nazi Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels on the technique of the “Big Lie.”



Skilled propagandists barraged German citizens with powerful and repetitive antisemitic messaging as a way to shape German public opinion and behavior. Newspapers such as Der Stürmer (The Attacker), printed vile cartoons with exaggerated caricatures of Jews, often juxtaposed against images of the Nazi ideal, the “Aryan.”

Aryans were depicted as good and pure while Jews as evil and dangerous. Street signage, storefronts, radio broadcasts, textbooks, movies, and political rallies, reinforced familiar age-old antisemitic stereotypes. Their frequency gave the illusion that citizens agreed with them. Eventually, people stopped questioning them and the lies become “truth.”

Creating fear of “the Jew” made it easier to secure the acquiescence of millions of bystanders. After enough conditioning and brainwash, German society came to accept and even contribute to the persecution of their neighbors, friends, and sometimes even family, leading up to targeted persecution and mass murder.



The Nuremberg Laws

Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor of 15 September 1935

Thoroughly convinced by the knowledge that the purity of German blood is essential for the further existence of the German people and prepared to be guided by the will to achieve the German nation in the future, the Reichstag has resolved upon the following law and statute, which is promulgated herewith:

SECTION 1
1. Marriages between Jews and citizens of German or kindred blood are forbidden. Marriages concluded in defiance of this law are void, even if the parties have contracted them before the coming into force of this law. In the future, they are prohibited. 2. Proceedings for annulment may be initiated only by the Public Prosecutor.

SECTION 2
Relations outside marriage between Jews and citizens of German or kindred blood are forbidden.

SECTION 3
Jews will not be permitted to employ female citizens of German or kindred blood in their households.

SECTION 4
1. Jews are forbidden to bear the Reich and national flag to prevent the culture of the Reich.
2. On the other hand they are permitted to present the Jewish colors. The exercise of this authority is to be exercised by the State.

SECTION 5
1. A person who acts contrary to the prohibition of section 1 will be punished with hard labor.
2. A person who acts contrary to the prohibition of section 2 will be punished with imprisonment up to a year and with a fine or without either.

SECTION 6
The Reich Minister of the Interior in agreement with the Deputy of the President and the Reich Minister of Justice will issue the legal and administrative regulations which are required for the implementation and supplementation of this law.

SECTION 7
The law will become effective on the day after the promulgation, section 3 however only on January 1, 1936.

To purify Germany and the Aryan “race,” the Nuremberg Citizenship Laws determined who was a Jew and who was considered “German.” No longer a religion or a culture, they were defined as a race and identified by blood and genealogy. While focus was on the Jews, these race laws also applied to other groups considered inferior including black people and Roma (gypsies).

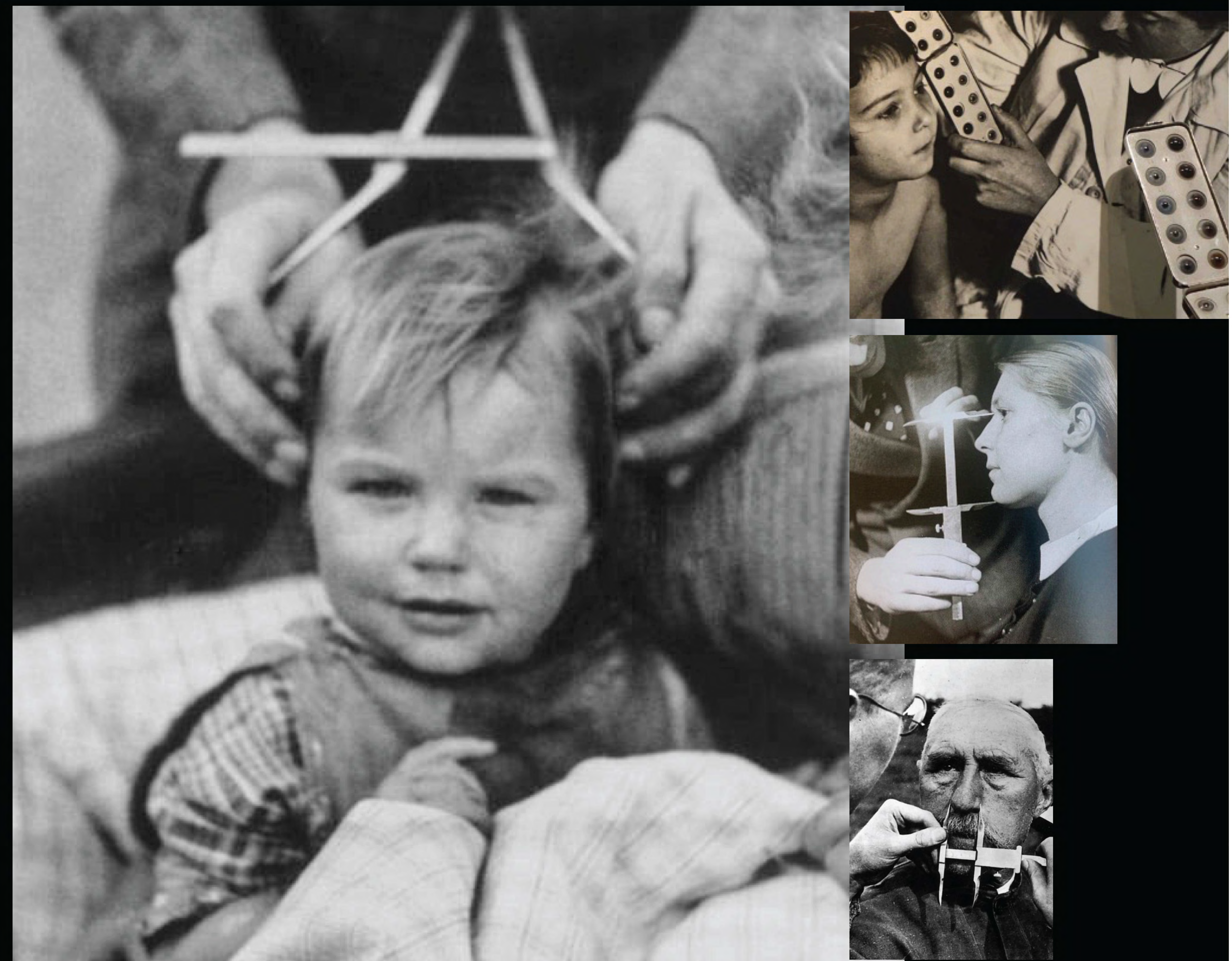


Fritz Gluckstein (left) with his Jewish father and Christian mother. The Nuremberg Laws of 1935 classified him as mixed-race or Mischling. Fritz was classified as a Jew.

“For a racially pure people which is conscious of its blood can never be enslaved by the Jew.”

- Adolf Hitler, Mein Kampf

The tools of Nazi racial pseudoscience, calipers and eye color chart.



Julius Wolf, a Jewish man and his non-Jewish fiancée Christine Neeman were accosted by police and led through the streets. Both forced to wear a sign the reads, “I am a race defiler.” Temporarily imprisoned in a concentration camp and then released, Wolff immigrated to the US in 1938.

What are the dangers of stereotyping and biases?
What were the dangers of Nazi “pseudoscience?”

Nazi Germany's first act of territorial aggression in the quest to unite ethnic Germans and acquire more Lebensraum (living space) was called the Anschluss (connection). Soldiers were greeted with flowers and kisses as they entered Austria. Almost immediately, residents turned on their Jewish neighbors with acts of terror and humiliation. By then, it was clear the Jews of Germany were not welcome.



The image shows Jews who were forced to scrub the sidewalk with bare hands as people look on. Vienna, Austria, March 1938.



The Refuge by Felix Nussbaum, a German Jewish artist, 1939, painted as a reflection of his fear and desperation on the eve of WWII while in exile in Belgium. Arrested in 1944, he and his family all perished in Auschwitz.



Synagogues destroyed.

Kristallnacht or the Night of Broken glass, was a coordinated unleashing of Nazi terror that rained down on the Jewish population of Germany and Austria. On November 9-10, 1938, a pogrom (attack) by Nazi thugs and brown shirts resulted in 30,000 Jewish men and boys arrested and sent to concentration camps. Synagogues were burned, 7,000 Jewish shops plundered and destroyed, people were assaulted, and beaten, 91 Jews were murdered, and torah scrolls were destroyed and burning in the streets. Local police and fire departments were told to stand down unless German buildings were in jeopardy.



The men were released from the concentration camps on the condition they would leave Germany.



Roll call of prisoners, Buchenwald, November 10, 1938.



Line at police station waiting for visas, Vienna, 1938-39.

A refugee crisis ensued. The Anschluss convinced many Jews that it was time to leave. The United States had no laws for refugees and their quotas were low from 1924. Even as some German Jews found places to emigrate, each new territorial German expansion only brought more Jews under their realm.

President Roosevelt convened a conference in Evian, France, July, 1938, of 32 countries to discuss the crisis with the understanding that no countries would be forced to accept Jewish refugees. After eight days of leisure, each declined to accept any refugees, claiming financial burden and other reasons. Only the Dominican Republic volunteered to, in exchange for money.



“When I came home and approached the house we lived in, I saw my mother in the street with a broom sweeping up the glass. ...a lot of people were screaming and whistling and making fun of her.”

- Holocaust Survivor Johanna (Hanne) Hirsch Liebmann, then a teenager.



As early as 1933, the Nazis applied pressure through boycotts, intimidation, and fear in an effort to economically crush and “persuade” the Jews to leave Germany. “Voluntary” aryanization of Jewish businesses brought sales to non-Jews at deep discounts, but after Kristallnacht, things changed radically. Now, forced aryanization of remaining Jewish businesses, insurance payments as a result of Kristallnacht, bank accounts, and other viable assets were expropriated by the Nazis and used to fund the war and destruction of the remaining population.

In time, the resulting poverty created insecurity in satisfying daily needs. The implementation of a compulsory “Jewish Badge” or armband was used to humiliate and stigmatize. Designed to create isolation by their Aryan neighbors, the identifying badge also invited (legal) violence, theft, verbal, or physical humiliation. Those defended or aiding a Jew were labeled “Jew lover” and ostracized.

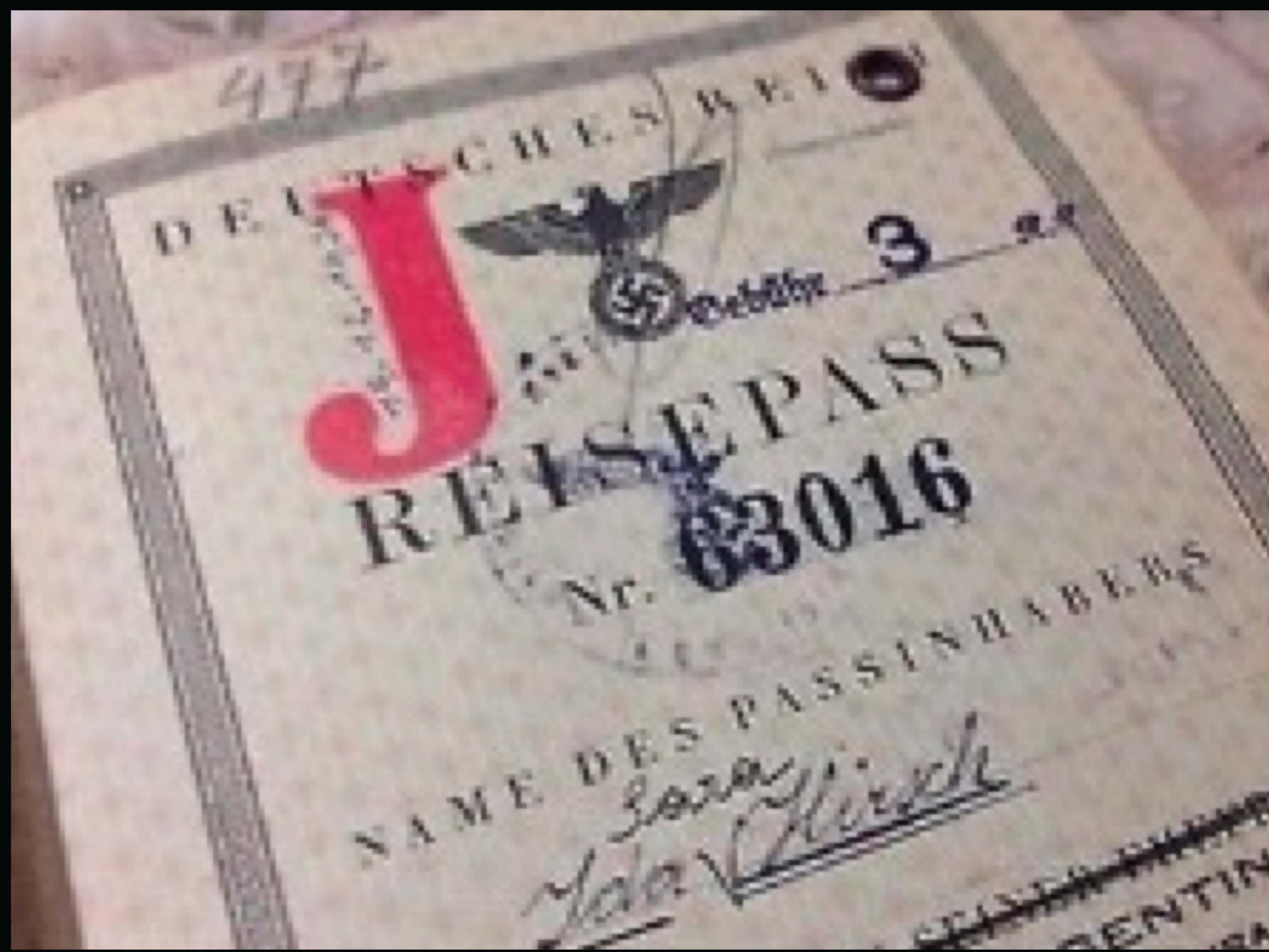


Brothers Avraham and Emanuel Rosenthal, Kovno, Lithuania, 1944.



A Belgian family wearing the compulsory badge, 1942.

Deemed stateless, Jews were forced to surrender their passports to only have them reissued with Jewish identifying credentials such as the large red “J” and the addition of the Hebrew middle name of “Sara” for females and “Israel” for males.



Notice “Sara” near bottom of Reisepass (passport).



Limited food was allowed inside the ghettos. Extreme overcrowding and starving children were a daily sight.



On September 1, 1939, when Germany invaded Poland, it was the beginning of the end. Free to do as they wished with the expanding Jewish populations (gained from invasions of Poland and most of Europe), and not yet having consensus on the “next phase” for the Jews, ghettos were established. Ghettos were often enclosed districts created to segregate, starve, punish, and extract slave labor. A vast number died in the ghettos of starvation and disease. Those that made it out alive did so primarily in closed cattle cars enroute to concentration camps, slave labor camps, and in most cases, death camps.



A deportation to “the East.” As a German deception, Jews were told to pack a suitcase each with everything they would need for relocation.

On June 22, 1941, Germany broke its 1939 non-aggression pact and invaded the Soviet Union. This marked a turning point in the Holocaust. Whereas during the invasion of Poland in 1939, Jews were rounded up and forced into ghettos, the operational policy had changed with the soviet invasion.

Following behind the army, the Einsatzgruppen (special mobile killing units) would round up all the Jews, Roma, Communists, and Soviet civilians they encountered to be stripped of their valuables and clothing. With assistance from local collaborators and police, shootings were conducted and bodies thrown in mass graves. One third of Holocaust victims died in this way. Over the course of two days in September 1941, Einsatzgruppe “C” reported back to headquarters in Berlin that they had killed 33,771 Jews in Babi Yar ravine near Kiev.



On January 20, 1942, the Wannsee Conference was held in the company of high-level German officials to discuss the implementation of the “Final Solution,” the

code name for the deliberate, systematic physical annihilation of Europe’s Jews. Having established that previous methods of eliminating “enemies” was difficult on the soldiers, particularly when it involved women and children, they knew they needed a more depersonalized, cost effective, and industrialized solution.



An Einsatzkommando (mobile killing squad).

“Operation Reinhard” was the code name in honor of Reinhard Heydrich, head of the office organizing the deportation and murders of close to 1.5 million Jews in the Generalgouvernement (German-occupied Poland). Heydrich was assassinated in 1942.



Toys excavated from the grounds of Chelmno.

Mass killings had already begun at Chelmno by December 1941, the first stationary killing facility used by the Nazis. There, at least 172,000 people were killed. In total, six killing centers were established, all located in Poland: Chelmno, Treblinka, Sobibor, Belzec, Majdanak, and Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Why were the death camps located in Poland?
 Why would the Einsatzgruppen find such willing local collaboration?

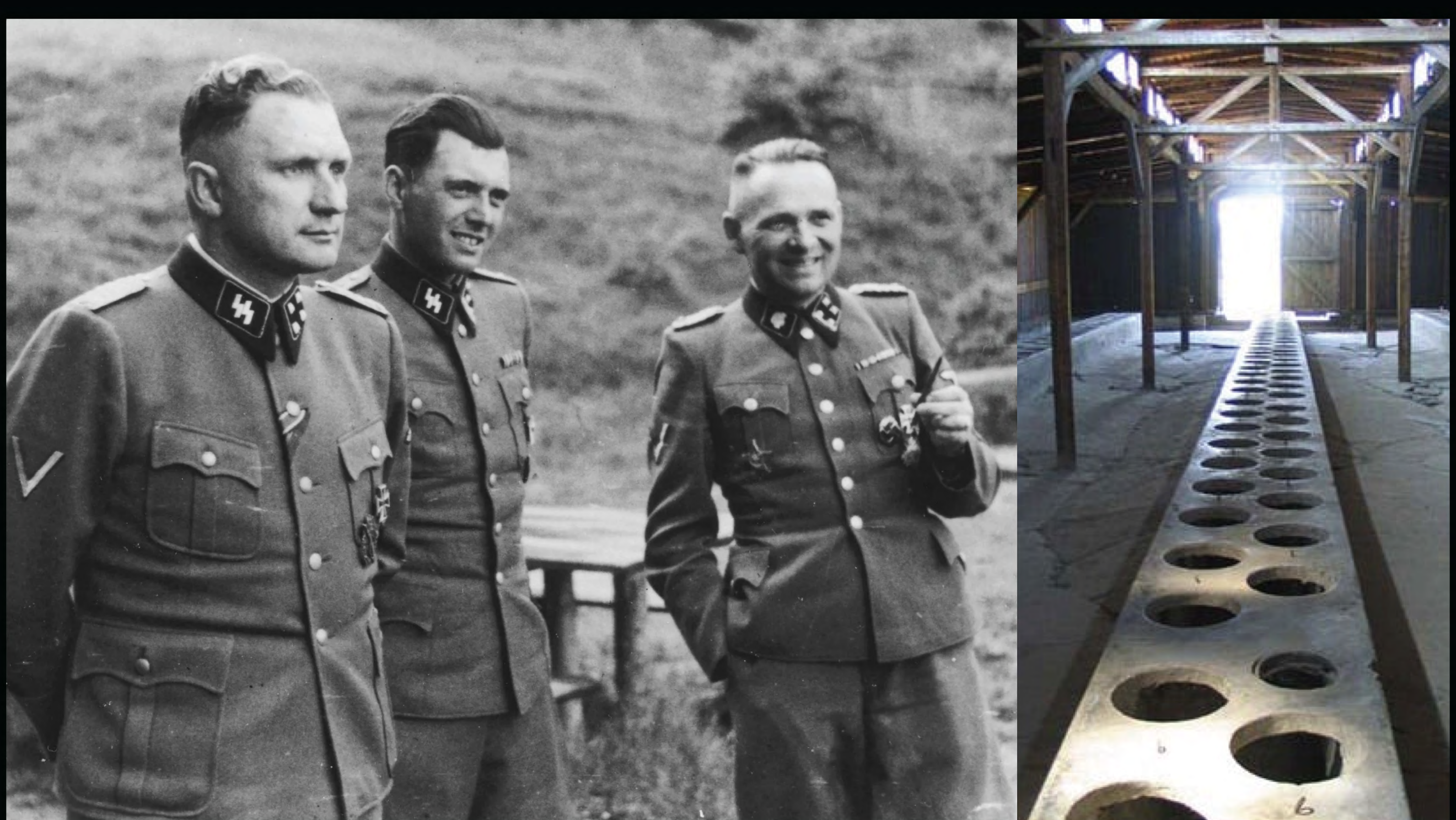


Tracks leading into Auschwitz-Birkenau.

The Germans own records show over 44,000 ghettos and camps were established throughout Europe. These sites were used for detention of enemies of the state, forced labor, and mass murder. Each varied in size, purpose, and operation. The most notorious of them was Auschwitz and its related 40 sub-camps. Auschwitz-Birkenau was built as an industrial killing site with up to four operating crematoria using Zyklon B poisonous gas. At the height of deportations, an average of 6,000 Jews per day were gassed. Unique to Auschwitz and its sub-camps was the application of numbered tattoos to prisoners' bodies. This was used to dehumanize as well as assist camp officers in their record keeping.



Overfilled train cars with exhausted Jews would arrive at a place of horror that had never been seen before. Their travels over several days with no food and two buckets among 75-100 people, one with water and one for waste, turned them easily compliant on arrival. As doors opened, yelling SS guards and their dogs forced them to descend the ramp and separate, women one side, men on the other. A selection was conducted by Nazi "doctors." Within seconds of inspection, they would decide who lives and who doesn't. Pregnant mothers, those with young children, the handicapped, the elderly, those of the age considered too young to work (approximately 14), and anyone unwilling to separate was sent directly to the gas chamber.



Dr. Mengele (center), the "Angel of Death."

Latrine, Auschwitz.

Those who passed inspection and allowed to live were stripped, fully shaved, given a numbered tattoo, disinfected, and handed an ill-fitting uniform. Traumatized, they received no explanation and no idea of the fate of family members. Prisoners faced a daily battle by surviving regular beatings, starvation, exhaustion, illness, and the elements. Regular selections were conducted by camp personnel to determine who was still fit for work; the others were sent to the gas chambers.



Crematoria.



The Death March.

Soviet troops liberated Auschwitz on January 27, 1945. Anticipating their arrival, Nazi guards hurriedly destroyed incriminating documents, liquidated prisoners and prepared to depart on the Death March. Nearly 60,000 prisoners left Auschwitz and its sub-camps marching west toward Germany. SS guards shot anyone who couldn't keep up. Approximately 15,000 died from starvation, cold, exhaustion and the elements.

Jewish resistance came in many forms ranging from passive spiritual resistance to active and armed resistance, even in the face of certain retaliation. In Nazi Germany, even the act of staying alive for a Jew was a form of resistance.

Cultural or spiritual acts of willful disobedience helped one maintain a degree of personal agency and humanity. This could include the creation of fine art, music, poetry, the practice of religious customs (including prayer), the maintenance of a secret library, or the performance of concerts and literary meetings. Children in the ghettos attended clandestine schools while others recorded daily life in diaries.

I Am a Jew

I am a Jew and will be a Jew forever.
 Even if I should die from hunger,
 never will I submit.
 I will always fight for my people,
 on my honor.
 I will never be ashamed of them,
 I give my word.
 I am proud of my people,
 how dignified they are.
 Even though I am suppressed,
 I will always come back to life.



Flowers and a Butterfly by Dorit Weiser (1933-1944), Terezin Ghetto.

Poem by Franta Bass (1930-1944), born in Brno, Czechoslovakia, was deported to the ghetto of Terezin, December 2, 1941, and died in Auschwitz on October 28, 1944. Poem published in: *I never saw another butterfly...*



The Oneg Shabbat archive.

Historian Emanuel Ringelblum, while in the Warsaw Ghetto, assembled a small group to secretly compile documents describing the destruction in the ghettos and of Polish Jewry. This archive included camp diaries and scientific research. These documents were sealed into three large metal milk cans and metal boxes then buried in the cellars of Warsaw buildings. Incredibly, after the war, two of the three milk cans were discovered intact.



Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

Armed resistance occurred in a number of ghettos and camps. The most famous revolt was the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. After witnessing the deportation of 300,000 Jews to Treblinka, the remaining Jews chose to fight. With makeshift weapons, they held out for nearly a month until their defeat. Uprisings also occurred in death camps. At Treblinka, Sobibor, and later Auschwitz-Birkenau, guards were shutting down camp functions or preparing to kill their Jewish work forces, prisoners preemptively killed Nazi guards and destroyed infrastructure. At Sobibor, 300 prisoners escaped: of that number, 58 survived.



Abba Kovner (center, in black), with the "Avengers."

Jewish partisan groups comprising ghetto escapees (fighting for their lives), often joined non-Jewish partisans (fighting for their country). These groups hid in forests and swamps for cover and were responsible for blowing up Nazi supply routes, bridges, and military installations. Abba Kovner is the most well-known Jewish partisan.



“Choiceless Choices.” What does that mean?

What is the relationship between resistance and human dignity?

What does your identity mean to you?

We must consider the human capacity for great hate but also for great love. Far too few individuals and networks extended themselves during the Holocaust. Those that did, usually began with small acts only to extended their size and duration over time — others simply turned away.



The German liner St. Louis, carrying 937 refugees was close enough to the US border in May of 1939, that the passengers reported seeing the lights of Miami. Neither Cuba, the US, nor Canada allowed that ship to dock. With no other alternative, it returned to Europe. Records show that 254 of those passengers were killed in the Holocaust.

In contrast, during the same period, a rescue effort called the Kindertransport was underway. It was a direct response to the Kristallnacht pogrom. Between December 1938 until May 1940, Great Britain agreed to accept 10,000, mostly Jewish, children until the war was over. Each child had to be at least two years old and not older than seventeen. Also, a bond was needed for each child to cover their care. In the ultimate act to save their lives, many parents surrendered their children, putting them into the arms of strangers. After the war was over in September of 1945, approximately half of those parents were alive to claim their children.



Each child wore a numbered tag around their neck so they could be claimed upon arrival in Britain.

It is estimated that only 0.005% of the non-Jewish population extended lifesaving aid to Jews during the Holocaust. The majority chose to do nothing. Some actually turned in their fellow Christian neighbors who were sheltering Jews in their homes or on their farms, and in return, received a small monetary reward or food. Common practice of the Nazis was, if caught harboring Jews, they would not only kill those in hiding, but also the rescuer and their family members. On occasion, the entire village was implicated and punished. This created incentive to watch one's neighbors. Knowing the risks, many still chose to help their fellow man.



Nicholas Winton on 60 Minutes. He told no one of his rescue work that saved 669 Czech children on the Kindertransport until his wife found the list of children's names 50 years later. He has received the honor of Righteous Among the Nations.

If one had the correct appearance and could obtain false papers, they could hide in plain sight. The physicality of Jewish males, nearly all circumcised, could reveal their identity if arrested or challenged. This required an added degree of conscientiousness. Even while hiding in the open, many Jews required the assistance of underground networks.



Sweater of Krystyna Chiger.

At eight years old, in 1943, Krystyna Chiger went into hiding in the sewers during the liquidation of the Lvov ghetto. She, her family, and sixteen others, remained there for fourteen months with the aid of a city employee working on the sewer lines, a Catholic Polish man named Leopold Socha.



Suse Grunbaum at age one. Then at age eleven, upon hearing of upcoming deportations, she and her mother hid on a Dutch farm for two years, first under the floorboards and later in a specially constructed space.



Nevada Center for
Humanity

What does it mean to be a human being?

What can we learn about ourselves through the choices made by rescuers?

Despite the inevitable consequences, the Nazi German diplomat stationed in Denmark Georg Duckwitz, tipped off the Danish Jews to the Nazi plans to deport them and swiftly arranged for nearby Sweden to safely accept them. In a national collective effort, Denmark managed to save most of its 7,000 Jewish residents from deportation by ferrying them across the channel to neighboring Sweden.



“I will assume responsibility for everything I am going to do. I am consoled by my strong faith that good deeds can never go wrong.”
 - Georg Ferdinand Duckwitz, September 26, 1943, a diary entry.

In France, the Huguenot (Protestant) village of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon had a history of lending aid to those in need. This was a result of their own collective memory of suffering as a religious minority. So in that same tradition, it was natural to also extend aid to Jews in need. In addition to preaching against antisemitism, Pastor Trocmé and the residents of his village saved nearly 3,500 Jews from arrest.



Pastor André and Magda Trocmé.



Children saved by the residents of Le Chambon, France.

“We do not know what a Jew is, we only know men.”
 - Pastor André Trocmé

Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg was stationed in Budapest, 1944, at the apex of local terror and Nazi deportations of Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz. Working with the newly created American War Refugee Board, he issued Swedish “protective orders” that resulted in saving at least 4,500 Jews. Other notable diplomats stationed throughout Europe during the war that issued lifesaving visas, even against their own governments mandate, include: Aristides de Souza Mendez, the Portuguese diplomat in Bordeaux, and Chiune Sugihara, the Japanese diplomat in Kaunas, Lithuania.



Diplomats Wallenberg, de Souza Mendez and Sugihara.

Irene Sendler was a Polish social worker who helped smuggle over 2,500 Jewish children out of the Warsaw ghetto. She hid them in orphanages, convents, schools, hospitals, and private homes.

Muslim rescue resulted in the shelter of most of Albania’s 2,000 Jews. In addition, Khaled Abdul-Wahab, a Tunisian, saved 24 Jews when the Nazis invaded North Africa.



Sendler and Abdul-Wahab.

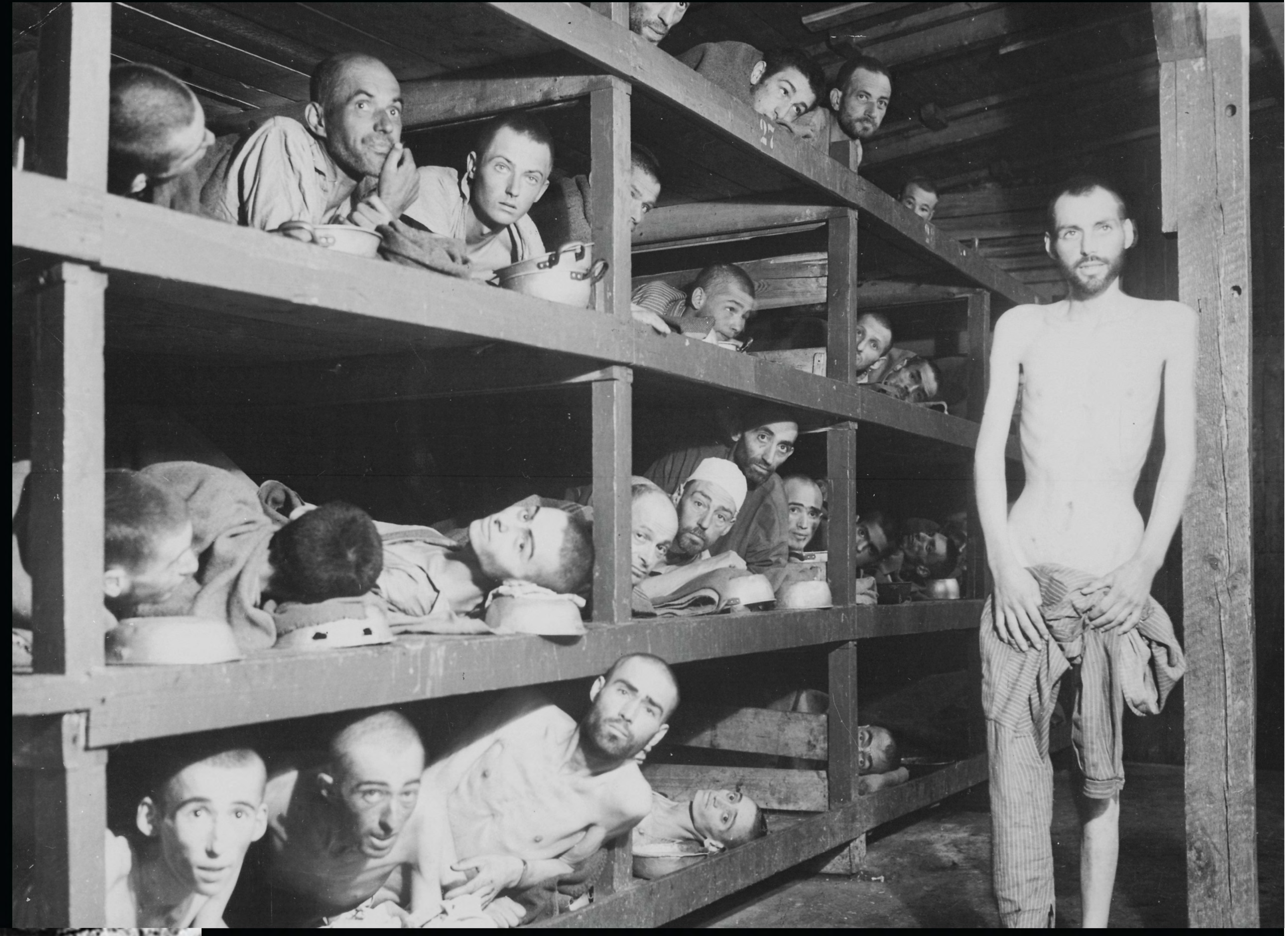
Righteous Among the Nations is an honor established at Yad Vashem in Israel and bestowed upon non-Jewish rescuers who risked their lives to save the life of one or more Jewish people during the Holocaust. To date, 28,217 people from 51 different countries have been given this honor. Five Americans are among this total.



All the individual rescuers highlighted have been honored as Righteous Among the Nations.

How were these rescue efforts possible?
 What traits did rescuers need to be successful in their efforts?

Allied and Soviet troops discovered horrors that defied description as they liberated the camps. They encountered skeletal figures who had been starved, tortured, and forgotten. Concentration camp prisoners greeted their liberators with a range of shock, tears, joy, grief, hunger, and illness. After having had their immediate needs met, survivors inquired about finding relatives who may have survived the war.



Top right: Buchenwald concentration camp. The man on the second bunk, seventh from the left, is Elie Wiesel. Below: children liberated from Auschwitz.



“Get it all on record now. Get the films, get the witnesses, because somewhere down the road of history, some bastard will get up and say this never happened.”
- General Dwight D. Eisenhower

“I have just seen the most terrible place on the face of the earth.”
- Correspondent for the New York Times, W. H. Lawrence



After the war, the top 24 surviving Nazi leaders were tried in Nuremberg, Germany before an International Military Tribunal (a court of justice). Presiding judges from the Allied powers included: the United States, Great Britain, France, and also the Soviet Union. The charges of the Tribunal included crimes against peace, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. Of the 199 defendants tried at Nuremberg, 162 were convicted. The defendants, while generally not denying their crimes, testified that they were “only following orders.”

While too many perpetrators and their collaborators remained unpunished, in the end these trials had an enormous influence on international criminal law.



British Prime Minister Winston Churchill said, “We are in the presence of a crime which has no name.”

That “name” became *genocide*, with legal definition to include: violent attacks with the specific intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group. Coined by Raphael Lemkin and codified as an independent crime under International Law or: the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. The term was partly a response to the unprecedented Nazi policies of systematic murder of the Jewish people.

The Holocaust was neither the first genocide, nor was it the last. Other recognized genocides include: the Armenian, Cambodian, Darfur, Guatemalan, and Rwandan.



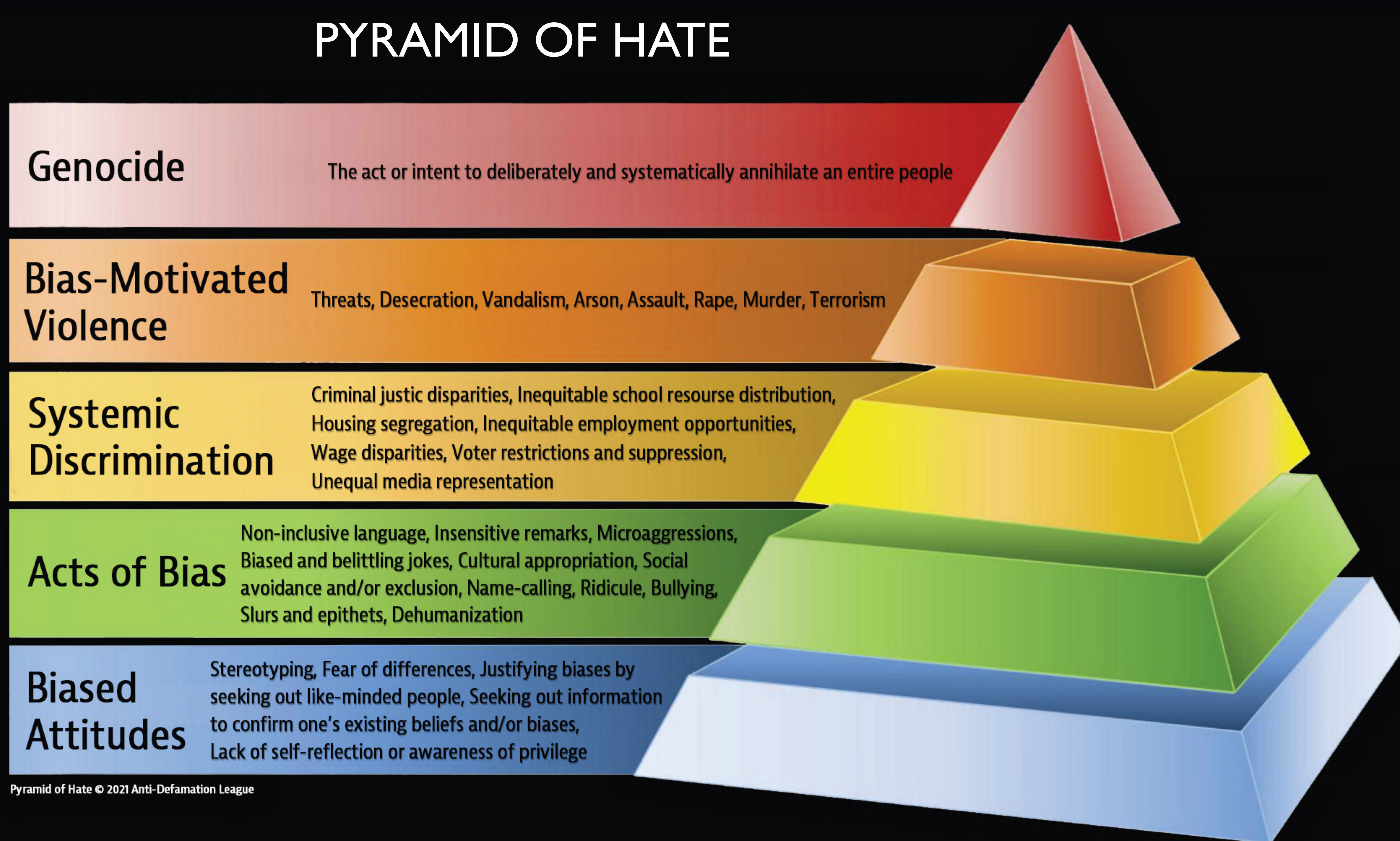
Adolf Eichmann on trial in Israel, 1961.

Eichmann admitted to arranging the transports of millions of Jews to their deaths yet believed he was just a “cog in the wheel” obeying orders. Convicted of crimes against humanity, the Jewish people, war crimes, and of membership in a criminal organization, he was sentenced to death.

“For evil to flourish, it only requires good men to do nothing.”
-Simon Wiesenthal, survivor and former Nazis hunter

Through this exhibit, we have learned how bias and harmful words paved the path toward genocide. The history of the Holocaust shows that targeting an entire group has far reaching consequences which can lead to an increase in xenophobia (prejudice against people from other countries), homophobia, racism, and extremism, with potentially devastating consequences.

PYRAMID OF HATE



Hatred of one group rarely ends with that group. The ADL Pyramid of Hate exhibits how biased attitudes can lead to biased acts, that if left uninterrupted and unchallenged, become normalized and can escalate.

The rescuers (upstanders) you were introduced to earlier embodied certain traits that contributed to their having acted including: compassion, self-sacrifice, ingenuity, integrity, moral leadership, cooperation, social-responsibility, and courage.

Which of those traits do you hold that could lead you to interrupt and challenge bias related acts?

“I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormenter, never the tormented.”
- Elie Wiesel, Nobel Peace Prize Winner, Holocaust Survivor, author of Night

In what ways does Elie Wiesel’s quote inspire you to take action?

How will what you have learned about perpetrators, collaborators, bystanders, and rescuers inform YOUR choices moving forward?