

Germans were entitled to civil and political rights. Jews were reduced to subjects of the state. The Nürnberg Laws formally divided Germans and Jews, yet neither the word *German* nor the word *Jew* was defined. That task was left to the bureaucracy. Two basic categories were established in November: Jews—those with at least three Jewish grandparents—and *Mischlinge* (“mongrels,” or “mixed breeds”)—people with one or two Jewish grandparents. Thus, the definition of a Jew was primarily based not on the identity an individual affirmed or the religion he practiced but on his ancestry. Categorization was the first stage of destruction.

Responding with alarm to Hitler's rise, the Jewish community sought to defend their rights as Germans. For those Jews who felt themselves fully German and who had patriotically fought in World War I, the Nazification of German society was especially painful. Zionist activity intensified. “Wear it with pride,” journalist Robert Wildest wrote in 1933 of the Jewish identity the Nazis had so stigmatized. [Martin Buber](#) led an effort at Jewish adult education, preparing the community for the long journey ahead. Rabbi [Leo Baeck](#) circulated a prayer for [Yom Kippur](#) (the Day of Atonement) in 1935 that instructed Jews how to behave: “We bow down before God; we stand erect before man.” Yet while few, if any, could foresee its eventual outcome, the Jewish condition was increasingly perilous and expected to get worse.

By the late 1930s there was a desperate search for countries of refuge. Those who could get visas and qualify under stringent quotas emigrated to the United States. Many went to Palestine, where the small Jewish community was willing to receive refugees. Still others sought refuge in neighbouring European countries. Most countries, however, were unwilling to receive large numbers of refugees.

Responding to domestic pressures to act on behalf of Jewish refugees, U.S. President [Franklin D. Roosevelt](#) convened, but did not attend, the Évian Conference on resettlement, in Évian-les-Bains, France, in July 1938. In his invitation to government leaders, Roosevelt specified that they would not have to change laws or spend government funds; only philanthropic funds would be used for resettlement. The result was that little was attempted, and less accomplished.

From [Kristallnacht](#) to the “final solution”

On the evening of November 9, 1938, carefully orchestrated anti-Jewish violence “erupted” throughout the Reich, which since March had included Austria. Over the next 48 hours rioters burned or damaged more than 1,000 synagogues and ransacked and broke the windows of more than 7,500 businesses. The Nazis arrested some 30,000 Jewish men between the ages of 16 and 60 and sent them to [concentration camps](#). Police stood by as the violence—often the action of neighbours, not strangers—occurred. Firemen were present not to protect the synagogues but to ensure that the flames did not spread to adjacent “Aryan” property. The [pogrom](#) was given a quaint name: [Kristallnacht](#) (“Crystal Night,” or “Night of Broken Glass”). In its aftermath, Jews lost the illusion that they had a future in Germany.

On November 12, 1938, Field Marshall [Hermann Göring](#) convened a meeting of Nazi officials to discuss the damage to the German economy from pogroms. The Jewish community was fined one billion Reichsmarks. Moreover, Jews were made responsible for cleaning up the damage. German Jews, but not foreign Jews, were barred from collecting insurance. In addition, Jews were soon denied entry to theatres, forced to travel in separate compartments on trains, and excluded from German schools. These new restrictions were added to earlier prohibitions, such as those barring Jews from earning university degrees, from owning businesses, or from practicing law or medicine in the service of non-Jews. The Nazis would continue to confiscate Jewish property in a program called “Aryanization.” Göring concluded the November meeting with a note of irony: “I would not like to be a Jew in Germany!”

Non-Jewish victims of Nazism

While Jews were the primary victims of Nazism as it evolved and were central to Nazi racial ideology, other groups were victimized as well—some for what they did, some for what they refused to do, and some for what they were.

Political dissidents, trade unionists, and [Social Democrats](#) were among the first to be arrested and incarcerated in concentration camps. Under the Weimar government, centuries-old prohibitions against [homosexuality](#) had been overlooked, but this tolerance ended violently when the SA (Storm Troopers) began raiding gay bars in 1933. Homosexual intent became just cause for prosecution. The Nazis arrested German and Austrian male homosexuals—there was no systematic persecution of lesbians—and interned them in concentration camps, where they were forced to wear special yellow armbands and later pink triangles. [Jehovah's Witnesses](#) were a problem for the Nazis because they refused to swear allegiance to the state, register for the draft, or utter the words “Heil Hitler.” As a result the Nazis imprisoned many of the roughly 20,000 Witnesses in Germany. The Nazis also singled out the [Roma](#) (Gypsies). They were the only other group that the Nazis systematically killed in gas chambers alongside the Jews.

In 1939 the Germans initiated the [T4 Program](#)—framed euphemistically as a “euthanasia” program—for the murder of mentally retarded, physically disabled, and emotionally disturbed Germans who departed from the Nazi ideal of Aryan supremacy. The Nazis pioneered the use of gas chambers and mass crematoria under this program.

Following the invasion of [Poland](#), German occupation policy especially targeted the Jews but also brutalized non-Jewish Poles. In pursuit of *Lebensraum* (“living space”), Germany sought systematically to destroy Polish society and nationhood. The Nazis killed Polish priests and politicians, decimated the Polish leadership, and kidnapped the children of the Polish elite, who were raised as “voluntary Aryans” by their new German “parents.” Many Poles were also forced to perform hard labour on survival diets, deprived of property and uprooted, and interned in concentration camps.

Nazi expansion and the formation of ghettos

Paradoxically, at the same time that Germany tried to rid itself of its Jews via forced emigration, its territorial expansions kept bringing more Jews under its control. Germany annexed Austria in March 1938 and the [Sudetenland](#) (now in the Czech Republic) in September 1938. It established control over the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia (now in the Czech Republic) in March 1939. When Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, the “Jewish question” became urgent. When the division of Poland between Germany and the Soviet Union was complete, more than two million more Jews had come under German control. For a time, the Nazis considered shipping the Jews to the island of Madagascar, off the southeast coast of Africa. But as the seas became a war zone and the resources required for such a massive deportation scarce, they discarded the plan as impractical.

On September 21, 1939, [Reinhard Heydrich](#) ordered the establishment of the [Judenräte](#) (“Jewish Councils”), comprising up to 24 men—rabbis and Jewish leaders. Heydrich's order made these councils personally responsible in “the literal sense of the term” for carrying out German orders. When the Nazis sealed the Warsaw Ghetto, the largest of German-occupied Poland's 400 ghettos, in the fall of 1940, the Jews—then 30 percent of [Warsaw](#)'s population—were forced into 2.4 percent of the city's area. The ghetto's population reached a density of over 200,000 persons per square mile (77,000 per square km) and 9.2 per room. Disease, malnutrition, hunger, and poverty took their toll even before the first bullet was fired.

For the German rulers, the ghetto was a temporary measure, a holding pen for the Jewish population until a policy on its fate could be established and implemented. For the Jews, ghetto life was the situation under which they thought they would be forced to live until the end of the war. They aimed to make life bearable, even under the most trying circumstances. When the Nazis prohibited schools, they opened clandestine schools. When the Nazis banned religious life, it persisted in hiding. The Jews used humour as a means of defiance, so too song. They resorted to arms only late in the Nazi assault.

Historians differ on the date of the decision to murder Jews systematically, the so-called “final solution to the Jewish question.” There is debate about whether there was one central decision or a series of regional decisions in response to local conditions; but in either case, when Germany attacked the Soviet Union, its former ally, in June of 1941, the Nazis began the systematic killing of Jews.

The [Einsatzgruppen](#)

Entering conquered Soviet territories alongside the Wehrmacht (the German armed forces) were 3,000 men of the *Einsatzgruppen* (“deployment groups”), special mobile killing units. Their task was to murder Jews, Soviet commissars, and Roma in the areas conquered by the army. Alone or with the help of local police, native anti-Semitic populations, and accompanying Axis troops, the *Einsatzgruppen* would enter a town, round up their victims, herd them to the outskirts of the town, and shoot them. They killed Jews in family units. Just outside Kiev, Ukraine, in the valley of [Baby Yar](#), an *Einsatzgruppe* killed 33,771 Jews on September 28–29, 1941. In the Rumbula Forest outside the ghetto in Riga, Latvia, 25,000–28,000 Jews died on November 30 and December 8–9. Beginning in the summer of 1941, *Einsatzgruppen* killed more than 70,000 Jews at Ponary, outside Vilna (now Vilnius) in Lithuania. They slaughtered 9,000 Jews, half of them children, at the Ninth Fort adjacent to Kovno (now Kaunas), Lithuania, on October 28.

The mass shootings continued unabated, with a first wave and then a second. When the killing ended in the face of a Soviet counteroffensive, special units returned to dig up the dead and burn their bodies to destroy the evidence of the crimes. It is estimated that the *Einsatzgruppen* killed more than one million people, most of whom were Jews.

Historians are divided about the motivations of the members of *Einsatzgruppen*. Christopher Browning describes them as ordinary men in extraordinary circumstances in which conformity, peer pressure, careerism, obedience to orders, and group solidarity gradually overcame moral inhibitions. Daniel Goldhagen sees them as “willing executioners,” sharing Hitler's vision of genocidal anti-Semitism and finding their tasks unpleasant but necessary. Both concur that no *Einsatzgruppe* member faced punishment if he asked to be excused. Individuals had a choice whether to participate or not. Almost all chose to become killers.

The [extermination camps](#)

On January 20, 1942, Reinhard Heydrich convened the [Wannsee Conference](#) at a lakeside villa in a Berlin suburb to organize the “final solution to the Jewish question.” Around the table were 15 men representing government agencies necessary to implement so bold and sweeping a policy. The language of the meeting was clear, but the meeting notes were circumspect: “Another possible solution to the [Jewish] question has now taken the place of emigration, i.e., evacuation to the east... Practical experience is already being collected which is of the greatest importance in the relation to the future final solution of the Jewish question.” Participants understood “evacuation to the east” to mean deportation to killing centres.

In early 1942 the Nazis built extermination camps at [Treblinka](#), [Sobibor](#), and [Belzec in Poland](#). The death camps were to be the essential instrument of the “final solution.” The *Einsatzgruppen* had traveled to kill their victims. With the extermination camps, the process was reversed. The victims traveled by train, often in cattle cars, to their killers. The extermination camps became factories producing corpses, effectively and efficiently, at minimal physical and psychological

cost to German personnel. Assisted by Ukrainian and Latvian collaborators and prisoners of war, a few Germans could kill tens of thousands of prisoners each month. At [Chelmno](#), the first of the extermination camps, the Nazis used mobile gas vans. Elsewhere, they built permanent gas chambers linked to the crematoria where bodies were burned. Carbon monoxide was the gas of choice at most camps. [Zyklon-B](#), an especially lethal killing agent, was employed primarily at [Auschwitz](#) and later at other camps.

Auschwitz, perhaps the most notorious and lethal of the concentration camps, was actually three camps in one: a prison camp (Auschwitz I), an extermination camp (Auschwitz II–Birkenau), and a slave-labour camp (Auschwitz III–Buna-Monowitz). Upon arrival, Jewish prisoners faced what was called a *Selektion*. A German doctor presided over the selection of pregnant women, young children, the elderly, handicapped, sick, and infirm for immediate death in the gas chambers. As necessary, the Germans selected able-bodied prisoners for forced labour in the factories adjacent to Auschwitz where one German company, [IG Farben](#), invested 700,000 million Reichsmarks in 1942 alone to take advantage of forced labour. Deprived of adequate food, shelter, clothing, and medical care, these prisoners were literally worked to death. Periodically, they would face another *Selektion*. The Nazis would transfer those unable to work to the gas chambers of Birkenau.

While the death camps at Auschwitz and [Majdanek](#) used inmates for slave labour to support the German war effort, the extermination camps at Belzec, Treblinka, and Sobibor had one task alone: killing. At Treblinka, a staff of 120, of whom only 30 were [SS \(the Nazi paramilitary corps\)](#), killed some 750,000 to 900,000 Jews during the camp's 17 months of operation. At Belzec, German records detail a staff of 104, including about 20 SS, who killed some 600,000 Jews in less than 10 months. At Sobibor, they murdered about 250,000. These camps began operation during the spring and summer of 1942, when the ghettos of German-occupied Poland were filled with Jews. Once they had completed their missions—murder by gassing, or “resettlement in the east,” to use the language of the Wannsee protocols—the Nazis closed the camps. There were six extermination camps, all in German-occupied Poland, among the thousands of concentration and slave-labour camps throughout German-occupied Europe.

The impact of the Holocaust varied from region to region, and from year to year in the 21 countries that were directly affected. Nowhere was the Holocaust more intense and sudden than in [Hungary](#). What took place over several years in Germany occurred over 16 weeks in Hungary. Entering the war as a German ally, Hungary had persecuted its Jews but not permitted their deportation. After Germany invaded Hungary on March 19, 1944, this situation changed dramatically. By mid-April the Nazis had confined Jews to ghettos. On May 15, deportations began, and over the next 55 days, the Nazis deported some 438,000 Jews from Hungary to Auschwitz on 147 trains.

Policies differed widely among Germany's Balkan allies. In [Romania](#) it was primarily the Romanians themselves who slaughtered the country's Jews. Toward the end of the war, however, when the defeat of Germany was all but certain, the Romanian government found more value in living Jews who could be held for ransom or used as leverage with the West. [Bulgaria](#) permitted the deportation of Jews from neighbouring Thrace and Macedonia, but government leaders faced stiff opposition to the deportation of native Bulgarian Jews.

German-occupied [Denmark](#) rescued most of its own Jews by spiriting them to Sweden by sea in October 1943. This was possible partly because the German presence in Denmark was relatively small. Moreover, while anti-Semitism in the general population of many other countries led to collaboration with the Germans, Jews were an integrated part of Danish culture. Under these unique circumstances, Danish humanitarianism flourished.

In [France](#), Jews under [Fascist Italian](#) occupation in the southeast fared better than the Jews of [Vichy France](#), where collaborationist French authorities and police provided essential support to the understaffed German forces. The Jews in those parts of France under direct German occupation fared the worst. Although allied with Germany, the Italians did not participate in the Holocaust until Germany occupied northern Italy after the overthrow of the Fascist leader, [Benito Mussolini](#).

Throughout German-occupied territory the situation of Jews was desperate. They had meagre resources and few allies and faced impossible choices. A few people came to their rescue, often at the risk of their own lives. Swedish diplomat [Raoul Wallenberg](#) arrived in Budapest on July 9, 1944, in an effort to save Hungary's sole remaining Jewish community. Over the next six months, he worked with other neutral diplomats, the Vatican, and Jews themselves to prevent the deportation of these last Jews. Elsewhere, Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, a French Huguenot village, became a haven for 5,000 Jews. In Poland, where it was illegal to aid Jews and where such action was punishable by death, the Żegota (Council for Aid to Jews) rescued a similar number of Jewish men, women, and children. Financed by the Polish government in exile and involving a wide range of clandestine political organizations, the Żegota provided hiding places, financial support, and forged identity documents.

Some Germans, even some Nazis, dissented from the murder of the Jews and came to their aid. The most famous was Oskar Schindler, a Nazi businessman, who had set up operations using involuntary labour in German-occupied Poland in order to profit from the war. Eventually, he moved to protect his Jewish workers from deportation to extermination camps. In all occupied countries, there were individuals who came to the rescue of Jews, offering a place to hide, some food, or shelter for days, weeks, or even for the duration of the war. Most of the rescuers did not see their actions as heroic but felt bound to the Jews by a common sense of humanity. Israel later recognized rescuers with honorary citizenship and commemoration at Yad Vashem, Israel's memorial to the Holocaust.

Jewish [resistance](#)

It is often asked why Jews did not make greater attempts at resistance. Principally they had no access to arms and were surrounded by native anti-Semitic populations who collaborated with the Nazis or condoned the elimination of the Jews. In essence the Jews stood alone against a German war machine zealously determined to carry out the “final solution.” Moreover, the Nazis went to great lengths to disguise their ultimate plans. Because of the German policy of collective reprisal, Jews in the ghettos often hesitated to resist. This changed when the Germans ordered the final liquidation of the ghettos, and residents recognized the imminence of their death.

Jews resisted in the forests, in the ghettos, and even in the death camps. They fought alone and alongside resistance groups in France, Yugoslavia, and Russia. As a rule, full-scale uprisings occurred only at the end, when Jews realized the inevitability of impending death. On April 19, 1943, nine months after the massive deportations of Warsaw's Jews to Treblinka had begun, the Jewish resistance, led by 24-year-old [Mordecai Anielewicz](#), mounted the [Warsaw Ghetto Uprising](#). In Vilna partisan leader Abba Kovner, recognizing the full intent of Nazi policy toward the Jews, called for resistance in December 1941 and organized an armed force that fought the Germans in September 1943. In March of that year, a resistance group led by Willem Arondeus, a homosexual artist and author, bombed a population registry in Amsterdam to destroy the records of Jews and others sought by the Nazis. At Treblinka and Sobibor uprisings occurred just as the extermination camps were being dismantled and their remaining prisoners were soon to be killed. This was also true at Auschwitz, where the Sonderkommando (“Special Commando”), the prisoner unit that worked in the vicinity of the gas chambers, destroyed a crematorium just as the killing was coming to an end in 1944.

By the winter of 1944–45, with Allied armies closing in, desperate SS officials tried frantically to evacuate the camps and conceal what had taken place. They wanted no eyewitnesses remaining. Prisoners were moved westward, forced to march toward the heartland of Germany. There were over 50 different marches from Nazi concentration and extermination camps during this final winter of Nazi domination, some covering hundreds of miles. The prisoners were given little or no food and water, and almost no time to rest or take care of bodily needs. Those who paused or fell behind were shot. In January 1945, just hours before the Red Army arrived at Auschwitz, the Nazis marched some 60,000 prisoners to Wodzisław and put them on freight trains to the camps at [Bergen-Belsen](#), [Gross-Rosen](#), [Buchenwald](#), [Dachau](#), and [Mauthausen](#). Nearly one in four died en route.

In April and May of 1945, American and British forces en route to military targets entered the [concentration camps](#) in the west and caught a glimpse of what had occurred. Even though tens of thousands of prisoners had perished, these camps were far from the most deadly. Still, even for the battle-weary [soldiers](#) who thought they had already seen the worst, the sights and smells and the emaciated survivors they encountered left an indelible impression. At Dachau they came upon 28 railway cars stuffed with dead bodies. Conditions were so horrendous at [Bergen-Belsen](#) that some 28,000 inmates died after they were freed, and the entire camp had to be burned to prevent the spread of typhus. Allied soldiers had to perform tasks for which they were ill-trained: to heal the sick, comfort the bereaved, and bury the dead. As for the victims, liberation was not a moment of exultation. Viktor Frankl, a survivor of Auschwitz, recalled, “Everything was unreal. Unlikely as in a dream. Only later—and for some it was very much later or never—was liberation actually liberating.”

The Allies, who had early and accurate information on the murder of the Jews, made no special military efforts to rescue them or to bomb the camps or the railroad tracks leading to them. (See [Sidebar: Why wasn't Auschwitz bombed?](#)) They felt that only after victory could something be done about the Jewish situation. Warnings were issued, condemnations were made, plans proceeded to try the guilty after the war, but no concrete action was undertaken specifically to halt the genocide. An internal memo to U.S. Secretary of the Treasury [Henry Morgenthau, Jr.](#), from his general counsel in January 1944 characterized U.S. State Department policy as

“acquiescence to the murder of the European Jews.” In response Morgenthau helped spur the creation of the [War Refugee Board](#), which made a late and limited effort to rescue endangered Jews, mainly through diplomacy and subterfuge.

The aftermath

Although the Germans killed victims from several groups, the Holocaust is primarily associated with the murder of the Jews. Only the Jews were targeted for total annihilation, and their elimination was central to Hitler's vision of the “New Germany.” The intensity of the Nazi campaign against the Jews continued unabated to the very end of the war and at points even took priority over German military efforts.

When the war ended, Allied armies found between seven and nine million displaced persons living outside their own countries. More than six million people returned to their native lands, but more than one million refused repatriation. Some had collaborated with the Nazis and feared retaliation. Others feared persecution under the new communist regimes. For the Jews, the situation was different. They had no homes to return to. Their communities had been shattered, their homes destroyed or occupied by strangers, and their families decimated and dispersed. First came the often long and difficult physical recuperation from starvation and malnutrition, then the search for loved ones lost or missing, and finally the question of the future.

Many Jews lived in displaced-persons camps. At first they were forced to dwell among their killers because the Allies did not differentiate on the basis of religion, merely by nationality. Their presence on European soil and the absence of a country willing to receive them increased the pressure on Britain to resolve the issue of a Jewish homeland in British-administered Palestine. Both well-publicized and clandestine efforts were made to bring Jews to Palestine. In fact, it was not until after the [establishment of the State of Israel](#) in May 1948 and the liberalization of American immigration laws in 1948 and 1949 (allowing the admission of refugees from Europe) that the problem of finding homes for the survivors was solved.

Upon liberating the camps, many Allied units were so shocked by what they saw that they meted out spontaneous punishment to some of the remaining SS personnel. Others were arrested and held for trial. The most famous of the postwar trials occurred in 1945–46 at Nürnberg, the former site of Nazi Party rallies. There, the International Military Tribunal tried 22 major Nazi officials for war crimes, crimes against the peace, and a new category of crimes: crimes against humanity. This new category encompassed “murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation, and other inhumane acts committed against any civilian population...persecution on political, racial, or religious grounds...whether or not in violation of the domestic laws of the country where perpetrated.” After the first trials, 185 defendants were divided into 12 groups, including physicians responsible for medical experimentation (but not so-called euthanasia), judges who preserved the facade of legality for Nazi crimes, *Einsatzgruppe* leaders, commandants of concentration camps, German generals, and business leaders who profited from slave labour. The defendants made up, however, a miniscule fraction of those who had perpetrated the crimes. In the eyes of many, their trials were a desperate, inadequate, but necessary effort to restore a

semblance of justice in the aftermath of so great a crime. The [Nürnberg trials](#) established the precedent, later enshrined by international convention, that crimes against humanity are punishable by an international tribunal.

Over the ensuing half-century, additional trials further documented the nature of the crimes and had a public as well as a judicial impact. The 1961 trial in Jerusalem of [Adolf Eichmann](#), who supervised the deportations of Jews to the death camps, not only brought him to justice but made a new generation of Israelis keenly aware of the Holocaust. The Auschwitz trials held in Frankfurt am Main, West Germany, between 1963 and 1976 increased the German public's knowledge of the killing and its pervasiveness. The trials in France of [Klaus Barbie](#) (1987) and Maurice Papon (1996–98) and the revelations of François Mitterrand in 1994 concerning his indifference toward Vichy France's anti-Jewish policy called into question the notion of French resistance and forced the French to deal with the issue of collaboration. These trials also became precedents as world leaders considered responses to other crimes against humanity in places such as Bosnia and Rwanda.

The defeat of Nazi Germany left a bitter legacy for the German leadership and people. Germans had committed crimes in the name of the German people. German culture and the German leadership—political, intellectual, social, and religious—had participated or been complicit in the Nazi crimes or been ineffective in opposing them. In an effort to rehabilitate the good name of the German people, the Federal Republic of [Germany](#) (West Germany) firmly established a democracy that protected the human rights of all its citizens and made financial reparations to the Jewish people in an agreement passed by parliament in 1953. West German democratic leaders made special efforts to achieve friendly relations with Israel. In the [German Democratic Republic](#) (East Germany), the communist leaders attempted to absolve their population of responsibility for the crimes, portraying themselves as the victims of the Nazis, and Nazism as a manifestation of capitalism. The first gesture of the postcommunist parliament of East Germany, however, was an apology to the Jewish people. At one of its first meetings in the newly renovated Reichstag building in 1999, the German parliament voted to erect a Holocaust memorial in Berlin. The first state visitor to Berlin after its reestablishment as capital of a united Germany was Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak.

At the beginning of the 21st century, the history of the Holocaust continued to be unsettling. The [Swiss](#) government and its bankers had to confront their role as bankers to the Nazis and in recycling gold and valuables taken from the victims. Under the leadership of German prime minister Gerhard Schröder, German corporations and the German government established a fund to compensate Jews and non-Jews who worked in German slave labour and forced labour programs during the war. Insurance companies were negotiating over claims from descendants of policyholders killed during the war—claims that the companies denied immediately after the war by imposing prohibitive conditions, such as the presentation of a death certificate specifying the time and place of death of the insured. In several eastern European countries, negotiations addressed Jewish property that the Nazis had confiscated during the war but that could not be returned under the region's communist governments. Artworks stolen during the war and later sold on the basis of dubious records were the subject of legal struggles to secure their return to the original owners or to their heirs. The German government continued to pay reparations—first

awarded in 1953—to individual Jews and the Jewish people to acknowledge responsibility for the crimes committed in the name of the German people.

Artistic responses to the Holocaust

Artists the world over and camp survivors themselves have responded to the Holocaust through art. The very existence of Holocaust art can, however, create a sense of unease. Critic Irving Howe has asked, “Can imaginative literature represent in any profound or illuminating way the meanings of the Holocaust? Is ‘the debris of our misery’ (as one survivor described it) a proper or manageable subject for stories and novels? Are there not perhaps extreme situations beyond the reach of art?” Similarly, philosopher Theodore Adorno has commented that writing poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. Yet poetry has been written—moving poetry that seeks to come to terms with the tragedy even in the German language—in works by Nelly Sachs and Paul Celan, among others. Gripping work dealing with the horror, pain, and loss of the Holocaust has appeared in every literary genre and in music, film, painting, and sculpture.

Survivors of the Holocaust have produced powerful works that record or reflect on their experiences. Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl* (originally in Dutch, 1947), Eli Wiesel's *Night* (originally in Yiddish, 1956), and works by Primo Levi are some of the most memorable in the field of literature. Paintings and drawings by survivors Samuel Bak, Alice Lok Cahana, and David Olère document the horrors that they experienced in ghettos and death camps. Holocaust survivors have also composed a wide variety of music, including street songs, which gave voice to life in the ghetto; resistance songs, such as Hirsh Glik's “Song of the Partisans” (composed and first performed 1943, published 1953); and classical compositions, such as *Quartet for the End of Time* (first performed 1941) by Olivier Messiaen and the opera *Der Kaiser von Atlantis oder der Tod dankt ab* (first performed 1943; “The Emperor of Atlantis or Death Abdicates”) by Victor Ullman.

Artists of all kinds, regardless of any firsthand experience with the Holocaust, have sought to grapple with this tragedy. George Segal's memorial sculpture, *Holocaust*, is but one notable example. Visual art in response to the Holocaust includes paintings by Holocaust refugees Marc Chagall and George Grosz and the illustrated story *Maus* (published in installments 1980–85) by Art Spiegelman, the son of a survivor. Notable musical responses to the Holocaust include Arnold Schoenberg's *A Survivor from Warsaw* (first performed 1947), Dmitri Shostakovich's *13th Symphony* (first performed 1962), which used the text of the poem “Baby Yar” (1961) by Yevgeny Yevtushenko, and works by composers Charles Davidson, Michael Horvitz, and Oskar Morawetz.

Film, too, has been a prime medium for dealing with the Holocaust. Shortly after World War II, several eastern European filmmakers, including Aleksander Ford, Wanda Jakubowska, and Alfred Radok, attempted to capture the experience of Holocaust victims. Some of the most influential films since then include *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1959), directed by George Stevens; *Il Giardino dei Finzi-Contini* (1970, *The Garden of the Finzi Continis*), directed by Vittorio De Sica; the nine-hour documentary *Shoah* (1985), directed by Claude Lanzmann; *Au Revoir les*

Enfants (1987, *Goodbye, Children*), directed by Louis Malle; *Schindler's List* (1993), directed by Steven Spielberg; *La Vita è Bella* (1997; *Life Is Beautiful*), directed by Roberto Benigni; and *Bent* (1997), directed by Sean Mathias and based on Martin Sherman's 1979 play about the Nazi persecution of homosexuals.

Conclusion

Today the Holocaust is viewed as the emblematic manifestation of absolute evil. Its revelation of the depths of human nature and the power of malevolent social and governmental structures has made it an essential topic of ethical discourse in fields as diverse as law, medicine, religion, government, and the military.

Many survivors report they heard a final plea from those who were killed: "Remember! Do not let the world forget." To this responsibility to those they left behind, survivors have added a plea of their own: "Never again." Never for the Jewish people. Never for any people. They hope that remembrance of the Holocaust can prevent its recurrence. In part because of their efforts, interest in the event has increased rather than diminished with the passage of time and in fact [Holocaust Remembrance days](#) are observed each year in many countries. More than half a century after the Holocaust, institutions, memorials, and museums continue to be built and films and educational curricula created to document and teach the history of the Holocaust to future generations.
