

TIMELINE OF THE HOLOCAUST

The following timeline provides a brief overview of key events leading up to, during, and following the Holocaust. Its primary source is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's Holocaust Timeline of Events ([USHMM Timeline](#)), a visually engaging and comprehensive resource rich with primary and secondary sources that illuminate each event in greater depth. It serves as an invaluable tool for both educators and students — ideal for classroom instruction, independent research, and thoughtful reflection on the historical progression of the Holocaust. While the USHMM timeline is a primary source for this resource, additional sources can be found in the “Additional Resources” section for expanded exploration and context.

If possible, invite learners to explore The [Montreal Holocaust Museum Interactive Map](#), which visually illustrates Germany's occupation during World War II and highlights key locations of persecution and mass killings.

Before 1933: Aftermath of World War I and the Formation of the Nazi Party

1918

End of World War I: An armistice, or ceasefire agreement, is signed between the Germans and the Allies (France, Great Britain (including Canada), Russia, Italy, Japan, and, later, the United States), officially ending World War I. Germany suffers defeat with over 1.7 million total dead, including about one-fifth of the German army. They also experience devastating losses to their economy, their territories, their military, and their pride.

November Revolution: The discontent over the loss of World War I leads to an uprising of German soldiers, political leaders, and workers, which results in the abdication of Germany's leader, Kaiser Wilhelm II, making way for the establishment of the Weimar Republic. As Germany makes its first attempt as a democracy, with a parliament known as the Reichstag and an elected president, extreme political parties form, struggling for power, and often violently taking to the streets.

1919

The Treaty of Versailles is Signed: Following their defeat in World War I, many Germans feel a deep sense of embarrassment and national humiliation. This collective shame and resentment creates fertile ground for extremist ideologies to take root in the years that follow. The signing of the Treaty of Versailles imposes severe economic and territorial penalties on Germany. Nearly one-tenth of Germany's valuable industrial land is given to France and Belgium. Germany gives up all its foreign colonies. Military restrictions include a reduction in the German Army to only 100,000 men. In addition, Germany is forced to take responsibility for the war and pay reparations. Many Germans perceive the treaty as a “Diktat,” a dictated peace or harsh penalty forced upon them, and feelings of resentment grow with military and political leaders placing blame on Jewish people and Communists for the defeat. Revision of the Versailles Treaty later becomes a central platform for extremist parties in Germany, including Adolf Hitler's Nazi Party, increasing their ability to gain traction with mainstream voters with promises to rebuild the military, reclaim lost territory (especially in the East) and restore Germany's status as a major European and global power after the humiliating defeat.



1919 (continued)

Formation of the German Workers Party: The German Workers Party is formed, composed mostly of former military personnel and unemployed workers. Party members promote nationalist, antisemitic, and white supremacy ideologies.

1920–21

Formation of the Nazi Party and the Rise of Adolf Hitler: The German Workers Party changes its name to National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) or the Nazi Party. Adolf Hitler joins and soon takes control, increasingly spreading rhetoric regarding the desire for a racially pure German population.

1923

Beer Hall Putsch: In an attempt to overthrow the German government, Hitler and the Nazis concoct a plot called the "Beer Hall Putsch," intended to seize control of the local government in Munich. The plot fails and Hitler is arrested for treason and sentenced to five years in prison, but is released after one year.

1925

***Mein Kampf* is Published:** While in prison, Hitler writes the first volume of *Mein Kampf* ("My Struggle"). The book details Hitler's radical ideas of German nationalism, antisemitism, white supremacy, and anti-Communism. He links Social Darwinism with the human struggle, arguing that only the strongest races survive and the German race should be kept "pure." The book becomes the ideological base for the Nazi Party and uses deep-rooted antisemitism to justify its racist policies.

1927

The Nazis Gain Support Through Strategic

Propaganda: After Hitler's release from prison, he reforms the Nazi Party to successfully compete in future German elections. He establishes the SA (Sturmabteilung), a paramilitary unit; the SS, (Schutzstaffel), an elite group that serves as a security unit; and a propaganda department. To gain the support of the people, Nazi sympathizers stir up trouble in small towns suffering from the poor economy and political instability. The Nazi SA then comes in with brutal tactics and restores order. Gradually, the tactics work on people's fears and they support the Nazis.

1929

The Great Depression: The U.S. stock market crashes, triggering the Great Depression. Germany's economy, heavily reliant on American loans, collapses, leading to mass unemployment and social unrest. The Weimar Republic is unable to cope with the problems of high unemployment, high inflation, and public despair. The coalition government of liberal and conservative parties in the Reichstag (Parliament) collapses. President Paul von Hindenburg is persuaded to impose emergency powers allowing him to restore order. Laws now come from the executive branch, bypassing the Reichstag legislature.

1932

Hitler Becomes Chancellor of Germany: President von Hindenburg faces another election. He decides to run again to prevent Hitler from becoming president. Hindenburg wins as president, but the Nazi Party wins almost 37 percent of the vote, making it the largest party in the Reichstag. The nation continues to suffer under von Hindenburg's ineffective policies, and Hitler keeps the pressure on with massive propaganda campaigns and daily street violence. In a desperate move, von Hindenburg appoints Hitler as chancellor (prime minister) of Germany and head of the Reichstag, hoping he can control him.

1933–1938: Rise of the Nazi Party and The Beginnings of the Holocaust

1933

The Reichstag Fire Decree Suspends Civil Liberties:

The Reichstag building in Berlin, the seat of the German parliament, is set ablaze by an arsonist. The Nazi Party declares it's a communist plot to overthrow the government, in order to pressure President Paul von Hindenburg to issue the Reichstag Fire Decree, which suspends civil liberties, including freedom of the press, assembly, and association. In order to suppress opposition, the decree allows the regime to arrest and imprison political opponents without trial, dissolve political organizations, and suppress publications.

The Dachau Camp is Established: The Enabling Act is passed, granting Hitler dictatorial powers and allowing him to enact laws without Reichstag approval. Shortly after, the first concentration camp was established in Dachau, Germany, to incarcerate political opponents.

Disenfranchisement of Targeted Groups: The Nazi regime organizes a nationwide boycott of Jewish-owned businesses, marking the beginning of systematic economic persecution of Jewish people. They also engage in other modes of systematic oppression, including the burning of "un-German" books, exclusion from civil service positions, and restrictions against Jewish children in public schools. The German government also passes the "Law for the Prevention of Offspring with Hereditary Diseases" which provides their basis for the involuntary sterilization of disabled individuals and people identified as having mental illness, as well as Roma, those identified as "asocial elements," and Black people.

1935

The Nuremberg Laws: The Nuremberg Laws are enacted, transforming the definition of Jewish identity from religious to racial and stripping Jewish people of German citizenship.



1938–1945: The Holocaust and World War II

1938

Kristallnacht (Night of Broken Glass): A pogrom, or violent attack, exclusively against Jewish synagogues, businesses, and homes across Germany and Austria that results in widespread destruction and the arrest of approximately 30,000 Jewish people. This nationwide program will foster the outbreak of war that marks the transition in Nazi racial antisemitism toward genocide. The “Night of Broken Glass” is considered to be the official beginning of the era of the Holocaust.

1939

Germany invades Poland: Initiating World War II, this leads to the establishment of ghettos and the beginning of mass deportations of Jewish people. Hitler also authorizes an order allowing doctors to legally murder people with disabilities through euthanization with no threat of prosecution. Great Britain and France officially declare war on Germany; however, initially there is only limited engagement.

Piotrków Ghetto Established: The Third Reich occupies Piotrków Trybunalski, a city in central Poland, and establishes the Piotrków Ghetto, the first official ghetto created by the Nazis during WWII and operating from 1939 to 1942. Thousands of Jewish people are confined within the ghetto’s sealed boundaries, causing extreme overcrowding and dire living conditions.

1940

Auschwitz Camp Established: Auschwitz, also known as Auschwitz-Birkenau, is established as the largest of the Nazi concentration and death camps. Located in southern Poland, it evolves into a network of camps where Jewish people and other perceived enemies of the Nazi state are exterminated, often in gas chambers, or used as slave labor. During World War II, more than one million people lose their lives at Auschwitz.

Dunkirk Evacuation: Nazi Germany attacks France, Belgium, and the Netherlands. British and French soldiers retreat to the French port town of Dunkirk. The Allied troops are able to escape from Dunkirk with the help of British ships and boats that ferry them across the English Channel to Britain. The rescue is not just the work of British naval ships: More than 800 fishing boats, some piloted by civilians, rescue approximately 338,000 soldiers over nine days. Not long after these events, France surrenders to Germany, and Britain stands largely alone against Nazi Germany.

Axis Powers Established: The Tripartite Pact (Berlin Pact), a military alliance between Germany, Italy, Japan, is signed in Berlin, formalizing the Axis Powers.

1941

Krakow Ghetto Established: German authorities announce, establish, and seal a ghetto in Krakow, Poland. Between 15,000 and 20,000 Jewish people are forced to live within the ghetto boundaries, which are enclosed by barbed-wire fences and, in places, by a stone wall. A Jewish resistance movement forms in the Krakow ghetto, with leaders focusing underground operations initially on supporting education and welfare organizations.

Operation Barbarossa: Germany launches its largest military operation of the war, Operation Barbarossa, with plans to invade the Soviet Union. Despite initial German successes, the operation ultimately fails due to the harsh winter conditions, the resilience of the Soviet forces, and the vastness of the Soviet territory. This is a significant turning point in the war, as it opens the Eastern Front, bringing the Soviet Union into the Allied forces, strengthening them against Germany.

Occupation of Kyiv (The Babi Yar Massacre): German forces enter Kyiv (Kiev), the capital of Soviet Ukraine. During the first days of the German occupation, two major explosions destroyed the German headquarters. The Germans use the sabotage as a pretext to order German authorities to murder the Jewish population of Kyiv at Babyn Yar (Babi Yar), a ravine northwest of the city. As the victims move into the ravine, they are shot in small groups. Over 33,771 Jewish people were murdered during this two-day period, which became one of the largest mass murders at an individual location during World War II.

The United States joins the Allied Forces: The day after the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, a U.S. Navy base in Hawaii, the U.S. declares war on Japan and officially enters World War II on the side of the Allied Forces.

1942

The Wannsee Conference: The Wannsee Conference is held, where Nazi officials formalize the “Final Solution” to the “Jewish Question,” planning the systematic extermination of the Jewish population by establishing a larger network of extermination camps.

Operation Reinhard: Operation Reinhard is established as the code name for the German plan to murder two million Jewish people in German-occupied Poland. It is marked as the deadliest day in Holocaust history. Approximately 1.7 million Jewish people are slaughtered in killing centers and mass shootings. Individuals from other minority groups are also murdered: Poles, Roma (Gypsies), and prisoners of war.

1943

Warsaw Ghetto Uprising: As the Nazis come to deport members of the Jewish community from the Warsaw Ghetto, they are met with mines, grenades, and bullets. Mordechai Anielewicz, leader of the Jewish Combat Organization, commands over 700 young Jewish fighters during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, which is considered the first and largest acts of armed resistance against the Nazi persecution during World War II.

1944

D-Day: Under the code name Operation “Overlord,” over 150,000 U.S., British, and Canadian troops (the Allied Forces) land on the beaches of Normandy, France. A significant turning point of WWII, D-Day marks the beginning of the Allied invasion and is the largest land and water invasion in history. The success of D-Day opens a Western front, hastens the liberation of Europe from Nazi control, and brings the Allies one step closer to defeating Germany.



1944 (continued)

The Auschwitz Report: *The Auschwitz Report*, written by two Slovak Jewish prisoners who escaped from Auschwitz, goes public through media channels in Switzerland, launching a worldwide press campaign condemning Nazi atrocities and intensifying rescue efforts.

1945

End of WWII: Soviet forces liberate Auschwitz-Birkenau, uncovering the extent of Nazi atrocities. As Soviet forces near his command bunker in central Berlin, Adolf Hitler commits suicide, and Berlin falls to the Soviets within days. Germany and Japan surrender unconditionally to the Allies, ending World War II.

Postwar Aftermath and Exodus: Holocaust survivors and the Jewish families who made it through the war begin the difficult journey of rebuilding their lives. Most no longer feel safe in Europe, leading to a massive exodus of refugees seeking safe haven in countries outside the continent. However, they often face resistance and strict immigration policies that limit opportunities for Jewish people to emigrate.

The Nuremberg Trials begin: A series of military tribunals are held to prosecute high-ranking Nazi leaders for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. Held in Nuremberg, Germany, these trials mark the first time international law is used to hold a government accountable for such crimes. They establish lasting principles of justice and set a precedent for future international courts.

1950

First Holocaust Survivor Memoirs Published:

Holocaust survivors begin sharing their personal stories with the world. Landmark works like *The Diary of Anne Frank* and Elie Wiesel's *Night* bring global awareness to the human experience behind the Holocaust.

1961

The Eichmann Trial in Israel: Adolf Eichmann, a key architect of the Holocaust, is captured and tried in Jerusalem. The televised trial exposes the horrors of the Holocaust to a worldwide audience and gives survivors a public voice.

1979

First Holocaust Survivor Oral Testimonies

Recorded: Efforts begin to preserve Holocaust survivor stories on film. These oral histories become a vital tool for education and remembrance, capturing firsthand accounts.

Additional Resources

Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center

<https://www.fswc.ca/holocaust-and-genocide-education-resources>

Journeys in Film. 2013. *Defiant Requiem Curriculum Guide*.

<https://journeysinfilm.org/product/defiant-requiem/>

Journeys in Film. 2018. *Schindler's List Curriculum Guide*.

<https://journeysinfilm.org/product/schindlers-list/>

Montreal Holocaust Museum

<https://museeholocauste.ca/en/history-holocaust/>

Montreal Holocaust Museum Interactive Timeline

<https://histoire.museeholocauste.ca/en/map/war-persecutions-mass-killings>

The National WWII Museum

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/>

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
Timeline of Events

<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/timeline/holocaust>

The USC Shoah Foundation

<https://sfi.usc.edu/>

The Wiener Holocaust Library

<https://wienerholocaustlibrary.org/>