

Holocaust Glossary

anti-Semitism *n.*

Prejudice or discrimination against Jews. Antisemitism can be based on hatred against Jews because of their religious beliefs or their group membership (ethnicity), but also on the erroneous belief that Jews are a race. Nazi antisemitism was racial in nature; Jews were viewed as racially inferior to Aryans and destructive of the world order. —**antisemitic** *adj.*

Auschwitz-Birkenau (ow sch vits-beer ken ow)

A complex consisting of concentration, extermination, and labor camps in Poland. It was established in 1940 as a concentration camp for Poles and a killing center was in operation from 1942, where more than one million Jews were murdered.

Bar Mitzvah (bahr mits va)

A Jewish male who at the age of thirteen transitions to a state of religious and ritual obligation under the precepts of Jewish law becomes a *Bar Mitzvah*. The term has also come to denote a communal initiation ceremony signifying the beginning of religious/ritual responsibility. Young women reach the status of **Bat Mitzvah** (bah mits va) at age twelve.

bigotry

An unreasonable or irrational attachment to negative stereotypes and prejudices.

boycott

To abstain from using, buying, or dealing with as an expression of protest or disfavor or as a means of coercion.

concentration camp

Camps established by the Nazi regime, which eventually became a major instrument of terror, control, punishment, and killing performed through both deliberate means as well as attrition by hunger and/or disease.

crematoria

Furnaces used to cremate bodies. During the Holocaust, crematoria were installed in several camps, among them the extermination camps and the Theresienstadt ghetto.

death march

Referring to the forced marches of Nazi camp prisoners toward the German interior at the end of World War

II. Such marches began when the German armed forces, trapped between the Soviets to the east and the advancing Allied troops from the west, attempted to prevent the liberation of camp inmates in the harsh winter of 1945. Treated with tremendous brutality during the forced marches, thousands were shot or died of starvation or exhaustion.

discrimination

The denial of justice and fair treatment by both individuals and institutions in many arenas, including employment, education, housing, banking, and political rights. Discrimination is an action that can follow prejudicial thinking.

displaced persons' camp (DP camp)

Camps set up after World War II in Austria, Germany, and Italy as temporary living quarters for the tens of thousands of homeless people created by the war. Many survivors of the Holocaust who had no home or country to which they could return were among the displaced persons.

extermination camp *also called* **death camp**

A Nazi facility where victims were killed on a mass industrialized scale and their bodies burned or buried in mass graves. The Nazis operated six extermination camps: Auschwitz-Birkenau, Belzec, Chelmno, Majdanek, Sobibór, and Treblinka.

genocide

The destruction of an ethnic, religious, or national group of people to the extent that they no longer exist as a defined unit. Genocide includes mass murder and the destruction of cultural and political institutions.

Gestapo (gesh tah poh)

The Nazi Secret State Police who were directly involved in implementing the murder of Jews and other Nazi victims during the Holocaust.

ghetto

Sections of towns and cities that the German occupation authorities and their allies used to concentrate, exploit, and starve regional Jewish populations.

Holocaust

The murder of approximately six million Jews by the Nazis and their collaborators. Sinti-Roma, Poles, people

Holocaust Glossary

with physical and mental disabilities, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Soviet prisoners of war, and political dissidents were among other victims of Hitler's regime.

internment camp

A camp in which foreigners, prisoners of war, or others considered dangerous to pursuing a war effort are confined during wartime.

Nuremberg Laws

Racial laws put into effect by the German parliament in Nuremberg on September 15, 1935. These laws became the legal basis for the racist anti-Jewish policy in Germany. One of the first Nuremberg Laws declared that only Aryans could be citizens of the Reich. This stripped Jews of their political rights, forbade sexual relations between "Aryans" and Jews and did not allow Jews to display the German/Nazi flag or national colors. Thirteen additional decrees were added to the Nuremberg Laws over the next eight years; these included the first official definition of who was to be considered a Jew and who an Aryan.

prejudice

Prejudging or making a decision about a person or group of people without sufficient knowledge. Prejudicial thinking is frequently based on stereotypes.

racism

The practice of discrimination, segregation, persecution, and domination of a group based on that group's race.

Reich (rye ch), Third Reich

The official name of the Nazi regime; ruled from 1933 to 1945 under the command of Adolf Hitler. Historically, the First Reich was the medieval Holy Roman Empire, which lasted until 1806. The Second Reich included the German Empire from 1871–1918.

Schutzstaffel (SS) (shoe ts shtah fel)

Originally organized as Hitler's personal bodyguard, the SS was transformed into a giant organization under Heinrich Himmler. Although various SS units were assigned to the battlefield, the organization is best known for carrying out the destruction of European Jewry.

sexism

Prejudice and/or discrimination based on gender.

Shoah (sho ah)

A Hebrew word meaning "catastrophe," referring to the Holocaust.

stereotype

An oversimplified generalization about a person or group of people without regard for individual differences. Even seemingly positive stereotypes that link a person or group to a specific positive trait can have negative consequences.

survivor

Within the context of the Holocaust, a survivor is someone who escaped death at the hands of the Nazis and their collaborators.

swastika

An ancient Eastern symbol appropriated by the Nazis as their emblem.

Zyklon B

Hydrogen cyanide, a poisonous gas originally developed as a fumigation agent to remove insects. In September 1941, it was used experimentally on Soviet prisoners of war. The success of these experiments had devastating consequences for millions of Jews who were gassed in the Nazi extermination camps.