

The Holocaust

What Was the Holocaust?

The Holocaust was a genocide that took place during World War II, in which approximately six million Jews were systematically murdered by Nazi Germany and its collaborators. Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party rose to power in Germany in the 1930s, implementing policies of discrimination against Jews that included exclusion from political and social life, forced labor, and forced relocation to ghettos.

With the invasion of Poland in 1939, the Nazis began a campaign of mass murder, initially using mobile killing squads known as Einsatzgruppen. Later, the Nazis established concentration camps and extermination camps, such as Auschwitz-Birkenau and Treblinka, where Jews, Romani people, homosexuals, people with disabilities, Jehovah's Witnesses, political dissidents, and others were regularly subjected to brutality, and many were systematically murdered in gas chambers.

In addition to Germany and Poland, the Holocaust occurred in numerous other countries that were either occupied by the Nazi regime or collaborated with the Nazis. This included, for example, the Soviet Union, Romania, the Netherlands, Hungary, Greece, France, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Italy, Yugoslavia, Lithuania, and Latvia.

The Holocaust came to an end with the defeat of Nazi Germany in 1945. In the aftermath of the war, the world grappled with the scale of the atrocities committed by the Nazis. The Nuremberg Trials, held between 1945 and 1946, prosecuted prominent Nazi leaders for war crimes, crimes against peace, and crimes against humanity.

It is important to understand that the Holocaust is not merely an historical event; the loss and trauma it caused still deeply impacts the Jewish people today. There is an enduring impact from the loss of entire communities, there are living survivors who bear witness to the atrocities, and there are family members who continue to mourn those lost. A study suggests that a child of a Holocaust survivor may be at a higher risk for mental wellness issues including depression, anxiety, and PTSD.¹ The memory of the Holocaust also continues to have a profound impact on global society. It serves as a reminder of the dangers of hatred and intolerance, and the need to promote respect for diversity and human rights. The memory of the Holocaust is commemorated through memorials, museums, and education initiatives aimed at preventing such atrocities from occurring in the future.

What is Holocaust Denial?

Holocaust denial is the assertion that the genocide of six million Jews during World War II did not occur, or that it was greatly exaggerated. Holocaust deniers often employ a variety of tactics to promote their views, including the manipulation of historical evidence and the use of conspiracy theories.

Holocaust denial is a form of antisemitism because it seeks to undermine and delegitimize the historical reality of the genocide of the Jewish people. By denying the existence of the Holocaust or downplaying its significance, Holocaust deniers seek to perpetuate the same hatred and intolerance that led to the genocide in the first place.

Furthermore, Holocaust denial often includes the propagation of antisemitic stereotypes and conspiracy theories, such as the idea that Jews control the media or the world's financial systems. These beliefs are rooted in centuries-old antisemitic tropes and serve to fuel further hatred and prejudice against Jewish people.

It is crucial to combat Holocaust denial and to promote education and awareness about the realities of the Holocaust and its lasting impact.

What is Yom HaShoah (Holocaust Remembrance Day)?

Yom HaShoah, also known as Holocaust Remembrance Day, is a day of commemoration for the victims of the Holocaust. It falls on the 27th day of the Hebrew month of Nisan, which usually occurs in April or May on the Gregorian calendar.

Yom HaShoah is a time to remember the six million Jews who were systematically murdered by the Nazis during World War II, as well as the millions of others who were targeted for persecution and extermination. The day is observed with solemn ceremonies, including the lighting of candles, the recitation of prayers, and the reading of names of those who perished in the Holocaust.

The observance of Yom HaShoah also serves as a reminder of the ongoing struggle against antisemitism and other forms of hatred and intolerance. It is a time to reflect on the lessons of the Holocaust and to renew the commitment to promoting respect for diversity and human rights. Yom HaShoah is observed in Israel and Jewish communities around the world as both a day of religious observance as well as a secular day of commemoration. Public secular events to remember the Holocaust will take place, and synagogues will observe Yom Ha-Shoah rituals and liturgy. Due to the modern nature of the holiday, new rituals are still being created.

Yom HaShoah is not the only Holocaust memorial day. January 27th has been designated as International Holocaust Remembrance Day by the United Nations, and Roma Holocaust Memorial Day occurs on the 2nd of August.

Intersectionality and the Holocaust

An intersectional approach to Holocaust awareness and education in the workplace recognizes that the Holocaust impacted various marginalized groups and that individuals may belong to multiple such groups, including, for example, LGBTQIA persons, and people with disabilities, in addition to Jews. Employee resource groups (ERGs) can play a crucial role in Holocaust education and awareness in the workplace from an intersectional approach. They can provide a safe space for employees to discuss and learn about the Holocaust from diverse perspectives, and raise awareness about the experiences of LGBTQIA persons, people with disabilities, and other marginalized groups during the Holocaust.

How Can Familiarity with the Holocaust Create a More Inclusive Workplace?

Knowledge of the history and impact of the Holocaust can help employers better identify and address instances of discrimination, prejudice, and hate speech. It can help employers be mindful of the need for employees to seek accommodations on Yom HaShoah as well as the impact of scheduling around that day. And it can also raise awareness of the potential need for accommodations for related mental wellness issues, such as those related to depression, PTSD, etc.

By fostering a culture of inclusivity and understanding, workplace Holocaust education initiatives can contribute to creating a more inclusive and respectful work environment, promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion, and fostering empathy among employees.

Selected Resources

- [United States Holocaust Memorial Museum](#) - The USHMM is a national institution that provides extensive resources for learning about the Holocaust, including a vast online archive of documents, photographs, and survivor testimonies. Their website also features educational resources, exhibitions, and information on events and programs.
- [Yad Vashem](#) - Yad Vashem is Israel's official memorial to the victims of the Holocaust and provides online resources for learning about the Holocaust, including survivor testimonies, photographs, and historical documents. Their website also offers educational resources and programs.
- [Anne Frank House](#) - The Anne Frank House in Amsterdam provides online educational resources for learning about Anne Frank, the Holocaust, and World War II. Their website features a virtual tour of the Anne Frank House, educational videos, and teaching materials.
- [Holocaust Education Trust](#) - The Holocaust Education Trust is a UK-based organization that provides resources and support for teaching and learning about the Holocaust. Their website features educational materials, survivor testimonies, and information on workshops and events.
- [Simon Wiesenthal Center](#) - The Simon Wiesenthal Center is a global human rights organization dedicated to preserving the memory of the Holocaust and promoting tolerance and respect for diversity. Their website features educational resources, news and events, and information on their initiatives to combat hate and extremism.
- [Holocaust Museum Houston: Minority Victims of the Holocaust](#) - A comprehensive resource providing guidance and sources for those seeking to research and learn about the experiences of minority groups targeted by the Nazi regime during the Holocaust, including LGBTQ individuals, people with disabilities, Romani people, and others. The guide includes recommended readings, primary sources, and links to relevant organizations and archives.

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