2023

Educational Materials

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Scenario

The Wannsee Conference

What role did the Conference play in the chronology of the Holocaust?

Aim of the lesson:

The unit aims at providing an overview of the history of the Holocaust and sheds light on the role of the Wannsee Conference within the process of persecution of Jews. With the help of photographic documents the students create a timeline and reconstruct the different ‘stages of persecution” (Raul Hilberg) that led up to the murder of the European Jews. They discuss the significance of the Wannsee Conference within this process and are encouraged to develop their own questions before their visit to the memorial site.

The lesson is designed to last approx. 45-60 min. and can be deepened by additional digital offers.

Age of participants: 16-19

Learning materials and educational resources:

- position cards
- timeline:
    - photographs
    - explanatory texts
    - cards of the stages of persecution

Lesson flow:

Opening activity (5 min.): Position line

- A line is drawn in the room, the ends are marked by two cards that read “I agree” and “I disagree”.
- The teacher reads statements about the Holocaust and remembrance culture that ideally address the students’ interests. The students position themselves on the line depending on how much they agree with the statements. The teacher asks the students why they chose their position. The answers lend themselves to short discussions.
- *Examples for statements (own statements can be added)*:
- *The Holocaust is talked about enough in our society / schools.*

- *I know a lot about what happened during WW II in other European countries.*
- *It is important to understand the history of the Holocaust to understand the world we live in.*
- *Jewish life today is visible in my country, city, community.*

Creating the timeline (25 min)

- Students can pair up or work alone.
- The teacher lays out the photos and documents. The students walk around and choose one or two pictures. They explore the photos. Guiding questions might be: *What can be seen? What do we assume happens on the photo? What can't be seen? When and where was the photo taken? Who took the photo (possibly) and whose perspective is shown (Perpetrators, bystanders, victims, others…)? Do we know photos from other perspectives about the Holocaust? Why are some perspectives more dominant than others?*
- The teacher hands out explanatory texts. The students read them and match them to the photos. Each event is presented and discussed.
- Together, students put the events in the right order on the timeline.

Optional deepening activity:

- The students are asked to add other relevant events or photos.
- This activity can be organized as a WebQuest during which the students research important events or iconographic photos of their own country, society or community.

Determining the 'Stages of Persecution (Hilberg) (10 min.)

- The teacher explains that scholars have tried to analyze and understand the scale and horrors of the Holocaust. One academic goal is to determine different phases and dynamics of the process of persecution and murder.
- *Possible questions: Why do you think there was and still is the need to define different phases of the Holocaust? Why could this be a challenge? How could this be helpful?*
- The teacher shortly introduces the Holocaust researcher Raul Hilberg (1926-2007) and explains that Hilberg has created an analytical framework: the 'stages of persecution'. However, the

teacher does not indicate the precise order yet, this will be done by the students in the next step.

- The teachers hands out cards that contain the phases and respective explanations (see the copy templates) and asks the student to match them and put them in a useful order on the timeline. The teacher reveals the correct solution.
- The teacher explains the different stages: *Is it plausible / convincing to differentiate the stages so clearly and put them in a chronological order? How is this approach helpful? When and why could it be problematic? Are there overlapping phases?*
- The teacher stresses the fact that the so-called stages of persecution are just a methodological framework and that in reality, the phases are not clearly distinguishable. They often run parallel or happen in a cyclical, overlapping or non-consecutive manner. However, an analytical framework can be helpful in understanding escalation dynamics.

Reflection (5 min.)

- The teacher asks the students to pay attention to the place of the Wannsee Conference on the timeline: *What do you notice? What surprises you? What was the role of the Wannsee conference? What do you think the Conference is most known for? Is that assumption correct?*
- At this point, it is important for the teacher to emphasize that the Holocaust was not decided during the Wannsee Conference. This is a common, but false assumption. By looking at the different dynamics of the war (for instance the fact that the systematic murder of Jews had already begun in the form of mass shootings after the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941), students understand that the Holocaust had already been decided upon. In January 1942, high-ranking Nazi officials met to discuss how the state authorities could organize the Europewide deportations and mass murder. It was not a question of "if", but rather "how" and "who". This becomes also clear by looking at the participants who were not in positions to make political decisions, but to implement decisions made by others into the work of their organizations.

Guiding questions for the closing reflection / discussion:

- *What are the reasons to teach the history of the Wannsee Conference in schools all over Europe?*
- *What are the challenge(s) for a historic site with the history of perpetrators at the center? Why is it important to remember the Wannsee Conference?*

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- *Why do you think the false assumption that the Holocaust was decided at the Wannsee Conference is so widespread and persistent?*
- **Optional (if enough time):** The teacher hands out cards and asks the students to write down key notes / questions: *What are your questions for your visit to the memorial site? Which aspects or questions would you like to explore deeper?*

Recommended additional materials:

- Different introductory videos on the website of the House of the Wannsee Conference, mostly available with English subtitles (Link: https://www.ghwk.de/de/bildungsangebote/digitale-angebote)
- The WebApp of the exhibition, also available in English (Link: https://www.ghwk.de/webapp/)
- The online project "Statistics and Catastrophe": An in-depth analysis of page 6 of the Wannsee protocol with the help of an interactive infographic, available in German, English and Polish (https://www.ghwk.de/statisticsandcatastrophe/)
- The movie "The Wannsee Conference" (2022) by Matti Geschonnek (available on DVD, streaming on https://www.zdf.de/filme/die-wannseekonferenz)
- And exploration of the Berlin born family Chotzen whose story makes the consequences of the Holocaust more tangible (materials available in German at https://www.ghwk.de/de/bildungsangebote/chotzen and https://www.chotzen.de/)

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Copy templates

Opening activity: Position line

I agree

I disagree

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Creating the timeline

1933: Economic blockade of Jewish shop owners

Source: Hans Schaller; bpk, Berlin

On 1st April 1933 - shortly after seizing power - the National Socialists organized an antisemitic campaign against Jewish shop owners. Shops were smeared with hateful anti-Jewish slogans and destroyed, owners humiliated and abused, customers intimidated. The majority of the non-Jewish population remained passive – an important signal to the National Socialist regime. For Jews in Germany this was the first time that they faced open terror from the government.

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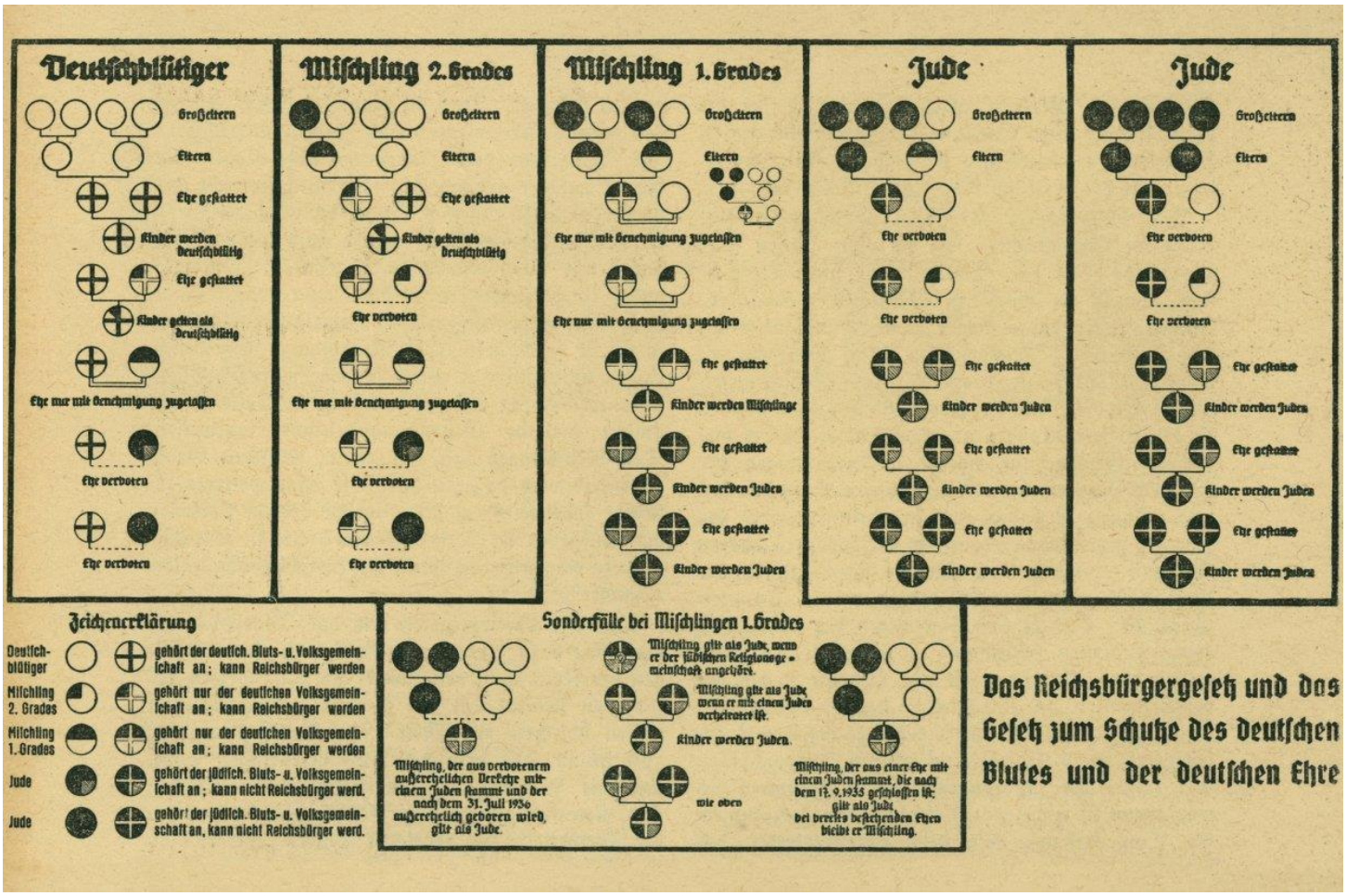
1935: Nuremburg Laws



Source: DHM Berlin

In September 1935 the Nazi regime passed the so called Nuremberg Laws. In these laws and the follow up decrees the Nazis defined who is Jewish – people with three or four Jewish grandparents. With these laws state officials knew to whom anti-Jewish measures were applied.

For people who were defined as Jewish by these laws persecution became more and more inescapable, in parts because the definition of being Jewish was based on the blood.

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November1938: Burning synagogue in Siegen, Germany

Source: https://synagoge-siegen.de/de/reichspogromnacht

In October 1938 Germany expelled Jews who immigrated from Poland to Germany. For weeks they were stranded between Germany and Poland. In this conflict a Jewish man attacked and killed a German diplomat in Paris. The regime used this attack to initiate a pogrom on November 9 against German and Austrian Jews. Thousands of synagogues, apartments and shops were destroyed and set on fire, more than 1.300 people were murdered in the days around the pogrom. More than 30.000 men were arrested and brought to the concentration camps of Dachau, Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen.

The international responses to the open terror were weak. It became clear that nobody would interfere with Nazi Germany in order to help and support the German and Austrian Jews.

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September 1939: Invasion of Poland

Source: https://www.britannica.com/event/World-War-II/The-war-in-Europe-1939-41

On Sep. 1, 1939 Germany invaded Poland. This marked the beginning of WWII which ended in Europe on May 8th 1945 with the unconditional surrender of Germany.

Poland was conquered within weeks and a regime of terror against the civilian population was established. The Eastern half of Poland was conquered by the Soviet Union.

Anti-Jewish measures were established in all German occupied countries that lead in most cases to deportation and murder. Anti-Jewish policies in Poland served as a role model for other countries.

For Jews in Europe it was very difficult to emigrate and find refuge under the conditions of war

November 1939: Obligation for Jews in occupied Poland to wear a blue star

Source: Bundesarchiv

A boy selling armbands in the Radom Ghetto. In November 1939, Jews in German-occupied Poland (Generalgouvernement) had to wear a white armband with a Jewish star. Similar measures were introduced in the German occupied Soviet Union in summer 1941. German Jews were forced to wear the yellow star in September 1941. Photographs from military propaganda units presented a distorted view of Jewish life that concealed the harsh living conditions, hunger and violence.

November 1940: Auction in Lörrach

Source: Municipal archive of Lörrach

Household items of Jews who were deported were sold at public auctions. In Lörrach, too, many people participated in the bargain hunt for "Jews' things" in November 1940. The Jews of Southwest Germany had been deported to an internment camp in Gurs, France, shortly before.

Through auctions like this and other forms of participation many Germans became complicit in the persecution of their Jewish neighbours.

June 1941: Invasion of the Soviet Union

Source: https://www.bpb.de/kurz-knapp/hintergrund-aktuell/229431/22-juni-1941-ueberfall-auf-die-sowjetunion/

Germany invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941. Right behind the German military forces the so called “Einsatzgruppen” began murdering Jews.

These SS and police battalions were organized by the Reich Security Main Office in Berlin under the command of Reinhard Heydrich.

The Germans murdered more than 800.000 Jews – men, women and children – in the first six months after the invasion.

September 1941: Massacre of Babyn Yar

Source: HIS, Hamburg

One of the largest massacres of Jews took place in Kiev on September 29 and 30, 1941.

More than 33.000 Jewish men, women and children were murdered in the ravine of Babyn Yar by SS and police troops and with the support and help of the Wehrmacht.

The Jews of Kiev were informed on September 26 to appear on September 29 at specific places to be resettled. They were unaware of the intentions of the Germans to murder all Jewish inhabitants of Kiev.

After this mass murder the ravine was completely covered with earth and no traces of the crimes were left.

December 1941: Entry of the USA into the war after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor

Source: https://www.britannica.com/event/Pearl-Harbor-attack

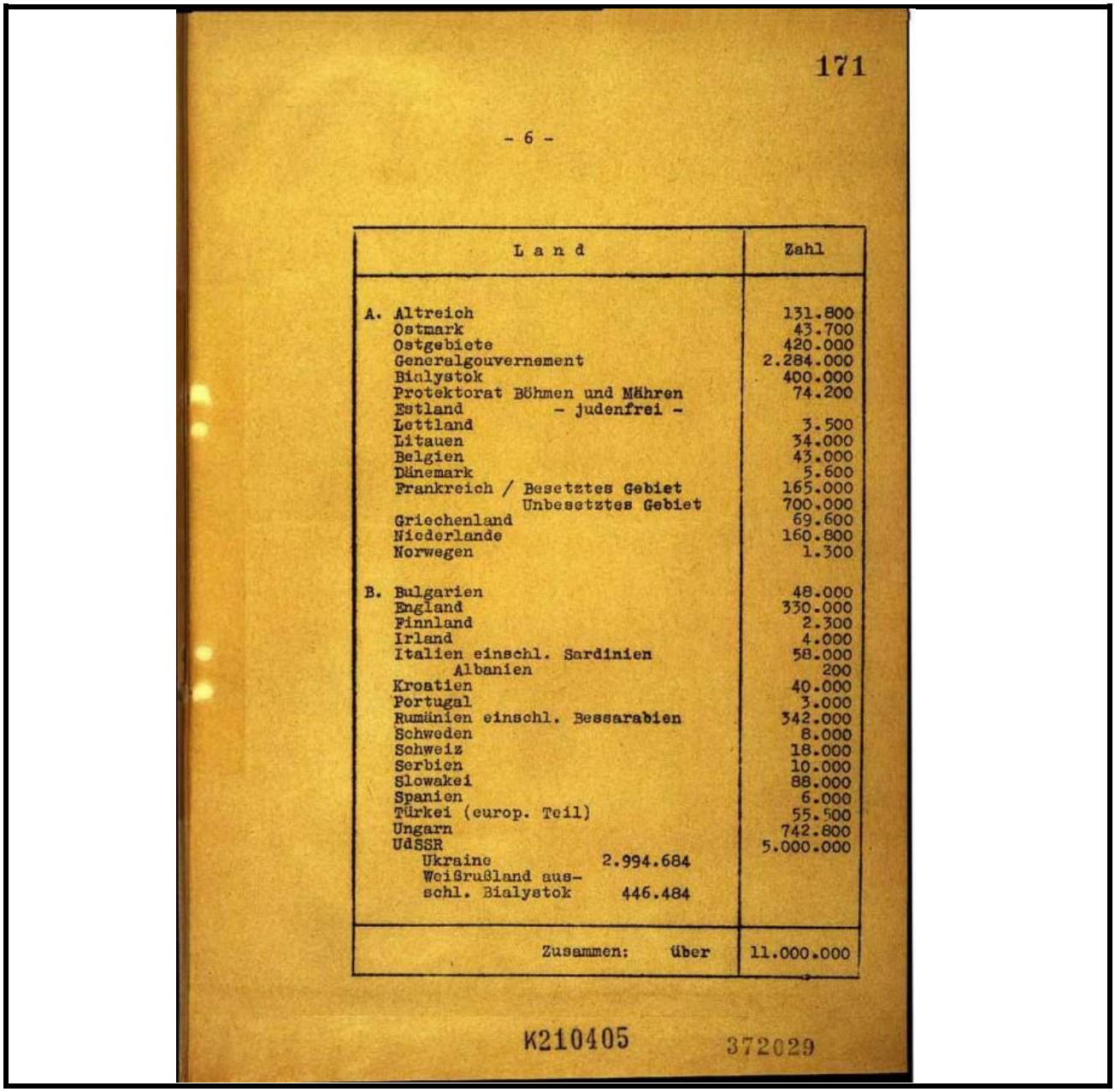
The Japanese air force attacked the naval base of the U.S. army in Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941. Until then the U.S. did not actively participate in the war.

Japan and Germany were allies and Germany declared war on the United Stats on Dec.11.

With the U.S. joining the war in Asia and Europe the two regional wars developed into a world war.

World War II ended in Europe on May 8, 1945 and in Asia on August 9, after the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

January 1942: Wannsee Conference



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Land	Zahl
A. Altreich	131.800
Ostmark	43.700
Ostgebiete	420.000
Generalgouvernement	2.284.000
Bialystok	400.000
Protektorat Böhmen und Mähren	74.200
Estland - judenfrei -	
Lettland	3.500
Litauen	34.000
Belgien	43.000
Dänemark	5.600
Frankreich / Besetztes Gebiet	165.000
Unbesetztes Gebiet	700.000
Griechenland	69.600
Niederlande	160.800
Norwegen	1.300
B. Bulgarien	48.000
England	330.000
Finnland	2.300
Irland	4.000
Italien einschl. Sardinien	58.000
Albanien	200
Kroatien	40.000
Portugal	3.000
Rumänien einschl. Bessarabien	342.000
Schweden	8.000
Schweiz	18.000
Serbien	10.000
Slowakei	88.000
Spanien	6.000
Türkei (europ. Teil)	55.500
Ungarn	742.800
UdSSR	5.000.000
Ukraine 2.994.684	
Weißrußland aus-	
schl. Bialystok 446.484	
Zusammen: über	11.000.000

K210405 372029

Source: Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

On Jan 20, 1942 15 high ranking Nazi officials met in villa at lake Wannsee in Berlin for a work meeting with breakfast afterwards.

There was only on topic on the agenda: “the final solution of the Jewish question in Europe”, the deportations and murder of the European Jews.

The participants - most in the ranks of permanent secretaries of the ministries and organizations – planned the implementation of the different steps leading to mass murder.

Reinhard Heydrich who presided over the meeting wanted to secure his leading role, asked for cooperation of the attending men, and made everybody aware that “final solution” meant the planned murder of 11 million Jews of Europe. After the meeting he was quite satisfied for achieving all of his goals.

From spring 1942 on the Jews of Europe were deported to the death camps in occupied Poland and murdered there.

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Spring of 1943: Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

Source:https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Warsaw_Ghetto_Uprising#/media/File:Stroop_Report_-_Warsaw_Ghetto_Uprising_BW.jpg

For the Jews in the different European countries there was no way out. Emigration to safe countries was almost impossible.

It became more and more clear to the Jewish communities that their history will come to an end and that they all will be murdered.

Facing destruction many decided to fight back. In the Warsaw ghetto an uprising began on April 19, 1943. Poorly equipped with guns and facing a well armed enemy that uprising lasted almost four weeks.

For the Jews the uprising was an important symbol to maintain their dignity and show that they were willing to fight back even without the chance of winning.

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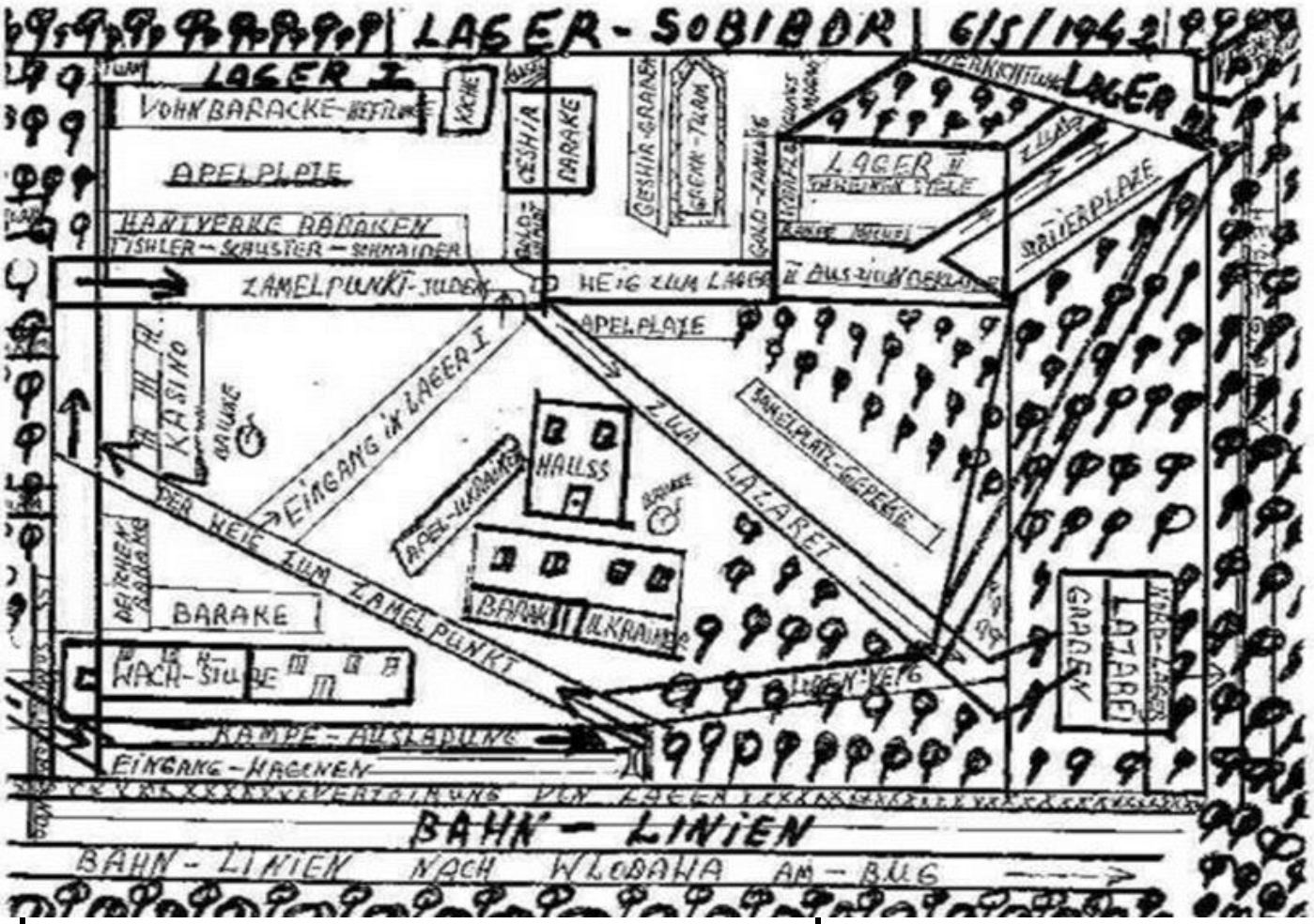
October 1943: Uprising in the Extermination Camp Sobibor



Source: http://www.deathcamps.org/sobibor/maps_de.html

From December 1941 the Nazis used gas vans to murder Jews in Kulmhof. In early 1942 they established the death camps of Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka. In these camps more than 1.5 million Jews from the general government and some European countries were murdered in the so called “Aktion Reinhard”. In the camps of Majdanek and Auschwitz-Birkenau the Nazis also established gas chambers to murder the Jews of Europe.

In Sobibor prisoners succeeded in revolting in October 1943. Around 300 prisoners managed to escape from the camp of whom around 60 survived the war. The survivor Moshe Bachir later drew a sketch of the death camp for a trial.

1944: The deportation and murder of Hungarian Jews in Auschwitz-Birkenau (Holocaust by gas)

Source: https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/de/exhibitions/album_auschwitz/arrival.asp

In March 1944 Germany invaded Hungary. Until then the Jews of Hungary were discriminated against by a serious of antisemitic laws and decrees, but not deported and murdered.

From May 1944 on the Germans deported more than 450.000 Jews to Auschwitz. Most of them were murdered directly on arrival. Auschwitz-Birkenau became the largest death camp. Altogether more than 1.1. Million Jews from all over Europe were murdered there.

The arrival of Hungarian Jews in May 1944 was documented by two SS officers in a series of more than 150 photographs. The photos from Auschwitz are some of the few photos we know from the arrival of Jews until shortly before they were murdered.

Mai 1945: Unconditional surrender of the German armed forces in Karlshorst

Source: https://www.hdg.de/lemo/bestand/objekt/foto-keitel-kapitulation.html

On May 8th 1945 World War II in Europe ended with the unconditional surrender of the German Wehrmacht. Hitler had committed suicide a coupe of days earlier, as did other prominent Nazis.

Europe was finally liberated after almost six years of war which caused 60 million deaths, half of them civilians.

Almost six million Jewish men, women and children were murdered by the Germans.

Only slowly and on a much smaller scale until today Jewish life began again.

After 1945: Displaced Persons Camps

Source: https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/displaced-persons

New beginnings or continuities?

Europe was liberated from the Nazis in May 1945. In all European countries people began to rebuild and restore their cities and slowly life came back.

Jewish life as it used to be was destroyed irretrievably. Many survivors lived in so called displaced persons camps in the first months and sometimes years after the war. In these DP camps they began to rebuild their lives, got married and founded families. The picture shows Ibby Neumann and Max Mandel at their wedding at the Bad Reichenhall displaced persons' camp in February 1948.

After 1945: Unwillingness to come to terms with the Nazi past in German society

Source: Stadt Nürnberg, Stadtarchiv, A 80 Nr. 794

In the first years after the war the allies held a number of trials from the major war criminal trial to the 12 follow up trials against the elites of the regime, as for example against Wilhelm Stuckart the permanent secretary of the Reichministry of the Interior in the so called Wilhelmstraßentrial.
But many Germans did not feel liberated from National Socialism. For them the unconditional surrender and the loss of WW II was a day of mourning not of celebration.
After the founding of the two German states both societies were not willing to reflect on their own involvement or to prosecute the perpetrators of the murder of the Jews and innumerous other victims.
The effort to look back and come to terms with the traumatic Nazi past was taken by minority groups, e.g. the organizations of survivors.

The stages of persecution (Raul Hilberg)

(Note: The cards are not handed out in correct order. Students discuss the possible order and pin them to the timeline).

Definition

Expropriation

Concentration

Deportation

Murder