

Permanent Exhibition Guide



UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM

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THE HOLOCAUST

THE HOLOCAUST was the state-sponsored, systematic persecution and annihilation of European Jewry by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945. Jews were the primary victims—six million were murdered. Roma (Gypsies), people with disabilities, and Poles were also targeted for destruction or decimation for racial, ethnic, or national reasons. Millions more, including homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Soviet prisoners of war, and political dissidents, also suffered grievous oppression and death under Nazi tyranny.

This publication has been made possible through the generosity of an anonymous donor.

Visiting the Permanent Exhibition

The Holocaust, the Museum's self-guided exhibition, offers a comprehensive historical narrative.

Typically, visitors spend between one and three hours in the exhibition.

One moves through the exhibition's three floors, starting at the top: the opening floor, **Nazi Assault—1933 to 1939**; the middle floor, **The "Final Solution"—1940 to 1945**; and the final floor, **Last Chapter**. The experience begins as one enters an elevator that goes up to the start of the exhibition on the Museum's Fourth Floor.

The following pages highlight key elements of the exhibition. Numbered illustrations correspond to locations identified in the fold-out map at the back of this brochure.

*The things I saw beggar description....
The visual evidence and the verbal
testimony of starvation, cruelty and
bestiality were... overpowering....
I made the visit deliberately, in order
to be in [a] position to give first-hand
evidence of these things if ever, in the
future, there develops a tendency to
charge these allegations merely to
"propaganda."*

—General Dwight D. Eisenhower
April 15, 1945

THE OPENING FLOOR

Nazi Assault—1933 to 1939

The exhibition opens with images of concentration camps taken by U.S. Army soldiers in 1945. These scenes shocked even battle-hardened troops and informed the world of the horrors of Nazism and the enormity of the Holocaust.

The opening floor of the exhibition explores how systematic mass murder could have happened. It chronicles events in Germany from the rise to power of the Nazi party in 1933 to the outbreak of World War II in September 1939.

Two films are presented on this floor: *The Nazi Rise to Power* (13 minutes) and *Antisemitism* (14 minutes).

The exhibition explores how the powerful tools of a totalitarian state—propaganda, terror, violence, and state-sponsored racism—allowed persecution to escalate. Four major themes are covered:

- the creation of a police state following Adolf Hitler's appointment as chancellor of Germany;
- implementation of Nazi policies that transformed the country's Jews from citizens to outcasts;
- the mobilization of an entire nation against groups deemed to be "enemies of the state"; and
- the refugee crisis that left hundreds of thousands of Jews and others without safe haven.

Beginning on this floor and continuing throughout the exhibition, visitors learn how Americans responded to news of Nazi persecution, the refugee problem, and the events leading up to and including the Holocaust.

Nazi Assault—1933 to 1939



1

LEFT General Dwight D. Eisenhower visited the newly liberated Ohrdruf concentration camp in April 1945, to witness firsthand the evidence of Nazi atrocities. Expressing shock and revulsion, he urged U.S. Army troops, journalists, photographers, and Congressional delegations to see the camps, lest these crimes be forgotten or dismissed as mere “propaganda.” *National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC*

LOWER LEFT Within six months, the Nazis transformed Germany from the democratic republic it had been during the Weimar era into a police state. *Bundesarchiv Koblenz, Germany*



2



3

ABOVE Through a highly orchestrated propaganda effort, the Nazis used the state-controlled media as well as the school system to indoctrinate Germans with hate towards those they deemed “enemies of the state.”

Stadtarchiv Nürnberg

Nazi Assault—1933 to 1939



4

ABOVE In their quest to create a “master race,” the Nazis wanted to “cleanse” Germany of those who did not fit their racial ideal. Scientists and physicians helped to lend credence to Nazi racist ideology. *USHMM*



6

ABOVE Hundreds of thousands of Jews, desperately seeking to leave Germany and German-annexed Austria, lined up for exit permits at police stations and for visas at foreign consulates. Few countries in the world were willing to admit large numbers of Jewish refugees, a point poignantly conveyed when Cuba and the United States refused entry to 907 Jews aboard the ill-fated passenger liner, the *St. Louis*, in 1939. *Österreichische Gesellschaft für Zeitgeschichte, Vienna*



5

ABOVE On November 9–10, 1938, the Nazis unleashed a wave of riots against Jewish businesses and synagogues that came to be called *Kristallnacht* (“The Night of Broken Glass”). These Torah scrolls were desecrated during *Kristallnacht* in Vienna, Austria, and Marburg, Germany. *USHMM*



7

BELOW In the effort to “purify” German society, the Nazis transformed psychiatric hospitals and clinics into centers for mass murder. Using the cover of war, Adolf Hitler authorized the so-called “euthanasia” program, in which more than 70,000 disabled Germans, judged by their physicians to be “life unworthy of life,” were killed in gas chambers or by lethal injection or poison between 1939 and 1941. *USHMM*

Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, which has turned my life into one long night, seven times cursed and seven times sealed. Never shall I forget that smoke. Never shall I forget the little faces of the children, whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky.

Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever.

Never shall I forget that nocturnal silence which deprived me, for all eternity, of the desire to live. Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things, even if I am condemned to live as long as God himself. Never.

—Elie Wiesel (b. 1928), Nobel laureate and Auschwitz survivor

THE MIDDLE FLOOR

The “Final Solution”—1940 to 1945

The middle floor of the exhibition examines the wartime evolution of Nazi policy toward the Jews, from persecution to mass murder.

As Germany expanded its territory across Europe, Nazi officials segregated Europe’s Jews from the rest of the population through laws, special markings, and relocation to ghettos. In 1941, with the invasion of the Soviet Union, Germany embarked upon the path of genocide, the physical annihilation of an entire people—which the Nazis euphemistically termed the “Final Solution of the Jewish Question.” When World War II ended in 1945, the Nazis and their collaborators had killed some six million Jews in Europe, representing two-thirds of the Jewish population in prewar Europe.

An audio theater on this floor presents the testimony of Holocaust survivors in *Voices from Auschwitz*.

A major focus of this floor is the world of the concentration camp, which rapidly expanded in the 1940s. The Nazis established thousands of camps holding hundreds of thousands of inmates—Jews, Soviet prisoners of war, Poles, political prisoners, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Roma (Gypsies), homosexuals, and others—who were subject to dehumanizing treatment, forced labor, and death.

Jewish experience in the ghettos and camps, as well as in hiding, is covered on this floor of the exhibition. Highlights include efforts to preserve the evidence of Jewish life under Nazi rule, armed resistance in the Warsaw ghetto uprising, and the legacy of Anne Frank.

The "Final Solution"—1940 to 1945



ABOVE In the Warsaw ghetto, a group of Jews led by historian Emanuel Ringelblum secretly collected records documenting Jewish life and death under German occupation. As the ghetto neared destruction, they buried the archive in metal containers such as this milk can, preserving their history for posterity.

On loan from the Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw

The railcar is located at the **HALFWAY POINT** in a visit to the Permanent Exhibition.



ABOVE Railcars transported Jews from all over Europe to ghettos, concentration camps, and killing centers. *USHMM*

BELOW The vast majority of Jews deported to Nazi killing centers were murdered shortly after arrival. *Yad Vashem*



The “Final Solution”—1940 to 1945



ABOVE Millions of men, women, and children passed through Nazi concentration camps and detention centers: Jews, Soviet prisoners of war, Poles, political opponents, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Roma (Gypsies), and homosexuals. Hundreds of thousands imprisoned in these camps were forced to wear markings identifying their “crimes.” Most Jews, killed upon arrival, were neither photographed nor registered. *State Museum of Auschwitz-Birkenau, Oświęcim, Poland; Bundesarchiv Koblenz, Germany; Niedersächsische Landeszentrale für politische Bildung, Hannover, Germany*

RIGHT The Nazis developed a systematic, industrialized form of mass murder, carrying out large-scale killing of Europe’s Jews in specially constructed gas chambers, as depicted in this model of Crematorium II at Auschwitz-Birkenau. *USHMM*



ABOVE Barracks at the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp frequently held hundreds of prisoners, who had to sleep five or six across on a single bunk. *On loan from the State Museum of Auschwitz-Birkenau, Oświęcim, Poland*



*First they came for the socialists,
and I did not speak out—*

Because I was not a socialist.

*Then they came for the trade unionists,
and I did not speak out—*

Because I was not a trade unionist.

*Then they came for the Jews,
and I did not speak out—*

Because I was not a Jew.

*Then they came for me—
and there was no one left to speak for me.*

*—Attributed to Martin Niemöller (1892–1984),
anti-Nazi German pastor*

THE FINAL FLOOR

Last Chapter

The final floor of the Permanent Exhibition addresses the liberation of the Nazi camps and the Allied victory over Nazi Germany in 1945, rescue and resistance efforts, and the aftermath of the Holocaust.

The postwar quest to render justice to those who carried out the murder of millions of innocent civilians is covered, as are the efforts of Holocaust survivors to build new lives in Europe, Israel, and the United States.

The exhibition concludes with a second series of films on American responses to the Holocaust during the war years, and the film *Testimony*, in which survivors, rescuers, and liberators share their experiences.

A recurring theme is the issue of individual responsibility toward fellow human beings in danger. Thousands of courageous non-Jews risked death or imprisonment to save their Jewish neighbors, and others—Jews and non-Jews—joined in the underground war against the Nazis. Still others joined the killers, becoming perpetrators or enablers of genocide. The vast majority of Europeans, however, were bystanders who did little to deter the Nazis or to aid Jews or other victims of Nazi persecution.

Highlights of this floor include the activities of French villagers in Le Chambon-sur-Lignon to hide Jews, the Danish rescue of some 7,000 Jews, and the actions of the American War Refugee Board and Raoul Wallenberg to save Jews in occupied Europe.

THE FINAL FLOOR
Last Chapter



ABOVE In October 1943, Danes rescued more than 7,000 Jews by transporting them to neutral Sweden by boat. *USHMM*

RIGHT Jews fought back against the Nazis throughout Europe, in ghettos, forests, and killing centers. *Institute of Contemporary History and Wiener Library Limited, London*



LEFT Thousands of men and women, active in every country in occupied Europe, risked their lives to save Jews. *USHMM*



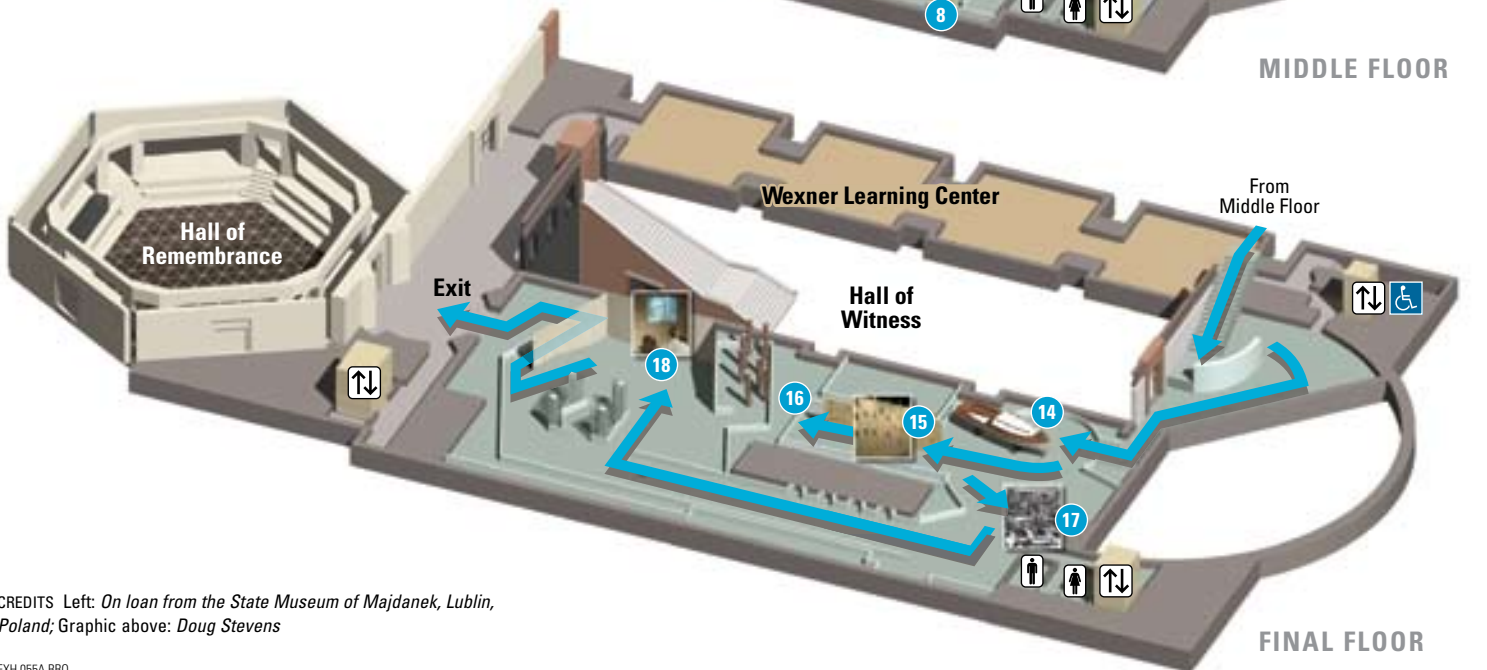
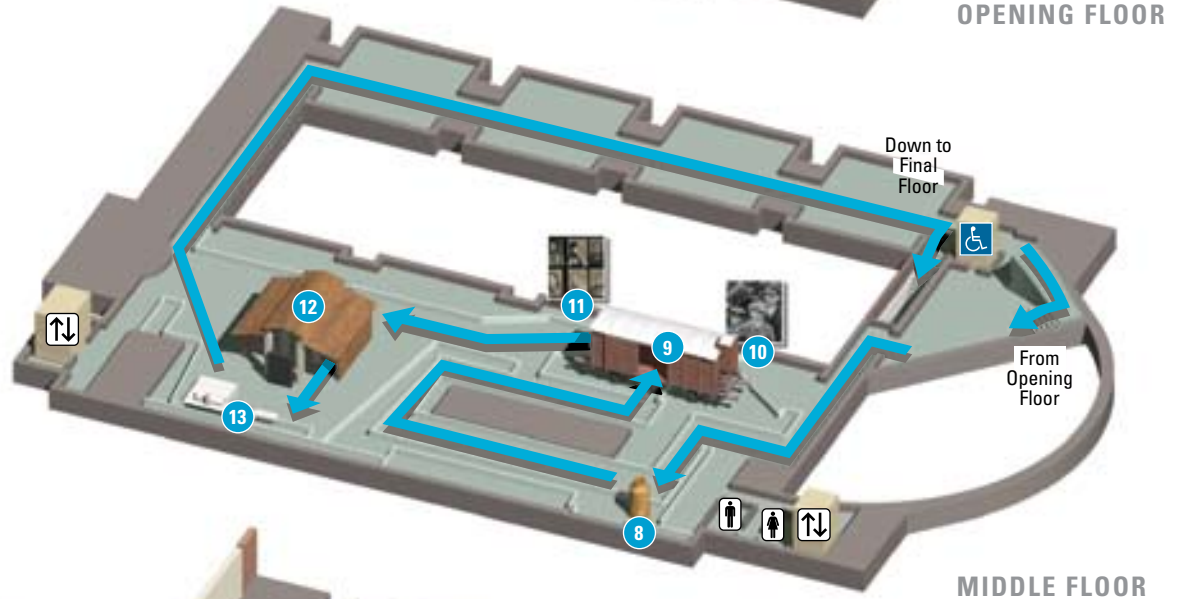
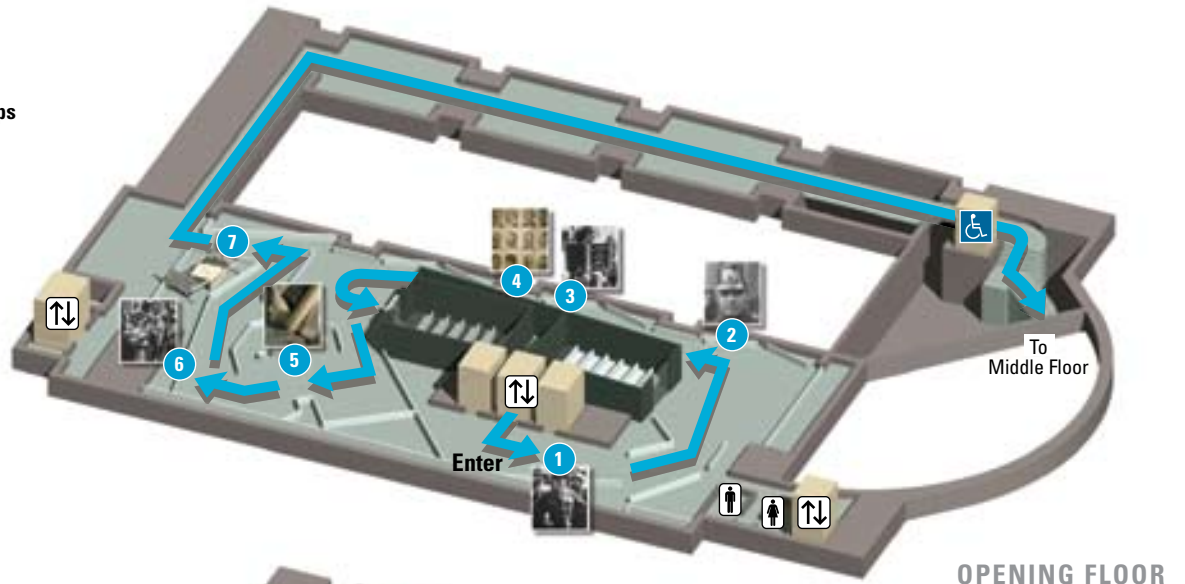
LEFT Allied troops uncovered and liberated hundreds of Nazi concentration camps as they advanced into German-held territory. *National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC*



ABOVE The Permanent Exhibition concludes with eyewitness testimonies about survival, rescue, and resistance. *USHMM*

Extend your visit. To learn more about America's responses during the Holocaust, visit our special focus page, www.ushmm.org/AmericanResponses.

- 1 Americans Encounter the Camps
- 2 The Terror Begins
- 3 Nazi Propaganda
- 4 The "Science" of Race
- 5 *Kristallnacht*
- 6 The Search for Refuge
- 7 Nazi "Euthanasia"
- 8 Warsaw Ghetto Milk Can
- 9 Railcar
- 10 Arrival at the Killing Centers
- 11 Prisoners of the Camps
- 12 Auschwitz Barracks
- 13 Gas Chamber Model
- 14 Danish Rescue
- 15 Rescuers Wall
- 16 Resistance
- 17 Liberation
- 18 Testimony Theater



CREDITS Left: On loan from the State Museum of Majdanek, Lublin, Poland; Graphic above: Doug Stevens



UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM

Situated among America's national monuments to freedom, the Museum is both a memorial to the past and a living reminder of the moral obligations of individuals and societies.

PARTICIPATE IN OUR IMPORTANT MISSION

Join us in our effort to remember the victims, teach the lessons of the Holocaust, and prevent genocide. Become a part of our e-community by signing up at our Web site, www.ushmm.org, or at one of the designated computer kiosks in the Museum.

Visit us online at www.ushmm.org



THE YAFFA ELIACH SHTEL COLLECTION, USHMM, PHOTO BY TIMOTHY HURSLEY

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