

1933 – 1945

Holocaust Timeline

The Holocaust was the systematic, state-sponsored murder of approximately six million Jewish people by Nazi Germany – the largest genocide of the 20th century, carried out across occupied Europe during World War II.

1933 ○ **Hitler Takes Power**

Adolf Hitler is appointed Chancellor of Germany on January 30; the Nazi Party rapidly dismantles democratic institutions and takes total control.

> **Why it mattered:** *The Nazis used democratic processes to gain power, then destroyed democracy itself — showing how quickly a government can turn against its own people.*

1933 ○ **First Concentration Camps**

The Nazis open Dachau, the first concentration camp, initially to imprison political opponents, trade union leaders, and others who resisted Nazi rule.

> **Why it mattered:** *The camp system began as political repression — but it grew into a vast network used to imprison and murder millions of people classified as enemies of the Nazi state.*

1935 ○ **Nuremberg Laws**

The Nazi government passes laws stripping Jewish Germans of citizenship and banning marriage or relationships between Jewish and non-Jewish people.

> **Why it mattered:** *The Nuremberg Laws transformed antisemitism into official state policy with the force of law — marking Jewish people as permanently outside the German national community.*

1938 ○ **Kristallnacht — Night of Broken Glass**

On November 9-10, Nazi-organized mobs attack Jewish homes, businesses, synagogues, and hospitals across Germany and Austria, killing dozens and destroying thousands of properties.

> **Why it mattered:** *Kristallnacht marked a sharp, open escalation of violence against Jewish people with full government involvement — many historians consider it a turning point into the Holocaust.*

Holocaust Timeline *continued*

1939

World War II and Mass Killings Begin

Germany invades Poland; the Nazis immediately begin mass shootings of Jewish people, intellectuals, and others in occupied territories.

> **Why it mattered:** *The war gave the Nazis both cover and territory — now the persecution could expand across all of occupied Europe, affecting millions of Jewish people outside Germany.*

1941–42

The Final Solution

Nazi leaders coordinate a plan for the systematic murder of all Jewish people in Europe — what they called the Final Solution to the Jewish question.

> **Why it mattered:** *The Final Solution represented an industrial approach to genocide — the Nazis aimed not just at persecution or exile, but at the total elimination of Jewish people from Europe.*

1942–44

The Death Camps

Six purpose-built death camps in occupied Poland — including Auschwitz-Birkenau — receive trainloads of Jewish people from across Europe and kill most of them upon arrival.

> **Why it mattered:** *The death camps were designed for mass murder on an industrial scale — at its peak, Auschwitz processed and killed thousands of people every day.*

1944

Liberation Begins

Allied forces advance on German-held territory; Soviet troops liberate the first death camp, Majdanek, in July 1944, revealing its full horror to the world.

> **Why it mattered:** *The liberation of the camps exposed the reality of the Holocaust to the world — shocking even battle-hardened soldiers with what they found inside.*

1945

Camps Liberated; War Ends

Allied forces liberate the remaining camps including Auschwitz (January), Bergen-Belsen (April), and Dachau (April); Germany surrenders in May.

> **Why it mattered:** *The liberation confronted the world with evidence of systematic genocide on a scale never seen before — and began the reckoning with what governments can do to their own people.*

1945–46

Nuremberg Trials

Nazi leaders are tried at Nuremberg for war crimes and crimes against humanity; the trials establish that following orders is not a defense for participating in genocide.

> **Why it mattered:** *The Nuremberg Trials created the legal framework for international human rights law — establishing that some crimes are so grave that individuals are personally responsible, regardless of what their government ordered.*