

FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS:

UPRISING STUDY GUIDE

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PRESENTED BY THE JEWISH PARTISAN EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION

Second Edition

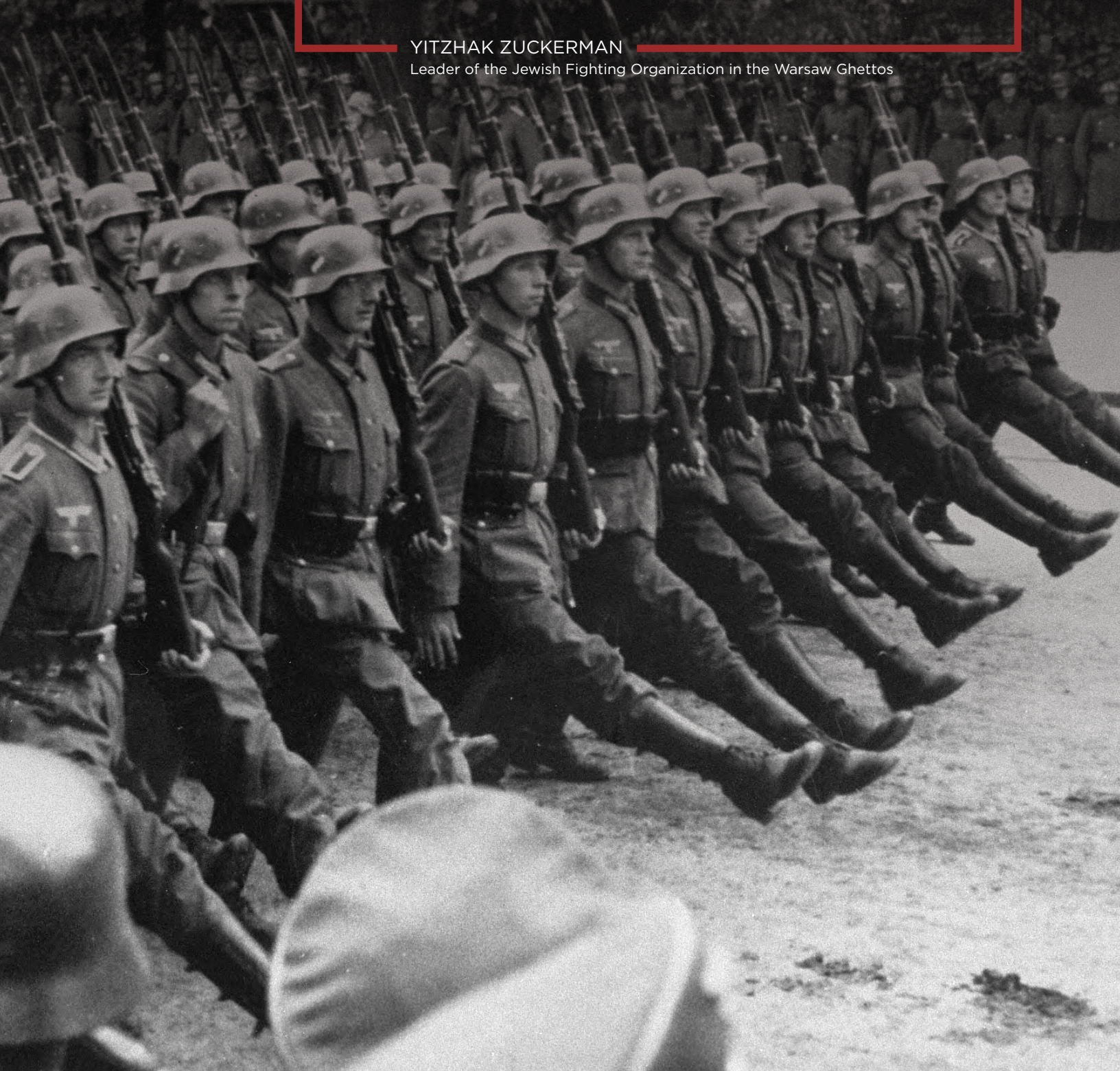
Version 1.2

“ ”

Before we confronted the Germans for the first time, I was sure that you shoot and you die. You shoot and that's it. A one time last act. And now it turned out that in those specific conditions it wasn't the final act at all.

YITZHAK ZUCKERMAN

Leader of the Jewish Fighting Organization in the Warsaw Ghettos



UPRISING STUDY GUIDE

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FROM EILEEN AND DAVID HILSON

*In tribute to the lives of Ida Engel & Hulda Deutsch, our great and great-great-grandmothers of
blessed memory, who were incarcerated in the Warsaw Ghetto. We will not forget you!*

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FOREWORD

BY JON AVNET

The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, in April of 1943, was the most significant act of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust. Between 500 and 1000 fighters, women and men, barely armed, held off the German Army for almost a month. In fact, when German General Jürgen Stroop declared Warsaw Judenrein (free of Jews) in May 16, 1943, he was dead wrong. Armed resistance continued past December of that year.

75 years have now passed since the Jewish Fighters of the Warsaw Ghetto heroically battled their oppressors. And it is also almost 17 years since I directed this film, which Paul Brickman and I wrote. Any attempt to capture the events of those days will be at best incomplete. What the film does accomplish, is to portray the facts of what transpired and the spirit of the Ghetto Fighters whose motto was, "To live with honor, Die with honor, Jewish Honor." And they did. And their legacy lives on with the steely resolve that the Jews will never give up, never be crushed, and will live to fight another day; if fight they must.

This movie was made as a tribute to those who fought and those who perished and those who survived and carried on. It gives voice to those who no longer have a voice. I wanted the viewers of today and of future generations, to know Mordechai Anielewicz, Zivia Lubetkin, Kazik Rotem, Tosia Altman, Marek Edelman, Yitzhak Zuckerman, Vladka Mead, Zacariah Artenstein, Mira Fruchner and so many many more.

Perhaps the most important point that the film makes is that the Jews were not passive and did not go like sheep to slaughter. As Marek Edelman said to me during the filming, "The Jews resisted in every way they could." Although they were starving, and the vast majority had no weapons, Jewish men and women defiantly built underground synagogues, hospitals and schools. In a concrete bunker fifty feet below ground, they held bar mitzvahs. Imagine that. Residents of the ghetto didn't imagine this; they celebrated it. To me, the last great indignity of the Holocaust, is those who paint the Jews as willing participants in their own genocide, as if they in some way were accomplices. I hope this film helps to set the record straight.

Dr. Michael Berenbaum and I commissioned a documentary featuring Marek, Kazik and Vladka to share their stories directly in their own words. I hope this film motivates all who experience it to rededicate themselves to humanitarian action on behalf of our people and all who are in need.

JON AVNET

Director

FOREWORD BY DR. MICHAEL BERENBAUM



A brief sense of history: before the war, Warsaw was the largest Jewish community in Europe with a Yiddish theater and press, Yiddish movies and Polish poetry. Its Jews were intense. The religious were devoutly pious and many secular Jews were politically engaged as Zionists or Bundist, trying to create a just society in the Land of Israel, or on the streets of Poland.

When the ghetto was formed in November 1940, Warsaw was the largest of the more than 1,000 ghettos in Europe. The Jews of Warsaw were more than 1/3 of the city, but they lived in 2.4 of its area at a density of nine people per room under conditions of hunger, starvation, disease and despair.

From July–September 1942, 265,000 Jews—men, women and children—were shipped from Warsaw to the Treblinka death camp where they were gassed upon arrival. It was then that a group of young Jews decided that resistance was the only course of action.

“Sage leaders” had cautioned that the Germans imposed collective responsibility. All were responsible for the deeds of one, and the Nazis retaliated disproportionately for all acts of resistance.

BUT THE YOUNG UNDERSTOOD THAT THERE WAS VERY LITTLE LEFT TO FEAR.

And their despair gave way to fierce determination. They resolved to no longer submit to deportation but instead to offer armed resistance. Marek Edelman said: “Resistance was a way to live until we died. We were the freest people in Europe because we no longer feared death.”

A Jewish Fighting Organization, the Z.O.B. (Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa), was formed as well as a rival, more politically conservative group. Warsaw Ghetto Jews would never field one single fighting force, even against an enemy committed to their annihilation.

The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising began on April 19, 1943. For the Germans, “cleansing” Warsaw of its Jewish population was a gift to the Fuehrer for his 54th birthday on April 20th. For the Jews, April 19th was the eve of Passover, the festival celebrating the miraculous exodus of the Biblical slaves from Egypt.

The Germans had planned to liquidate the ghetto within three days but the Jews held out for more than a month. Fighting continued into the summer, long after Stropp announced on May 16th: “The Jewish Quarter in Warsaw is no longer.”

The Uprising was literally a revolution in Jewish history. Its importance and scope cannot be conveyed by the result, the overwhelming massacre of the Jews. Yet, the fighters understood its significance. They saw themselves as freedom fighters, willing to risk all, to lose all, yet not to surrender.

Its commandant, Mordecai Anielewicz, who at the age of 24 was at the helm of the battle, gave the most expressive sense of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Anielewicz wrote to Yitzhak Zuckerman, a unit commander:

“ ”

What really matters is that the dream of my life has become true. Jewish self-defense in the Warsaw ghetto has become a fact. Jewish armed resistance and the retaliation have become a reality. I have been witness to the magnificent heroic struggle of the Jewish fighters.

MORDECAI ANIELEWICZ

Commander of the Jewish Fighting Organization in the Warsaw Ghetto

Jon Avnet's film *Uprising* captures poetically and passionately the life and struggle of Warsaw's Jews. It is his heartfelt tribute to them and to the values for which they stood. It is based on his deep learning. He read documents, spoke to survivors and pondered the importance of this heroic struggle.

And this guide for teacher and student alike, offers a wonderful opportunity to learn more and unpack the history that the movie portrays. Having worked on the first study guide, I am most grateful to the Jewish Partisan Education Foundation, and to its imaginative and indefatigable leader Mitch Braff, as well as to Jack Weinstein, an educators' educator, for giving renewed life to the film and these learning tools. It is indeed a fitting way to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

DR. MICHAEL BERENBAUM

American Jewish University

Los Angeles, California

FOREWORD BY ELLIOTT FELSON



The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was one of the most important instances of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust. The 75th Anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Revolt presents an important opportunity for the Jewish Partisan Educational Foundation (JPEF) to incorporate this significant event into its RESIST curricula, and to show the strong connection between the armed resistance of these ghetto fighters and that of the Jewish partisans. We are proud to release this seminal study guide for educators and students, developed by Dr. Michael Berenbaum, for Jon Avnet's gripping film *Uprising*.

JPEF defines a partisan as, "a member of an organized body of fighters who attack or harass an enemy, especially behind enemy lines; a guerrilla. In April 1943, 500–1,000 Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto used weapons and explosives, many of them makeshift, to hold off the far more powerful Germany army for

months, disrupting the Nazis' plan to liquidate the ghetto in just one day and causing them serious damage.

Fighters in the Vilna Ghetto, under the leadership of Abba Kovner, eventually escaped to the forest, as was their plan from the outset, and formed the all-Jewish Avengers partisan group. As a fighter in the Warsaw Ghetto, Joseph Greenblatt destroyed a German tank with a Molotov cocktail, eventually escaping through the sewers to join a Polish partisan unit where he continued his campaign against the Nazis and their collaborators.

Ghetto fighters and Jewish partisans successfully attacked enemy soldiers, destroyed Nazi property, and significantly halted the German war effort, forcing them to use precious resources to secure areas that the German army thought they could easily control. Both groups were defiant, both groups retaliated, and both groups forcibly resisted—sadly, nearly all those who fought in the Warsaw Ghetto perished, while according to historian Fred Rosenbaum, approximately two-thirds of all Jewish partisans survived the war in the forests, mountains, fields and underground bunkers that sheltered them.

On behalf JPEF's Board and staff, we hope that the *Uprising* study guide provides educators and students with new insights into the significant resistance of the Warsaw Ghetto and that it will be used together with the other free educational materials on our website, www.jewishpartisans.org.

Our profound thanks to both Jon Avnet and Dr. Michael Berenbaum for their collaboration in allowing us to bring this valuable learning tool to you.

Elliott Felson
JPEF President
San Francisco, California

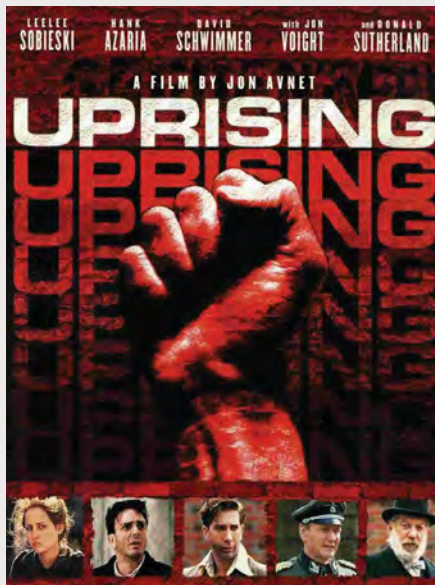
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY GUIDE

The film *Uprising* dramatizes the story of a small group of courageous Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto during World War II who banded together to create a unified, armed resistance against their German oppressors. Against impossible odds, these resistance fighters held off the German army longer than the entire country of France, determined to live with honor—and if need be, die with honor—while lighting the torch for Jewish resistance in the German-occupied territories. *Uprising* is a historical drama that recreates the true stories of the Jewish resistance fighters in the Warsaw Ghetto. The filmmakers have based their interpretation on personal accounts, recovered documents, and historical artifacts.

The film provokes discussions about the use and abuse of power, the importance of individual choice, and the roles and responsibilities of individuals, organizations, and nations when confronted with human rights violations and/or policies of genocide.

Uprising provides a detailed look at the complicated nature of resistance during the Holocaust. While viewers see the physical acts of armed revolt in the ghetto, they will also recognize other types of physical and spiritual defiance that took place.

Uprising poses difficult questions about human behavior and allows students to see that events such as the Holocaust are not inevitable but are possible because individuals, groups, and nations made decisions to act or not to act.



This study guide provides historical background for the events portrayed in the film as well as a set of discussion questions and activities that can be adapted for different age levels. Reproducible timelines and information about the individual characters in the film are provided.

Two documentaries are also included with the DVD (but not the Digital Download):

Resistance: A 30-minute historical documentary that reinforces the themes conveyed in the film *Uprising* with testimony from survivors, actors, and historians, archival photographs and film.

Breaking Down the Wall: Provides details about the making of the film and perspectives of the filmmakers and actors.

A limited number of DVD's are available for educators. Current working educators can request a free copy of the DVD by writing uprising@jewishpartisans.org.

The DVD is available at Amazon and other retailers, as well as digital downloads and rentals at Amazon, Apple, and others.

IMPORTANT NOTE: *Uprising* is a recreated dramatization of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, with attention to historical accuracy.

TIME LINE

1939–1943

In 1941 alone, more than 43,000 Jews—more than one in ten—die in the Warsaw ghetto from disease, starvation, malnutrition and despair.

1939

September 1

Germany invades Poland.

September 17

Parts of Eastern Poland are annexed by USSR.

September 28

Warsaw surrenders. Poland is partitioned between Germany and USSR. German forces control Western Poland and occupy Warsaw.

November 28

Judenrate (Jewish Councils) are established in Polish cities and towns under German occupation by order of Reinhard Heydrich.

December 1

All Jews in German-occupied Poland must wear the Jewish Star.

December 5–6

German authorities seize Jewish property in Poland.

1940

October 12

On Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish year, Jews are told that a ghetto will be formed and a map is published detailing streets.

November 16

The Warsaw Ghetto is sealed. The Jews, 30 percent of the city's population, are packed into an area of less than one square mile.

1941

December 7

Japan attacks the United States at Pearl Harbor.

December 8

First Jews are gassed at the death camp of Chelmno near Lodz, Poland, in mobile gas vans, pre-cursors to stationary, permanent installations in other camps.

The United States declares war on Japan.

December 11

The United States declares war on Germany.

1942

January 20

The “Final Solution,” a decision to kill all the Jews, is solidified at a conference held in a villa in Wannsee, Germany, near Berlin.

Spring 1942

Birkenau – the death camp at Auschwitz, is opened. Deportations of Jews to death camps at Treblinka, Belzec, and Sobibor begin.

July 23

Deportations from Warsaw begin. On average, 7,000 Jews are chosen daily and sent by train to Treblinka, where almost all are killed in gas chambers on arrival.

***Note:** The day is also Tisha B'Av, the Jewish fast day commemorating the destruction of the First and Second Temples in ancient Jerusalem and marking the onset of exile from the land of Israel.*

September 21

Deportations cease from Warsaw. Only 60,000 people from a peak of over 450,000 remain in the Ghetto.

1943

January 9

Heinrich Himmler visits the Warsaw Ghetto and orders a “thinning out” of the Ghetto population.

January 18-22

Second German deportation “action” begins. Jewish resistance fighters confront German forces. Deportations are halted after four days.

***Note:** It appears to the Jews that Jewish resistance forced the Germans to cease their action—short of the “liquidation” of the ghetto.*

April 19

German forces enter the ghetto to resume deportations. Jewish fighters respond with armed resistance.

***Note:** The night is also the eve of Passover, the Jewish holiday commemorating the liberation from slavery in Egypt.*

May 16

The Jewish Resistance ends as all the fighters are killed or captured. General Jürgen Stroop announces, “The Jewish Quarter is no more.” The main Synagogue of Warsaw is blown up.

WORLD WAR II BEGINS

On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland. The Polish army could not match the ferocious German war machine. France and Britain honored their treaty obligations with Poland and declared war against Germany on September 3, 1939, but they offered no immediate military support.



Courtesy of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.



German soldiers on parade in Warsaw to celebrate the conquest of Poland. USHMM Photo Archives.

Poland was left to fend for itself. German divisions, with more than 2,000 tanks and over 1,000 planes, broke through Polish defenses along the border and advanced on Warsaw, which they encircled, shelled and bombed. Warsaw surrendered to the Germans on September 28, 1939. Leaders of the Polish government fled to France where they set up a government-in-exile. The German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact of August 1939 contained a secret protocol that stated that Poland was to be partitioned between the two powers, enabling Germany to attack Poland without the fear of Soviet intervention. In accordance with this plan, the Germans occupied Western Poland, and the Soviet army occupied and annexed Eastern Poland in September, 1939.

The German occupation of Poland was brutal. Poles were considered racially inferior, and German occupiers sought to eliminate the Polish political, religious, and intellectual leadership. Thousands of teachers, priests, and other intellectuals were shot in mass killings in and around Warsaw. Thousands more were sent to the newly built Auschwitz, Stutthof, and other concentration camps where non-Jewish Poles constituted the majority of inmates until March, 1942.

The Nazis also conducted indiscriminate retaliatory measures against populations in areas where resistance occurred. German officials expelled hundreds of thousands of Poles from their homes in Western Poland and settled more than 500,000 ethnic Germans in these areas. Cities and towns were renamed with German names. Approximately 50,000 Polish children with certain physical traits aligned with “Aryan” identity were forcibly taken from their families and transferred to Germany to be raised as “Aryans.”

Between 1939 and 1945, at least 1.5 million Polish citizens were deported to German territory for forced labor. Hundreds of thousands were imprisoned in Nazi concentration camps. Then there were the Jews.

After laboring to make Germany Judenrein, “free of Jews,” the Germans now had 2,000,000 Polish Jews under their control. The question of what to do with the Jews became a logistical dilemma, one that would evolve over time and eventually result in the “Final Solution.”

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE GHETTOS

Beginning in late September, 1939, German officials required Warsaw's Jews to wear white armbands with a blue Star of David (elsewhere Jews were forced to wear the more commonly known yellow star). German authorities closed Jewish schools, confiscated Jewish-owned property, and conscripted Jewish men into forced labor.

On October 12, 1940—*Yom Kippur*, the holiest day of the year for Jews—the Germans announced a decree ordering the establishment of a Jewish ghetto in Warsaw. The Nazis often used Jewish holidays as the occasions to proclaim harsh decrees or to initiate murderous policies to further humiliate the Jews and show their scorn for Judaism. The decree required all Jewish residents of Warsaw to move into a designated area of less than one square mile, which German authorities sealed off from the rest of the city in November, 1940. This ghetto was enclosed by a wall that was over 10 feet high, topped with barbed wire, and closely guarded to prevent movement between the ghetto and the rest of Warsaw. The Jews were required to pay for the wall themselves, which the Germans said was needed to insulate “the Aryan side” of Warsaw from “Jewish diseases and plagues.” A German decree stated that any Jew found outside the ghetto without permission would be killed.

More than 150,000 Jews were relocated to an area of less than one square mile. Thirty percent of the city's population was therefore confined to 2.4 percent of its area. Jews were brought to Warsaw from smaller cities and towns, villages and hamlets. At its peak in 1941, the Warsaw ghetto contained 450,000 Jews. Families had to improvise to survive. A semblance of normal life was maintained, but conditions rapidly deteriorated, with ten or more people to share one room. Food, medical care, and proper sanitation were scarce.

More than one in ten Jews died in 1941 from starvation and disease. Yet this was only the beginning. The establishment of ghettos was regarded by the Germans as a “provisional measure” to control and segregate Jews until they could devise a more efficient method or “solution.”

In 1942, they did—the death camps.



A bridge over an “Aryan” section which divided the Warsaw Ghetto into two parts. Courtesy Bundesarchiv.



Jews moving their belongings into the Krakow Ghetto in horse-drawn wagons. ARCHIWUM PANSTWOWE W KRAKOWIE, courtesy USHMM (circa 1940).



Children in the Warsaw Ghetto (May 21, 1941). Photo by Ludwig Knobloch, German Federal Archives.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF THE WARSAW GHETTO

These photos were taken in the early days of the ghetto by Willy Georg, a German soldier who did not know photography in the ghetto was forbidden. Most of his film was confiscated, but some was undetected. At the time the photos were taken, conditions were still tolerable and many people maintained their faith in a better future.



Religious Jews with beards were subject to harassment by the Germans, who often hacked the beards off.



The average ghetto resident was able to get four pounds of bread per month. Dough was often mixed with sawdust or potato peels.



"The first to be murdered were the children, for from them a new nation could be born," wrote ghetto poet Yitzhak Katzenelson.



Warsaw Ghetto Judenrat (Circa 1939-1942). Courtesy YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.

THE *JUDENRATE* (JEWISH COUNCILS)

On September 21, 1939, three weeks after the invasion of Poland and before the ghettos were formed, SS Chief of the Security Police Reinhard Heydrich issued a decree ordering the establishment of Jewish councils called the *Judenrate*. They would be composed of up to 24 Jewish men chosen from “authoritative personalities and rabbis” within the Jewish community. They would serve as go-betweens, representing “Jewish interests” to their German occupiers and passing on German demands to Jewish residents. Each *Judenrat* [singular of *Judenrate*] would be “fully responsible” for the implementation of German decrees. The failure to obey meant the penalty of death.

In the early stages, most Jews did not know the Germans’ ultimate intentions. Members of the *Judenrate* believed that they would be a municipal authority whose role was to provide basic services to their beleaguered communities such as food, shelter, sanitation, education, and medicine. War had come and gone before, and many thought that if they could just keep their communities going, this war would end and Jews could go back to their “normal” lives.

Each *Judenrat* set up its own system of government financed by taxation of those Jews who still had money and the forced labor of those who did not. Jewish Police, under the control of the council, enforced rules and orders.

The level and tenor of interaction between the *Judenrate* and the Germans differed ghetto by ghetto, meeting by meeting, day by day. At times, Nazi officials were courteous and even friendly; at other times, they were harsh and threatening. Generally, the Germans would make demands of the *Judenrate*, who, in return, would beg for supplies and relief on behalf of their ever more desperate populations.

Most difficult for these councils was how to deal with German demands for lists of Jews to be deported to concentration camps. Most knew that deportation meant extreme misery or death. While many leaders tried to stave off the deportations through bribery or pleading, they were ultimately presiding over doomed communities with no power to influence the Germans.

As the ultimate intentions of the Germans became clear and members were themselves deported to the death camps, authority in the ghettos collapsed and the *Judenrate* disintegrated.

The behavior of the *Judenrate* is one of the most controversial and painful aspects of Jewish life during the Holocaust. Some argue the *Judenrate* unwittingly made it easier for the Germans to accomplish the “Final Solution.” Others argue the members had no choice and tried their best in impossible situations. Regardless of their level of cooperation with the Germans, few *Judenrate* leaders survived the war.

Czerniakow’s diary survived the war, and gives important insight into his anguish. It is clear he *did not* believe, *could not* believe, or *refused to* believe that the Germans ultimately intended to kill all the Jews. It is also clear his one hope—and self-justification for the role he was playing—was that he could save the children of the ghetto.

When the Germans gave him the order in the summer of 1942 that *all* Jews would be deported, including the children, Czerniakow refused to sign the order, took several cyanide pills, and committed suicide. The last words of his diary read, “The SS wants me to kill children with my own hands. This I cannot do.”



Adam Czerniakow (standing third from the left in the front row) Chairman of the Warsaw ghetto Jewish Council, participates in a ceremony honoring Jewish police killed in the line of duty. Jewish Historical Institute, courtesy USHMM Photo Archives.

Jewish Police

In order to maintain order in the ghetto and enforce their directives, the *Judenrate* set up Jewish police forces. To many Jews, the Jewish Police were even more hated than the Germans because these were their own people policing them. In a few cities including Warsaw, Jewish police under German direction were responsible for the roundups prior to deportation. When armed resistance eventually broke out in Warsaw, the Jewish police were the first targets for assassination.



Adam Czerniakow, chairman of the Warsaw Ghetto Jewish Council, in his office. A German administrative official stands next to him. Landeshauptstadt Muenchen Stadtarchiv, courtesy USHMM Photo Archives.

Adam Czerniakow

Adam Czerniakow [cher-nya-kov], an engineer who had been actively involved in the Jewish community, was appointed the leader of the Warsaw ghetto *Judenrat*.

Czerniakow refused to help the Jewish underground and opposed acts of armed resistance because he feared that German reprisals would result in greater harm to the Jewish community.



Jewish troops are prepared for execution by Waffen-SS troops and SD officers. State Archives of the Russian Federation, courtesy USHMM Photo Archives.

“COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY”

This was the Germans policy in which German forces would retaliate mercilessly against civilians for any acts of resistance against German soldiers or officials. The most famous example was following the assassination of Reich Security Chief Reynhard Heidrich by partisans in Czechoslovakia. The German army in retaliation destroyed the entire town of Lidice, killing all the men and deporting all the women and children. They went so far as to publish new maps of the region in which the town was erased. No one from Lidice was involved in the assassination, nor did they provide a haven for the resistance fighters who had carried out the assassination. Their sole “crime” was proximity to the site at which Heydrich was shot. This incident was well known, and it is likely that Czerniakow was aware of it.

The German army in retaliation destroyed the entire town of Lidice, killing all the men and deporting all the women and children.

UNARMED RESISTANCE



Children were sometimes able to smuggle food into the ghetto. Yad Vashem, courtesy USHMM Photo Archives.

Resistance does not always involve the use of arms. Many Jews resisted through non-violent means—defying the Germans spiritually and emotionally by refusing to abandon their way of life. Some historians distinguish between unarmed resistance, which they term **defiance**, and armed resistance, which they commonly refer to as **resistance**.

Perhaps the simplest act of defiance or unarmed resistance was to live a “normal life” under extremely difficult conditions. When schools and religious services were banned, people fought to carry on with educational and religious activities in secret. Scores of underground newspapers were published. Youth groups continued to meet. Cultural life continued with theater, music, and writing.

Unarmed resistance included the smuggling of food, medicine, and arms into the ghetto. Smugglers included children, small and agile enough to crawl through holes in a wall or through a tunnel. Those who looked “Aryan” could function on the Aryan side to secure food, supplies, and information.

Malnutrition and epidemic diseases took their toll. The mortality rate of children was very high, and large numbers of people of all ages died. The struggle to live brought out compassion in some people. House committees in large buildings helped poor tenants to secure food. Others responded more selfishly, adopting an attitude of “survival of the fittest.” As Hillel Seidman, the chief archivist of the Warsaw Ghetto, noted critically:

“ ”

Those who were small minded before have become even more petty; those who were already evil have inevitably become worse. Many have become selfish and extremely insensitive to every possible need. They are so terrified of death that the smallest matter—even a single slice of bread—is magnified into a question of life and death.

HILLEL SEIDMAN

Chief Archivist of the Warsaw Ghetto

An important and daring act of unarmed resistance was the attempt to get word to the West of what was happening in German-occupied Poland. Though rumors and intelligence had alerted Britain and the United States to many facts, the West either did not understand or could not believe the German plans for the total annihilation of the Jews. The Jews hoped the West would intervene, but even with accurate information about what was happening, the West did little to stop it.

Perhaps most important to the ghetto inhabitants were children. Smaller, more nimble, and more adaptable than their parents, children proved to be capable at smuggling in food and supplies, often at great risk to themselves.

THE WANNSEE CONFERENCE

On January 20, 1942, 15 men gathered at a magnificent villa in a lakeside area of Berlin for the purpose of planning the “Final Solution to the Jewish Question.” These men were high ranking Nazi party and German government officials, with more than half holding doctorates.

The Conference was not a decision-making conference. The decision to kill the Jews had already been made at a higher level by Hitler himself. Its task was to coordinate the killing. An earlier idea to deport all of Europe’s Jews to the island of Madagascar was abandoned as impractical. The war clearly would not end soon. German occupying forces feared diseases and epidemics. Reinhard Heydrich, a 38 year-old rising star of the Nazi party, introduced the Wannsee agenda:



SS-Brigadeführer (Major-General) Reinhard Heydrich seated at his desk in Gestapo headquarters. KZ Gedenkstaette Dachau, courtesy, USHMM Photo Archives.

“ ”

Another possible solution of the [Jewish] problem has now taken the place of emigration, i.e. evacuation of the Jews to the East... Practical experience is already being collected which is of greatest importance in relation to the future Final Solution of the Jewish problem.

REINHARD HEYDRICH

Rising star of the Nazi party, introduced the Wannsee agenda



While extermination was never explicitly mentioned in the protocols (the minutes) of the meeting, the men understood that “evacuation to the East” was a euphemism for concentration camps, and that the “Final Solution” was to be the systematic murder of all the Jews of Europe. Within a few months of the meeting, the first poison gas chambers were installed at concentration camps in German-occupied Poland. Heinrich Himmler, the SS, and the Gestapo oversaw the augmentation of the death camps and the logistics necessary to carry out the Final Solution.

The Wannsee Villa where the plan on how to implement the Final Solution was discussed. Wannsee, Germany, 1922. Ulstein Bilderdienst.



Jews captured by SS and SD troops during the suppression of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising are forced to leave their shelter and march to the Umschlagplatz for deportation. Main Commission for the Prosecution of the Crimes against the Polish Nation, courtesy USHMM Photo Archives.

DEPORTATION

In July, 1942, Nazi officials told the *Judenrat* that the Jews of Warsaw would be “deported” to the East of Poland where they would live and work in special camps. Some Jews, having heard rumors that at the Chelmno concentration camp near the Polish town of Lodz, Jews had been killed in mobile gas vans, expressed fear while others refused to believe such ideas.

Jews on deportation lists were ordered to report to the ghetto’s transit point, the *Umschlagplatz*, on June 22 to board cattle cars for Treblinka. German troops and police personnel beat and tortured Jews to make them move more quickly. Many were shot. When brute force could not force some residents out of hiding, the Germans made false announcements that the deportations were over and that bread would be disseminated to those who remained.

The Jewish resistance was desperate to discover the destination of the trains. They feared the worst but had no concrete evidence about mass killings. They sent one of their members, Zygmunt Frydych, to follow the trains. Near Treblinka, he spoke with railway men, who told him the trains would arrive at the camp daily filled with people and leave empty, yet no food was being brought in, and no wells were being dug to provide water. Most

eerily, the camp was silent. The information confirmed his fears, but he still lacked absolute confirmation. He then met an escaping Jew who had hidden on a train from Treblinka who told him of the killing. When he asked for proof, he was told to breathe in deeply. The smell of burning flesh was unmistakable.

Meanwhile, the deportations continued. As many as 7,000 people a day were sent to their deaths at Treblinka. The Jewish underground tried to warn the ghetto inhabitants that death awaited them, but the “street,” Marek Edelman’s term for the ghetto, was not convinced. “People didn’t believe in such a thing.”

People were also starving. Taking advantage of this, the Germans would hand out bread and jam at the *Umschlagplatz* and assure them that there were no death camps. For many, weakened by hunger and physically and emotionally exhausted, this seemed believable. After all, why would the Germans provide food if they were about to kill them?

By the end of the deportations in September, 1942, almost 300,000 Jews had been deported to Treblinka. Fewer than 60,000 remained in the ghetto. For those who remained, despair gave way to a determination. The old and the very young had been shipped to their deaths. They now were certain they had nothing to lose. The different Jewish underground factions united, defense plans were drawn up, and preparations began. Making a stand meant Jewish honor.



Jewish women awaiting deportation at the Umschlagplatz hold loaves of bread that were distributed by the Jewish police (1942). Archiwum Akt Nowych, courtesy USHMM Photo Archives.

Language as Propaganda

Language can be a powerful propaganda tool. The Germans went to great lengths to disguise what they were doing to the Jews. Deportation to death was called “Resettlement in the East,” murder was called “liquidation,” and the annihilation of the Jewish people was termed the “Final Solution to the Jewish Problem.” Because the systematic extermination of millions of people was unprecedented, euphemism was very effective.



Suppression of Warsaw Ghetto Uprising—The Neyer Family are led by German Waffen SS soldiers to the assembly point for deportation (Umschlagplatz) in Warsaw. US National Archives.



Warsaw Jews forced to board trains to the death camp Treblinka. Jewish Historical Institute, courtesy USHMM Photo Archives.

THE RESISTANCE TAKES HOLD

After two months of deportations in late summer of 1942, the 60,000 or so Jews who remained in the ghetto had few illusions. The young were angry that resistance had not broken out earlier. Though a fight surely would result in massive bloodshed for the Jews, it was now clear they were being sent to their deaths. Any fears Jews had about armed resistance gave way to a resolve to fight with whatever they had.

The biggest obstacle for the Jewish Fighting Organization was procuring arms. No organized Jewish resistance in Europe could help them. The Polish underground was short of arms, and included antisemitic elements within its own ranks. Jewish fighters acquired a few weapons using Jewish couriers who could pass as Aryans to smuggle them into the ghetto. These pistols and a few sticks of dynamite were little match for the well-armed German forces.

Jewish disunity also existed. The left-wing factions, the Zionists, and the Bundists had to come together with the Jewish Fighting Organization. They agreed that resistance would be a last stand. A group of right-wing revisionist factions whose leaders had some military training wanted command responsibilities. Despite their differences, one thing was clear. All shared a common enemy bent on their annihilation.

Yitzhak Zuckerman (front row, center) with members of a Zionist youth movement, BEIT LOHAMEI HAGHETAOT, courtesy USHMM Photo Archives.



THE FIGHT

On January 9, 1943, SS Chief Heinrich Himmler visited the Warsaw ghetto. He ordered the deportation of another 8,000 Jews. On January 18, the second *Aktion* began as German troops entered the Ghetto. When the time came for those on the deportation list to report, they did not come as ordered. The Resistance sprang into action. Jewish fighters struck quickly and then escaped across the rooftops. German troops were caught by surprise and withdrew for a time.

Jews interpreted this as a victory—the German “supermen” had been driven from the ghetto. Hideouts were fortified and resistance units were strengthened in preparation for the next battle. As Yitzhak “Antek” Zuckerman, the Z.O.B. leader recalled: “We saw ourselves as a Jewish underground whose fate was a tragic one, the first to fight.”

On April 19, Himmler ordered a special *Aktion* to clear the ghetto by force as a special birthday present to Hitler, who turned 54 the next day. Under the command of General Jürgen Stroop, 2,000 SS men and army troops moved into the area with tanks, rapid-fire artillery, and ammunition trailers. While most remaining Jewish civilians hid in bunkers, Jewish fighters, some 1,500 strong, opened fire with their pistols, a few rifles, one machine gun, and homemade bombs—destroying a number of tanks, killing German troops, and holding off reinforcements. The Germans withdrew at evening. The next day, the fighting resumed. Jewish casualties mounted. The Germans used gas, police dogs, and flamethrowers to rout the Jews from their bunkers.

On the third day, the tactics shifted. The Germans no longer entered the ghetto in large groups, but roamed in small bands. They had decided to burn the entire ghetto.

Block by block, the Germans bombed and burned. Fighters succeeded in hiding in the sewers. Not until May 8 did the Nazis manage to take the bunker headquarters of the fighters. Civilians surrendered, but many of the surviving fighters took their own lives to avoid capture. The one-sided battle continued until May 16. Stroop then supervised the dynamiting of the Great Synagogue of Warsaw. Thereupon he wrote in his report:

“ ”

**THE JEWISH QUARTER
IS NO MORE.**

JÜRGEN STROOP
German SS commander

ESCAPE THROUGH THE SEWERS

As fighting raged in the ghetto, Yitzhak Zuckerman and a few members of the Resistance remained on the Aryan side trying to secure weapons. Desperate to help their comrades, they decided to mount a rescue attempt using the sewers. Under the leadership of Simcha “Kazik” Rotem, a group of fighters and civilians who had managed to survive the German assault escaped through the sewers. Among them was Marek Edelman. They returned to the Aryan side via the sewers where a truck had been arranged to take them out of the city. In broad daylight, the ragged group emerged from the sewers within shouting distance of German and Polish patrols. In the haste to leave, some of the group in the sewers who had strayed too far from the exit point were left behind. When the resistance returned later, the Germans had found the group in the sewer and executed them.



A housing block burns during the suppression of the Warsaw ghetto uprising. National Archives, courtesy USHMM Photo Archives.



Jewish resistance fighters, participants in the Warsaw Uprising who had escaped the Warsaw Ghetto during its liquidation by the SS one year earlier, hide in a crowded bunker during the fighting on the streets above. Sidney Schlesinger, courtesy USHMM Photo Archives.

AFTERMATH

Were one to judge the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising from the perspective of German casualties versus Jewish casualties, it was, as anticipated, a mismatch—a massacre. More than 7,000 Jews, most of them resistance fighters or persons hidden inside the ghetto, were killed. 7,000 of the remaining Jews were deported to Treblinka where they were gassed. Approximately 42,000 other Jews were deported to concentration and forced labor camps. German reports list only 16 killed. The true number of German casualties is likely much higher, but it is impossible to know. The Germans rewrote the historical record to cover up their embarrassment.

Despite the grossly lopsided numbers, the Uprising was a revolution in Jewish history. It was a defiant people's assertion of Jewish honor and an end to military passivity. The Germans had planned to liquidate the ghetto in three days. The Jews held out for more than a month—longer than the armies of some countries. The revolt's significance went far beyond the numbers of those who fought and died. It was a turning point when Jews realized that they could no longer depend on anyone else to protect them.

REACTION IN THE WEST

The American government and their most important ally, Great Britain, did not consider rescue a priority. Winning the war was the dominant objective. Allied political and military leaders were uncertain how they could pursue large-scale rescue actions behind German lines. Antisemitism, isolationism, domestic unemployment, and xenophobia made it difficult for refugees to obtain entry visas before the war.

After the onset of World War II, the American government did not distinguish between Germans—enemy aliens—and German Jews, even though German Jews were the declared enemy of the Nazis. The American press did not often highlight reports of Nazi atrocities. The State Department also delayed publicizing reports of mass murder. In August, 1942, the State Department received a cable confirming Nazi plans for the murder of Europe's Jews. The report was not passed on to its intended recipient, Rabbi Stephen Wise, and when he eventually received it from another source, the State Department asked him to refrain from publicizing it. Even after Rabbi Wise confirmed the accuracy of the report, the State Department would not “publicly” do so. In 1943, Polish courier Jan Karski informed President Franklin D. Roosevelt of reports of mass murder received from Jewish leaders in the Warsaw ghetto. No immediate executive action was taken.

By the spring of 1944, the Allies knew of the gassings at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Some Jewish leaders pleaded with the U.S. government to bomb the gas chambers and railways leading to the camp. Several times between August 20 to September 13, 1944, the U.S. Air Force bombed the portions of Auschwitz-Monowitz industrial complex where the factories produced synthetic oil, but even though the gas chambers in Birkenau were less than five miles away, the U.S. maintained its policy of non-involvement in rescue and bombed neither the gas chambers nor the railways used to transport people to the death camps.



Rabbi Stephen Wise. Library of Congress, courtesy USHMM Photo Archives.



Egyptian wall painting in a tomb near ancient Beni Hassan, middle Egypt. It depicts the arrival of a tribe of Semitic Nomads in Egypt about the year 1895 B.C.E. Courtesy Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria.

WHO ARE THE JEWS?

Jews are members of a complex and diverse ethnic and religious community. Their history dates back over 4,000 years to Biblical times; to the Patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; to the experience of slavery in Egypt; to the Biblical leader Moses; to a sojourn in the Sinai Desert and the giving of the Ten Commandments at Sinai; and to entry into the Promised Land. The centerpiece of Judaism—the Jewish religion—is the belief that there is one God—monotheism—not many Gods—polytheism—and that the Jewish people have formed a “covenant” with God.

After being exiled in the 1st century C.E. by the Romans from the land on which they had settled, known today as Israel, Jews emigrated to all parts of the world and became members of many disparate societies. Judaism was transformed from a national religion of a particular people centered on their land with a sacred Temple in Jerusalem, to a portable religion that could be constituted wherever Jews lived. Jews centered their existence in the synagogue. Sacredness was established by the presence of the Torah (the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible). Although different branches or sects of the Jewish religion developed over time, Jews remained essentially united by their common ancestry and belief in one God.

Over time, the religious aspects of Judaism expanded with the Jewish population and took on different forms. In the modern world, Jews have manifested different levels of religiosity, but at the core is a shared history, a common ancestry and monotheism, the belief in one God.

Judaism has an ethnic component in that according to Halachic Judaism, a child is considered Jewish if his or her mother is Jewish. This has led to a common error in which Jews are classified as a “race.” However, over the thousands of years of Jewish history, intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews, and conversions of non-Jews to Judaism, have resulted in a diverse population with an equally diverse blood line. Jews are of many different races and they have lived—and continue to live—in many different countries.



A unit of German soldiers views the burning of a synagogue in Siedlce, Poland (1939).

Photo Credit: INSTYTUT PAMIECI NARODOWEJ (Institute of National Remembrance) and the USHMM Photo Archives.

THE ORIGINS OF HATRED

Throughout their history, Jews have faced prejudice and discrimination, known as antisemitism. Although Jews were welcomed in some countries and enjoyed long periods of peace with their neighbors, they also were persecuted and even expelled from certain host countries. In European societies where the population was primarily Christian, Jews often found themselves isolated and persecuted as outsiders. Jews and Christians share a belief in one God and in the Hebrew Bible, which Christians call the Old Testament, but Jews do not share the Christian belief that Jesus is the Son of God. Many Christians historically considered this refusal to accept Jesus' divinity as threatening. It made Jews outsiders in Christian Europe for many centuries. Until recent times, the Church taught that Jews were responsible for Jesus' death, not recognizing, as most historians and most Church authorities do today, that Jesus was executed by Roman officials who viewed him as a political threat to their rule. Reflecting this religious discrimination, orders and laws were enacted in some countries preventing Jews from owning land and holding certain jobs. Over time, prejudices developed and periodically deepened or receded under the banners of theological, political, and national differences, myths and fears about economic practices and cultural traditions, and questions about who could and could not be accepted within specific societies as full members.

As ideas of political equality spread in Western Europe during the late 18th and 19th century, in many European countries, Jews gradually gained equal rights as citizens. Yet new forms of antisemitism emerged – political antisemitism and racial antisemitism. Political antisemitism was the use of anti-Jewish rhetoric to marshal political support by criticizing and mobilizing against the Jews for political gain. Racial antisemitism was the argument that Jews were a separate race of people called “Semites” who shared common blood and physical features. For antisemites, Jews remained Jews even if they converted to other religions.

THE JEWS OF POLAND

By the turn of the twentieth century, Jews had lived in Poland for over 700 years. Relations between Jews and non-Jewish Poles had been uneasy. Most Poles saw Jews as outsiders. Antisemitism was common but not monolithic, and sporadic violence against Jews occurred. For the most part, however, the Jews were tolerated and played an important function in the Polish economy and society. Despite persecution and hatred, the Jewish community in Poland grew and sometimes prospered.

By the eve of World War II, Jews accounted for over ten percent of the Polish population, living primarily in large cities. Polish Jewry represented a socially and politically complex society. Jews were major contributors to the textile industry, comprising 84 percent of Warsaw's peddlers, merchants, and traders. Most belonged to the lower middle class and lived in insulated communities. They worked for Jewish employers, shopped at Jewish stores, and spoke Yiddish as their primary language. Still, many Jews also integrated into Polish life.

Following World War I and the terrible economic difficulties that plagued Europe, antisemitism in Poland increased. Polish antisemites were emboldened by the antisemitism intensifying in neighboring Germany. The Polish government began to undermine the economic position of the Jews, and antisemitic attacks on Jews by Poles increased.

In 1938, Jews accounted for 28 percent of Warsaw's total population of 1.3 million. Many Polish Jews did not comprehend the fervency of Germany's Nazi racial ideology. Poland had been under German occupation less than twenty-five years before, and many remembered the Germans as relatively tolerant. It was hard for many Jews, especially the older generation, to believe that an "advanced culture" such as Germany had been overtaken by the philosophy of Adolf Hitler.

Even if they did perceive the danger, there was little the Jews could do. They had insufficient power to face so powerful an enemy and so grave a threat. Most countries where Jews could live freely, including the United States, had strict immigration quotas severely limiting the number of Jews allowed to enter.



Polish Jews buy food from a street vendor in Warsaw. Courtesy of Archives of the Mechanical Documentation, Warsaw, Poland.



Shneyer Shainwald (top right) served in the Polish Army before World War II—as did many Jews. Photo JPEF Archives.



A Jewish family strolls along a street in Kalisz, Poland (1935). Frances Hirshfeld, courtesy USHMM Photo Archives.

Emanuel Ringelblum and his son, Uri (1938). YIVO Institute of Jewish Research, courtesy USHMM Photo Archives.

EMANUEL RINGELBLUM: RESISTANCE THROUGH MEMORY

MEMORY IS AN ACT OF DEFIANCE.

In Warsaw, Emanuel Ringelblum, a university-trained historian, led an effort to chronicle daily life in the Warsaw ghetto. He and his colleagues carefully sealed diaries, notes, records, scholarly papers, and German posters and decrees in milk containers and buried them deep underneath the Warsaw ghetto. They knew they would not survive but hoped their archive would.

Some of these “Ringelblum Archives”—we will never know how many—did survive the destruction of the ghetto, and two milk cans were discovered buried in the rubble of Warsaw after the war. They contained important information about the inner life of the ghetto written by the Jews themselves. Without the archive, most of what we have would be German propaganda and survivors’ post-war memories.

One of the Ringelblum milk cans, unearthed on December 1, 1950 at 68 Nowolipki Street. This can contained copies of several underground newspapers, public notices by the Jewish Council, and a narrative of deportations from the Warsaw Ghetto. Jewish Historical Institute, courtesy of USHMM Photo Archives.

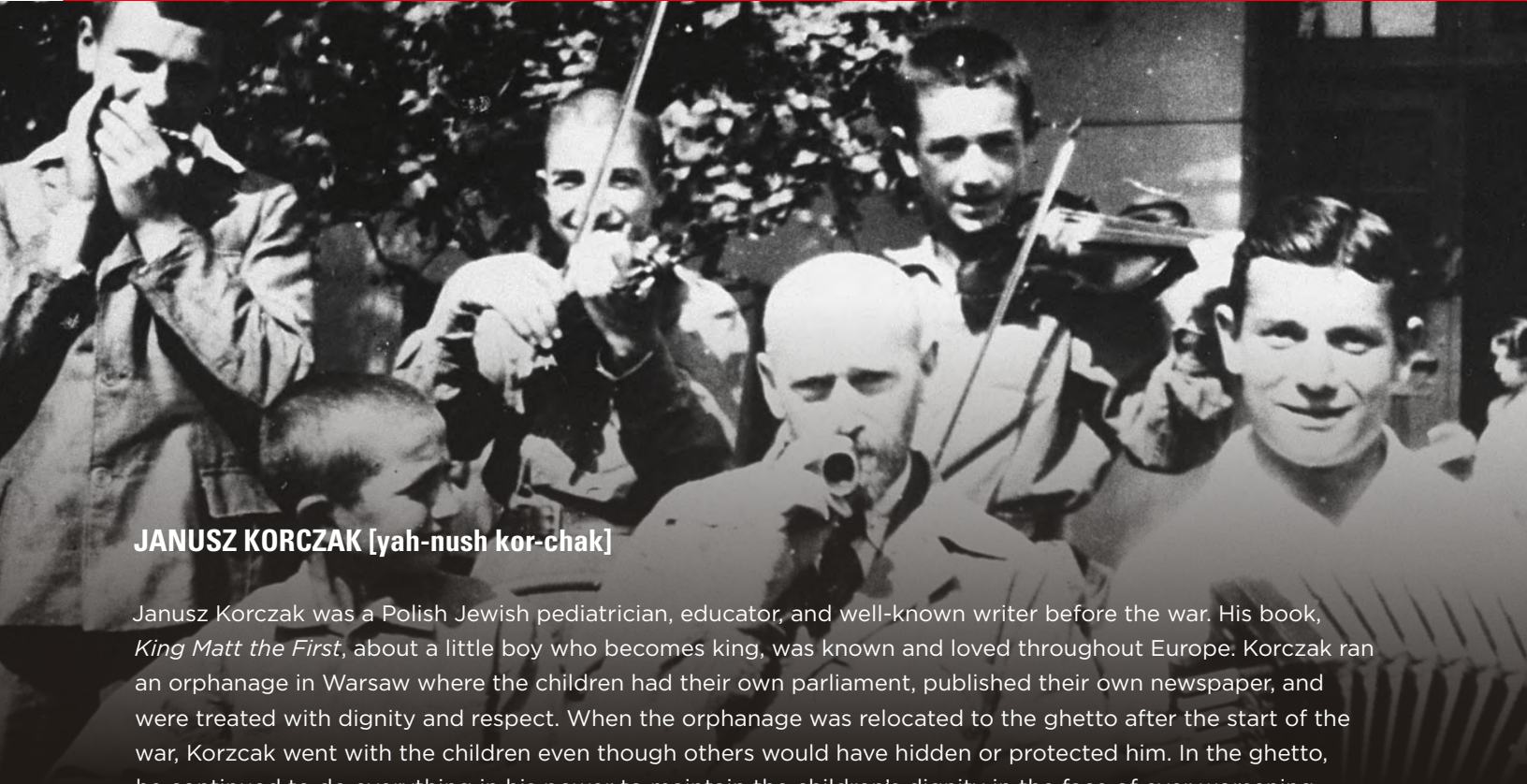


SAMUEL ARTUR ZYGELBOJM [zie-gul-bloom]



Samuel Arthur Zygelbojm. Syma Minc Klok Crane, courtesy USHMM Photo Archives.

An officer of the Jewish political party, the Bund, Samuel Artur Zygelbojm escaped from German-occupied Poland and made his way to Britain where he attempted to make the West aware of what was happening to the Jews of Eastern Europe. He petitioned political leaders and made addresses on the BBC chastising the Allies for being passive in the face of the extermination of the Jews. After learning of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and the deportation of his wife and son to the death camps, Zygelbojm wrote a final letter railing against the indifference of the West, and set himself on fire. Part of his letter read: “Let my death be an energetic cry of protest against the indifference of the world which witnesses the extermination of the Jewish people without taking any steps to prevent it.”



JANUSZ KORCZAK [yah-nush kor-chak]

Janusz Korczak was a Polish Jewish pediatrician, educator, and well-known writer before the war. His book, *King Matt the First*, about a little boy who becomes king, was known and loved throughout Europe. Korczak ran an orphanage in Warsaw where the children had their own parliament, published their own newspaper, and were treated with dignity and respect. When the orphanage was relocated to the ghetto after the start of the war, Korczak went with the children even though others would have hidden or protected him. In the ghetto, he continued to do everything in his power to maintain the children's dignity in the face of ever worsening conditions. When he received the order that the children were to report to the Umschlagsplatz to be deported to Treblinka, Korczak led them in a procession to the cattle cars. The children were singing and chanting on the way to the train. Emanuel Ringelblum wrote—“Unlike the usual chaotic mass of people shrieking hysterically...the orphans walked in rows of four with quiet dignity...This was no march to the train cars, but rather a mute protest against this murderous regime, the likes of which no human eye has ever witnessed.” Korczak was offered the chance to escape deportation by a German officer, but he refused. He would not abandon the children, and he went to his death with them.

Janusz Korczak poses with the children's orchestra at the Krochmalna street orphanage. BEIT LOHAMEI HAGHETAOT (GHETTO FIGHTERS HOUSE MUSEUM), courtesy USHMM Photo Archives.

MEET SOME SURVIVING FIGHTERS

Interviews with the following survivors of the Uprising can be found in the documentary **RESISTANCE** on DVD Disc 2.

SIMCHA “KAZIK” ROTEM



Simcha “Kazik” Rotem, 1943. Beit Lohamei Haghettoat, courtesy USHMM Photo Archives.

Simcha Rotem, known as Kazik, was born in 1926 in Czerniakow, a suburb of Warsaw. He was the oldest of four children. Because he lived in a mostly non-Jewish area of Warsaw, Kazik’s Polish was fluent and unaccented. His ability to speak Polish was essential to his survival.

When the war broke out, his home was severely damaged by a German bomb, one of the many that dropped on Warsaw. Some members of his extended family were killed, but his parents and siblings were not harmed. As the war progressed and the persecution of the Jews intensified, ownership of the family store was forcibly transferred to an ethnic German, and Kazik took risks to provide food for his family, traveling freely because he looked, talked, and acted like a Pole.

In 1942, he went to work for a peasant in the country and was not in Warsaw when the summer deportations took place and almost 300,000 Jews were sent to [Treblinka](#). His parents, by luck and happenstance, escaped the deportation.

Kazik entered the ghetto on a mission for the Jewish Underground. So convincing was his appearance and demeanor that those he encountered did not believe he was Jewish until he muttered prayers and spoke [Yiddish](#). He joined the resistance, where his major duty was acquiring weapons. To do this, the resistance needed money. Because of his non-Jewish appearance, Kazik was effective in “requisitioning and expropriating” funds from those Jews who still had valuables because Jews were much more fearful of non-Jews than they were of one another. “These actions were not my pride and joy. I preferred to work against the Germans,” he explains.

Like most fighters, Kazik was attached not only to a cause, but also to the people who embodied the cause. “Relationships within the group, the attachments we formed were very important,” he recalled.

“ ”

Our acquaintances in the fighting group turned into young love... couples talked a lot, exchanged feelings, dreamed.”

SIMCHA “KAZIK” ROTEM

Israeli member of the Jewish underground in Warsaw

When the Germans entered the ghetto to begin the January 1943 deportations, Kazik remembers, “They looked like they’re going to war. What force did we have against an army? We only had pistols and grenades.” Yet he still recalls the exhilaration of the resistance. “After exploding a mine, I couldn’t believe it. German soldiers were screaming in panicky flight, leaving their wounded behind.”

There was no plan for withdrawal from the ghetto. The fighters had not expected to live. When, days into the *Aktion*, fighters were still alive and casualties relatively light, Kazik was sent with Zygmunt Frydrych to find an escape through the sewers. He needed to make contact with sewer workers to find safe passage from the ghetto and to find transportation that would take escaping Jews into the forest. Time was of the essence, as the ghetto was being destroyed.

After much difficulty, he was successful in finding a passageway out and led the fighters through the sewers to the Aryan side. Describing their condition, he says, “I didn’t recognize anyone coming out of the sewers, though I knew them all well.”

At the exit point on the Aryan side, Kazik had to make a fateful choice. His trucks were loaded and full, but some fighters were on another landing in the sewer. To wait for them was to imperil the others. Zivia Lubetkin, Kazik’s friend and ordinarily his superior in the command structure, refused to leave. He responded: “I am the commander of the operation and it wouldn’t be right or wise to delay.” He ordered the trucks to depart.

Even when they arrived in the forest, Zivia was unforgiving. “Zivia said she wanted to shoot me. I said fine! You shoot me and I’ll shoot you and we will be even.” Returning later to Warsaw on a rescue mission, Kazik helplessly watched as some of those he left behind in the sewers were found by the Germans and killed. It is the one deed for which he still feels guilty. He had made a choiceless choice. Savior to some, he had been forced by circumstances to abandon others.

Kazik lived on the Aryan side after the Ghetto was destroyed. After liberation, he was one of the very few young fighters who was reunited with his parents and one of his sisters, who had survived in hiding. He immigrated to Palestine, which later became the State of Israel, where he pursued a successful career as a business executive, running Israel’s major supermarket chain. His wartime diary, *Memoirs of a Warsaw Ghetto Fighter: The Past Within Me*, was first published in 1946. At the insistence of Yitzhak Zuckerman, he wrote a more extensive memoir after he retired, which was published in English in 1994.

DISCUSSION

According to Kazik, the fighters realized that “from a military point of view, our uprising was a zero, maybe less than that,” Given these odds, why did they choose to fight? What is the significance of this “hopeless” struggle for those learning about the Holocaust today?

MAREK EDELMAN



Mark Edelman. Courtesy USHMM Photo Archives.

Malek Edelman was born in Warsaw in 1921. He became a member of the *Zukunft*, a youth movement affiliated with the Jewish political party called the Bund. Ardently socialist and secular (non-religious), the Bund sought to defend an autonomous Jewish culture within Polish society. As youth assumed greater measures of responsibility, Edelman rose in the ranks. During the Ghetto years, 1939–1942, he became a member of the Bund's central institutions. In November 1942, he joined the Jewish Fighting Organization, the ZOB, as the Bund's representative to the command structure. During the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, he was the first commander of the Brushmakers area, the site of one of the fiercest battles. Edelman was among the last of the fighters to hold out at Mila 18, the site of the ZOB's command bunker. He then crossed over to the Aryan side in an operation led by Kazik. Because of his Jewish looks, he remained mainly indoors during his time on the Aryan side and fought in the city-wide Warsaw Uprising of 1944 in which the non-Jewish Poles of Warsaw rose up against their German occupiers.

Edelman was among the first to record his memoirs and was the highest ranking leader of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising alive in 2002, the date of this writing. His report, entitled *The Ghetto Fight*, gives a clear picture of the scope of the Bund's activities—all illegal, all underground. His impressions of the Ghetto are unromantic:

A few hundred people crowded every large unheated room of a synagogue, every hall of a deserted factory. Unkempt, lousy, with no facilities to wash, undernourished and hungry, they remain all day on their filthy straw mattresses with no strength to rise. The mattresses usually lie on the ground, seldom on wooden supports. The whole family often receives sleeping space for one. This is the kingdom of hunger and misery.

He was critical of the Jewish Council and their agencies, most critical of their corruption. "Agencies established to give the Ghetto a semblance of normal life," he wrote, "were in reality nests of corruption and demoralization." He is firm in his criticism of Adam Czerniakow, the chairman of the Warsaw Judenrat: "He knew beyond a doubt that deportation meant death... Being unable to counteract events, he decided to quit [commit suicide] altogether...We thought that he had no right to act as he did... Since he was the only person in the ghetto whose voice carried a great deal of authority it should have been his duty to inform the entire population, to dissolve all public institutions and dismantle the Jewish police."

His description of the burning of the ghetto is vivid: "The flames cling to our clothes which now start smoldering. The pavement melts under our feet in a black gooey substance... our soles begin to burn from the heat of the stone pavement."

DISCUSSION

Remembering when he saw post-war German chancellor Willy Brandt kneel down in front of the Warsaw monument to the ghetto fighters, Marek exclaims, "It showed the Germans their place. I won, but at what price? Can you be a winner with six million people sacrificed on the altar of justice?" Consider the events of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and the Allied defeat of the Germans in light of his question. How would you respond?

VLADKA MEED (FEIGELE PEITEL)



*Feigele Peitel, 1944.
Courtesy USHMM Photo
Archives.*

The character of Tosia in the film is based in part on the real life of Feigele Peitel. Her mother, brother, and sister were among those sent to their deaths during the summer 1942 deportations. She remained in the ghetto, full of despair, until she heard the words of Abrasha Blum, a member of the Jewish Coordinating Committee, who sought to unite the diverse political factions of the ghetto: “We must no longer submit to deportation. We must offer armed resistance. By now everyone knows where those freight cars are going. But one has to know even how to die.” Vladka recalled, “I listened breathlessly as he spoke. A passion for revenge raged within me.”

Her appearance was that of a non-Jewish Pole and her Polish was flawless. She could pass as Aryan on the other side of the ghetto walls, and as a woman was especially valuable to the Jewish underground. Jewish men were circumcised, thus their Jewishness was easily verified. This was not a problem with women.

She was sent to live on the Aryan side of Warsaw to purchase weapons, secure dynamite, pass information, and rescue ghetto children by finding a few committed Poles willing to risk their lives to shelter them. She smuggled a map of the death camp Treblinka out of the ghetto in the valiant hope that solid information about the killing would spur a serious response in the West. She brought dynamite into the ghetto, which required not only courage, but also vodka and Zlotys (Polish currency) to “oil” the path in and out. Vladka alludes to the loneliness and pressure of her double life only in passing: “You can be my friend,” she said to Benjamin, the man who was also passing as an Aryan and who would later become her husband, “because if I don’t come back, I want someone to care that I am missing.” Vladka was on the Aryan side as the German forces burned the ghetto to the ground. “I felt that really everything was finished. I didn’t think about myself if I will live or if life will go on. I was mad at myself that I was not there... this was the place, to be together with them.”

She and her husband, Ben Meed, survived the war by passing as Aryans and emigrated from Poland to the United States. She dedicated much of her life to teaching educators about the Ghetto Uprising and resistance, and has never stopped believing that we need to be “alert to evil.”

DISCUSSION

In Vladka’s testimony she remembers: ‘They started putting block after block on fire. It was also the Polish holiday, it was Easter, and children were riding round and round and music was playing. Not far from there the ghetto was burning, and you heard the shooting, and you saw the smoke, and people outside were admiring, and some said ‘Take a look. The Jews are frying now in the ghetto.’” In what way did the choices made by the non-Jewish Poles affect the fate of the Jews?

Consider Vladka’s words at the end of the documentary: “You are not able to live on Mars. You are part of what is going on around you. And I do like people, and want to believe in people, but to be alert to the evil.” What does this tell us about the legacy of the Warsaw Ghetto for her? How did the experiences of Kazik and Marek shape their views since then?

ANALYZING THE FILM

1. Consider the scenes with which the filmmaker chose to begin and end the film. What might be the motivation behind this choice? What do they communicate about Jewish life before the war? (See scenes 1 and 38)
2. Throughout the film, Adam Czerniakow continually looks at his watch. What thematic significance does this have?
3. The movie soundtrack goes silent when the ghetto inhabitants are sealed in train cars for deportation to Treblinka. Why do you think the filmmaker made this choice? (See scene 11)
4. What German attitudes toward the Jews are communicated by the filmmaker in the way the soldiers march into the ghetto to begin the January 8, 1943 round of deportations? How do their future entries into the ghetto reflect a changed attitude? What is the significance of the table that Stroop brings to the ghetto entrance in the second attack? (See scene 21)
5. What is the significance of the juxtaposition of the Polish celebration of Easter with the destruction of the ghetto? (See scene 26)

ACTIVITY

Pick a scene from the film and then conduct research (see resources at the back of this study guide) as to how accurately it depicts the historical reality. In addition to comparing the substance of the scene with the historical record, pay attention to details such as sounds, scenery, costumes, and props. What contributes to the filmmaker's ability to realistically portray the events? What are the advantages and disadvantages of choosing historical drama to tell this important story?

For this activity, you are encouraged to watch *Breaking Down the Walls*, a documentary on DVD Disc 2 that provides details about the making of the film, the efforts made for historical accuracy, and the perspectives of the filmmakers and actors.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

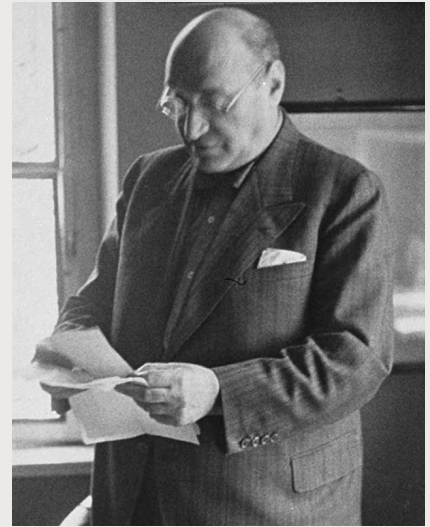
TEACHER'S NOTE: The following discussion questions and activities are focused around themes of choice, life in the ghetto, resistance, propaganda, honor and film making. Before watching the film, ask students to take note of the topics below that will be addressed after viewing:

- Situations in which individuals are faced with difficult moral choices
- Living conditions in the ghetto
- Acts of resistance and defiance
- Nazi use of propaganda and stereotypes
- Film making choices, such as the use of significant images, sounds, and music
- Identifying pictures of the characters in the film are provided on page 45

In addition to questions and activities addressing *Uprising*, also included are those addressing issues raised in the documentary *Resistance* (on DVD Disc 2), which features in-depth interviews with survivors of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, along with archival films, photos, and conversations with historical experts, the filmmaker, and the stars of the film.

CHOICES

1. Holocaust scholar Lawrence Langer described the circumstances faced by Jews during the Holocaust as “Choiceless Choices.” What do you think he means by this? What instances in the film depict characters facing a “choiceless choice”?
2. Adam Czerniakow made a choice to become head of the Jewish Council in the Warsaw ghetto. What difficult choices did this position then require him to make? What were the guiding principles behind the decisions that he made? Do you view him as a collaborator or as a resister? Does your assessment of his role change as circumstances in the ghetto changed? (See scenes 5, 6, and 11)
3. Mordecai Anielewicz asks the question both of the Jewish Policeman, Cael Wasser, and his students: “Can a moral man maintain his moral code in an immoral world?” Consider what factors help determine one’s moral code. What do the choices Anielewicz and Wasser make tell us about their moral codes? How do their moral codes change as conditions in the ghetto worsen? (See scenes 3, 13, 25)
4. Simcha “Kazik” Rotem stated that during the deportations, people thought: “It is so unbelievable that out of the blue someone is going to kill you just because you are a Jew—so people don’t believe it, you don’t want to, and you can’t.” How did this view affect the choices made by many of those in the Warsaw Ghetto?
5. According to reports, during the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the passengers on Flight 93, the plane that eventually crashed in Pennsylvania, knew what had happened to the earlier flights that crashed into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. How might this knowledge have influenced their choice to storm the cockpit and confront the hijackers? Can you suggest some parallels between their situation and those of the Jews in the ghetto and between their choice and the choice made by the Resistance Fighters in the Warsaw Ghetto?



Adam Czerniakow. Landershauptstadt Muenchen Stadtarchiv, courtesy USHMM Photo Archives.

In Your Own Words

Write an essay describing an instance in which you felt morally obligated to take action. What factors influenced your decision? What circumstances might have prevented you from acting?

Write a profile of someone outside the scope of the film who chose/ chooses to live a “moral life” under immoral circumstances.

LIFE IN THE GHETTO

1. Tosia is the young woman in the film who has been forced by circumstances in the ghetto to try and provide for her mother and sick father. Why does this responsibility fall to her? What unusual resources must she utilize to help her family survive? How do these new roles played by young people in the ghetto change the “normal” relationships within families? How do you think these experiences changed Tosia’s view of herself? (See scene 4)
2. Early in the film, Adam Czerniakow is given a ransom demand for the release of Jewish prisoners. To meet this demand, he assigns to the Jewish Police the task of collecting the necessary funds. When they are unable collect the full amount, he goes with a rabbi to an “establishment of ill repute” to raise the additional sum. Why does Czerniakow bring the rabbi? What is the bordello owner’s reaction to this? What is communicated here about the different Jewish social classes and religious views within the ghetto? How has German occupation changed things? (See scenes 4 and 5)



Destitute child in the Warsaw ghetto. Photo: Heinz Joest; Copyright Gunther Schwarberg.

ACTIVITY

With a partner, use either printed sources or the websites provided at the end of the study guide to conduct your own research into the actual living conditions of the inhabitants of the Jewish ghettos during World War II. Pick a specific topic, such as housing, food rations, work, education, or religious practices and make a presentation to your fellow classmates about what you have learned, incorporating web-based images or interviews and scenes from the film or documentary if possible.

RESISTANCE

1. Discuss examples of actions in the film that could be classified as defiance or resistance. Consider the range of deeds that included musicians performing a classical music concert, Janusz Korczak's efforts on behalf of the orphanage, and Tosia's smuggling of a map of Treblinka out of the ghetto. What did these actions accomplish? Were they important? What risks were involved? (See scenes 9, 11, 14)
2. According to actor Jon Voight, orphanage director Janusz Korczak resisted by living his life as a "continuous challenge to answer the most hideous circumstances with dignity." How is the procession of the children to the train cars a demonstration of this goal? Who are other people in the film who conducted their lives with the same purpose?
3. According to the following excerpt from the "Call for Resistance" of the Jewish Fighting Organization, what factors led the Jewish resistance to the decision to use force against the Germans? What might have prevented people from making this choice earlier? What does it tell us about the situation facing the Jews? What are some conflicting messages it contains?

CALL FOR RESISTANCE BY THE JEWISH FIGHTING ORGANIZATION IN THE WARSAW GHETTO JANUARY 1943

TO THE JEWISH MASSES IN THE GHETTO

On January 22, 1943, it will be six months since the deportation from Warsaw began. All of us remember well the terrible days in which 300,000 of our brothers and sisters were deported and brutally murdered in the death-camp of Treblinka. During the past six months we have been living in constant, mortal fear, never knowing what the coming day would bring. News has reached us from all sides, about the extermination of Jews in the General Government, in Germany and in the occupied countries. Having heard the sad news, we have been waiting for our turn, every day, every hour. Today, we must understand that the Hitlerite murderers have allowed us to live only because they want to exploit our labor to the last drop of blood and sweat, to the last breath. We are slaves; and when slaves no longer bring profit, they are killed. Each one of us must realize this, and each one of us must remember this constantly.

During the last few weeks, certain persons have spread information about letters—alleged to have come from Jews deported from Warsaw who are supposedly in labor—camps near Pinsk or in Bobrujsk.

JEWISH MASSES, DO NOT BELIEVE THOSE STORIES.

They are spread by Jews who are in the service of the Gestapo. The bloody murderers are thereby pursuing a certain objective: to calm the Jewish population, so that the coming deportation will be carried out without difficulties, with minimal forces and without loss of German lives. They do not want the Jews to prepare hiding places or resistance. Jews, do not repeat these lies. Do not help the agents. The criminal Gestapo men will receive their punishment.

JEWISH MASSES!

The hour is drawing near. You must be prepared to offer resistance and not let yourselves be slaughtered like sheep. No Jew must enter a boxcar. People unable to resist actively should offer passive resistance, that means, hide themselves...

OUR MOTTO MUST BE

Everybody should be prepared to die like a human being

We are rising to struggle!...

ARISE AND FIGHT!

Do not lose hope in the possibility of rescue! You should know that rescue is not to be found in going to death passively like a flock of sheep. It lies in something considerably higher: In struggle! He who fights for his life stands a chance of saving himself! He who in advance gives up has lost straightaway! Only disgraceful death in the asphyxiating machine of Treblinka awaits him.

ARISE, PEOPLE, AND FIGHT!

Summon up courage to do reckless deeds! Down with the shameful acceptance of statements such as "We are all doomed to death!" This is a lie! For us, too, a life future was destined! We, too, have the right to it! It is only necessary to fight for it! It is no achievement to live when your life is spared only as a favor! It is an achievement to live when someone else wants to wrest this life from you.

ARISE, PEOPLE, AND FIGHT FOR YOUR LIVES!

Let the disgrace of the first act of our extermination never repeat itself! Down with resignation and self distrust! Let the enemy pay with his own blood for every Jewish life! Let your homes become fortresses!

OUR SLOGAN

Not one Jew will perish in Treblinka anymore! Down with the traitors of the nation! Relentless struggle against the invader to the last drop of our blood! Prepare for action!

BE ON YOUR GUARD!

The invader is about to carry out the second act of your extermination. Do not go to death unresistingly. Defend yourselves. Take hold of an axe, a crowbar, knife, barricade your house.

LET THEM CAPTURE YOU LIKE THAT...

In fighting you stand a chance to survive... FIGHT...

ACTIVITY

Identify a situation at another point in history or today in which a "Call For Resistance" might have been appropriate. Then write a "Call For Resistance" of your own, either in the form of a speech, essay, poem or song.

PROPAGANDA

1. Filmmaker Fritz Hippler films Adam Czerniakow in his office for the propaganda film, *The Eternal Jew*. What does Hippler hope to accomplish by manipulating the scene? What antisemitic stereotypes does he associate with the Jews? How does he incorporate elements of these stereotypes into the German propaganda he is creating? (See scene 10)
2. How does the finished film, *The Eternal Jew*, distort reality to create a negative impression of Jewish people? Are the techniques it employs effective? (See scene 26)
3. The example on the right of Nazi propaganda is the cover of a children's book titled *The Poisonous Mushroom* (the entire work and other examples are also available on-line at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website). What message is being conveyed? What logical and/or emotional appeals are present? What might be the results of this propaganda?



Cover of the antisemitic German children's book, "Der Giftpilz" [The Poisonous Mushroom], published by Der Stürmer-Verlag. Lawrence E. Gichner, courtesy USHMM Photo Archives.

ACTIVITY

Joseph Gobbels the German Minister of Propaganda, believed that propaganda is most effective when it delivers simple , repeated messages meant to play to people's emotions. Locate an example of Nazi propaganda that made use of these techniques. Then locate a recent commercial advertisement, either in print or on television, that utilizes propaganda techniques such as simplicity of message, repetition, stereotyping, and emotional appeal. Why are these methods so effective in influencing people's beliefs and choices?

HONOR

1. As Adam Czerniakow, Mordecai Anielewicz, and Yitzhak Zukerman discuss their different views of Jewish honor, Czerniakow asks: “A father who is hiding his son is not honor? A rabbi who is teaching a child his lessons is not honorable? A mother who is taking care of her children and many more is not honor? No—for you honor can only come out of the barrel of a gun. You talk about honor. I talk about responsibility.” What is the difference between honor and responsibility? Which perspective do you find most persuasive?
2. Mordecai Anielewicz, commander of the Jewish Fighting Organization, was killed in the command bunker at 18 Mila Street. He wrote the following during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1943:

“ ”

It is now clear that what took place exceeded all expectations. In our opposition to the Germans we did more than our strength allowed—but now our forces are waning. We are on the brink of extinction. We forced the Germans to retreat twice—but they returned stronger than before.

One of our groups held out for forty minutes, and another fought for about six hours. The mine, which was laid in the area of the brush factory, exploded as planned. Then we attacked the Germans and they suffered heavy casualties. Our losses were generally low. That is an accomplishment...

I feel that great things are happening and that this action we have dared to take is of enormous value...

I cannot describe the conditions in which the Jews of the ghetto are now “living”~ Only a few exceptional individuals will be able to survive such suffering. The others will sooner or later die. Their fate is certain, even though thousands are trying to hide in cracks and rat holes. It is impossible to light a candle, for lack of air. Perhaps a miracle will occur and we shall see each other again one of these days. It is extremely doubtful.

The last wish of my life has been fulfilled. Jewish self-defense has become a fact. Jewish resistance and revenge have become realities. I am happy to have been one of the first Jewish fighters in the ghetto.

Where will rescue come from?

MORDECAI ANIELEWICZ

Commander of the Jewish Fighting Organization

What does this tell us about Anielewicz and his sense of honor? Support your answer with details from the film.

ACTIVITY

Conduct further research into other examples of resistance and defiance that took place during the Holocaust. How did others attempt to maintain honor and faith in the worst of all circumstances?

GLOSSARY

Antisemitism – name first introduced by German journalist Wilhelm Marr in 1879 to denote the hatred of the Jews. The name derives from misidentifying the Jews as a race of “Semites”. Antisemitism has had three primary manifestations, religious antisemitism—opposition to the Jews because of their religion; political antisemitism—opposition to the Jews as a political tool, and the Nazi contribution of racial antisemitism—declaring the Jews a race and then opposing anyone with Jewish blood. Religious antisemitism could be “solved” by conversion; political antisemitism by expulsion; but Nazi racial antisemitism required annihilation. There are two different spellings in use: Anti-Semitism and antisemitism. Most contemporary scholars use the latter spelling.

Aryan – originally, a term for peoples speaking the languages of Europe and India. Twisted by Nazis, who viewed those of Germanic background as racially superior, “Aryan” was re-defined as “nobility of blood, beauty of form and of the mind, and a superior breed.” To the Nazis, all civilization was the result of a struggle between the creative Aryan and the uncreative non-Aryan. In other, less precise use, Aryan meant non-Jew and non-Aryan meant Jews.

Final Solution – the German term given to the program to murder all the Jews, formally initiated at the Wannsee Conference in January, 1942. The term derives from the Nazi identification of the Jews as a “problem.” Murder, henceforth, was to represent a “Final Solution.”

Judenrat – the German appointed Jewish Council in each ghetto, whose task it was to represent the ghettos, enforce German decrees, and provide for their captive Jewish populations under the direst conditions and with limited resources.

Judenrein – German word meaning “free of Jews.” Germany sought to make its own country and others free of Jews, first by forced emigration and later by annihilation.

“Resettlement in the East” – the German euphemism for deportation to death camps.

SS – Schutzstaffel, or elite guard. By origin, the SS was the blackshirted personal guard of Hitler. Under the leadership of Heinrich Himmler, it grew into a mass army essential to the exercise of Nazi power. At the Nuremberg trials, the SS was declared an organization guilty of persecuting and exterminating Jews, as well as administering the slave labor program and murdering prisoners of war. All members of the SS were declared war criminals.

Treblinka – one of the six German death camps, approximately 60 miles outside of Warsaw, used primarily for the murder of Polish Jews by poison gassing. Between 700,000 and 870,000 Jews were murdered at Treblinka.

Umschlagsplatz – the deportation point in Warsaw from which Jews were transported by train to Treblinka.

Yiddish – a high German language written in Hebrew characters that is spoken by Jews and descendants of Jews of Central and Eastern European origin. It was the language most prevalent among the Jews who died in the Holocaust, and it was nearly destroyed as a secular language in the Holocaust. Yiddish is still spoken by Orthodox Jews throughout the world.

Yom Kippur – the Jewish Day of Atonement, and the holiest day of the Jewish calendar. The theme of the day is that it is a time of repentance, when God sits in merciful judgment and is ready to receive those who return to God.

UPRISING CAST



Hank Azaria as Mordecai Anielewicz



David Schwimmer as Yitzhak Zuckerman



Donald Sutherland as Adam Czerniakow



Stephen Moyer as Simcha "Kazik" Rotem



Leelee Sobieski as Tosia Altman (composite)



John Ales as Marek Edelman



Cary Elwes as Dr. Fritz Hippler



Pallel Granditsky as Dr. Janusz Korczak



Andy Nyman as Calel Wasser (fictional)

INTERNET RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

Facing History and Ourselves

www.facinghistory.org

Facing History and Ourselves is a national educational organization whose mission is to engage students of diverse backgrounds in civic education that encourages the skills, promotes the values, and fosters the ideals needed to sustain a democratic society.

The Ghetto Fighters' House Museum of Holocaust and Resistance

www.gfh.org.il/eng

A memorial museum in Israel established by survivors of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

The Jewish Partisan Educational Foundation

www.jewishpartisans.org

The most comprehensive website on Jewish partisans in the world—over 50 interviews with surviving resistance fighters, 12 short documentary films, 20 lessons and study guides, and a free online learning platform.

Simon Wiesenthal Center

www.wiesenthal.com

The Simon Wiesenthal Center is an international Jewish human rights organization dedicated to preserving the memory of the Holocaust by fostering tolerance and understanding through community involvement, educational outreach and social action.

Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation

www.vhf.org

In 1994, after filming *Schindler's List*, Steven Spielberg established the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation to videotape and preserve the testimonies of Holocaust survivors and witnesses. Today, the Shoah Foundation has collected more than 50,000 eyewitness testimonies in 57 countries and 32 languages, and is committed to ensuring the broad and effective educational use of its archive worldwide.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

www.ushmm.org

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is America's national institution for the documentation, study, and interpretation of Holocaust history, and serves as this country's memorial to the millions of people murdered during the Holocaust.

See also the Learning Site for students on the Web (www.ushmm.org/outreach) and The Holocaust Learning Center on the Web (www.ushmm.org/learn).

YadVashem

www.yadvashem.org

Yad Vashem is Israel's and the Jewish People's memorial to the Holocaust. Its principal missions are commemoration and documentation of the events of the Holocaust, collection, examination, and publication of testimonies to the Holocaust, the collection and memorialization of the names of Holocaust victims, and research and education.

For a complete chronology of the Holocaust log onto www.holocaustchronicle.org

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