

Progression of the Holocaust

Holocaust historians have divided the Holocaust and the events leading up to it into different stages. Keep in mind that historians identified these stages after the event, and that the divisions are arbitrary—some historians have identified three stages, others only two, and some even six or more stages. What the stages do, no matter how they are divided, is help us understand that the Holocaust was a progression, and that the actions taken against the Jewish people grew increasingly violent and intent on genocide.

For our purposes, we will use a four-phase model of the Holocaust proposed by historian Raul Hilberg.

Identification/Definition

First, the Nazis identified who was Jewish, which they considered to be a racial, not a religious, identity. The Nazis passed laws that identified people as Jews based on how many of a person's grandparents were Jewish. Once someone was identified as a Jew, that identity was marked on the person's passport. After 1941, people who were identified as Jews were forced to wear a cloth Star of David on their clothing at all times.

Economic Discrimination and Separation

Jewish people were no longer allowed to work for or employ Germans. Shares in business were taken away, and Jewish people were no longer allowed to sit on the board of a business (even their own). Many businesses were sold (under duress) to an Aryan, and many Jews could no longer practice their professions. Life under the Nazis became more and more difficult for the Jewish people.

Concentration

After the Jewish people were economically and socially segregated (separated) from society, it became easier for the Nazis to physically separate them as well. Some Jews were forced to move to ghettos; others were sent to forced-labor camps or concentration camps. In all these circumstances, the Nazis controlled the food, work and every other aspect of the lives of the Jews. The Jewish people were now defenseless; without money, food or resources; and cut off from society.

Extermination

In 1942, the Nazis met at the Wannsee conference to discuss how to remove the Jews from German living space and society more quickly and efficiently. After this, the Nazi extermination

efforts increased with mass shootings, mobile gas chambers and deportation to the death camps.