

HOW SHOULD WE STUDY THE "FINAL SOLUTION"?

The “Final Solution” or “Final Solution of the Jewish Question” was a Nazi code phrase referring to the systematic plan to murder all Jewish people in Europe. It replaced earlier plans aimed at forcing Jewish people to relocate with a policy of systematic annihilation, and resulted in the murder of 6 million Jews.

Below are some figures demonstrating the scale of destruction of the Final Solution. To the right of these numbers is an excerpt from a poem.

How do you interpret the lines from the poem in light of the statistics? What does it say to you about how we should study the Final Solution?

Statistics on the Final Solution*

- Jews murdered in mass shootings by the Einsatzgruppen and local collaborators: 2 million–2.2 million
- Jews murdered at Chelmno: about 200,000
- Jews murdered at Belzec: 435,000–500,000
- Jews murdered at Sobibor: about 180,000 or more
- Jews murdered at Treblinka: at least 900,000
- Jews murdered at Majdanek: about 60,000
- Jews murdered at Auschwitz: about 1 million
- Jews murdered in the most fatal single day during the Holocaust: about 43,000 on November 3-4, 1943

Excerpt from “Hunger Camp at Jaslo” Wisława Szymborska (Polish poet and essayist, 1923-2012)

History counts its skeletons in round numbers.
A thousand and one remains a thousand, as though the one had never existed: an imaginary embryo, an empty cradle, a primer opened for no one, air that laughs, cries, grows, stairs to a void bounding out to the garden, nobody’s place in the line.

**The number of Jews murdered is an imprecise number because the Nazis did not keep track of all their victims, or in some cases, destroyed the records. These numbers indicate the latest research, as of 2020, and are approximate.*

DISCUSSION NOTES: