

How did Jewish people resist during the Holocaust?

Lesson 1: What counts as resistance?

History

Lesson 1 of 4 lessons

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Resistance to the Nazi state

Historians have found lots of evidence of men and women who resisted the Nazi state. People resisted the Nazis for different reasons.

- Some resisted the Nazis for **moral** or religious reasons like Catholic priests, Protestant Christians, Jehovah's Witnesses and other groups.
- Some resisted for **political** reasons because they disagreed with the Nazi political beliefs. Some left and right-wing politicians in Germany opposed the Nazis.
- Some people resisted the Nazis for **military** reasons because decisions during the War were being made by Hitler and some army officers did not trust him.
- And some resisted the Nazis for **cultural** or social reasons. For instance, some teenagers did not want to join the Hitler Youth but preferred to hang out with their friends, wear British fashion and listen to US music.



Resistance to the Nazi state was difficult

The way in which the Nazi state was organised made resistance difficult to organise.

- The Nazis controlled the **police** and the **courts**. Anyone who resisted might be arrested by Nazi-supporting police and put on trial with a Nazi-supporting judge.
- The **Gestapo** were the secret police who could arrest, torture and imprison someone without even having to take them to court.
- People living under the Nazi state **feared** what their neighbour might do if they did not do what was expected of them. A neighbour could report you to the Gestapo who would then visit you and frighten you.
- The Nazis rewarded people who **conformed** and did not resist. Sometimes, the pressure to conform was so great that people chose to stay quiet rather than resist, even when they saw something happening that they disagreed with.



Jewish resistance to the Holocaust

The Holocaust is the name given to the murder of 6 million Jewish men, women and children by the Nazis. The Nazis were attempting to wipe out every Jewish people in Europe. Historians have also found evidence of Jewish resistance to the Nazi state both before the Holocaust and during the Holocaust.

Jewish people resisted the Nazis but this is often not presented. The historian Yehuda Bauer argues that studying the Holocaust has centred much more on the **perpetrator**. This means the way the Holocaust is often presented leads people to see the Nazis 'doing things' to Jews. This means the Jews are portrayed only as **victims**. Any survival stories of Jews during the Holocaust have focused on the Jews being rescued by non-Jews. This also portrays the Jews as helpless victims. Without intending to do so, many people have **de-humanised** the Jewish people.



Jewish resistance to the Holocaust

Yehuda Bauer says there are lots of examples from all over Europe where Jewish people stood up against the Nazis. Bauer uses a Hebrew (Jewish) word to describe this resistance, 'amidah'. **Amidah** means to stand up against something. Bauer argues that if you look for them, you will find lots of examples of Jewish men and women resisting the attempts to de-humanise and murder Jews during the Holocaust.

Bauer argues that some of the example of amidah (standing up against) are small and appear to be insignificant. Bauer argues that many Jewish people were standing up against the Nazis' attempts to de-humanise them by reinforcing their humanity. These examples of amidah were often unarmed and non-violent and took place in the most horrifying and challenging circumstances. Bauer argues there were also armed example of amidah, using force and violence to protect Jewish people and attack the Nazis.



Glossary

Conform: to go along with something, even if you do not agree with it, because you are worried about fitting in or appearing different from others.

Perpetrator: someone who does something (usually something bad) to another person.

De-humanise: to take away someone's humanity by treating them in a way that suggests they are not a thinking, intelligent, caring, living human being.

Re-humanise: to work against de-humanising someone by restoring to them what it means to be a thinking, intelligent, caring, living human being.

Amidah: a Hebrew (Jewish) word meaning to 'stand up against'. Some historians use the word amidah to describe Jewish resistance during the Holocaust.

