

# The History of the Twentieth Century

## Episode 373

### “The Machinery of Mass Murder”

#### Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

*If all Hitler had done was kill people in vast numbers more efficiently than anyone else ever did, the debate over his lasting importance might end there. But Hitler’s impact went beyond his willingness to kill without mercy. He did something civilization had not seen before. Genghis Khan operated in the context of the nomadic steppe, where pillaging villages was the norm. Hitler came out of the most civilized society on Earth, the land of Beethoven and Goethe and Schiller. He set out to kill people not for what they did but for who they were. Even Mao and Stalin were killing their “class enemies.” Hitler killed a million Jewish babies just for existing.*

Historian and essayist Nancy Gibbs.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening War Theme]

Episode 373. The Machinery of Mass Murder.

Today I want to talk about the Holocaust.

Last time, I talked about concentration camps, and again I want to emphasize the difference between a concentration camp, which is meant to imprison people, and extermination camps, which the Nazis built for the sole purpose of killing as many human beings as possible as quickly and efficiently as possible.

These camps are generally called “extermination camps” or “death camps.” Personally, I don’t think either term captures the full horror. The English language has a word that specifically means the intentional killing of another human being. That word is *murder*. The most honest and accurate designation for these places would therefore be *murder camps*.

While I’m on the subject of words, let’s talk about the word *holocaust*. This word is derived from a Greek word for a burnt offering: *holos* meaning whole and *kaustos*, meaning burnt; that is, something, usually a dead animal, burned as a sacrificial offering to a god. When Jewish

Scripture was translated into Greek, the word *holocaust* was used to describe the sacrificial offerings made in the Temple in Jerusalem. The word passed into Latin as *holocaustum*, and from there to English. The use of the word *holocaust* to describe a massacre of Jewish people did not originate in the twentieth century, but in the 12<sup>th</sup>. English commentators of the time used this very word to describe a massacre of Jews in London in 1189.

The 19<sup>th</sup>-century *Oxford English Dictionary* definition of holocaust includes “complete destruction, especially of a large number of persons.”

Before the Second World War, the word was often used to describe the mass killing of large numbers of people of any ethnicity, especially by fire. *The New York Times* used the word *holocaust* in 1895 to describe Turkish massacres of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire; other writers, including Winston Churchill, used it to describe the First World War genocide of Armenians. The word was also used in connection with the burning and massacres in the city of Smyrna in 1922.

*The New York Times* used the word to describe what the Nazis were doing to Jewish people as early as 1943, in the phrase “the Nazi holocaust.” By the 1960s, the plain word *holocaust* without any modifier was becoming the common name for the Nazi genocide. By the 1980s the word began to be used as we use it today; that is, *Holocaust* with a capital *H* signifies the Nazi genocide (the landmark 1978 American television mini-series titled simply *Holocaust* may have influenced this usage), while the word *holocaust* with a lower-case *h* is used as a synonym for genocide, as in “the Cambodian holocaust,” or “the Rwandan holocaust.”

The use of a word that originally meant a religious sacrifice, including Jewish religious sacrifices, to describe the mass murder of Jews strikes some people as inappropriate, to say the least. It seems to imply that the Nazis intended their actions as some kind of religious or mystical rite, which is in no way true.

Also controversial is the use of *Holocaust* to describe the Nazi murders of people who were not Jewish, as in, “Poles were also victims of the Holocaust,” or “gay people were also victims of the Holocaust.” Historians contend that the Nazi killings of Jewish people were unique, in that the Nazis did not intend to kill every Pole or every gay person, though the Romani do have a claim to that same unique status, as do perhaps disabled people. In Hebrew, the word for the Holocaust is *Shoah*, and in Hebrew the word is definitely restricted to the killings of Jews.

On the other hand, one of the most famous Holocaust survivors, Jewish writer and activist Elie Wiesel, supported the broader usage. He once said, “Not all the victims of the Holocaust were Jews, but all Jews were victims.” This broader usage of *Holocaust* with a capital *H* has become increasingly common in our time, and it may be too late to put the genie back in the bottle.

When I talked about the German concentration camps last time, I explained that in the period before the war, the camps were intended to imprison people from disfavored groups, but were

not intended to murder them, although inmates of these camps did sometimes die from the harsh mistreatment. On the other hand, Nazi ideology disdained anyone who was not a hardworking, socially and politically conformist, ethnic German. One clear example is people with disabilities. Before the war, Hitler expressed a desire to murder all people with disabilities, while also lamenting that it was politically impossible. The war made it politically possible, and the SS set to work on it. In that instance, wartime necessity gave Adolf Hitler a convenient excuse to do what he wanted to do anyway.

By the way, those who did fall into the category of hardworking, socially and politically conformist, ethnic Germans, which was most of the population of Germany, had little to fear from the Nazi government, provided they made no effort to oppose it. These ordinary Germans passed through the Nazi period in relative safety and comfort, at least until the hardships of war began to bite. In 1953, an American journalist named Milton Mayer interviewed some ordinary Germans and found that they generally remembered the Nazi period with fondness. They thought of themselves as having lived free and happy lives during the Thirties and did not see Adolf Hitler as particularly evil. The title of the book Mayer wrote about this research, published in 1955, says it all: *They Thought They Were Free*.

Hitler and his government did not reveal any particular interest in murdering all Jewish Germans during the period from 1933 to 1939. They hated Jewish people, regarded them as enemies, and wanted to immiserate them, impoverish them, and expel them from Germany, but their hostility did not extend all the way to mass murder. Jews weren't being placed in concentration camps merely for being Jewish, at least not until 1938.

It was a combination of events that led to the Holocaust. The invasion of Poland led to the Nazis ruling over 1.5 million more Jewish people than before, while the war meant that a policy centered on forced emigration was no longer practical. As we saw, the Nazis sought in effect to turn all of Poland into one big labor camp. Jewish people in Poland were herded into the ghettos, which were in some respects labor camps within a labor camp.

Then came the invasion of the Soviet Union. This put millions more Jewish people under Nazi rule. It also led to the Hunger Plan, in which Hitler hoped to starve most of the existing population of European Russia to extinction to make room for German settlers. When the Soviet Union did not collapse as expected, Germany was faced with a long war, in which millions of German soldiers would have to be mobilized. Keeping this vast army fed was itself a challenge.

The Nazis remembered well how domestic food shortages helped bring down Germany in the last war and were determined not to let history repeat itself. The Army was ordered to collect its own food in Soviet territory. Feeding the Army and German civilians were the top priorities; feeding Soviet POWs ranked at the bottom. More than two million Soviet POWs died in German custody in 1941, from starvation, mistreatment, and sometimes deliberate killings.

These deaths made it easier for Hitler to contemplate murdering Jews. He himself posed the question of why his treatment of Jewish people should be gentler than his treatment of Soviet POWs.

At the same time, the *Einsatzgruppen* were working behind German lines, hunting down and murdering Soviet civilians. Officially, their targets were partisans, commissars, and other Communist Party officials. In practice, all three of those terms were regarded as synonymous with Jewish, and as we saw, by autumn of 1941, Jewish Soviet citizens of all ages and sexes were routinely murdered, sometimes in mass killings. This is sometimes referred to as the Shoah by bullets.

Also by autumn of 1941, Hitler and the Nazi leadership decided that the so-called Final Solution would require the massacre of every Jew in Europe. I already told you about the Wannsee Conference, in which mid-level German officials drew up the plans for carrying out this terrible decision.

How would this be carried out in practice? So far, the Nazis had tried three methods of mass murder. The first was sending teams of soldiers out into the field to hunt down and shoot Jewish people, the *Einsatzgruppen*. This method was judged unsatisfactory. It required soldiers and military equipment that could be put to better use on the front, and in any case soldiers were prone to bragging about their exploits to their families and friends.

This operation demanded secrecy. It would be best to keep the number of people involved in these killings as small as possible and rely on those most trustworthy. The SS for example, who could be trusted to remain loyal and keep their mouths shut.

Additionally, mass shootings were not an easy thing to endure, not even for the shooters. In August 1941, Heinrich Himmler attended a mass shooting of Jewish people in Minsk; it made him throw up. That was all it took to convince him to explore alternatives.

The second method was the gas vans. These were specially designed transport vans that could pipe engine exhaust into the passenger space in the back of the vehicle. SS members would operate these vans, which would drive to where the victims were and pick them up. They would be told only that they were being transported to some destination, but by the time they reached it, everyone inside would be dead from carbon monoxide poisoning. The SS had pioneered this technique during the campaign to eliminate people with disabilities, so the special vehicles and experienced staff were already in place.

Gas vans had their own problems. As they were being gassed, the victims would scream, cry out, and bang on the sides of the van, which could attract attention from anyone nearby. In at least one case, a gas van broke down and was stranded by the side of the road, crammed full of dead bodies. Sorting that one out was pretty awkward. Even when the vans worked as intended, when

they arrived at their destinations, usually a concentration camp where the corpses were to be buried, SS soldiers had to unload the mass of bodies from the back of the van.

This was a gruesome chore. Not to put too fine a point on it, the bodies were smeared with sweat, blood, vomit, urine, and feces. Unloading them, carrying them, or even handling them was not a job anyone would take on voluntarily, nor was the job of cleaning the van well enough that it could take on a new batch of victims without the telltale smell that would warn them of what was coming.

That left the third method, the murder camps. Instead of murdering the victims en route to the camp, the SS would murder them inside the camp after they arrived. If you manage it properly—in other words, if you lie—you can convince the victims to follow your instructions and cooperate in their own murders. The SS had already experimented with this method, having used a repurposed Polish Army bunker to murder Polish POWs.

Construction of the first purpose-built murder camp was begun in November 1941, near the Polish village of Bełżec, which lay near the eastern border of the General Government. The site was chosen for convenience, because it was halfway between the city of Lublin, in the General Government, and Lwów, which lay in the portion of eastern Poland that had been occupied by the Soviet Union in 1939, then occupied by the German Army in 1941. Both of these cities had substantial Jewish populations.

Then there was the camp at the Polish village of Chełmno, which lay within the territory Germany annexed after the fall of Poland. The Germans called the village Kulmhof, but for some reason, when we speak of the murder camp here, we use the Polish name and not the German name, even though it was known by the German name at the time. Chełmno was originally used as a site to receive those gas vans and bury the victims' bodies, but in December 1941, it began gassing victims on site.

In spring of 1942, following the Wannsee Conference, when the Nazi government in Germany was gearing up to increase the numbers of murders, a camp was built in the forest near the village of Treblinka, which stood not far from Warsaw, at the northern edge of the General Government. Before the war, a gravel quarry operated on this site, which was isolated from populated areas but connected to the Polish railroad network. This made it ideal for the SS. The first Treblinka camp was a labor camp, opened September 1, 1941, which used slave laborers to operate the quarry, most of whom were Polish.

In April 1942, construction began on a second facility two kilometers away, Treblinka II, which would be a dedicated murder camp. The construction work was done by 238 workers conscripted from the Warsaw ghetto. They were all Jewish Germans who recently had been relocated from Germany to the Warsaw ghetto; they were chosen for convenience because they could understand German. The camp began operating two months later, and once construction was finished, the Jewish workers who had been forced to build it were then forced to help operate it.

And the last camp I want to talk about was outside the village of Sobibór, about halfway between Bełżec and Treblinka. This was also a murder camp. It's not clear when work on it began, but it was the last to be finished, in the summer of 1942. The local *Judenrat*, the Jewish council put into place by the Germans, was ordered to provide Jewish laborers. It's possible the SS conscripted some local Polish labor as well. No one knows for sure, because after the camp began operation, the workers who built it were among the first to die there.

These were the five camps where Operation Reinhard was carried out. In ascending order of numbers of people killed: Chełmno, Sobibór, Bełżec, Treblinka, and Auschwitz.

Yes, I did say that Auschwitz was a forced labor camp, didn't I? But in August 1941, less than two months into the invasion of the Soviet Union, the SS was already experimenting with the use of poison gas to kill Polish and Soviet POWs there.

The original Auschwitz camp could hold about 7,000 prisoners. After an inspection visit, Heinrich Himmler ordered that the camp be expanded. As with Treblinka, the SS built a second facility, Auschwitz II, about three kilometers east of the original camp, Auschwitz I. This second camp was much larger, with facilities to house more than 100,000 prisoners. Because it was close to the Polish village of Brzezinska, Auschwitz II is sometimes called Auschwitz-Birkenau, or simply Birkenau, after the German name for the village. This is where the gas chambers were built in spring of 1942.

Auschwitz eventually grew to include a couple of dozen smaller, satellite labor camps, set up to house forced laborers who worked on site in factories owned by German businesses that produced materials for the war effort. These businesses paid wages for the workers' labor, but the wages went to the SS, not to the workers.

There is a reason why it is the name of Auschwitz in particular that is remembered in connection with the Holocaust, or sometimes even used as a metonym for the Holocaust. You might think that's because Auschwitz murdered more people than any other camp. That's true, but it has more to do with the fact that, unlike the other murder camps I've told you about, Auschwitz was also part labor camp. Late in the war, when Auschwitz was liberated, thousands of inmates were rescued, people who could testify to what went on there.

In contrast, other camps, like Treblinka, were mostly or entirely murder camps. There were no witnesses, because there were no inmates. For example, only 58 people are known to have survived Sobibór.

The murder camps did make use of Jewish forced labor in camp operations. Prisoners who were young and fit, and generally male, were made to assist in the murders of their fellow Jews under threat of being killed themselves. The Germans organized these workers into what they called *Sonderkommandos*, or "special units." This was, however, simply one more form of

extermination through labor, as these workers were not fed or treated well, and their health and strength declined over time.

These laborers would therefore last only a few weeks before being killed and replaced by newer arrivals. Sometimes SS guards would pit prisoners against one another in macabre athletic competitions, such as footraces or wrestling matches or other tests of strength, with the understanding that the winner would get to join a *Sonderkommando*, and thereby live at least a little while longer, while the losers would be killed immediately.

In this way, the SS ensured there would be no survivors and no witnesses.

[music: Beethoven, Sonata No. 8 in C minor, “Pathétique”]

You should take note that Nazi plans for dealing with the Jewish population of Europe were always implicitly genocidal. The Madagascar Plan sounds relatively merciful at first, but once you think seriously about taking millions of Europeans and forcibly relocating them to Madagascar—which, by the way, would more than double the population of the island—and expect them to survive there without assistance, you realize the idea is really a plan for genocide in all but name.

In the same way, Hitler’s plan for relocating Jews and Slavs to Soviet lands east of the Urals was also implicitly genocidal.

As were the ghettos in Poland. Jewish Poles were crammed into small neighborhoods and hardly ever permitted to leave. The food ration for residents of the ghettoes was under 200 calories per person per day, and most of that was in the form of bread, potatoes, and turnips, always those of poorest quality, the food that no one else would want. It’s obvious that a ration of 200 calories per day is intended not to support ghetto residents; it is intended gradually to starve them to death.

The ghetto system succeeded in its implicit goal; around a half a million people died in the ghettoes. Dead and dying littered the streets. Lice were everywhere. The living were weak and gaunt and usually sick; they were living on borrowed time. The desperate stole food from their neighbors, even from their own family members.

How did anyone survive this? Well, remember that some portion of the ghetto residents were used as labor, and they were paid something. The wages were poor, but even so, those who had one of these jobs were envied by those who did not. The ghettoes also developed cottage industries, where residents who had the right skills could make items for sale outside the ghetto in exchange for food. This trade was technically forbidden, but tolerated. Enough could be made from these cottage industries to attract the interest of German businesses, which came to the ghettoes to function as middlemen, buying up products made inside the ghetto and reselling them on the outside, for a markup, of course.

The ghettos were also rife with food smuggling. Some ghetto residents had money or valuables to trade for food; outside the ghetto there were sometimes those willing to donate food. Smugglers carried this trade across the ghetto walls. This was a dangerous job, as a smuggler could be shot on sight. Most of these smugglers were children, who could climb over the walls with greater alacrity.

Once the ghettos were established, the Germans began relocating the remaining Jewish populations in the Reich and the General Government and the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia into the ghettos. Once Operation Reinhard got going in 1942, the first Jews shipped to the murder camps came from the ghettos, beginning with the old and the sick, those who could not work.

The ghetto was run by a *Judenrat*, a Jewish council that served the Germans. Larger ghettos in the big cities also had Jewish police. Once Operation Reinhard began, the SS would simply demand of the *Judenrat* a certain number of Jews. It was up to the *Judenrat* to decide who to send, and up to the police to collect them and turn them over. The members of the *Judenrat* did what they did because they knew that if they didn't, the SS would punish any disobedience or lawlessness with mass killing.

Nevertheless, it was fellow Jews who were tearing parents away from children, or husbands from wives, to turn over to the SS, and so the police and the *Judenräte* were generally despised.

From roughly spring of 1942 to spring of 1943, the SS shipped Jews from the ghettos to the death camps. By autumn of 1942, the Germans were rounding up Jewish people in the occupied territories in the West. The French State and Fascist Italy declined to cooperate, and their Jewish citizens were safe, for the time being. French Jews living in the German occupation zone were not so fortunate. They were among the first to be relocated; then came Dutch Jews, Belgian Jews, even Norway's small Jewish population.

No one was told that these people being rounded up and shipped away were traveling to their deaths. Of course not. The cover story was that they were being sent east to be resettled.

The SS went to great lengths to preserve that illusion. Jews transported from Western Europe often rode in actual third-class passenger carriages, and paid standard passenger rates of the Deutsche Reichsbahn, the German railroad. Eastern European Jews rode in boxcars, though they were still charged third-class rates. The passengers themselves would be required to pay for their own transport if they had the money. If not, Jewish community organizations or *Judenräte* in the east were forced to pay.

The railroad was also in the business of transporting soldiers and supplies to the Eastern Front, and the Germans were ruthless about assigning the trains to the death camps the lowest priority, meaning they frequently had to wait at a station for other trains to pass. This in turn meant that



trips that should have taken no longer than a day at most more often took four or five days. Sometimes two weeks or more. No food was provided.

This was particularly brutal to the people in the boxcars, who were crammed inside as tightly as possible, as many as 150 people to a car, and the doors locked. They were given no food, no water, and there were no rest rooms. There was no heat in the winter; no air conditioning in the summer. Sometimes when such trains arrived at the camp, the passengers were already dead.

Assuming they survived, they were let out at a place that looked like a typical rural railroad station, complete with a ticket office, baggage room, and posted timetables laying out scheduled runs to major cities in the region. There might even be a restaurant in the station, though the tables were always empty. On the platform there might be a brass band, welcoming the arrivals with cheerful tunes.

Everyone in the station from the waiters in the restaurant to the ticket clerk and the band were actually SS members, though they were dressed like civilians. After what was often a harrowing ride on the train, arrival at the station was like stepping back into normality, as if it were 1937 again and the war and the ghettos had never happened. What a relief it must have been.

The SS had learned the power of hope in manipulating people, so they went to great lengths to instill a sense of optimism, a belief that maybe the Germans weren't lying after all, and they really were being relocated to a better life.

Occasionally, there might be one or a few people who sensed something wasn't right. For instance, the track that had brought them to this station ended right here at the platform. They don't build passenger stations on dead-end sidings. People who figured this out might jump off the platform and try to make a break for it. They would be shot dead by the guards, and everyone else got the message.

The new arrivals would be herded through the station, through the gate and into the enclosed camp, carrying their luggage with them. The camp entrance might have taken them down a pleasant lane lined with cottages. Each cottage had a path leading to the front door, and flowers blooming in window boxes. They were in truth SS barracks, though built to give the impression that yes, we really are arriving in a pleasant little town.

The arriving group, which might number in the thousands, would be led to the town square. There they would be told to leave their luggage. Most people worried they might never find their bags again, but the civilian officials addressing them would assure them everything would be taken care of. They should bring along only their identification and their valuables.

As the group was led deeper into the camp, they would become anxious as they passed machine gun nests manned by uniformed SS soldiers and through gates in barbed wire fences.

Back at the town square, where they had left their luggage, Jewish *Sonderkommandos* were already rifling through their things, sorting out the items the SS might have use for and sending the rest to be destroyed. Woe to any of them who found food in a suitcase and succumbed to the temptation to eat it.

The new arrivals would be led to men in white coats and Red Cross armbands, who would separate men from women and children. Families were uncomfortable at being separated, but the white coats would assure everyone this was only for the purpose of cleaning and delousing them. But then uniformed SS guards would bark orders, as the process began to shift from enticement to intimidation. The separated groups were led into barracks and told to strip naked and leave their clothes and shoes neatly folded on a shelf. They should bring along only their valuables and their identification to a booth where they would check these items. The SS would confiscate the valuables; the identification papers helped them keep track of exactly whom they had murdered.

Women had their hair cut off, for delousing, they were told. In fact, the SS used it to make socks for the soldiers at the front. Most of these women would feel ashamed to sit naked while a strange man cut their hair. These strange men were more Jewish camp workers. They were under orders not to speak to any of the new arrivals, either to warn or comfort them, on pain of their own deaths.

Afterward, everyone was ordered out the back doors of the barracks and marched down a lane, hands on their heads. Anyone who slowed down or hesitated was likely to get hit by an SS guard's truncheon or rifle butt. By now it was becoming clear that the camp was not what they were promised, but it's hard to offer resistance when you're naked and facing uniformed soldiers bearing rifles and clubs and whips and uninhibited about using them.

First the men went into the showers, herded along by guards and now dogs that occasionally took bites out of their victims. The showers were for disinfecting, they were told. There were ten shower rooms, and dozens of men were herded into each one, packed tightly as possible, because they died faster that way. The doors were then sealed and the room flooded with gas. An SS officer would watch through a small window as the people inside died. At most of the camps, the SS used an engine repurposed from a Soviet tank. It was connected to a generator to help provide electricity for the camp, while its exhaust was pumped into the gas chamber.

At Auschwitz and a couple other places they used not carbon monoxide, but Zyklon B to kill their victims. This was a commercial pesticide, developed in Germany in the Twenties. Its main ingredient was hydrogen cyanide.

It took about 25 minutes for everyone to die. During this period, the victims shouted and screamed and pounded on the doors, to no avail. Their deaths were plainly audible to the second group, the women and children waiting their turn, who now fully realized what was to come. As they waited, their SS guards often tormented, struck, abused, even raped the waiting women and children.

After everyone was dead, the gas chambers were opened, and *Sonderkommandos* used to remove the bodies and clean the chamber. An SS officer with a pistol would supervise, ready to shoot any body that still showed signs of life. Another *Sonderkommando* would then inspect the victims' mouths and pry away with pliers any gold they found in there. Then a third unit would load the corpses onto carts to take them to where steam shovels had opened up the earth to create mass graves.

At this stage of the process, the SS did not burn the bodies. That would come later.

No one can say exactly how many Jews were murdered in the Holocaust, though the number is certainly between five and seven million. The usual estimate, six million, is a reasonable one.

The German Army, especially the *Einsatzgruppen*, murdered about a million people in occupied Soviet territory in 1941 and 1942. About half a million people starved to death in the ghettos. Operation Reinhard shipped about one and a half million people to their deaths in just the three months of August, September, and October 1942, and perhaps another half million in the months before and after.

Our historical narrative has reached October 1942. The Battles of Stalingrad and Guadalcanal have already begun, and in Egypt, Montgomery is preparing his offensive at El Alamein. At this historical moment, something like 65% of the total number of people murdered in the Holocaust are already dead. By the end of 1942, it will be 75%.

The Holocaust is already mostly complete.

We'll have to stop there for today. I thank you for listening, and I'd especially like to thank Gene for his kind donation, and thank you to Michael for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons like Gene and Michael help cover the costs of making this show, which in turn keeps the podcast available free for everyone, so my thanks to them and to all of you who have pitched in and helped out. If you'd like to become a patron or make a donation, you are most welcome; just visit the website, [historyofthetwentiethcentury.com](http://historyofthetwentiethcentury.com) and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons.

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I'm going to be attending this year's World Science Fiction Convention in Glasgow the weekend of August 8. If there are any Glaswegians listening, maybe we can get together. Dunediners are welcome, too.

I hope you'll join me next week, here on the *History of the Twentieth Century*, as we pick up the thread of the coming Battle of Stalingrad. At this point, the German Army is advancing on the city, and no one knows how they can be stopped. A Steppe Too Far, next week, here, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. You sometimes hear those who are not knowledgeable about the Holocaust talk about how the victims could have or should have resisted being sent to the murder camps. After listening to today's episode, I trust you can see the problem with that thinking. That a massive, well-organized, and very secret mass program was in the process of murdering millions of people is hard for any decent human being even to imagine. To suggest such a thing is to invite accusations of delusional paranoia.

The Nazis well knew how unimaginable this operation was, and took advantage of that to keep their victims in ignorance to the very end. Jewish community leaders unwittingly helped organize the destruction of their own communities. Imagine the horror of those leaders once the truth was revealed to them. One such leader, Adam Czerniaków, head of the *Judenrat* in Warsaw, killed himself in July 1942 when the mass deportations from the Warsaw ghetto began, because he realized what would be done to them.

By 1943, the existence of the murder campaign was being common knowledge, and by then you do indeed find Jews fighting back. We will talk more about that in a future episode.

[music: Closing War Theme]