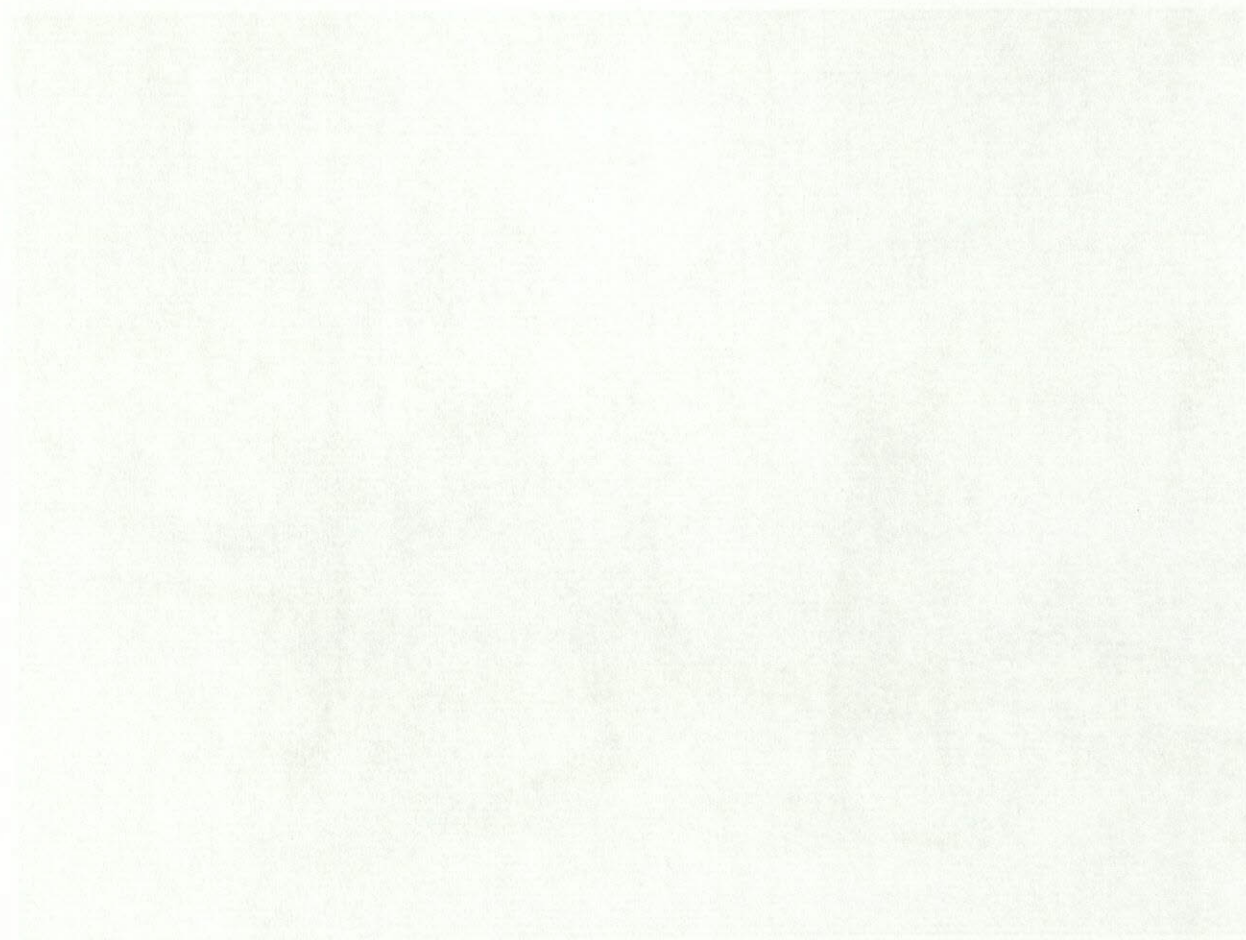


THE HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES



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About Photo

Jewish Partisans in a Forest
near the Town, Bialystok,
Poland (3774/43)

Yad Vashem Photo Archive

*“Resistance does not have to be with a gun
and a bullet....”*

– Roman Kent, Jewish Survivor

Preparing to Use This Lesson

Below is information to keep in mind when using this lesson. In some cases, the points elaborate on general suggestions listed in the “Teaching about the Holocaust” section in the [Introduction](#) to this resource, and are specific to the content of the lesson. This material is intended to help teachers consider the complexities of teaching the Holocaust and to deliver accurate and sensitive instruction.

- The term “resistance” when related to Jews in ghettos and camps during the Holocaust takes on a different meaning than the way students may understand the term. Jews faced an increasingly lethal situation in the ghettos, and once the Nazis adopted the “Final Solution” every single Jew living under Nazi tyranny was sentenced to death.
- Throughout this lesson, help students understand that resistance required great courage and at times physical strength. Those who chose to resist had to grapple with many dilemmas including the possible price of disobeying Nazi orders, the possible effect of their resistance on their families and communities, and the punishment they might have to endure for resisting. These issues are not always obvious and should be brought to students’ attention. [See also Preparing to Use This Lesson, Lesson 4: The Ghettos.]
- Emphasize that the fighters of the Warsaw ghetto were Jews who were imprisoned in the ghetto and suffered from the same misfortune as other Jews there. Because their actions were so remarkable it may seem that they were “different” from other Jews in the ghetto. Realizing that what they did was done from within the misery of the ghetto, their deeds seem even more remarkable.

Lesson 6 JEWISH RESISTANCE

About This Lesson



120–180 minutes

❖ **INTRODUCTION** This lesson provides an opportunity for students to explore Jewish resistance efforts during the Holocaust—focusing on the period from the establishment of the ghettos through the implementation of the “Final Solution.” An opportunity is provided for students to learn about the risks of resisting Nazi domination and the means, scope, and intensity of resistance efforts. These ranged from cultural and spiritual resistance in the ghettos to armed resistance of partisans and ghetto and camp prisoners. At their core, these forms of resistance are expressions of the capacity to preserve what is best in humanity in the face of the worst humanity has to offer. This lesson also provides an opportunity for students to consider the role of personal and cultural identity in their lives.

This two-part lesson has material appropriate for history, social studies, Holocaust studies, and English/language arts classes. Instructional strategies used in the lesson include large-group discussion, vocabulary building, brainstorming, small-group work, interpreting visual history testimony, analyzing primary source documents, reading for information, critical thinking, comparing and contrasting information, crafting a written argument, and journaling.

❖ **OBJECTIVES** After completing this lesson, students will be able to:

- Define resistance within the context of the Holocaust.
- Explain how resistance and rebellion were discouraged in occupied territories.
- Identify various forms of resistance that took place in the ghettos and camps.
- Conclude that designating an action as “resistance” is based on a variety of factors, i.e., what might be considered resistance in one situation may not be considered resistance in another situation.
- Interpret primary source materials—including clips of visual history testimony—that represent a range of resistance efforts against the Nazi regime in Europe.
- Explain the connection between the “Final Solution” and armed resistance.
- Construct an argument, based on evidence from primary and secondary sources, to support the claim that Jews resisted the Nazi regime in a variety of ways.
- Analyze the role of culture, customs, and traditions in individual or group narratives.

RESOURCES & TESTIMONIES

All of the resources used in this lesson can be found in this guide at the end of this lesson and at echoesandreflections.org.

Visual history testimonies are available on the website or on the DVD that accompanies this resource guide.

Teachers are urged to review the lesson procedures to identify other materials and technology needed to implement the lesson.

❖ KEY WORDS & PHRASES

<i>Aktion</i>	ghetto	Sobibor
armed resistance	Holocaust	Sonderkommando
Aryan	<i>Kadoshim</i>	spiritual resistance
Auschwitz-Birkenau	liquidated	Treblinka
cantor	<i>Lodz Ghetto Chronicle</i>	tyranny
collaborator	Majdanek	underground
Communist	Molotov Cocktail	Warsaw ghetto
concentration camp	Nazi	Warsaw Ghetto Uprising
crematoria	partisans	Yom Kippur
cultural resistance	Passover	Zionist
Einsatzgruppen	Purim	Z.O.B.
extermination camp	Resistance	

❖ **ACADEMIC STANDARDS** The materials in this lesson address the following national education standards:

Common Core State Standards

- Reading Standards for Informational Text 6–12
- Writing Standards 6–12
- Speaking and Listening Standards 6–12
- Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6–12
- Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6–12

A complete analysis of how this lesson addresses Common Core State Standards by grade level and specific skills is available on the Echoes and Reflections website.

National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies

- ❶ Culture
- ❷ Time, Continuity, and Change
- ❸ People, Places, and Environments
- ❹ Individual Development and Identity
- ❺ Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- ❻ Power, Authority, and Governance
- ❽ Civic Ideals and Practices

Procedures

Part 1: Spiritual and Cultural Resistance

1. Begin this lesson by writing the word “resistance” on the board. Have students brainstorm the meaning of the word and suggest situations when an individual or group of people might decide that resistance is appropriate or necessary. Record the students’ responses on the board or on chart paper.
2. Introduce students to Roman Kent and show the first clip from Part 1 of Visual History Testimony: *Jewish Resistance*. After students have watched the testimony clip, discuss the

following questions:

- What are the specific examples of resistance Roman Kent shares in his testimony?
 - In his testimony, Roman says, “sometimes the easiest resistance is with a gun and a bullet.” What do you think he means by this statement? Do you agree with him? Explain your thinking.
 - Roman wants people to understand that contrary to what some may think, Jews *did* resist the Nazis during the Holocaust in a variety of ways. Why do you think he feels it is important for people to understand this?
3. Ask students to think about the term “resistance” in the context of the Holocaust. Have them consider and respond to the question, “What were Jews resisting during the Holocaust?”
 4. Explain to students that there were many examples of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust even though the risks of opposing the Nazi regime were grave. Using the board or chart paper, record students’ thoughts on possible reasons why most people could not resist (e.g., hunger, sickness, isolation, lack of weapons, care for children, parents, or other family members).
 5. In addition to the term “resistance,” have students think about the term “survival.” Take a few minutes to discuss how these terms are similar and how they are different. Ask for volunteers to look the words up in dictionaries and compare the dictionary definitions.
 6. On the board or on chart paper, write the heading, “Jewish Resistance during the Holocaust” and below write the subheadings “Cultural/Spiritual Resistance” and “Active/Armed Resistance.” While providing students with the definitions below, have a volunteer(s) write key ideas for each form of resistance under the appropriate heading.

Cultural/Spiritual Resistance

Cultural/spiritual resistance during the Holocaust was acts of opposition that originated or found their expression in culture, traditions, and the human spirit to undermine Nazi power and inspire hope among the persecuted Jews. For most Jews, acts of cultural and spiritual resistance were the only possible means to oppose Nazi tyranny. Examples of cultural resistance included creating schools in the ghettos; maintaining religious customs; writing poems and songs or performing concerts or plays; drawing, painting, or secretly photographing observed events; and keeping records of ghetto or camp life and hiding them in the hope that they would be discovered after the war. Acts of cultural/spiritual resistance could be intentional and conscious, or only understood to have been resistance in retrospect.

Active/Armed Resistance

Active/armed resistance during the Holocaust was acts of opposition, defiance, or the sabotage of Nazi plans using weapons or including typical battles and attacks. Examples of armed resistance are the

TESTIMONY VIEWING

About the Interviewee

Roman Kent was born on April 18, 1929, in Lodz, Poland. He was incarcerated in the Lodz ghetto and was later imprisoned in the Flossenbürg, Auschwitz, and Gross-Rosen concentration camps. Roman was also imprisoned in the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp. His interview was conducted in the United States. When the war began, Roman was ten years old.

For additional information about Roman Kent, see his [Biographical Profile](#) available on the website.

NOTE 1.3

While an immediate response to this question might be “the Nazis,” students should also understand that Jews were resisting things like isolation, dehumanization, starvation, and the “Final Solution”—death.

NOTE 1.4

Refer to Lesson 4: The Ghettos and Lesson 5: The “Final Solution” for additional information on life in the ghettos and camps.

NOTE 1.6

It should be understood that in a sense, cultural/spiritual resistance was active since it too involved action. Sometimes Jews simply refused to cooperate or follow a command, and this could be seen as classic passive resistance.

TESTIMONY VIEWING

About the Interviewees

Helen Fagin was born on February 1, 1922, in Radomsko, Poland. She was forced to live in the Lodz, Warsaw, and Radomsko ghettos. Helen escaped during a deportation and then went into hiding in Poland. Her interview was conducted in the United States. When the war began, Helen was seventeen years old.

Ruth Brand was born in 1928 (exact date unknown), in Cuhea, Romania. She was forced to live in the Dragomiresti ghetto and later imprisoned in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. Ruth was also imprisoned in the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp. Her interview was conducted in Israel. When the war began, Ruth was eleven years old.

For additional information about Helen Fagin and Ruth Brand, see their [Biographical Profiles](#) available on the website.

- bombing of a bunker, camp, office, or train, or an uprising or revolt using weapons and arms. Unarmed active resistance could include many things, such as preparing bunkers, forging and using false papers, smuggling food and other items, etc.
7. Explain that spiritual resistance can often be seen as an attempt to maintain one's previous way of life and his or her unique identity. The terrible reality in which Jews lived was expressed by the teacher, Chaim Kaplan who lived in the Warsaw ghetto: "Everything is forbidden to us, but we do everything." Have students consider the meaning of this statement.
 8. After introducing students to Helen Fagin and Ruth Brand, show the next two clips from Part 1 of Visual History Testimony: *Jewish Resistance* and discuss the following questions:
 - How would you characterize the activities Helen Fagin initiated in the ghetto?
 - What purpose does the *Gone with the Wind* story serve for the students in Helen's "clandestine school"?
 - What reason does Ruth Brand give for fasting on Yom Kippur, despite the danger of doing so?
 - How were Ruth and the other girls punished for this act of resistance?
 - What does the word "brave" mean to you? Based on your definition, would you describe Helen and Ruth as brave?
 9. Distribute the *Cultural and Spiritual Resistance* handout. Have students read the excerpts that were compiled from a variety of documents and then divide the class into small groups. Instruct each group to use the excerpts and clips of visual history testimony that they watched to discuss the following questions:
 - Which of the excerpts on the handout would you identify as examples of resistance and why?
 - How does the information in the excerpts illustrate the need Jews felt to maintain the traditions that had been in place prior to the war? Provide specific examples from the text.
 - What role do traditions, customs, and culture play in people's lives?
 - Why do you think it was so important for Jews to remain connected to the traditions, customs, and culture that were part of their lives even when this connection placed them in immediate jeopardy?
 - Jews in the ghettos tried to maintain their customs from before the war, but at the same time were confronted with a totally different reality. How are these two themes reflected in the excerpts and testimony clips?
 - What were the dilemmas in maintaining traditions and customs during the Holocaust?

10. End this part of the lesson with a whole-group discussion whereby students respond to the following question: How, if at all, has your understanding of resistance, especially as it pertains to the Holocaust, changed over the course of this lesson?

Part 2: Partisans and Armed Resistance

1. Begin this part of the lesson by having students review the definitions of spiritual and armed resistance and provide examples of each.
2. Introduce students to Mira Shelub and Sol Liber and then show Part 2 of Visual History Testimony: *Jewish Resistance*.

TESTIMONY VIEWING

About the Interviewees

Mira Shelub was born on January 13, 1922, in Zdzieciol, Poland. She was forced to live in both the Zdzieciol and Dworzec ghettos and later escaped to the Lipiczany Forest, where, she, along with her sister, joined the partisans until they were liberated, in 1944. Her interview was conducted in the United States. When the war began, Mira was seventeen years old.

Sol Liber was born on December 3, 1923, in Grojec, Poland. He was forced to live in the Warsaw ghetto and was later imprisoned in the Skarzysko-Kamienna, Majdanek, Buchenwald, Treblinka, and Tschenstochau concentration camps. His interview was conducted in the United States. When the war began, Sol was fifteen years old.

For additional information about Mira Shelub and Sol Liber, see their [Biographical Profiles](#) available on the website.

Discuss the testimonies using the questions below.

- Were you surprised to learn that there were female partisans? Why or why not?
 - What do you learn about the partisans from Mira Shelub's testimony?
 - What does Mira say was the goal of the partisans?
 - What do you learn about armed resistance in the Warsaw ghetto from Sol Liber's testimony?
 - Both Mira and Sol give insight into how resistance during the Holocaust didn't mean "winning," but each and every act remained significant. How were the acts of resistance that Mira and Sol describe "significant"?
3. Prepare students for the material on partisans by asking the questions below:
 - What visual image do you have when you hear the word "forest"?
 - Is a forest a protected or an exposed place?

NOTE 2.3

Having maps and photographs of the forests of Eastern Europe available for students to see will enhance their understanding of the partisans' struggle. It is important that students understand that the European forests that the partisans faced are probably very unlike forests that they know. These large, dense woodlands and swamps cover thousands of square miles, and because of the harsh and extreme climate in the winter, there are no edible plants.

- What are some possible dangers and difficulties that someone would face if he or she were to survive for any length of time in a forest?
4. Distribute the *Partisans* handout and instruct students to read the material and identify textual evidence to support their responses to the questions below.
 - What dilemmas did a Jewish person face when thinking about whether he or she should flee to the forest?
 - What were the main differences between a Jewish partisan and a non-Jewish partisan?
 - According to information provided in the text, why was it so difficult for people to flee to the forest? Why was it impossible for most Jews to flee to the forest?
 - Why did partisans feel it necessary to keep their location secret—even from local farmers and peasants?

NOTE 2.5

Make sure that students understand that most of the Jewish population—parents of children, the children themselves, the elderly, the sick, and the millions who were murdered before conditions became ripe for revolt—could not take part in the armed uprising.

5. Distribute or show students the pronouncement that was written and read by Abba Kovner at a meeting in Vilna on January 1, 1942. To provide context, explain that Abba Kovner was a young Lithuanian Jew who was a leader of a youth movement that hoped to take part in building a Jewish state in Israel. A young activist in the ghetto, he eventually became the leader of an armed underground. After a wave of murder during the second half of 1941, in which 2/3 of the Jews of Vilna were killed, Kovner was convinced that the Germans had a plan to murder all Jews everywhere. He had no real solid proof, but a strong feeling based on the events that had occurred in Vilna. Thus, the underground members decided to enter the ghetto and when it was about to be liquidated, they hoped to lead an armed uprising. After reading the pronouncement together, have a discussion based on the following questions:
 - To whom is Abba Kovner directing his message? What specific words in the text support your answer? Explain why you think this was his audience.
 - What are Abba Kovner’s arguments in favor of resistance?
 - Analyze the following statement from the text: “It is better to die as free fighters than to live at the mercy of murderers.” What was Abba Kovner’s central argument?
 - Why do you think that most Jews who participated in the revolts were youth?
6. Explain to students that, in addition to the underground partisan resistance that occurred in the villages and countryside of Nazi-occupied territories, there were forms of active resistance including armed revolts that were organized in the ghettos, concentration camps, and even extermination camps during the Holocaust. Stress that it was very difficult for Jews to conduct armed resistance, and have students brainstorm possible conditions or other factors that made armed resistance so difficult. To help put this in context, tell students that the German army in World War II was a very powerful army, and it took nearly six years from the start of the

war and an effort unparalleled in history to defeat it.

7. Distribute the *Armed Resistance in the Ghettos and Camps* handout. Have students read the information aloud or in small groups. Discuss the reading with emphasis on the following questions:
 - What motivated Jews to fight the Nazis?
 - How were their motives similar or different from other examples of resistance that you know about?
 - What does it mean to “offer resistance for its own sake”?
8. After a general discussion of resistance in the camps and ghettos, distribute the *Personal Testimonies* handout. After the class has read the handout (either in groups, individually, aloud, or for homework), have them respond to the following questions, citing specific information and examples from the text to support their answers whenever possible.
 - What difficulties and dilemmas did the fighters face in obtaining weapons?
 - What expressions does Mordechai Anielewicz use to describe the revolt?
 - To whom does Mordechai Anielewicz address his message? Why do you think this is his audience?
 - Why do you think it was important to Mordechai Anielewicz that news of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising be broadcast over the underground radio?
 - What descriptive word or term would you use to describe this revolt?
 - Why was it important for Zalman Gradowski to leave written testimonies behind?
 - How would you title the Zalman Gradowski passage?
 - What, in your opinion, makes someone a hero? Based on your definition of “hero,” is the man who wrote these lines a hero?
 - Antek Zuckerman said about the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising: “If there’s a school to study the human spirit, there it [the Uprising] should be a major subject.” From the statement, what importance does Zuckerman assign to the Uprising? Cite other examples studied in this lesson that could also be used to support the statement.
9. Assign students the writing prompt below as a culminating activity for this lesson.

Prompt: Sometimes people who have not studied the Holocaust will ask, “Why didn’t Jews fight back?” In his testimony, Roman Kent addresses this very question when he says, “I’ve heard so many times [it] being said that Jews didn’t do anything, that they went like sheep to the ovens, but it’s not true...”

Based on materials studied in this lesson, prepare a written argument to support the claim that Jews did resist the Nazi regime in a variety of ways. The argument should introduce the topic,

NOTE 2.9

In addition to reviewing the written materials covered in this lesson, encourage students to go to the website and review the clips of testimony that they had watched earlier.

establish the significance of the claim, and provide relevant and sufficient evidence from primary and secondary sources to support your argument.

Reflect and Respond

Either in class or as homework, have students reflect and respond to one or more of the topics below or have them develop a topic that has meaning for them based on the material covered in the lesson.

- Reflect on the meaning of unarmed and armed resistance based on the testimonies you heard. Why is one form of resistance more appropriate than another in certain situations? Think of an example of a situation that might warrant each type of resistance.
- In the Krakow ghetto, the underground declared that they were fighting “for three lines in history.” Reflect on what you understand this statement to mean and how studying about resistance efforts during the Holocaust influence your understanding of the words and the sentiment they express.
- Think about the role culture, traditions, and customs play in your life. Write about one or more traditions that are particularly important to you, explaining why they are important and how they have shaped—or continue to shape—your identity.

Making Connections

The additional activities and projects listed below can be integrated directly into the lesson or can be used to extend the lesson once it has been completed. The topics lend themselves to students’ continued study of the Holocaust as well as opportunities for students to make meaningful connections to other people and events, including relevant contemporary issues. These activities may include instructional strategies and techniques and/or address academic standards in addition to those that were identified for the lesson.

1. Visit [IWitness \(iwitness.usc.edu\)](http://iwitness.usc.edu) for activities specific to Lesson 6: Jewish Resistance.
2. Using a variety of print and digital sources, have students research other examples of underground movements or partisan resistance during World War II: Italian, Slovakian, Polish, French, Yugoslavian, and others, and prepare a written, oral, or multimedia presentation on their findings. Encourage students to identify how the partisan movement they researched was both different from and similar to the Jewish partisans’ movement.
3. Using the information discussed in this and preceding lessons, break students into small groups and have them construct their own “underground newspaper” from one of the camps or ghettos. Articles, announcements, and advertisements should reflect what they have learned about the culture and environment in the ghettos or camps.
4. Have students access *Excerpts from On Both Sides of the Wall* available in the **Additional Resources** section of the **Lesson Components**. Have students read the introduction to Vladka Meed and the two excerpts from her autobiography. After reading the text, instruct students, either individually or as part of a small group, to prepare up to five questions they would ask Meed about her experiences as part of the underground if they could have interviewed her (Vladka Meed passed away on November 21, 2012, at the age of 90). Students should then research the answers to their questions using a variety of sources including Vladka Meed’s testimony (available on IWitness and YouTube), her **Biographical Profile**, and her autobiography. Their final piece of writing should be written in interview format, clearly

indicating what questions were posed and how Vladka Meed might have responded.

5. Throughout history, music has been used as a form of resistance and as a catalyst for societal change. During the Holocaust, music was secretly composed and performed in the ghettos as a way to uphold traditions, escape the harsh existence that Jews faced, and to document ghetto life. One such composition, created by Hirsh Glick, became the official song of the partisans. It was translated into several languages and was well known in both the ghettos and concentration camps. Show or distribute a copy of *Never Say* (available in the **Additional Resources** section of the **Lesson Components**) and have students identify specific words, phrases, or lines that reveal Glick's intended audience as well as the message/s he was attempting to convey in the song. Refer to Yad Vashem's *Heartstrings* exhibition (available on the website in the **Additional Resources** section of the **Lesson Components**) so students can hear the song. Ask students if the rhythm is what they had expected or if they had anticipated the song to sound different, and if so, in what way.

Extend this activity by having students research the role of music in resistance efforts, protest, and/or in raising awareness of social issues in the United States, and prepare a multimedia presentation to share their findings. Encourage students to visit "History Now: The Music and History of Our Times" at the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History website for primary source materials and soundtracks that will support their research (gilderlehrman.org/history-now).

6. Have students gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources about resistance efforts by enslaved African Americans in the 17th and 18th centuries or interned Japanese Americans during World War II and prepare a multimedia presentation. Their research should include information about both active/armed resistance and cultural/spiritual resistance. Examples of primary source materials (e.g., a newspaper written in an internment camp, photographs, interviews) should be included in the presentation. Have presentations posted on the class website so students will be able to learn about resistance efforts by the group that they did not study and to see a variety of primary sources.
7. Have students pretend they are a film critic for a local media outlet and their assignment is to review one of the following films: *Uprising* (2001), *Escape from Sobibor* (1987), or *Defiance* (2008). After watching the film, have students write a review of the film and recommend whether people should see it or not. The review should comment on such things as acting, cinematography, etc., but the focus of the review should be on whether the film is historically accurate based on what students have learned in this lesson and through additional research on the topic addressed in the film.

CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL RESISTANCE

Excerpts of Voices from the Ghetto

“In the ghetto, there are, of course, many people who are shaking their heads and refusing to participate in this deception, because in their opinion, the life of the Jews in the ghetto does not permit the shallowness of social life. However, this means repressing the tortured people’s fundamental expression of the will to live and shutting off the only avenue of affirming the importance of that life. To sit in a theater again, far from the gloomy atmosphere of the prison, to chat in the lobby of the Cultural Center during the intermission again, to flirt, to show off a new dress or an attractive hairdo—this is a human need that cannot be repressed. This was the way it was for the people who lived in this superior cultural center, as Litzmannstadt [Lodz ghetto] had been in the years preceding the war. And to whomever reads this in the future, the writer wants to say that from his perspective, the suffering of the ghetto was not in the least alleviated by these shows, even if they did provide a few hours of pleasure.”¹

January 17, 1944

Announcement! Re: Obligatory Registration of Musical Instruments

“For once, a measure not aimed at the stomach of the ghetto dweller, but no less severe on that account. [The ghetto is thirsty for culture...] Now this last vestige of that happiness is to vanish. One can readily imagine what it means for a professional musician, a virtuoso, even a dilettante, to be forced to give up his beloved violin [...] The street will notice nothing; harsh life will go on; and to the torments of hunger and cold will be added the unappeased craving for music.”²



The ghetto orchestra, Kovno, Lithuania. In front standing from left is Michael Hofmekler, the conductor, and sitting next to him is Boris Stupel who survived Dachau and immigrated to Australia. In the background playing the violin is Yankale who was 13 years-old and standing to his right is Shmaya (Alexander) Stupel (Boris’s brother) who perished in Dachau. Yad Vashem Photo Archive (75GO9)

June 9, 1942

“A hunger for the printed word is now making itself felt more strongly in the ghetto. To ascertain how hungry people are for books, it is enough to take a look at the kilometer-long line at Sonenberg’s lending library (even there!) [...] Each reader walks up to the table, requests a couple of titles, finds out if a given book is available (it usually is not), receives a couple of books to choose from, and has to make up his mind in a hurry. There is no time for long deliberation, as there once had been.”³

March 4, 1941

“The soup kitchen for the intelligentsia is a regular meeting place of the who’s who [...] Only here do they at least have an illusion of things they had become accustomed to in the old days: a certain degree of courtesy [by the staff] in their conduct and attitude toward those who are now destitute and stripped of their status [...] [...] From time to time, the kitchen management organized reading and poetry evenings and concerts. The aim was to give the ghetto inhabitants cultural entertainment and provide financial support for the artists. [...] The moments spent in kitchen number 2 – [...] those are also moments of an exchange of opinions, something like a club in which those people, the who’s who meet over lunch.”⁴



Jews in prayer shawls praying in a synagogue in the ghetto, Warsaw, Poland. Yad Vashem Photo Archive (1605/858)

“The *kloyz* [small synagogue] is almost full. The cantor prays melodiously; you would never know from him and the worshippers that the world is on the brinks of an abyss. They are wearing prayer shawls and tefillin. If you closed your eyes for a moment and did not look at these people, at their skinny faces... but just listened to the hum of their prayers, you would be sure you had fallen into a house of God in a time of peace and tranquility. There are young people, too, among the worshippers, and not just a few. They, too, are participating in creating an atmosphere in which the physical is forgotten and the soul is dedicated to sublime, lofty service totally removed from the oppression of the body and making the suffering of the moment pale in significance... I was suddenly suffused with

warmth that I hadn’t felt since before the war. Someone, something, lifted me, carried me, and placed me in a congregation of Jews from the Middle Ages who were fighting and dying for their religion.... In the world—murder, violence, robbery and fraud; the street, cold; in the heart, anguish and pain; but above them all there hovers a different force, supreme and eternal—the power of past and future generations.”⁵ —Reuven Feldshaw

“The living spirit behind the school was Yitzhak Katzenelson [Warsaw ghetto]. He was our most respected and popular teacher. His specialty was *Bible*, and he taught his students to love their people and their heritage, and to strive for national independence. His enthusiasm was contagious and at its height he would start singing and his students and the family in whose apartment they were studying would soon join in. It was usually very difficult to find classrooms in apartments, but there was never a problem in securing one for Katzenelson’s lessons.”⁶

“Under conditions of this sort we celebrated Purim, 5701. The Book of Esther was not read in the darkened synagogues, because all public worship is prohibited; but we were happy about the defeat of the Persian Haman. We celebrated Purim in the Zionist soup kitchen at 13 Zamenhof Street, which is the center of all Hebrew-Zionist social activity. Here we always find the atmosphere and

the warmth of Zionism. Every so often programs are put on with lectures, songs, instrumental music and recitations. When we come here we forget our troubles and all the terrible events taking place outside. Here you can hear debates and sermons, arguments and quarrels as in the good days. And when your throat is dry you can wet it with a glass of black coffee without sugar. [...]

This year we read the Scroll in the Sephardic pronunciation; then we sang the holiday songs accompanied by a piano, and between one number and the other we even had a bite-three pieces of bread spread with butter, a taste of the traditional poppy-seed tarts, and a glass of sweetened coffee.

Credit for this heroic achievement goes to Dr. I. Schiper, M. Kirszenbaum, Bloch, and Kaminar.

We came sad and left sad, but we had some pleasant moments in between—God remember these men with favor!”⁷

End Notes

¹Arie Ben-Menachem, *The Lodz Ghetto Chronicles*, Vol. 3, trans. from Hebrew by Marion Duman (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1988), 305.

²Lucjan Dobroszycki, *The Chronicle of the Lodz Ghetto, 1941–1944* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), 434.

³*Ibid.*, at 201–202.

⁴*Ibid.*, at 28–30.

⁵Reprinted with permission from Yad Vashem Archive O.3/959.

⁶Zivia Luberkin, *In the Days of Destruction and Revolt* (Israel: The Ghetto Fighters' House, 1981), 69.

⁷Chaim A. Kaplan, *The Warsaw Ghetto Diary of Chaim A. Kaplan* (New York: Collier Books, 1973), 256.

PARTISANS

Partisans during World War II were armed units in areas dominated by Nazi Germany and her allies that fought against them behind the front lines. As the war progressed, many countries fell under Nazi domination, either as occupied territory or run by regimes that were allied to Nazi Germany. Frequently civilians and soldiers continued to oppose this situation, and decided to continue the armed struggle against the Nazis and their collaborators.

The partisans generally formed and fought in places that offered them some sort of cover, such as forests, swamps, or mountains. They engaged in a variety of activities, most commonly ambushes and sabotage. Often they sought to disrupt the transport of soldiers and war material, and this meant that frequent targets were rail lines, bridges, and vehicles. Especially in the occupied territory of the former Soviet Union, partisan activity grew, became organized, and took place in coordination with military and government authorities.

When the murder of the Jews struck, many Jews fled to the countryside. They literally fled for their lives. Before fleeing, however, they had to face dilemmas about leaving behind family members who were unable to join them, and the realization that their actions could lead to repercussions in the places from which they had escaped. It is only when Jews were able to obtain weapons that they could engage in partisan activities.

Jewish partisan activity began before other more organized partisan warfare emerged. As a result, already existing Jewish units sometimes were brought under the control of the other partisan units that had firmer military backing, and many Jews as individuals joined those units as well. Owing to anti-Jewish attitudes, in many instances Jews were not wanted in these units, and even when they were allowed to join them,

they often faced discrimination that could be very harsh.

A hallmark of the Jewish partisans was that unlike other partisans who focused strictly on fighting, Jewish partisans also sought to rescue Jews from certain death at the hands of the Nazi regime. The result was that so-called “family camps” came into being. The largest was under the Bielski brothers in Belarus with some 1,200



About Photos

Top: A group of partisans from the “family camp” of Tuvia Bielski in the Naliboki Forest, Poland, May 1944. Ghetto Fighters House Archives (32425)

Bottom: Partisans Kiril Tros (left) and Masha Bruskina (center, holding sign) marched through Minsk, Russia by German troops on October 26, 1941 prior to their public executions. The sign reads in German and Russian “We are partisans and have shot at German soldiers.” Bundesarchiv, Bild 146-1972-026-43/CC-BY-SA

Jews, many of whom were non-fighters—older people and children. A similar family camp in the same area—the Zoran unit—had about 800 Jews in it. The non-fighters often performed services for other partisan units, such as sewing clothing, nursing, and repairing weapons. It can be said of the family camps that they fought just enough to justify their existence as partisans, but focused primarily on keeping alive as many Jews as possible. Nonetheless some Jewish units, such as the one in which Abba Kovner was a leader, focused on fighting.

Life in the forests, swamps, and mountains for the Jewish partisans was far from easy and posed many dilemmas. Many were not used to the rough living conditions and their shelter was usually far from adequate. The provision of food, which often was confiscated from local

peasants, created tension that endangered them and rarely provided sufficient sustenance. When partisans were wounded or contracted sickness they only had the most primitive medical care, since medical equipment and medicines were not available. Many Jewish partisans fell victim to the “Jew hunts” conducted by the Nazis, who sought to discover Jews in hiding, and to other partisans who fought the Nazis but hated Jews. Like all partisans, Jewish partisan units frequently had to move their base of operations, sometimes in great haste, primarily because the Nazis considered the partisans a very serious problem and invested great effort in discovering and destroying them. In light of all of these hardships, and despite the heroic acts of many of the fighters, relatively few Jews survived the ordeal.



Abba Kovner (back row, center) with members of the United Partisan Organization, a Jewish resistance organization based in the Vilna ghetto that organized armed resistance against the Nazis.



A group of Jewish partisans from the Kovno ghetto in the Rudniki Forest. Yad Vashem Photo Archive (7003/168)



Jewish women and children partisans in the forest near Pinsk, Poland. Yad Vashem Photo Archive (1262/1)



Jewish partisans in forest, Vilna, Poland. Yad Vashem Photo Archive (8409/59)

PRONOUNCEMENT BY ABBA KOVNER

“Jewish youngster, do not trust those that deceive you. Of the eighty thousand Jews in ‘The Jerusalem of Lithuania’ [Vilna], only twenty thousand have survived. In front of our very eyes, they tore our parents, our brothers, our sisters from us.

Where are the hundreds of men who were abducted for labor by the Lithuanian ‘kidnappers’?

Where are the naked women and the children who were taken away from us on the terrible night of the provocation?

Where are the Jews who were taken away on Yom Kippur [taken on that day]?

Where are our brethren from the second ghetto?

Whoever was taken out of the ghetto gates never returned again.

All the roads of the Gestapo lead to Ponary [the woods in the outskirts of Vilna where Jews were shot by the Einsatzgruppen]

And Ponary is death!...

Hitler is plotting to annihilate all the Jews of Europe. It befell the Jews of Lithuania to be the first in line.

Let us not go like sheep to the slaughter!

It’s true, we are weak and defenseless, but the only response to the enemy is resistance!

Brothers! It is better to die as free fighters than to live at the mercy of murderers.

Resist! To our last breath.”

Reprinted with permission from Yitzhak Arad, Yisrael Gutman, Abraham Margalio, eds., *Documents on the Holocaust, Selected Sources on the Destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Poland and the Soviet Union* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1981), 433. All rights reserved.

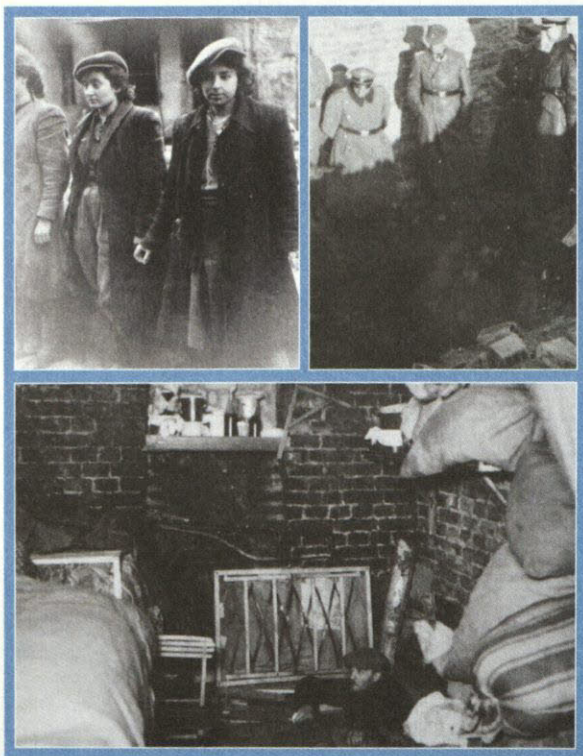
ARMED RESISTANCE IN THE GHETTOS AND CAMPS

Resistance in the Ghettos

On January 18, 1943, German forces entered the Warsaw ghetto in order to arrest Jews and deport them. To their astonishment, young Jews offered them armed resistance and actually drove the German forces out of the ghetto before they were able to finish their ruthless task. This armed resistance came on the heels of the great deportation that had occurred in the summer and early autumn of 1942, which had resulted in the dispatch of 300,000 Jews, the vast majority of the ghetto's inhabitants to Nazi camps, almost all to the Treblinka extermination camp. About 60,000 Jews remained in the ghetto, traumatized by the deportations and believing that the Germans had not deported them and would not deport them since they wanted their labor. Two undergrounds led by youth activists, with several hundred members, coalesced between the end of the first wave of deportations and the events of January.

During four days in January, the Germans sought to round up Jews and the armed resistance continued. The ghetto inhabitants went through a swift change, no longer believing that their value as labor would safeguard them. With the news of the first incident of fighting they stopped responding to the Germans' calls that they come to the gathering point, known as the *Umschlagplatz*. They began devising hiding places, and the Germans had to enter many buildings and ruthlessly pull out Jews. Many were killed in their homes when they refused to be taken. On the fourth day, having only managed to seize between five and six thousand Jews, the Germans withdrew from the ghetto. The remaining inhabitants believed that the armed resistance combined with the difficulties in finding Jews in hiding, had led to the end of the *Aktion*. As a result, over the next months the armed undergrounds sought to strengthen themselves and the vast majority of ghetto residents and zealously built more and better bunkers in which to hide.

On the eve of Passover, April 19, 1943, German forces again entered the ghetto aiming to liquidate it. This time they were more prepared for resistance, but so were the two Jewish undergrounds and the ghetto population. Mostly with handguns, but also with a few rifles and many homemade Molotov Cocktails, several hundred young Jewish fighters who had no military training or battle experience confronted



About Photos

Top Left: HeHalutz women captured with weapons during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. HeHalutz (The Pioneer) was an association of Jewish youth.

Top Right: Waffen SS soldiers locating Jews in dugouts. National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, 6003996

Bottom: A Jew inside a bunker used for hiding. National Archives and Records Administration

the German military force in pitched battles. In the hand-to-hand combat the Germans were not able to put down the rebellion, since many fighters managed to get away and retreat over the rooftops; nor could the Germans find the non-combatant Jews hiding in the bunkers.

Both sides sustained losses, but the ghetto fighters knew even before they had begun that they could not really defeat the powerful German forces. They fought primarily for the sake of offering resistance, for vengeance, and with the idea that the Germans should pay a heavy price for their lives. They did not believe the fighting could lead to mass rescue, but they did hope that some fighters and ghetto inhabitants might be able to escape from the convulsing ghetto and continue offering resistance as underground members and partisans.

A significant episode in the uprising was the so-called “battle for the flags” that took place in the northern ghetto on Muranowska Street. A group of fighters had managed to hoist two flags at the top of a high building on that street: the blue-and-white flag of the Zionists, and the white-and-red flag of Poland, which had been smuggled into the ghetto through the sewer system. The flags could be seen from outside the ghetto walls, and communiqués concerning them were communicated to the Polish underground and broadcast over Polish radio (certain sections of these communiqués were even picked up by *The New York Times*). The flags flying over the ghetto sparked the imagination and the enthusiasm of the local population—a

grave affront to the Germans. The Germans understood this and made Muranowska Street a primary target, bringing in even heavier artillery and increasing manpower in order to take the flags down at any cost.

Yet the fighters were determined to do whatever it took not to give up the flags, which they continued to wave over the ghetto for almost four days. Finally, by Friday, April 23, 1943, after tanks and artillery had pounded the buildings on Muranowska Street to such an extent that the entire street shook, the flags ceased to wave, having been shot to pieces.

When the Germans understood they would be unable to make the Jews report for deportation as planned, they began systematically setting fire to the ghetto, turning it into a vast firetrap. The flames and the heat turned life in the bunkers into hell; the very air felt afire, the goods that had been stored spoiled, and the water was no longer fit to drink. Gradually, the Jews’ ability to resist or hide declined. For almost a month the Jews of the Warsaw ghetto fought for their lives. Many of them perished in the fire and smoke; others were murdered in the ghetto streets; those who remained were sent to Treblinka, Majdanek, and other camps.

On May 16, 1943, Jurgen Stroop, the German commander of the forces ordered to put down the uprising, had the Great Synagogue on Tłomackie Street destroyed. After the building had been razed, he declared, “There is no longer a Jewish quarter in Warsaw,” meaning



About Photos

During the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, April–May, 1943, from left to right: Burning of blocks of dwellings during the suppression of the uprising, National Archives and Records Administration; Waffen SS soldier next to destroyed dwellings, National Archives and Records Administration; the ruins of the Great Synagogue on Tłomackie Street destroyed as a sign of the final suppression of the uprising.



About Photos

Left: German storm troopers force Jews of all ages in the Warsaw ghetto out of the bunkers during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in April–May, 1943.

Background photo: Waffen SS soldiers leading Jews captured during the suppression of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, 6003996

the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising had been quashed. Even after Stroop's declaration, sporadic resistance continued for a while and a few of the fighters and others did manage to flee by way of the sewer system; some went on to join the Polish underground and continued to battle the Germans.

In addition to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, in approximately one hundred other ghettos in Eastern Europe underground fighting organizations were formed. They came into being with goals similar to those of the Warsaw ghetto fighters, understanding they could not defeat the Nazis and to a large extent fighting for its own sake. Nevertheless, some undergrounds put more emphasis on various escape plans that would be implemented in the wake of the fighting. There were cases in which the fighting was spontaneous and others where it was more organized. In most cases, Jewish youth movements were deeply involved. In some places the planned armed resistance was never realized, owing to local conditions. Ultimately each ghetto has its own story. Among all of the ghetto uprisings, the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was the largest, the longest, and the most influential.

Resistance in the Extermination Camps

The extreme terror of the Nazi camp system made any kind of organized resistance

tremendously difficult. Nonetheless prisoners in a number of camps carried out organized acts of resistance. Most notably Jewish prisoners in three extermination camps, Treblinka, Sobibor, and Auschwitz-Birkenau rose up against their persecutors. This happened at a point when it was clear to them that they were destined to be murdered. In Treblinka and Sobibor, the goal was to facilitate escape; in Auschwitz-Birkenau the goal was to disrupt the process of murder.

The first of these uprisings was in Treblinka on August 2, 1943. Six hundred prisoners using mostly knives, clubs, and other "cold" weapons (weapons that do not involve fire or explosions) fell upon their guards and then broke out of the camp. Most of the rebels were killed immediately or very soon after they left the camp. Several dozen managed to escape. In Sobibor, on October 14, 1943, the fate of the fighters was very similar, although somewhat more managed to flee and hide or join the partisans nearby. In Auschwitz-Birkenau, on October 6 and 7, 1944, prisoners who were forced to work in the special unit in the gas chamber complex, the Sonderkommando, managed to blow up one of gas chambers, but they all fell in the ensuing battle. All of these uprisings were born of desperate situations, but nevertheless say much about the spark of humanity and dignity that remained alive among many prisoners even in the unyielding cruelty of the Nazi camps.

PERSONAL TESTIMONIES

From the founding meeting of the Jewish Fighting Organization (Z.O.B.)¹

“On July 28, 1942, a meeting of ‘HeHalutz’ was held. It was decided that a Jewish Fighting Organization would be established [...] however, the sum total of the ghetto’s weapons at the time was only one pistol!”

From an interview with Marek Edelman, a Warsaw ghetto fighter²



Marek Edelman

“Then we collected weapons.

We smuggled it from the Aryan side (we took money by force from all kinds of institutions and private people)...”

Interviewer: How much would you pay for a pistol?

From three thousand to fifteen thousand. The closer to April, the more expensive: the demand in the market increased.

Interviewer: And how much did it cost to get a Jew to the Aryan side?

“Two thousand, five thousand. All kinds of prices. It depended on whether the person looked like a Jew, if he spoke with an accent, and if it was a man or a woman.”

Interviewer: That means that for one pistol, it would have been possible to hide one, two or even three people for a month. If you had been offered the choice at that time: one pistol or the life of one person for a month...

“Such a choice was not offered. Perhaps it was even better that it was not offered.”

From the last letter of Mordechai Anielewicz, smuggled from the Warsaw ghetto to the underground courier Antek Zuckerman³



Mordechai Anielewicz

“It is impossible to put into words what we have been through... I feel that great things are happening and what we dared do is of great, enormous importance... It is impossible to describe the conditions under which the Jews of the ghetto are now living. Only a few will be able to hold out. The remainder will die sooner or later. Their fate is decided. In almost all the hiding places in which thousands are concealing themselves it is not possible to light a candle for lack of air. With the aid of our transmitter we heard the marvelous report on our fighting by the *Shavit* radio station. The fact that we are remembered beyond the ghetto walls encourages us in our struggle. Peace go with you, my friend! Perhaps we may still meet again! The dream of my life has risen to become fact. Self-defense in the ghetto will have been a reality. Jewish armed resistance and revenge are facts. I have been a witness to the magnificent, heroic fighting of Jewish men in battle.” —Mordechai Anielewicz, April 23, 1943

From the testimony of Zivia Lubetkin at the Eichmann Trial⁴



Zivia Lubetkin

“It is difficult for me to describe life in the ghetto during that week, and I had been in this ghetto for years. The Jews embraced and kissed each other; although it was clear to every single one that it was not certain whether he would remain alive, or it was almost certain that he would not survive, nevertheless that he had reached the day of our taking revenge, although no vengeance could fit our suffering. At least we were fighting for our lives, and this feeling lightened his suffering and possibly also made it easier for him to die.

I also remember that on the second day—it was the Passover Seder—in one of the bunkers by chance I came across Rabbi Meisel. There had been contacts between us and him, since the days of the Halutz underground in ordinary times as well. The Halutz underground, in its operations, had not always had an easy time on the part of the Jewish population—they did not always accept us. There were those who thought that we were bringing harm to their lives—as I have pointed out, the collective responsibility, the fear of the Germans. But this time, when I entered the bunker, this Jew, Rabbi Meisel, interrupted the Seder, placed his hand on my head and said: *May you be blessed. Now it is good for me to die. Would that we had done this earlier.*”

From the words of Zalman Gradowski, one of the fighters in the Auschwitz-Birkenau revolt⁵

“Dear finder, search every part of the ground. Buried in it are dozens of documents of others, and mine, which shed light on everything that happened here... As for us, we have already lost all hope...

...The future will judge us on the basis of this evidence. May the world understand some small part of the tragic world in which we lived.” —Zalman Gradowski, September 6, 1944

NOTE: The revolt in Auschwitz-Birkenau attempted to put an end to the murder by disrupting the operation of the crematoria, and also to create a memory and a testimony to the tragedy of the lives and deaths of the hundreds of thousands of people who were killed in front of their eyes. After writing down and documenting the events, they buried them near the crematoria. This document was written by one of the organizers of the uprising.

From a 1968 interview with Yitzhak “Antek” Zuckerman on the 25th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising⁶



Yitzhak Zuckerman

“I don’t think there’s any real need to analyze the Uprising in military terms. This was a war of less than a thousand people against a mighty army and no one doubted how it was likely to turn out. This isn’t a subject for study in a military school. Not the weapons, not the operations, not the tactics. If there’s a school to study the human spirit, there it should be a major subject. The really important things were inherent in the force shown by Jewish youth, after years of degradation, to rise up against their destroyers, and determine what death they would choose: Treblinka or Uprising. I don’t know if there’s a standard to measure that.”

End Notes

¹Yitzhak Arad, Yisrael Gutman, and Avraham Margalio, eds., *Documents on the Holocaust, Selected Sources on the Destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Poland and the Soviet Union* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1981), 293–294.

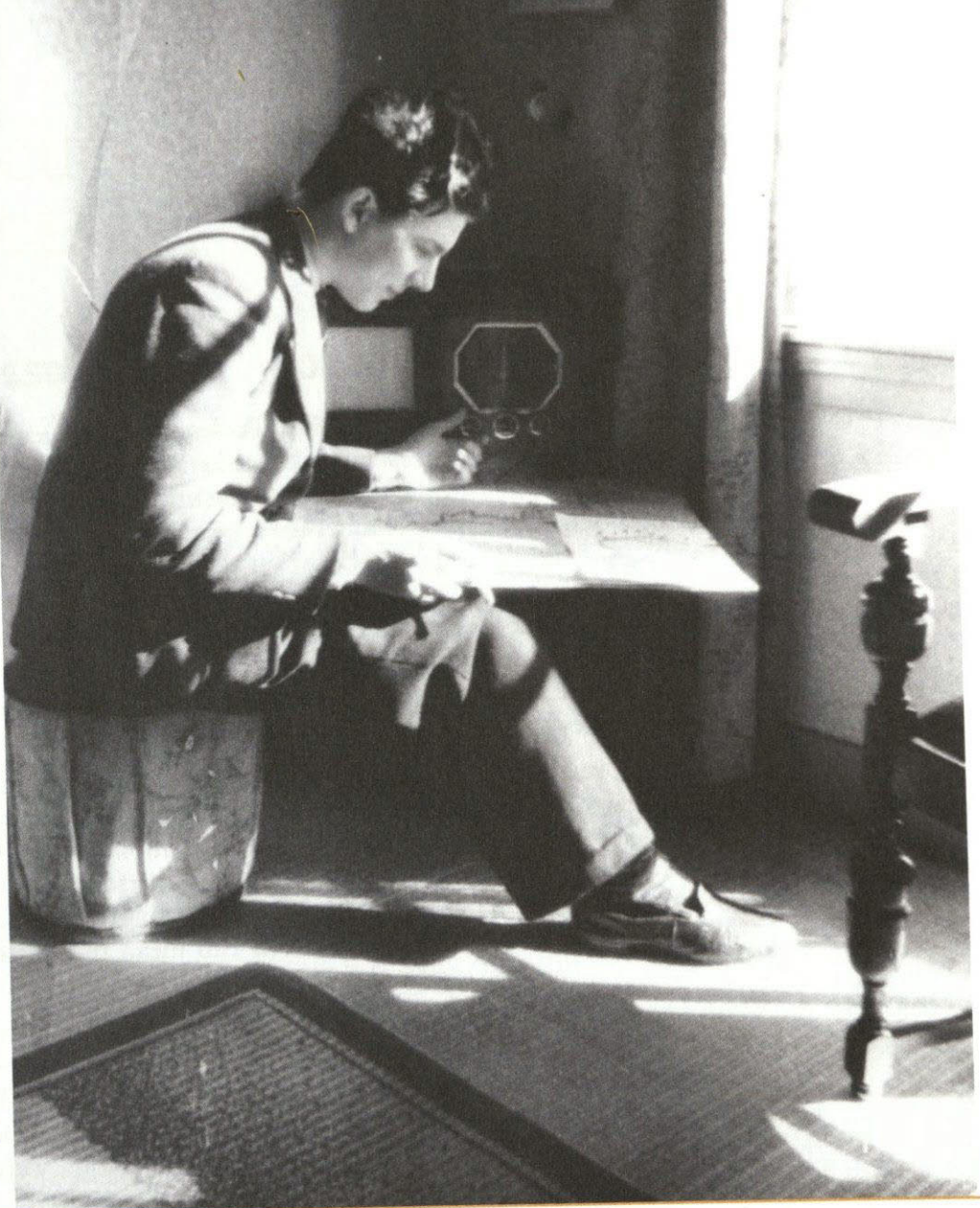
²*Preceding God – An Interview with Marek Edelman of the Warsaw Ghetto Fighters*, trans. from Polish by Hanna Krall (Jerusalem: Adam Publishing House, 1981), 57.

³Supra note 1, at 315–316.

⁴*Attorney General v. Adolf Eichmann*, 36 I.L.R. 5 (Dist. Jerusalem 1961), *aff’d*, 36 I.L.R. 277 (S.Ct.1962) (Israel), Trial Transcript. Retrieved from nizkor.org/hweb/people/e/eichmann-adolf/transcripts/Sessions/Session-025-04.html.

⁵Ber Mark, *The Scrolls of Auschwitz*, ed. Isiah Avrech, trans. from Hebrew by Sharon Neemani; adapted from the Yiddish original text (Tel Aviv: Am Oved Publishing House, 1985), 205.

⁶Yitzhak (“Antek”) Zuckerman, *A Surplus of Memory: Chronicle of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*, trans. from Hebrew by Barbara Harshav (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).



About Photo

Max Cohen in His Hiding Place, Haarlem, Holland, October 1942 (6044/9)

Yad Vashem Photo Archive

“Our vision in our church was that we always had to help those people in need....”

– Arie Van Mansum, Rescue and Aid Provider