PERMANENT EXHIBITION NARRATIVE

UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM
WASHINGTON, D.C.

The Permanent Exhibition opens with an image of American soldiers surveying the Ohrdruf concentration camp in Germany, 1945. *Photo by Edward Owen, reproduced with permission of Rizzoli International Publications, Inc.*

The following narrative outlines the history of the Holocaust as it is presented in the Museum's Permanent Exhibition. In the left column are the titles of the sections of the exhibition. On the right are brief summaries of each of the sections. The sections appear in the exhibition in the same order as they are outlined here.

It is highly recommended that teachers familiarize students with the layout and content of the Permanent Exhibition prior to visiting, so that students can get the most out of their self-guided tour. Teachers may wish to use the narrative to familiarize themselves with the exhibition before describing it to students.

Teachers may also wish to assign one segment of the exhibition narrative to each student. Students would then be responsible for finding more information about the themes and content of that segment, presenting the information as a written report, an oral presentation, or by creating their own museum exhibition segment. Students may explore the Museum's Web site and search for photographs, maps, text, or other sources and evidence that could help them to complete their projects. When students later visit the Permanent Exhibition they can compare and contrast the information and photographs they used with what is displayed in the Museum.

Uniforms worn by inmates of Nazi concentration camps.

To begin the Permanent Exhibition, visitors enter a large industrial-looking elevator. In the elevator, they see historical film footage on a video monitor and hear the voice of an American soldier describing his first encounter with a concentration camp in 1945, as World War II came to an end in Europe.

NAZI ASSAULT 1933–1939

AMERICANS ENCOUNTER THE CAMPS

As the elevator doors open, visitors to the Permanent Exhibition confront the evidence of genocide discovered by liberators of concentration camps. The wall-sized photograph shows American soldiers in Germany viewing the corpses of Ohrdruf concentration camp inmates. In a letter to Chief of Staff George Marshall, General Dwight D. Eisenhower described the horrors he witnessed at Ohrdruf. Museum visitors encounter a prophetic excerpt from this letter at the beginning of the Permanent Exhibition.

BEFORE THE HOLOCAUST

The exhibition then provides images of Jewish life in Europe before the Holocaust.

TAKEOVER OF POWER, 1933

Additional displays along the introductory corridor describe the beginnings of Nazi rule in Germany.

THE NAZI RISE TO POWER

The film *The Nazi Rise to Power* (14 minutes) explains how the economic, social, and political conditions in Germany helped set the stage for Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party to attain power.

THE TERROR BEGINS

Hitler's rise to power in 1933 marked the end of parliamentary government in Germany. When members of Nazi paramilitary formations became police auxiliaries, political violence became governmentally sanctioned. Photographs, artifacts, and film clips in the exhibition describe how the Nazis used propaganda to advance their political and racist agenda and how they employed violence to terrorize both real and perceived opponents of the regime.

BOYCOTT

On April 1, 1933, the Nazis announced an official boycott of Jewish businesses throughout Germany. The boycott represented a major step in the campaign against the German Jewish community.

THE BURNING OF BOOKS

NAZI PROPAGANDA

Nazi Party officials and student organizations raided libraries and bookstores across Germany, burning books that they deemed "un-German." Through state-controlled news media, countless parades, speeches, ceremonies, and events, the Nazis influenced the German population. Propaganda was aimed at fostering nationalism, antisemitism, and allegiance to Hitler.

THE "SCIENCE" OF RACE

The Nazis sought to bolster their racial myth of "Aryan supremacy" by encouraging the pseudodiscipline of "race science." Scientific instruments, shown in the exhibition, measured physical characteristics in order to distinguish members of "inferior" or alien races from "superior" Aryans. Beginning in January 1934, the quest for racial purity led to forced sterilization of those considered "abnormal."

Exhibition display panels describe Nazi rule in Germany during the years 1933 to 1938. *Photo by Edward Owen, reproduced with permission of Rizzoli International Publications, Inc.*

THE NUREMBERG LAWS, 1935

FROM CITIZENS TO OUTCASTS

TECHNOLOGY AND PERSECUTION

Between 1933 and 1939, the Nazis reversed a century of equal opportunity for German Jews, enacting more than 400 laws designed to define, segregate, and impoverish German Jews. The Nazis employed sophisticated technology to identify and locate their victims quickly and efficiently.

JEWISH RESPONSES

Nazi discriminatory policies triggered a variety of Jewish responses, including the expansion of Zionism (a movement advocating the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine) and the development of separate cultural institutions.

EXPANSION WITHOUT WAR

In 1938, Germany annexed Austria and the Sudetenland (a part of Czechoslovakia). All Jews within the newly annexed territories were immediately subjected to the Nazis' discriminatory laws and policies.

NO HELP NO HAVEN, 1938

In July 1938, representatives from 32 nations attended the Evian Conference in Evian, France, to discuss the growing refugee crisis in Europe. The United States and most other countries were unwilling to ease their immigration restrictions.

"NIGHT OF BROKEN GLASS"

On November 9, 1938, the Nazis orchestrated a nationwide pogrom (mob violence often supported by local authorities) directed against Jews throughout Germany. Hundreds of synagogues and more than 7,000 Jewish-owned businesses were vandalized during what became known as *Kristallnacht* ("The Night of Broken Glass").

ANTISEMITISM

A film entitled *Antisemitism* (14 minutes) provides historical background on anti-Jewish hatred throughout the centuries.

"ENEMIES OF THE STATE"

The exhibition includes information about non-Jewish groups targeted in Germany by the Nazis: Roma and Sinti (Gypsies), political dissidents, homosexuals, Freemasons, and Jehovah's Witnesses.

NAZI SOCIETY

POLICE STATE

Photographs, film, and text describe German society, nearly every aspect of which was subject to Nazification under Hitler's rule. The Gestapo (the Secret State Police) was vested with almost unlimited authority to monitor the activities of all citizens and to impose arrest without warrant.

SEARCH FOR REFUGE

THE VOYAGE OF THE SS ST. LOUIS

After *Kristallnacht,* thousands of refugees began to look for safe havens in other countries. In May of 1939, more than 900 Jewish passengers boarded the German ocean liner SS *St. Louis* in search of refuge in Havana, Cuba. Most awaited immigration to the United States. Once in Havana, the passengers were not permitted to disembark and were forced to leave Cuban waters. After sailing near the Florida coast, in the hopes of docking in the United States, the ship was eventually forced to return to Europe.

TO SAFETY

At great risk because of their politics and publications, Jewish and non-Jewish writers, philosophers, artists, and intellectuals fled the European continent. Cultural life in the United States and Great Britain benefited enormously from the contributions of such refugees as Hannah Arendt, Marc Chagall, Marlene Dietrich, Albert Einstein, Sigmund Freud, Lotte Lenya, and others.

THE WAR BEGINS

TERROR IN POLAND

The exhibition focuses next on the German invasion of Poland in September 1939, which marked the beginning of World War II. The Nazis considered the Poles fit only to serve as slave laborers. In the autumn of 1939, the German occupation government initiated a campaign to kill Polish priests, teachers, writers, artists, politicians, and suspected resistance members.

MURDER OF THE HANDICAPPED

Physically and mentally disabled individuals were among the first victims of systematic Nazi murder under a program code-named "Operation T-4." The exhibition features items from a German medical facility that was converted into an "Operation T-4" center where disabled children were killed by lethal injection.

WORLD AT WAR: GERMAN CONQUESTS

As the war progressed, Germany proceeded to invade and occupy other countries in Europe and beyond. A series of maps in the exhibition illustrate the movement of Germany's invading armies from 1939 to 1942.

AMERICAN RESPONSES

Even prior to the beginning of World War II, Nazi actions in Europe made headlines in the media throughout the United States. Videos in the exhibition portray American responses to Nazi policies.

A SHTETL: THE EJSZYSZKI SHTETL COLLECTION

A three-story tower in the exhibition displays photographs taken between 1890 and 1941 in the shtetl of Ejszyszki (also known as Eishishok), a small town in what is now Lithuania. The photographs portray the vibrancy of Jewish life and culture before the Holocaust.

A casting taken from the gated entrance to Auschwitz I concentration camp. The inscription *Arbeit Macht Frei* means "Work makes one free."
Photo by Edward Owen, reproduced with permission of Rizzoli International Publications, Inc.

"FINAL SOLUTION" 1940–1945

THE "FINAL SOLUTION"

The next floor of the exhibition documents the escalating Nazi anti-Jewish policies and mass murder in German-occupied Europe.

IN WESTERN EUROPE

In western Europe, Nazi rule brought the confinement of Jews in detention camps and deportation of Jews to killing centers. Some individuals and families managed to go into hiding, such as Anne Frank and her family in Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

GHETTOS, 1939–1944
THERESIENSTADT
THE WARSAW GHETTO
THE ŁÓDŻ GHETTO
THE KOVNO GHETTO
FOUR HUNDRED GHETTOS

The exhibition focuses next on the experiences of people in eastern Europe. Throughout the region, Nazis confined Jews in hundreds of ghettos, where brutal conditions of overcrowding, squalor, and forced labor led to disease and death. As visitors walk over a wooden bridge, they see photo murals that depict scenes from the Warsaw and Łódż ghettos in Poland. Images on video monitors document the conditions of life in those ghettos as well as the Theresienstadt ghetto in the German Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia (formerly part of Czechoslovakia) and the Kovno ghetto in Lithuania.

Exhibition display panels describe conditions of life in the ghettos.

INVASION OF THE SOVIET UNION, 1941

MOBILE KILLING SQUADS

BABI YAR

HOLOCAUST IN ROMANIA

Near the end of the wooden bridge, the exhibition turns to the summer of 1941, when German troops invaded the Soviet Union. The troops were accompanied by the *Einsatzgruppen*, specially trained mobile squads under order to kill all Jews, Roma and Sinti (Gypsies), and Communist party officials. About one million Jews and an unknown number of non-Jews were killed by the *Einsatzgruppen*. In Babi Yar, on the outskirts of Kiev, Ukraine, 33,771 Jews were murdered at the hands of the *Einsatzgruppen* in two days. In addition, Romanian army units collaborated with the Nazi mobile killing squads to murder thousands of Jews from Bessarabia, north Bukovina, and Transnistria (regions occupied by Romania during World War II). Privacy walls, here and in other parts of the exhibition, shield young visitors from graphic images of atrocities.

THE WANNSEE CONFERENCE, 1942

On January 20, 1942, German officials met at the Wannsee Conference in Berlin to discuss and coordinate the implementation of the "Final Solution"—the Nazi term for the mass murder of European Jews.

THE WARSAW GHETTO UPRISING, PASSOVER 1943

The exhibition then presents an example of Jewish resistance against the Nazis. Armed with only several dozen pistols and hand grenades, a few hundred Jews fought thousands of German soldiers during what has become known as the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of 1943.

DEPORTATIONS

The Nazi deportation of Jews and Roma and Sinti (Gypsies) took three main forms: transports from towns and cities to internment camps or ghettos; from smaller ghettos to larger ones; and, beginning in 1942, from camps and ghettos to six killing centers (also known as extermination camps), all in Poland. Railroad cars, such as the one in the exhibition, served as the primary means of transportation. As many as 100 people were packed into a single car without sanitation, food, or water; many did not survive the trip.

WHO SHALL LIVE AND WHO SHALL DIE

The exhibition describes the experiences of people who were sent to the Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland. As prisoners disembarked from the trains, officers of the SS (Hitler's elite guard) conducted a selection of new arrivals. The sick, the elderly, pregnant women, women with young children, and children too young to work were sent immediately to be killed in gas chambers. Those deemed capable of work were assigned to slave labor.

PRISONERS OF THE CAMPS

Prisoners selected for labor were registered and some were photographed upon arrival at the camps. The exhibition displays some of those photographs. Since most Jews were immediately sent to their death, neither registration forms nor photographs exist for the majority of victims.

THE CONCENTRATION CAMP UNIVERSE

VOICES FROM AUSCHWITZ

AUSCHWITZ

KILLING CENTERS

As visitors enter this section, they pass under a gate that is a casting taken from the entrance to the Auschwitz I concentration camp. The inscription is an ironic phrase: *Arbeit Macht Frei* (Work makes one free). Oral testimonies from former prisoners —describing experiences of terror, brutality, and despair— can be heard in the audio theater entitled *Voices from Auschwitz*. In 1941, Auschwitz II (Auschwitz-Birkenau) was built. It became the largest of the Nazi killing centers. The exhibition displays reconstructed barracks from Auschwitz-Birkenau.

NOTE: Near the end of this floor in the exhibition, visitors encounter shoes taken from prisoners at Majdanek; photographs of former prisoners' tattooed arms; a large photo mural of hair shorn from prisoners at Auschwitz; and castings of the crematoria and other items used to dispose of bodies in the concentration camps and killing centers.

Shoes taken from victims at Majdanek.

In 1941 and 1942, the Nazis established six killing centers at Auschwitz-Birkenau, Chełmno, Bełzec, Majdanek,* Sobibór, and Treblinka. All were situated near railroad lines in Poland. The primary method of killing was asphyxiation either by carbon monoxide or by Zyklon B gas.

SLAVE LABOR IN THE CAMPS

The Nazis used concentration camps to persecute real and perceived enemies of the regime through forced labor. Prisoners were housed, fed, and worked in such a way that death often followed within weeks. In addition to forced labor, daily life in Nazi concentration camps consisted of a series of deprivations and torments. Prisoners were subjected to hours of standing at attention for roll call, regular beatings, food that was scarcely edible, poor hygiene, and overcrowded, lice-ridden barracks. In every major camp, Nazi officials and their collaborators employed terror, torture, and collective punishments to maintain tight control over the prisoners.

WHY AUSCHWITZ WAS NOT BOMBED

In 1944, some Jewish organizations asked the War Department to bomb Auschwitz in an attempt to stop the killing operations at the camp. A display in the exhibition addresses some of the reasons why the United States government decided not to bomb Auschwitz.

THE END OF A SHTETL

At the end of this floor of the exhibition, visitors revisit the tower of photographs displaying life in the Ejszyszki (Eishishok) shtetl and learn about the destruction of the shtetl's Jewish community during the Holocaust.

* Despite concerns among some historians that, operationally, Majdanek resembled concentration camps more than it did killing centers, most scholars include it among the killing centers because of the large number of prisoners who died there and the use of poison gas in the killing process.

LAST CHAPTER

WORLD AT WAR: THE GERMAN COLLAPSE

The final floor of the exhibition begins with maps illustrating the course of the war from the turn of the tide against Germany in the winter of 1943 to Germany's eventual defeat and uncon- ditional surrender.

THE COURAGE TO RESCUE

LE CHAMBON: A PLACE OF REFUGE

THE WAR REFUGEE BOARD

WALLENBERG AND FELLOW RESCUERS: BUDAPEST, 1944

THE FATE OF BULGARIAN JEWS

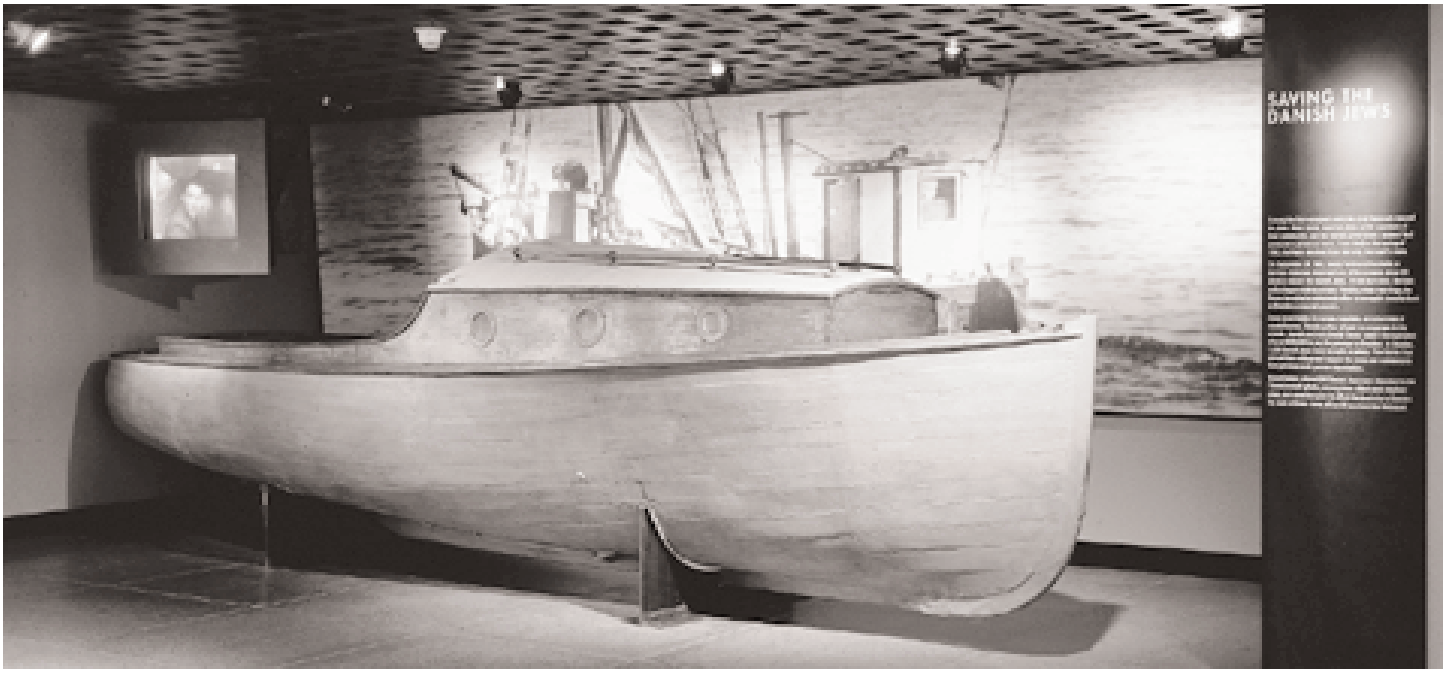
THE FATE OF ITALIAN JEWS

ZEGOTA

SAVING THE DANISH JEWS

Most non-Jews in occupied Europe did nothing to directly help or hinder the Nazi genocide. A small number, however, risked their lives to help Jews escape death during the Holocaust. Displays in the exhibition tell the stories of rescuers in France, Hungary, Italy, Bulgaria, Poland, and Denmark. In particular, a few examples of rescue are highlighted. The townspeople of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, France, provided safe hiding for thousands of refugees. With the assistance of the American War Refugee Board established in 1944, Raoul Wallenberg and fellow rescuers in Budapest, Hungary, saved tens of thousands of Hungarian Jews from destruction. In occupied Poland, Zegota (the Council for Aid to Jews) provided safe hiding places and money to those trying to escape Nazi persecution. Many Danes courageously worked to save virtually all Danish Jews by smuggling them by boat to neutral Sweden.

A small fishing boat that was used to save Danish Jews. *Photo by Edward Owen, reproduced with permission of Rizzoli International Publications, Inc.*



In 1953, the Israeli parliament directed the Yad Vashem Remembrance Authority in Jerusalem to establish a memorial to "the Righteous among the Nations who risked their lives to save Jews." The rescuers wall within the exhibition pays tribute to more than 10,000 individuals honored by Yad Vashem.

LIDICE: RESISTANCE AND REPRISAL

BEHIND ENEMY LINES

THE WHITE ROSE

RESISTANCE

GHETTO REVOLTS

DEATH CAMP REVOLTS

JEWISH PARTISANS

In addition to those who rescued Jews were those who resisted the Nazis in various ways. The exhibition presents examples of resistance, both by non-Jews and Jews. The Nazis generally held entire families or communities accountable for acts of rescue and resistance, such as the assassination of Nazi leader Reinhard Heydrich. Because they suspected inhabitants of the town of Lidice (in Czechoslovakia) as having helped the assassins, the Nazis murdered the men of the town, deported the women to concentration camps, and deported many of the children to Poland. In all, the German occupiers killed approximately 3,000 Czechs in retaliation for the assassination of Heydrich. Of the groups in Germany that opposed Hitler's dictatorship, only one, code-named White Rose, openly protested the Nazi genocide against Jews. The leaders of the White Rose movement, who were non-Jewish German students, were executed for treason in 1943. Between 1941 and 1943, Jews formed underground resistance movements in nearly one hundred ghettos. Jewish partisans fought Nazi Germany and its collaborators throughout Europe. In Auschwitz, Jewish concentration camp prisoners managed to blow up a crematorium. In Sobibór and Treblinka, they organized uprisings and mass escapes.

Liberated inmates of Allach, a subcamp of Dachau, greet troops of the U.S. Seventh Army (April 30, 1945). *U.S. National Archives, Courtesy of USHMM Photo Archives*

DEATH MARCHES
LIBERATION: ENCOUNTER
LIBERATION: AFTERMATH

As the war came to an end in the spring of 1945, Nazis began evacuating prisoners from the camps to areas still under German control, in what has become known as death marches. When Soviet, British, and American troops liberated the Nazi camps, they were stunned by the evidence of mass murder and by the sight of tens of thousands of survivors ravaged by starvation and disease. Video monitors in the exhibition depict scenes of liberation as well as the immediate aftermath.

THE KILLERS
THE GUILT OF THE BYSTANDERS

During the Nuremberg Trial following the war, the International Military Tribunal representing the Allied nations prosecuted Nazi leaders for conspiracy to wage a war of aggression, for war crimes, and for crimes against humanity. This last charge dealt specifically with genocide of the Jews. Video monitors in the exhibition feature recordings of the proceedings at Nuremberg and other trials. Most individuals, governments, and nations stood by while millions of people were killed during the Holocaust. The great majority of Europeans were neither killers nor victims. Most were in a position to observe events, even if small in scope, that formed part of the larger catastrophe of the Holocaust, and few came to the aid of victims.

CHILDREN

This section of the exhibition describes the experiences of children. Approximately 1.5 million children under the age of 15 died during the Holocaust. Featured in the exhibition is artwork by children in the Theresienstadt ghetto. Of the 15,000 children who passed through Theresienstadt, only a few hundred survived. Also featured is information on children's experiences in hiding, in ghettos, being rescued, and being liberated.

POGROMS
DISPLACED PERSONS
EXODUS
A NEW STATE
A NEW WORLD

After the war, thousands of Jewish survivors, unable or unwilling to return to their homes, were forced to live in displaced persons camps in Europe. Those who did return to their native homes sometimes faced anti-Jewish pogroms. The search for permanent homelands led many to the United States and Palestine. In fact, thousands attempted to enter

Exhibition display panels show survivors arriving in the United States after liberation. *Photo by Arnold Kramer, reproduced with permission of Rizzoli International Publications, Inc.*

AMERICAN RESPONSES

Palestine illegally, despite the British ban on large-scale Jewish immigration. In November 1947, the United Nations General Assembly voted to partition Palestine into a Jewish and an Arab state. In 1948, the nation of Israel was formed.

TESTIMONY

News about mass murder in Nazi-occupied Europe came to the United States as early as 1942. Videotaped film clips in the exhibition examine American responses to events that took place in Europe from 1940 to 1945.

The final element in the exhibition is a film, entitled *Testimony*, in which survivors recount their experiences of loss, suffering, and anguish, as well as rescue, resistance, compassion, and hope.

Portions of this section of the teacher guide are borrowed from The Holocaust Museum in Washington *by Jeshajahu Weinberg and Rina Elieli (New York: Rizzoli, 1995) and reproduced with permission of Rizzoli International Publications, Inc.*

EXHIBITION DISPLAY PANELS

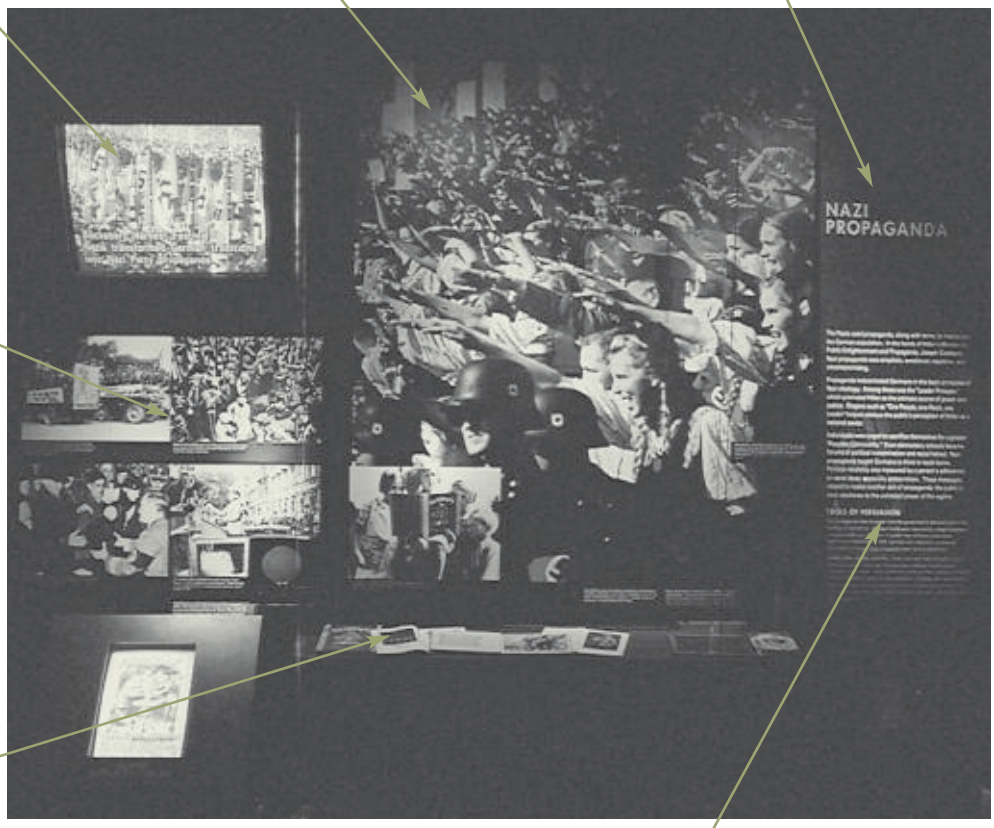
Within the different sections of the Permanent Exhibition, there are display panels that convey information about the events of the Holocaust. Each includes one or more types of media, such as photographs, documents, objects, moving images, and text. The display panel below, entitled *Nazi Propaganda,* includes all types of media used in the exhibition.

Video Monitor Displays historical photographs or moving images. Most of the photographs or moving images displayed in the Permanent Exhibition were taken by liberators, Nazis, and/or their collaborators. Captions indicate the dates and locations, if known, of the photographs or images.

Photo Mural Conveys the central theme of the display panel in visual form.

Title Presents the central theme of the display panel.

Collage of Photographs Displays a collection of photographic images that shows similar events occurring in different locations or different individuals experiencing the same event. Captions indicate the various dates and locations, if known, of the photographic images.



Artifacts Presents authentic material from the Holocaust time period. Artifacts include original photographs, documents, and other objects. Enlargements and reproductions of photographs have been used in various displays throughout the exhibition in place of the originals. Most artifacts are originals; captions will indicate instances where reproductions of documents and replicas of objects have been used.

Text Displayed in two parts: The primary text is a summary of main events related to the title of the display panel, providing important dates, places, and the names of significant individuals. The secondary text offers additional details connected to the events referenced in the primary text.