



Lessons From Auschwitz

Madeleine Jenkins, Molly Mudie, Ieuan Lumb, Emily Cushion



KSIĘGA IMION

Nazwiska pomordowanych zostały
zapisane w tej księdze na dowód
wiecznej pamięci.

ספר השמות

בספר הזה חקוקים שמות הנרצחים
לידיון עולם.

What was the Holocaust?

The Holocaust Educational Trust defines the Holocaust as the murder of approximately six million Jewish men, women, and children by Nazi Germany and its collaborators during the Second World War.

Pictured above is the book of names held in Block 27 of Auschwitz Birkenau, a collection of 4.2 million names of the victims of the Holocaust. These were collected by the Yad Vashem Institute. However, 2 million other names are gone and forgotten. It is important that we help to rehumanise victims of the Holocaust and their individual identities. The reminder of humanity is what we can utilise for change.

Origins and Evolution of Anti-Semitism

- As everyone knows, the most notable instance of antisemitism was the Holocaust during the years 1941 and 1945. However, examples of antisemitism can be found in many places throughout history.
- Many events over the past 2000 years have been blamed on the Jewish community, eventually leading them to become an easy scapegoat. The philosopher Louis Harap (1904-1998) expanded on the speculations made by Roman Catholic historian Edward Flannery that there were different categories of antisemitism: Religious, Economic, Social, Racist, Ideological and Cultural. All of these categories can be noticed in most examples of antisemitism throughout history.

Image: A picture of a burning of the Jews from around 1353 as they were being blamed for the plague epidemic in Europe.



Events in history

- The Ancient world:

-Jewish people are famously blamed for the Crucifixion – one of the earliest examples of religious antisemitism.

-In 38CE, there was an attack on Jews in Alexandria in which thousands of Jews were killed. This was possibly as a result of Jews being portrayed as misanthropes (people who dislike humanity and avoid human society) in light of their refusal to accept 'societal standards'.

- The Middle Ages:

- In the late 6th and the 7th centuries, there were many new policies against Jews and their practices and rights. These included laws against marrying Christians or observing Jewish holy days, with punishments ranging between forced conversion, slavery, exile and death.

- As the Black Death spread rapidly across Europe in the mid-14th century, Jews were used as scapegoats. People started rumours that they were poisoning wells to spread the disease, which resulted in hundreds of Jewish communities being destroyed. 900 Jews were burned alive in Strasbourg, where the plague had not yet affected the city.

Events in history

- 17th to 18th Centuries:
 - European Jewish immigration to the USA caused the governor of new Amsterdam (currently New York), Peter Stuyvesant, to implement new plans to prevent Jews from settling in the city.
 - Bohdan Khmelnytsky's supporters massacred tens of thousands of Jews in the Eastern and Southern areas of Europe that he controlled (modern-day Ukraine): one of the many violent conflicts of the mid-to-late 17th century during which the overall Jewish population decreased by between 100,000 - 200,000.
- 19th to 20th Centuries:
 - Henry Ford propagated antisemitic ideas in his newspaper The Dearborn Independent (published from 1919 to 1927).
 - Almost 50,000 Jews were killed in violent riots during the Russian Civil War.



Case Studies

When learning about the Holocaust, it is often only the numbers of victims that is shared: **600,000 Jews were murdered**. However, it is only by understanding these victims as **real people**, with individual and diverse lives, beliefs and cultures, that we can truly understand what was lost in the Holocaust.

Image: Makabi Kaunas, a Jewish football team in Kaunas, Lithuania, 1936.

Oświęcim

Oświęcim was the name of the town in Poland that was renamed Auschwitz when the Nazis took over in 1939, becoming the site of the notorious death and concentration camps. Before the invasion, Jews made up 58% of the population. They worked in a variety of industries and professions: half of the town council was Jewish.



The Great Synagogue (left) was the centre of communal life, used for socialising as well as worship. Positioned on either side of the main street, the building created a sense of great pride, connectedness, belonging and worth for the Jewish community.

“When there was a procession for Corpus Christi [an important Christian festival] there was light coming out of the windows of Jewish homes. And likewise, if there were Jewish festivities, the Poles also felt it was their duty to decorate the windows of their houses. It was as if an agreement had been made, an agreement for mutual respect.”

Marta Świdorska, former resident of Oświęcim

Ota and Katerina Margolius



Ota and Katerina Margolius were a young Jewish couple - 1930 in Prague, Czechoslovakia.

Ota was an international hockey player for Czechoslovakia, and a leader of a Jewish sports club in Prague. Katerina had trained at art school and then became a milliner (hat-maker).

The Germans invaded and introduced antisemitic laws in March, 1939. By September, all Jews over the age of six were forced to wear a yellow Star of David badge in public, singling them out from the rest of society. From late 1941 onwards, Czech Jews were sent to the Terezín Ghetto, near Prague, from where most were eventually transported to killing sites in eastern Europe, where almost all of them were killed on arrival in gas chambers. By the end of the war nearly 90% of the Jews in Czechoslovakia (almost 315,000 people) had been murdered, including Ota Margolius.



The extended Margolius family, including Ota and Katerina's daughter, Ines (centre) - 1933



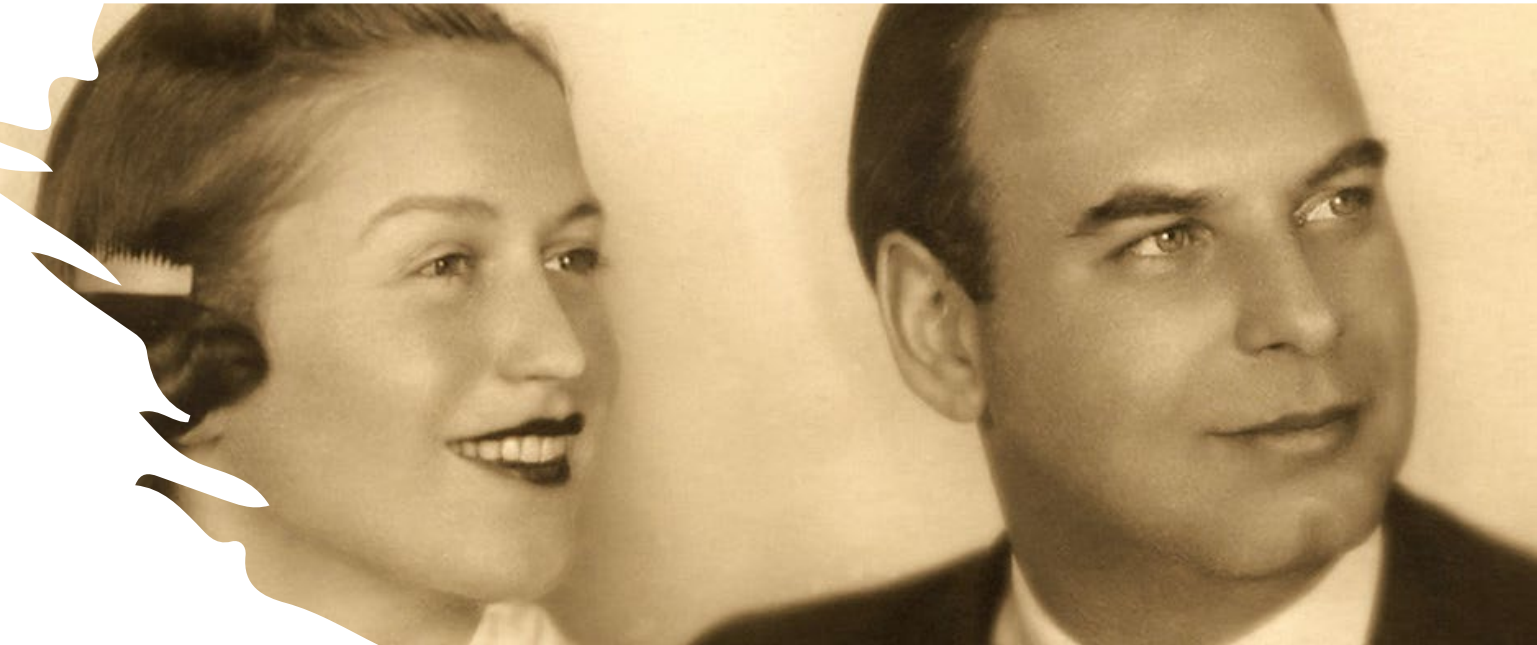
Survivor Testimony

Eva Clarke with her mother, Anka Kauderová

Eva Clarke

We were fortunate enough to hear from a survivor, Eva Clarke, who was born in Mauthausen concentration camp on the 29th of April 1945. Her parents had been sent to Theresienstadt in 1941, where her mother, Anka, became pregnant with a son, Dan. Dan unfortunately passed away at two months old, however he saved Anka and Eva's life in that when Anka arrived at Auschwitz-Birkenau (secretly pregnant with Eva), she was not sent to the gas chamber, as she would have been done if she'd had a baby with her. Anka had followed her husband, Bernd Nathan, to Auschwitz-Birkenau, though sadly he did not survive. As Anka's pregnancy was not visible, she was sent to work in an armaments factory in Freiberg. She worked for the entirety of her pregnancy, and in spring 1945 her and fellow prisoners were forced onto a train. This 3 week-long journey was extremely difficult; they had hardly any food or water, and for Anka, who was heavily pregnant, this put her in an extremely vulnerable position. Eva mentioned to us that her mother, looking so malnourished and unwell, was given a glass of milk by a passing man. Anka believed this had saved both her life, and Eva's. When the train finally arrived at Mauthausen concentration camp, Anka was so distraught that she went into labour. Eva was born in a cart, out in the open, without assistance of any kind. Mauthausen was liberated just days after Eva's birth; if it weren't for this, neither of them would have survived. Anka and Eva were the only survivors of their family; her grandparents, father, uncles, aunts and cousin had been killed in Auschwitz-Birkenau. The two returned to Prague, Anka remarried, and both were able to rebuild their lives. Eva now lives in Cambridge, is married and has two sons. Eva's story is a testament to resilience and her mother's incredible story is one that provides hope. Against all the odds, through instances of kindness and pure chance, as well as her own resilience, Anka's mother ensured the survival of herself and her daughter. Remembering specific stories and people in connection to the Holocaust is vital to understanding its significance.

Pictured to the right, Eva Clarke and her parents





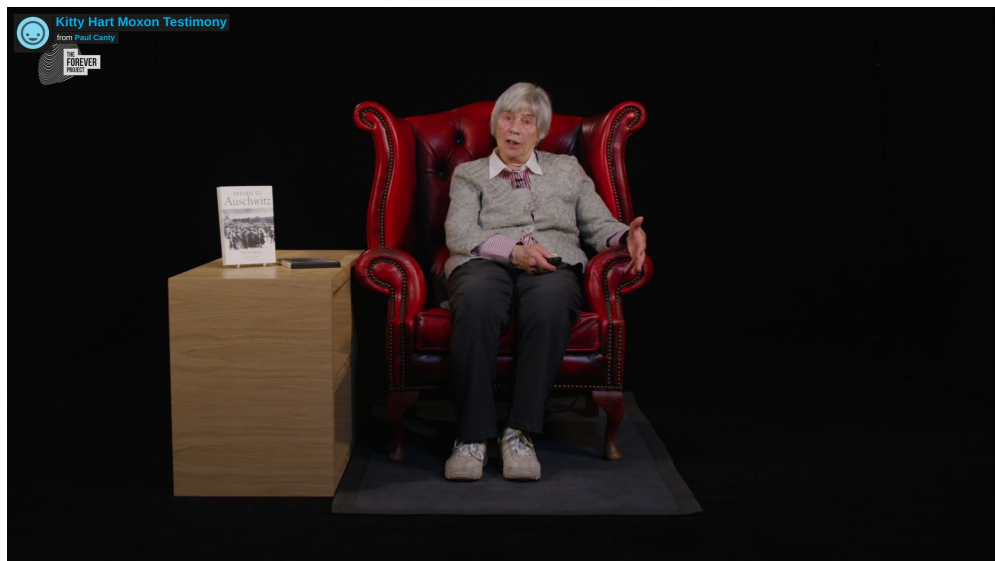
The Role of Camps

- Concentration camps began to be built as soon as Hitler became Chancellor of Germany in March 1933. Originally, they were intended to hold 'political prisoners', such as communists. However, by the end of 1941, the '**Final Solution**' for the Jews was decided – to kill all Jews in Europe.
- Consequently, camps were built all over German-occupied Europe. This included six extermination camps, where Jewish people were sent with the sole purpose of being murdered, and many concentration camps which were used for slave labour.

Auschwitz

Auschwitz was a complex of over three main sites situated in German-occupied Poland. Auschwitz-Birkenau was the largest of Nazi concentration and death camp complexes.

Upon arrival by train at the 'Judenrampe' ('Jewish platform'), the people, unaware of what was happening, were quickly separated by guards into two lines: men, and women and children. They were then assessed for a few seconds and a flick of a guard's thumb decided whether they would work (1 in 10) or would be sent straight to the gas chambers. Those chosen for work were straight away **stripped of their individuality**: their possessions taken, their names replaced by a number tattooed on their forearms, given flimsy prisoner uniforms and their bodies shaved. Prisoners were forced to do back breaking physical work from dusk until dawn – and beyond. If they became too weak to keep up, they would be killed and replaced. They received brutal treatment from the guards, who used the situation as an opportunity to **exercise power**. Slight mistakes could lead to extremely harsh punishments, including being beaten, sometimes to death. Prisoners were given rations, which provided them with about a quarter of their daily recommended calorie intake. This consisted of small amounts of bread, watery soup and coffee substitutes. The food contained poison which subdued people, making them easier to control. The crowded conditions and lack of access to clean water meant that it was **impossible to maintain personal hygiene**. Diseases such as typhus spread quickly, and the severe diarrhea that this caused meant that prisoners were forced to soil themselves – they were only allowed two toilet breaks a day, and even then, it was difficult to use them because there were so many people.



Kitty Hart-Moxon is a survivor of the Holocaust who was sent to Auschwitz in 1943 at the age of 16. In her testimony, she described having a "one track mind on survival", like an animal. She risked her life to smuggle food from the fields she was working on because the rations were impossible to live on. To aid her survival, she worked her way up to becoming 'staff'. One day this involved her loading her friends on to be taken to the gas chambers. She said that that day she did not want to live – it was her mother that stopped her committing suicide. This shows the **mental torture**, as well as physical, that prisoners had to endure.



- A drawing of the inside of a male barrack in Birkenau - *Mieczysław Kościelniak, a survivor*
- Shared latrines in Birkenau. There was no plumbing installed, so they were simply holes that prisoners had to clean out themselves.



- The selection process. This was the last time that many families saw each other.



Perpetrators

Perpetrators were individuals who contributed to the genocide of Jewish people.

Each perpetrator is guilty, with the persecution of Jews relying on a collaborative effort.

Who were the perpetrators?

Perpetrators could come from a range of backgrounds and jobs, varying from transport workers and filmmakers to Nazi officials and army members. Some examples of these are:

Women in the SS Auxiliary Service:

Women in the SS auxiliary service worked in positions such as telephone workers, telecom operators, and camp supervisors. These women were aged from 17 to 30 years old and responsible for the persecution of Jewish people. The job position was valued as it was viewed as an opportunity to travel and gain independence.

Rudolf Hoess:

Rudolf Hoess was a German SS Officer convicted for war crimes, and the longest serving commandant of Auschwitz. He was responsible for testing and implementing the Final Solution (the Nazi goal of murdering all European Jews). Hoess was also considered a family man, moving his wife and children into Auschwitz, their home a stonethrow away from the gas chamber killing 70,000 people. The house was decorated with stolen items from prisoners. His daughter, Ingebritt Hannah Hoess, recalls a "beautiful childhood", and her father was also known as a loving father who was kind to animals.



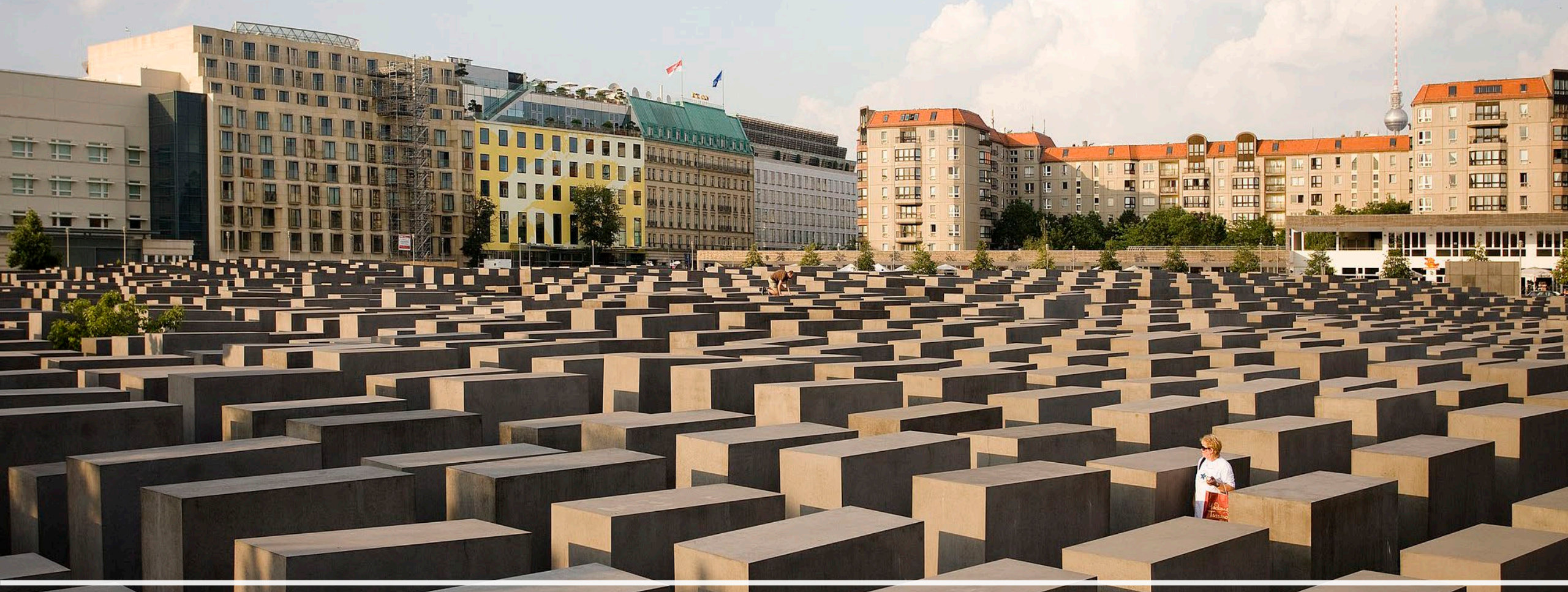
How should we address the Perpetrators?

- It is important to ensure that we don't categorise perpetrators as inhumane monsters, despite the inclination, as this limits our understanding of the Holocaust and dismisses the free will perpetrators held.
- By trying to understand perpetrator's reasoning for their actions and surrounding society, we can educate ourselves about the consciousness they held, and remove the possibility of falling into the trap of dehumanising them. Perpetrators were not forced to work in concentration camps so we must try to understand why they chose to.
- We must attempt to understand perpetrator's multifaceted identities. The same individuals who committed hateful crimes and contributed to the persecution of Jews could also be a devoted family member at home. It is key to sit with the uncomfortable juxtaposition and use it as a tool to learn about and understand the Holocaust.



Rudolf Hoess, German SS Officer, photographed with his family.

Image: Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin.



Contemporary Relevance

What is the Contemporary Relevance of the Holocaust?

- Remembrance for victims of the Holocaust
- Hearing Holocaust survivors
- Humanising statistics to, not simply learn, but to understand the Holocaust
- Antisemitism today: 2020 saw 1668 antisemitic incidences across the UK
- Learning the destruction caused from being a bystander
- Showing the dangers of othering members of society
- Learning from the past
- Understanding prejudices still at work today with outwardly racist politicians continuing to be voted in
- Realising this is not an outdated issue- racism, religious intolerance, and hatred is still at large today
- Identifying and standing up against intolerance today such as the persecution of Uyghur communities in China



Rally against Antisemitism in British government.

Xinjiang Re-education Camps:

In China, authorities are rounding up members of Uyghur communities (mostly Muslim men and women) and detaining them in camps to 'rid them of terrorist extremist leanings'.

- Chinese authorities have been at work detaining Uyghur people in camps since 2017 and more than 1 million Uyghur's and other minorities are believed to be held there.
- People held in the Xinjiang re-education camps are made to learn Chinese songs and language and adhere to a strict set of rules.
- Muslims are forced to subvert their culture, made to eat pork and drink alcohol.
- Extreme violence is used during interrogations and as punishment.
- There has been an estimated 2148 deaths.
- A survivor named Orynбек Koksybek, an ethnic Kazakh, recounts "I spent seven days of hell there. My hands were handcuffed, my legs were tied. They threw me in a pit. I raised both my hands and looked above. At that moment, they poured water. I screamed."
- Nur, another survivor, who was detained in detention centers and political education camps stated, the guards "told us that Uyghurs and Kazakhs are the enemies of China, and that they want to kill us, and make us suffer, and that there's nothing we can do about it".
- It is important for us to educate ourselves on what is happening and urge the government to take further action in shutting these camps down.



April 2017, Detainees in a political education camp in Lop County, Hotan Prefecture, Xinjiang.

What should we bring from this?

When considering all of these points together, we can understand the origins of antisemitism, how this has impacted Jews through time, and how antisemitism still affects the Jewish population today. We can also look at case studies of victims of the Holocaust to be reminded of the reality of the events and honour them, with statistics often being hard to comprehend and impersonal. We can hear the messages of survivors through their testimonies, developing our understanding of the Holocaust and the contemporary relevance.

Going forward, we are not going to have the privilege to learn from and listen to survivors of the Holocaust. Therefore, it is our duty to do so, and take the reminder of humanity with us.

It is imperative that we listen to the Jewish community today and do what we can to be tolerant and inclusive of everyone, no matter their race, sexuality, gender, or religion.

Most important of all, we must commemorate the lives of those lost and ensure that it never happens again. We must commemorate Ota Margolius, Bernd Nathan, and the other countless victims. We must thank survivors and those giving testimonies for their bravery and persistence in battling future persecution, and for educating people like us to assist future generations in continuing this fight. We must thank Eva Clarke and Kitty Hart-Moxon.

Kitty Hart-Moxon: "My main message for the youth of today would be to learn from the Holocaust... so that they're prepared in case something should happen. They would know what they have to do."