

Defining the Holocaust
Timeline activity

The Holocaust was the **systematic, bureaucratic, state-sponsored persecution** and **murder** of approximately six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its **collaborators**. During the era of the Holocaust, German authorities also targeted other groups because of their perceived “racial inferiority”: **Roma (Gypsies)**, the **disabled**, and some of the Slavic peoples (**Poles**, Russians, and others). Other groups were persecuted on political, ideological, and behavioral grounds, among them Communists, Socialists, **Jehovah’s Witnesses**, and **homosexuals**.

Each student has been given several documents. Take a few minutes to examine these documents. As we focus on the key terms in the definition, can you categorize these documents according to the terms? Please stand and **briefly** share with the group. When you finish, place the documents beneath the appropriate year on the timeline wall.

- Some images portray prewar **Jewish** life.
- **Systematic**-methodical; used a fixed plan; organized; considered logistics.
- **Bureaucratic** - relating to the business of running an organization, or government.
- **State-sponsored**-the Nazi government supported anti-Jewish actions by passing laws and decrees legalizing persecution.
- **Persecution**-a program or campaign to exterminate, humiliate, drive away, or subjugate (*control*) people based on their membership in a religious, ethnic, social, or racial group
- **Annihilation** –total destruction
- **Collaborator**-a person who cooperates traitorously with an enemy
- **Roma (Gypsies)**- Targeted as “non Aryans” and “racial inferiors”, Gypsies belonged to an ethnic group called Roma and Sinti. They had been in Germany since the 1400s and faced prejudices there for centuries.
- **Disabled**-Between 1933-1945, 250,000-300,000 mentally ill and physically disabled were forcibly sterilized. More than 200,000 were murdered between 1940-1945.
- **Jehovah’s Witnesses**- Members of a small Christian sect, they were victimized for their Beliefs which included not joining the army or pledging allegiance to the government. By 1939, 6000 had been arrested. Approximately 1400 died in concentration camps.
- **Homosexuals**- Victimized by the Nazis for reasons of behavior, they were viewed as “abnormal” and “unmanly” and as a threat to Nazi policies of reproduction. Lesbians were not regarded as a threat to Nazi racial policies and were generally not targeted for persecution. Between 1933 and 1945 the police arrested an estimated 100,000 men as homosexuals. Most of the 50,000 men sentenced by the courts spent time in regular prisons, and between 5,000 and 15,000 were interned in concentration camps. There are no known statistics for the number of homosexuals who died in the camps.