

# JEWISH KRAKOW

Web. 23 Jan. 2013.

"What to See." *JewishKrakow.net* -. N.p., n.d. Web. 23 Jan. 2013

**Elie Wiesel, a Holocaust survivor, said in the Chicago Sun Times in November 2001,** "They were going to die. They knew it, and their last words were I love you. Even in great pain, their last words were of love... People who could have saved themselves and they ran back in to save others instead. If humanity is capable of that, how can I lose hope in humanity?....(Thus) Education is the key to preventing the cycle of violence and hatred that marred the 20th century from repeating itself in the 21st century." This quote by Elie Wiesel talks about the importance of the memory of the victims of the Holocaust. These victims were so concerned for the families in the midst of this horrific event that they went back to save them. It is therefore, our duty as citizens and as nations to educate and be advocates for the memories of the victims of the Holocaust. For if indifference towards this tragedy continues, then the events and violence of the Holocaust may occur again. In turn, many nations in Europe and the United States have reflected on their history and created memorials and museums for the Holocaust. Specifically, the city of Krakow in Poland has a deep history in the Holocaust and has used this history to educate people about the past and allow them to reflect on it.

Krakow has a rich history revolving around the Holocaust and the Jewish people that reflects ideals and events that would shape a generation, not only in Krakow but the worldwide culture. The Holocaust is a Jewish word meaning widespread disaster. For Jews across Europe the Holocaust was a disaster because many countries such as France and Britain, easily fell victim to the German dictator, Adolf Hitler. With his growing power, Hitler took control of Czechoslovakia and his only threat came from the Soviet Union. So in 1939, Hitler made a pact with the Soviet Union called the German-Soviet Pact. The German-Soviet Pact said, "Poland was to be partitioned between the two powers, which enabled Germany to attack Poland without the fear of Soviet intervention." (us Holocaust museum) Hitler broke this pact in the fall of 1939 by invading Russian Poland and in turn World War II began. Within a month of the invasion, "Germany directly annexed those former Polish territories along German's eastern border: West Prussia, Poznan, Upper Silesia, and the former Free City of Danzig. The remainder of German-occupied Poland (including the cities of Warsaw, Krakow, Radom, and Lublin) was organized as the so-called Generalgouvernement (General Government) under a civilian governor general, the Nazi party lawyer Hans Frank" (us holocaust museum). The invasion in Krakow directly impacted the lives of many Jews. At first the Jews were forced to do humiliating jobs on the streets; they also had limited use of public transportation and their goods were taken by the Germans. In March 1941, the Krakow ghetto was established by Otto Wachter, the Krakow district governor. According to Jewish *Krakow.net*, "The ghetto was situated in the Podgorze district of Krakow and eventually housed 20,000 Jews, not just from Krakow, but also from neighboring communities....The daily reality of ghetto life was one of hunger,

disease and overcrowding. Illnesses decimated the population. Many died trying to get food or medicines from beyond the ghetto walls, the usual punishment for those being caught was to be shot by the Germans." (Jewish Krakow). The ghetto was liquidated in 1943 either by murder or transport to camps. The horrific aspect in Krakow's history is what helps to make this city dynamic and powerful. Their history allows them to firstly preserve the memories of the Jews that went through such a horrific event. Also, this would help to make Krakow an agent against indifference.

The city of Krakow has embraced their history by acting as an ambassador against indifference through landmarks made into memorials. The Krakow ghetto today is mostly non-existent, as the city needed to continue to grow and develop over time. However, the city of Krakow did not want people to forget the ghetto's victims. The memorial for the ghetto is 33 steel and cast iron chairs and 37 smaller chairs. Krakow did an accurate job in emphasizing the message from the ghetto because each chair is the same, thus emphasizing equality among all people. The memorial, according to the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, also suggests that anyone could be victimized; the memorial is also located near the bus stations and therefore, emphasizes the deportation of the Jews. In turn, the memorial for the Krakow ghetto will help people to realize that they cannot avoid being an advocate for people who were being persecuted; they must be an advocate because they could always be the next victim, the next chair. Another famous site that was located just outside of the ghetto was Schindler's Factory. In Nazi occupied Poland, the Jews were forced to work in factories. One of these was Schindler's factory. Oskar Schindler was the owner of the factory and he hid more than 1200 Jews from a slow and painful death at Auschwitz. By creating the factory a museum and memorial, the city of Krakow emphasizes the memories of those on the famous Schindler's list. Not only are the memories of the Schindler's list survivors emphasized but also the city of Krakow can celebrate a hero, Oskar Schindler. Schindler was not Jewish yet he stepped up to save good people, in the face of adversity. Therefore, the city of Krakow is emphasizing the importance of fighting indifference and taking a stand, by celebrating the life of Oskar Schindler. Lastly, if one did not make it into hiding, the Nazis often deported people to camps; one close by is Auschwitz. Auschwitz can be described by its, "infamous gate "Arbeit macht frei", and consists of former prison blocks, as well as blocks used by the Germans" (Jewish Krakow.net). The museum today looks as it was left when the Jews were liberated in 1945. This allows the visitors to get the full experience of the camp. Jewish Krakow.net says, "The feelings or emotions experienced will clearly vary from person to person, a visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau is a uniquely subjective experience, but perhaps the one thing that everyone feels is disbelief. When confronted by the exhibits at Auschwitz, or the sheer size of Birkenau, it's impossible to believe that the events described and documented could have happened, but they *did* happen, and for that very reason this is a place that people should make the effort to come and see." Therefore, by visiting the camp many people will be changed and forever remember the victims of the camp. Because of the city of Krakow and the surrounding area's emphasis on history, Auschwitz will never be forgotten physically or literally. This remembrance demonstrates the city's efforts to fight indifference and educate all ages, as the Holocaust survivors die off.

Elie Wiesel said, "Indifference to me, is the epitome of evil." After reviewing their history and the impact of the Holocaust, the city of Krakow knew that it was their duty to be advocates for their history. For history will always be apart of our culture and ideas, thus it is our responsibility to learn from it and teach others. The city of Krakow has done this duty perfectly through its many historical memorials and museums.

### **Works Cited**

- "Holocaust History." *Invasion of Poland, Fall 1939*. N.p., n.d. Web. 23 Jan. 2013.**  
**"Krakow Ghetto Memorial." *Krakow Ghetto & Deportation Monument : Center for Holocaust & Genocide Studies : University of Minnesota*. N.p., n.d. Web. 23 Jan. 2013.**  
**"Schindler's Factory in Krakow." *Schindler's Factory in Krakow*. N.p., n.d.**