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Mordechai Anielewicz *No to Despair*

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TRANSLATED BY ALISON L. STRAYER

*A Searing Portrait of the last days of the
Warsaw ghetto uprising and its young
leader, Mordechai Anielewicz.*

Set before and during the days of the Warsaw ghetto uprising, *Say No to Despair*, part of the new They Said No series of histories, is a compelling and profound look at the final days of the life of Mordechai Anielewicz, leader of the Jewish Fighting Organization that led the insurrection against Nazi control in Poland during the Holocaust. Tracing the moments before and during the uprising up to Mordechai's death in 1943, Hausfater delivers an uncompromising story of a revolutionary with a lesson all readers must take with them. Both disturbing and moving, thrilling and devastating, Anielewicz's story elucidates the immense power of resistance and the obligations we have to defend each other from violence and capture—no matter the costs. As Anielewicz himself puts it, “The opposite of despair is not hope, it’s struggle.”

Chronology

- 1919 Mordechai Anielewicz is born in Wyszkow, Poland, to a poor Jewish family.
- 1930s He joins the ranks of Hashomer Hatzair, a socialist Zionist youth movement.
- September 1, 1939 The troops of Nazi Germany invade Poland, signaling the start of World War II.
- 1940 Mordechai Anielewicz organizes resistance groups among Jewish youth in occupied Poland.
- November 15, 1940 The Warsaw ghetto is sealed off.
- January 20, 1942 The Wannsee Conference takes place, where Nazi leaders decide to implement the “Final Solution to the Jewish Question,” i.e., the extermination of the Jewish people.
- Summer 1942 Three hundred thousand Jews are deported from the Warsaw ghetto, most of them to Treblinka extermination camp.
- November 1942 Mordechai Anielewicz becomes commander of the Jewish Combat Organization.
- April 19, 1943 The Warsaw ghetto uprising starts.
- May 8, 1943 Mordechai Anielewicz commits suicide.
- May 16, 1943 The Warsaw ghetto uprising ends.
- May 8, 1945 Germany surrenders, marking the end of World War II in Europe. Between 1939 and 1945, six million Jews have been assassinated.

For More Information

FILMS

- The Time of the Ghetto*, Frédéric Rossif, 1961
- The Island on Bird Street*, Søren Kragh-Jacobsen, 1997
- Uprising*, Jon Avnet, 2001
- The Pianist*, Roman Polanski, 2002
- Seven Minutes in the Warsaw Ghetto*, Johan Oettinger, 2012

BOOKS

- The Little Boy Star: An Allegory of the Holocaust*, by Rachel Hausfater and Olivier Latyk, Milk & Cookies Press
- The Island on Bird Street*, by Uri Orlev, HMH Books for Young Readers
- 28 Days: A Novel of Resistance in the Warsaw Ghetto*, by David Safier, Feiwel & Friends
- The Complete Maus: A Survivor's Tale*, by Art Spiegelman, Pantheon Graphic Library

LINKS

www.yadvashem.org

Yad Vashem: The World Holocaust
Remembrance Center

www.gfh.org.il/eng

Ghetto Fighters' House Museum

[encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article
/the-warsaw-ghetto-uprising](http://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-warsaw-ghetto-uprising)

Article on the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

www.ushmm.org

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum,
Washington, DC

www.mjhnyc.org

Museum of Jewish Heritage, New York,
New York

www.museumoftolerance.com

Museum of Tolerance, Los Angeles, California
Kibbutz Yad Mordechai in Israel is named in
memory of Mordechai Anielewicz

Discussion Questions

- I. "The opposite of despair is not hope. It's struggle." Do you agree?
2. Mordechai Anielewicz said: "Rebel against reality!" What did he mean?
3. Do you think fighting is, in certain circumstances, the only solution?
4. Although the insurrection was defeated, the ghetto fighters won their battle for human dignity. Is human dignity important? Why?
5. The Warsaw ghetto uprising is a symbol of heroism. Why is it exemplary?
6. Feigle participates in the insurrection, although she is only fourteen. What do you think of child "soldiers"?
7. While the ghetto was burning, Polish people went on with their lives on the other side of the wall. Do you think they should have tried to help? To what extent are witnesses responsible?
8. Mordechai Anielewicz "led a desperate struggle without despair." In what ways did you see him drive away despair?
9. Have you ever said no to despair? In which circumstances?
10. Saying no to despair "takes a variety of forms, ranging from armed struggle to humor, from solidarity to poetry, scientific research to rebellion." Give examples that you have witnessed or heard about.
- II. *"I will not carry myself down to die, When I go to my grave, my head will be high."* Discuss these words from Bob Dylan.