

Gerstein, Kurt

(1905--1945), SS officer who tried in vain to tell the world about the Nazis' murderous activities. Gerstein joined the Nazi Party in 1933, but at the same time associated himself with the anti-Nazi Confessing Church. As a result he was sent to a concentration camp and kicked out of the Nazi Party in 1938. At that point he began studying medicine.

Gerstein's sister-in-law was murdered as part of the Euthanasia Program; Gerstein was determined to discover the truth about the murder of mental patients in "euthanasia institutes," so he volunteered for the *Waffen*-SS and was sent to work at its hygiene institute. In this post, he worked with Zyklon B, the poison gas used by the Nazis for mass extermination. In August 1942 he visited the Treblinka, Sobibor, and Belzec extermination camps, ostensibly to view Zyklon B in action for work purposes. In truth, Gerstein wanted to make sure his facts were accurate so he could tell the world what was really going on.

Gerstein made contact with various diplomats and clergymen, but his efforts to expose the Nazis and stop the mass murder were ignored. After the war he was arrested as a suspected war criminal. He died in jail, apparently as a suicide.