what are Yizkor books

Yizkor books are memorial anthologies created primarily by Holocaust survivors to commemorate Jewish communities destroyed during the Holocaust. They preserve the history, daily life, culture, and residents of specific towns or regions, often in Eastern Europe, through essays, photographs, maps, and necrologies listing the murdered.[1] [2]

Origins and Purpose

The term "Yizkor" derives from the Hebrew prayer "May God remember," recited during Jewish memorial services on holidays like Yom Kippur. These books evolved from medieval European memorbücher honoring pogrom victims, reviving post-World War II to honor six million lost lives. Published by survivor groups or landsleit societies, they focus on pre-war vibrancy, Nazi atrocities, and post-war diaspora.[3] [2]

Content and Languages

Most Yizkor books detail interwar Jewish life, including synagogues, schools, businesses, and notable figures, alongside survivor testimonies. They are predominantly in Yiddish or Hebrew, with growing English translations since the 1990s. Necrologies make them invaluable for genealogy.[4] [5]

Publishing and Access

First appearing in the U.S. in Yiddish around 1943, production peaked in Israel during the 1950s-1970s, with over 60% in Hebrew. Small print runs make originals rare, but digitization projects by institutions like the New York Public Library, Yiddish Book Center, and JewishGen offer online access to hundreds.[6] [2] [1]

1. https://libguides.nypl.org/yizkorbooks/about
2. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yizkor_books
3. https://library.pdx.edu/research/special-collections-university-archives/yizkor-collection/about-yizkor-books/
4. https://www.yiddishbookcenter.org/collections/yizkor-books
5. https://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/
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7. https://www.library.jhu.edu/news/2025/06/yizkor-books-traveling-homelands-and-portable-memorials/
8. https://www.ushmm.org/online/hsv/source_view.php

9. https://www.facebook.com/groups/tracingthetribe/posts/10160081275645747/