

THE HOLOCAUST

THE GHETTOS AND CONCENTRATION CAMPS

1939

- Confining Jews in ghettos was not Hitler's brainchild. For centuries, Jews had faced persecution, and were often forced to live in designated areas called ghettos . The Nazis' ghettos differed, however, in that they were a preliminary step in the annihilation of the Jews, rather than a method to just isolate them from the rest of society. As the war against the Jews progressed, the ghettos became transition areas, used as collection points for deportation to death camps and concentration camps.

1940

- Hitler incorporated the western part of Poland into Germany according to race doctrine. He intended that Poles were to become the slaves of Germany and that the two million Jews therein were to be concentrated in ghettos in Poland's larger cities. Later this would simplify transport to the death camps. Nazi occupation authorities officially told the story that Jews were natural carriers of all types of diseases, especially typhus, and that it was necessary to isolate Jews from the Polish community. Jewish neighborhoods thus were transformed into prisons. The five major ghettos were located in Warsaw , Łódź, Kraków, Lublin, and Lvov.
- On November 23, 1939 General Governor Hans Frank issued an ordinance that Jews ten years of age and older living in the General Government had to wear the Star of David on armbands or pinned to the chest or back. This made the identification of Jews easier when the Nazis began issuing orders establishing ghettos.

SEGREGATION



In Warsaw, a street sign states, "Jews are forbidden to walk on this side of the street."



Jews carried whatever personal belongings they could as they left in mass deportations from Plonsk, a town 50 miles northwest of Warsaw, Poland.

*Photo credit: Mieczystwo Walka, Zagłada Żydów Polsce 1939-1945.
Poland. No. 65.*

On November 14, 1939,
the President of Łódź
decreed that all Jews
must wear arm bands or
badges with a Jewish
star.

Photo credit:

*Meczenstwo Walka,
Zagłada Żydów Polsce
1939-1945. Poland. No.
43.*



In Cracow, Poland, as decreed on March 1, 1940, Jews could only ride in certain areas of the streetcar. The sign indicates which section was for Jews (*FÜR JUDEN*) and which was for non-Jews (*FÜR NICHT JUDEN*).

Photo credit: Mecenstwo Walka, Zagłada Żydów Polsce 1939-1945. Poland. No. 51.



1941

- In total, the Nazis established 356 ghettos in Poland, the Soviet Union, the Baltic States, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Hungary between 1939 and 1945. There was no uniformity to these ghettos. The ghettos in small towns were generally not sealed off, which was often a temporary measure used until the residents could be sent to bigger ghettos.
- Larger cities had closed ghettos, with brick or stone walls, wooden fences, and barbed wire defining the boundaries. Guards were placed strategically at gateways and other boundary openings. Jews were not allowed to leave the so-called "Jewish residential districts," under penalty of death.
- All ghettos had the most appalling, inhuman living conditions. The smallest ghetto housed approximately 3,000 people. Warsaw, the largest ghetto, held 400,000 people. Łódź, the second largest, held about 160,000. Other Polish cities with large Jewish ghettos included Białystok, Częstochowa, Kielce, Kraków, Lublin, Lvów, Radom, and Vilna.

1942

- Many of the ghetto dwellers were from the local area. Others were from neighboring villages. In October 1941, general deportations began from Germany to major ghettos in Poland and further east. Also, Jews from Austria and the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia were sent to the ghettos.
- Ghetto life was wretched. The ghettos were filthy, with poor sanitation. Extreme overcrowding forced many people to share a room. Disease was rampant. Staying warm was difficult during bitter cold winters without adequate warm clothes and heating fuel. Food was in such short supply that many slowly starved to death.
- Even in the midst of these horrible conditions, many ghetto dwellers resisted dehumanization. Parents continued to educate their children, although it was considered an illegal activity. Some residents secretly continued to hold religious services and observe Jewish holidays.
- The Nazis established the Theresienstadt (or Terezín) ghetto in northwestern Czechoslovakia as a so-called model Jewish settlement to counter rumors in the international community about the poor conditions in the ghettos. Flower gardens, cafés, and schools were constructed to demonstrate to visiting International Red Cross inspectors and audiences of Nazi propaganda films the humane conditions of a "typical" ghetto. Terezín also functioned as a transit camp for many who were later sent to Auschwitz or other death camps.

1942 (CONTINUED)

- In January 1942, SS official Reinhard Heydrich held a meeting of Nazi government officials to present the Final Solution. At this meeting, known as the Wannsee Conference, the Nazi officials agreed to SS plans for the transport and destruction of all 11 million Jews of Europe. The Nazis would use the latest in twentieth century technology, cost efficient engineering and mass production techniques for the sole purpose of killing off the following racial groups: Jews, Russian prisoners of war, and Gypsies (Sinti-Roma). Their long-range plans, unrealized, included targeting some 30 million Slavs for death.
- Starting early in 1942, the Jewish genocide (sometimes called the Judeocide) went into full operation. Auschwitz 2 (Birkenau), Treblinka, Belzec, and Sobibór began operations as death camps. There was no selection process; Jews were destroyed upon arrival.

THE RESULTS

- Ultimately, the Nazis were responsible for the deaths of some 2.7 million Jews in the death camps. These murders were done secretly under the ruse of resettlement. The Germans hid their true plans from citizens and inhabitants of the ghettos by claiming that Jews were being resettled in the East. They went so far as to charge Jews for a one-way train fare and often, just prior to their murder, had the unknowing victims send reassuring postcards back to the ghettos. Thus did millions of Jews go unwittingly to their deaths with little or no resistance.
- The total figure for the Jewish genocide, including shootings and the camps, was between 5.2 and 5.8 million, roughly half of Europe's Jewish population, the highest percentage of loss of any people in the war. About 5 million other victims perished at the hands of Nazi Germany.

Concentration Camps in Europe

