

MISSION STATEMENT

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is America's national institution for the documentation, study, and interpretation of Holocaust history, and serves as this country's memorial to the millions of people murdered during the Holocaust.

The Holocaust was the state-sponsored, systematic persecution and annihilation of European Jewry by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945. Jews were the primary victims --- six million were murdered; Gypsies, the handicapped, and Poles were also targeted for destruction or decimation for racial, ethnic, or national reasons. Millions more, including homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Soviet prisoners of war, and political dissidents also suffered grievous oppression and death under Nazi tyranny.

The Museum's primary mission is to advance and disseminate knowledge about this unprecedented tragedy; to preserve the memory of those who suffered; and to encourage its visitors to reflect upon the moral and spiritual questions raised by the events of the Holocaust as well as their own responsibilities as citizens of a democracy.

Chartered by a unanimous Act of Congress in 1980 and located adjacent to the National Mall in Washington, D.C., the Museum strives to broaden public understanding of the history of the Holocaust through multifaceted programs: exhibitions; research and publication; collecting and preserving material evidence, art, and artifacts relating to the Holocaust; annual Holocaust commemorations known as the Days of Remembrance; distribution of educational materials and teacher resources; and a variety of public programming designed to enhance understanding of the Holocaust and related issues, including those of contemporary significance.

HOLOCAUST LEARNING CENTER

◀ | CONTENTS | PRINT



Nordrhein-Westfaelisches Hauptstaatsarchiv
Duesseldorf

A writer from
Duesseldorf who was
arrested for
homosexuality.
Duesseldorf,
Germany, 1938.
See more photographs

PERSECUTION OF HOMOSEXUALS IN THE THIRD REICH

While male homosexuality remained illegal in Weimar Germany under Paragraph 175 of the criminal code, German homosexual-rights activists became worldwide leaders in efforts to reform societal attitudes that condemned homosexuality. Many in Germany regarded the Weimar Republic's toleration of homosexuals as a sign of Germany's decadence. The Nazis as moral crusaders who wanted to stamp out the "vice" of homosexuality from Germany in order to help win the racial struggle. Once they took power in 1933, the Nazis intensified persecution of German male homosexuals. Persecution ranged from the dissolution of homosexual organizations to internment in concentration camps.

The Nazis believed that male homosexuals were weak, effeminate men who could not fight for the German nation. They saw homosexuals as unlikely to produce children and increase the German birthrate. The Nazis held that inferior races produced more children than "Aryans," so anything that diminished Germany's reproductive potential was considered a racial danger.

SS chief Heinrich Himmler directed the increasing persecution of homosexuals in the Third Reich. **Lesbians** were not regarded as a threat to Nazi racial policies and were generally not targeted for persecution. Similarly, the Nazis generally did not target non-German homosexuals unless they were active with German partners. In most cases, the Nazis were prepared to accept former homosexuals into the "racial community" provided that they became "racially conscious" and gave up their lifestyle.

On May 6, 1933, students led by Storm Troopers (Sturmabteilung; SA) broke into the Institute for Sexual Science in Berlin and confiscated its unique library. Four days later, most

of this collection of over 12,000 books and 35,000 irreplaceable pictures was destroyed along with thousands of other "degenerate" works of literature in the book burning in Berlin's city center. The remaining materials were never recovered. Magnus Hirschfeld, the founder of the Institute and a pioneer in the scientific study of human sexuality, was lecturing in France at the time and chose not to return to Germany.

**Friedrich-Paul was born in the
old trading city of Luebeck in
northern ...**

Personal stories



The destruction of the Institute was a first step toward eradicating an openly gay or lesbian culture from Germany. Police closed bars and clubs such as the "Eldorado" and banned publications such as *Die Freundschaft* (Friendship). In this early stage the Nazis drove homosexuals underground, destroying their networks of support. In 1934, the Gestapo (secret state police) instructed local police forces to keep lists of all men engaged in homosexual activities. Police in many parts of Germany had in fact been doing this for years. The Nazis used these "pink lists" to hunt down individual homosexuals during police actions.

On June 28, 1935, the Ministry of Justice revised Paragraph 175. The revisions provided a legal basis for extending Nazi persecution of homosexuals. Ministry officials expanded the category of "criminally indecent activities between men" to include any act that could be construed as homosexual. The courts later decided that even intent or thought sufficed. On October 26, 1936, Himmler formed within the Security Police the Reich Central Office for Combating Abortion and Homosexuality. Josef Meisinger, executed in 1947 for his brutality in occupied Poland, led the new office. The police had powers to hold in protective custody or preventive arrest those deemed dangerous to Germany's moral fiber, jailing indefinitely--without trial--anyone they chose. In addition, homosexual prisoners just released from jail were immediately re-arrested and sent to concentration camps if the police thought it likely that they would continue to engage in homosexual acts.

From 1937 to 1939, the peak years of the Nazi persecution of homosexuals, the police increasingly raided homosexual meeting places, seized address books, and created networks of informers and undercover agents to identify and arrest suspected homosexuals. On April 4, 1938, the Gestapo issued a directive indicating that men convicted of homosexuality could be incarcerated in concentration camps. Between 1933 and 1945 the police arrested an estimated 100,000 men as homosexuals. Most of the 50,000 men sentenced by the courts spent time in

regular prisons, and between 5,000 and 15,000 were interned in concentration camps.

The Nazis interned some homosexuals in concentration camps immediately after the seizure of power in January 1933. Those interned came from all areas of German society, and often had only the cause of their imprisonment in common. Some homosexuals were interned under other categories by mistake, and the Nazis purposefully miscategorized some political prisoners as homosexuals. Prisoners marked by pink triangles to signify homosexuality were treated harshly in the camps. According to many survivor accounts, homosexuals were among the most abused groups in the camps.

Because some Nazis believed homosexuality was a sickness that could be cured, they designed policies to "cure" homosexuals of their "disease" through humiliation and hard work. Guards ridiculed and beat homosexual prisoners upon arrival, often separating them from other inmates. Rudolf Hoess, commandant of Auschwitz, wrote in his memoirs that homosexuals were segregated in order to prevent homosexuality from spreading to other inmates and guards. Personnel in charge of work details in the Dora-Mittelbau underground rocket factory or in the stone quarries at Flossenbuerg and Buchenwald often gave deadly assignments to homosexuals.

Survival in camps took on many forms. Some homosexual inmates secured administrative and clerical jobs. For other prisoners, sexuality became a means of survival. In exchange for sexual favors, some Kapos protected a chosen prisoner, usually of young age, giving him extra food and shielding him from the abuses of other prisoners. Homosexuals themselves very rarely became Kapos due to the lack of a support network. Kapo guardianship was no protection against the guards' brutality, of course. In any case, the Kapo often tired of an individual, sometimes killing him and finding another on the next transport. Though individual homosexual inmates could secure a measure of protection in some ways, as a group homosexual prisoners lacked the support network common to other groups. Without this help in mitigating brutality, homosexual prisoners were unlikely to survive long.

One avenue of survival available to some homosexuals was castration, which some criminal justice officials advocated as a way of "curing" sexual deviance. Homosexual defendants in criminal cases or concentration camps could agree to castration in exchange for lower sentences. Later, judges and SS camp officials could order castration without the consent of a homosexual prisoner.

Nazis interested in finding a "cure" for homosexuality expanded this program to include medical experimentation on homosexual inmates of concentration camps. These experiments caused illness, mutilation, and even death, and yielded no scientific knowledge.

There are no known statistics for the number of homosexuals who died in the camps.

Related Links

Nazi Persecution of Homosexuals in the Third Reich

USHMM Library Bibliography: Gays and Lesbians

USHMM Educational Resources: Homosexuals

USHMM Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies: 2000 Program on the Persecution of Homosexuals

Translation of Paragraph 175

Related Articles

Classification System in Nazi Concentration Camps

Mosaic of Victims

Copyright © United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C.

GERMANY 1933 - 1936

- 30 January 1933 Hitler appointed Chancellor of Germany.
- 28 February 1933 Suspension of freedoms of speech, assembly, press, and other basic rights.
- 20 March 1933 First concentration camp opens at Dachau.
- 1 April 1933 Nazi-organized boycott of Jewish-owned businesses.
- 7 April 1933 Jews excluded from government employment, including teaching jobs at all levels.
- 14 July 1933 New law provides basis for forced sterilization of handicapped persons, Gypsies, and Blacks.
- October 1934 First major wave of arrests of homosexuals throughout Germany.
- 16 March 1935 Military conscription introduced.
- April 1935 Many Jehovah's Witnesses arrested throughout Germany.
- 15 September 1935 Anti-Jewish racial and citizenship laws issued at Nuremberg.
- 6 February 1936 Winter Olympics open at Garmisch-Partenkirchen.
- 7 March 1936 German troops march unopposed into the Rhineland.
- 16 July 1936 Some 800 Gypsies interned near Berlin.
- 1 August 1936 Summer Olympics begin in Berlin.

Menu

Next

HOLOCAUST LEARNING CENTER

[◀ | CONTENTS |](#) [PRINT](#)

Jewish parachutist Hannah Szenes with her brother, before leaving for a rescue mission. Palestine, March 1944

[See more photographs](#)

Beit Hannah Szenes

WOMEN

The Nazis targeted both Jewish men and women for persecution and eventually death. However, women, both Jewish and non-Jewish, were often subjected by the Nazis to unique and brutal persecution.

Individual camps and certain areas within concentration camps were designated specifically for women. In May 1939, the Nazis opened **Ravensbrueck**, the largest concentration camp established for women. Over 100,000 women passed through Ravensbrueck by the time it was liberated in 1945. In 1942, a women's camp was set up at Auschwitz (where women deported from Ravensbrueck were the first prisoners). At **Bergen-Belsen**, a women's camp was established in 1944. Thousands of Jewish female prisoners from Ravensbrueck and Auschwitz were transferred to Bergen-Belsen.

Neither women nor children were spared from Nazi mass murder operations. Women perished beside men in German-occupied

Soviet territories, victims of the **Einsatzgruppe** (mobile killing unit) mass shootings. Women, especially those with small children, were often the first to be "selected" for gassing at extermination camps.

In ghettos and camps, the Nazis seized women for **forced labor**. Nazi doctors often used Jewish and Romani (Gypsy) women for sterilization experiments and other **unethical human experimentation**. In both camps and ghettos, women were particularly vulnerable to beatings and rape. Pregnant Jewish women often tried to conceal their pregnancies or were forced to submit to abortions.



Eva was the second daughter of five children born to Jewish parents. Her ...
Personal stories



See artifacts

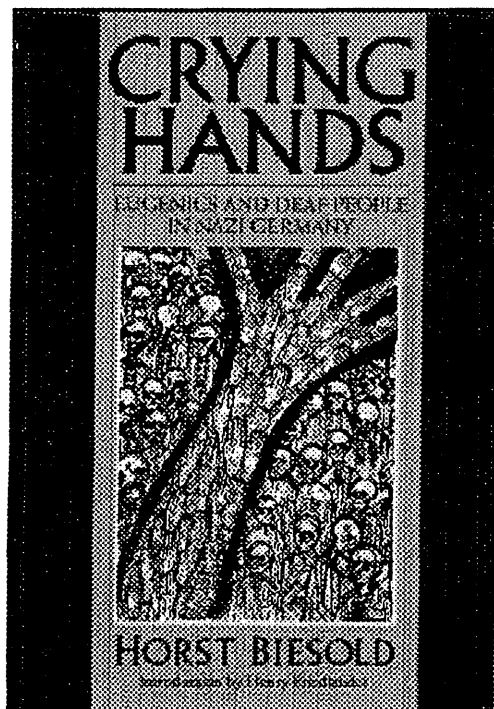
Doll from the Krakow ghetto

Some women—such as Haika Grosman in Bialystok—were leaders or members of ghetto resistance organizations. Others were active in camp armed resistance. In Auschwitz, Ella Gartner, Regina Safir, Estera Wajsblum, and Roza Robota supplied the gunpowder that Sonderkommando prisoners used to blow up a gas chamber and kill several SS men in October 1944. Other women were active in the aid and rescue operations of the Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe. Among them, **Jewish parachutist** Hannah Szenes and Zionist activist Gisi Fleischmann, whose Working Group (Pracovna Skupina) attempted to halt deportations of Jews from Slovakia.

Related Links

USHMM Library Bibliography: Women

HIGHLIGHTS



Crying Hands: Eugenics and Deaf People in Nazi Germany

by Horst Biesold

- ◀ [Consult the Library's annotated bibliography on the handicapped during the Holocaust](#)
- ◀ [Purchase from the Museum Shop](#)
- ◀ [Order from the publisher, Gallaudet University Press](#)

On July 14, 1933 Hitler and his cabinet put into effect a sterilization law for persons suffering from a variety of mental and physical disabilities. This law, called the Law for the Prevention of Offspring with Hereditary Diseases, became a cornerstone of the Nazi eugenics movement. It allowed for the forced sterilization and, in some cases, the murder of people afflicted with hereditary diseases. Along with people diagnosed with schizophrenia, epilepsy, so-called feeble-mindedness, hereditary blindness, severe hereditary physical deformity, severe alcoholism, and other ailments, the deaf were systematically turned in to local Nazi officials by teachers, nurses, social workers, and doctors. In most

cases they were sterilized. Some were forced to abort pregnancies. Others were murdered.

In ***Crying Hands***, Dr. Horst Biesold explores this tragic treatment of the deaf in Nazi Germany. Using archival research, including institutional studies and interviews with survivors, Biesold, a certified interpreter of German Sign Language, wrote the work originally as a doctoral dissertation, published in German as ***Klagende Hande***. This translation by Gallaudet University Press makes available for the first time in English a work that focuses on the persecution of the deaf in Nazi Germany. The presentation and organization of the German original have been edited. Segments dealing with the efforts by survivors to gain compensation from the government have been removed, and personal names have been altered to protect individuals' privacy. What remains is a painful story of mutilation, hidden suffering, and betrayal.

Biesold begins by discussing the Social Darwinistic origins of the eugenics movement in Germany and America. When the National Socialists came to power, they adopted eugenics as a national policy to stop what they called "hereditary diseases." Despite the debates over the genetic origins of deafness, it became classified as a hereditary disease in Nazi Germany. Consequently, the deaf were targeted for sterilization and other forced procedures.

Biesold presents the results of a questionnaire that he distributed in Germany during his lectures and presentations. Testimony and data gathered from the 1,215 questionnaires completed by deaf survivors of the

Nazi's forced sterilization program demonstrate that teachers of the deaf in Germany's special schools actively supported measures against deaf people. Many letters are reproduced in the text to demonstrate this complicity between teachers, municipal officials, and the doctors performing these sterilizations. Biesold focuses on ten institutions, including hospitals, teacher training schools, and schools for the deaf, to show how the deaf were turned in by teachers and other employees for forced sterilizations or abortions, even when evidence showed that deafness had occurred due to an accident. Even the Reich Union of the Deaf of Germany (REGEDE), the leading social organization of and for deaf Germans, lost its independence under the Nazi regime and became collaborationist, informing on deaf individuals and promoting the idea of deafness as a hereditary disease.

Biesold includes a chapter on deaf resistance by teachers, doctors, and caregivers, but he argues that resistance to Nazi policies was minimal at best. In a chapter focused on the Jewish deaf in Germany, he demonstrates how Jewish schools for the deaf had become some of the best in Germany, but he further reveals that the Jewish deaf were the first to be turned in, not from pro-Nazi hearing persons, but from the Nazi deaf. In "Sterilization's Legacy," he addresses the post-war treatment of the survivors of this sterilization policy, their shame, the trivialization of their experience, and the long-term medical and psychological effects of the sterilization. A final chapter deals specifically with cases of deaf Germans put to death in the so-called euthanasia program.

The book's appendices include the text of the questionnaire Biesold distributed and an analysis of the 1,215 respondents by gender, age, and place of residence during the Nazi era, institutions attended, year of sterilization, age at the time of sterilization, place of sterilization, and agency or person who reported them for sterilization. Substantial footnotes, an index, the author's personal bibliography, and a bibliography of English works are included. Valuable additions include photographs, contemporaneous and historical data and analysis, official and private letters, and the forms used by teachers of the deaf, medical practitioners, and Nazi officials in handling such cases.

The book also includes a forward written by the publisher to explain editorial changes and highlight points made in the text; a translation of the author's preface to the German edition; and an introduction by Dr. Henry Friedlander, author of *The Origins Of Nazi Genocide: From Euthanasia to the Final Solution*. Friedlander's essay, available on the Gallaudet University Press Web site, places the persecution of the deaf within the context of the history of the eugenics movement and the Nazi racial hygiene laws and programs.

208 pages

ISBN: 1-56368-077-7

Call no: HV2748 .B5413 1999

The Library always welcomes suggestions for acquisitions. While we cannot guarantee that we will acquire the recommended title, we do