

Ghetto.

[This entry gives a general survey of the Jewish ghettos in Nazi-occupied Europe. For detailed descriptions of the life and fate of the ghettos, see under individual cities and towns; some of the major ghettos were those of Bialystok; Kovno; Lodz; Minsk; Riga; Vilna; and Warsaw. For information on Nazi-sponsored Jewish organizations in the ghettos, see Judenrat and Judischer Ordnungsdienst. On Jewish attempts to document their plight, see Lodz Ghetto, Chronicles of the; and Oneg Shabbat. Resistance in the ghettos is detailed in Fareynegte Partisaner Organizatsye; Resistance; Jewish; Warsaw Ghetto Uprising; Zydowska Organizacja Bojowa; and Zydowski Zwiazek Wojskowy.]

The word "ghetto" originally referred to a city quarter or street in which only Jews lived, confined and separated from the other parts of the city. The term had its origin in Venice, where in 1516 the Jews were forced into a closed quarter call the Geto Nuovo (New Foundry). Other Italian cities - with the exception of Leghorn (Livorno) - also put their Jews into ghettos, and the practice was adopted by towns in southern France that belonged to the pope; by several large cities in Germany; in Bohemia and Moravia; and in some Polish cities. The purpose of ghettoizing the Jews was to restrict contacts between them and Christians and to confine the Jews to certain economic activities. Inside the ghettos, the Jews lived their lives in accordance with their traditional customs. From the end of the eighteenth century, the forcible restriction of Jews to ghettos was gradually abandoned; the last ghetto to exist in Europe was the one in Rome, which came to an end in 1870, when papal rule of the city was terminated.

Separate city quarters, on a voluntary or compulsory basis, for both Jews and Christians existed in many Muslim countries until the twentieth century. For the most part, the Jews lived in separate quarters of their own free will and were not barred from residing in other parts of the city. In more recent times the term "ghetto" came to be applied to urban areas inhabited by blacks in the

United States and South Africa and to quarters inhabited by any minority that was oppressed and living in slum conditions.

None of these forms of ghetto can be compared to the ghettos established by the Germans in the countries they occupied in World War II. These were not designed to serve as a separate area for Jewish habitation; they were merely a transitional phase in a process that was to lead to the "Final Solution" of the Jewish question. The Nazi-instituted ghettos were, in fact, camps where the Jews were held under duress, with their internal life and organization imposed on them and enforced, through violent means, from the outside, by the Nazi regime. The ghettos were introduced after the outbreak of the war in the towns and cities of Eastern Europe - in Poland, the Baltic States, and the occupied parts of the Soviet Union. The ghetto established in Amsterdam, which was not a closed ghetto; the houses in Budapest marked as "Jewish" in the final stage of the war; and the Theresienstadt camp, near Prague, differed in their form and structure from the ghettos in eastern Europe, and are not included in this survey.

Nazi-instituted Ghettos during the War: There is no record of any general order having been issued for the establishment of ghettos, and it may be assumed that they were the result of local initiative. True, Reinhard Heydrich's directive of September 21, 1939, on the policy to be adopted toward the Jews in the occupied territories, stated that "the concentration of the Jews in the cities may require, for reasons of general police security, that orders be issued prohibiting Jews from entering certain parts of the cities; also, while taking into consideration the needs of the economy, Jews will not be permitted to leave the ghetto after a certain time in the evening, and so on." The directive, however, did not contain a specific order for the establishment of ghettos, and Heydrich apparently used the term to refer to the Jewish quarters existing at the time in Polish cities. At any rate, when Hans Frank became responsible for the Generalgouvernement, he did not issue a general order providing for the creation of ghettos, as he did with regard to Judenrate (Jewish councils; see Judenrat), the Jewish badge, and the forced-labor system.

As a result, the ghettos in the various parts of occupied Poland were not set up at one and the same time, nor was there uniformity in the method of separating the ghettos from the outside world, or in the internal regimes of the ghettos. The first ghetto in Poland, in Piotrkow Trybunalski, was started as early as October 1939, while the ghetto in Lodz, Poland's second largest city (situated in the Warthegau, the part of Poland that was annexed to the Reich), was closed on April 30, 1940, at which time it had a population of 164,000. The Warsaw ghetto, the largest in occupied Europe (Warsaw having contained Europe's largest Jewish community), was fenced in during November 1940; its population reached its maximum in March 1941, when it numbered 445,000. In Lublin and Krakow the ghettos were established in March 1941, followed in April by Radom, Kielce, and Czestochowa, the remaining large cities of the Generalgouvernement. In Silesia, an area that was annexed to the Reich, Jews were locked into ghettos only at the end of 1942 and the beginning of 1943, at the time when its Jewish communities were about to be annihilated. The Sosnowiec ghetto was established in October 1942. When the German invasion of the Soviet Union was in full swing, in the latter part of 1941, ghettos were set up in the areas captured from the Soviet Union - in Vilna, in Kovno, in the Baltic states, and in Belorussian towns. At the end of August 1941, the military administration in the Ukraine ordered that ghettos be established "in places with a relatively large Jewish population, primarily in the cities." In those towns and cities of Eastern Europe in which the Jews constituted a majority of the population, the establishment of ghettos ran into difficulties and took time. In the Soviet areas the establishment of the ghettos was preceded by massacres, carried out by the Einsatzgruppen; in some places, such as Vilna, the congregation of the Jews in a ghetto was planned as part of an operation, in which the next steps were to seize masses of Jews and to take them to sites that had been designated for their murder. In areas that had been part of the Soviet Union before World War II, the mass murder and annihilation of Jews were carried out as soon as the German army and the Einsatzgruppen reached the scene,

and only a few ghettos were set up; the largest was in Minsk, the capital of Belorussia, which had a maximum population of 100,000.

Euphemisms, Brick Walls, and Barbed Wire.

The Germans did not use the term "ghetto" in every instance in which they locked Jews into a separate quarter. In Piotrkow Trybunalski they did use the term in the order for the establishment of such a quarter, as they did in Lodz, where it was officially called the Litzmannstadt ghetto (the Germans used the name Litzmannstadt for Lodz). In Warsaw, Krakow, and other places they referred to the ghetto as the Judischer Wohnbezirk (Jewish residential quarter), carefully avoiding the use of any other term.

The methods by which the ghettos were locked in and guarded took various forms. The Lodz ghetto was enclosed by a barbed-wire and wooden fence and, in some places, a brick wall, with guards posted on both the inside and the outside of the dividing line. The Warsaw ghetto was surrounded by an 11-mile (18-km) wall, with guards posted at the gates and patrolling the length of the wall; the Krakow ghetto was also behind a wall. The Lodz ghetto was hermetically closed, non-Jews being able to enter only by special permission and Jews unable to leave at all; there was hardly any smuggling in the ghetto, in either direction. In the Warsaw ghetto, on the other hand, smuggling went on throughout its existence, by way of the wall or checkpoints, and there was also infiltration by individuals into the ghetto. In medium-sized cities and towns, there were ghettos that Jews were permitted to leave at certain hours of the day only, to make food purchases, while in other places it was possible to move in and out without special difficulties. Piotrkow Trybunalski, for example, did not have a fence and was not under guard, and hundreds of Poles were able to go back and forth, while the Jews had no difficulties in leaving. This situation, however, began to change at the end of 1941, and by the spring of 1942 the ghetto was locked in. When the deportations and the "Final Solution" were launched, most of the ghettos were put under lock and key. Under a decree issued in October 1941 by Hans Frank, chief of the

Generalgouvernement, any Jew found outside the ghetto without permission was to be put to death; on the basis of this order, Jews from Warsaw - including women and children - were executed at the end of 1941. Nevertheless, the smuggling did not stop for as long as the ghettos remained in existence, despite the cost in human lives.

A ghetto and its administration required the provision of services and institutions in which Jews had had no previous experience. In their cynical propaganda, the Nazis often described the ghetto as a form of self-government, a sort of autonomy that they had granted to the Jews. In addition to the Judenrate, which were created before the ghettos were established and without connection with them, the ghetto framework, as well as specific orders issued by the authorities, forced the Jews to organize a police force and postal services, to distribute food rations, and to provide work, housing, and health facilities - the kind of municipal and other services that had not previously been within the range of functions carried out by Jewish community organizations.

Reasons and Excuses.

The German authorities justified the introduction of ghettos on various grounds: they were to prevent the spread of contagious diseases by the Jews, to combat Jewish profiteering and political rumormongering, and the like. Some of these claims were unfounded and partly invented as excuses for their actions. A number of scholars maintain that the ghettos were designed to serve as an indirect instrument of destruction, as a means of physically destroying the Jews by denying them the basic necessities of life, rather than by the use of lethal weapons. The situation in the two large ghettos - Lodz and Warsaw - seems to support this thesis. In 1941 and 1942, 112,463 persons died in the two ghettos of starvation and disease, which means that 20 percent of the population perished in the space of two years, while the

birthrate was practically nil. Joseph Goebbels spoke of the ghettos as Todeskisten ("death crates"), and Hans Frank, in August 1942, stated: "Clearly, we are sentencing 1.2 million Jews [i.e., the Jewish population of the Generalgouvernement] to death by starvation; and if they do not die from hunger, we will have to adopt other anti-Jewish measures." When Frank made this statement he was already well aware of the "Final Solution" and its implications; previously he had said it would be worthwhile to exploit skilled Jewish laborers, who would be working practically for free. Senior Nazi officials in the Generalgouvernement had on several occasions suggested that Jewish food rations be increased to raise productivity. In the medium-sized cities the Jews in the ghettos suffered from severe shortages, from the hard labor forced on them, and from the overall intolerable conditions, but in many cases there was no death from starvation. It is correct to say that although the Nazis had no qualms about masses of Jews dying from hunger and shortages of other basic necessities, especially if they were not part of the needed labor force, no conclusive evidence exists that the ghettos were created for the purpose of the physical destruction of the Jews, or that in the course of time the Nazis sought to transform the ghettos into places where the total liquidation of the Jewish people would be carried out.

The "Final Solution" Implemented.

The ghettos established in the cities housed not only the local Jewish population and those classified as Jews according to the racial laws, but also refugees from other towns and villages, near and far. Thus, by the time the Warsaw ghetto was enclosed, in November 1940, ninety thousand refugees had been added to the city's Jewish population. In addition to Polish Jewish refugees, Jews from Germany, Austria, and the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia were also brought to the ghettos; at the end of 1941, twenty thousand Jews from these countries were deported to the Lodz ghetto, and thousands to the Riga, Minsk, and Warsaw ghettos. The Lodz ghetto, at one stage, also took in Gypsies, who were housed in a special section. Some places had more than one ghetto, or the ghetto consisted of several separate parts. In

most cases, two ghettos existed - one with a working population, the other for Jews whose annihilation was imminent. Such differentiation was instituted at an early stage, when the Einsatzgruppen were being deployed, as in Vilna. The procedure was also followed in the final stage of the liquidation of the ghettos; in Warsaw, for example, from the great deportation of the summer of 1942 until the final annihilation of the Jews in the city during the spring of 1943, there were three separate ghettos, or separate divisions of the ghetto. In Minsk, Jews brought in from Western Europe were confined to a ghetto of their own.

The liquidation of the ghettos coincided with the beginning of the "Final Solution," in the spring of 1942. The last ghetto to be liquidated was that of Lodz, in the summer of 1944. On July 19, 1942, Heinrich Himmler issued an order for the physical destruction of the Jews of the Generalgouvernement by the end of the year: "After December 31, 1942, no person of Jewish origin must be found in the Generalgouvernement, with the sole exception of those in the concentration camps [Sammellager] in Warsaw, Krakow, Czestochowa, Radom, and Lublin." Another Himmler order, dated June 21, 1943, provided that "all Jews who may still be found in ghettos in the Ostland must be confined in concentration camps." Most of the Jews taken out of the ghettos were murdered in the extermination camps, and only a small percentage were put into concentration and forced-labor camps in the latter stages of the war. Himmler's orders also specified that "the presence of the remaining Jews in labor camps is also to be regarded as temporary; they will stay there only as long as there is a need for the work they do and they are physically able to perform it."

All the Jews of the occupied countries in Eastern Europe were enclosed in ghettos, but when the territories in which ghettos had been established were liberated, in the Soviet Union, Poland, and Lithuania, not a single ghetto was left standing, in whole or in part.