

Life In The Ghetto



View of the Łódź ghetto residents crossing a pedestrian bridge. 1941.
USHMM, courtesy of Żydowski Instytut Historyczny Instytut Naukowo-Badawczy



Jews at forced labor constructing the wall around the Krakow ghetto. 1941.
USHMM, courtesy of Instytut Pamięci Narodowej

Once in control of Poland, the Nazis created ghettos to separate the over 3 million Jews from everyone else. The first ghetto, in the city of Łódź, used wooden fences topped with barbed wire to confine the Jewish population.

Primarily, ghettos were located in large urban areas. Jews were forced out of their homes, leaving most of their possessions behind. The ghettos were extremely overcrowded with deplorable living conditions. Starvation and disease were the norm.

Ghettos were governed by Jewish administrations, the *Judenrat*, under SS supervision. Within the ghettos Jews attempted to live their lives with some semblance of normalcy. Illegal underground organizations were formed, newspapers were published, classes or lectures held and religious services were conducted. This all occurred despite threats of punishment, possibly death, for such actions.

Theresienstadt, located near Prague in Czechoslovakia, was known as the “Model Ghetto.” Established in 1941, the ghetto was home to Jews from Czechoslovakia, Germany, Holland and Denmark. Under pressure from Denmark, the Nazis allowed a visit from the Red Cross in 1944. In preparation for the visit, the Nazis beautified the camp, planting gardens, painting buildings and renovating cultural buildings. The Red Cross was taken in by the charade and reported that the Jews were being treated well.

The ghettos were regarded by the Nazis as a temporary solution in dealing with the Jews. In reality, they were the last stop before extermination. As one survivor stated, “If Auschwitz was hell, Theresienstadt was the anteroom.” The same could be said of all the ghettos.

“Across the hallway there was a family with only two people. My father made a deal with them, he would pay rent for the whole apartment if they would give us the smaller room; also, he would buy a stove that the apartment didn’t have.

Szymon (my brother) was the only one that received permission to go to work...the ghetto was surrounded with a fence, with Jewish police inside and Polish police on the outside. Szymon had an I.D. that allowed him to go in the morning from the ghetto, but he had to be back in the evening.”

Abe Price

Memoirs of a Survivor: My Life Under Nazi Occupation



Still photograph of a street scene from the Nazi propaganda film, “The Führer Gives the Jews a City.” 1944.
USHMM, courtesy of Ivan Vojtech Fric

