

HOLOCAUST:

RESISTANCE, RESCUE AND SURVIVAL

The “Other” Victims of the Holocaust: Roma & Sinti (Gypsies), Poles, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Homosexuals, Handicapped

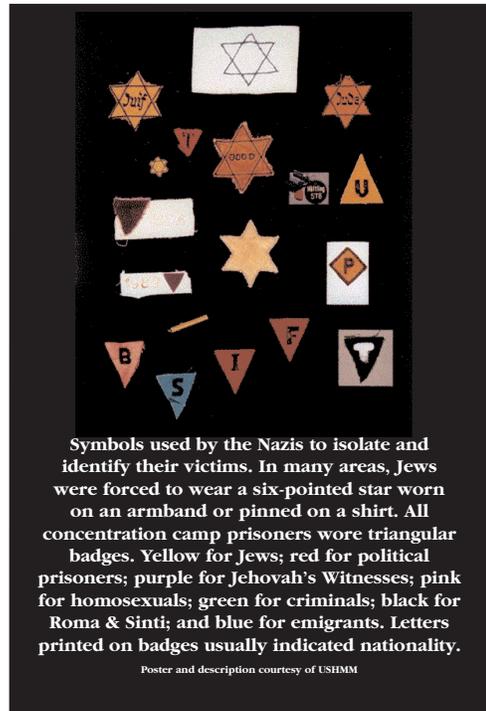
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Years ago, when I first took a course in Shakespeare, the professor compared the evil in a Shakespearean tragedy to the sticky, expanding mass in that old sci-fi film “The Blob.” Once the mass got started, he said, it consumed everything in its path. Extraordinary steps had to be taken to destroy it.

This analogy also applies to the genocide we call the Holocaust, a real-life program of evil. The dimensions of Hitler’s plan to produce the “**Master Race**” were far more expansive than most people realize. Many people believe the Holocaust was “something that happened to the Jews.” The Nazis targeted a wide range of groups. Each of these groups the Nazis perceived as “outsiders” or “asocials.”

Hitler saw life as a constant struggle between the weak and the strong, and war as the natural state of human beings. To that end, Hitler imagined that he could create a “Master Race” — a superior group of people. Those that did not fit Hitler’s image were to be eliminated. This philosophy provided the perfect excuse to take over other people’s land. In Hitler’s plan, Poland would provide the **Lebensraum** or “living space” the Germans needed to follow the Nazi order to reproduce on an epic scale. The Poles, who the Nazis considered higher than Jews, but lower than Aryans, were to serve as slaves until their eventual elimination.

The experience of one Polish woman in Gdynia was all too typical: the **Gestapo** arrived at her house without warning, gave her only a few hours to prepare her family for deportation, and demanded that she clean the house thoroughly for the Germans who would be occupying it. In the camps, Polish prisoners were, like the Jews, frequently worked to death. It is estimated that almost two-million, non-Jewish Poles were murdered by the Nazis. To the Nazis, these murders were acts of virtue because they were fulfilling Hitler’s vision of a world run by a “Master Race.”



Symbols used by the Nazis to isolate and identify their victims. In many areas, Jews were forced to wear a six-pointed star worn on an armband or pinned on a shirt. All concentration camp prisoners wore triangular badges. Yellow for Jews; red for political prisoners; purple for Jehovah’s Witnesses; pink for homosexuals; green for criminals; black for Roma & Sinti; and blue for emigrants. Letters printed on badges usually indicated nationality.

Poster and description courtesy of USHMM

The beliefs of Jehovah’s Witnesses had no place in a Nazi world. The Nazis oppressed and persecuted them because they refused to be drafted or to perform war-related work. One of the basic beliefs of Jehovah’s Witnesses is that one owes allegiance first to a Supreme Being and then to the state. For the Nazis, the will of the state was never to be questioned.

In a remarkably savage act of retaliation, **Helene Gotthold**, a devout Jehovah’s Witness, was beaten with metal rods until she miscarried and was eventually guillotined. In truth, the Nazis had little use for any form of Christianity and its humanitarian message. They preferred instead a world-view in which the “unfit” were ruthlessly eliminated.

There were many groups labeled as unfit: the disabled, because they threatened the creation of the Master Race; homosexuals, because they were “degenerates”; Gypsies and people of color, because they were non-Aryan. All of these groups suffered intense persecution consisting of sterilization and even mass killings. They were also often used as subjects in the brutal Nazi medical experiments.

So while Jews were by far the largest of the victimized groups, it is important to remember that other groups suffered as well. Once a culture begins thinking in terms of “us” and “them,” it becomes increasingly easy to identify “outsiders” and “asocials.”

activities

1. Dr. Blades explores the impact of the idea of an “us” and “them” mentality. Look through today’s Seattle Times and locate images or articles that create a separation between humans. Read the articles and study the images; then, write an opinion essay on why we separate into groups. Include your thoughts on if this is a good thing or bad, and why you feel the way you do.
2. This article talks about Hitler’s personal life philosophy as a “constant struggle between the weak and strong, and war as a natural state of human beings.” What is your own personal “life philosophy” — take some time to think/write about it and then, using images, words, headlines, etc., from The Seattle Times, and create a collage that illustrates your philosophy. Share it with your classmates.

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