

Teacher information sheet

Nazi Persecution



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In addition to singling out Jews for complete annihilation, the Nazis targeted many other groups for discrimination and persecution. Hundreds of thousands of lives were destroyed or changed beyond recognition because of Nazi Persecution, and many groups did not receive acknowledgment of their suffering for many years.

The Nazis persecuted different groups for different reasons:

1. Race ideology

Nazi beliefs categorised people by race, and Hitler used the word 'Aryan' for his idea of a 'pure German race', superior to all other people. Their devotion to what they believed was racial purity and their opposition to racial mixing partly explains their hatred towards Jews, Roma and Sinti people (sometimes referred to as 'Gypsies') and black people. Slavic people, such as those from Poland and Russia, were considered inferior and were targeted because they lived in areas needed for German expansion.

2. Eugenics

The pseudoscientific field of eugenics aimed to 'improve' the gene pool of the population by selective breeding of individuals with desirable traits. These ideas were used to justify the Nazis' persecution of people they deemed to be disabled, either mentally or physically, as well as gay people.

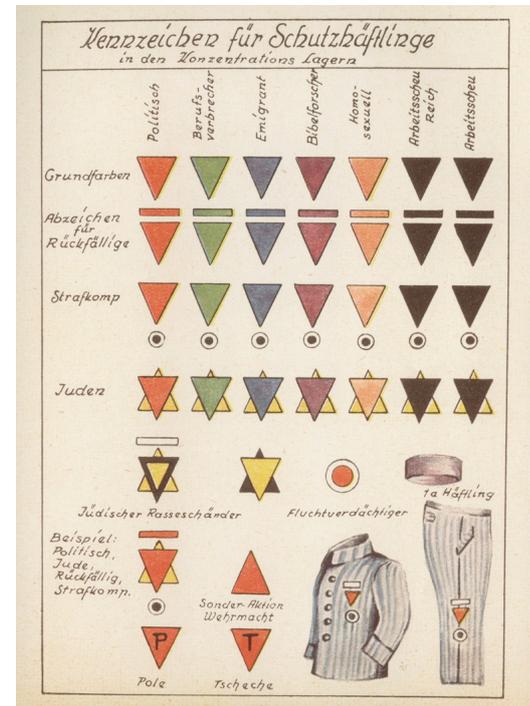
3. Ideological differences

Political opponents - primarily communists, trade unionists and social democrats, as well as those whose religious beliefs conflicted with Nazi ideology, such as Jehovah's Witnesses, were also targeted for persecution.

Below are three examples of the experiences of different groups persecuted and murdered by the Nazis :

Roma and Sinti people

Europe's Roma and Sinti people (often referred to as 'Gypsies' historically) were targeted by the Nazis for total destruction. The *Porrajmos*, which translates to 'the Devouring', is the term used to describe the genocide of Europe's Roma and Sinti population by the Nazis. More than 200,000 Roma and Sinti people were murdered or died as a result of starvation or disease – around 25% of the pre-war population. Many more people were imprisoned, used as forced labour or subjected to forced sterilisation and medical experimentation.



Persecuted groups were given different colour badges in concentration camps

Disabled people

Severely mentally and physically disabled people, as well as those perceived to have disabilities, were targeted because of Nazi beliefs that disabled people were a burden both to society and to the state.

In 1933 laws were passed allowing for the forced sterilisation of people with conditions such as epilepsy, schizophrenia and alcoholism. Between 1933 and 1939 an estimated 360,000 people were sterilised.

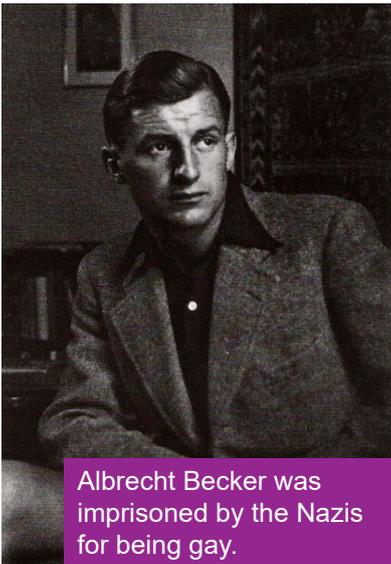
In 1939 the killing of disabled children began under the 'Aktion T4' programme. Many parents were unaware of the fate of their children, instead being told that they were being sent for improved care, then that they had died of pneumonia.

Following the outbreak of war in September 1939 the programme was expanded to include adults. Killing centres were established to speed up the process. Thousands of disabled people were killed in gas chambers disguised as shower rooms. Approximately 250,000 people were murdered by the Nazis because they were physically or mentally disabled.



Helene Melanie Lebel was murdered by the Nazis following a mental illness diagnosis.

Gay people



Albrecht Becker was imprisoned by the Nazis for being gay.

Repression against gay men and lesbians started within days of Hitler becoming Chancellor. Unknown numbers of German gay men and lesbians fled abroad, and others entered into marriages to appear to conform. The thriving gay culture in Berlin was lost.

The police made lists of homosexually active persons. Significant numbers of gay men were arrested, of whom around 50,000 received severe jail sentences in brutal conditions. Most homosexuals were sent to police prisons, rather than concentration camps, where they were exposed to inhumane treatment, including hard labour and torture, or they were experimented upon or executed.

An estimated 10-15,000 men who were accused of homosexuality were deported to concentration camps. Most died in the camps, often from exhaustion. Many were castrated and some subjected to gruesome medical experiments. Collective murder actions were undertaken against gay detainees, exterminating hundreds of people at a time.

Find out more...

Nazi Persecution: hmd.org.uk/nazipersecution

Other information for teachers: hmd.org.uk/education

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Learning from genocide - for a better future