

Most people are aware of the atrocities directed against Jewish people during WWII, however, many do not realize the extent of the genocide that was perpetrated by Nazi Germany against other groups. They deemed these groups to be 'undesirables' with no real future in the Nazi state. This was their rationale for exterminating various groups throughout the entire war. Genocide is defined as the deliberate killing of people who belong to a particular racial, social, or political group (Merriam-Webster). The atrocities which Jewish people endured are what is known by most people. While these acts of injustice are not at all something to be ignored or diminished as they are an extremely important and vital reminder of our history, it is also imperative to be cognizant of other groups who suffered greatly at the hands of the Nazis. The range of this discrimination was much broader since the acts of genocide targeted groups such as Polish citizens, mentally and physically handicapped individuals, homosexuals, and the Roma people.

The first group that saw their citizens decimated is the place where the war is truly said to have begun. Poland was invaded by Germany on September 1, 1939, and its citizens saw their homes and villages destroyed while they fled for safety. It is estimated that 3 million Christian Poles along with another 3 million Jewish Poles were killed during WWII-- a loss of 22% of their entire population (Silverstein). The occupation and genocide of Poland by the Nazis was known by the name Operation Tannenberg. This plan saw the Polish people executed as they were viewed to be subhuman by the German State. A lesser known plan, Intelligenzaktion Pommern, involved the elimination of Polish elites including teachers, doctors, priests, and community leaders. These subgroups of people were eliminated as the Germans viewed them as threats to their plans of occupying Europe (Intelligenzaktion Pommern). Hitler had stated that he viewed the Polish elites as threats who he felt could convince Poles to disobey their new German

leaders. This caused the death of over 100,000 Poles who might demonstrate powerful influence over their community members. This operation ended in 1940 and was then followed by the second stage of the Nazi Germany Campaign.

The subsequent stage was AB-Aktion which involved the mass disappearance and murder of more intellectuals and members of the upper class of Polish society. Throughout the spring and summer of 1940, Nazi authorities arrested over 30,000 Poles. Around 7,000 of these citizens who were teachers, priests, and community leaders were massacred throughout various locations of the Palmiry Forest. The remaining captured citizens were sent to various German concentration camps that included Auschwitz, Sachsenhausen, and Mauthausen (German AB-Aktion). In addition to the murder of teachers and priests, the Germans also authorized the mass slaughter of 22,000 Polish Military officers. These two stages of the Nazi Campaign were seen as a pre-emptive strike to scatter members of the Polish resistance. The Nazis believed this action would prevent the Polish people from revolting by destroying the leadership of the Poles. They felt this was imperative for the beginning of the Nazi invasion of France.

Homosexuals, mainly gay males and lesbians to a lesser degree, were another oft-overlooked victim of the atrocities of WWII at the hands of the Germans. In 1933, when Hitler first took office, he banned all homosexual organizations in an attempt to lessen their influence because the Germans believed that homosexuality weakened the Aryan race and feared that this was an infection that could become an epidemic affecting the country's youth. In 1935, the Nazi administration revised Paragraph 175 of the German criminal code in order to make a wide array of behaviors between men illegal (Paragraph 175). The Schutzstaffel or SS drew up "Pink Lists" in order to embark on a crackdown of homosexual men and women. Homosexuals were required to wear a pink triangle to identify them. This identification system allowed the Nazis to track

down homosexuals. Many were sent to mental hospitals as the Nazis believed they could cure homosexuality as if it were an illness. In addition, others were sent to concentration camps where an estimated 55,000 were executed (Persecution of Homosexuals). While in concentration camps, the prisoners were segregated in order to prevent homosexuality from spreading to other inmates and guards who saw it as a disease. Medical experimentation was often performed on prisoners as the Nazis were interested in finding a “cure” for homosexuality. This experimentation only led to the illness and death of prisoners.

A group that many do not realize were persecuted during WWII is the mentally and/or physically disabled. The Nazi government took many steps towards creating a master Aryan race with one of the first steps being the implementation of the Law for the Prevention of Progeny with Hereditary Diseases which called for the sterilization of all people who suffered from hereditary diseases. These included mental illness, learning disabilities, physical deformities, blindness, deafness, and epilepsy (People with Disabilities). The German psychiatrists and physicians were quick to assume that any mental or physical impairment was hereditary thus it needed to be eliminated in order to create what they thought was a master race.

Discrimination towards disabled individuals was intensified when Adolf Hitler initiated Operation Tiergartenstrasse 4 (T4) which was a medically administered program which resulted in 70,000 deaths between 1940 and 1941 when Hitler formally ended the program. However, he secretly ordered it to continue until the end of the war. In addition, a program known as, 14f13, involved psychiatrists from the T4 Operation being sent to concentration camps to purge the camps of prisoners who were deemed to be unfit for work in the camps. Mentally ill patients residing in asylums located in the occupied regions of Poland, Russia, and East Prussia were killed by the Einsatzgruppen squads who were the mobile killing squads of the SS (Nazi

Euthanasia Program). By the time it was truly ended, there was a death toll of approximately 275,000 (People with Disabilities). The Nazi propaganda furthered these atrocities by labeling them as “life unworthy of life” or “useless eaters” while also attempting to highlight their burden on society.

The Roma people are another group who was heavily discriminated against by the Nazis during the war. This group is more commonly known by the name Gypsies although this term will not be used again in the scope of this paper as many people deem it to be a racial slur. In addition to the mentally and physically disabled, the Roma people were included in the 1933 the Law for the Prevention of Progeny with Hereditary Diseases. This law allowed for the sterilization, arrest, and internment of the Roma people. This group was deemed to be of an inferior race by the Nuremberg Laws of 1935. These set of laws revoked German citizenship from those who were of Roma descent and also prohibited marriage between a member of this group and a member of the German race (Nuremberg Race Laws). This was done by the Nazis as they claimed them to be “nonpersons,” of “foreign blood,” and “labor shy” which resulted in them being deemed asocial. These are all unethical terms that the Nazis used in order to attempt to justify their purification process for a master race.

At the onset of the war in 1940, the Roma people were sent to the occupied territories of Poland. Around 1942, the decision was made to send nearly all of them to concentration camps with the majority going to Auschwitz or Treblinka. The minority of them who were not sent to the camps were shot by local police. At Auschwitz, the Roma were singled out even further as approximately 20,000 of them were sent to a special camp where they were separated from the other prisoners. Most of those who were sent there did not survive as they were sent to the gas chamber. It is estimated that 19,000 of the Roma who were sent to Auschwitz died at the

concentration camp (Roma Victims of the Holocaust). The exact number of Roma casualties at the hands of the Nazis is not known. However, it is estimated that out of the less than one million Roma living in Europe, approximately 220,000 of them were killed. This means that around 25% of the Roma living in Europe at the onset of the war had been killed (Genocide of European Roma).

The events of WWII are atrocities which the world should never forget. Many of the groups who were targeted in these acts of violence are not widely mentioned in discussions about the Holocaust. It is important to be cognizant of all the different groups in order to understand the vast scale of this tragedy. These acts of discrimination were perpetrated against numerous groups that Nazi Germany deemed to be inferior to the Aryan race. In addition to the Jewish people, these groups included the Poles, the Roma, mentally and/or physically handicapped, and homosexuals. All of these groups experienced acts of injustice that involved their rights being stripped away as they were forced from their homes and brought to death camps. Many of these people would not return from the concentration camps which would become the site of their demise. As a society, it is imperative that we are knowledgeable regarding those events in order to prevent horrible acts like these from occurring again. Elie Wiesel, himself a Holocaust survivor, stated in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, "I swore to never be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented."

The only way to prevent these types of events is to stand up for those who need help. Once we begin to stand up for all those who need help, we can truly begin to put an end to all of the injustice that occurs in this world. When these injustices are put to an end, we will be able to love one another which will truly make this world an amazing place for all on this earth. Peace

on Earth is truly a goal that is within reach for all of humanity. This can be achieved once we begin to stand up for all members of society regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, or any other differences. When we stand up for all of those regardless of differences, we will then be able to function as a peaceful unit which will make our society a place for all.

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