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The Concentration Camps Inside the Nazi System of Incarceration and Genocide

Part 4B: Women's Camps and Brothels

This document contains historical images
of the Holocaust and the concentration camps.

Please be advised that some of these pictures
and descriptions are graphic
and may be disturbing to viewers.



Ravensbrück was the largest concentration camp for women in the German homeland (Reich). There, more than 50,000 women were imprisoned from 30 separate countries.

Female forced laborers in the Ravensbrück concentration camp, located approximately 50 miles north of Berlin, Germany. *Photo credit: USHMM.*



The Płaszów concentration camp (near Kraków, Poland) was divided into subsections that separated men from women and Jews from non-Jews. There, they were all subjected to forced labor.

Jewish women at forced labor in the Płaszów camp. *Photo credit: USHMM #03390.*



Jewish women at forced labor in the Płaszów, Poland concentration camp, 1943. *Photo credit: USHMM #62979.*

Women were subject to forced labor under conditions that often led to their deaths. German physicians and medical researchers used Jewish and Roma women as subjects for unethical human experiments.

In both camps and ghettos, women were particularly vulnerable to beatings and rape. Additionally, pregnant Jewish women often tried to conceal their pregnancies or were forced to submit to abortions.



Himmler introduced concentration camp brothels where Nazi guards and officers sexually tortured female prisoners. Male prisoners were sometimes permitted to have sex with the trafficked female prisoners if they had a voucher for commendable work efforts.

Heinrich Himmler visiting a brothel at Mauthausen concentration camp. *Photo Credit: Bild 192-220.*



More than 500 “brothels” were established in Nazi-occupied Europe for use by German soldiers, Nazi SS, kapos, or male prisoners as a reward for hard work.

At least 34,140 women and girls were trafficked and subject to sexual terror during the Third Reich. This does not include thousands more who were raped by Nazi soldiers and police.

Heinrich Himmler, who oversaw the existence of rape camps, also made their use compulsory for homosexual prisoners as a method of “curing” them.

SS chief Heinrich Himmler reviews a unit of SS police in Kraków, Poland, March 13, 1942. *Photo credit: USHMM, courtesy of James Blevins.*



Women who were imprisoned for forced labor were often beaten or raped. Many were forced to have abortions if pregnancy resulted from their abuse.

Jewish women who were selected for forced labor at Auschwitz-Birkenau march toward their barracks. *Photo credit: USHMM #77370.*



Zofia Olkuszewska was a Polish political prisoner. She was born in Ponta Grossa, Brazil, on February 13, 1916 and worked as a clerk before being sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau on April 27, 1942. Zofia was transferred to Flossenbürg concentration camp in 1944 where she was eventually liberated.

Photo credit: Archive of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum.



Jewish women and children from Ukraine await selection on the ramp at Auschwitz-Birkenau. *Photo credit: USHMM #77255.*

Women and children made up a disproportionate number of Jews sent to immediate death at the extermination camps, as Jewish men had better chances of being selected for work.



During the deportation of prisoners, pregnant women and small children were regarded as “incapable of work” and were routinely sent to their deaths.

Jewish children and women from Subcarpathian Rus who had been selected for death at Auschwitz-Birkenau wait to be led to the gas chambers. *Photo credit: USHMM #77349.*



The Nazis segregated concentration prisoners by gender. Certain camps and compounds were often designated specifically for female prisoners.

Young female survivors look out from behind the barbed wire fence enclosing the women's camp at Mauthausen. *Photo credit: USHMM #38067.*



The largest Nazi concentration camp established for women was Ravensbrück, which the SS opened in 1939. The camp was administered by SS men, but all of the guards were Nazi women.

More than 100,000 women were imprisoned in Ravensbrück before the camp was liberated in 1945.

Female Romani (Gypsy) inmates stand at attention during an inspection of the weaving mill, a site of forced labor in the Ravensbrück concentration camp. *Photo credit: USHMM and Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz.*



Jewish women from Ukraine who were selected for forced labor at Auschwitz-Birkenau, march toward their barracks after disinfection and headshaving. *Photo credit: USHMM #77367.*

Female prisoners were largely kept in separate camps or specific compounds but were still subjected to dreadful conditions and extreme violence. Approximately 34,000 female prisoners died in the women's camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau between 1942 and 1943.



The Nazis frequently segregated concentration prisoners by gender within camps, and some camps were often designated specifically for female prisoners.

Young female survivors look out from behind the barbed wire fence enclosing the women's camp at Mauthausen. *Photo credit: USHMM #38067.*