



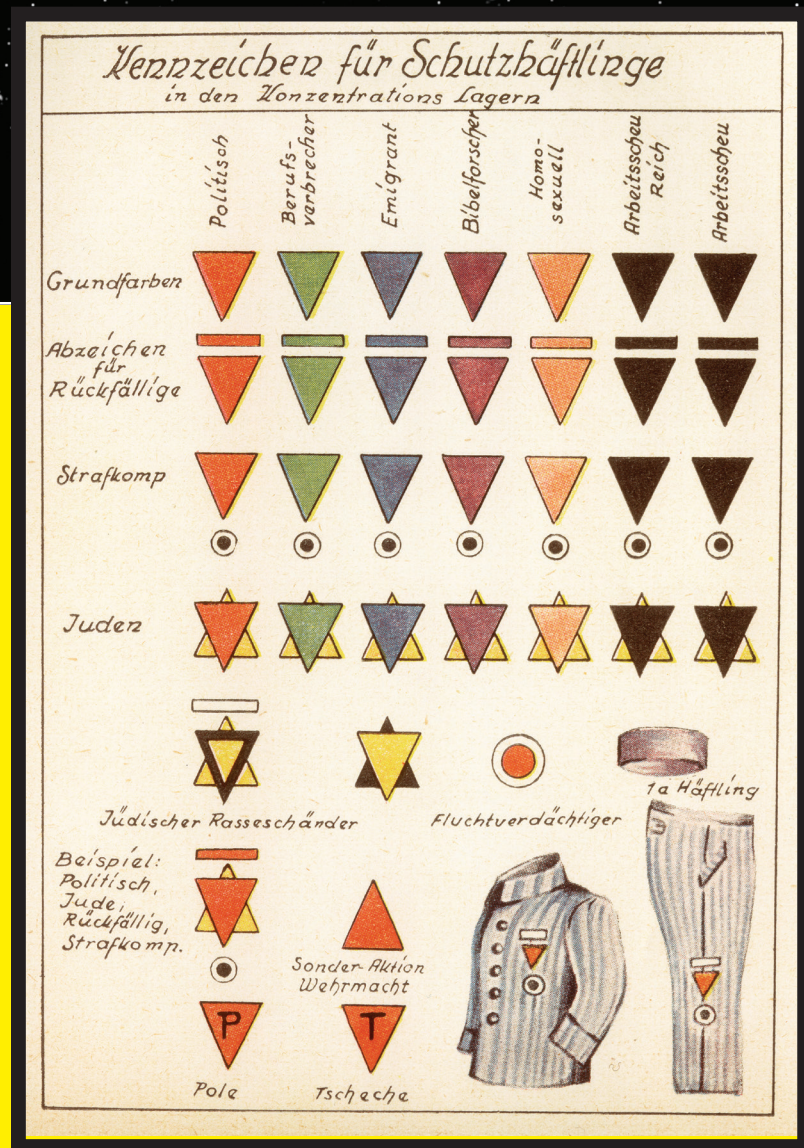
FROM THE STAR OF SHAME
TO THE STAR OF COURAGE:

THE STORY OF THE YELLOW STAR


The Harriet and Kenneth Kupferberg
Holocaust Resource Center and Archives

QUEENSBOROUGH 
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

On the cover: "I will bless you abundantly and make your descendants as countless as the stars of the sky..." A Jewish concentration camp detainee, branded with a yellow star, reflects on this divine promise made to Abraham. A promise which, despite the aims of evil men, would endure.



At right: Organizational chart of concentration camp badges (pg. 8)



FROM THE STAR OF SHAME
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THE YELLOW STAR

EXHIBIT CURATED AND TEXT WRITTEN BY:
RABBI ISIDORO AIZENBERG

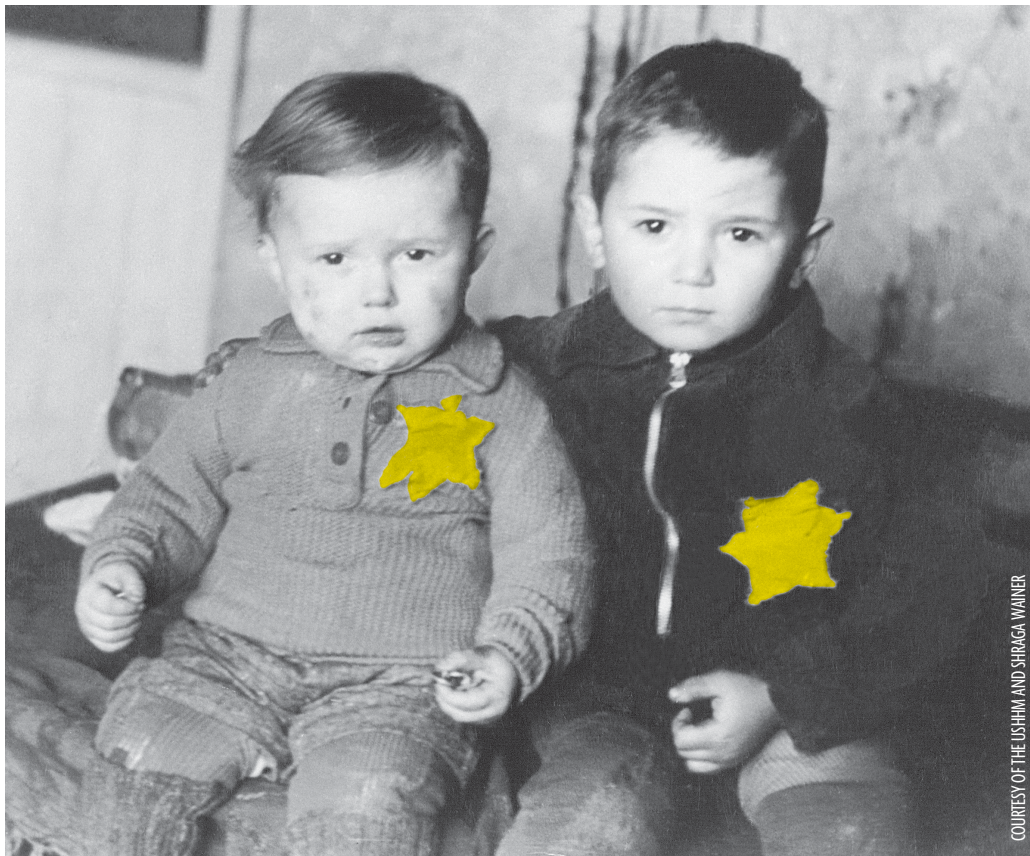
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COURTESY OF THE USHM AND SHRAGA WAINER

PORTRAIT OF EMANUEL (2 YEARS) AND AVRAM (5 YEARS) ROSENTHAL WEARING JEWISH YELLOW STARS IN THE KOVNO GHETTO. THE CHILDREN, DEPORTED IN THE MARCH 1944 "CHILDREN'S ACTION," DID NOT SURVIVE.

THE NAZIS' revival of medieval measures of discrimination against Jews — *“shows an unprecedented refinement in force and mercilessness, in disregard for the established principles of law and morals, in complete non-recognition of individual human dignity.*

“Viewed in this light one of the most recent decrees compelling all Jews in Germany and German-dominated territories to wear a yellow star as a badge of infamy, represents an exemplary instance for comparing genuine and modern medievalism (sic) in the sphere of Jewry legislation. It is indeed a very refined revival of one of the most harmful and objectionable regulations of mediaeval (sic) Jewry-law.”

— GUIDO KISCH, “THE YELLOW BADGE IN HISTORY” *HISTORIA JUDAICA*, OCTOBER, 1942



HISTORIAN GUIDO KISCH, during the height of the war, was already pointing to the medieval antecedents of the yellow star. These degrading symbols were first imposed in the Moslem world.

The origin of a distinctive mark, “of the most degrading—was the wearing of special clothes and signs and badges, to mark them off [the Jews] from true believers. The yellow badge...had its origins in early medieval Baghdad. This was one instance where the West learned intolerance from the East.”

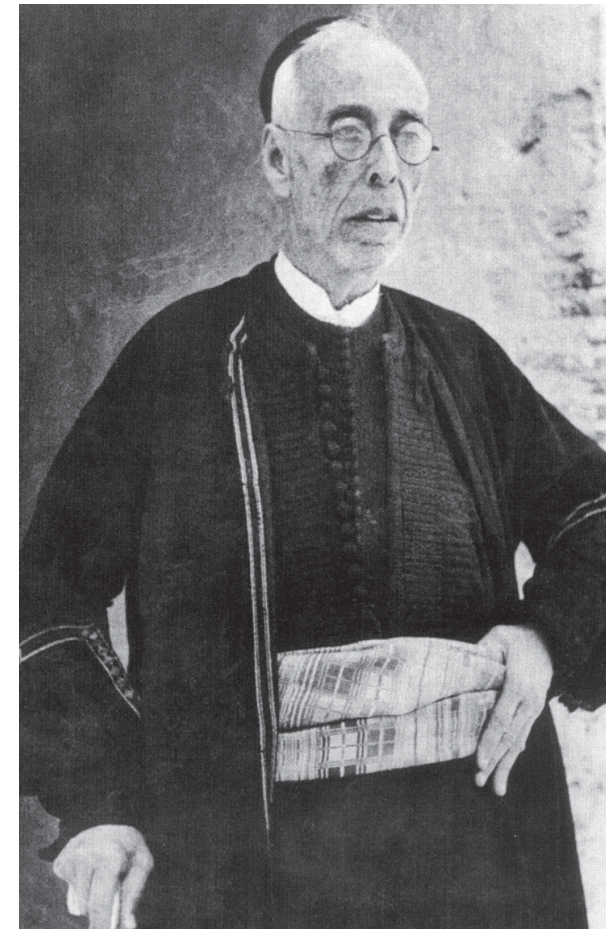
— BERNARD LEWIS, *SEMITES AND ANTI-SEMITES:
THE MUSLIMS AND THE JEWS*, P. 131

“Ahmad b. Talib, the Maliki qadi (a judge ruling in accordance with Islamic religious law) of Qayrawan (Tunisian town south of Tunis), issued an order for dhimmis (non-Muslim subjects governed in accordance with Muslim law) to wear a patch of white fabric on the shoulder of their outer garments. The patch for Jews had the image of an ape and the patch for Christians the image of a pig.

“In Mamluk Egypt, dhimmis were so-to-speak color coded by their outer garments, beginning with a decree issued in 1301. Christian men had to wear a blue turban, Jews a yellow one, and Samaritans, a red one, in clear contrast to the white turban worn by Muslims.

“Throughout the Islamic world in later medieval times, dress codes for the native non-Muslim population were...rigorously enforced. A Flemish traveler visiting Tunis in the second half of the 15th century observed that the Jews of Tunis have a special attire, which is different from that of the Moors; if they do not wear distinctive clothing they would be stoned; they sport a patch of yellow fabric on the head or the neck.”

— YEDIDA KALFON STILLMAN, *ARAB DRESS:
A SHORT HISTORY*, PP. 105, III, 114



MOROCCAN JEW IN BLACK ATTIRE. EVEN AS LATE AS THE SECOND HALF OF THE 19TH CENTURY, MOROCCAN JEWS WERE STILL SUBJECT TO THE TRADITIONAL DRESS CODE.

► **ARAB DRESS, P.118.**



NOT BE OUTDONE, Christian-ruled European lands gained inspiration from Moslem rulers, and also imposed degrading dress and marks on Jewish populations. On November 11, 1215, an assembly of 412 bishops, 800 abbots and priors convened in Rome at the Church San Giovanni in Laterano. Pope Innocent III (1198-1216) presided over this Fourth Lateran Council, one of the most important ecumenical councils of lasting influence on Christian faith and life. In canon 68, the conciliar decree ordained that, "*Jews and Saracens of both sexes in every Christian province and at all times shall be marked off in the eyes of the public from other peoples through the character of their dress.*" Graphic examples of how canon 68 was implemented abound.

A special 1267 Vienna city council session forced Jews to wear *Pileum cornutum* (a cone-shaped headdress, common in medieval illustrations of Jews).



A 14TH CENTURY STAINED GLASS AT THE ST. STEPHEN CATHEDRAL, VIENNA. JEWS IN CONE-SHAPED HATS STARING AT THE BRAZEN SERPENT (DEUTERONOMY 21:9).

► HEINZ SCHRECKENBERG, *THE JEWS IN CHRISTIAN ART: AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY*, P. 91.



ON JUNE 19, 1269, (Saint) Louis IX of France orders all Jews found in public without a badge (French: *rouelle* or *roué*, Latin: *rota*) to be fined ten livres of silver. The enforcement was repeated by local councils and spread to Italy.

In 1274 King Edward I of England enacted the Statute of Jewry, including the following regulation: "Each Jew, after he is seven years old, shall wear a distinguishing mark on his outer garment, that is to say, in the form of two Tables joined, of yellow felt of the length of six inches and of the breadth of three inches."



A CHRISTIAN WOMAN GIVES A JEWISH PAWNBROKER A CONSECRATED HOST, THE EUCHARISTIC BREAD, TO REDEEM A GARMENT (THIS RELATES TO AN ALLEGED PROFANATION OF THE HOST IN PARIS, 1290). THE JEW IS WEARING THE PRESCRIBED ROTA ON HIS RIGHT SHOULDER.

► MINIATURE IN *THE FLORENTINE CHRONICLE (AN HISTORICAL ACCOUNT) OF GIOVANNI VILLANI*, 14TH CENTURY. SCHRECKENBERG, P. 273.



AN ENGLISH JEW WITH THE TWO TABLES OF THE LAW. THE TABLES ARE ENLARGED IN CARICATURE. THE TEXT *INTERDICTA EST IUDEIS LICENTIA USURANDI*, JEWS ARE FORBIDDEN TO LEVY INTEREST, INDICATES THAT A TYPICAL MONEY-LENDER IS BEING DEPICTED.

► MINIATURE IN A CHRONICLE FROM THE REIGN OF KING EDWARD I. SCHRECKENBERG, P. 305.



"ALL JEWS ARE REQUIRED TO WEAR A YELLOW RING (AS SHOWN) ON THE LEFT SIDE OF THE CHEST OR DRESS WITHIN ONE MONTH OF COMING TO RESIDE IN ANY TOWN."

Thus read a 1551 decree issued in Vienna by Emperor Ferdinand I of Austria.



► FRIEDBURG STADTARCHIV XIIC, MONUMENTA JUDAICA B. 359. ALFRED RUBENS, A HISTORY OF JEWISH COSTUME, P. 104



ABOUT 388 YEARS following the decree of Emperor Ferdinand I and only a little more than 100 years since full emancipation had been accorded to German Jews, the Nazis began imposing similar decrees throughout Germany, Austria, and all the other European countries they overran.

Order by the District Chief of Krakow [south Poland]

I hereby order that as of December 1, 1939, all Jews over the age of 12 years in the District of Krakow are to wear a clearly visible mark of identification while outside their homes. This order also applies to Jews temporarily present in the District of Krakow for the duration of their stay.

For the purpose of this order, a Jew is considered to be:

- 1. whoever belongs or has belonged to the Mosaic religious community,*
- 2. whose father or mother belongs or has belonged to the mosaic religious community.*

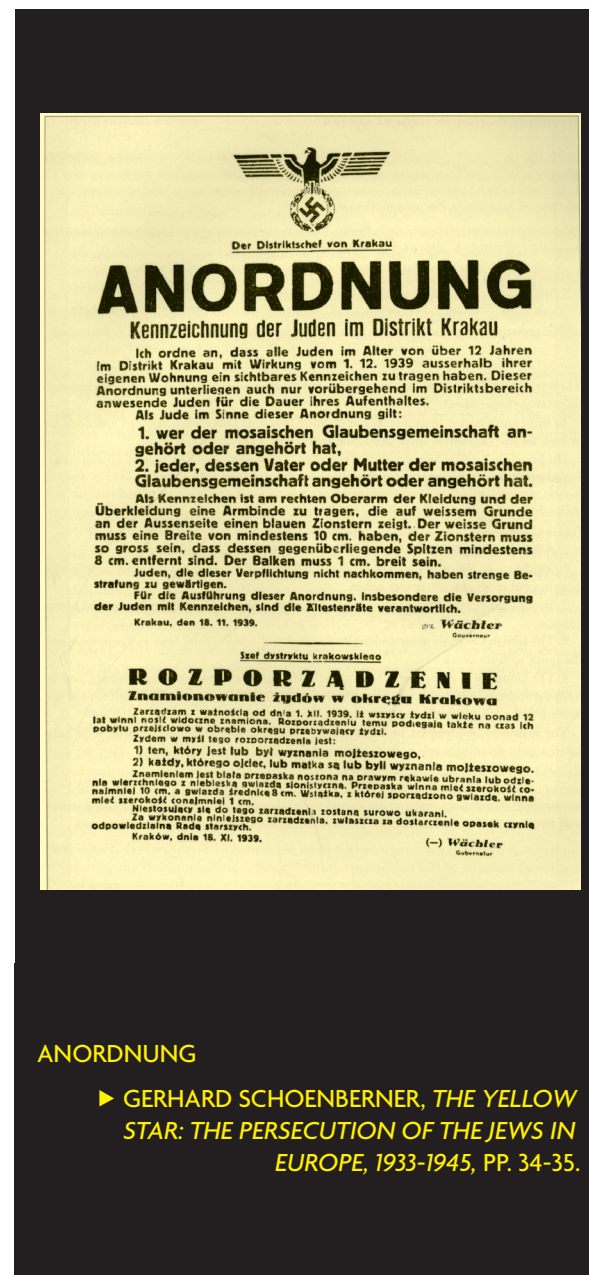
The identification is to take the form of an armband, to be worn on the upper arm of clothing and outer clothing, bearing on its outer side a blue Star of David against a white background. The white background must be at least 10 cm. [4 in.] wide. The star must be of such a size that there is at least 8 cm. [3 in.] between the opposite points of the star. The lines forming the star must be at least 1 cm. [.5 in.] wide.

Jews who do not fulfill this obligation are liable to severe punishment.

The Council of Elders are responsible for carrying out this order, in particular for supplying the Jews with the identification insignia.

Krakow, November 18, 1939

signed – Waechter (Governor)

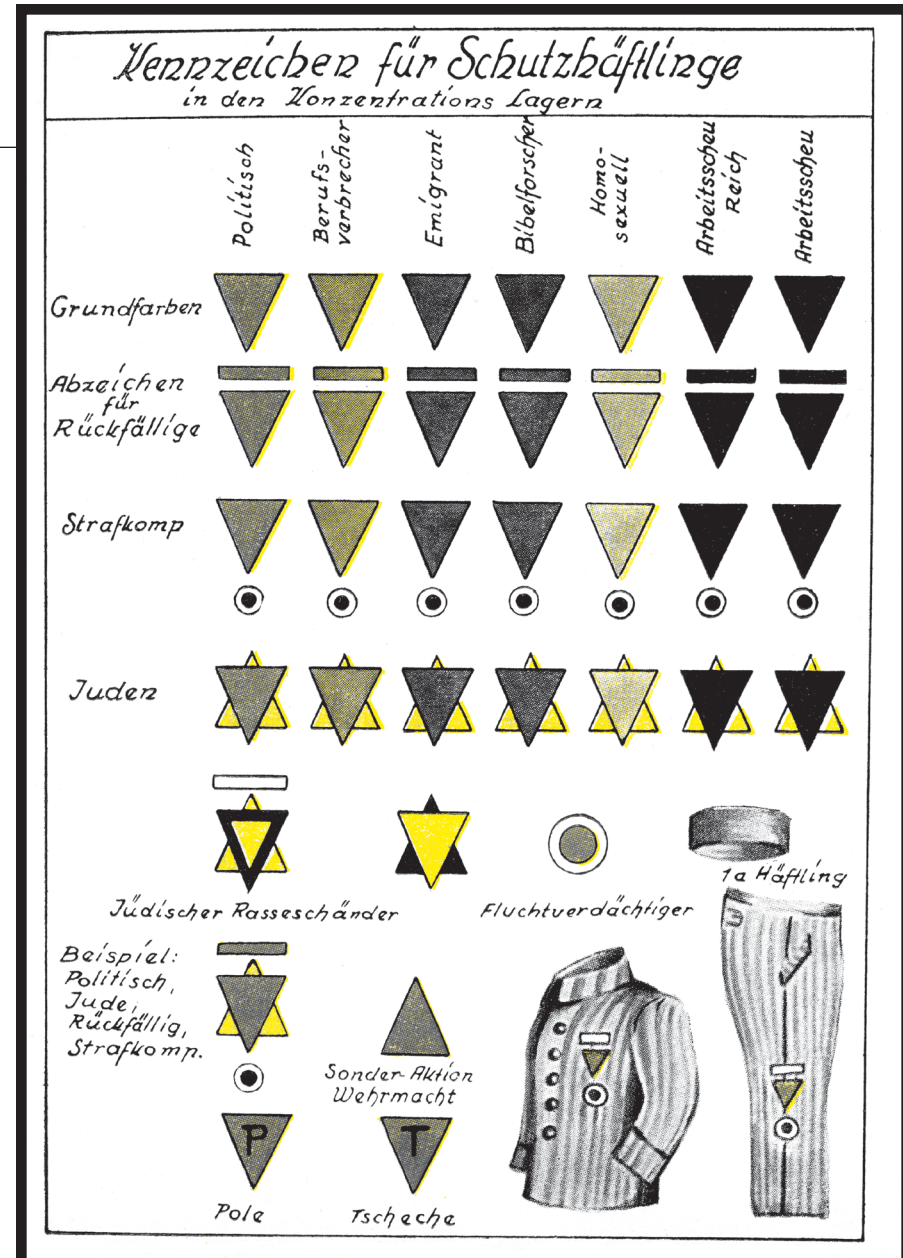




THE DISCRIMINATORY BADGES that Jews were forced to wear in terms of color and size were not uniform throughout German administered territories. For example, it was only through a decree issued on September 5, 1941 (*Reichs-Law Gazette*) that the yellow Jew-badge was made official and after that universally enforced throughout Germany. In addition, the Nazi regime developed a whole set of discriminatory insignia for all people it deemed racially inferior.

The horizontal categories list markings for the following types of prisoners: political, professional criminal, emigrant, Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexual, Germans out of work, and other nationalities out of work. The vertical categories begin with the basic colors, and then show those for repeat offenders, prisoners in punishment kommandos, Jews, Jews who have violated racial laws by having sexual relations with Aryans, and Aryans who violated racial laws by having sexual relations with Jews.

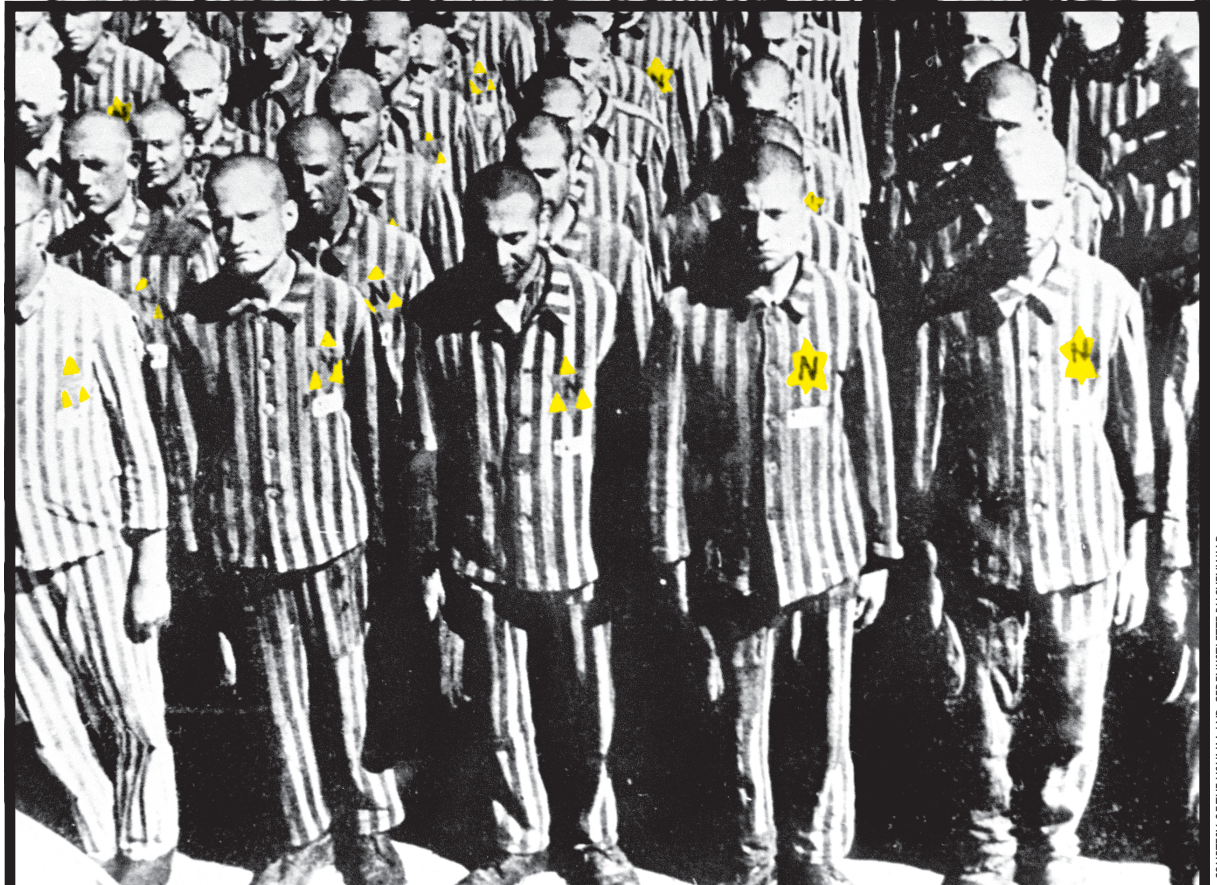
The remaining symbols give examples of marking patterns.



A CHART OF PRISONER MARKINGS USED IN GERMAN CONCENTRATION CAMPS, THIS PARTICULAR ONE FROM DACHAU, CIRCA 1938-1942.



ON FEBRUARY 28, 1941, 389 Jewish prisoners from Amsterdam and Rotterdam, many of them working class longshoremen, arrived in Buchenwald. All were immediately sent to work in the quarry and on construction projects, which led many to soon fall ill and die from exhaustion, exposure, and poor diet. On May 22, the remaining 341 Dutch Jews were transferred to the Gusen, Austria, concentration camp (a satellite camp of Mauthausen), where they were murdered.



DUTCH JEWS WEARING PRISON UNIFORMS MARKED WITH A YELLOW STAR AND THE LETTER "N," FOR NETHERLANDS, STAND AT ATTENTION DURING A ROLL CALL AT THE BUCHENWALD CONCENTRATION CAMP.



IF THE FORCED WEARING of the yellow star inside the concentration camps was degrading, how much more so must it have been in the public square.

During Kristallnacht (Nov. 9-10, 1938), a few hours before setting fire to the synagogue in Baden-Baden, 60 Jewish men, including guests at the renowned spa, were rounded-up and marched through the town in columns. While they marched, SS men yelled to the German spectators, "Here are the Jews. Do to them what you will!" No hand was raised against them. When the Jews reached the synagogue they were funneled up the staircase. Once inside the sanctuary they were forced to listen to a fellow Jew, gymnasium professor Dr. Flehinger, read selections from Hitler's *Mein Kampf* at the lectern from where the Torah is generally chanted. Afterwards, the Jews had to rehearse the "Horst- Wessel-Lied" (anthem of the Nazi party from 1930, and part of Germany's national anthem from 1933-1945) until they could recite the text perfectly. Forty of these Jews were later deported to Dachau.



JEWS UNDER ARREST BY THE SS ARE LED THROUGH THE CITY WHILE THEY ARE FORCED TO CARRY A YELLOW STAR ON WHICH IS MOCKINGLY WRITTEN "GOTT VERLAEST UNS NICHT," THAT IS, "GOD DOES NOT FORSAKE US."



CAN ONE POSSIBLY IDENTIFY with the feelings of discrimination and degradation that Jews must have felt when wearing the yellow star? Here is one such testimony. It was bequeathed to us in the diary of H elene Berr, a young French woman, murdered in Bergen-Belsen in April 1945, just before the arrival of the British liberation forces.

On June 1, 1942, she was told that she would have to wear the yellow star. *“At that moment I decided that I wasn’t going to wear it. I considered the star a disgrace and a testament to our obedience to the Germans. But this afternoon everything changed: I find that not wearing it is an act of cowardice that I must not commit, witnessing those who did. I just want to be always elegant and to look dignified, so that people will see what this is. I want to do whatever is most valiant. I believe that I’ll wear the star this afternoon.”* A few hours later, H elene wrote again: *“My God, I never believed that it would be so hard. I was very courageous the whole day. I walked with my head up, and I looked at people to their faces and into their eyes. But this is very hard. Aside, most people don’t look. The hardest is to find other people wearing the star.”*

— Rapha el Sorin, *Liberation*, Dec. 6, 2007



COURTESY OF THE USHMM AND DANIEL WELLNER

PICTURED ARE LUCIE WELLNER AND HER THREE CHILDREN, MARCEL (RIGHT), DANIEL (LEFT) AND MYRIAM, POSING IN ANTWERP, BELGIUM, SOMETIME BETWEEN MAY-SEPTEMBER, 1942, WEARING THE YELLOW STAR. THE WELLNER PARENTS DIED IN AUSCHWITZ. THE CHILDREN SURVIVED THE WAR HIDDEN BY CHRISTIAN NEIGHBORS.



COURTESY OF THE USHMM AND ROBERT ABRAMS

JEWS WEARING YELLOW STARS STAND IN A STREETCAR IN THE LITZMANNSTADT GHETTO, RADOGOSZCZ TRAIN STATION, SPRING 1942.

"I HALTED AT the next tram stop. The tram arrived. I got in. I had scarcely moved when the conductor came up. He looked at me, glanced at the star on my coat, shook his head and asked: 'Have you got a travel permit for Jews? No?' He pulled the bell twice, and the tram came to a halt."

— Cioma Schönhaus, *The Forger: An Extraordinary Story of Survival in Wartime Berlin*, p. 69



MAX JACOB (1876-1944) was a French poet and novelist descended from German Jews. He became a well-known art critic in Paris, joining the circle of Apollinaire and Picasso. In 1915 he converted to Catholicism. But after the German occupation of France in 1940, Jacob was arrested by the Gestapo and died later in the Drancy internment camp.

Jacob's conversion did not prevent his murder. Forced to wear the yellow star he wrote a poem, "*Amour du Prochain—Love of One's Neighbor*," translated from French by Wallace Fowle. "The mocking tone [of the poem] reflects the elegance of despair, a desire to give the reader the most exact idea possible of the station of hell to which this lover of his fellows has been brought. Now he must envy a toad that passes unremarked." [Salim Jay, "A Star is Worn," in *Yale French Studies*, N. 85 (1994), p. 54].

*Who saw the toad cross the street?
He's a very small man. A doll isn't smaller.
He drags himself on his knees.
Might you say he's ashamed? No, he has rheumatism.
One leg drags behind and he brings it forward!
Where is he going? The poor clown comes out of the sewer.
No one noticed this toad in the street.
At one time no one paid attention to me in
the street, and now the children make fun
of my yellow star. Happy toad! You
have no yellow star.*



COURTESY OF THE USHIMM AND FLORA CARASSO MICHAEL

PICTURE OF RACHEL AND JOSEPH CHASID WEARING THE YELLOW STAR IN SALONIKA, GREECE, 1942-1943



THE PHYSICAL AND VISIBLE stigmatization to which the European Jewish populations were subjected to was not limited to the wearing of the yellow badge. To further degrade the Jewish populations and to be able to convict non-Jews for unlawful business dealings with Jews, Jewish-owned stores were also forced to be marked with the yellow star.



"JEWISH BUSINESS"
SIGN WITH YELLOW
STAR OF DAVID

A JEWISH OWNED
BARBERSHOP IN LODZ
(POLAND)





JEWISH HOMES were not exempt from Nazi forced stigmatization. This picture is of a yellow star posted on the vandalized door of a Jewish residence in Berlin, sometime between 1933-1939. The nameplate on the door reads “Emil Israel Blumenfeld,” in accordance with the Nazi regulation that all Jewish males take on the middle name of Israel.





THE YELLOW STAR was also applied in many instances on Jewish identification cards. This card was issued by the Cernauti (Romania) County Office to Erika Neuman, authorizing her to remain in Cernauti rather than be deported. The card also includes her address, signature, and the numbers of her census certificate and population office registration. The card was signed by representatives of the police, the Bukovinan government, and the Jewish community.

WHY YELLOW? While not always that color, yellow was the prevalent sign of stigmatization. As an international sign of disease, a ship would display a yellow flag if there was illness aboard. In the Nazi mind, therefore, “Judengelb” (Jew-Yellow) was associated with the unhealthy, unnatural and alien. In addition, Guido Kisch writes, “Yellow seems to be the most conspicuous color and quickly and easily attracts attention. In the Middle Ages, the offenders to whom public attention was to be directed to deter others...or to point to insolvent debtors, had to wear a yellow patch. In Germany, prostitutes and concubines of clergymen were compelled to have yellow head-bands or veils. Hence yellow seemed also the most appropriate color to distinguish Jews.” (p. 116)





NAZI PROPAGANDA used the yellow star as a powerful symbol to defame Jews. This picture of a Nazi propaganda poster was entitled, “*Die Katze labt das Mausen nicht*,” that is, cats (Germans), don’t want the mice (Jews). The text with the word “*Jude*” (Jew), inside the yellow star, is followed by the admonition that, “Whoever wears this symbol is an enemy of our people.” The poster was issued by the *Parole der Woche*, a wall newspaper published by the National Socialist Party propaganda office in Munich on July 1, 1942.

Die Katze lässt das Mausen nicht!

Die führende englische Zeitung „Daily Mail“ berichtet:

„Die Beteiligung der Juden an Verbrechen gegen die englischen Kriegswirtschaftsgesetze hat das Judentum und den jüdischen Namen in England verfehmt, erklärte der Großrabbiner Dr. J. Hertz in einer Londoner Synagoge.“

Der Rabbi wollte mit diesen Vorhaltungen sicherlich seine Rassegenossen zur größeren Vorsicht bei ihren dunklen Schiebergeschäften ermahnen, damit das englische Volk nicht erkennt, **welche Läuse es sich da in den Pelz gesetzt hat.** Seine Bemühungen dürften jedoch vergeblich sein. **So sind die Juden.** Erst hetzen sie die Völker in den Krieg, und während die Soldaten dieser Völker kämpfen und bluten,

machen sie aus dem Kriege Geschäft, schachern, schieben und betrügen und füllen sich ihre schmutzigen Taschen auf Kosten ihrer Gastvölker. **In Deutschland wurde ihnen das Handwerk gelegt.** Wir haben sie von der deutschen Volksgemeinschaft abgesondert und sie mit dem gelben Judenstern gekennzeichnet. **Jedermann weiß:**

Wer dieses Zeichen trägt, ist ein Feind unseres Volkes



“**T**HE JEW-BADGE remained an instrument as important as it was efficient in the arsenal of deadly weapons against the Jews. Not only were Jews portrayed as vermin but also further stigmatized as criminals against Germany in order to legitimize every severity visited and to be visited upon them.”

— Guido Kisch, p. 122.

This photo portrays one of the thousands of such anti-Semitic posters. (This one is from Germany, circa 1940.) A severe, pointing finger coming out of the light, accuses a black attired, stereotypical hook-nosed Jew set against a black background and wearing a yellow star, and the word “Jude” inside. The German text “He is at fault for the war!” accuses German Jews for being fifth columnists.





MRS. ROSE GOIDLE-GILBERT, now living in Queens, New York and an expert seamstress since her youth, would leave her Budapest home every morning, but not before her landlord checked to make sure that the yellow star was on her coat. Once in the street, she would take it off since the star was only basted, and then, as needed, quickly sewed it back on in the same holes. In this way, Rose could move about fairly easily without being stopped or, worse, rounded up.

But most Jews could not do the same, particularly those in the concentration camps. Even young children wore the patch with resignation.

AN INK AND WATERCOLOR DRAWING "CHECKING FOR LICE" AND SIGNED "HELGA WEISSOVÁ HEIM 24," PORTRAYS A JEWISH LADY AND A STAR ON HER OUTER GARMENT. HELGA WAS BORN IN PRAGUE IN 1929 AND DEPORTED TO TEREZIN AT AGE 12 TOGETHER WITH HER PARENTS. SENT TO AUSCHWITZ IN 1944, SHE SURVIVED THE WAR.

► FROM *I NEVER SAW ANOTHER BUTTERFLY*, P. 23





EVEN JEWISH REFUGEES who, with great difficulty, succeeded in fleeing Nazi Europe were photographed landing in Palestine with their few belongings, still wearing the yellow star sewn on their backs. The clothing they were wearing was probably the only they owned, and even in safe circumstances, the yellow star was still part of who they were. They had arrived on board the Portuguese ship Geuin at the Atlit shore, a small coastal town south of Haifa, on November 4, 1944



COURTESY PHOTO ARCHIVE KEREN KANEMET LE ISRAEL

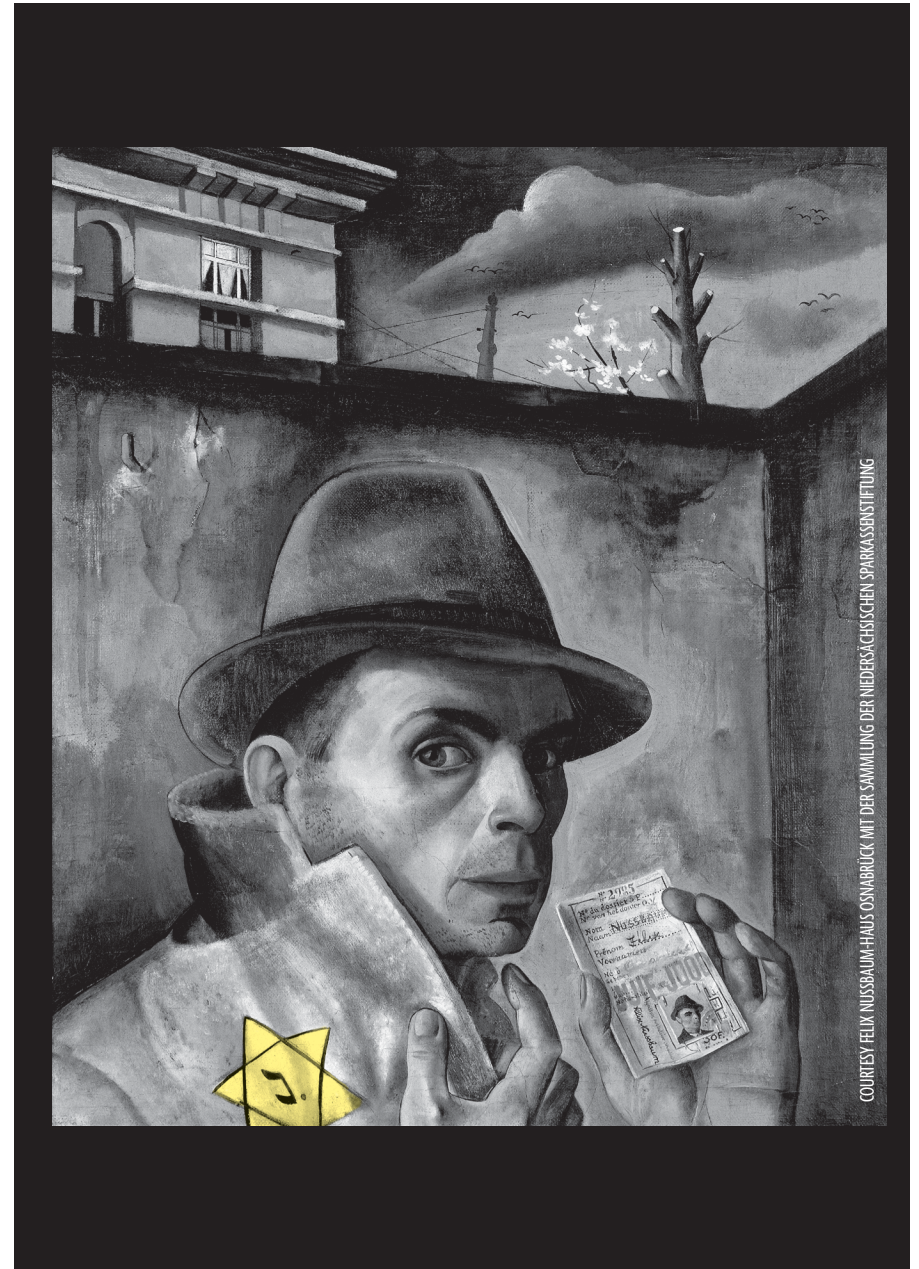


THE DEEP MARK OF PAIN that the forced and degrading wearing of the yellow star left upon Europe's World War II Jews is reflected in art as well. One of the most famous and powerful such works is Felix Nussbaum's "Self Portrait with Jewish Passport," painted circa 1943. Born in Germany in 1904 he had moved to Belgium in 1937. Following the Nazi occupation, he lived underground and in perpetual fear. It was then that he painted this self-portrait.

The painting reveals deep despair and fear.

"He is trapped in a corner, and professes his Judaism, declaring his solidarity with the persecuted and killed. In reality, he never wore the yellow Star of David in public. The passport is also an invention (his real passport still exists). Nussbaum and his wife had to live many years [hidden]. They were always in danger of being found out, and yet they always managed to escape imprisonment. One month before Brussels was liberated the couple was denounced and arrested. They were deported to Auschwitz on one of the last transports and died there."

— Artists Rights Society, New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn





THIS IS AN EXTRAORDINARY PHOTO taken in the Lodz ghetto (central Poland) sometime in 1943 showing the yellow star of shame and the blue star of courage. In spite of dire conditions prevailing in the ghetto following deportations to the extermination camp at Chelmno, several political and social groups—WIZO, Bund and “Trade Union Left”—held secret meetings, taught and provided education.

In our image, Zionist youth, all wearing a yellow star, gather for a celebration in front of a Zionist flag with a blue Star of David, flanked by portraits of the national poet of Israel, Chaim Nachman Bialik, and the founder of the Zionist Movement, Theodore Herzl. Standing in the center is Esterka Grynztajn.



COURTESY OF THE LUSHIMM AND ABRAM ZELIG



REPRESENTATIVE TOM LANTOS, the late chairman of the U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee and the only Holocaust survivor ever elected to Congress, died on February 11, 2008. Among the dignitaries who eulogized him was Tzipi Livni, Israel's foreign minister. She recalled Lantos's visit to Israel in 2007, including watching a film together about the American failure to bomb Auschwitz.

Said Livni, "Those same skies that did not hear the roar of the fighter planes in time were hearing them now [she was referring to the three Israeli F15s that flew over Auschwitz-Birkenau in 2003 on their way back to Israel after participating in the 85th anniversary celebration of Poland's air force]. And in my eyes, the Star of David that was just formed from a yellow Star of David on the torn clothing of a victim into a shining blue Star of David emblazoned on an American Air Force jet and flown by an Israeli fighter pilot; that shining star is Tom Lantos. May his memory be blessed."



COVER OF A BOOKLET ISSUED BY THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE IN BERGEN-BELSEN ON THE OCCASION OF THE JEWISH DP CONGRESS IN BERGEN-BELSEN IN SEPTEMBER 1945. THE COVER BEARS THE IMAGE OF TWO ISRAELI FLAGS WITH WHITE AND BLUE STARS, ON EITHER SIDE OF A NAZI-ERA YELLOW JEWISH STAR, "JUDE" INSCRIBED ON THE INSIDE AND THE WORD "YIZKOR" (REMEMBER). ABOVE THEM IS A RIBBON BEARING THE SLOGAN IN HEBREW AND YIDDISH, "OPEN THE GATES TO THE LAND OF ISRAEL!" WHILE IN ENGLISH IT SAYS, "OPEN THE GATES OF PALESTINE!"

COURTESY OF THE USHMM AND NORBERT WOLLEHEIM



SUGGESTED READINGS

Salim Jay, "A Star is Worn," in *Yale French Studies*, N. 85, Discourses of Jewish Identity in Twentieth Century France. (1944), pp. 51-61.

An indispensable scholarly study regarding the repercussions caused by the forced wearing of the yellow star upon French Jews.

Guido Kisch, "The Yellow Badge in History," in *Historia Judaica*, October, 1942, Vol. IV, N. 2, pp. 93-144

Published in 1942, this scholarly article is a must in learning about the history of the yellow star.

Yedida Kalfon Stillman, *Arab Dress From the Dawn of Islam to Modern Times*.

The Yellow Spot.

Published in New York in 1936, it is one of the earliest collections of documents relating to three years' persecution of German Jews, derived chiefly from National Socialist sources assembled by a group of investigators. The graphics, too, are precious documents.

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