

Poland's Important Role in World War II

Lesson 3

Atrocities and Genocide: The Remaining Years (1942-1945)

Hitler's Mass Murder of Poles, Polish Jews, and Roma; Stalin's Mass Murder of Poles

Hitler's and Stalin's Genocide of Poles (1942-45)

Hitler's Genocidal Actions against Poles:

- Over 800 villages destroyed; up to 20,000 villagers murdered
- Thousands of Poles died in these concentration camps
Auschwitz – 75,000; Gusen – 50,000; Sachsenhausen – 20,000; Gross-Rosen – 40,000
Neuengamme – 17,000; Dachau – 10,000; Stutthof – 65,000
Ravensbrück – 17,000 Polish women
- 1944 Warsaw Uprising – 185,000 civilians killed; 17,000 Home Army soldiers killed

Stalin's Genocidal Actions against Poles:

- 1.5 million Poles were deported to Soviet slave labor camps; up to half died from starvation, disease, and physical exhaustion.
- Mass shootings of 22,000 Polish officers at Katyn Forest in the Soviet Union

Hitler's Genocidal Actions Against Polish and European Jews

Hundreds of thousands died in the extermination camps.

- **Camps established specifically for Polish Jews (“Operation Reinhard”):**

Belzec – 434,500

Sobibor – 170,000

Treblinka – 870,000

- **Camps established for European Jews:**

Auschwitz-Birkenau – 960,000

Majdanek – 72,000

Chelmno – 152,000

1943 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising – 56,000 eventually killed.

*Additional Jewish Deaths: 800,000 ghetto deaths mainly from starvation and disease;
500,000 deaths in Operation Barbarossa*

Hitler's Genocide of Europe's Roma

An estimated 1.5 million of Europe's 2 million Roma were killed.

Countries that aided Hitler in eliminating European Roma:

- Croatia, Slovakia, Finland, France, Czech Protectorate, Romania, Hungary, Italy

Of Poland's estimated 50,000 Roma, 8,000 were killed.



Roma in Asperg prison, Germany, prior to deportation to occupied Poland



Roma prisoners at Belzec labor camp



Monument to Roma killed by Germans in Polish village of Borzęcin 4

The Five Acts of Genocide

The term “genocide” was created during World War II in 1944 by Rafal Lemkin.

In 1948, the United Nations defined genocide as any of these five actions committed against *a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group*, in whole or in part:

1. Kill group members;
2. Forcibly transfer a group’s children to another group;
3. Prevent births within the group;
4. Cause serious bodily or mental harm to group members;
5. Impose living conditions that cause physical destruction of the group.

Genocide of Poles, Jews, and Roma - *Examples*

1. Kill group members, in whole or in part.

- Hitler's mass shootings of Poles and Polish Jews.
- Hitler's mass gassings of Polish Jews and Polish Roma.
- Stalin's mass shootings of Polish Officers at Katyn.

2. Forcibly transfer a group's children to another group.

- Up to 200,000 Polish children were kidnapped for Germanization under Hitler's Lebensborn program. (Jewish and Romany children were not kidnapped.)

3. Prevent births within a group.

- Polish women slave laborers in Germany were forced to have abortions.
- Newborns in Auschwitz were drowned or starved.

4. Cause serious bodily or mental harm to group members.

- Medical experiments on Polish Jews and Polish Roma at Auschwitz.
- Medical experiments on Polish women prisoners at Ravensbrück and Polish priests at Dachau.

5. Impose living conditions that cause physical destruction of the group.

- Deaths of Poles, Polish Jews, and Polish Roma in concentration and extermination camps.
- Deaths of Polish Jews and other European Jews in German-established ghettos.

Genocide and its Toll in Human Lives

Hitler's Policy for Jews and Roma: *Comprehensive genocide*

Hitler's Policy for Poles: *Comprehensive genocide over a longer period of time*

- *Polish slave laborers were needed to support Germany's wartime industry.*

Genocidal Toll of Lives:

- Polish Jews – 2.9 million (by Hitler)
- Poles – 2.8 million (by Hitler and Stalin)
- Poland's total deaths – 5.7 million (by Hitler and Stalin)
- *For Poland, Hitler's and Stalin's murders were a double holocaust.*
- Other European Jews – about 3 million (by Hitler)
- European Roma – 1.5 million (by Hitler)