

Life in the Warsaw Ghetto (c. 1942)

Abstract

The capital of the Polish Republic, Warsaw, was a vibrant and diverse city in the interwar period. With 35 million people on the eve of World War II, Jews made up about 7.7% of the total national population. In the commercial districts of Warsaw's old city center, however, Jews had a much greater presence. With the onset of war in September 1939, Polish Jews who lived closer to the German border fled the invading army, and consequently the number of Jews in Warsaw swelled. With the partition of Poland and the establishment of the Nazi-occupied territory known as the General Government, official persecution of Polish Jews began. The ghetto's existence was formally declared by the Governor of the General Government, Hans Frank, on October 16, 1940, and it was sealed off from the rest of the city by November 15. All Jews from Warsaw and its suburbs were forcibly relocated there immediately, and in the coming months Jews from the surrounding countryside were sent here as well. As many as 400,000 men, women, and children, were forced into an area that made up only 2.4% of the city's land. Most ghetto inhabitants relied on smuggled food to survive. Those who did not have the resources to secure food this way quickly became weak and ill. As many as 100,000 died of starvation or disease before the deportations to Nazi death camps began in the summer of 1942. By the end of the year, it was evident to those remaining that their deported loved ones were going to their deaths. Between January and April 1943, armed resistors fought SS guards and police attempting to round up further transports. It took thousands of highly trained German soldiers and SS troops to bring the underground resistance to an end. On May 16, 1943, the Great Synagogue was razed as a symbol of German victory. These clips are taken from footage shot by Willy Wist, a German cameraman who had been sent to the Warsaw ghetto in order to shoot footage for a Nazi propaganda film about the ghetto, which was never finished. In addition to the images of destitution and starvation seen in these clips, the Nazis stages several scenes that were supposed to demonstrate how well the Jews were living in the ghetto.

Source

Source: Accessed at United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Bundesarchiv Filmarchiv. RG-60.3431.

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