THE FACE OF THE GHETTO
Pictures Taken by Jewish Photographers in the Litzmannstadt Ghetto 1940-1944
TEACHER’S GUIDE
The Face of the Ghetto: Pictures Taken by Jewish Photographers in the Litzmannstadt Ghetto 1940-1944

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INTRODUCTION

The Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre, in partnership with the German Consulate General in Vancouver, is proud to present the West Coast launch of a new teaching exhibit, *The Face of the Ghetto: Pictures Taken by Jewish Photographers in the Litzmannstadt Ghetto, 1940-1944.*

Following the invasion of Poland in 1939, the Nazis imposed a ghetto in the city of Lodz, which they renamed Litzmannstadt. From 1940 to 1944, more than 180,000 Jews and 5,000 Roma and Sinti lived in the cramped quarters, with many working in factories that supported the war effort.

A handful of Jewish photographers, commissioned by the local Jewish Council, took photographs of life inside the ghetto. While instructed to document the productivity of the war industry for the Nazis, the photographers — at great personal risk — also captured intimate moments of family, childhood and community.

Drawing from a collection of 12,000 images that reveal the resilience and dignity of those imprisoned in the Lodz Ghetto, this travelling exhibit from the Topography of Terror Foundation offers a rare glimpse into daily life during the Holocaust.
TEACHER’S GUIDE

This teaching resource facilitates student engagement with historical context and individual narratives that relate to The Face of the Ghetto exhibit. The activities are recommended for grade six to twelve. An investigation of primary source material fosters historical and critical thinking skills in students. The guide complements student visits to the 60-minute interactive exhibit tour, and is divided into two sections. The pre-visit activities introduce students to the concept of racial antisemitism, and guide discussion about Jewish life in prewar Poland and under Nazi occupation. Post-visit exercises address themes raised during the school program, and offer students the opportunity for further reflection on resistance, ethical decision-making during the Holocaust, and memorialization in its aftermath.

Lesson plan objectives correspond to six concepts outlined by the Historical Thinking Project. According to this initiative of the University of British Columbia’s Centre for the Study of Historical Consciousness, to think historically students need to be able to:

1. Establish historical significance
2. Use primary source evidence
3. Identify continuity and change
4. Analyze cause and consequence
5. Take historical perspectives
6. Understand the ethical dimension of history

For more information about these six concepts and the Historical Thinking Project, please visit: http://www.historicalthinking.ca

Additional Holocaust education resources can be found on the VHEC’s website: http://www.vhec.org

Note: Although the lessons in this guide can be conducted pre or post-visit to the VHEC, the student readings and classroom activities can support learning in classrooms across British Columbia and Canada.
PRE-VISIT LESSONS

OBJECTIVES
Students gain a critical understanding of Jewish life in prewar Poland, and consider the impact of the German occupation of Poland on the Jewish community.

TEACHER PREPARATION

- Make copies of *Readings: Prewar Jewish Life* and *Nazi Occupation of Poland*. Distribute to students at the beginning of the class or assign as homework.
- Reproduce copies of *Home Videos: Prewar Jewish Life* and *Dossier: Children of the Ghetto* and distribute to students at the beginning of class. Alternatively, provide access to digital copies.
- If incorporating *Supplementary Reading: Antisemitism and the Holocaust*, distribute and assign as homework the day before the lesson. Distribute *Dossier: Child Profiles* and assign as post-lesson homework.

LINKS TO HISTORICAL THINKING CONCEPTS

*Use Primary Source Evidence*
Students view home videos to make inferences about how Jews lived in Poland before the Nazi occupation. Students will also examine photographic evidence and Nazi race laws to see what they reveal about life in occupied Poland.

*Establish Historical Significance*
Students examine photographs, videos, and survivor narratives to assess the significance of these documents in relation to the Holocaust.

*Analyze Cause and Consequence*
Students consider the conditions of the German occupation and the consequence of legislated antisemitism and ghettoization on the daily lives of Polish Jews.

*Identify Continuity & Change*
Students analyze anti-Jewish laws and discuss their impact on Jews in Nazi Europe.

*Take Historical Perspectives:*
Students consider the perspective of Polish Jews before and during the Second World War, and how individuals responded to persecution.
HOME VIDEOS: JEWISH LIFE IN PREWAR POLAND

Explain to students that they are going to view pre-Second World War home videos belonging to Jews who lived in Poland. In pairs or small groups, students view two of the videos in Home Videos: Prewar Jewish Life. Alternately, screen the videos as a class. Ask students to respond to the following prompts:

- Describe what you see in the videos. Include the people, dress, setting, and activities.
- Based on the visual cues, when do you think these videos were recorded?
- What do these videos tell us about Jewish life in prewar Poland? What do they not reveal?
- How are these videos different from your family videos? How are they similar?

As a class, assemble the answers. Identify which conclusions came from a) the videos themselves, or b) contextual knowledge about Jewish life in prewar Poland.

On an overhead, share Reading: Polish Jewish Life and read aloud. Discuss how the reading changed or corroborated students’ interpretation of the videos.

DISCUSSION: YIDDISH CINEMA

The 1930s represented a golden age of Yiddish cinema, with many films produced or set in Poland. Explain to the students that they will watch a clip from the 1936 Yiddish film Yitl Mitn Fidl (Yiddle with his Fiddle). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TezMIJDKe5A. Alternately, assign as pre-class viewing.

Based on their viewing of this clip and the home videos, engage students in a discussion about media representations with the following prompts:

- What do you notice about the film clip? How does it portray Polish Jewish life in comparison to the home videos?
- Who were the intended audiences of the different clips? How might this effect their portrayal?
- Do you think the film is a reliable representation of Jewish life in prewar Poland?

EXTENSION

RECOMMENDED FOR SECONDARY STUDENTS.

Using the case of Yitl Mitn Fidl as an example, ask students to research a popular film that depicts a particular historical event or period. Some examples include Band of Brothers (TV mini-series), Defiance, Roots, or Fiddler on the Roof.

Each student should write a journal entry explaining to what extent the film accurately portrays the time period or event in question. Alternately, students may prepare a media presentation using clips from their selected film.
READING & GROUP ACTIVITY: NAZI OCCUPATION OF POLAND

Students work independently to summarize *Reading: Nazi Occupation of Poland*, noting the anti-Jewish measures enacted after the occupation.

Senior secondary teachers may wish to include *Supplementary Reading: Antisemitism and the Holocaust*.

In groups of four or five, students consider anti-Jewish actions in Poland, using the following prompts:

- What anti-Jewish laws were implemented in Poland?
- In what ways did Jewish life change under Nazi occupation?
- How do you think Jews in Poland responded to persecution?

PHOTO ANALYSIS: CHILDREN OF THE GHETTO

RECOMMENDED FOR GRADES SIX TO NINE.

Explain to the students that they are going to be learning about child inhabitants of the Lodz Ghetto.

In pairs or small groups, students examine the photographs in *Dossier: Children of the Ghetto*, and discuss the following questions:

- What do you see in the photographs? Describe the setting, activities, poses, etc.
- Do you think the photos are candid or staged? Why do you think this matters?
- Who do you think took the photo?
- To what extent do these photographs look like “normal” photographs of childhood?

HOMEWORK: Distribute *Dossier: Child Profiles* and ask each student to read the short biography of one child survivor. Instruct students to write a letter to the survivor and pose at least three questions that they would want answered about the survivor’s life before, during, and after the Holocaust. Have students share their letters with a classmate and compare questions.
HOME VIDEOS: PREWAR JEWISH LIFE

These videos are part of the Steven Spielberg Film and Video Archive at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Visiting Jacob Herz’s Father & Relatives in Wola, Poland, June 1937 (1:52)

Jewish Men; Street Scenes in Middle Class District, 1935 - 1938 (2:15)

Warsaw Jewish Quarter, 1936 (2:34)

Playing in the Garden in Prewar Poland, 1933 (00:29)

Children Ski Outside their Vacation Home in Prewar Poland, February 1935 (1:12)

Orthodox Jews in Biecz, Poland, August - September 1936 (1:18)

Children Bathe in the Yard of their Home in Prewar Poland, 1932 (1:41)
Jews lived in Poland for more than one thousand years, and represented the largest Jewish community in eastern Europe. For hundreds of years, Jews lived in small towns called shtetls that were self-governed by local councils called kehilla that addressed issues within the Jewish community. Each town included a synagogue, cemetery, ritual bath and cheder, a Jewish religious school. Most Jews spoke Yiddish and wore traditional dress associated with devout religious observance.

By the 1930’s, Jews maintained their distinct traditions but many adopted modern dress, spoke Polish as their mother tongue, and migrated to urban centres like Warsaw and Lodz. Jews were integrated into all aspects of society and represented nearly ten percent of the Polish population, or some 3,000,000 people. Jewish cultural life thrived in the form of Yiddish cinema and literature, Zionist youth groups, and sports associations. Despite quotas that limited Jewish participation in universities and some professions, Jews made vital contributions to Polish industry, politics and social life.
REVIEW: NAZI OCCUPATION OF POLAND

The Second World War began on September 1, 1939 with the German invasion of western and central Poland and an attack by the Soviet army, which occupied the eastern part of the country. Western Poland was annexed and integrated into Germany, while central Poland became known as the “General Government.”

Within weeks of the occupation, Nazi race laws aimed at isolating and oppressing Jews were implemented. Synagogues were destroyed, Jewish children removed from schools and adults from many professions. Marriages between Jews and non-Jews were forbidden, and Jews over the age of six were required to wear identifying badges. The Nazis forced Jews into hundreds of ghettos, often enclosed by walls or barbed wire fences, in the poorest parts of cities where they lived in unsanitary and overcrowded conditions, and were subjected to violence and starvation policies. Daily life and infrastructure, including labour, and distribution of food rations, and eventually deportations, were organized by German-appointed Jewish Councils.

After Warsaw, the Lodz Ghetto (renamed Litzmannstadt) was the second largest ghetto in Poland with some 180,000 Jewish and 5,000 Roma and Sinti prisoners. Jews performed slave labour in factories and workshops, producing goods for the German war effort in exchange for meagre food rations. Thousands died of starvation, malnutrition, and disease during the ghetto’s existence. Others were deported in a series of transports to Chelmno death camp and later, Auschwitz concentration camp.

In August 1944, Lodz was the final ghetto in Poland to be liquidated. Some 3,000,000 Polish Jews, or ninety percent of the prewar population, perished during the Holocaust in ghettos, camps, or at sites of mass murder.
Antisemitism means prejudice against or hatred of Jews. The term became widespread in the 1870s, but Christian antisemitism, intolerance for the Jewish religion, had existed in Europe for many centuries. Riots against Jewish populations were often sparked by false rumours that Jews used the blood of Christian children for religious rituals. At times, Jews were also blamed for everything from economic conditions to epidemics to natural disasters.

The Nazi party, which was founded in 1919 by Adolf Hitler, argued for the removal of all Jews from Germany. Nazism gained popularity, in part, by disseminating propaganda that blamed the Jews for Germany’s loss in the First World War and for the country’s economic problems. This false accusation against Jews is particularly striking because Jews composed less than 1% of the German population when Hitler came to power in 1933 and were very integrated into German society.

Unlike Christian antisemitism, which was hatred of Jews based primarily on religion, Nazi antisemitism defined Jews as an undesirable “race.” Drawing on eugenics, the Nazi party defined Jews as an “inferior” racial group, rather than a religious one, that threatened the purity of the “Aryan” race.

The Holocaust, the state-sponsored persecution and murder of European Jews by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945, is considered to be history’s most extreme example of antisemitism. Prior to the Second World War, Jews were stripped of their German citizenship and discriminated against through antisemitic laws. After the Second World War broke out in 1939, Jews and other “inferior” people, such as Roma and Sinti (Gypsies), Slavs, and homosexuals, were worked to death and murdered in concentration and death camps.

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1 Jew: Someone of the Hebrew or Jewish people. Someone who is either born into or converts to Judaism, the religion, philosophy and way of life of the Jewish people.

2 Nazism: The ideology of the Nazi party, which stressed nationalism, imperialism, anti-Communism, militarism, racism and antisemitism.

3 Eugenics: A racial theory that was popular in many Western nations at the time. According to eugenics, observation, family genealogies and intelligence tests could be used to define which groups had “superior” or “inferior” qualities.

4 Roma and Sinti: Roma (Gypsies) originated in India as a nomadic people and entered Europe between the eighth and tenth centuries. They were called “Gypsies” because Europeans mistakenly believed they came from Egypt. This minority is made up of distinct groups called “tribes” or “nations.” Most of the Roma in Germany and the countries occupied by Germany during World War II belonged to the Sinti and Roma groupings.

5 Slavs: Ethnic group of peoples inhabiting mainly eastern, southeastern and east central Europe, including Russians, Poles and Czechs, among others. Nazis considered Slavs to be an inferior race that was only suited for enslavement.

6 Concentration and death camps: The Nazis established concentration camps shortly after assuming power in 1933 to imprison and isolate political opponents and those considered to be racially undesirable, such as Jews, and Sinti and Roma. Most of the approximately 1,800 camps were transit or labour camps. After the occupation of Poland, death or extermination camps were established for the purpose of mass murder at Auschwitz-Birkenau, Treblinka, Sobibor, Belzec, Chelmno and Majdanek.
DOSSIER: CHILDREN OF THE GHETTO

The Face of the Ghetto: Pictures Taken by Jewish Photographers in the Litzmannstadt Ghetto, 1940-1944.
Produced by Topography of Terror Foundation, Berlin.
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DOSSIER: CHILD PROFILES

**Chaim Benzion Cale** was born in Lodz in October 1927 to parents who worked in the meat delivery business. After the Nazi occupation, Chaim’s grandfather was severely beaten by soldiers and died soon after. Chaim’s father insisted on preserving Jewish traditions and Chaim celebrated his bar mitzvah in the ghetto in October 1940.

Chaim left school and began working in a metal workshop in 1942. In August 1944, Chaim and his parents were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. His mother was killed on arrival. Chaim and his father were registered, tattooed, and transferred to two other concentration camps as forced labourers. A few weeks before liberation, Chaim’s father was murdered.

Chaim was liberated in Flossenbürg at the age of 17. He later changed his name to Aleksander Laks and immigrated to Brazil.

**Karolina Dressler** was born in Lodz in December 1927 to a middle-class, assimilated family. In the ghetto, Karolina found work in a sewing workshop where she produced round shoulder pads and attended a makeshift school organized by the workshop head.

Karolina’s father died in the ghetto in July 1942. The rest of the family escaped a series of deportations before being placed on one of the final transports to Auschwitz in August 1944. Karolina and her sister Teresa were selected for slave labour but her mother was murdered on arrival. The sisters survived a series of camps, and Karolina was liberated on May 8, 1945 in Halbstadt.

She returned to Lodz and reunited with her sister. In 1957 Karolina, her husband, and two daughters immigrated to Brazil, and later settled in Israel.
Jakub Lapides was born on November 15, 1928 in Lodz. Both of his parents died before the Second World War, and Jakub and his three siblings grew up in an orphanage.

During the Gehsperrre Aktion of September 1942, Jakub and his siblings hid in the cemetery. When they saw soup being brought into the orphanage courtyard, they ran back. All three of Jakub’s siblings were caught and deported. Jakub found work in a leather and saddlery workshop, and later in a sausage-making factory. In March 1944, he was deported to the Hasag slave labour camp and liberated the following January.

Jakub returned to Lodz and married a fellow survivor. They had two sons and immigrated to Israel in 1957. Jakub died in 2005.

Jutta Szmigreld was born in Breslau, Germany on July 8, 1927. In 1935, Jutta’s family moved to Lodz, Poland. Jutta’s father died before the outbreak of the Second World War. In May 1940, Jutta, her grandmother, mother, and younger brother moved into the Lodz Ghetto.

Jutta worked in a number of the ghetto workshops, and played an active role in the Zionist youth movement, where she befriended a group leader named Henryk Bergman. In September 1942, Jutta’s grandmother was sent Chelmno. The rest of the family was deported to Auschwitz in August 1944, where Jutta’s mother and brother were murdered on arrival. Jutta survived Auschwitz and was later transferred to a slave labour camp.

After liberation, Jutta returned to Lodz and was reunited with Henryk Bergman. Together they went to Germany and were married. Henryk and Jutta immigrated to Palestine in March 1948.
POST-VISIT LESSONS

OBJECTIVES
Students reflect on the subject of resistance and consider the function of photography as both a form of resistance and as evidence of Nazi crimes. They also examine the complexities of Jewish leadership during the Holocaust, and the preservation of memorial sites in its aftermath.

TEACHER PREPARATION

• Make copies of Reading: Jewish Resistance During the Holocaust and Activity Sheet: Responses to Persecution. Distribute to students at the beginning of the class or assign as homework.
• Reproduce copies of Dossiers: Jewish Councillors and Ghetto Photographs and distribute to students in small groups. Alternatively, provide access to digital copies.

LINKS TO HISTORICAL THINKING CONCEPTS

Primary Source Evidence
Students respond to photographs and historical sites, and consider what they reveal about the societal attitudes towards historical events and the victims being remembered.

Analyze Cause and Consequence
Students reflect on cases of resistance during the Holocaust, and consider the implications of resistance on daily life for Jews under Nazi occupation.

Take Historical Perspective
Students consider the perspective of photographers who documented daily life in the Lodz Ghetto. How did their official roles in the ghetto, personal values, and worldview influence the individuals and scenes they captured on film?

Understand the Ethical Dimensions of History
Students critically assess the ethical implications of using ghetto photographs as teaching tools. Is it disrespectful or dehumanizing to display photos, some taken secretly, of people in vulnerable positions? Or, must these photos be displayed as evidence of Nazi crimes? Students also consider how Jewish Councils responded to the demands placed on them by Nazi administration, and how their actions affected ghetto inhabitants.
CLASS DISCUSSION: JEWISH RESISTANCE DURING THE HOLOCAUST

In small groups, students complete *Reading: Jewish Resistance During the Holocaust*, summarizing the various forms of resistance and the obstacles to resistance faced by Jews living under Nazi occupation.

Introduce the term “resistance” to students.

As a class, engage students in a discussion using the following prompts:

- How do you define the notion of resistance?
- What are some examples of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust?
- What were the goals of Jewish resistance?
- What were the obstacles to Jewish resistance?

REFLECTION: GHETTO PHOTOGRAPHY

Mendel Grosman and Henryk Ross were official photographers for the Lodz Ghetto from 1940 to 1944. They were responsible for taking identification card headshots and photos that documented ghetto labour productivity. At great personal risk, Grosman and Ross also captured images of daily life, including family, life cycle events, and deportations, which would later serve as evidence of Nazi crimes. They took these photographs illegally and at great personal risk.

As a class (or, as computers permit, in small groups), screen the video interview *Voices from the Lodz Ghetto* (4:01): [http://www.ushmm.org/information/exhibitions/online-features/online-exhibitions/voices-from-lodz-ghetto/interview](http://www.ushmm.org/information/exhibitions/online-features/online-exhibitions/voices-from-lodz-ghetto/interview).

Alternatively, ask students to view the online video as homework the night before the lesson.

Distribute *Dossier: Ghetto Photographs* to students, and ask them to respond to the following prompts for each photograph:

- Think about the subject of the photo. How do you think they felt having their photo taken?
- Do you think the photographers asked permission to take photos? Should they have asked permission?
- How do you feel about the way people are portrayed in the photos?
- Do you think photos of human suffering should be displayed publicly? Why or why not?
EXTENSION: ETHICAL IMAGE-MAKING

RECOMMENDED FOR SECONDARY STUDENTS

According to the Oxford Companion to the Photograph, ethical photography refers to “principles of best practice that any photographer should adopt in carrying out their practice. The majority of these principles are based on common sense, goodwill, and morality rather than on laws and regulations.”

Mendel Grosman hesitated to photograph an elderly man and his family pushing a cart of human waste, despite the man encouraging him to do so: “Let it remain for the future, to let others know how humiliated we were.”

Why do you think the elderly man wanted Grosman to document this scene? Why do you think Grosman hesitated to take the photo? Students should prepare a short journal entry on their thoughts about capturing images of human suffering, even with the subjects’ permission.

ACTIVITY: INDIVIDUAL EXPRESSION

NOTE: THIS ACTIVITY REQUIRES STUDENT ACCESS TO CAMERA OR VIDEO DEVICES.

Students will be assigned the task of documenting their lives — in pictures or in video — for three days, capturing moments and items that are important to them. After three days, students should compile the media they think best represents them to present as a slide show or a Prezi.

As a class, discuss what the photos say about the students’ values and interests. What is the photographer most interested in showing? What do they want us to think about? Draw special attention to any depictions of the same subject to consider how individual photographers presented the subject in different ways.
GROUP ACTIVITY: JEWISH COUNCILLORS

Distribute Dossier: Jewish Councillors and Activity Sheet: Responses to Persecution. Divide class into small groups, and assign each group one Jewish Councillor Profile.

In small groups, ask students to complete Activity Sheet: Responses to Persecution for their individual councillor and share their responses with the class.

As a class, engage students in a discussion about how each councilor responded to calls for deportation in their respective ghettos. Were there similarities to their actions? What do you think motivated their behaviours? How do you think the circumstances influenced their actions?

READING & CLASS DEBATE: HISTORICAL SITES

RECOMMENDED FOR SECONDARY STUDENTS.

During the final months of the Second World War, the Nazis tried to destroy proof of their crimes by burning incriminating files, blowing up gas chambers, and sending surviving camp inmates on death marches. The Nazis failed to destroy all the evidence — camp sites, goods belonging to victims, and a small number of European Jews survived. Seventy years later, many of the sites and belongings are falling into a state of disrepair and there is debate over how to best preserve these pieces of historical evidence. Some argue that we must maintain historical sites as evidence of Nazi crimes, even if this requires extensive repairs. Others believe that in order to preserve these sites’ authenticity, they must be allowed to deteriorate naturally with minimal intervention.

Stage a “4 Corners Debate” in the classroom. Students are to engage in the debate as if they are Holocaust historians responding to the future treatment of historical sites.

Present students with the statement: Present-day society has a responsibility to future generations to preserve historical sites.

Ask students if they agree or disagree, and to write a paragraph or list of points explaining their opinions. Post four signs around the room: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. Instruct students to stand under the sign that describes their opinion. Encourage students to explain their position, and to move freely between the four corners.

Debrief the process and consider the role of original sites and artefacts in teaching about the Holocaust and honouring the memory of its victims in the 21st century.
Europe’s Jews resisted Nazi oppression and dehumanization in a number of ways, both individually and collectively. This included armed resistance, hiding, escape and the preservation of Jewish traditions and faith in the face of annihilation.

Organized armed resistance was the most rare form of Jewish resistance. Jews participated in armed resistance in about 100 ghettos and three death camps, with the most famous being the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in April 1943, where members of the Jewish Fighting Organization lead a revolt against the Nazis using homemade bombs and smuggled-in weapons for several weeks. At the end of the uprising, nearly all surviving Jews were deported to Treblinka death camp or slave labour and concentration camps. Jews also escaped ghettos and joined partisan groups in the forests of eastern Europe, where they engaged in anti-German activities in Jewish and mixed units.

These acts of defiance must be weighed against the many obstacles that made resistance to the Nazis both difficult and dangerous. Jews were isolated, unarmed, and vulnerable, and had few opportunities and resources to resist occupation. Nazi practice of “collective responsibility” — a retaliation policy that punished entire families and communities for individual acts of resistance — made the decision to act very difficult. Further, the speed and secrecy the Nazis used to carry out deportations and killings made it nearly impossible for Jews to grasp the enormity of the destruction of their communities.

The most frequent acts of resistance were hiding and escape. Jewish groups forged identity papers, sought non-Jewish helpers to hide family members, and worked with non-Jewish resistance movements to transport Jews to safety in unoccupied territory. In ghettos, Jews also engaged in acts of spiritual resistance by observing Jewish holidays and rituals, creating schools for youth, creating cultural institutions and art, publishing newspapers, and collecting and hiding evidence of Nazi crimes against the Jews. The ultimate goal of spiritual resistance was survival and the perpetuation of Jewish life and traditions.
DOSSIER: GHETTO PHOTOGRAPHS

At the corner of Sulzfelder Street and Blechgasse following the liquidation of the “gypsy camp,” circa spring 1942. The Face of the Ghetto: Pictures Taken by Jewish Photographers in the Litzmannstadt Ghetto, 1940-1944. Produced by Topography of Terror Foundation, Berlin.
DOSSIER: GHETTO PHOTOGRAPHS

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DOSSIER: JEWISH COUNCILLOR PROFILES

1. Modecahai Chaim Rumkowski

“We are not led by the thought ‘How many will perish?’ but by the thought ‘How many can we save?’… I must cut off the limbs in order to save the body itself…” – Chaim Rumkowski

Rumkowski led the Jewish Council in the Lodz Ghetto from 1940 to 1944. Before the war, Rumkowski had worked as a businessman and orphanage director and was a respected member of the Lodz Jewish community.

Rumkowski’s authoritarian style of rule earned him the nickname “King of the Jews.” He set up hospitals, schools, and orphanages, and organized food ration distribution and housing. Rumkowski transformed the ghetto into an industrial centre, establishing some 120 factories and workshops where more than 60,000 Jews worked in exchange for food.

From January to May 1942, Rumkowski cooperated with German orders to assemble and deport 55,000 Jews to Chelmno death camp. In September of 1942 the Nazis demanded a further deportation of 20,000 Jews. Hoping to spare productive workers, Rumkowski delivered an infamous speech, begging parents to hand over their children. In August 1944, he was sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau with one of the final transports from the ghetto and murdered on arrival.
2. Adam Czerniakow

“They are demanding that I kill the children of my people with my own hands. There is nothing for me to do but to die.”
– Adam Czerniakow (allegedly from his suicide note)

Czerniakow led the Warsaw Ghetto’s Jewish Council from 1939 to 1942. Trained as a chemical engineer, he had served on Warsaw’s Municipal Council and as an elected member of the Polish Senate before the Second World War. He was highly assimilated and spoke little Yiddish.

After the Nazi forces occupied Warsaw in fall 1939, they appointed Czerniakow as head of the Jewish Council, overseeing the largest ghetto in occupied Poland. Czerniakow handled administrative functions for the Germans, including ration distributions, housing, sanitation, and health services. Czerniakow’s negotiations minimized German interference in ghetto life, and allowed for food to be smuggled in.

In the summer of 1942, the Germans began a two-month wave of deportations from Warsaw to the Treblinka death camp. On July 22, the German leadership instructed Czerniakow to round up the Jews selected for “resettlement in the east.” Unwilling to send Jews to their deaths, Czerniakow killed himself the following day.
3. Dr. Joseph Parnes

After the outbreak of the Second World War, Lvov was invaded by the Soviet Army. During the Soviet occupation, the Jewish population of Lvov was 200,000, half of whom were refugees from Nazi-occupied Poland.

After the German invasion in June 1941, a ghetto was established in Lvov and Dr. Joseph Parnes, a respected Jewish leader in his seventies, was appointed head of the Jewish Council. Parnes came from a well-known local family and had served as an officer in the Austrian army during the First World War. Parnes tried to minimize German interference in the ghetto, and exercised control over food, housing and the police force.

In the fall of 1941, the German administration demanded that Parnes cooperate in the deportation of Jews to the Janowska slave labour camp. Parnes refused this order, and was executed in November 1941.

* Information from, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, yadvashem.org, jewishvirtual-library.org and How Was it Possible by Peter Hayes (2015)
ACTIVITY SHEET: RESPONSES TO PERSECUTION

Describe the Jewish councillor and their role in prewar society.

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What actions did they take in their role as a *Judenrat* leader?

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What alternative courses of action could they have taken?

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How did their actions impact their life?

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How did their actions impact the lives of other ghetto inhabitants?
APPENDIX: GLOSSARY

**Action / Aktion:** German word meaning “action” but used to refer to any non-military campaign. An aktion was an operation undertaken for political or racial reasons. For example, Aktion 14f13 was the code name for the murder of the disabled.

**Aktion Gehsperre:** The deportation of nearly 16,000 children, sick, and elderly from the Lodz Ghetto to the Chelmno death camp in September of 1942.

**Antisemitism:** Opposition or hatred of Jews. As a term, it came into widespread use in the 1870’s. Subsequently, it has come to denote hatred of Jews in all of its forms throughout history.

**Aryan:** Originally a linguistic term referring to the Indo-European group of languages. Before the end of the nineteenth century, the term had taken on racial definitions, often referring to people whose ancestors were northern European and thus “purer” than “lesser” races. The Nazis viewed Jews and other non-Aryans such as Roma and ethnic Poles as either inferior or subhuman.

**Auschwitz:** A concentration camp established in 1940 near Oswiecim, Poland. In 1942, it became a death camp. It contained a labour camp, the death camp Birkenau, and the slave labour camp, Buna-Monowitz. Up to 1.5 million Jewish men, women, and children were murdered in this camp and 100,000 victims from other ethnic and cultural groups. Only 7650 survivors were found alive at liberation.

**Birkenau:** The sub-camp of Auschwitz with four gas chambers, also known as Auschwitz II. The Auschwitz gassings took place here — as many as 6,000 a day.

**Cattle Car:** Jews were often transported to concentration camps by train in freight cars — sometimes referred to as cattle cars. The cars were packed tight and sealed off, and passengers had no food or water. Many people inside the cars, especially the old and very young, died before the train reached its destination.

**Chelmno/Kulmhof:** The Nazi death camp established in 1941 near Lodz. It was the main location for deportees from Lodz, until the ghetto’s liquidation in 1944. During that time, hundreds of thousands of Jews and Romani people were murdered in the camp, primarily through the use of gas vans.

**Children’s Colony:** A refuge for children set up within the Lodz Ghetto in the summer of 1940. It offered 15,000 children a chance to recuperate, and escape from the reality of the ghetto. Free meals were provided for the children.

**Concentration Camps:** Immediately after assuming power on January 30, 1933, the Nazis established camps where they “concentrated” and imprisoned perceived enemies of the state. Enemies of Nazism included real and imagined political opponents including: Communists, Socialists, trade unionists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Roma and Sinti people, homosexuals and others deemed “anti-social.” The general round up of Jews did not begin until 1938. Before then, only Jews who fit the other categories were interned in the camps. The first three camps in Germany were Dachau, Buchenwald, and Sachsenhausen.

**Deportation:** Initially an effort to rid German occupied territory of Jews, deportation eventually became a means to deliver Jews to concentration camps and implement the Final Solution.

**Final Solution:** Nazi codename for the plan to destroy Europe’s Jews.

**Gas Chamber:** Underground room where victims were gassed at concentration and death camps, including Birkenau and Chelmno. Prisoners were told that they were showers intended for sanitation and handed a piece of soap. The room was packed full and zyklon B gas pellets were released from the shower heads. Within half an hour, everyone in the room had died from asphyxiation.

**Ghetto:** A section of the city where all Jews from the surrounding areas were forced to live. Surrounded by barbed wire or walls, ghettos were sealed to prevent people from entering or leaving. Established mostly in Eastern Europe, ghettos were characterized by overcrowding, starvation and forced labour. All were eventually destroyed as the Jews were deported to death camps.

**Hitler, Adolf:** Nazi party leader from 1921 to 1945. He became the German Chancellor on January 30, 1933 and President on August 2, 1934. He committed suicide in his Berlin bunker on April 30, 1945 following Germany’s defeat by the Allied powers.
APPENDIX: GLOSSARY

**Holocaust:** The systematic murder of approximately six million European Jews and millions of other “undesirables” by Nazi Germany and its collaborators, 1933 to 1945.

**Judenrat:** Jewish Councils set up within the ghettos by German administration to maintain order and carry out the orders of the occupying forces.

**Judenrein:** German for “Free of Jews.” It refers to Hitler’s plan to murder all the Jews of Europe.

**Lebensraum:** German for “living space.” It refers to Hitler’s plan to establish an area for the Aryan race in Eastern Europe.

**Liberators:** Soviet, British, Canadian, and American troops who entered the concentration camps at the end of the Second World War.

**Litzmannstadt:** The German name adopted in 1940 for the city of Lodz. It was renamed for a German First World War general named Litzmann.

**Lodz:** The third largest city in Poland, and home to over 230,000 Jews in 1939. After the German occupation of Poland in 1939 it became home to the second largest and longest-lasting ghetto in Poland, liquidated in August 1944.

**Nazi:** Name for the National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP).

**Nazism:** The ideology of the National Socialist German Workers Party and the party’s system of rule from 1933 to 1945. The ideology included: 1) anti-liberalism and anti-parliamentarianism; 2) anti-communism and anti-socialism; 3) the Führer principle which replaced parliament with a hierarchical dictatorship based on the concepts of leader and follower, command and obedience; 4) nationalism; 5) racism and antisemitism; 6) imperialism; and 7) militarism.

**Nuremberg Laws:** A set of antisemitic laws passed by Hitler and the Nazi government in 1935. They forbid marriage between Jews and Germans. They also took away German Jews status as citizens, and stripped them of their rights. The laws were later implemented in countries occupied by Nazi Germany.

**Rumkowski, Mordecahai Chaim:** Head of the *Judenrat* (Jewish Council) in the Lodz ghetto. Rumkowski established schools, hospitals, and factories within the ghetto, and made Lodz a centre of productivity and labour.

**Second World War:** The war fought from 1939-1945 between the Axis and the Allied powers. The war began when Germany invaded Poland in September 1939. Germany surrendered on May 7, 1945. On August 6, 1945, the U.S. dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan; nine days later, Japan surrendered. The war ended with the signing of a peace treaty on September 2, 1945.

**Star of David:** A six-pointed star formed of two equilateral triangles; a traditional symbol of Judaism. Used by the Nazis as an identification marker for Jews. By Nazi decree, Jews over the age of six had to wear a yellow Star of David badge or blue and white armband on their clothing.

**Swastika:** Symbol of the Nazi party. A cross with equal arms each of which is bent at a right angle. It appeared on Nazi uniforms and flags.

**Yiddish:** The traditional language of Eastern European Jews.
1887
Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski is born.

1910
Henryk Ross is born in Warsaw.

1913
Mendel Grosman is born in Staszow, Poland.

1914-1918
The First World War is fought all across Europe.

1919
The Treaty of Versailles re-establishes Poland as an independent nation.

1929-1932
The Wall Street crash and fall of the New York Stock Exchange signal a worldwide economic crisis, The Great Depression.

The National Socialist German Workers Party (Nazi Party) becomes a major political party in Germany.

1933
Hitler begins to assume power after being democratically elected.

1939
September 1
Germany invades Poland; Second World War begins.

September 9
German army enters Lodz.

September 17
The Soviet army invades Eastern Poland.

October 6
The Polish army, including 130,000 Jewish soldiers, is defeated.

October 13
Mordecahi Chaim Rumkowski is appointed the “Elder of the Jews,” and placed in charge of the Judenrat (Jewish Council) in Lodz.

October-December
The German occupiers begin to pass anti-Jewish laws in Poland. Jews are forced to identify themselves, first with armbands, then with yellow stars on their chests. Jews were forbidden to marry non-Jews. Many Jews have their possessions, businesses, and properties confiscated. Forced labour begins in parts of Poland.

December 20
Jewish schools are closed and their property is confiscated.

1940

Late January-February
Jewish resettlement to the Lodz Ghetto begins, Poles forced out of their homes in the area.

April
City of Lodz renamed Litzmannstadt after a First World War German general.

More than 160,000 Polish Jews have been relocated to the Lodz Ghetto.

8,000-10,000 Jewish labourers begin to work in exchange for food supplies.

May 1
The Lodz Ghetto is sealed off from the rest of the city by barbed-wire fences.

The Jewish Police Force is created inside the Lodz Ghetto.

May
Over 40 schools are established to educate well-over 10,000 students (both primary & secondary).

Hospitals begin to be established within the ghetto.

July-August
The Children’s Colony is established, offering 15,000 children an opportunity to recuperate from the conditions of the ghetto.

August
A photographic office is established within the Jewish Council’s statistics department. Mendel Grosman and Henryk Ross are hired as official ghetto photographers.
APPENDIX: TIMELINE

1941

June 27
Nazi Germany wages war against its former ally, the Soviet Union.

October
The Ghetto schools are closed to make room for an additional 20,000 inhabitants.

October-November
20,000 Jews from Western Europe are resettled in the Ghetto.

November 5-9
The first transports of Roma and Sinti people from Burgenland arrive at the Lodz Ghetto. They were confined in a separate camp within the ghetto that soon housed more than 5,000 people.

December
A death camp with mobile gas vans is set up at Chelmno, near Lodz.

1942

January 5-12
The Roma and Sinti camp is liquidated. Some 4,300 Roma and Sinti people are transported to Chelmno and murdered.

January-May
The first major deportation of Jews from the Lodz Ghetto. More than 55,000 Jews are murdered at Chelmno.

September 3-12
Aktion Gehsperre—nearly 16,000 children, sick, and elderly are transported to Chelmno and murdered.

September 4
Chaim Rumkowski delivers his infamous “Give Me Your Children” speech, asking parents to turn over their children for deportation.

1943

The ghetto has become an industrial centre. More than 60,000 ghetto inhabitants, including 13,000 children between ages 10 to 17, are working in more than 96 departments.

1944

May
Reichsfuhrer Heinrich Himmler (man in charge of the SS) announces the planned liquidation of the Lodz Ghetto.

1945

January 16
The Russian forces liberate Lodz.

January 27
The Russian forces liberate Auschwitz and free the remaining prisoners.

April
Mendel Grosman is shot on a death march from Sachsenhausen concentration camp.

May-June
Grosman’s sister recovers his hidden photos in the Lodz Ghetto.

November
International Military War Crimes Tribunal begins in Nuremberg, Germany.

1956

Henryk Ross immigrates to Israel, bringing his photos of the Lodz Ghetto with him.

1961

Adolf Eichman (an SS officer, and major organizer of the Holocaust) is put on trial in Jerusalem. Ross’ photos are used as evidence.
APPENDIX: RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

BOOKS AND ARTICLES


YOUNG READERS


APPENDIX: RECOMMENDED RESOURCES


WEBSITES

http://en.auschwitz.org
The official homepage of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum.

http://www.lodz-ghetto.com/
A website featuring information, maps and timelines on the subject of the Lodz Ghetto.

http://www.holocaustresearchproject.org/ghettos/Lodz/lodzghetto.html
Holocaust Research Project’s page on the Lodz Ghetto.

http://www.ushmm.org/information/exhibitions/online-features/online-exhibitions/voices-from-lodz ghetto
The online exhibit “Give Me Your Children”: Voice from the Lodz Ghetto by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. It details the Lodz ghetto primarily through first hand accounts.

Photographs from the Lodz Ghetto from the Yad Vashem Photo Archive.

Children’s Diaries from the Holocaust - from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s Holocaust Encyclopedia.

http://www.ushmm.org/information/exhibitions/online-features/online-exhibitions/voices-from-lodz ghetto/interview
Link to an interview with Judith Cohen, chief photo archivist at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, in which she discusses Lodz Ghetto photographers.

FILMS

*Auschwitz: Inside the Nazi State* (2005)
A historical documentary describing the Final Solution phase of the Holocaust, particularly focused on the most infamous of the death camps.

A documentary detailing resistance during the Holocaust through survivor testimony.

*I’m Still Here: Real Diaries of Young People Who Lived During the Holocaust* (2008)
A documentary that brings to life the diaries of young people who witnessed first-hand the horrors of the Holocaust.

A documentary detailing the history of the Lodz Ghetto, primarily through narration from diaries & journals.

A documentary film documenting the experience of Lodz Ghetto survivor Yosef Neuhaus.

A documentary about the Lodz Ghetto primarily focused on a collection of photographs taken by Nazi photographer Walter Genewein.

*Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre Holocaust Testimony Project: Bronia S.: Lodz Ghetto Survivor*
Holocaust survivor Bronia S. details her time in the Lodz Ghetto.