

The Third Reich

Deportation

A first radical turning point in defining racial differences of the Gypsies in Germany took place in **December 1938** when Heinrich Himmler, Chief of the German Police, **ordered the complete profiling** of “pure” Gypsies, Gypsy Mischlinge (i.e the children of mixed marriages) and itinerants behaving like Gypsies. In addition to the academic debate, a decision, based on unified criteria, was now made to instigate policies of uniform repression throughout Reich territory. This decree was accompanied by an order whereby it was compulsory for the police **to issue fingerprinted colour-coded, and therefore immediately recognizable, identity cards**

In the meantime, the research conducted by Robert Ritter, of the Centre of Racial Hygiene, had led to the classification of 30,000 subjects, two thirds of whom were German while the remainder were either Austrian or Sudeten. This resulted in a widespread **scientific racial classification** of people, based on their greater or lesser degree of “German blood”. Though this division had absolutely no scientific foundation, it served as a basis for subsequent measures. As far as **Himmler** was concerned, defining **the racial nature of the Roma and Sinti was something that he personally wished to oversee** in keeping with his bizarre passion for anthropology and all things esoteric. In 1941, when the War was at its height, he introduced the distinction between Sinti, German Gypsies, and Roma of Hungarian origin. The latter represented a “corruption” of Aryan racial traits. The entire question involved no less than 35,000 people.

Furthermore, following the Nazi war of aggression and conquest, the acquisition of the territories in the East meant that a large number of Gypsy communities ended up under German control. While already during the second half of the 1930s, the doors of concentration camps had been opened to several of them, who were imprisoned individually, particularly in Dachau, Buchenwald and then Ravensbrück, the issue of handling the Roma and Sinti as a tightly knit ethnic group, was dealt with in a unique manner. In other words, it was considered necessary to reach a conclusive policy, capable of “solving” the problem of the “Gypsy nuisance” once and for all, and this now took precedence over all other policies.

Though not applying the *corpus* of the racial laws now enforced against the Jews, the formulation of an anti-Gypsy discriminatory policy began to run on parallel tracks. **The spatial segregation and repression of civil, social and political rights** soon became a fundamental component, fuelled, as in the case of other persecutions of target groups (including, in particular, homosexuals, Jehovah’s Witnesses and “a socials”), by the intensification of war-related behaviours.

Although German Roma and Sinti were forced to do **military service** which meant there was a period when it seems they might have been employed in fighting units, **from February 1941 anyone having the physiognomic traits “typical” of Nomadic races was exempted**. This exclusion was loaded with consequences owing to the fact that, in those countries whose participation in the war effort was a sign of full citizenship, being discriminated against marked the marginalization of those subjected to it. Furthermore, in this way, the principle whereby the racial nature of an individual was identifiable on account of his/her physical traits was further strengthened.

This measure was subsequently reinforced in **July 1942**, when Gypsies who were **children of intermarriage were subjected to the same treatment**, regardless of their individual valour on the battlefield. Additionally in March of that year, the Roma and Sinti had been subjected to the **vexatious laws applied by legislation to salaries paid to Jews** as well as the **Social Equalization tax imposed on Jews and Poles**.

While these were just some of the principle conditions which were enforced, others, including **the policy of territorial distribution** of the Sinti and Roma recommended by the SS and implemented by Reinhard Heydrich, Chief of the Security Service of the Reich, were later added. On **April 27, 1940**, Himmler ordered the **deportation of 2,800 Sinti and Roma from Western Germany to the "General Gouvernement"**, that part of Poland which, though not incorporated into the “Great Reich” nonetheless fell under German civil administration. All those subjects whom the Nazi State considered as undesirables, while waiting to learn about their final destinations, were deported to the **ghettos** that had sprung up in the cities of the “Gouvernement”. This first deportation which excluded all those married to Aryans or those who had joined the armed forces, acted as a prelude to future, sinister developments. The majority of deportees were sent to **labour camps** located in the ghettos that had sprung up in Polish cities. These were set up near the **Bug river** and were housed in dilapidated buildings (that had been evacuated by their previous owners, most of whom were Jews). This event triggered other **forced transports** which, within the space of a short time, became regularised. The destination of at least 4,000 Austrian Roma and Sinti was the Lackenbach camp from where, in November 1941, some of them, together with other thousands of unfortunates doomed to suffer the same fate, were sent to the Lodz ghetto, the anti-chamber to death. Almost all the Austrian Roma and Sinti deported to Jewish ghettos in Poland were subsequently exterminated in camps like Chelmno.

At that point, Heinrich Himmler decided to differentiate his treatment of the Sinti and the Roma, by assigning separate fates to the two groups. The former were saved from deportation to the East and settled in holding camps in ten or so German cities. Though still subject to administrative restraints which prevented their freedom, they were, nevertheless, awarded the right to practise their customary trades. Himmler ordered the internment of the remaining Romani populations, or rather the Roma and children of intermarriage, in a **camp**

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