

Algeria

Country in central North Africa that, from the mid-nineteenth century, was governed by France. In 1870 the Jews of Algeria received French citizenship. At that time, and from the 1920s through World War II, Antisemitism was rampant in Algeria. On the eve of the war, there were 120,000 Jews living there.

In June 1940 France was divided into north and south - the north conquered and governed by the Nazis, the south unoccupied by the Nazis, but controlled by the pro-Nazi Vichy government. Under the French-German cease-fire agreement, North Africa was considered part of unoccupied Vichy France, and most of the Europeans in North Africa supported the Vichy regime. All French laws were activated in Algeria, including those that restricted the legal status of Algerian Jews. On October 7, 1940, the Jews lost their citizenship, and a few days later, were subjected to the racial *Statut des Juifs* - just like the Jews of France. Over the next two years, France's Office for Jewish Affairs ordered many more anti-Jewish measures that were enacted both in Vichy France and in Algeria. These included the establishment of an Aryanization office in Algeria that confiscated Jewish property; the institution of strict quotas on the number of Jews who could work in the professions, including doctors, registered nurses, druggists, lawyers, and others; severe restrictions on the number of Jewish students who could study at university; and the exclusion of Jewish children from elementary and secondary schools. The Bedeau camp located near the town of Sidi-bel-Abbes acted as a concentration camp for Algerian Jewish soldiers. These men had been placed in a special unit called the Jewish Work Group, and made to do extremely hard forced labor. The authorities also planned to set up a *Judenrat* based on the Union of French Jews, and the Germans intended to begin deporting Jews to Extermination Camps in Europe. All these anti-Jewish measures were devised both in accordance with the antisemitic Vichy philosophy, and in order to gain the favor of the North African Muslim population.

The Jews of Algeria believed that the Germans pressured the French authorities into instituting racist laws. Thus, many joined the Algerian

underground after it was formed in 1940 by a group of young Jews, some of whom were former French army officers. Other Jewish underground groups were also established and joined the organized resistance, which made contact with certain French officials who had come to Algeria to get ready to continue the battle against the Germans. At the end of October 1942, the American authorities told the Algerian resistance about their plans to land in Algeria and Morocco, and asked them to participate in the fight by seizing control of strategic locations in Algiers, Oran, and Casablanca. The underground was not successful in Oran or Casablanca, but fully succeeded in its part of the capture of Algiers on November 7-8. There were 377 resistance members who took Algiers - of whom 315 were Jews. Thus, the Algerian Jewish community survived due to this early Allied Liberation of Algeria in November 1942.

However, the Jews were not truly "liberated." The Americans agreed to appoint a Vichy official named Francois Darlan as High Commissioner of North Africa in exchange for a cease-fire, and allowed Vichy law, including its anti-Jewish regulations, to remain intact. When Darlan was murdered in December 1942, Jewish resistance leaders were arrested for collaboration - on the orders of their former French comrades in the resistance. In March 1943 only some of the anti-Jewish laws were cancelled. General Charles de Gaulle took control of Algeria in May, and three months later, he reinstated citizenship for the country's Jews and revoked its anti-Jewish legislation. (For more on Vichy, see also France.)