

Badge, Jewish

Symbol that Jews were forced to wear during the Holocaust, so that they could be identified as Jews. The Germans used the Jewish badge, often in the form of a yellow Star of David, to harass and isolate the Jews. In that way, they were able to create a wide rift between the Jews and the rest of the population. Sometimes, other opponents of the Nazis were also forced to wear special identification badges. The Nazis' inspiration for the Jewish badge came from medieval times, when both Muslims and Christians decreed that Jews must wear articles of clothing that would set them apart and shame them for being different.

Reinhard Heydrich first suggested the Jewish badge concept after the *Kristallnacht* pogrom of November 1938. In September 1939, after the German invasion of Poland, the Nazis decreed that Jewish stores should be branded with a distinctive mark. Soon after, the head of the *Generalgouvernement*, Hans Frank, ordered that the Jews themselves be marked: all Jews over the age of 12 were to don white armbands, at least four inches wide, inscribed with a blue Star of David. From then on the idea spread to all territory held by the Nazis.

The Jews were responsible to buy and distribute the badges. If a Jew was caught without a badge, he was fined, imprisoned, or shot. In some Ghettos, certain groups were given different badges to identify them as being unique among the Jews. These included Jewish police, doctors, *Judenrat* employees, and factory workers, who no longer had to wear the regular Jewish badge and thus felt more favored than the rest of the Jews.

Different symbols, all variations on the same theme, were introduced in different areas of the *Generalgouvernement* and the Polish territories occupied by Germany. In 1941 the SS ordered the Jews to wear a yellow six-pointed star, four inches high, on the left side of the breast and on the back. When Germany invaded the Soviet Union, Jews there were also forced to wear Jewish badges. By September 1941 Jews within the Reich were ordered to wear the "Jewish star."

The Jewish badge also became the norm in other areas controlled by or allied with the Nazis, such as Slovakia, part of Romania, and in Hungary after the Nazi occupation. The Germans had a harder time, however, convincing their satellite countries in Western Europe to force Jews to wear Jewish badges. The French Vichy government refused to implement the order in the unoccupied zone, saying that the anti-Jewish measures they had already taken were enough, and that a distinguishing mark would "shock" the French people. The decree was carried out, though, in occupied France, Belgium and the Netherlands.

The Nazis did not even try to make the Jewish badge obligatory in Denmark, due to the Danes' strong opposition to anti-Jewish measures. A story is told that King Christian X himself donned the Jewish badge in solidarity with the Jews of Denmark. The story is fictional (as Danish Jewry was never forced to wear badges), but it powerfully demonstrates the Danish king's courage and commitment to his country's Jews.

Both Jews and non-Jews reacted strongly to the Jewish badge decree. Almost all Polish Jews cooperated with the law, in fear of severe punishment; however, diaries from the time speak with unabashed bitterness about having to wear the badge. In Germany, the introduction of the badge was followed by a wave of suicides. Many French Jews refused to wear the badge, and some French non-Jews expressed their empathy for the Jewish plight by wearing stars themselves. Even the French police did not enforce the decree. In Holland, an underground newspaper expressed its solidarity with the Jews by printing 300,000 stars, inscribed with the words, "Jews and non-Jews are one and the same." (For more on Vichy, see also France.)