



Deportations

In 1919 Adolf Hitler wrote of his desire for the complete removal of Jews from Germany, and his belief that methodical measures were needed in order to achieve that goal. By the mid-1930s, the SS had transformed that theoretical goal into a policy that called for a Germany physically “cleansed” (*Judenrein*), or “free of Jews” (*Judenfrei*). After the annexation of Austria (*Anschluss*) in March 1938 and even more so after the *Kristallnacht* pogrom of November 1938, the Nazis began pressuring Jews to emigrate.

Soon after the Germans invaded Poland in September 1939, they began implementing the first stage of deportation, by forcing Jews out of their homes and into Ghettos. There were also attempts to drive the Jews into Soviet territory. The Nazis then decided to deport all the Jews living within the Reich to an area in Poland's *generalgouvernement* called the Lublin Reservation. This scheme was part of the Nazis' larger plan to relocate the populations of Europe. Besides these designs for the Jews, they intended to remove many Poles from Poland, and resettle the area with ethnic Germans (*Volksdeutsche*), primarily from the Soviet Union. Adolf Eichmann was placed in charge of the deportations of Jews and Poles, as the SS expert on “Jewish affairs and evacuations.” However, the so-called Nisko and Lublin plan faltered. Germany's resettlement plans halted completely in mid-1941, during preparations to invade the Soviet Union. Thus, Hitler's goal to expel all Jews from German-occupied areas had not yet been achieved.

The next stage of deportation emerged as the result of a shift in the Nazi's Jewish policy from expulsion to mass extermination. After invading the Soviet Union in June 1941, the Germans began to massacre Soviet Jewry by firing squad. However, this method could not reasonably be used in the cities of Eastern and Western Europe. Thus, the Nazis decided to deport Jews to extermination centers in the East. Deportations from the Lodz Ghetto to the first extermination camp, called Chelmno, began in December 1941. The other major extermination camps were ready for operation by mid-1942.



Jews were transferred to the camps by train. The German Transport Ministry and German Railways helped the Nazis in their murderous goal by providing special trains for the Jews. In most cases, Jews were crowded into cattle cars; in northern Europe some Jews paid for their tickets, and sometimes even upgraded to first-class. Irrespective of how they traveled, Jews deported to the east suffered a similar fate.

The Jews of Poland were transported to extermination camps throughout 1942. In March 1942 nearly 60,000 Slovak Jews were deported to Poland to meet their deaths. In July 1942 mass deportations were launched from France, Belgium, and the Netherlands – initially consisting mostly of foreign Jewish refugees. Throughout August, 5,000 Jews from Croatia were deported. Starting in late October, more than 700 Norwegian Jews were arrested and taken to the extermination camps. Deportations continued in 1943 from the aforementioned countries, however the Germans began to focus primarily on deporting the Jews of the Balkans.

Romania carried out the deportation of Jews to Transnistria from the territories it had taken from the Soviet Union, including Bessarabia and Bukovina. Nonetheless, the Romanians refused to deport their own Jews. The Italian government protected the Jews within its jurisdiction, such as in southern Greece and France, and parts of Yugoslavia. However, most Greek Jews lived in northern Greece, in Salonika, which was occupied by Germany. Thus, some 44,000 Greek Jews were deported to extermination camps between March and August 1943, with the remainder following later.

The Germans also tried to deport the Jews of Denmark in October 1943. However, the local population foiled their plan by hiding their country's Jews and then smuggling them to neutral Sweden.

In 1944 most of the remaining Jews were deported from Slovakia and from the last ghetto in Lodz. However the Nazis' central effort at that period was driven toward the destruction of Hungarian Jewry. After Germany occupied Hungary in March 1944, 437,000 Jews were deported to their deaths at Auschwitz.