



Gypsies

(Roma, Sinti), a people who have been living in Europe since the fifteenth century, that shares a common language, culture, and until the twentieth century, a wandering way of life. The Gypsies, also called Roma, were one of the groups persecuted by the Nazis. About 200,000 Gypsies, and possibly more, were killed throughout Europe.

The Gypsies probably originally came from India, and migrated to Iran by the fourteenth century. They reached Hungary, Serbia, and other Balkan countries by 1438. Next, they spread into Poland, Russia, Sweden, Spain, and Great Britain. Some Gypsies converted to Islam or Orthodoxy, but most became Catholics, while still observing much of their pre-Christian religion. Their language split into many dialects; only today is it becoming a written language.

Because of their nomadic lifestyle, the Gypsies made a living mainly from trading horses and other animals, peddling, silver and gold work, and music. They were not allowed to own land where they lived, and were often accused of stealing by the locals. Because the Gypsies were deemed different and foreign, they were treated in a hostile manner by their adopted countries.

When the Nazis came to power, they slated the Gypsies for persecution, because the Gypsies represented a contradiction to the Aryan ideal. They were not as bad as Jews, but they were not of pure Aryan blood, they did not live a settled way of life, and they did not fit into the kind of society the Nazis aspired to. The Nazis sought to determine which Gypsies were most harmful. Their treatment of Gypsies was influenced by whether they were "pure" or of mixed blood, and whether they lived a traditional Gypsy lifestyle or not. Since at various times the Nazis regarded these factors differently, Gypsies were treated inconsistently. Some Gypsies were murdered, others were enslaved, others were to be sterilized and others were largely left alone.

The Nuremberg Laws of September 1935 included the Gypsies in their discrimination. In 1936, groups of Gypsies were taken to the Dachau camp. A Nazi named Richard Ritter set to the task of deciding what to do with the Gypsy population. He called for the separation of Gypsies from Aryans, and



Mischlinge Gypsies from pure Gypsies, and for the sterilization and imprisonment of the Mischlinge. In 1939 Heinrich Himmler announced the removal of 30,000 Gypsies from Germany to the Generalgouvernement, only 2,500 were deported. On December 16, 1942 Himmler ordered the transfer of the Mischlinge Gypsies to Auschwitz, with the exception of a few former German soldiers, important war industry workers, and those who were "socially adapted," who were to be sterilized, instead. In 1943 and 1944 thousands of Gypsies were deported to Auschwitz. They lived under horrible conditions. Many died of starvation, illness, and medical experiments. Others were murdered. In total, about 24,000 Gypsies from Germany and Austria were sent to concentration camps. Approximately 13,500 others were saved. Only a few hundred Czech Gypsies survived.

In German-occupied Europe, Gypsies often were murdered along with the Jews. Generally, the Nazis would imprison the Gypsies and then transport them to Germany or Poland to be killed. In Yugoslavia alone, 90,000 were exterminated. Gypsies from the Netherlands, Luxembourg, France, and Belgium were arrested and sent to Auschwitz. About 16,000--18,000 Gypsies from non-occupied France were murdered in German camps. Some Italian Gypsies were interned, some were made to perform forced labor, and others were sent to extermination camps. Many Gypsies from Hungary were deported. About 25,000 Romanian Gypsies died, and Slovak Gypsies were forced into labor brigades, expelled, and murdered by their Slovak countrymen. In Poland, Gypsies were put in the ghettos, and sent to camps; about two-thirds of the Polish Gypsies died, numbering 25,000. In the Soviet Union and the Baltic States, a distinction was sometimes made between settled and nomadic Gypsies. Those Gypsies from Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, and Greece were spared.