

Muselmann

German term widely used among concentration camp inmates to refer to prisoners who were near death due to exhaustion, starvation, or hopelessness. The word *Muselmann* literally means "Muslim." Some scholars believe that the term originated from the similarity between the near-death prone state of a concentration camp *Muselmann* and the image of a Muslim prostrating himself on the ground in prayer.

Many victims, totally lacking the wherewithal to adapt, reached this stage soon after arrival in a camp. Other prisoners succumbed to sickness, physical abuse, hunger, and overwork. One could identify *Muselmanner* by their physical and psychological decline; they were lethargic, indifferent to their surroundings, and could not stand up for more than a short period of time. Most other prisoners avoided contact with *Muselmanner*, in fear of contracting the condition themselves.

The Nazis running the camps considered the *Muselmanner* undesirable, because they could not work or endure camp rule. Thus, during selections, these victims were the first to be sentenced to death. A person at the *Muselmann* stage had no chance for survival; he or she would not live for more than a few days or weeks.