



Lodz

City located in Poland. An important center of Jewish culture, Lodz was home to 223,000 Jews on the eve of World War II.

The Germans entered Lodz on September 8, 1939. They designated the city as part of the Warthegau, a Polish region that was annexed to the Reich. Upon occupation of Lodz the Germans began to persecute the city's Jews, organizing riots and kidnapping of Jews for forced labor. Jews were confined to their homes from 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m., and were restricted economically. The Germans also outlawed synagogue services. On November 9, Lodz was formally annexed to the Reich, and from November 15-17 the Germans razed all synagogues in the city. Concurrently, the Jews were ordered to don the Jewish badge (see also Badge, Jewish). In October 1939, the Germans appointed a *Judenrat* (known in Lodz as an *Alttestenrat*, or Council of Elders), with Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski as its chairman.

From the beginning of the German occupation, the Jews of Lodz were subjected to periodic expulsions. By March 1940 approximately 70,000 Jews had left the city. Some had fled of their own will, but most had been deported by the Germans. A ghetto was set up in February and sealed off in late April; approximately 164,000 Jews were packed into it. The ghetto administration was headed by Hans Biebow, whose major concern was making money for the SS. - he established factories in the ghetto, where cheap Jewish labor was exploited for the German war economy. The *Alttestenrat* clung to these factories as a means of proving Jewish productivity, with the hope to save Jewish lives and thus energetically found work for increasingly more Jews.

Throughout 1941 and 1942 some 38,500 Jews were moved into the Lodz Ghetto, including Jews from Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Luxembourg, and other towns in the Warthegau. By the end of 1942, approximately 204,800 people had passed through the ghetto. About 43,500 people died there as a result of starvation, disease, and cold.

Deportations from the Lodz Ghetto began in December 1940. Initially, Jews were transferred from the ghetto to forced labor camps outside the city. From



January 1942, Jews were deported from the ghetto directly to Chelmno extermination camp. From January to May 1942, 55,000 Jews and 5,000 Gypsies (who had been held in Lodz temporarily) were sent to their deaths at Chelmno. Another deportation *aktion* was carried out in early September of that year: almost 20,000 Jews were sent to Chelmno, and hundreds were killed on the spot during the deportation process.

From September 1942 to May 1944, there were no more deportations and life in Lodz was relatively calm for the 77,000 remaining ghetto inmates. During that time, underground political parties and youth movements contributed much to the ghetto in the way of (illegal) political, public, and cultural activities. However, these groups could not help their fellow Jews when the Germans decided to liquidate the Lodz Ghetto in May 1944. The Nazis renewed transports to Chelmno, and by July more than 7,000 Jews had been deported. In early August the Nazis rerouted the deportations to Auschwitz in order to accelerate the extermination process. By August 30, the date of the last transport to Auschwitz, about 70,000 Jews had been sent to the infamous extermination camp. Only 1,200 Jews were left in Lodz. Six hundred were sent to labor camps in Germany, while the other 600 were put in a camp inside Lodz (Radogoszcz prison). The Nazis intended to kill all the prisoners in that camp before they withdrew, but the prisoners managed to escape to the ghetto area, where they were liberated by the Soviet army on January 19, 1945. By the war's end, no more than 7,000 Jews from the Lodz Ghetto had survived the concentration camps.