Warthegau

(Wartheland), territory established by the Germans in October 1939 in the part of Poland that was incorporated into the Reich; the Warthegau existed until it was liberated in January 1945. It was the largest administrative unit in the Reich, covering a total of 16,966 square miles. At the beginning of World War II, 4,922,000 people lived in the area, including 385,000 Jews and 325,000 Germans.

The Warthegau was run by Arthur Greiser, who intended to turn the region into a model of racial purity. He divided the population into superior persons- the Germans - and inferior persons, including Poles, Jews, and Gypsies. Within weeks, the superior group had taken all the high posts in the business, political, and economic administration of the region, and received many privileges.

Members of the "inferior group" were badly persecuted. More than 70,000 Poles were murdered and others were sent to forced labor and Concentration Camps. The Germans also persecuted Poles by restricting their movement, expelling many, giving them the most meager of food rations, welfare, and health services, and preventing certain couples from getting married. The Germans confiscated 95.5 percent of Polish property, closed down their schools, and forbid Poles from developing their cultural and social lives. Even using the Polish language was restricted.

As soon as the Warthegau was established, the Germans began instituting anti-Jewish measures. Jews were forced to wear Jewish badges (see also Badge, Jewish), sent to labor camps, and were forbidden to use public transportation. Jewish property was confiscated, and Jews were banned from cultural, educational, and political activities. Some Jews were also murdered.

From early 1940 to late 1941, the Jews were herded into 173 ghettos and forced labor camps. Many died of starvation, overwork, and unsanitary conditions; several thousand were murdered. Beginning in December 1941, most of the Jews were exterminated. During the last few months of the war the Germans slowed the rate of extermination, so that the remaining Jews could be exploited for their work abilities. Altogether, 380,000 Warthegau

Jews were killed, and only 5,000 survived. In addition, hundreds of Gypsies living in the Warthegau were also murdered.

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