

FLASHES OF MEMORY

PHOTOGRAPHY CREATING PERCEPTION DURING THE HOLOCAUST

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SHOAH

The Holocaust (Shoah) was the anti-Jewish campaign initiated and implemented by Nazi Germany during the years 1933-1945. Its culmination was an unprecedented and systematic genocide that aimed to totally eradicate Judaism and annihilate the Jewish people.

The campaign's primary motivation was an antisemitic, racist ideology, which asserted that the Jews were a danger to Germany and to humankind as a whole. According to this ideology, the Jews were parasites who exploited non-Jewish peoples and disseminated ideas about human equality perceived as undermining the natural and ostensibly appropriate hierarchy between the so-called "races".

From 1933 onwards, Nazi Germany implemented anti-Jewish policies: Initially, they defined who were Jews, stripped them of most of their rights, their professional status and their property, and acted to isolate them socially. During the Second World War, anti-Jewish measures escalated, both in Germany and in occupied and Germany-allied Europe, and included banishment from the general population by marking, segregating or concentrating Jewish people in ghettos, forced labor, starvation and more. These actions gained broad support in Germany and many other countries, and led to the Jews' removal from civil, social and economic life in their countries of residence.

The systematic murder of Jews began in the summer of 1941 with the invasion of the Soviet Union, and Nazi policy gradually developed into a comprehensive genocide termed "The Final Solution to the Jewish Question". By the end of the war, nearly six million Jews had been murdered.



Photograph that a German soldier sent from the front, depicting German policemen executing Jews. On the back of the photo, the soldier wrote: "Jews during an Aktion, Ivangorod, Ukraine, 1942".

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Courtesy of Jerzy Tomaszewski



Deportation from the Warsaw ghetto to the Treblinka and Majdanek extermination camps after the Uprising was quashed. April-May 1943.

National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, U.S.A

FLASHES OF MEMORY

PHOTOGRAPHY CREATING PERCEPTION DURING THE HOLOCAUST

Visual documentation is one of the major factors in shaping historical awareness of the Holocaust. Alongside archival documentation of the period's events and the research on these records, visual documentation has contributed significantly towards knowledge of the Holocaust, influenced the manner in which it has been analyzed and understood, and affected the way it has been engraved in the collective memory. The camera, with its manipulative power, has tremendous impact and far-reaching influence. Although photography purports to reflect reality as it is, it is essentially an interpretation of it, since elements such as worldview, values, and moral perception influence the choice of the object to be photographed as well as how it is presented. When visual documentation is also used as a historical document, its use requires attributing the greatest of importance to these components.

Different parties photographed during the Holocaust. The Nazi State left behind a huge quantity of photographic and cinematic documentation. As a result, German visual materials, much of which were created for propaganda purposes, largely shaped the visual image of World War II events, including the Holocaust.

For the Nazi German regime, the visual media played a crucial role in propaganda as a means of expression and a tool for manipulating and mobilizing the masses. This kind of documentation attests to Nazi ideology and how German leaders sought to mold their image in the public eye. Conversely, Jewish photography was a component in the struggle for survival of the Jews imprisoned in the ghettos, and a manifestation of underground activity that testified to their desire to document and transmit information on the tragedy befalling their people. The Allied armies, who understood the propaganda value of photographing the camps they liberated, documented the scenes revealed to them, bringing in official photographers and encouraging soldiers to document the Nazi horrors as evidence for future war crimes trials and in an effort to re-educate the German population.

This exhibit presents a critical examination of documentation through the camera lens, focusing on the circumstances of the photograph and the worldview of the photographer, while referring to the Jewish photographers' different and unique viewpoints as direct victims of the Holocaust.

YAD VASHEM

Since its founding in 1953, Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center, located on the Mount of Remembrance in Jerusalem, has been dedicated to preserving the memory of the Holocaust. Through its collections, documentation, research and education about the horrors of the Holocaust, Yad Vashem aims to instill the significance of the Holocaust in the coming generations.

This exhibition is an adaptation of the “Flashes of Memory – Photography During the Holocaust” exhibition, curated by Vivian Uria and exhibited at Yad Vashem.

The exhibition was produced by the Traveling Exhibitions Department, Museums Division, Yad Vashem.

Design: Graphics Studio, Information Technology Division, Yad Vashem

POLITICAL PHOTOGRAPHY AND FILMING IN NAZI GERMANY

"Always aim at the masses!"

"The receptive capability of the wider masses is quite restricted... therefore, the propaganda subject should be limited to only a few points. These should be processed and sent back to the masses as slogans, again and again until the last listener imagines to himself what is favored!"

- Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*

In the years following WWI, photography became a widespread pastime in Germany, both professionally and as a hobby. The Nazi Party was greatly aware of the importance of visual media as a propaganda and recruitment tool. As a result, this sector was developed vigorously after its rise to power. The Nazification - the process whereby the Nazi regime took over aspects of German life - of photography was first expressed in official photography, which served its communications efforts, the movie industry, and government institutions. Nazification was also significant in amateur photography, with the Party extending its patronage to photography clubs and periodicals. These processes were clearly reflected in the representation of the Jews in antisemitic propaganda and their increased persecution as documented by private photography.



Photographers at one of the Nazi Party Committee [meetings] before the war.

Archiv Lauterwasser, Überlingen Germany



During the 1930s, people collected cards placed in packs of cigarettes and then pasted them into special albums devoted to a specific topic. Several such albums were produced in Nazi Germany. One of the most popular albums, printed in 1933, was entitled "Germany Awakens." The album described the rise of the Nazi movement in 225 pictures and captions. The album and its pictures were produced by Heinrich Hoffmann, the Nazi Party's official photographer.

Yad Vashem Archives

HELENA “LENI” RIEFENSTAHL

Director Leni Riefenstahl's early work impressed Hitler, and in 1933, he asked her to produce a film of the Nazi Party rally taking place that year. This creation was the first of a trilogy of party rally films by Riefenstahl, the most famous of which was *Triumph of the Will*, produced in 1934. In 1936, Riefenstahl produced a film of the Berlin Olympic Games. While the question of her role in the Third Reich is still up for debate, her films undoubtedly had a significant influence on the image of the Nazi regime during the 1930s. She was especially known for her use of advanced and creative photographic techniques and technologies.



Leni Riefenstahl directing a photo shoot of Hitler Youth during the filming of *Triumph of the Will*.

Bundesarchiv, Picture 183-R80430 / Photographer: O. Ang

OLYMPIA

The Nazi regime engaged Leni Riefenstahl's services to produce an official documentary film of the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games. Its main purpose was to glorify the Nazi state and its people. This was accomplished, among other methods, through various visual motifs that stressed the “perfect physiology” of the Aryan race, for example, through artistic filming of seemingly “Ancient Greek” athletes at the film's opening. *Olympia* broke the boundaries of filming and visual documentation of the time. The film exemplifies the advanced technology and abundant resources employed in Nazi Germany's propaganda efforts.



Leni Riefenstahl standing behind photographer Walter Frenz during the filming of *Olympia*. A wagon is being used for filming in motion – a film technique favored by Riefenstahl.

Bundesarchiv, Picture 146-1988-106-29 / Photographer: O. Ang

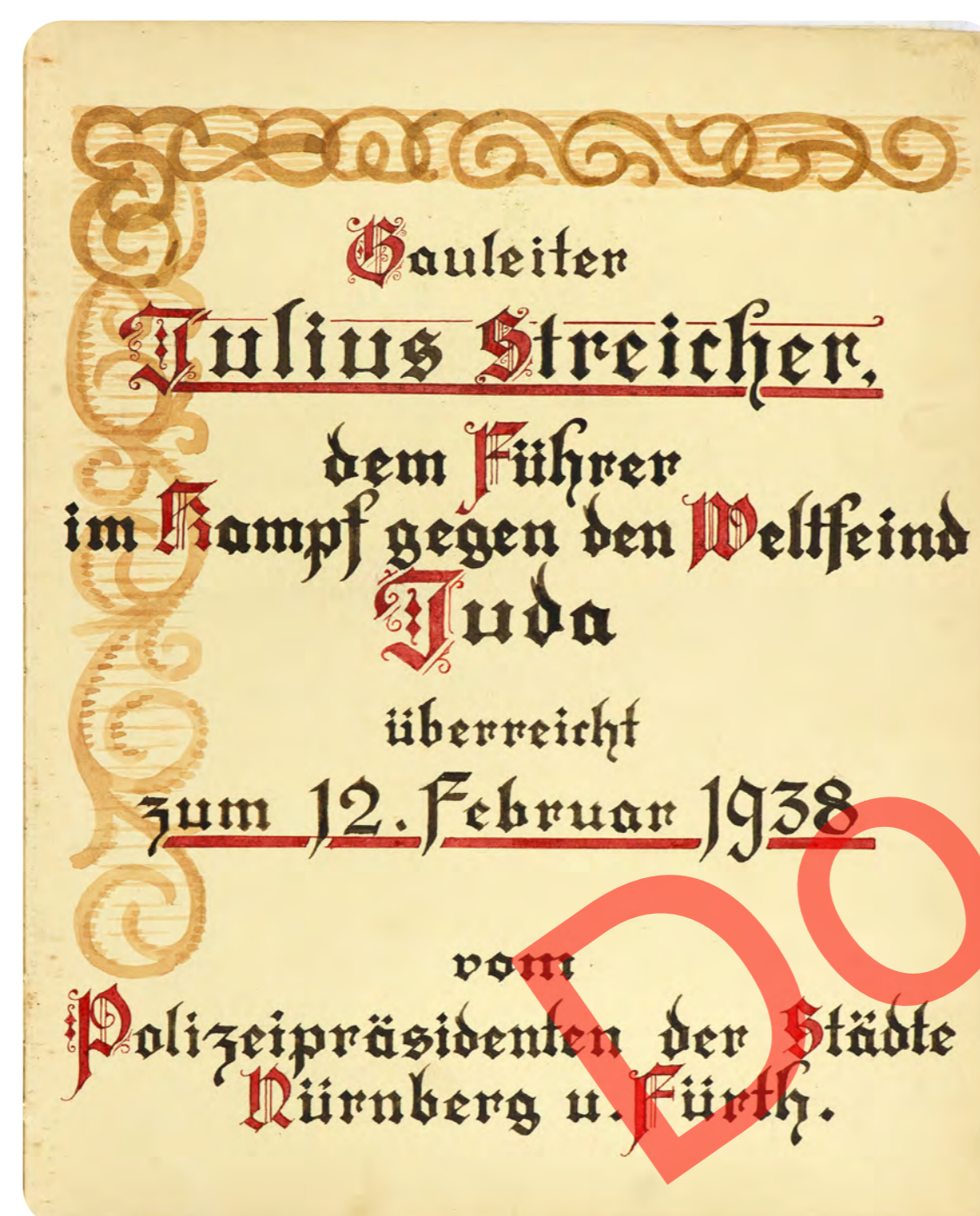
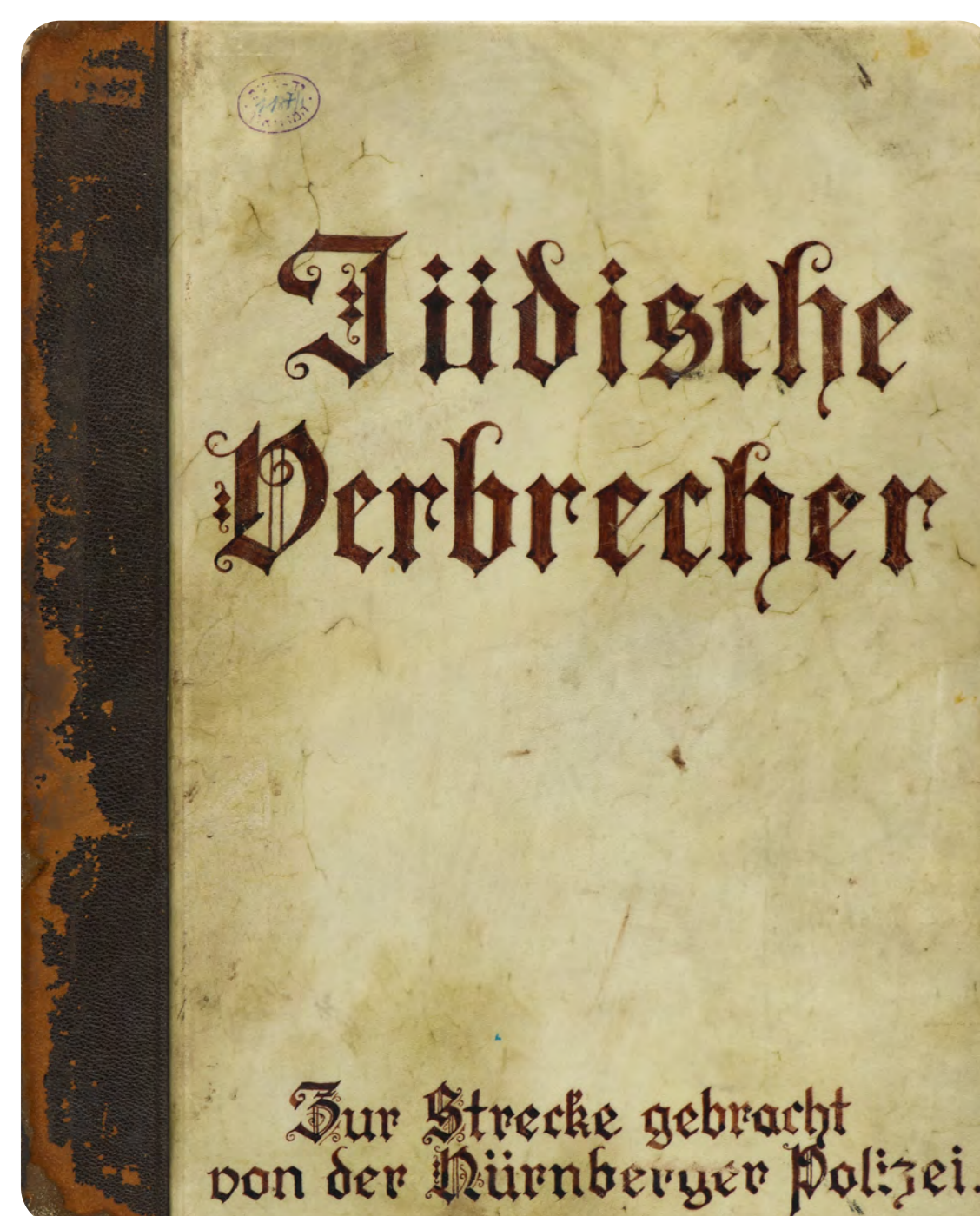


Leni Riefenstahl and her photographers installing a camera during the filming of *Olympia*. Placing the camera in a pit enabled filming sportsmen from below – an angle that added a special dramatic effect to their movements.

Bundesarchiv, Picture 183-R78303 / Photographer: O. Ang

PHOTOGRAPHY AS A MIRROR OF GROWING ANTISEMITISM

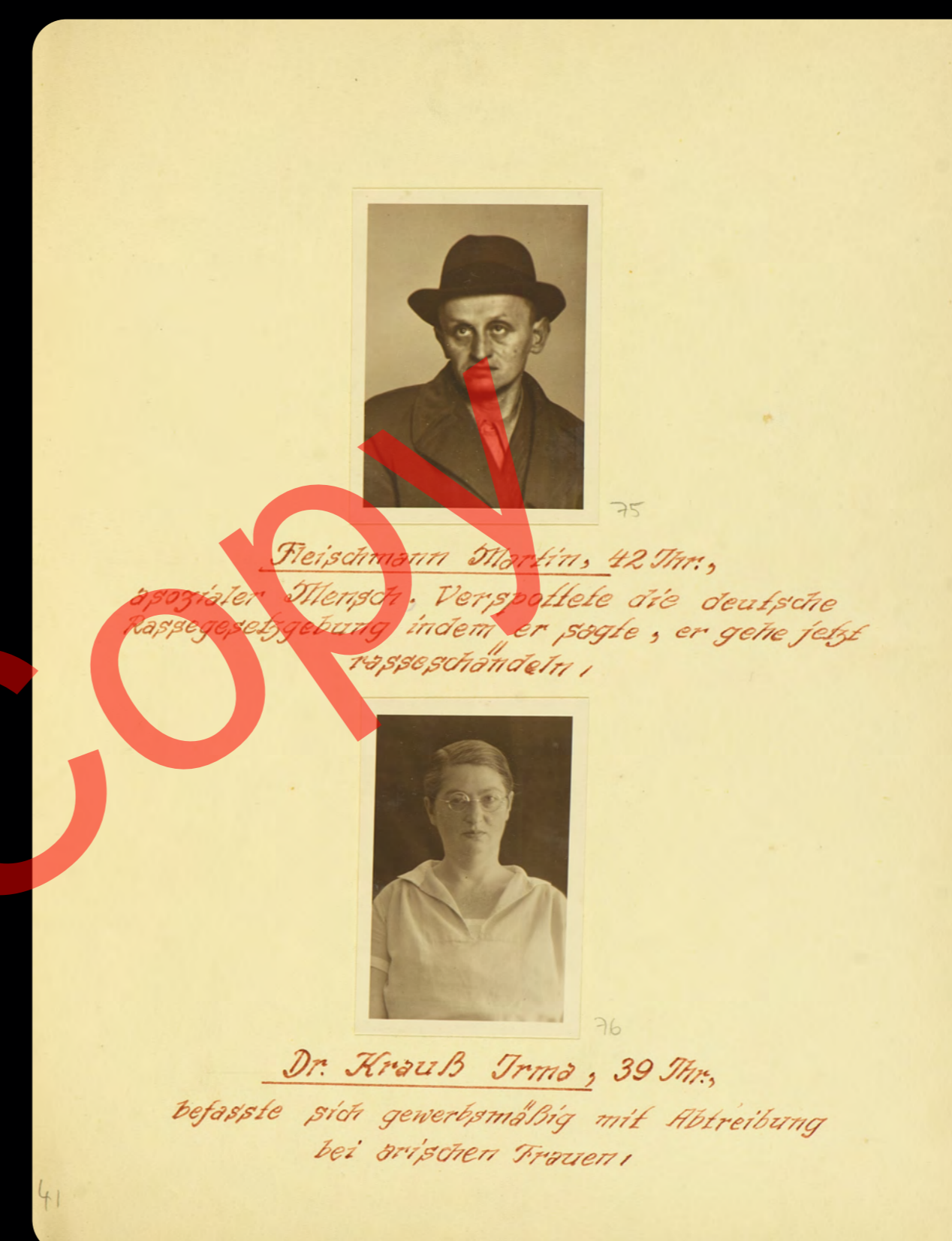
The increasing recruitment of photography by the Nazis also included visual presentations of the Jews. These presentations were distorted and biased, in line with the regime's radical antisemitic ideology. Photography in the growing antisemitic spirit was a tool for disseminating the idea of the "People's Community" (the regime's utopian vision of German society), and thereby aided in the process of removing the Jews from that community.



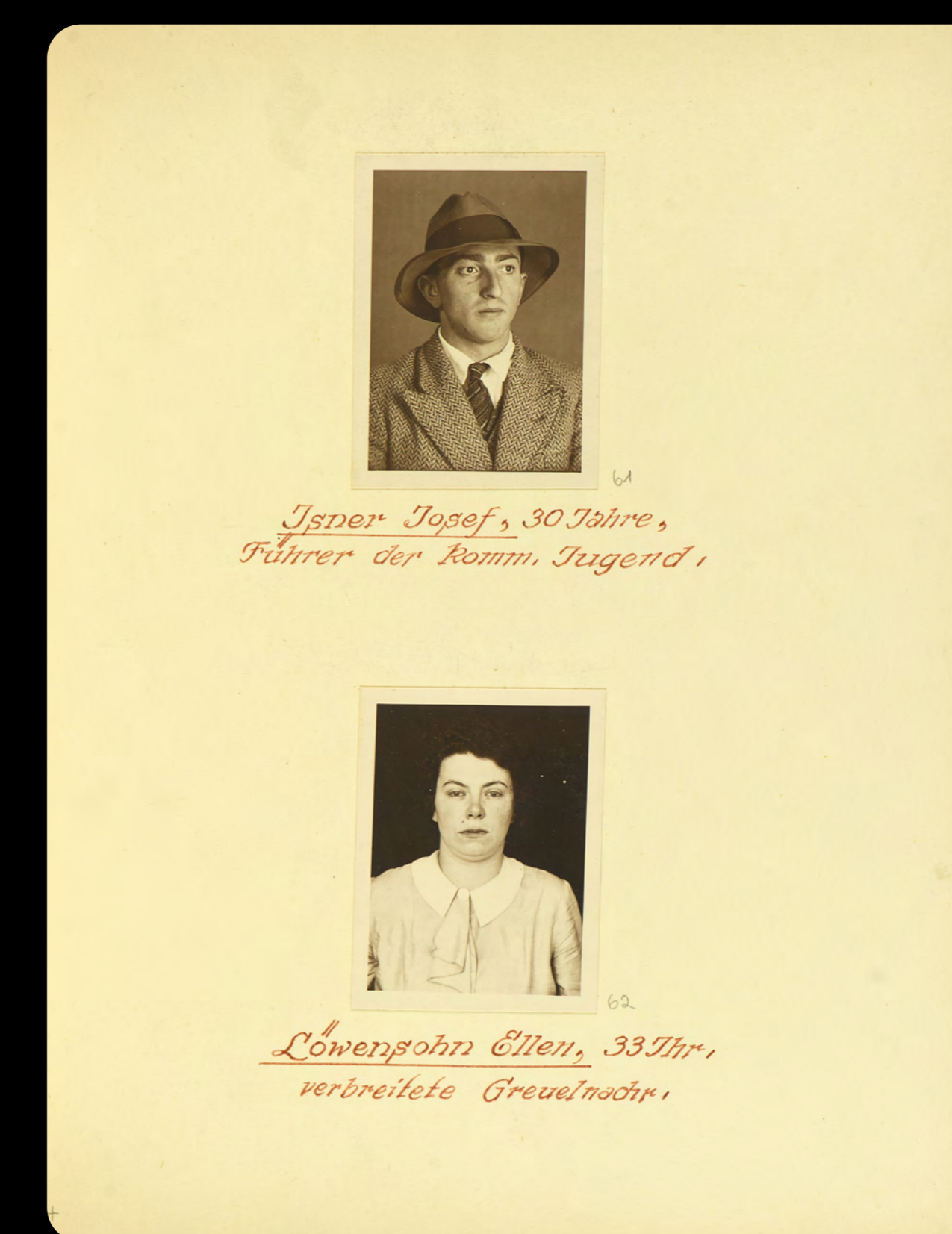
The "Jewish Criminals" Album

This album represents the Nazification of official photography in the spirit of radical antisemitism. The album was produced by the Nuremberg police, and presented to Gauleiter (District Governor) Julius Streicher, publisher of the antisemitic newspaper *Der Stürmer*. The album purported to present the variety of "crimes" committed by Jews who were arrested by the police. It presented the institutionalized tendency in Germany to link the Jews with criminality – including crimes against the Nazi concept of a "People's Community."

Yad Vashem Archives



Jewish man accused of mocking the Race Laws, and female Jewish doctor accused of carrying out abortions on German women.



Jewish man accused of communist activity, and a Jewish woman accused of spreading false news.

PERSONAL PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE GROWING ANTISEMITIC SPIRIT

In addition to official party photography, regular citizens photographed events and objects that also gave expression to the mounting antisemitism: antisemitic demonstrations, signs, graffiti, and more. An interesting example of this work was photographs of popular carnivals that constituted part of German folklore, especially in southern and western Germany. The carnivals included costume parades and various performances. After the Nazi rise to power, the costumes and performances began to taken on antisemitic tones. Photographs of these carnivals added an additional visual layer to the growing antisemitism.



Youth near a car with the words, "The Jews are our misfortune," written on the spare tire. This motto, attributed to German historian Heinrich von Treitschke, was adopted and disseminated by the Nazi Party.

Stadtarchiv Nürnberg, E. 39 Nr.2255/10

Antisemitic performance at the Cologne Carnival, 1934. On the left is a sign with the words, "A dose of iron" above a bunch of garlic (garlic was considered a "Jewish" food). A sign on the wagon shows the way from Cologne to Tel Aviv-Jaffa. On the back is a sign, "The last ones are leaving" and beneath, "We are only making a short trip to Liechtenstein and Jaffa."

Yad Vashem Archives

DER STÜRMER

Established in April 1923, *Der Stürmer* became the symbol of radical Nazi antisemitism. Its founder and chief editor was Julius Streicher, leader of the Nazi Party in Nuremberg and, later on, of the Franconia region. Streicher was known as an especially brutal and extreme antisemite, a reputation that found ample expression in his newspaper's content. By 1938, the newspaper's distribution reached a half-million copies. *Der Stürmer* focused its antisemitism on the figure of Jews throughout history as agitators and manipulators; a collective that sought to destroy the Aryan race. It delivered its messages through a combination of texts, photographs, and illustrations.

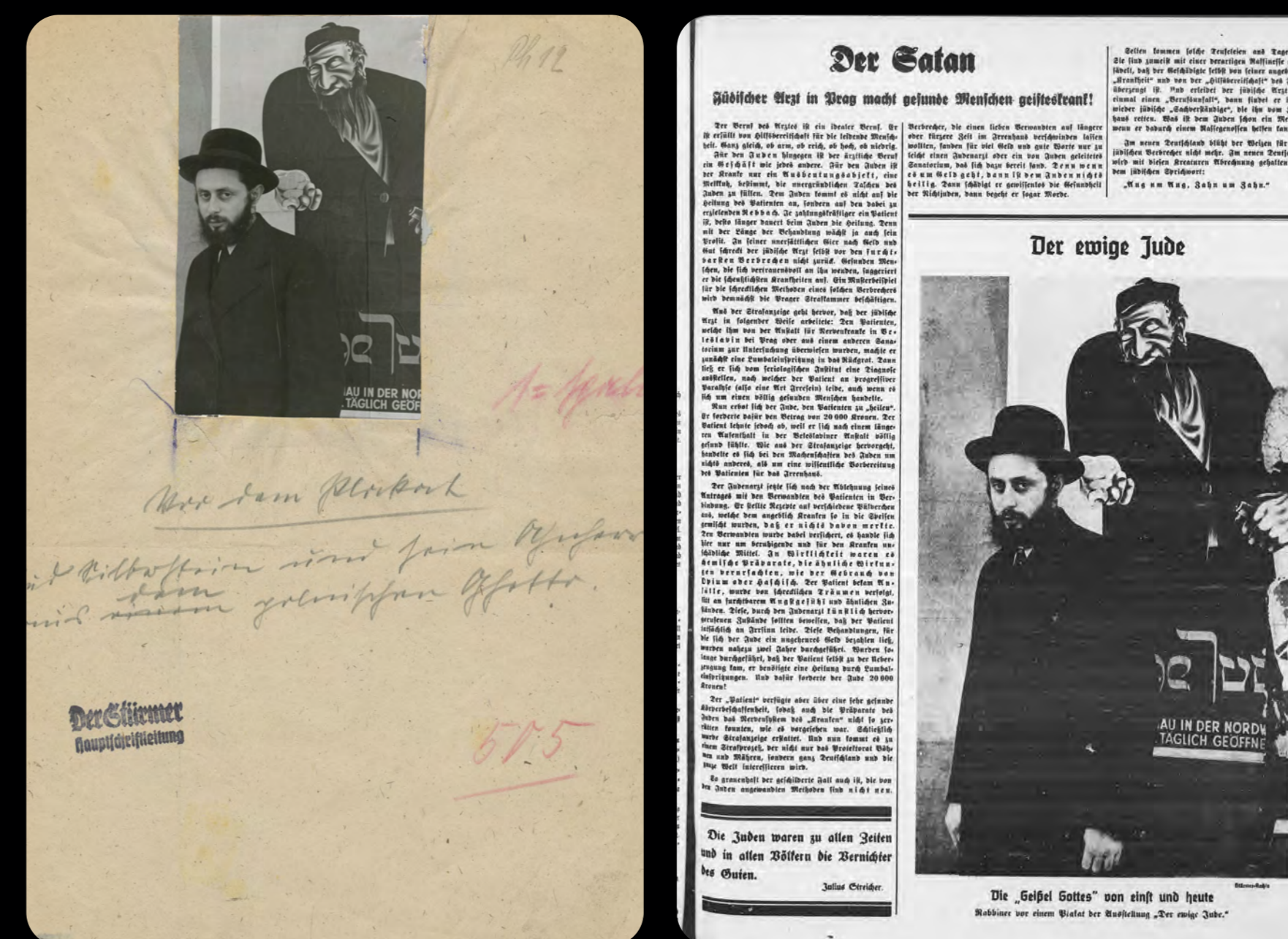


Der Stürmer display case in a rural area of Germany before World War II. Yad Vashem Archives



Preparation for publishing the photograph in the article on Vienna. The text states: "An idyll from Leopoldstadt in Vienna. As if Hell had spewed him out, this devil of a foreign race has snuck in here." The graphic editor marked off in pencil the places for cropping the photograph's edges and the desired size. The newspaper text is identical to the preparation for publication.

Stadtarchiv Nürnberg, E.39 Nr. 295/3



Preparation for publishing the photograph. The text states: "In front of the poster. The yid Silberstein and his type from the Polish ghetto." The newspaper states: "The Eternal Jew. 'God's hostage' then and now. A Rabbi standing before a poster for the 'Eternal Jew' exhibition."

Stadtarchiv Nürnberg, E.39 Nr.348/1

TWO VIEWPOINTS ON PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE GHETTOS



Photographer from the SS Propaganda Company in the Łódź ghetto, apparently during the fall of 1940.

Bundesarchiv, Picture 101111Wisniewski-025-12A / Photographer: Wisniewski

The first ghettos were established in German-occupied Poland at the end of 1939. During 1940, their numbers grew rapidly. Most ghettos were created as temporary and haphazard way to isolate the Jews from their surroundings. However, the majority eventually became the permanent residence for hundreds of thousands of Jews.

Tens of thousands of photos were taken in the ghettos, mostly by German photographers but also by several Jewish ones. Many of the German photographers acted in an official capacity for several different organizations of the Nazi state. Other photographed for personal

objectives. The few Jewish photographers who managed to work in the ghettos did so in an official capacity for the Jewish ghetto leadership. However, both by German and Jewish photographers, the borders between official and private photography were often blurred.

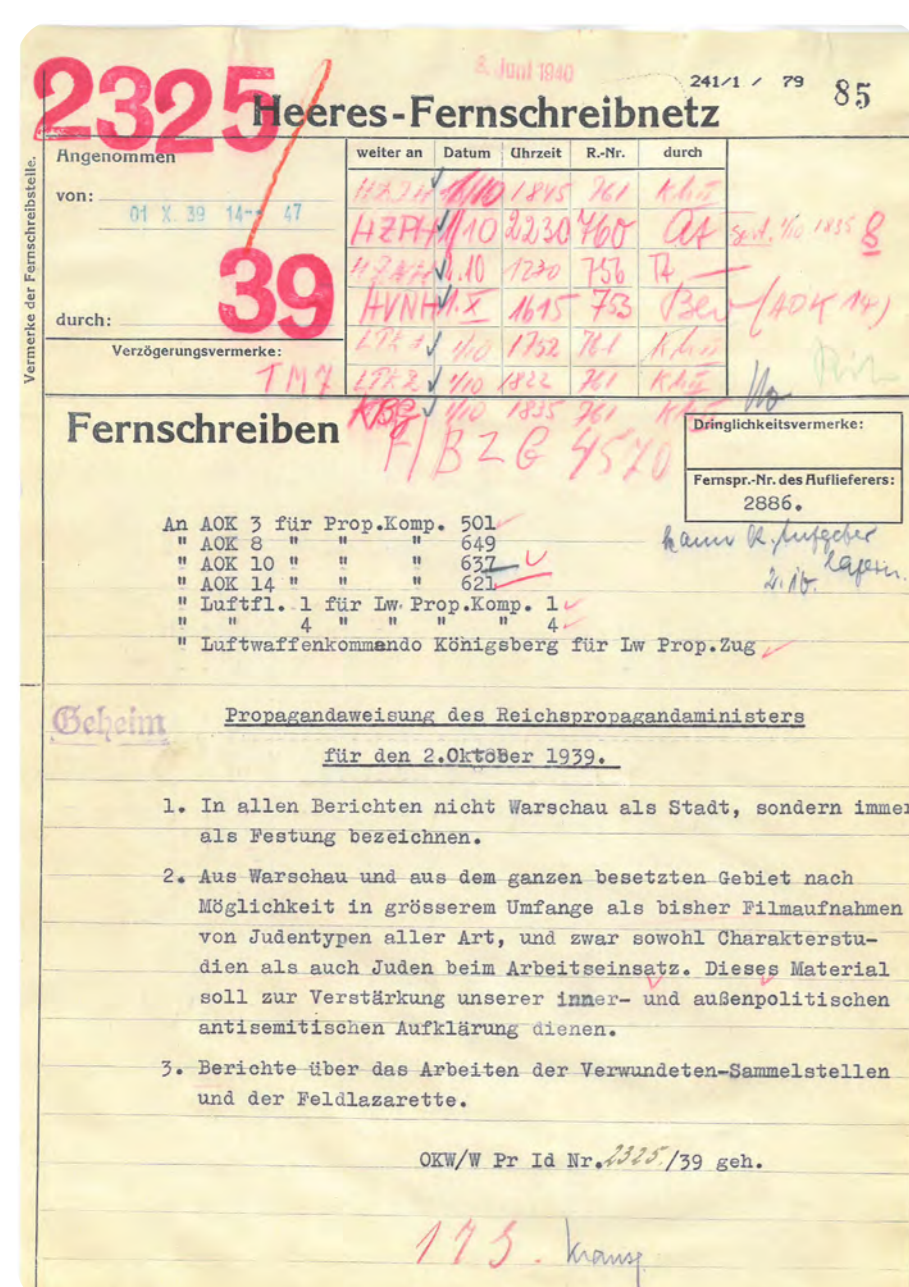
The bias in German official photography was clear, and aimed at conveying various propaganda messages. In contrast, Jewish photography was carried out for the most part as survival strategy vis-à-vis the Germans, with the goal of documenting and displaying a more realistic view of life in the ghettos.



Łódź ghetto photographer Mendel Grossman in his laboratory in the ghetto.

Yad Vashem Archives

PHOTOGRAPHY, PHOTOGRAPHERS AND SUBJECTS



In 1939-1941, German photography in the ghettos constituted an important part of the Nazi regime's antisemitic propaganda. The scenes in the Jewish quarters and ghettos of occupied Poland provided the Germans an opportunity to present the Jews in a stereotypic manner.

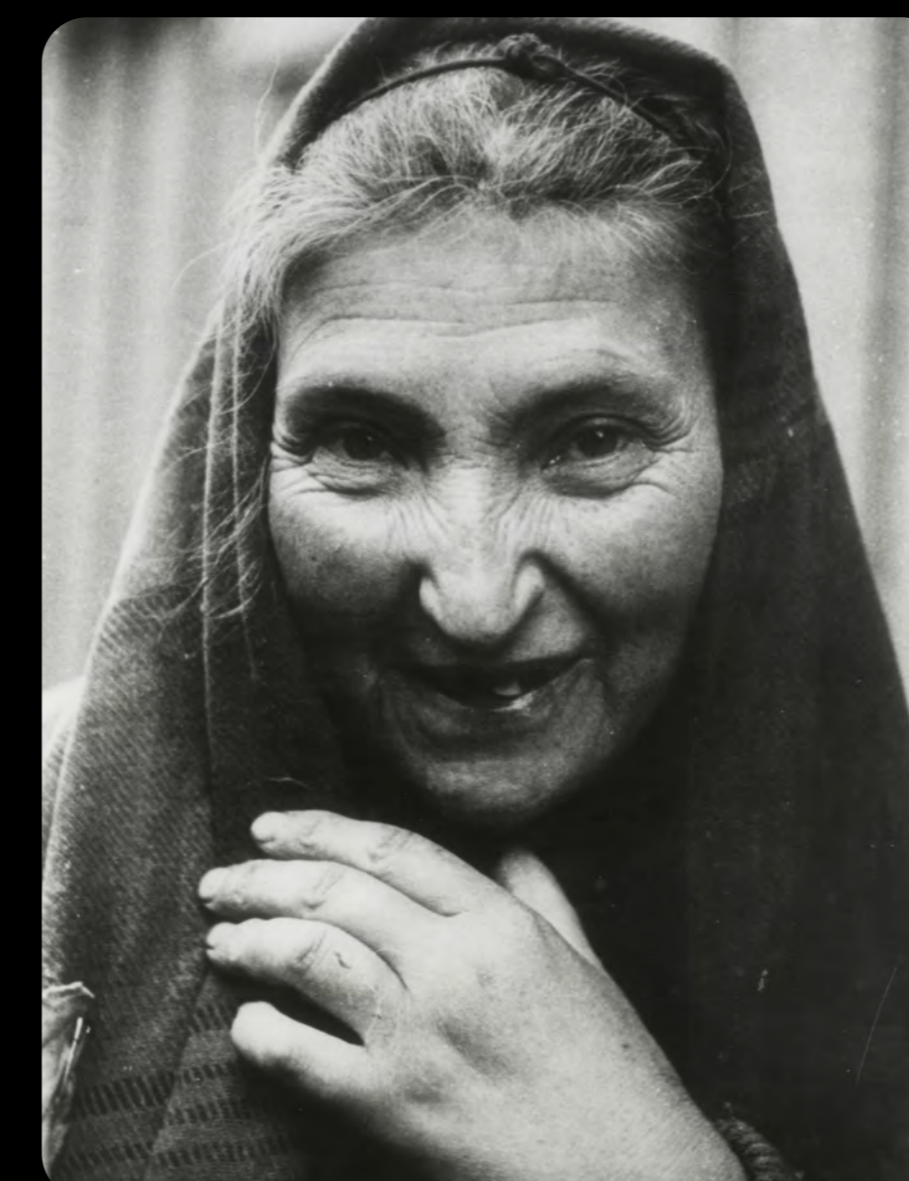
Many of the photos and films were made in the ghettos by professional photographers from the German army's "Propaganda Companies." While their official duty was to document military events for propaganda purposes, they also recorded other subjects. Additional photographers worked for newspapers or various agencies of the Nazi regime. The photographers were provided with the latest equipment of the period. They used professional photography techniques; sometimes they staged their subjects to achieve the desired visual affect. Propaganda photographs from the ghettos were published in the press and various other publications, as well as in propaganda films. Especially notorious in this context was *The Eternal Jew*.

The Propaganda Ministry's Order of the Day to Propaganda Companies in Poland, October 2, 1939.

Written in Section 2: "To increase as much as possible the sending from Warsaw and all the occupied areas films documenting Jews of every type, not just character images, but also during forced labor. The material will be used for strengthening antisemitic education in and outside of the State."

Bundesarchiv, BArch RW 4/241 fol. 85

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The antisemitic propaganda film *Der Jude im Regierungsbezirk Zichenau* (The Jew in Ciechanów District) was apparently produced during 1940 at the initiative of the leadership of the Ciechanów district, which was annexed to the province of East Prussia after Poland was occupied by the Germans. The movie was filmed mostly, but not entirely, in the Płońsk ghetto. Some of the Jews filmed in the movie were also photographed with a still camera. The pictures are included in an album entitled "Typy Żydowskie" (The Jewish Type). In the movie and stills photographs, one can clearly observe the photographic style of Nazi racial propaganda. Focusing on faces and directing the subjects to turn and tilt their heads, they intended to illustrate the physical characteristics of races considered inferior by the Nazi regime.

Biblioteka Uniwersytecka Warszawa

“THE JEWS LEARN TO WORK” – THE GHETTO AS A PRODUCTIVE PLACE

As part of the effort to present the “New Order” established by the Germans in occupied Poland, the ghettos were portrayed as locations where the “naturally lazy” Jews learned to work. This propaganda constituted a continuation of prewar Nazi propaganda that utilized earlier antisemitic stereotypes.



Report in *Illustrierter Beobachter* of April 10, 1941, entitled “The Jews are Learning to Work for the Common Good.” The subtitle states, “The Jew of the East under German Supervision: Less Commerce, More Labor!”

Yad Vashem Archives

Photography crew from Propaganda Company PK689 filming a movie in a Warsaw ghetto sewing workshop, May 1941. The crew is using a rickshaw.

Bundesarchiv, Bild 101-134-0769-39A/ photographer: Knobloch, Ludwig

THE GHETTO AS A DANGER

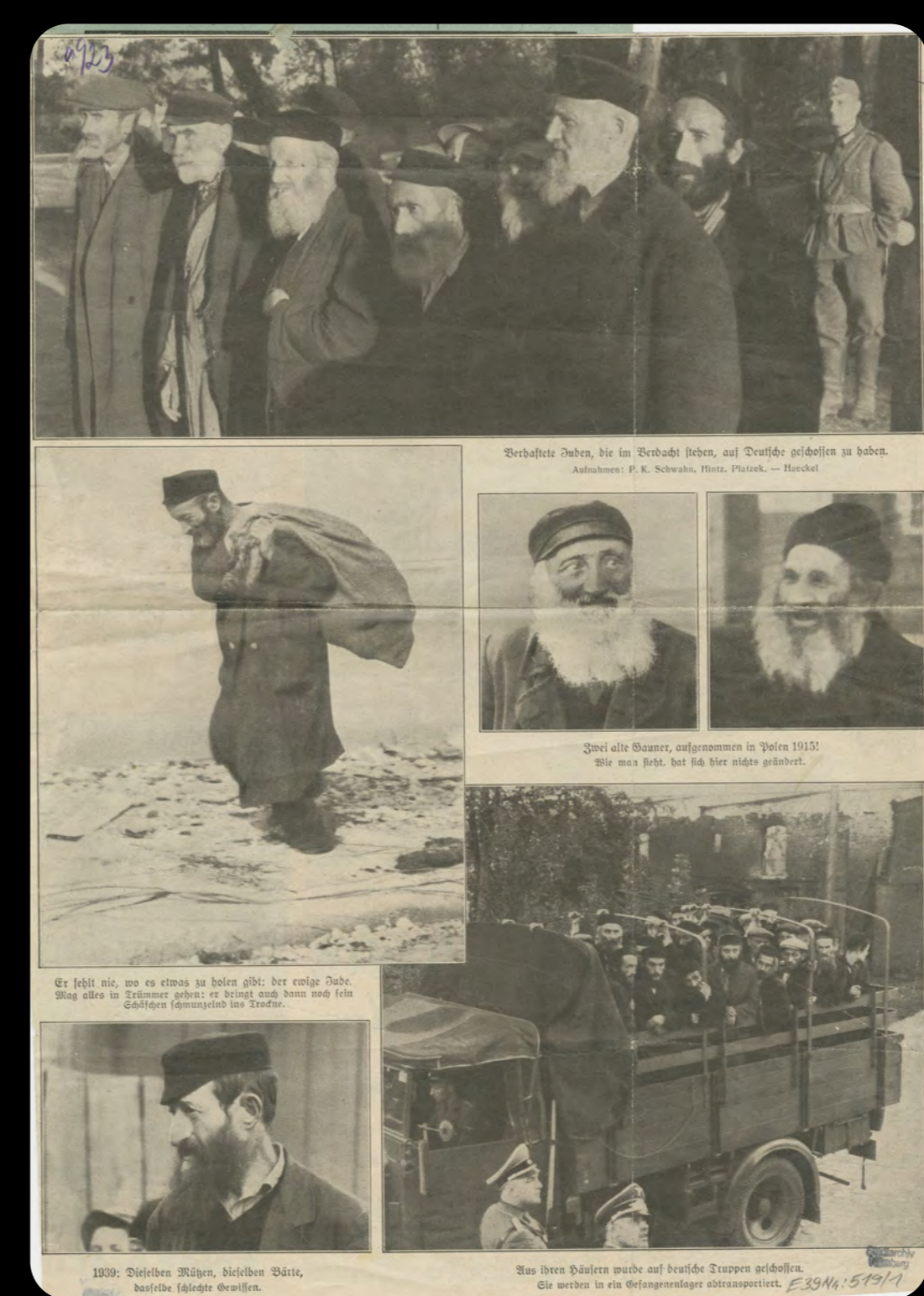
Besides being depicted as a place for Jews to be productive, the ghettos were also utilized in Nazi propaganda as a wellspring for various types of dangers. From the security aspect, they were shown as nests of resistance; from the point of view of sanitation, they were presented as a source of disease; from the economic perspective they were considered a factor endangering the commercial development of German-occupied Poland.

In reality, there was nothing of consequence in any of these claims. During this period, active resistance to the Nazi occupation was almost non-existent; the sanitary danger was mainly a result of the poor living conditions that the Germans themselves created in the ghettos; and the economic activity in the ghettos not only did not sabotage the German development, but the Germans also exploited the ghettos as a cheap resource of alternative manpower; i.e., forced labor.



Front page report from *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* of December 5, 1939, headlined "A City under a City. In the Lublin Ghetto... and 25 meters Under the Ghetto." The report describes a German Police raid on the ghetto, during which various merchandise was found in cellars.

Yad Vashem Archives



After the Germans entered Wieruszów, some three days following the invasion of Poland, they executed at least 17 Jewish residents and arrested another 82. The Jews were beaten and then taken by truck to a detention camp near Nuremberg. The pretext for their arrest was that they had taken part in resistance activities against the Germans. The photograph shows cameraman from the German 4th Motorized Propaganda Company. The movie they filmed was included in the Ufa Company's newsreel No. 471, September 14, 1939.

Bundesarchiv, Bild 101-380-0069-40/ photographer: Lifta

A page in *Illustrierter Beobachter* of September 28, 1939. The top and bottom right photos document the arrest of Jews in Wieruszów after "shots were fired at German soldiers from their houses."

Stadtarchiv Nürnberg, E. 39-Nr.519/1

PERSONAL GERMAN PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE GHETTOS

Many soldiers, citizens, and policemen passed through the ghettos. Some chanced to be there because of their position; others while wandering about, or passing through. The ghettos constituted an extraordinary sight, causing a number of them to take out their personal cameras and photograph. These photos usually ended up in a private album. The most photographed ghetto was the Warsaw ghetto, due to the city's position as an important transit point for the German Army to the Eastern Front.



A woman and children in the Warsaw ghetto. A private photograph taken by an unidentified German.

Yad Vashem Archives

Der Stürmer encouraged its readers to send in antisemitic material to be published in its column for readers' letters, "Dear *Stürmer*." Privet pictures sent there were stored in the editorial office archives. Some of them were published.



Photograph sent by a German soldier to the *Der Stürmer* editorial office. On the reverse side, he wrote: "A popular amusement in Poland. A former peddler who had exploited and cheated the poor people is now paying for his actions and is being ridiculed. What is he thinking about when his eyes are closed? If he were free, we would be dealing with many scams because they [the Jews] are masters of lying and nastiness. Private Sap Kristian (via Vienna, April 4, 1940)."

Stadtarchiv Nürnberg, E. 39.Nr.1685/8, 1,2



Photograph sent to the *Der Stürmer* editorial office. On the reverse side, he wrote: "This is how they loiter on the streets of Lublin. Photographed during August 1940, in Lublin. Ernst Miller, Vienna."

Stadtarchiv Nürnberg, E. 39.Nr.332/3, 1,2



Photograph sent by a German soldier through the military post to the *Der Stürmer* editorial office. On the reverse side he wrote: "The eternal Jew! This is how he wanders around the world endangering humanity. Photographed in Kraków on May 15, 1941, by Corporal Albert Glass, Military Post A25167."

Stadtarchiv Nürnberg, E. 39.Nr.324/6, 1,2

JEWISH PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE GHETTOS

Unlike the German photographers, Jewish photographers worked within very strict boundaries. The Jews were under a sweeping prohibition from owning cameras, and their access to photography equipment was very limited. The few photographers who succeeded in operating in the ghettos, did so mainly due to an official role. Ghetto institutions sometimes employed non-Jewish photographers to bypass German restrictions.

Official Jewish photography was, from the start, designated to aid in survival. The goal was to convince the Germans that under efficient self-rule, the ghetto was productive and served their needs. In at least one case in Warsaw, use was made of photography to enlist aid for its inhabitants from outside of the ghetto.

Similar to the Germans, for both Jewish and non-Jewish ghetto photographers, the lines between official and personal were never clear-cut. Several of them photographed clandestinely, in an effort to create more visual and realistic documentation than that produced by German and official Jewish photographers.



Łódź ghetto photographer Mendel Grossman with his camera.
Lodz State Archives



Zvi Hirsch Kadushin, Kovno ghetto photographer.
Beit Hatfutsot, The Oster Visual Documentation Center, Zvi Kadushin Collection

THE ŁÓDŹ JUDENRAT PHOTOGRAPHERS

The Łódź ghetto, the second-largest ghetto after Warsaw, existed in some form from December 1939 until August 1944. It excelled in its widespread economic activity, as well as an especially large *Judenrat* under the management of Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski. In an effort to present to the Germans the effective management and economic benefit of the ghetto, the Łódź Judenrat employed two Jewish professional photographers: Mendel Grossman and Henryk Ross. Both worked in the ghetto's Department of Statistics, and their principal role was to provide photographs for the grandiose reports the department prepared. However, they, along with Aryeh ben Menahem (Prinz), Grossman's assistant, would photograph beyond the bounds of their roles, and contrary to Rumkowski's absolute prohibition. Some of these photographs documented the harsh sides of ghetto life, which were not displayed in official reports.

These photographers took thousands of pictures that were hidden with additional documentation before the ghetto was liquidated, and thus survived.



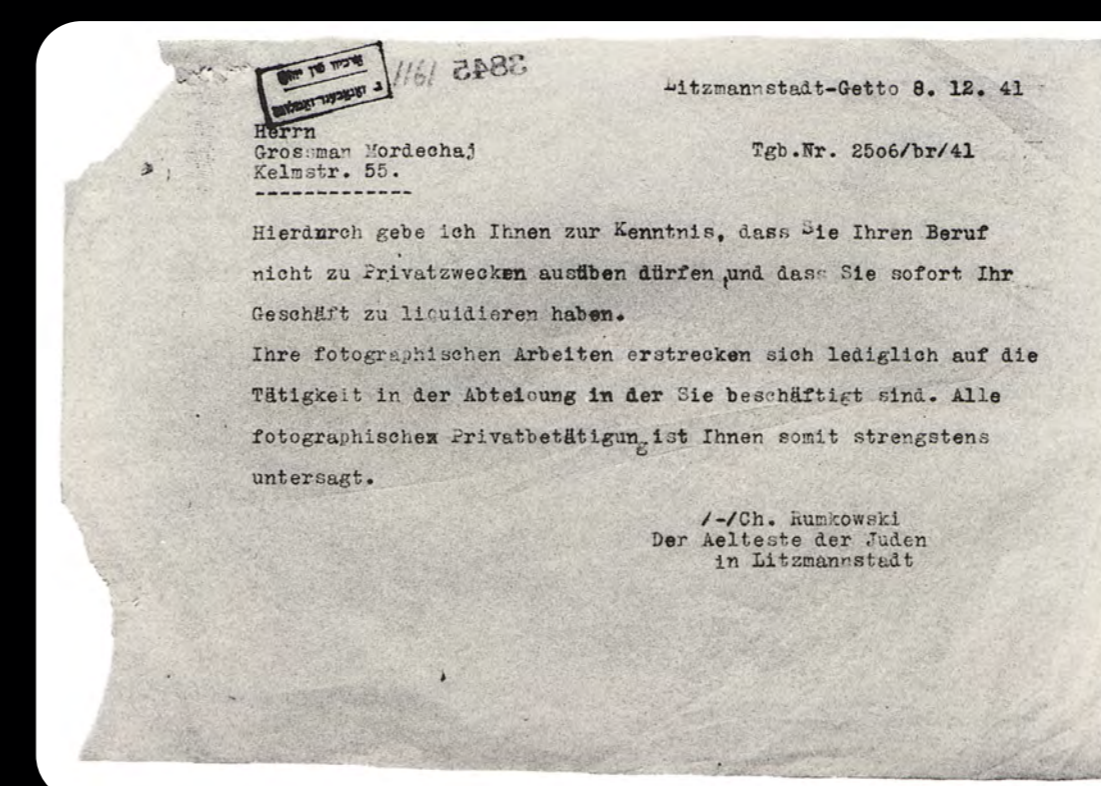
Chaim Rumkowski, head of the Łódź ghetto *Judenrat*, examining an album produced by the *Judenrat*'s Department of Statistics.

Lodz State Archives



Łódź ghetto photographer Mendel Grossman clandestinely photographing the deportation of Jews from the Łódź ghetto. The photo was taken by Grossman's assistant, Aryeh Ben-Menachem.

Yad Vashem Archives



An official letter written by Chaim Rumkowski, head of the Łódź ghetto *Judenrat*, to photographer Mendel Grossman on December 8, 1941. It states: "I hereby notify you that you are forbidden to engage in your profession for private purposes, and that you must immediately liquidate your business. Your photographic work will be limited from now onward to the department in which you work. All other photography activities are strictly forbidden."

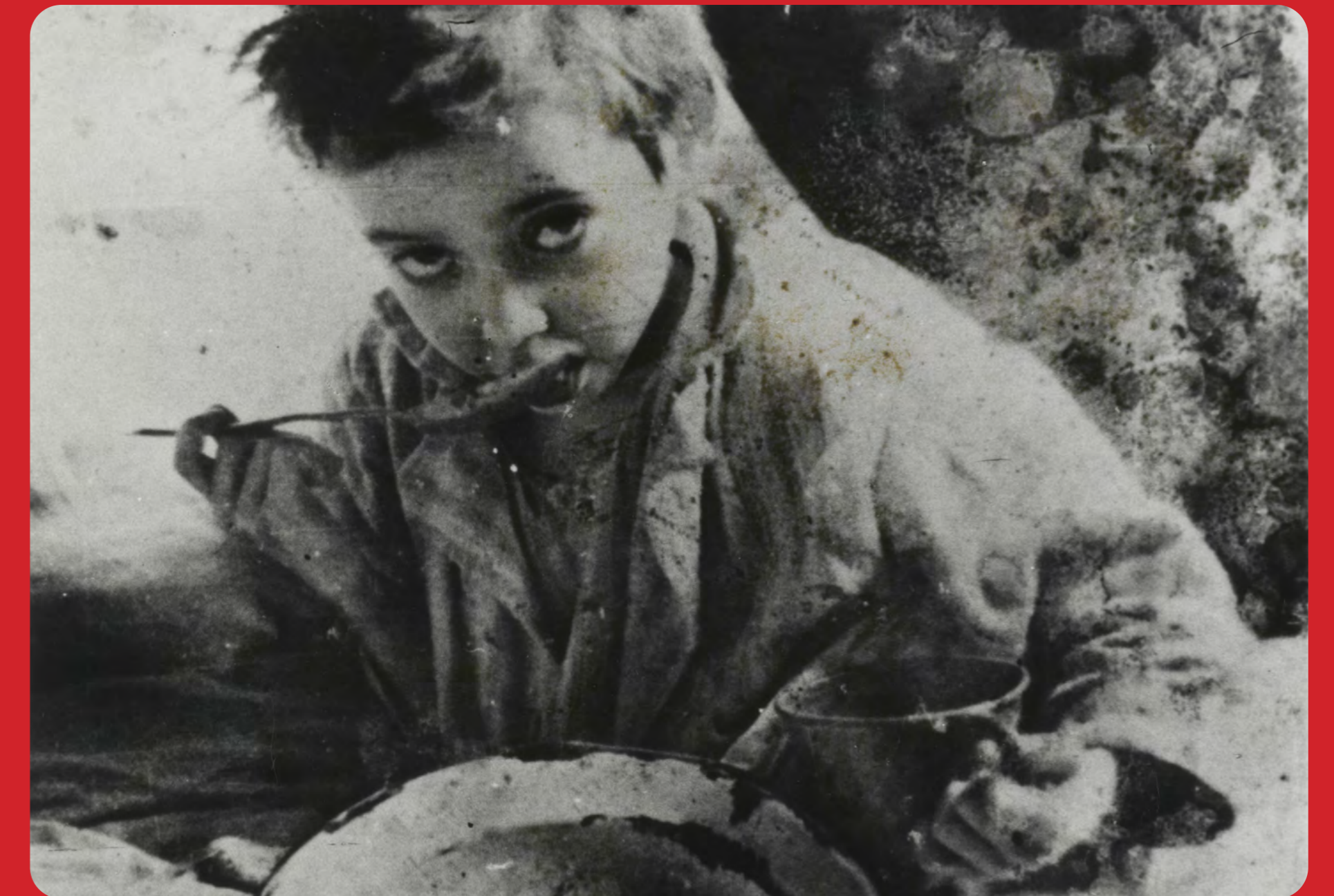
YIVO Institute for Jewish Research Archives, New York

*“Having an official camera,
I could capture the entire tragic
period in the Łódź ghetto.
I did it knowing that if I were
caught, my family and I would
be tortured and killed.”*

Henryk Ross



Children on a Łódź ghetto street
Yad Vashem Archives



A young boy in the Łódź ghetto
Yad Vashem Archives



Taking leave of deportees in the Łódź ghetto
Yad Vashem Archives



Apparently taking leave of deportees in the Łódź ghetto
Yad Vashem Archives



Deportation of Jews from the Łódź ghetto
Yad Vashem Archives

JEWISH PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE WARSAW GHETTO

The Warsaw ghetto existed from November 1939 until its liquidation following the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in May 1943. It was the largest ghetto, with a sizeable *Judenrat*. Several factories and workshops operated in the ghetto, making it economically significant to the Germans. Photographs found in the ghetto archives (coordinated by Jewish historian Emanuel Ringelblum), which was hidden and survived the Uprising in part, point to various photographers who worked for the *Judenrat*. In at least two instances, the *Judenrat* hired the services of a local photography shop to prepare several series of photographs. These series served to enlist aid from outside the ghetto, and later on to demonstrate the productivity of the ghetto's factories. The identities of the photographers are unknown; all that remains are the results of their work.

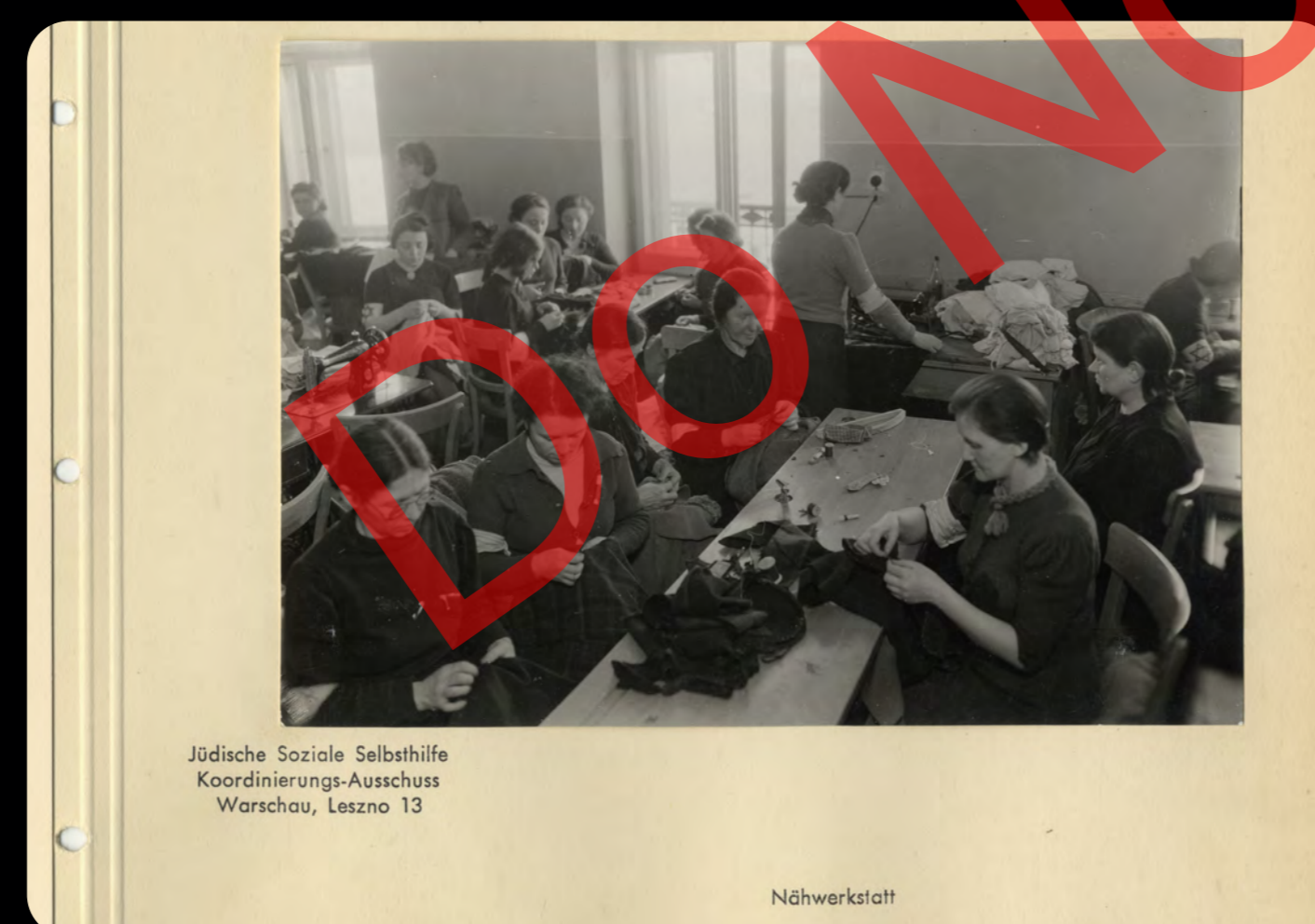
Pages from an album produced by the Joint [JDC] with the Warsaw ghetto *Judenrat* in 1940 in order to raise support for the ghetto's residents.

Photographs in an album initiated by the Warsaw ghetto *Judenrat* to demonstrate the ghetto's productivity. Apparently, the album was never completed. After the war, only cut sheets of the first pages were found.



Jews waiting to receive aid packages in the Warsaw ghetto, Passover 1940

Yad Vashem Archives



Sorting used clothing at the offices for self-help in the Warsaw ghetto, 1940

Yad Vashem Archives



Welding a water boiler in a workshop for manufacturing boilers in the Warsaw ghetto, apparently during 1941.

Yad Vashem Archives



A sewing workshop for manufacturing hats in the Warsaw ghetto, apparently during 1941.

Yad Vashem Archives

ZVI (HIRSCH) KADUSHIN – UNDERGROUND PHOTOGRAPHER IN THE KOVNO GHETTO

The Kovno ghetto was established in July 1941 and liquidated three years later. Zvi Kadushin, a resident of the city, was an amateur photographer who managed to take many clandestine photographs of the ghetto in order to document the tragic events taking place there. His work as an x-ray technician in a German army hospital gave him access to photography and developing materials. He developed various techniques for hiding his camera and taking clandestine photographs through his clothes. Kadushin went into hiding, together with his photographs, before the ghetto was liquidated. As a result, he and a large number of his photographs survived. After the war, he exhibited his photographs in various locations.



Deportation to the Kovno ghetto,
July 1941

Yad Vashem Archives



Sewing workshop in the Kovno ghetto,
1943

Yad Vashem Archives



German loading Jews from the Kovno
ghetto onto a truck to take them to
forced labor near the ghetto, 1943.
From the picture, it is noticeable that
Zvi Kadushin secretly photographed the
scene.

Yad Vashem Archives

“I took over a thousand [photos...] and I went on taking those pictures for later, for eternity.”

Zvi Hirsch Kadushin



Jews assembled for deportation from the Kovno ghetto, 1943
Yad Vashem Archives



Deportation of Jews from the Kovno ghetto on October 26, 1943
Yad Vashem Archives



Jews in the street during a deportation from the Kovno ghetto. The photograph was apparently secretly taken from a house window.
Yad Vashem Archives



A group of women from the Kovno ghetto on a truck. The photograph was secretly taken from a house window.
Yad Vashem Archives

LIBERATION OF THE CAMPS – FUNCTION AND DISTRIBUTION

Visual documentation played a central role for the Allied nations in revealing Nazi persecution, as well as displaying their own moral superiority vis-à-vis the fascist enemy.

The Soviets were the first to liberate the concentration camps. Since private photography was almost nonexistent in the USSR during the war, visual evidence of liberation by Soviet forces remained in the hands of the official photographers. In contrast, the British and Americans encouraged their troops to engage in private photography in the liberated camps, as part of the effort to disclose Nazi crimes to the public as widely as possible. Another important consideration was the collection of visual documentation for trials of German war criminals, which the Allies planned to hold after the war.

To a great extent, liberation photos and films, including those that were reconstructed, molded the collective and visual memory of the Holocaust for generations to come.



US Army cameraman and photographer at the Ohrdruf concentration camp after its liberation, April 1945

Yad Vashem Archives



Soviet military photographer near a sign at the Auschwitz concentration camp after its liberation, January 1945

Central State CinePhotoPhono Archives of Ukraine named after H. Pshenychnyi

LIBERATION DOCUMENTATION BY THE WESTERN ALLIES



American soldier looking at the crematorium in the Dachau concentration camp after its liberation.

Yad Vashem Archives



Former prisoners photographed by an American soldier in a barrack in the Buchenwald concentration camp after its liberation, 1945.

Yad Vashem Archives

The Western democracies, and in particular the US and Great Britain, were eager to present to their public the extent of the Nazi regime's crimes, in order to justify the heavy sacrifice and total mobilization. As a result, their governments made a considerable effort to document the liberation process of the camps and what they found there in the most comprehensive manner possible. Tremendous resources were allocated towards this end, including employing well-known producers and directors and supplying them with a great deal of photographic and movie equipment. Civilian photographers and film crews were also organized and brought to the camps. In at least one case, the US Army used former prisoners to stage camp scenes, illustrating what had taken place in the camps under the Nazi regime. The results of their work were not used for media purposes. They constituted part of the effort to gather material in preparation for the planned trials of war criminals as well. Later on, they also served the western Allied forces in their efforts to re-educate the German population in the spirit of democratic values.

Photographs from the liberated camps distributed by the US Army to the news agencies. Each photograph bore a label that included various technical and administrative details, as well as a description of the documented event.



EBENSEE PRISONERS WERE HUMAN GUINEA PIGS
 In the Austrian Alps at Ebensee, Austria, the Germans had one of their largest concentration camps, reputedly used for "scientific" experiments upon the inmates. The camp was liberated by the 60th Division of the Third U.S. Army shortly before the end of the war in Europe. The prisoners, many of whom were found to be starving to death, had been dying at the rate of 2,000 a week. A crematory in the camp was used to dispose of the bodies. Cart loads and horrible piles of dead bodies ready for the crematory were found by the Americans, left by the fleeing Germans who had no time to burn them. These pictures were taken May 7, 1945.

DIPPA RA 68021

THIS PHOTO SHOWS: Inmates of Ebensee who are able to stand, pose in their rags. The Austrian Alps can be seen in the background.
 U.S. Signal Corps Photo ETC-H-45-48729.
 SERVICED BY LONDON OMI TO LIST 2-1
 CERTIFIED AS PASSED BY SHAEF CENSOR

Prisoners at the Ebensee concentration camp liberated by the US Army on May 7, 1945. The label on the reverse side of the picture opens with the description "Ebensee prisoners were human guinea pigs."

Yad Vashem Archives



ANOTHER CONCENTRATION CAMP: AT PENIG
 JEWISH WOMEN FROM BUDAPEST FOUND STARVING
 CENSOR NO. 497899

'CORPSES STILL ALIVE AND WALKING AROUND' - THIS IS HOW OUR CENSURMAN DESCRIBES 68 WOMEN, ALL JEWISH, ALL FROM BUDAPEST, MOSTLY FROM CULTURED FAMILIES THERE, WHO WERE FOUND BY THE 3RD ARMY AT THE CONCENTRATION CAMP AT PENIG. THEY WERE HEROICALLY STARVED AND WORKED TO DEATH IN A GERMAN AIRPLANE PARTS FACTORY. THE AMERICANS IMMEDIATELY TOOK OVER HERE A LUFTWAFFE HOSPITAL AND HAD THE PERSONNEL TO TAKE CARE OF THESE MISERABLE SKELETONS UNTIL THEY RECOVER.
 KEYSTONE PHOTO SHOWS: THE DIVISIONAL SURGEON HELPS A WOMAN TO THE AMBULANCE.
 SOHENIAT/POOL/LIFE/F. KEYSTONE 490047

American soldier assisting a Jewish woman survivor from Budapest at the Penig concentration camp after its liberation. The label on the reverse side of the picture opens with the description "Corpses still alive and walking around."

Yad Vashem Archives

SOVIET DOCUMENTATION OF THE LIBERATION

In July 1944, the Soviet Army liberated the Majdanek concentration camp in Eastern Poland. This was first camp to be liberated, and the Soviets brought with them journalists, including press photographers, in order to show them the horrors of the Nazi regime. Official photographers of the Soviet Army and the Soviet regime's news agencies arrived at the Soviet-liberated camps and recorded what they saw. The most extensive visual documentation was created at Auschwitz, liberated on January 27, 1945. Since press and film crews were not present at the liberation itself, they were brought in a week later for a reconstruction of the camp's liberation. The Soviets distributed the results of this reconstruction not only for internal consumption, but also for the international media, with the aim of strengthening the legitimacy of its regime as relations with the West began to deteriorate.



Polish soldiers serving with the Soviet Army at the Majdanek concentration camp after its liberation by the Soviet Army, July 1944.

Central State CinePhotoPhono Archives of Ukraine named after H. Pshenychnyi



Staging prisoners at the Auschwitz concentration camp after its liberation by the Soviet Army, January 1945.

Central State CinePhotoPhono Archives of Ukraine named after H. Pshenychnyi



Staging of the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp by the Soviet Army.

Central State CinePhotoPhono Archives of Ukraine named after H. Pshenychnyi

YEVGENY KHALDEI

“I photographed Goering many times because I thought to myself: Hitler is dead, so Goering is the Number 1 criminal. I always tried to get close to him [...] when he noticed that I wanted to be in a picture with him, he raised his hand and hid his face.”

- Yevgeny Khaldei



Yevgeny Khaldei photographing Hermann Goering, Nuremberg Trial, Germany, 1946.
ASAP Creative/dpa picture alliance / Alamy Stock Photo

Before World War II, Yevgeny Khaldei served as a photographer for a Soviet news agency. During the war, he served as a senior military photographer.

In the morning hours of May 2, 1945 – a day after the surrender of Berlin – he climbed to the Reichstag’s roof and took 36 pictures with his German Leica camera.

One of the pictures, showing two soldiers waving the Soviet flag, was widely publicized, becoming the symbol of Nazi Germany’s defeat. A number of manipulations were made with this photograph in official Soviet publications. Khaldei himself admitted that he deleted one of the two watches that were on the soldier’s wrist to hide the widespread looting carried out by Soviet soldiers in Berlin. The Soviet news agency added clouds of smoke to the photograph to increase its dramatic effect. In some publications, the flag was changed for a more impressive one.

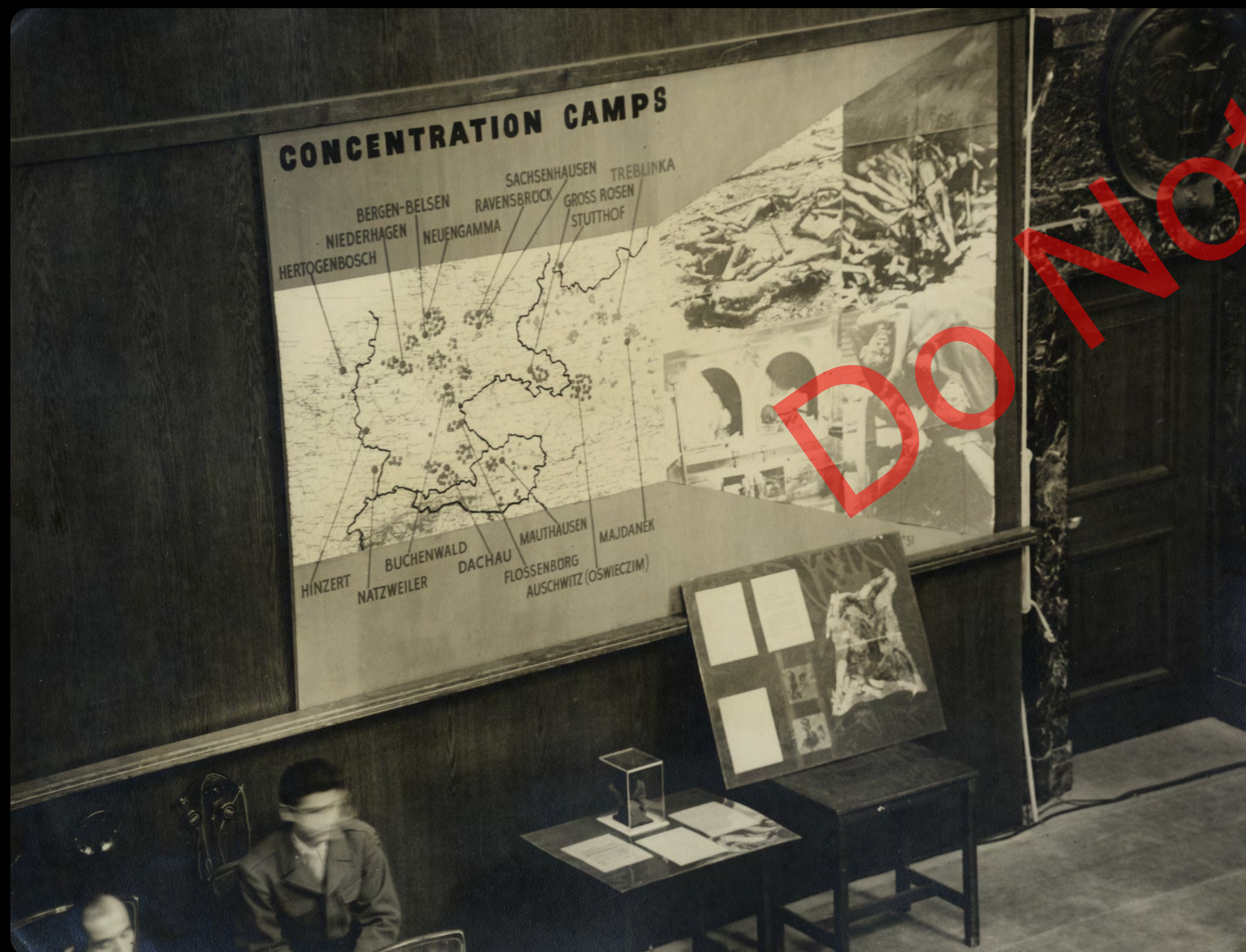


Yad Vashem Archives

DOCUMENTATION USAGE AND DISTRIBUTION

The sights discovered by the camp liberators were prominently published by media around the world. Additionally, legal teams preparing the Nuremberg trials amassed the visual materials as evidence to strengthen the prosecution's cases. In the courtrooms, a stand was built for projecting slides and movies onto a large screen installed in the center of the hall.

Furthermore, a selection of pictures of the liberation photographed by the US Army was printed in bulk and distributed in areas of Germany under their control, for the re-education of its population. Among them were pictures the Americans had staged in the Dachau concentration camp after its liberation. These and other photos were also received by Holocaust survivors at DP camps in Germany. They constituted part of the early documentation collected by the survivors for composing a visual history of the Holocaust.



Slide displaying photographs of the liberation of the concentration camps projected during a session of the International Court in Nuremberg.

Yad Vashem Archives



Poster displaying photographs from the liberation of the concentration camps, disseminated in the American Zone of Occupation in Germany for the re-education of the German population in the spirit of democratic values.

Yad Vashem Artifacts Collection. Gift of Yosef Kleinman, Jerusalem, Israel