

# HOLOCAUST ENCYCLOPEDIA

## HOLOCAUST HISTORY

Introduction to the Holocaust  
Holocaust Encyclopedia

- Français
- Español
- Italiano
- Русский
- Türkçe
- Português (BR)
- عربي
- فارسی
- اردو
- Ελληνικά
- Bahasa Indonesia
- 简体中文
- 한국어
- 日本語

Mapping Initiatives  
Online Exhibitions

## THERESIENSTADT

[| Related Articles](#) | [| Related Links](#) | [| Comments](#) | [| E-mail updates](#) | [| How to cite this article](#)

The Theresienstadt "camp-ghetto" existed for three and a half years, between November 24, 1941 and May 9, 1945. During its existence, Theresienstadt served three purposes:

1) First, Theresienstadt served as a [transit camp for Czech Jews](#) whom the Germans deported to killing centers, concentration camps, and forced-labor camps in German-occupied Poland, Belorussia, and the Baltic States.

2) Second, it was a ghetto-labor camp to which the SS deported and then incarcerated certain categories of German, Austrian, and Czech Jews, based on their age, disability as a result of past military service, or domestic celebrity in the arts and other cultural life. To mislead about or conceal the physical annihilation of the Jews deported from the Greater German Reich, the Nazi regime employed the general fiction, primarily inside Germany, that the deported Jews would be deployed at productive labor in the East. Since it seemed implausible that elderly Jews could be used for forced labor, the Nazis used Theresienstadt to hide the nature of the deportations.

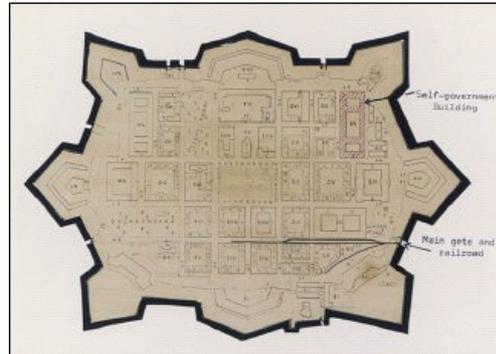
3) Third, Theresienstadt served as a holding pen for Jews in the above-mentioned groups. It was expected that that poor conditions there would hasten the deaths of many deportees, until the SS and police could deport the survivors to killing centers in the East.

Neither a "ghetto" as such nor strictly a concentration camp, Theresienstadt served as a "settlement," an assembly camp, and a concentration camp, and thus had recognizable features of both ghettos and concentration camps. In its function as a tool of deception, Theresienstadt was a unique facility.

### NAZI DECEPTION

Theresienstadt served an important [propaganda](#) function for the Germans. The publicly stated purpose for the deportation of the Jews from Germany was their "resettlement to the east," where they would be compelled to perform forced labor. Since it seemed implausible that elderly Jews could be used for forced labor, the Nazis used the Theresienstadt ghetto to hide the nature of the deportations. In Nazi propaganda, Theresienstadt was cynically described as a "spa town" where elderly German Jews could "retire" in safety. The deportations to Theresienstadt were, however, part of the Nazi strategy of deception. The ghetto was in reality a collection center for deportations to [ghettos](#) and [killing centers](#) in Nazi-occupied eastern Europe.

Succumbing to pressure following the deportation of Danish Jews to Theresienstadt, the Germans permitted the International [Red Cross](#) to visit in June 1944. It was all an elaborate hoax. The Germans intensified deportations from the ghetto shortly before the visit, and the ghetto itself was



Map of Theresienstadt from an original document (1942-1945) and mounted in an album assembled by a survivor. — USHMM, courtesy of Henry Kahn

### View Photographs



### View Personal Histories



### View Maps



### View Historical Film Footage



"beautified." Gardens were planted, houses painted, and barracks renovated. The Nazis staged social and cultural events for the visiting dignitaries. Once the visit was over, the Germans resumed deportations from Theresienstadt, which did not end until October 1944.

#### DEPORTATIONS FROM THERESIENSTADT

Beginning in 1942, SS authorities deported Jews from Theresienstadt to other ghettos, concentration camps, and extermination camps in Nazi-occupied eastern Europe. German authorities either murdered the Jews upon their arrival in the ghettos of [Riga](#), [Warsaw](#), [Lodz](#), [Minsk](#), and [Bialystok](#), or deported them further to extermination camps. Transports also left Theresienstadt directly for the extermination camps of [Auschwitz](#), [Majdanek](#), and [Treblinka](#). In the ghetto itself, tens of thousands of people died, mostly from disease or starvation. In 1942, the death rate within the ghetto was so high that the Germans built—to the south of the ghetto—a crematorium capable of handling almost 200 bodies a day.

Of the approximately 140,000 Jews transferred to Theresienstadt, nearly 90,000 were deported to points further east and almost certain death. Roughly 33,000 died in Theresienstadt itself.

#### CULTURAL LIFE AT THERESIENSTADT

Despite the terrible living conditions and the constant threat of deportation, Theresienstadt had a highly developed [cultural life](#). Outstanding Jewish artists, mainly from Czechoslovakia, Austria, and Germany, created drawings and paintings, some of them clandestine depictions of the ghetto's harsh reality. Writers, professors, musicians, and actors gave lectures, concerts, and theater performances. The ghetto maintained a lending library of 60,000 volumes.

Fifteen thousand children passed through Theresienstadt. Although forbidden to do so, they attended school. They painted pictures, wrote poetry, and otherwise tried to maintain a vestige of normalcy. Approximately 90 percent of these children perished in death camps.

---

#### Related Articles:

[Theresienstadt: Establishment](#) »  
[Theresienstadt: SS and Police Structure](#) »  
[Theresienstadt: Transit Camp for Czech Jews](#) »  
[Theresienstadt: "Retirement Settlement" for German and Austrian Jews](#) »  
[Theresienstadt: Cultural Life](#) »  
[Theresienstadt: Concentration/Transit Camp for German and Austrian Jews](#) »  
[Theresienstadt: Other Prisoners](#) »  
[Theresienstadt: Red Cross Visit](#) »  
[Theresienstadt: Final Weeks, Liberation, and Postwar Trials](#) »  
[Theresienstadt: Timeline](#) »  
[Ghettos](#) »  
[The Holocaust in Bohemia and Moravia](#) »  
[Concentration Camp System: In Depth](#) »

---

#### Related Links:

[Online Exhibition—Music of the Holocaust: Verdict \(music from Theresienstadt\)](#) »  
[USC Shoah Foundation—Czech-Language Portal: Lesson \(external link\)](#) »  
[Terezin Memorial \(external link\)](#) »

---

