

THE HOLOCAUST IN AUSTRIA

FROM THE ANSCHLUSS TO THE START OF WWII (1938-1939)

The German annexation of Austria on March 11, 1938 (*Anschluss*) was greeted with an enthusiasm that expressed itself in widespread antisemitic riots and an almost total absence of resistance to the Nazis.

During the very first weeks of the *Anschluss*, Austrian Nazis and the newly established Austrian Gestapo attacked Jews in the streets, launched an organized campaign of looting Jewish apartments, confiscating rugs, artwork, furniture, and other valuables, and shipping them to Berlin, applied the Nuremberg Laws to Austrian Jews, promulgated laws that expelled them from the country's social, economic, political and cultural life.

All Jews were dismissed from the army. All Jews were dismissed from their jobs at colleges and universities. All Jews were dismissed from their jobs in theaters, community centers, public libraries. Jewish communal offices, societies, and organizations (such as the Jewish community center and Zionist institutions) were shut down and their officers jailed. Prominent Jewish bankers, businessmen, and public personalities were arrested and sent them to Dachau. Austrian Jewish businesses, homes, and synagogues were ransacked, vandalized, and destroyed and Austrian Jewish men imprisoned in concentration camps on *Kristallnacht*.

About 128,500 Jews managed to flee Austria between the *Anschluss* and November 10, 1941, when emigration was banned altogether. Some went to Western European countries, some of which the Nazis later conquered and where 15,000 were caught. Others emigrated to the United States, Great Britain, Canada, Shanghai, Africa and South America.

WORLD WAR II (1939-1945)

The first deportations from Austria took place in October 1939. Transports of so-called young and elderly "stateless Jews" (some of whom had Polish nationality) were sent to Buchenwald, where they were immediately killed. Transports of Jews from eastern Austria (near Czechoslovakia) were sent to Nisko near Lublin, Poland, a camp from which very few returned. In February and March 1941 several thousand Austrian Jews were deported to the Kielce district in Poland, where they were murdered in the Belzec and Chelmno death camps in 1942.

However, mass expulsions and deportations did not begin in earnest until October 1941. They accelerated after the Wannsee Conference of January 1942. Like their German counterparts, Austrian Jews were deported to ghettos in Poland and the German occupied parts of the Soviet Union and the Theresienstadt camp in Czechoslovakia (mostly elderly Jews).

In November 1942, when the Vienna Jewish community was dissolved, only 7,000 Jews remained in Austria, most of them married to non-Jews. All of those who were fit, were set to forced labor

Altogether, more than 65,000 Austrian Jews lost their lives in the ghettos and concentration camps. After the war, only 1,747 returned to Austria.