

THE HOLOCAUST IN FRANCE

France's liberal refugee policy had traditionally provided a safe haven for those fleeing harsh political conditions, among them many East European Jews. However, in 1939, the government restricted Jewish immigration and set up internment camps for refugees. Still, in June 1940, when France was defeated by Germany, of the approximately 350,000 Jews living there, more than half of them refugees from Nazi Germany.

The armistice with Germany divided France in three. Northern France was placed under German occupation. The eastern Alsace and Lorraine were absorbed into the Reich. Southern France was allowed to retain autonomy under a new government headed by Marshal Henri Philippe Petain and a new capital in Vichy.

Although officially neutral, the Vichy government collaborated actively with Germany. It enacted the *Statut des Juifs* (Jewish Law), which defined Jews by race, excluded them from public life, dismissed them from the civil service, the army, commerce, and industry, and barred them from participation in the professions. It confiscated Jewish property, leaving many Jews destitute. It also established numerous internment camps for foreign Jews in southern France (most notably Gurs and Rivesaltes, where many died), and aided in their deportation to the death camps.

Starting in July 1942, after the German occupation of Vichy France, and ending in August 1944, two months after the Allied landings in Normandy, Jews from all over the country were deported. The French police facilitated this by rounding them up, loading them onto cattle cars and sending them to the Drancy transit camp northeast of Paris, from where they were taken to Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Of the 77,000 Jews deported from France who were murdered, one-third were French citizens and over 8,000 were children under the age of 13. Still, more than 75% of the Jews living in France in 1940 managed to survive. This was due to several factors, including dispersal of Jews in many localities, a minimal German police presence, and assistance from some non-Jews.