



CHILDREN DURING THE HOLOCAUST

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The information below is only part of the article, “Children during the Holocaust” taken from the Holocaust Encyclopedia on the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website. To read more please visit their website [see References].

Children were especially vulnerable in the era of the Holocaust. The Nazis advocated killing children of “unwanted” or “dangerous” groups in accordance with their ideological views, either as part of the “racial struggle” or as a measure of preventative security. The Germans and their collaborators killed children both for these ideological reasons and in retaliation for real or alleged partisan attacks.

The Germans and their collaborators killed as many as 1.5 million children, including over a million Jewish children and tens of thousands of Romani [Gypsy] children, German children with physical and mental disabilities living in institutions, Polish children, and children residing in the occupied Soviet Union. The chances for survival for Jewish and some non-Jewish adolescents [13-18 years old] were greater, as they could be deployed at forced labor.

The fate of Jewish and non-Jewish children can be categorized in the following way: 1) children killed when they arrived in killing centers; 2) children killed immediately after birth or in institutions; 3) children born in ghettos and camps who survived because prisoners hid them; 4) children, usually over age 12, who were used as laborers and as subjects of medical experiments; and 5) those children killed during reprisal operations or so-called anti-partisan operations.

In the ghettos, Jewish children died from starvation and exposure as well as lack of adequate clothing and shelter. The German authorities were indifferent to this mass death because they considered most of the younger ghetto children to be unproductive and hence “useless eaters.” Because children were generally too young to be deployed at forced labor, German authorities generally selected them, along with the elderly, ill, and disabled, for the first deportations to killing centers, or as the first victims led to mass graves to be shot.

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References

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. “Children During the Holocaust.” Holocaust Encyclopedia. <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/article.php?lang=en&ModuleId=10005142> (accessed March 21, 2009).