

## Gypsies Massacred as Part of the Darwinian Eugenic Holocaust

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### Abstract

The Gypsies, along with the Jews, were a major target of the Holocaust due to claims that they were both inferior races. Attempts to apply Darwinian eugenics were part of the Nazi effort to produce a superior race in Germany. The Gypsies have largely been ignored by scholars and others until recently. At least a dozen academic studies and four books have now been dedicated to document their experience during World War II. Hitler was not behind the genocide of Gypsies, nor was he concerned about them; the academic “race scientists” planned and orchestrated their genocide. The Gypsies’ case illustrates a major result of rejecting the Genesis teaching that all men are descendants of the original created pair of humans, and instead Nazi ideology classified people groups on a superior-inferior ranking. As documented in this brief review, the evil this worldview caused, even to a relatively small group, was enormous.

**Keywords:** Gypsies, Genocide, Holocaust, Nazi Ideology, World War II, Darwin, Racial Discrimination, Genesis, Adam, Eve, Racism

### Introduction

The persecution of Gypsies<sup>1</sup> “is one of the most neglected chapters in the history of the Nazi regime” (Lewy 1999, 383). The Nazi assault on the Gypsy people was launched in the first few months of the Third Reich’s rule. By the end of 1933, the outline of a policy to achieve total removal and eventually extinction was in place (Huttenbach 1991).

The main reason Gypsies were aggressively persecuted by the Nazis was that they were different ethnically and culturally. Under Adolf Hitler, a supplementary decree to the Nuremberg Laws issued on November 25, 1935, classified Roma as “enemies of the race-based state,” thereby placing them in the same category as Jews (Bauer 1990, 635). The decision was as follows: “the new cabinet issued a statement (with the force of law) proclaiming the concept of *Lebensunwertesleben*—life unworthy of living—a category of person that ... specifically and indiscriminately included and embraced all Gypsies” (Huttenbach 1991, 373). Furthermore, Germans who killed Gypsies were protected by this law, which stated that “taking the life of a Gypsy... did not act against the policy of the state” (Hancock 1991, 395). And behind these reasons was Darwinism. Mengele, Verschuer, and other scientists who were engaged in these nefarious acts were committed to Darwinism and used Darwinism to justify their racism (Bergman 2012; 2020).

### The Results of the Anti-Gypsy Law

The result was that the Nazis “slandered and persecuted the Gypsy people as an ‘inferior race’”

slated for extermination (Fings, Heuss, and Sparing 1997, 10, 91). Somewhere between 90,000 and 219,000 Romani were murdered by the Nazis and their collaborators (Lewy 2000, 222). This was probably around 75% of the estimated slightly fewer than two million Roma living in Europe at the time (Baumel and Laqueur 2001). The number is difficult to estimate because, as an itinerant people, many Roma lived in independent tribes that survived by wandering from one location to another throughout Europe. Furthermore, many Gypsies survived the campaigns against them because they were located in areas of governments allied with Germany, but not under the direct control of Germany. These “governments generally refused to participate in the extermination of the Gypsies (just as some did not participate in the destruction of the European Jews)” (Lutz 1995, 346).

Thus, much of the European Gypsy population lived in areas beyond the direct control of the Nazi extermination machinery. Geographic location was one major factor that explains the greater survival rate of the Gypsies compared to that of the Jews. The Jews, who were concentrated in areas under direct German control, including Germany, Austria, Poland, and Hungary, ended up in Nazi concentration camps, including Auschwitz, Dachau, and Treblinka.

### The Historiography of the Gypsies

The Gypsies originated from the northern Indian subcontinent during the fifth century and since then have moved into much of the world (Bauer 1990, 634). Today they number close to 3.5 million

<sup>1</sup> The term Gypsy is considered by some Roma people to be pejorative due to its connotations of illegal behavior, but is commonly used in the scholarly literature related to the Holocaust. They prefer Romani or Roma, which are also used in the literature about them.

in Europe (Matras 2015). About one-million live in North America, and 800,000 in Brazil. They speak one of several dialects of the Romani language, and Para-Romani, a dialect of the local language in the specific country in which they live. Their religion, especially in Europe, is predominately a sect of Christianity, although many are Muslims (Gall 1998, 316–318). In Germany, most Gypsies were primarily from two tribes, the Roma and Sinti (Crowe 1994).

For several reasons, the “Gypsies occupied a special place in Nazi racist theories” (Bauer 1990, 634). As was the case for the Jews, a major reason for the attempts to suppress the Gypsies was that “race scientists’ invoked the racial factor and the need to protect the purity of German blood” from contamination from evolutionary inferior races, such as the Gypsies. This supposed inferiority justified their suppression and eventually their extermination (Lewy 1999, 385). The sharp escalation of persecution during the last three years of the war was in a large part due to the pressure coming from lower-level-ranking Nazis who considered the war an opportunity to implement the racial scientists goals and the “Gypsy experts’ to solve the ‘problem’ of the Gypsy Mischlinge (guppies of mixed ancestry), labeled asocial, by way of deportation, incarceration, and sterilization” (Lewy 2000, 38).

In 1937, Dr. Robert Ritter (1901–1951) was appointed head of the *Research Office for Race, Hygiene and Population Biology* in Germany. Ritter and his team of scientists examined the Gypsy population and proposed solutions to the Gypsy race problem (Bauer 1990, 635). Dr. Ritter, the trained “racial scientist,” received his first doctorate in psychology from the University of Munich and his second doctorate in medicine from Heidelberg University. His research resulted in classifying 28,607 Gypsies, which greatly aided the Nazi government in their systematic genocide toward their goal of German racial purity. His detailed research concluded that 90% of Gypsies were of mixed blood, thus not a pure race, and therefore were not regarded as pure Aryans (Bauer 1990, 635). Ritter’s “science” sent about 25,000 Gypsies to Auschwitz, most all of whom died from starvation, epidemics, and medical experiments (Bauer 1990, 636).

### Himmler's Work in Solving the Gypsy Plague

In early 1939, Heinrich Himmler’s decree on the “Fight Against the Gypsy Plague,” made explicit use of racially inferior race criteria of the “Zigeuner mischlinge” (meaning: mixed-race gypsies), those who have mixed race, (German/ Aryan and Gypsy) ancestry that polluted German blood (Lewy 1999, 201). Therefore, it was necessary that “racially pure

Gypsies and Mischlinge be treated differently.” The mixed race, the Zigeuner mischlinge, had darker skin which was seen as evidence of their non-Aryan origins, thus Nazi policy required their “cleansing.” Furthermore, “Despite the Nazis’ fixation with race, social adjustment could override racial origin,” exempting some from “cleansing.” (Lewy 2012, 35).

One result of Himmler’s work occurred when, in September of 1939, Reinhard Heydrich ordered the removal of 30,000 Gypsies from the newly occupied Polish territories (Bauer 1990, 635). On November 5, 1941, the first trainload of Gypsies from the Ostmark (Austria) arrived in the concentration camp at Łódź and, by four days later, some 5,000 had been forced into a ghetto. By the end of 1941, the typhus epidemic became uncontrollable in the Gypsy camp, killing 613 persons. Medical care consisted primarily of separating the sick from the healthy. After a high-ranking German official died of the disease, the decision was made to liquidate the camp and murder those remaining alive. Gypsies, and other “inferior races” were viewed as natural carriers of pathogenic parasites including lice. Thus, the Nazis reasoned, to stop the spread of pathogens, inferior races must be exterminated.

In January 1942, about 4,400 Gypsies from Litzmannstadt (Łódź) ghetto in Poland were killed in the gas vans of Chelmno (Lewy 2012, 41). This was the second-largest ghetto in all of German-occupied Europe after the Warsaw Ghetto. Gypsies in the Soviet Union and Serbia were—like Jews—targeted to be destroyed. Exceptions were the Aryan categories of Gypsies declared “racially pure” including the Sinti Gypsies. Other exceptions included Gypsies legally married to “persons of German blood,” the socially-adjusted employed Gypsies, Gypsies still in military service or discharged during the current war after being wounded or decorated, Gypsies working in areas important for the war, and Gypsies who proved they had foreign citizenship (Lewy 2012, 60).

The “racially pure,” about 14,000 persons, were exempted from deportation, and those above the age of 12 were urged to consent to sterilization. Himmler also wanted to keep alive a few “pure Gypsies as a kind of live museum, or as ‘rare animals’” as another part to his plan to destroy the Gypsy people (Lewy 1999, 210).

### Medical Research on Gypsies

During the 1930s and 1940s, a Gypsy family of dwarf singers known as “The Lilliput Troupe” dazzled audiences with their unique vaudeville performances. The only all-dwarf show earned their fame—and ultimately saved their lives in Auschwitz. After descending from the cattle train in the Auschwitz death camp, the Ovitz family were separated from

the other Holocaust victims to be used for research. Formerly, “showered with flowers and besieged for autographs, these entertainers were now declared a...genetic error that the state set out systematically to erase” (Negev and Koren 2013, 91). A major reason for the research was part of an attempt to apply Darwinism to science with the end goal of producing a superior race. As Herbert Heuss explained,

The theories of Darwin, whose book *The Origin of Species* ... marked a decisive point in the development of the scientific study of race. Darwin had determined that natural selection and the fight for survival were the developmental principles of nature. Applied to society, Darwinism meant that western civilization had disturbed a possible higher development of the human species and degeneration (both physical and moral) had set in as a consequence of this [race mixture]. Following this logic, the destruction of unworthy elements [races] was regarded as necessary for the preservation of a people. Long before National Socialism, the ideas and terminology that were to become a terrible reality in the Third Reich were already in existence. (Heuss 1997, 20)

In 1930, Joseph Mengele (1911–1979) enrolled as a medical student at the University of Munich. He soon became intrigued by the then burgeoning field of heredity and eugenics. In 1935, he received a Ph.D. in anthropology for a thesis “attempting to demonstrate that one could differentiate racial groups according to jaw shape” (Negev and Koren 2013, 70). He claimed that “dental irregularities were hereditary and tended to appear with other hereditary abnormalities, like idiocy and dwarfism” (Negev and Koren 2013, 71). Mengele’s doctoral advisor’s

enthusiastic letter of recommendation won Mengele a highly coveted position as a research assistant at the Institute for Hereditary Biology and Racial Purity at the University of Frankfurt.... ‘Mengele was now at the epicenter of Nazi philosophical and scientific thinking, which held that it was possible to select, engineer, refine and ultimately purify the race.’ (Negev and Koren 2013, 70–71)

Of the ethnic Germans, mainly Jews and Gypsies were judged as persons of alien blood and thus were of most concern to the race scientists (Lewy 1999, 202). Dr. Mengele ordered a series of experiments on the Gypsies and concurrently developed a disturbing fondness for his “human lab-rats.” He “did not want simply to succeed,” but to become so famous that “his name would be in encyclopedias” (Negev and Koren 2013, 70). He succeeded, but not for the reason he had envisioned.

Mengele’s supervisor was Professor Verschuer, whose research on twins suffered a major setback due to the war because his access to new research subjects dried up. Verschuer therefore encouraged

Mengele to apply for a position in Auschwitz, where he would have continual access to an unlimited supply of human subjects. Mengele was accepted, and on May 30, 1943, the 32-year-old doctor arrived at the Birkenau-Auschwitz complex. Because Auschwitz was eventually unable to deal with the large number of “racially undesirable peoples” sent there, the new Birkenau camp began operation in February of 1942 (Negev and Koren 2013, 72).

Mengele was soon appointed chief physician of the Gypsy camp section, responsible for selecting which of the new camp arrivals should be sent to their immediate death or be assigned to the slave labor part of the camp. Soon his enthusiasm, charisma, and especially his cruelty, set him apart from the other death-camp doctors. The ambitious Mengele was soon no longer content to work as Professor Verschuer’s assistant but wanted his own research project. Mengele soon saw his opportunity. During

his first year in the camp, he had mainly experimented on a few dozen cases, most of them sets of twins, that he had discovered among the Gypsies.... But now, with the imminent arrival of hundreds of thousands of Jews, research vistas of unlimited scope and variety were about to open up for him. (Negev and Koren 2013, 88)

Mengele once confided to the distinguished Jewish pediatrician Berthold Epstein (1897–1962), who was then imprisoned at the camp, that his (Mengele’s) goal was to use his achievements “as a springboard towards a professorship... in the shape of a scientific treatise that would confirm... the indispensability of his research” into race. He also bluntly told Epstein, “We are enemies—you will not get out of here. If you perform scientific work for me and I publish it in my name, you will prolong your own life.” Consequently, Epstein was put to work to research topics such as the deadly gangrene of the face and mouth on Gypsy children and adolescents (Negev and Koren 2013, 88). An inmate artist named Dina was assigned to draw other inmates. Not happy with her apparent preference for good-looking Gypsies, Mengele selected ugly “elderly women and men... to acquire visual documentation to support his racial theory” to illustrate the book that he was writing (Negev and Koren 2013, 100).

Mengele’s research goals included deciphering genetic differences of Jews, Gypsies, and others to determine their resistance, or lack thereof, “to various infectious diseases, and to assemble as much material as possible from genetically affected twins or families” (Negev and Koren 2013, 87). The scientists felt the key to race was in the blood. As a result, in the 1940s German

medicine was obsessed with blood and its constituents. It was generally believed that blood plasma retained

all traces of illness and contained all genetic traits. German scientists considered blood as a key to the differentiation between superior and inferior races (Negev and Koren 2013, 93).

For this reason, Mengele's research relied primarily on blood evaluations

and anthropometric measurements. He had neither the time nor the inclination to test his hundreds of victims personally but ... did not need to—not with the abundance of expert professionals among the hundreds of thousands of people passing through the gates of Auschwitz-Birkenau (Negev and Koren 2013, 103).

Although Mengele acted according to standard practice, he had little clear ideas of what he was looking for. For this reason, the repeated tests took large amounts of blood for no apparent reason. The Gypsies

were never told which tests were going to be performed on them on any particular day, but...would find themselves lying naked and face down on the examination tables, and the bustle of medical activity around them only intensified their anxiety as they wondered where precisely their bodies would be pierced or jabbed or poked, and to what violent and devastating effect. (Negev and Koren 2013, 123)

After the mass extermination of almost half a million Hungarian Jews, the camp authorities turned to the problem of the Gypsies. The Nazis had been undecided in their policies towards them: should they be exterminated as an inferior race? The decision was, as a hereditarily inferior race, they were to be exterminated. In May of 1944, the SS surrounded the Gypsy camp

in an attempt to lead all 6,000 inmates to the gas chambers. The troopers, however, met with fierce opposition—men and women armed with knives, iron pipes and any metal object, dull or sharp, that they could find....As a result, the camp administration changed its plan. Able-bodied Gypsy women were sent to slave labor camps, and Gypsy men from Germany were sent to the Wehrmacht to serve as live mine detectors (Negev and Koren 2013, 119).

The victims knew they were slated to die in the gas chambers, and many yelled objections, including “we are German citizens. You can't do this to us” (Fings, Heuss, and Sparing 1997, 109). During his year as the Gypsy camp head physician, Mengele developed cordial relationships with many inmates. He formed a special fondness for the

children and often smiled when they called him ‘Uncle Mengele’. But when he received the final order to liquidate the remaining 2,897 Gypsies, most of them women and children, he carried it out obediently and diligently....he now made use of

their blind trust by enticing boys and girls out of the hiding places with the same candies he had offered them after painful experiments. As he led them to their death, he ignored their frantic pleas (Negev and Koren 2013, 120).

After the annihilation of the Gypsies, Mengele was appointed First Physician of the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp. The emergence of scientific racism and Social Darwinism linked social with racial differences, providing the German public with justification for prejudices against Gypsies. Some survived only because the camps they were held in were liberated by Americans or Russians (Schmittroth and Rosteck 1998, vol. 2, 464). In addition, “German military and SS-police units also shot at least 30,000 Roma in the Baltic States and elsewhere in the occupied Soviet Union, where Einsatzgruppen and other mobile killing units killed Roma at the same time that they killed Jews.” (*The Holocaust Encyclopedia* 2020)

### **After the War, the Scientists were Rarely Punished**

After the war ended, Mengele's professional sponsor, Dr. Verschuer, “head of the genetic and hereditary research program...was declared a Nazi sympathiser...was fined [only] 600 marks” (about 150 dollars). [Then,] in “1951, he became professor of human genetics at the University of Munster; three years later, he was promoted to the position of dean of the medical faculty...honors were bestowed on him by the American, Italian, Austrian and Japanese societies for [his work in] human genetics” (Negev and Koren 2013, 209).

Another example is Mengele's academic competitor, Professor Hans Grebe, who soon after the war obtained an academic “position in the department of human genetics at the University of Marburg” and in 1957 became president of the German Association of Sport Doctors. Dr. Robert Ritter, whose work resulted in the genocide of the Gypsies, was also never prosecuted for his part in the Darwinian eugenic goal of producing a superior race by genocide. He was hired to teach biology at the University of Tübingen from 1944 to 1946, and later brought in his former assistant in his eugenics work, race scientist Dr. Eva Justin (1909–1966), to work with him as a psychologist (Schmidt-Degenhard 2008). Anthropologist Justin earned her PhD in 1943 in race science at the University of Berlin for a thesis, titled in English, “Biographical destinies of Gypsy children and their offspring who were educated in a manner inappropriate for their species.” The Gypsy children that Justin studied were selected for deportation to the camps, but their deportation was delayed until she completed her research and received her PhD. Most were eventually killed in Auschwitz.

Dr. Mengele lived in the American Zone of Germany until 1949 when he traveled to South America with few problems. He lived with various Nazi sympathizers for 30 years until he died of a stroke in 1979 while enjoying a swim. The publicity about his inhumane camp medical experiments which, years after he arrived in his new homeland, brought attention to his case, which began a manhunt to find and bring him to justice.

In an effort to dissociate itself from its Nazi past, the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute was renamed “the Max Planck Institute.” In June 2001, the society’s president, Professor Hubert Markl, admitted that scientific evidence has proved “beyond the shadow of a doubt that directors and employees at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute were together intellectually responsible for, and sometimes even actively collaborated in, the crimes of the Nazi regime” (Negev and Koren 2013, 210). The fact is, the murder of over 70,000 Gypsies occurred under the direction of the nation’s leading scientists and scientific institutions. Hitler himself played practically no role in the Gypsies’ persecution and never once mentioned them in *Mein Kampf*.

### Conflicts Still Exist

The mistreatment against the Gypsies continued throughout Central and Eastern Europe after the war ended.

The Federal Republic of Germany determined that all measures taken against Roma before 1943 were legitimate official measures against persons committing criminal acts, not the result of policy driven by racial prejudice. This decision effectively closed the door to restitution for thousands of Roma victims, who had been incarcerated, forcibly sterilized, and deported out of Germany for no specific crime. (*The Holocaust Encyclopedia* 2020)

Fortunately, in late 1979

the West German Federal Parliament identified the Nazi persecution of Roma as being racially motivated, creating eligibility for most Roma to apply for compensation for their suffering and loss under the Nazi regime. By this time, many of those who became eligible had already died. (*The Holocaust Encyclopedia* 2020)

In the summer of 2010, French authorities demolished at least 51 Roma camps and began the task of repatriating their residents to their countries of origin. (“France sends Roma Gypsies back to Romania.” (Anonymous 2010).

### Summary

The slaughter of the Gypsies was one result of the rejection of the Genesis teaching the origin of all mankind from Adam and Eve. The origin of various

people groups as a result of the Tower of Babel judgment further compounded the problem. In short, rejecting Genesis and replacing the origin of humans with Darwinism produced a lethal combination that resulted in the mass slaughter of not only Jews but also Gypsies (Hancock 2004; Kenrick and Puxon 1995).

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