

# HOMOSEXUALS

UNITED STATES  
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Cover: A portrait of  
two companions.  
Berlin, Germany,  
1926. Schwules  
Museum, Berlin.

As part of the Nazis' attempt to purify German society and propagate an "Aryan master race," they condemned homosexuals as "socially aberrant." Soon after taking office on January 30, 1933, Hitler banned all homosexual and lesbian organizations. Brownshirted storm troopers raided the institutions and gathering places of homosexuals. Greatly weakened and driven underground, this subculture had flourished in the relative freedom of the 1920s, in the pubs and cafes of Berlin, Hamburg, Munich, Bremen, and other cities.



(Top) State Museum Auschwitz, Oswiecim, Poland. (Bottom) Nordrhein-Westfälisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Düsseldorf, RW 58-61940.

## HOMOSEXUALS: VICTIMS OF THE NAZI ERA

On May 6, 1933, Nazis ransacked the “Institute for Sexual Science” in Berlin; four days later as part of large public burnings of books viewed as “un-German,” thousands of books plundered from the Institute’s library were thrown into a huge bonfire. The institute was founded in 1919 by Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld (1868–1935).

It sponsored research and discussion on marital problems, sexually transmitted diseases, and laws relating to sexual offenses, abortion, and homosexuality. The author of many works, Hirschfeld, himself a homosexual, led efforts for three decades to reform laws criminalizing homosexuality. (In 1933 Hirschfeld happened to be in France, where he remained until his death.)

*Auschwitz mug shot of homosexual August Pfeiffer, a servant, who was born August 8, 1895, in Weferlingen, Germany. He arrived at Auschwitz on November 1, 1941, and died there December 28, 1941.*

*Mug shot of Friedrich Althoff, a waiter from Düsseldorf, who was born May 16, 1899. He was arrested on charges of homosexuality. Düsseldorf, Germany, January 25, 1939.*

In 1934, a special Gestapo (Secret State Police) division on homosexuals was set up. One of its first acts was to order the police “pink lists” from all over Germany. The police had been compiling these lists of suspected homosexual men since 1900. On September 1, 1935, a harsher, amended version of Paragraph 175 of the Criminal Code, originally framed in 1871, went into effect, punishing a broad range of “lewd and lascivious” behavior between men. In 1936 Nazi leader Heinrich Himmler created a Reich Central Office for the Combating of Homosexuality and Abortion: Special Office (II S), a subdepartment of Executive Department II of the Gestapo. The linking of homosexuality and abortion reflected the Nazi regime’s

population policies to promote a higher birthrate of its “Aryan” population. On this subject, Himmler spoke in Bad Tölz on February 18, 1937, before a group of high-ranking SS officers on the dangers both homosexuality and abortion posed to the German birthrate.


Under the revised Paragraph 175 and the creation of Special Office II S, the number of prosecutions increased sharply, peaking in the years 1937–1939. Half of all convictions for homosexual activity under the Nazi regime occurred during these years. The police stepped up raids on homosexual meeting places, seized address books of arrested men to find additional suspects, and created networks of informers to compile lists of names and make arrests.

An estimated 1.2 million men were homosexuals in

Germany in 1928. Between 1933–45, an estimated 100,000 men were arrested as homosexuals, and of these, some 50,000 officially defined homosexuals were sentenced. Most of these men spent time in regular prisons, and an estimated 5,000 to 15,000 of the total sentenced were incarcerated in concentration camps.

How many of these 5,000 to 15,000 “175ers” perished in the concentration camps will probably never be known. Historical research to date has been very limited. One leading scholar, Ruediger Lautmann, believes that the death rate for “175ers” in the camps may have been as high as sixty percent.

All prisoners of the camps wore marks of various colors and shapes, which allowed guards and camp functionaries to identify them by category. The uniforms of those



*One man (right) recounts how the Nazis' assumption of power in 1933 limited homosexuals' freedom and created an atmosphere of fear.*

## A HOMOSEXUAL RECALLS 1933

Then came the thunderbolt of the 30 January 1933, and we knew that a change of political climate had taken place. What we had tried to prevent, had taken place.

Over the years, more and more of my political friends disappeared, of my Jewish and of my homosexual friends. Fear came over us with the increasingly coordinated pressure of the Nazis. For heaven's sake not to attract attention, to exercise restraint. 1933 was the starting-point for the persecution of homosexuals. Already in this year we heard of raids on homosexual pubs and meeting places. Maybe individual, politically uneducated homosexuals who were only interested in immediate gratification did not recognize the significance of the year 1933, but for us homosexuals who were also politically active, who had defended the Weimar Republic, and who had tried to forestall the Nazi threat, 1933 initially signified a reinforcing of our resistance.

In order not to mutually incriminate ourselves, we decided to no longer recognize each other. When we came across each other in the street, we passed by without looking at one another. There were certain possibilities for us to meet, but that never happened in public.

For a politicized homosexual, visiting places which were part of the homosexual subculture was too dangerous. Friends told me that raids on bars were becoming more frequent. And someone had written on the wall of the subway tunnel of the Hamburg S-Bahn between Dammtor station and the main station, “Street of the Lost.” That was some sort of film or book title. We found this graffiti very amusing, for most of us tried to cope with the thing by developing a sort of gallows humor.

*From Hans-Georg Stümke and Rudi Finkler, Rosa Winkel, Rosa Listen, Homosexuelle und 'Gesundes Volksempfinden' von Auschwitz bis heute (Hamburg, 1981), trans. in Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wippermann, The Racial State: Germany 1933–1945 (New York, 1991), pp. 182–83.*

## PARAGRAPH 175

175. A male who commits lewd and lascivious acts with another male or permits himself to be so abused for lewd and lascivious acts, shall be punished by imprisonment. In a case of a participant under 21 years of age at the time of the commission of the act, the court may, in especially slight cases, refrain from punishment.

175a. Confinement in a penitentiary not to exceed ten years and, under extenuating circumstances, imprisonment for not less than three months shall be imposed:

1. Upon a male who, with force or with threat of imminent danger to life and limb, compels another male to commit lewd and lascivious acts with him or compels the other party to submit to abuse for lewd and lascivious acts;

2. Upon a male who, by abuse of a relationship of dependence upon him, in consequence of service, employment, or subordination, induces another male to commit lewd and lascivious acts with him or to submit to being abused for such acts;

3. Upon a male who being over 21 years of age induces another male under 21 years of age to commit lewd and lascivious acts with him or to submit to being abused for such acts;

4. Upon a male who professionally engages in lewd and lascivious acts with other men, or submits to such abuse by other men, or offers himself for lewd and lascivious acts with other men.

175b. Lewd and lascivious acts contrary to nature between human beings and animals shall be punished by imprisonment; loss of civil rights may also be imposed.

*English translation by Warren Johannson and William Percy in "Homosexuals in Nazi Germany," Simon Wiesenthal Center Annual, Vol. 7 (1990).*

sentenced as homosexuals bore various identifying marks, including a large black dot and a large "175" drawn on the back of the jacket. Later a pink triangular patch (*rosa Winkel*) appeared.

Conditions in the camps were generally harsh for all inmates, many of whom died from hunger, disease, exhaustion, exposure to the cold, and brutal treatment. Many survivors have testified that men with pink triangles were often treated particularly severely by guards and inmates alike because of widespread biases against homosexuals. As was true with other prisoner categories, some homosexuals were also victims of cruel medical experiments, including castration. At Buchenwald concentration camp, SS physician Dr. Carl Vaernet performed operations designed to convert

men to heterosexuals: the surgical insertion of a capsule which released the male hormone testosterone. Such procedures reflected the desire by Himmler and others to find a medical solution to homosexuality.

The vast majority of homosexual victims were males; lesbians were not subjected to systematic persecution. While lesbian bars were closed, few women are believed to have been arrested. Paragraph 175 did not mention female homosexuality. Lesbianism was seen by many Nazi officials as alien to the nature of the Aryan woman. In some cases, the police arrested lesbians as "asocials" or "prostitutes." One woman, Henny Schermann, was arrested in 1940 in Frankfurt and was labelled "licentious lesbian" on her mug shot; but she was also a "stateless Jew," sufficient cause for deportation.

*In 1935 the Nazi regime revised Paragraph 175 of the German criminal code to make illegal a very broad range of behavior between men. This is the text of the revised law (left).*

H O M O S E X U A L S ~ V I C T I M S O F T H E N A Z I E R A ~ 1 9 3 3 - 1 9 4 5

Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld, a Jew and homosexual, founded the Institute for Sexual Sciences. Berlin, Germany, 1928.



The closing of the Eldorado, a club where homosexuals socialized. Berlin, Germany, March 5, 1933.



The Institute for Sexual Sciences during a Nazi raid. Berlin, Germany, May 6, 1933.



Landesbildstelle Berlin.

(Top) Suddeutscher Verlag Bilderdienst, Munich, Germany. (Bottom) Akademie der Kunst, Berlin.

Among the Jewish inmates at Ravensbrück concentration camp selected for extermination, she was gassed in the Bernburg psychiatric hospital, a “euthanasia” killing center in Germany, in 1942.

Homosexuality outside Germany (and incorporated Austria and other annexed territories) was not a subject generally addressed in Nazi ideology or policy; the concern focused on the impact of homosexuality on the strength and birthrate of the Aryan population. During the war years, 1939 to 1945, the Nazis did not generally instigate drives against homosexuality in German-occupied countries.

Consequently, the vast majority of homosexuals arrested under Paragraph 175 were Germans or Austrians. Unlike Jews, men arrested as homosexuals were not systematically

deported to Nazi-established ghettos in eastern Europe. Nor were they transported in mass groups of homosexual prisoners to Nazi extermination camps in Poland.

It should be noted that Nazi authorities sometimes used the charge of homosexuality to discredit and undermine their political opponents. Charges of homosexuality among the SA (Storm trooper) leadership figured prominently among justifications for the bloody purge of SA chief Ernst Röhm in June 1934. Nazi leader Hermann Göring used trumped-up accusations of homosexual improprieties to unseat army supreme commander Von Fritsch, an opponent of Hitler’s military policy, in early 1938. Finally, a 1935 propaganda campaign and two show trials in 1936 and 1937 alleging rampant homosexuality in the priest-

*In a speech that Himmler gave before a conference of SS officers on February 17, 1937, he included remarks on the question of homosexuality.*

## NAZI LEADER HEINRICH HIMMLER ON THE “QUESTION OF HOMOSEXUALITY”

If you further take into account the facts I have not yet mentioned, namely that with a static number of women, we have two million men too few on account of those who fell in the war [of 1914–18], then you can well imagine how this imbalance of two million homosexuals and two million war dead, or in other words a lack of about four million men capable of having sex, has upset the sexual balance sheet of Germany, and will result in a catastrophe.

I would like to develop a couple of ideas for you on the question of homosexuality. There are those homosexuals who take the view: what I do is my business, a purely private matter. However, all things which take place in the sexual sphere are not the private affair of the individual, but signify the life and death of the nation, signify world power or ‘swissification.’ The people which has many children has the candidature for world power and world domination. A people of good race which has too few children has a one-way ticket to the grave, for insignificance in fifty or a hundred years, for burial in two hundred and fifty years....

Therefore we must be absolutely clear that if we continue to have this burden in Germany, without being able to fight it, then that is the end of Germany, and the end of the Germanic world....

*Translated in Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wipperman, The Racial State: Germany 1933–1945 (New York, 1991), pp. 192–93.*

## BREAKING THE SILENCE: FRIEDRICH-PAUL VON GROSZHEIM

Friedrich-Paul von Groszheim was arrested for the first time in 1937 with 230 other men, in a mass arrest of homosexuals in Lübeck, a German port on the Baltic Sea. In 1938 von Groszheim was again arrested, tortured, and given the choice between castration and concentration camp. He submitted to the operation and survived, but only told his story in 1992.



Von Groszheim told his story on a new film in German with English subtitles *We Were Marked with a Big A*, which was shown at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in 1993. A video of the film is available in the Museum Shop. Von Groszheim's story is also one of nine stories of homosexual victims told on Museum Identity Cards; his identity card may be accessed at the Wexner Learning Center by

touching I.D. Card Stories on the menu and then keying in 5364.

Von Groszheim was never acknowledged as a victim of the Nazi regime, and due to on-going persecution of homosexuals in Germany, it took nearly half a century before he broke his silence. Recently he explained why he began to speak out: "I'm living proof that Hitler didn't win. I'm aware of that every day. If I don't tell my story, who will know the truth?"

*Friedrich-Paul von Groszheim, one of the "forgotten victims" of the Holocaust, recently broke his silence to give testimony.*

hood, attempted to undercut the power of the Roman Catholic Church in Germany, an institution which many Nazi officials considered their most powerful potential enemy.

After the war, homosexual concentration camp prisoners were not acknowledged as victims of Nazi persecution, and reparations were refused. Under the Allied Military Government of Germany, some homosexuals were forced to serve out their terms of imprisonment, regardless of the time spent in concentration camps. The 1935 version of Paragraph 175 remained in effect in the Federal

Republic (West Germany) until 1969, so that well after liberation, homosexuals continued to fear arrest and incarceration.

Research on Nazi persecution of homosexuals was impeded by the criminalization and social stigmatization of homosexuals in Europe and the United States in the decades following the Holocaust. Most survivors were afraid or ashamed to tell their stories. Recently, especially in Germany, new research findings on these "forgotten victims" have been published, and some survivors have broken their silence to give testimony.



## FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

### VISIT THE PERMANENT EXHIBITION

*The Burning of Books* (4th floor)

*Enemies of the State* (4th floor)

*Prisoners of the Camps* (3rd floor): two pink triangular patches; “mug shots” of prisoners

*Return to Life* (2nd floor)

### VISIT THE WEXNER LEARNING CENTER (2nd floor)

From the MENU choose TOPIC LIST. From the alphabetical list of topics choose “MOSAIC OF VICTIMS: Nazi persecution of a mosaic of victims.” Choose “Homosexuals” to learn more about the persecution of homosexuals.

From the MENU choose ID CARD. Type in the following numbers to read about the experiences of homosexuals who were persecuted during the Holocaust: 5364; 5894; 5664; 5863; 3864; 7264; 5336; 5856; 3956.

## MUSEUM HOLDINGS

### COLLECTIONS

Limited number of documents pertaining to arrest and incarceration of homosexuals.

Numerous photographs, including those of groups, mug shots, individual portraits, gay/lesbian bars, public baths, and the raid on Institute for Sexual Sciences.

### LIBRARY

Several recently published scholarly studies in German, in addition to older books in English, such as Heger's and Plant's, aimed at general readers.

## RECOMMENDED READING

Burleigh, Michael, and Wolfgang Wippermann. *The Racial State: Germany 1933–1945* (Cambridge, England, 1991).

Heger, Heinz. *The Men with the Pink Triangle* (Boston, 1994).

Isherwood, Christopher. *Christopher and His Kind* (New York, 1976).

Lautmann, Ruediger. "Gay Prisoners in Concentration Camps as Compared with Jehovah's Witnesses and Political Prisoners," in Michael Berenbaum, ed., *A Mosaic of Victims: Non-Jews Persecuted and Murdered by the Nazis* (New York, 1990), pp. 200–221.

Plant, Richard. *The Pink Triangle: The Nazi War against Homosexuals* (New York, 1986).

Wolff, Charlotte. *Magnus Hirschfeld: A Portrait of a Pioneer in Sexology* (London, 1986).



United States Holocaust Memorial Museum  
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