

Life Under the Nazis



United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

The entrance to the Lodz ghetto. The sign reads "Jewish residential area—entry forbidden."

In newly released photographs by Henryk Ross, one photo shows a group of smiling children at a banquet table. In another, a couple looks happily at a newborn infant. In a third photograph, a young boy holds a furry teddy bear. Everyone looks content.

Esther Brunstein knows better. With a magnifying glass, the 76-year-old native of Poland searches other photos, hoping to spot a friend or a relative.

Finally, she stops at the face of a young child. A shadow of sadness creeps over her.

"You see, when I see the face of a child like this ... you know he did not survive," Brunstein told *The New York Times*.

Brunstein is not looking at a family photo album but at dozens of photographs taken during the **Holocaust**. The Holocaust refers to the killing of 6 million European Jews and others considered "undesirable" by the German Nazis, who were led by dictator Adolf Hitler during World War II (1939–1945).

Life in Lodz



Leigh Haeger

Lodz is located in central Poland.

Brunstein was lucky. She survived the Holocaust living in the notorious ghetto in the Polish city of Lodz. Brunstein and other survivors were in London recently to view for the first time photographs of the ghetto taken by photographer Henryk Ross.

Located in central Poland, Lodz was home to one of the largest Jewish communities in Europe. The city fell to the Nazis soon after the Germans invaded Poland on Sept. 1, 1939.

Almost immediately, the Nazis began rounding up Jews and forcing them to live in a small section of Lodz. Ultimately, more than 200,000 would crowd into the walled ghetto. Entire families were packed into a single room.

Pictures of Daily Life

Not all the Jews lived that way. The Nazis selected a handful of Jews to run and police the ghetto. Those Jews were considered privileged by many. They generally had more to eat, worked at the best jobs, and lived more comfortably

than the others.

Ross was one Jew who was among the "privileged." The Germans wanted Ross to photograph a favorable side of the ghetto. Many of Ross's photos show well-fed families, tailors, and doctors at work. One photo shows a man and a woman kissing in a park. One picture shows a chunky boy in a mini police officer's uniform marching behind his friends.

Dig deeper into Ross's photo archive and a vastly different portrait of Lodz emerges. Ross also photographed the daily atrocities of the ghetto.



Image courtesy of The Wiener Library, London

A soup kitchen in the Lodz ghetto.

He took pictures of the starving people spooning soup into their mouths. He photographed others being loaded into cattle cars for the trip to the death camps, where millions of Jews were murdered. Many of those photos have never been seen by the public until now. Ross buried them during the war and retrieved them years later.

Today, those photos still evoke painful memories. "All of these images are very much stuck in my mind," Aron Zylberszac, who lived in Lodz, told the *Times*. "I still have dreams every night, and photographs make it worse, which is why I don't like looking at them."

Chronicle of Evil Crimes

Like Zylberszac and Brunstein, Ross survived the Holocaust. He released only a few of his photographs to the public before his death in 1991. His son gave the collection to the Archive of Modern Conflict in London.

Thomas Weber, who authored the book *Lodz Ghetto Album: Photographs by Henryk Ross*, said the photos serve "to illustrate a particular interpretation of ghetto life ... [adding] to our understanding of the diabolical crimes of Nazi Germany."

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