

History in the Making

Volume 7

Article 8

January 2014

Holocaust Ghettos

Rebecca Parraz
CSUSB

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/history-in-the-making>

Recommended Citation

Parraz, Rebecca (2014) "Holocaust Ghettos," *History in the Making*: Vol. 7 , Article 8.
Available at: <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/history-in-the-making/vol7/iss1/8>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the History at CSUSB ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in History in the Making by an authorized editor of CSUSB ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@csusb.edu.

Holocaust Ghettos

By Rebecca Parraz

Abstract: In Nazi Germany, the Jewish people were forced into segregated areas that would ultimately evolve into “Holocaust ghettos.” Thousands of these ghettos were built across Europe, and within these ghettos Jews were under complete control and forced to follow severe regulations. These ghettos soon became overpopulated, and resources became scarce. By the end of World War II, thousands of Jews had died within the walls of the ghettos. Causes of death ranged from starvation to disease, and even murder. It is evident that as the war progressed, the Nazis began to use the ghettos as a tool in the Final Solution. The ghettos, however, were not initially intended as a stage in the Final Solution; rather, as they evolved, the Nazis began to use them as another tool to solve the Jewish Question. At the start of war, Jews were forced into areas, primarily slums, in order to expel Jews from German communities which created a “Jewish Absence.” The slums usually consisted of older districts that harbored rundown warehouses and buildings; they became a “Jewish Place.” The Jews, under extreme stress, utilized the area by implementing highly organized communities which aided in the adjustment of life within the ghettos. Then, as a means to further control and concentrate the Jews, the Nazis decided to build walls around the cities with the purpose of segregating them from the German population. The walls completely isolated the Jews and contributed to the formation of a Jewish community within the ghettos. The intent of this research will be to examine the Lodz and Warsaw ghettos by focusing on their construction, geography, and transition from a Jewish community into a Holocaust ghetto.

Introduction

Throughout the Holocaust, Nazis forced Jews into specified areas that became known as the Jewish Ghettos. By 1940, the Lodz and Warsaw ghettos were established and thousands of Jews were promptly forced to leave their homes and livelihoods behind to live in them. The ghettos were placed in specific areas, such as slums, because they were primarily located on the outskirts of the “German cities” and contained fewer “Aryans.” Additionally, these slums contained neglected buildings often filled with trash, and were less populated by the Germans. The

conditions in the Lodz and Warsaw ghettos were brutal; they were overcrowded, unsanitary, and epidemics of disease claimed lives daily. As a result, and due to a lack of sanitation services, corpses were often left on the streets. Furthermore, the Nazis supplied little food and supplies to the ghettos. In order to cope with the stress and horrible conditions, Jews began to form a community. These communities were headed by Jewish leaders who negotiated with the Nazis on behalf of those within the ghettos. Thus, they became a “Jewish place.” As the Jews began to settle, the ghettos became a new home, and there was hope that the terror was over. However, as conditions worsened, the number of deaths increased daily and the Nazis began to use the ghettos to solve the “Jewish Question.” Subsequently, the ghettos transitioned into “Holocaust ghettos.” More specifically, by 1942, the Lodz and Warsaw ghettos were no longer meant to sustain life. The intent of this paper is to argue that ghettoization began as a way to create a “Jewish Absence” in the “German Empire,” and only transitioned into “Holocaust ghettos” to more efficiently implement the Final Solution.

Shortly after the German Occupation of Poland in 1939, Germans began to force Jews into the ghettos as an attempt to create a “Jewish absence” within the cities. Adolf Hitler, Heinrich Himmler, and Reinhard Heydrich “envisioned a vast demographic reorganization of the newly conquered territories,” and as a part of this plan, Jews “were to be concentrated in urban centers then expelled to the furthest corner of the German empire.”¹ Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbles stated in 1939 that the Jews, “must be isolated completely, otherwise all of Europe will be poisoned.”² By expelling the Jews, the Nazis were creating a “German empire” that primarily consisted of “pure blooded Germans.” Evidence shows that in 1939 the attempt to expel the Jews to the “furthest corner of the German empire” was a means of creating a “Jewish absence,” rather than a means of initiating the Final Solution. During ghettoization, Jews were given a short notice of evacuation, and then were forced to leave most of their belongings behind. Thousands of Jews were expelled into specified areas outside major cities.

This process later became known as ghettoization, which can be defined as: “the drawing of boundaries (whether physical facades or imaginary dividing lines) which separate ‘Jews’ from ‘non-Jews.’”³ Simply, ghettoization was a process of removing Jews from German cities and placing them in specified areas for the sole intent of

¹ Christopher Browning, “Nazi Ghettoization Policy in Poland: 1939-1941,” *Central European History* 19, no. 4 (1986): 345.

² Phillip Friedman, “The Jewish Ghettos of the Nazi Era,” *Jewish Social Studies* 16, no. 1 (1954): 66.

³ Tim Cole, *Holocaust City: The Making of a Jewish Ghetto* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 37.

“cleansing” the “German Empire.” As Tim Cole argued, “Ghettoization can therefore be a means of gathering all the ‘Jews’ in the city together in one particular place (‘Jewish presence’), and/or it can be a means of making the remainder of the city *judenfrei* (‘Jewish absence’).”⁴ The Germans created a “Jewish absence” by removing the Jews from cities, and created a “Jewish presence” within the ghettos as a result. Therefore, ghettoization resulted in the formation of “Jewish cities,” (usually located within larger “German cities”) which later became known as the Jewish ghettos. Essentially, they became a city within a city.

After the Nazis decided ghettoization was necessary in order to create a “Jewish absence” within the “German Empire,” the question of where to place the Jews arose. As Cole argued, one must take the location of the ghettos seriously and, “recognize that the doctors of space involved in implementing ghettoization in the locality made decisions over where the ghetto boundaries were drawn and where they were not drawn within the Holocaust city.”⁵ The placement of the ghettos was thought out carefully to ensure they would not interfere with the success of the “German Empire.” For example, the Germans had to insure that the placement of the ghettos would not interfere with active markets, business districts, or heavily populated Aryan apartment buildings. Cole recognized that “there was clearly an architecture for ‘Aryans’ and an architecture for ‘non-Aryans,’ and, more broadly, distinctive ‘Aryan’ and ‘non-Aryan’ spaces.”⁶ The “non-Aryan” architecture and spaces would include the poorer districts and a small Aryan population. Consequently, the outdated slums were chosen for the ghettos, because the area was poor, trashed, and undesirable to Germans; they were a “non-Aryan” space.

In February 1940, the Chief of Police in Lodz issued a decree stating, “in order to concentrate all the Jews residing in the city of Lodz in one separate quarter, a residential area will be established in the part of the city northward from Deutschland Square.”⁷ Friedrich Uebelhoer, *Regierungspräsident* (Chief Administrator) for the Lodz region, stated “the creation of the ghetto is of course only a transitional measure. I shall determine at what time and with what means the ghetto and thereby also the city will be cleansed of Jews.”⁸ Hence, the establishment of the Lodz ghetto was simply a means of “cleansing” the city of the Jews by deportation and complete expulsion from the “German Empire.” By April 1940, Lodz was completely separated from the rest of the city⁹ and

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 36.

⁶ Ibid., 7.

⁷ Alan Adelson and Robert Lapides, *Lodz Ghetto* (New York: Viking, 1989), 31.

⁸ Browning, 346.

⁹ Ibid.

was surrounded by a fence with barbed wire to prevent people from escaping the ghetto. Further, the fence kept the Jews inside the ghetto and under complete control of the Nazis. Jews were not permitted to leave unless they worked outside the ghetto, otherwise they would be punished; usually they were shot on the spot. The Lodz ghetto was placed in the northern districts of the city, which was known as “Baluty” and “the Old City.”¹⁰ Although the northern districts of Lodz included several factories and warehouses, the area was nevertheless considered poor, because the buildings had heavily deteriorated in the years prior. Most were in danger of being torn down, and were filled with dirt and trash.¹¹ Additionally, the “Baulty” had crooked alleys, no street lights, and had no fire, sanitation or zoning regulations; essentially it was a breeding ground for disease.¹² Essentially, they were the most unappealing areas to the Germans. Furthermore, it was a “non-Aryan” space; it was an ideal place for the Lodz ghetto.

Similar to Lodz, the Warsaw ghetto was located in a rundown area and was established shortly after the German occupation. On October 2, 1940, L. Fischer, the governor of the district, signed an order “for the formation of a separate Jewish district in Warsaw;” the details of the construction and placement of the Warsaw ghetto was planned in the headquarters of the chief in Warsaw.¹³ As the capital of Poland, and according to the 1931 Polish census, Warsaw contained 352,659 Jews, 30.1 percent of the total population.¹⁴ Consequently, the Nazis quickly had to create a space to concentrate all of the Jews and remove them from the city or “Aryan” space. Throughout the Holocaust, the Warsaw ghetto was the largest ghetto in Poland. By 1941, the ghetto was divided up into three sections and, at one point, contained around 500,000 Jews.¹⁵ To maintain control of the large number of Jews (and to keep epidemics down) residing within the Warsaw ghetto, walls were put up. Nazis specifically placed the Warsaw ghetto in the “Seuchensperrgebiet,” an area that was threatened by an epidemic in the northern district of the city.¹⁶ The southern borders were altered several times to exclude further streets, and between October and November 1941, the border adjustments left around 75,000 people without shelter.¹⁷ It is clear the Nazis initially saw the Warsaw ghetto as a means of creating a “Jewish

¹⁰ Roman Mogilanski, *The Ghetto Anthology* (Los Angeles: American Congress of Jews from Poland and Survivors of Concentration Camps, 1985), 161.

¹¹ Adelson and Lapidés, 36.

¹² *Ibid.*, 35.

¹³ Mogilanski, 309.

¹⁴ Howard Fertig, *The Jewish Communities of Nazi-Occupied Europe* (Howard Fertig, 1982), 3.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Mogilanski, 309.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 310.

absence” within the city of Warsaw, and to create this absence, they looked to the most disease-ridden and unwanted section of the city; once more, it was a “non-Aryan” space.

Evidently, the establishment and placement of the Lodz and Warsaw ghettos were clearly planned and thought out. Phillip Friedman argued that “the purpose of the ghettos became apparent from the manner of their formation.”¹⁸ The Nazis specifically placed the ghettos in slum areas on the outskirts of major towns. As in the case of Lodz and Warsaw, walls were built and boundaries were established months after Germany occupied Poland, and Jews were forced to abandon their homes and move into these areas immediately. Upon establishment, the Germans planned to impoverish the Jews. As a result, the Nazis allowed Jews to carry few personal belongings, and in the cases of Warsaw and Lodz, businesses located outside the ghetto had to be completely abandoned.¹⁹ The Nazis took much of what the Jews left behind for the economic gain of the “German Empire;” such as, jewelry and gold. Thus, upon entering the ghettos, the Jews were at an economic disadvantage. Once in them, the Jews were forced to live in overcrowded buildings and poor conditions. Therefore, immediately forcing the Jews into the ghettos, stripping them of all economic opportunities, and most importantly, quality living conditions, were indications that the ghettos were not intended to sustain life.

The conditions in Lodz were horrible. The buildings were in danger of being torn down and only 382 of the apartments had water pipes and drains; 294 had toilets, and only 49 had a toilet, drain and a bath.²⁰ Many of the people could not shower or use a toilet in their home; they lived in conditions that were fit for wild animals. Many people rarely showered, and were forced to relieve themselves in other places. Subsequently, Lodz became extremely unsanitary, and diseases broke out and killed thousands. In 1941, Lodz had severe typhoid fever and spotted typhus epidemics, resulting in 1,080 Jewish dead within three weeks.²¹ As a response to the horrible conditions, Lodz citizens posted a bulletin that demanded all the trash to be cleaned up, all the toilets needed to be repaired, baths provided, disinfections for those infected, and free laundry for the poor.²² Obviously, these demands were not met.

Similarly, in Warsaw the conditions were appalling. There was a lack of sanitation, and a shortage of soap, disinfectant, and medical supplies. Diseases spread quickly in Warsaw, because like Lodz, it was very overcrowded and the living conditions were filthy. The lack of

¹⁸ Friedman, 75.

¹⁹ Ibid., 75-76.

²⁰ Adelson and Lapidés, 36.

²¹ Fertig, 44.

²² Adelson and Lapidés, 161.

plumbing and hygienic supplies resulted in irregular baths and improper disposal of human waste, resulting in the spread of disease and vermin. “During the last week of March, 1940 there were 281 cases of typhus in Warsaw, 268 among Jews and 13 among non- Jews. The first week of April brought 305 new cases, 293 among Jews...”²³ Lice also became a major problem within the ghettos; medical records from Warsaw stated that out of 12,164 children examined during August 1941, 19% suffered from lice; and in September 1941, out of 11,580 children examined, 20% had lice.²⁴ As time passed, the chances of survival within the ghettos became slimmer as the Nazis continued to overcrowd the ghettos and make conditions even worse.

In addition to living like animals, the Jews were treated like animals. Jews were forced to labor and were harassed on a daily basis. Nazis attacked Jews psychologically; for example, there were cases when Nazis would enter Jewish households and rape young girls and women in front of their husbands and parents.²⁵ There were several other reports of Nazis who would take women from the ghettos and send them to public houses in Germany or Poland, and force them into prostitution.²⁶ Many Jews within the ghettos broke down mentally, because of the horrid conditions and treatment. Moreover, the Nazis dehumanized the Jews. In Warsaw, on November 21, 1941, Emmanuel Ringelblum noted, “A Jew was ordered to kneel, and they urinated on him. They beat women, too, at Chlodna Street.”²⁷ Germans viewed the Jews not as human beings, but as a disease. The constant harassment deteriorated the self-worth of Jews. Howard Fertig stated “Apathy, resignation, lack of will power and suicides occurred frequently, as did psychic collapse and insanity.”²⁸ Jews were constantly dehumanized, and to a majority, this stripped them of any idea of self-worth and survival. In 1941, five times as many Jews committed suicide in Warsaw as in pre-Nazi occupied Poland.²⁹ For many Jews, suicide was an escape from the horrors; however, it was also an action motivated by fear. Occasionally, Jews committed suicide because they would rather end their own life than be killed by the Nazis. This type of suicide, nevertheless, occurred more during 1943 (when the Nazis began to liquidate the ghettos), than in any earlier year. At the end of summer 1942, a new wave of suicides began and families began to put an end to their lives together.³⁰

²³ Fertig, 44.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 45.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 55.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Jacob Sloan, *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1958), 91.

²⁸ Fertig, 45.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

Although thousands died from diseases, the biggest threat was starvation. All economic ties with the outside world were broken after the ghettos were isolated from the rest of the city, and supplies within the ghetto were quickly exhausted.³¹ Many Jews could not afford food, because they had few economic means and the prices were so high. Dawid Sierrakowiak, who lived and died in the Lodz Ghetto, wrote “Vegetables even potatoes are supposed to arrive this week, but even if they do arrive, I have no idea where to get cash for them.”³² Food, and the fear of starvation, were on the minds of many of the Jews residing in the ghettos. Dawid and thousands of other Jews often starved waiting for a shipment of food to arrive in the ghetto, even though they had no money to buy it. The lack of nourishment weakened the Jews and made them more susceptible to the constant threat of epidemics. The Nazis were aware that many Jews were starving, yet they rarely increased the rations and did nothing to provide the Jews with opportunities for economic gain. Average rations amounted to about 230 calories, and by 1942, 100,000 Jews died from hunger in the Warsaw ghetto.³³ Governor of the Warsaw district, Dr. Ludwig Fischer, declared, “After the war the Jewish question will receive a uniform solution in all Europe. Until then the ghettos must fulfill their aim.”³⁴ By 1942, the “aim” of the ghettos became more apparent as the number of deaths increased. Hence, the Lodz and Warsaw ghettos evolved into Holocaust ghettos; they were a tool in the Final Solution.

For many, in the beginning, the ghettos became a “Jewish place” and the prisoners of Lodz became a community. In 1941, the ghettos were a “Jewish place.” Jozef Zelkowicz, a man who lived in the Lodz ghetto wrote:

These were the first days in the ghetto. People did not yet comprehend the evil which had befallen them. The population was, so to speak, in the honeymoon of the ghetto life, and behaved therefore like a young, freewheeling bride-groom, eating well and spending one banknote from his dowry after another. Everything in the ghetto, therefore, was for sale. Everything that could be procured. After the turmoil in the city, after the killings inside the homes during the ‘planned resettlement,’ after the grabbing of people on the streets for forced labor, after the scare about what was going to happen

³¹ Browning, 348.

³² Alan Adelson, Kamil Turowski and Lawrence Langer, *The Diary of Dawid Sierakowiak* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 118.

³³ Mogilanski, 312.

³⁴ Friedman, 7.

tomorrow, or even in a few hours, the Jews in the ghetto, among themselves, rejoiced in *dolce far niente*.³⁵ Crowds gathered in the street and exchanged good news. Cards were played outdoors, and food was stashed away.³⁶

After being taken from their homes and forced into the ghettos, there was an attempt to form a community. Moreover, by creating a community, the Jews attempted to adjust to life within the ghettos, and this created a hope for survival. Moshe Fass argued that the resumption of cultural activities, such as performances and theater, began in small households because there was still a fear that large groups that assembled would be punished and forced into labor.³⁷ Performances and theater were used as a source of entertainment, as well as a means to cope with life within the ghettos. Additionally, theater was used to maintain their identities and cultural values. “The situation [in the ghettos] slowly stabilized, calm and quiet returned, patches of green began to cover the ghetto’s grounds, benches were placed on Lutomierska Street. The rejected community began to look like an island of self-government.”³⁸ For the most part, this sense of community united the Jews in Lodz.

Jacob Sloan argued, “There were many who, imbued with the best tradition of Jewish altruism, retained their humanity. Soon after, the ghetto was established, these people, [Emmanuel] Ringelblum among them, organized House Committees.”³⁹ The committees were created to serve the community of Warsaw and aid them when needed. For example, the committees “tried to support the impoverished residents, particularly the children, with food and clothing.”⁴⁰ Additionally, the committees helped strengthen the spirits of the community of Warsaw by providing aid and giving the people hope for survival. As the conditions worsened in Warsaw, the committees grew larger. People from all classes, ages, and occupations joined, and particularly in 1942, Emmanuel Ringelblum, a prisoner of the Warsaw ghetto, noted that women played an important role in the committees when the men were exhausted.⁴¹ Ultimately, the committees signified the will to survive in the Warsaw ghetto by the community uniting and providing aid for one another.

³⁵ Italian for: Sweet Frivolity.

³⁶ Adelson and Lapidés, 65.

³⁷ Mosche Fass, “Theatrical Activities in the Polish Ghettos during the Years 1939-1942,” *Jewish Social Studies* 38, no. 1 (1976): 54.

³⁸ Adelson and Lapidés, 45.

³⁹ Sloan, 101.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

In Lodz, the leader of the community was the Eldest of the Jews, Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski. Adelson stated that “the Eldest of the Jews is the head of the ghetto and, also, the intermediary between the ghetto and the outside world. He had been given absolute power over the ghetto from the very first moment. . .”⁴² Thus, Rumkowski controlled the Lodz ghetto. He issued proclamations, orders, and the community of Lodz was subjected to his rule. The question arises, however, if Rumkowski had complete power over Lodz, or if the Nazis held the power and simply used Rumkowski as a puppet. Adelson argued that Rumkowski was responsible for everything that happened in the ghetto, and the German authorities dealt straightly and solely with him.⁴³ Additionally, they considered Rumkowski the “executive organ for all their orders, but he was also the one they held responsible if something failed to meet their wishes.”⁴⁴ It is clear Rumkowski held a great deal of responsibility and power. Every decision he made affected the lives of thousands of Jews in the Lodz ghetto. If he went against the wishes of the Nazis, however, his (and his family’s) lives would be at stake.

Rumkowski was an ordinary man. He “had received his position by chance” and “his schooling was equivalent to that of the elementary grades.”⁴⁵ Adelson argued, however, that Rumkowski was born to be leader of the Lodz ghetto, because he “was always ready. Without discussion, to carry out orders, even those measures with grave consequences.”⁴⁶ Although Rumkowski was not educated, he was a smart man that attempted to find a balance between appeasing the German authorities and keeping the community of Lodz alive. “In the ghetto, other sides of his character also showed themselves; his intense vitality, admirable in a man of 63; his constant vigilance, day and night, for problems to be averted or overcome; his wish to hold power in his hands at all times, willing to surrender none of it to anyone.”⁴⁷ Therefore, Rumkowski was an ordinary man that had many flaws, and as the Lodz ghetto transitioned to a Holocaust ghetto, his position became more demanding.

By the end of 1941, much of the Lodz community began to distrust Rumkowski. Dawid Sierakowiak mentioned that Rumkowski had not given the community wood, and the food allocations had shrank.⁴⁸ Then, a few days later, Sierakowiak and much of the Lodz community began to distrust Rumkowski, when he noticed that he had “grown fat

⁴² Adelson and Lapides, 51.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 53.

⁴⁸ Adelson, Turowski and Langer, 81-82.

and looks incredibly younger.”⁴⁹ Instead of aging due to the stress of horrible conditions, and losing weight because of the food shortage, Rumkowski was quite healthy when compared with the rest of the Lodz community. Clearly, Rumkowski was eating plenty, and was somehow living a better life than the Lodz community. Therefore, he was not a part of the community of Lodz, he was simply a dictator. According to Rumkowski, “Dictatorship is not a dirty word. Through dictatorship I earned the Germans’ respect for my work. And whenever they say, ‘Litzmannstadt Ghetto,’ I answer them, ‘*Das isst kein Getto sondern eine Arbeitsstadt*’ [Ger.: ‘This is not a ghetto but a work town’].”⁵⁰ Though Rumkowski was in fact a dictator of Lodz, he did not have the respect of the Germans. He was simply another Jew within the ghetto that would ultimately become another victim of the Final Solution.

In September 1942, the Nazis announced that they wanted the children and elderly from Lodz and Rumkowski complied. Rumkowski stated in a speech responding to the order from the Nazis to give up their children and elders, “Yesterday afternoon, they gave me the order to send more than 20,000 Jews out of the ghetto, and if not—‘We will do it!’ . . . I must perform this difficult and bloody operation—I must cut off the limbs in order to save the body itself!”⁵¹ To give up members of their family affected everyone in the ghetto. Although an unethical decision, Rumkowski believed that by giving up 20,000 children and other Jews, the rest of the Lodz community would survive. It is not clear if Rumkowski was aware he was sending the children and elderly to their deaths. The decision to send them was difficult, however, and they were victims nonetheless. In the same speech, Rumkowski stated:

I understand you mothers; I see your tears, all right. I also feel what you feel you feel in your hearts, you fathers who will have to go to work the morning after your children have been taken from you, when just yesterday you were playing with your dear little ones. All this I know and feel. I share your pain. I suffer because of your anguish, and I don’t know how I’ll survive this—where I’ll find the strength to do so. . . A broken Jews stands before you. Do not envy me. This is the most difficult of all orders I’ve ever had to carry out at any time. I reach out to you with my broken, trembling hands and I beg: Give into my hands the victims, so that we can avoid having further victims, and a population of a hundred thousand Jews can be

⁴⁹ Ibid., 84.

⁵⁰ Adelson and Lapidés, 146.

⁵¹ Ibid., 328-329.

preserved. So they promised me: if we deliver our victims by ourselves, there will be peace...”⁵²

The Lodz community had completely broken by this point. The loss of the 20,000 children and elderly Jews broke the community physically and psychologically. Lodz had fully transitioned into a Holocaust ghetto.

Similarly, the Warsaw community had an elder Jew, Adam Czerniaków. The Jewish community was often known as the Jewish council, and in his diary Czerniaków often mentioned that he was a part of the community.⁵³ Although he often made such claims, Czerniaków is known for his collaboration with the Nazis during his time in Warsaw. He was an important figure in Warsaw, however, his method of survival involved collaborating with the Nazis rather than choosing to revolt, like a majority of those in Warsaw. In other words, Czerniaków worked with the Nazis by giving into their demands. For instance, when the Nazis demanded he send Jews to be deported, he gathered members of the community and sent them to their deaths. Though Czerniaków was the leader of the Warsaw community, he was more of a puppet to the Nazis. Joseph L. Lichten and Ludwik Kryżankowski argued that because of his collaboration with the Nazis, “Czerniaków was a type of Polish Jew about whom many speak with a bad grace, grudgingly, neglecting the historical and psychological background of the person.”⁵⁴ The question then arises if Czerniaków was involved with the Jewish community, why did he choose collaboration rather than revolt? Joseph L. Lichten and Ludwik Kryżankowski argued that Czerniaków identified himself as Polish and Jewish, and “for him they constituted a whole.” Furthermore, he was equally devoted to Polish and Jewish matters.⁵⁵ For instance, shortly after Germany occupied Poland, Czerniaków had the opportunity to flee despite the pressure from his wife and friends. As a response, Czerniaków stated, “No, you others may leave, for you do not bear the responsibility that I bear. . . I am the only one who must stay to the end. . . Either I stay and survive with my community or die with it.”⁵⁶ Czerniaków was devoted to the community in 1939, however, as the conditions of the ghettos worsened and the Nazis became more demanding, the stress overwhelmed him.

In 1942, Czerniaków committed suicide after deportations to Treblinka began, and before the uprising in Warsaw. Lichten and Kryżankowski argued that, “For Czerniaków the liquidation of the

⁵² Ibid., 330.

⁵³ Joseph L. Lichten and Ludwik Kryżankowski, “Adam Czerniaków and His Times,” *The Polish Review* 29, no. ½ (1984): 75.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 74.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 76.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 78.

Warsaw Ghetto was a personal blow, the ruin of all his efforts and his work of almost three years. More, it was the defeat of his philosophy of survival.”⁵⁷ Czerniaków was psychologically defeated and knew that death was imminent. His collaboration with the Nazis aided in the Final Solution, and further, aided in the extermination of his community. Before committing suicide, he wrote a letter to his wife; and a section of it stated “they demanded from me that I kill with my own hands the children of my people...there is nothing for me to do but die.”⁵⁸ Evidence indicates that Czerniaków felt guilty, however, he did not feel guilty about collaboration. He felt guilty that he had sent people from his own community to their deaths. Lichten and Kryżankowski suggest that Czerniaków “suspected that the deportations actually indicated annihilation, thought the hypocritical Germans assured him with their ‘word of honor’ that they were only performing a ‘resettlement’ to another place.”⁵⁹ By 1942, however, it was clear Czerniaków was aware that those who were being deported were being sent to their deaths. In a letter he wrote the Council of Warsaw before he committed suicide, he stated:

Werthoff and his associates (the resettlement staff) came to see me and demanded that a transport of children be prepared for tomorrow. This overfills my cup of bitterness for I cannot deliberately deliver defenseless children to death. I decided to leave. Do not treat this as an act of cowardice or an escape. I am powerless, my heart breaks with pain and sorrow I cannot bear this any longer. My deed will show the truth to everyone and perhaps lead to the proper course of action. I realize that I leave you with a heavy heritage.⁶⁰

Mentally, this broke Czerniaków and he could no longer cope with consequences of the decisions he made, and would have to continue to make if he had lived as an elder Jew. After discussions with the Gestapo, Czerniaków took a cyanide pill; this is believed to have been in his desk since the first day of his tenure.⁶¹

After the Great Liquidation in the Warsaw ghetto, many realized that a strong, organized resistance group was necessary in order to survive. By 1942, the community realized that Jews taken from the ghetto were being deported to extermination camps, such as Treblinka,

⁵⁷ Ibid., 88.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 89.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 88.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 89.

⁶¹ Ibid., 88.

rather than labor camps. As the people of Warsaw became aware that Jews were being exterminated in concentration camps, they realized that larger acts of resistance were necessary. Rueben Ainsztein noted:

Perle, another chronicler of the Great Liquidation, who wrote October 1942, 'We could have defended ourselves and resisted the slaughter. If all the Jews had left their houses, if all the Jews had broken through the walls, if they had invaded all the streets of Warsaw, both the Jewish and non-Jewish streets, shouting, with axes, stones, and choppers in their hands, then 10,000, 20,000 of them would have been shot down—but 300,000 could not have been gunned down at once. We should have died with honor. Those who survived would have scattered all over the country, in all the townlets and in all the villages. The Nazi murderer would not have found it so easy to exterminate us.'⁶²

Soon after, the Jewish Fighting Organization (*Żydowski Organizacja Bojowa* or *ŻOB*) and the Jewish National Committee (*Żydowski Komitet Narodowy* or *ŻKN*) were formed.⁶³ The resistance groups received help from other groups outside the ghetto and they signified the realization that single acts of resistance did little to increase the chance of survival. Much of the funding for the resistance groups was from wealthy Jews, which allowed them to obtain weapons for an armed resistance.⁶⁴ After 1942, the uprising was primarily fueled by the will to survive. Many Jews who participated believed that if they did not resist, they would be deported to an extermination camp or die within the ghettos. A resistance fighter in Warsaw stated, "These actions weren't exactly my pride and joy. Naturally, I preferred to work against the Germans, but circumstances dictated our methods. . . 'Taking care of' those who denounced and turned Jews in was not to my liking either. But did we have a choice?"⁶⁵ Nazis and Jews were both killed during the uprising, and in the end, the Jews failed. Ultimately, many resisted in order to avoid extermination in the concentration camps or a slow death within the ghetto walls themselves. More importantly, the resistance signified the strength of the Jewish community to unite and their will to survive.

⁶² Rueben Ainsztein, *The Warsaw Ghetto Revolt*, (New York: Holocaust Library, 1979), 58.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁶⁴ Imha Rotem (Kazilk), *Memoirs of a Warsaw Ghetto Fighter* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 25.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

Although the community of Lodz did not carry out an armed resistance, they did resist with other methods. Similar to that of Warsaw, in 1942, many Jews within Lodz realized that the ghettos were being used as an extermination tool, and to be deported was to be sent to one's death. On September 5, 1942, Jozef Zelkowicz wrote, "on Rybna Street the police have to take people out of their apartments. There they are encountering resistance... And what strength the ghetto people have. After three years of hunger, after three years of bitter enslavement, they still endure such days as this one."⁶⁶ Refusing to obey the commands of the Nazis and trying to escape were the main forms of resistance in Lodz. Not many people of Lodz resisted, because it was believed that if they worked hard and were productive, the Nazis would let them live longer. This plan worked to a certain extent; "The factories bought time for tens of thousands, but the Jews were playing a pre-determined game in which the out-come was always under German control."⁶⁷ Ultimately, there was no organized armed resistance, like in Warsaw. Rather, there were individual forms of resistance primarily, because there was little contact with those outside the ghetto in Lodz, hence, they did not receive much aid. Isaiah Trunk argued that "This absolute isolation from the outside world and the awareness of powerlessness were not conducive to creating a combative mood inside the Ghetto."⁶⁸ Moreover, the people of Lodz believed that if the community remained together, strong, and continued to be productive, they would survive. The mentality for an armed resistance did not exist, but a mentality of resistance in a general sense did.

In the final years of the ghettos (1943-1944) the Nazis began the final liquidation process. Most of the Jew which remained in the ghettos were sent to concentration camps. In Lodz, between "December 1943 and January 1944 tens of thousands were deported from there to their deaths" and there were only 80,000 Jews left in Lodz in May 1944.⁶⁹ On August 2, 1944 Rumkowski posted an announcement in the ghetto that declared 5,000 "evacuees" must report daily to the Radogoszcz station and the first transport left at 8:00 AM.⁷⁰ Thus, by 1943, those who survived the epidemics, starvation, and the executions were being liquidated and sent to die at the extermination camps. In Warsaw, a year earlier, the final attempts of liquidation occurred and they were either killed on the spot or sent to die at the extermination camps. In January

⁶⁶ Adelson and Lapides, 342.

⁶⁷ Raul Hilberg, "The Ghetto as a Form of Government," *Annals of American Academy of Political and Social Science* 450, (1980): 103.

⁶⁸ Isaiah Trunk, "Why Was There No Armed Resistance Against the Nazis in the Lodz Ghetto?" *Jewish Social Sciences* 43, no. 3/4 (1981): 329.

⁶⁹ Adelson and Lapides, 412.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 440.

1943, 40,000 Jews were left in Warsaw and on January 18 the Nazis began their second “extermination operation.”⁷¹

Ultimately, ghettoization began as a process of creating a “Jewish absence” in the cities. By 1939, Nazis created a plan to expel Jews from the “German Empire.” Thus, at the same time, this created a “Jewish absence” and a “Jewish presence.” The latter was located within the walls of the Jewish ghettos. Essentially, the ghettos became a city within a city. In both Lodz and Warsaw, the people began to unite and form a community. They would play cards, have small gatherings in homes, and watch performances. The community looked out for one another, and just as in the Warsaw ghetto, groups, such as the House Committee, were formed and gave aid to those who needed it. Ultimately, the formation of a community within the ghettos united the Jews, and for many, the creation of a community resulted in a stronger will to survive. This fueled many of the forms of resistance in the ghettos. Resistance within the ghettos was common as Jews began to recognize the destruction of their community. The people of Lodz chose smaller acts of resistance, such as disobedience, rather than armed resistance like in Warsaw. There was no one type of resistance within the ghettos and those who chose to act against the Nazis and assert their right to live resisted. However, with the swarming epidemics, constant threat of starvation, the executions, random shootings, cramped living quarters, and poor conditions in the Lodz and Warsaw ghettos, the number of daily deaths increased and thousands died within the walls. The rising number of deaths within the ghettos marked the transition to “Holocaust ghettos.” Within a “Holocaust ghetto,” death was imminent and there was no sense of a community. By 1943, the liquidation process had begun and thousands more were deported to concentration camps and killed. The communities that once existed within the walls were completely destroyed and death loomed over the people of Lodz and Warsaw. Thus, the ghettos had transitioned into “Holocaust ghettos” and became another tool used in the Final Solution.

⁷¹ Sloan, 358.

Bibliography

- Adelson, Alan, and Robert Lapides. *Lodz Ghetto*. New York: Viking, 1989.
- Adelson, Alan, Kamil Turowski, and Lawrence Langer. *The Diary of Dawid Sierakowiak*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Ainsztein, Rueben. *The Warsaw Ghetto Revolt*. New York: Holocaust Library, 1979.
- Browning, Christopher. "Nazi Ghettoization Policy in Poland: 1939-1941." *Central European History* 19, no. 4 (1986): 343-368.
- Cole, Tim. *Holocaust City: The Making of a Jewish Ghetto*. New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Fass, Mosche. "Theatrical Activities in the Polish Ghettos during the Years 1939-1942." *Jewish Social Studies* 38, no 1 (1976): 54-72.
- Fertig, Howard. *The Jewish Communities of Nazi-Occupied Europe*. New York: Howard Fertig Inc., 1982.
- Friedman, Phillip. "The Jewish Ghettos of the Nazi Era." *Jewish Social Studies* 16, no. 1 (1954): 61-88.
- Hilberg, Raul. "The Ghetto as a form of Government." *Annals of American Academy of Political and Social Science* 450 (1980): 98-112.
- Lichten, Joseph L. and Kryżankowski Ludwik. "Adam Czerniaków and His Times." *The Polish Review* 29, no. 1/2 (1984): 71-89.
- Mogilanski, Roman. *The Ghetto Anthology*. Los Angeles: American Congress of Jews from Poland and Survivors of Concentration Camps, 1985.
- Rotem (Kazilk), Simha. *Memoirs of a Warsaw Ghetto Fighter*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994.
- Sloan, Jacob. *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1958.

Trunk, Isaiah. "Why Was There No Armed Resistance against the Nazis in the Lodz Ghetto?" *Jewish Social Studies* 43, no. 3/4 (1981): 329-324.

Author Bio

Rebecca A. Parraz is a recent graduate of California State University, San Bernardino and completed a B.A. in History during the fall quarter of 2013. Currently, she is working on her M.A. in History at California State University, Fullerton and is expecting her first child in August 2014, a boy to be named Gabriel. At CSUF, Rebecca plans to further her studies on the Holocaust and Nazi Germany. She began her pursuit for a higher education at Mt. San Jacinto College where she earned an AA in Liberal Arts with an emphasis on Social and Behavioral Sciences, and an AA in Liberal Arts with an emphasis on Humanities. After Rebecca obtains her teaching credentials, she plans to teach history on a secondary education level and one day plans to teach classes about the Holocaust at two year colleges. Rebecca wants to thank everyone who supported her, especially Dr. Pytell, who inspired her to reexamine and question history, as well as encouraged her to continue working in Holocaust Studies.

