

# The National Socialist “Solution of the Gypsy Question”: Central Decisions, Local Initiatives, and Their Interrelation<sup>1</sup>

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**New empirical research on the Holocaust shows that the National Socialist annihilation of Jews was brought about not simply by orders from Berlin, but by an interplay between directives from above and initiatives from below. This interplay of center and periphery applies to Nazi persecution of the Gypsies as well. Initiatives from the periphery sometimes interrupted the escalation of Gypsy policy, sometimes aggravated it. The center occasionally prevented the periphery from engaging in murderous action. Sometimes Berlin, on the contrary, initiated and sanctioned deportation and murder. For an accurate picture of Gypsy policy one therefore has to go beyond a schematic approach in order to analyze the complex interaction between center and periphery.**

Recent research on the origins of the Holocaust has stressed the interaction between directives from above and pressure from below in reaching an exterminationist policy.<sup>2</sup> In 1941, the center in Berlin reacted to local pressures to remove Jews from German municipalities and from the occupied territories by sanctioning increasingly radical measures. These measures in turn stimulated new steps against the Jews in the periphery. Similarly, the Wannsee Conference of January 1942 can be understood both as an attempt by Reinhard Heydrich and the SS to implement their overall conception of “racial policy,” and as a radical response to complaints about Jews from the German occupation administration.<sup>3</sup> Although there was no equivalent to the Wannsee Conference in the case of the Nazi persecution of Gypsies (Roma and Sinti), the interaction between center and periphery, between directives “from above” and initiatives “from below,” is crucial to understanding the evolution of an exterminationist policy against this victim group as well.

## **Traditional Gypsy Policy**

In nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Germany, combating the “Gypsy nuisance” fell primarily to the police. Yet police efforts to “fight the Gypsies” were largely ineffective, amounting to little more than shuffling Gypsy groups from one municipal

domain to another. The stated objective of the measures directed against the Gypsies on the local level, the aim of which was, after all, to prevent them from settling permanently, was, paradoxically enough, “settling of the Gypsies” (*Seßhaftmachung*). This formula was based on governmental attempts to force the Gypsies to settle permanently and, in the words of the Enlightenment writer Heinrich Grellmann, to “transform them into useful citizens.”<sup>4</sup> However, since virtually every municipality took it as self-evident that it would not be the place where Gypsies were to settle, “settling” could be seen as, in essence, a policy of expulsion. It was thus only an apparent contradiction when, in response to a 1929 survey by the German Municipal Congress (*Deutscher Gemeindetag*) on Gypsy policy, the town leaders in Mühlhausen, Thuringia, indicated that they had not taken any measures to settle Gypsies in their city, but to the question of what legal measures they suggested for the “solution of the Gypsy question,” the same town leaders insisted that the “settling of the Gypsies” be “sped up.”<sup>5</sup>

National-level officials were well aware of the difficulties of implementing Gypsy policies. A vaguely worded directive by the Reich Ministry of the Interior in 1936 demanded that the German Gypsies be settled “in a particular place,” though it failed to specify where.<sup>6</sup> When it came to Gypsy policy, the ministerial bureaucracy was no further along after three years of Nazi rule than its predecessors in the Empire and the Weimar Republic had been.

### **Local Gypsy Camps and the “Prevention of Crime”**

After 1933 the police and ministerial bureaucracy of the Third Reich maintained a Gypsy policy that alternated between the goals of “expulsion” and “settlement.” Yet the discrimination and oppression against Gypsies that characterized the first years of National Socialist rule were not a simple matter of traditional Gypsy policy.<sup>7</sup>

In the *Länder* (states), for example, laws and regulations against Gypsies were often made more severe. Some municipalities and lower police authorities used traditional methods to control Gypsy groups, including high rents, substandard living conditions, sudden foreclosures or even destruction of camping areas, and harassing police checks. Others forced the Gypsies into centralized, sometimes fenced and even guarded, camps. Moreover, these efforts to restrict Gypsies from living in open sites or private quarters and to concentrate them in local camps must be seen in relation to the overall camp system created under the Third Reich almost as soon as the NSDAP came to power. Between 1933 and 1939, it became a virtually trivial matter for mayors, police chiefs, district administrators, and other officials to demand that Gypsies “be admitted to a concentration camp,” that “a general camp be erected,” that they be “concentrated in labor camps,” or that they be “forcibly admitted to a closed camp.”<sup>8</sup>

The oppression of Gypsies intensified on the national level as well. Anti-Gypsy agitation grew in the press and in professional journals,<sup>9</sup> while, beginning in 1934, some 500 Gypsies were sterilized under the Law to Prevent Genetically Deficient

Offspring. Furthermore, along with Jews, Gypsies were subject to the 1935 Nuremberg Race Laws, including the Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor, the ban on marriage between “Aryans” and “members of alien (*artfremden*) races,” and to the Marital Health Law, which denied marriage to allegedly inferior individuals

Enforcing racism also fell under police jurisdiction in Nazi Germany. Arthur Nebe, who headed the Reich Criminal Police Office (*Reichskriminalpolizei*amt, RKPA),<sup>10</sup> declared that police responsibilities included not just “the elimination of criminals” but also “preserving the purity of the German race.” Because National Socialism put “the community before the individual,” RKPA leaders reasoned that preventive measures to “forestall damage to the individual member of the *Volk* or the national wealth” were as important as investigation of actual crimes.<sup>11</sup> In accordance with this position, in late 1937 the RKPA designated as a Fundamental Decree its first order for “the preventive combating of crime.”<sup>12</sup> The decree declared behavior which was “injurious to the community,” particularly that committed by certain segments of society, to be criminal. Since the new regime explained criminal behavior in terms of genetic factors specific to certain groups, preventive detention (*Vorbeugungshaft*) became the primary means to combat crime

An immediate consequence of this socio-biologically determined policy of “preventive combating of crime,” was that by 1938 “at least 200 male persons capable of work” and drawn from the ranks of vagrants, beggars, pimps, Gypsies, and other “social aliens” were taken from each German police district and interned in concentration camps.<sup>13</sup> The proportion of Gypsies on the national level is not known, and it varied from district to district. In June 1939, a similar campaign of arrests was carried out in Austria under the operational name “Preventive Measure to Combat the Gypsy Nuisance in Burgenland.”<sup>14</sup> Altogether, more than 2,000 German and Austrian Gypsies, stigmatized as “asocial” in 1938/39, were incarcerated in concentration camps. Following Germany’s occupation of the Czech lands, Poland, Alsace-Lorraine, and the Netherlands, the provisions of the “preventive combating of crime” were, in modified form, imposed in these territories as well.<sup>15</sup>

### **A National-Level “Science”-Police Complex**

The police policy of the “preventive combating of crime,” was augmented in December 1938 by the decree On Combating the Gypsy Nuisance, which called for the “solution of the Gypsy problem based on the inner characteristics of that race” (*Lösung der Zigeunerfrage aus dem Wesen dieser Rasse heraus*) Formulated by the RKPA and signed by Himmler, this decree marked the definitive transition from a Gypsy policy aimed at the *removal* of “aliens to the community” (*Gemeinschaftsfremde*) to a persecution *sui generis*.<sup>16</sup>

That same year the Reich Central Office for Combating the Gypsy Nuisance was established within the Criminal Police.<sup>17</sup> This bureaucratic centralization was fol-



A German "race scientist" (possibly Dr. Robert Ritter, Director of the Research Institute for Racial Hygiene) and a gendarme interview a Gypsy woman, near Landau, Germany, ca. 1936-1940. Bundesarchiv-Koblenz, courtesy of USHMM Photo Archives.

lowed by the creation of a special criminal police section for "combating the Gypsies," an organization that extended down to the local police level. This central repressive mechanism heightened the effectiveness of "combating the Gypsies" by establishing more nationally uniform measures for police to follow. Identity papers, for instance, were no longer issued to Gypsies by the local authorities but only on instructions from national criminal police offices.

The December 1938 decree On Combating the Gypsy Nuisance drew distinctions among "genuine ethnic Gypsies," "mixed-race" Gypsies (*Mischlinge*), and "persons traveling about in the manner of the Gypsies."<sup>18</sup> In 1939 these categories were to be indicated in color-coded identity papers. Yet the criminal police responsible for registering the Gypsies handed the task of categorizing them to the Research Institute for Racial Hygiene (*Rassenhygienische Forschungsstelle*, RHF) under the direction of the neurologist and psychiatrist Robert Ritter.<sup>19</sup>

In accordance with the Nazi conception that Gypsies were poised to "destroy" the "Volk community" from within, Ritter stigmatized Gypsies as a race "alien to the community."<sup>20</sup> Still, they never were perceived as constituting the kind of threat Nazi ideologists saw in the Jews. As the Aryans' "anti-race," Jews were said to possess characteristics that were particularly "subversive" to the German Volk community. Thus, as Eva Justin, a leading member of Ritter's staff, claimed in 1943: "The Gypsy prob-

lem cannot be compared with the Jewish problem, because the Gypsies are not able to undermine or endanger the German *Volk* as such”<sup>21</sup>

One of the main functions of Ritter’s Institute was to work with the criminal police to classify Gypsies by racial criteria. Following on the 1938 decree, these categories included “Gypsies” and “Gypsy *Mischlinge*,” and “Gypsy *Mischlinge* with predominantly Gypsy or predominantly German blood”<sup>22</sup>. By examining police files and genealogical records from archives, parishes, and municipal offices in the Institute’s Gypsy Clan Archive (*Zigeunersippenarchiv*), RHF officials developed hereditary charts (*Erbsafeln*) that could be used to distribute certificates for “Gypsies” and “Gypsy *Mischlinge*.” In this way a “scientific”-police complex grew out of the RKPA and the RHF that could supersede any measures taken at the local or regional levels.

### **Nazi Gypsy Policy in the First Years of the War**

After Germany’s invasion of Poland in September 1939, Gypsy policy became harsher still, particularly on the national level.<sup>23</sup> In accordance with efforts to expel Jews and Poles from annexed territories designated for “Aryan” settlement, the criminal police favored resettling (*Aussiedlung*) the Gypsies outside the expanded Reich. By October 1939 the Reich Security Main Office (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*, RSHA), in which the RKPA now constituted Office V, ordered that “Gypsies who were later apprehended” were to be accommodated “in special camps until their final (*endgültigen*) deportation.”<sup>24</sup> After a failed attempt to deport Berlin Gypsies in May 1940, 2,330 (and by the fall some 500 more) Gypsies, mainly from western parts of the Reich, were sent to occupied Poland. The immediate impetus for this deportation order came from the Wehrmacht High Command, which acted on traditional stereotypes about “Gypsy spies” in preparation for the German invasion of France.<sup>25</sup>

Further Gypsy deportations planned by Office V for 1940 failed to materialize because of the same kind of policy contradictions and inconsistencies that characterized early Nazi handling of the “Jewish question.” The deportation intentions of the Nazi leadership and RSHA in Berlin were expressed in exact short- and intermediate-term plans, according to which increasing numbers of Jews and Gypsies were to be crowded together in German-occupied or -annexed Poland. This effort, however, was itself delayed by resistance within the occupation administrations, which sought to remove these groups altogether and viewed their enforced presence as an “untenable situation” in the long run.

The increasing social isolation of the Gypsies was further strengthened by the construction of “Gypsy collection camps” (*Zigeunersammellager*) such as the Lackenbach camp in Austrian Burgenland. Established in November 1940, this camp traces its origins to an urgent decree (*Schnellbrief*) in which the Reich Interior Ministry informed the Austrian criminal police that the planned “resettlement” of 6,000 Gypsies from the *Ostmark* (as Austria was called after the Anschluss) to Poland probably

could not take place during the war. The criminal police office in Vienna thus organized admissions to Lackenbach with RKPA consent and provided the camp administrators.<sup>26</sup>

On the other hand, some communities distributed traveling trades permits to Gypsies (*Wandergewerbescheine*) without police approval. Others simply refused Gypsies ration cards for food and clothing. Grassroots groups also began lobbying the criminal police to “arrange [for] the rapid transportation of the pests.”<sup>27</sup> Bound by the directives of the RKPA, the police typically responded that deporting the Gypsies was not then possible, and promised a “final solution to the Gypsy question” after the war.<sup>28</sup> Sometimes the criminal police would yield to the pressure of the administration *pro forma*, but only on the condition that the commune wanting to deport the Gypsies name another local camp to which they could be deported and cover all costs associated with the deportation (there is no evidence that any ever did).

When Germany began deporting German Jews after the invasion of the USSR in June 1941, Gypsies—in particular Roma from Austrian Burgenland—were also affected. The grounds for persecuting this group went back to the extraordinarily fervent local and regional witch-hunts against the Burgenland Roma that had been going on since 1938. Thus when Himmler, Heydrich, and the RKPA saw an opportunity to deport these Gypsies in fall 1941, they sent 5,000 Burgenland Roma to the Łódź ghetto despite the protests of the ghetto administration and the mayor of Łódź, who predicted overcrowding, food shortages, and epidemics. In the end, those Roma confined in Łódź were so malnourished and sick that the Germans responsible pronounced them “subhumans” who must be eliminated. The survivors of the epidemics were suffocated in gas vans in Kulmhof.<sup>29</sup>

Even beyond Austrian Burgenland, in the German village of Wehrden on the Weser, for example, local administrators exerted so much pressure on the criminal police that the RKPA finally agreed to “resettle” the local Gypsies in the Łódź ghetto. However, this particular deportation failed because the Gypsy camp in Łódź had been liquidated (January 1942) in the meantime.<sup>30</sup>

### **Mass Shootings**

The line between expulsion/concentration and systematic extermination was crossed shortly after Germany’s invasion of the Soviet Union. In late summer 1941, Gypsies joined Jews, communist functionaries, and other “undesirables” as victims of the SS *Einsatzgruppen* (special killing forces) operating in occupied Soviet territory.<sup>31</sup> At first the *Einsatzgruppen* killed Jewish members of the Soviet state and party apparatuses, members of the Jewish intelligentsia, and those Jews who were considered the most threatening potential opposition. As early as the first months of the war against the USSR, the *Einsatzgruppen* made the transition to selecting most male Jewish city dwellers of military service age as victims for execution, these murders presented as

“retaliation” for real or alleged public opposition. By late summer, they began to murder as many as possible of the Jewish population in the occupied Soviet Union and extended this killing to the Gypsies. Wehrmacht units also handed Roma over to the Einsatzgruppen or shot them themselves.

The Einsatzgruppen carried out these killings, viewing Gypsies as “racial inferiors,” “spies,” and “agents” of the imagined “Jewish world enemy.” Yet since the Gypsies were viewed as mere auxiliaries of “Judeo-Bolshevism,” they were not targeted for annihilation to the same extent as the Jews. However, when mobile killing units lingered in an area, as did Einsatzgruppe D in the Crimea, or if they were reinforced by the Order Police (*Ordnungspolizei*), as happened in the Baltic region, then the Einsatzgruppen typically proceeded systematically to murder Gypsies.

In the General Government, as in the USSR and the Baltic region, more Gypsies were shot by German Security Police (*Sicherheitspolizei*) and Order Police than were killed in concentration camps. The geographic distribution of the murders, their extension over time, and the participation of different German units all make clear that this extermination policy could affect any Gypsies living outside the cities. Based on eyewitness testimony and extensive court investigations, it has often been claimed that the Gypsies were shot in rural police raids that were typically directed against partisans or the Jewish underground. Yet in the General Government Roma also risked death when they remained hidden in a village. And the German police shot many Gypsies—along with Poles, Jews, and Soviet prisoners of war—in alleged retribution for partisan attacks that they had not committed.<sup>32</sup>

There is evidence to suggest that the sedentary *Bergitka Roma*, who had been part of the local economy, were less endangered than itinerant Roma.<sup>33</sup> Himmler himself tried to confine the extermination policy to traveling Polish Gypsies, since he imagined their “spying” to constitute a special danger to German occupation forces. In August 1942 Himmler ordered police in the General Government not to proceed against (*einschreiten*) sedentary Gypsies “on principle,” meaning as long as they were not criminals or did not collaborate with the partisans.<sup>34</sup> Since local authorities could interpret this instruction as they saw fit, the conditions for murder remained relatively unchanged.

### **“No Extermination of the Gypsies”**

In July 1941, an uprising of communist partisans erupted in occupied Serbia, surprising the Wehrmacht by its magnitude.<sup>35</sup> Right from the start, the tactics employed to defeat the partisans included “reprisal executions.” For every German soldier or “ethnic German” (*Volksdeutscher*) killed, 100 hostages would be shot; for every German soldier or ethnic German wounded, fifty hostages were to be executed. The designated victims were males between the ages of fourteen and seventy. Since the Wehrmacht had too small a reservoir of hostages, the Einsatzgruppe stationed in Belgrade was asked to provide the requisite number. In the summer of 1941, the Einsatzgrup-

pen forced Jews from Belgrade and the Yugoslavian part of the Banat into a “transit camp,” and placed a large group of Jewish refugees in the overcrowded Sabac concentration camp, where Gypsies also were being held. The commander of the Einsatzgruppe decided on the “removal” of 1,295 Jews from Belgrade and 805 Jews and Gypsies from the Sabac camp for the “reprisal executions.” Thus Serbian Roma found themselves among the victims of the German “atonement” measures (*Sühnemaßnahme*, a Wehrmacht euphemism).

These executions, however, raised a new question: What was to be done with the children, elderly, and women, both Jewish and Gypsy, whose men had been shot? In late October 1941, the German authorities decided on a temporary solution, the construction of a camp in Semlin, near Belgrade. The commandant was recruited in early 1942 from the Jewish Office of the Belgrade Gestapo and 292 Roma women and children joined the Jews in confinement. In spring 1942 the Jewish prisoners were gassed in an extermination van brought from Germany especially for the purpose. By contrast, the Roma women and children were released (the exact date remains unclear). In his 1967 trial, the former commandant, Herbert Andorfer, testified that he recalled that the Roma were released immediately prior to the murder of the Jewish women and children, i.e., in March.<sup>36</sup> Yet even intentionally truthful memory can often be deceptive, so it is also conceivable that the decision to spare the Roma women and children was linked with a discussion between Himmler and Heydrich on April 20, 1942, noted in Himmler’s official diary (*Diensttagebuch*) under the words “No destruction of the Gypsies” (*Keine Vernichtung der Zigeuner*).<sup>37</sup> This entry by the *Reichsführer-SS* could help to explain the release of Roma from Semlin, an action whose motives remain obscure. In 1942 Himmler began to develop an interest in the Indian origin of the Gypsies. This led him to the notion that among the Roma there was a small group of “racially pure” Gypsies who, because they had originated in India, were bonafide “Aryans.”<sup>38</sup> Although Himmler’s diary entry cannot be connected to a specific policy decision, seen from our vantage point, it points up the difference the SS leadership could make in extermination policy.

### **Auschwitz-Birkenau**

Himmler’s order of December 16, 1942 for the deportation of Gypsies “to a concentration camp” finally brought more coherence to what had been a disjointed policy of persecution and murder.<sup>39</sup> The RSHA, which was responsible for carrying out the order, chose the newly expanded camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau as the destination of Gypsies from Germany, Austria, Bohemia, Moravia, the Netherlands, Belgium, and the French departments of Nord and Pas-de-Calais, which were controlled by the German military command in Belgium. There were no deportation orders for Gypsies from the rest of France, where some 3,000 persons stigmatized as *nomades* or *tsiganes* had been incarcerated in camps from fall 1940, often under appalling conditions.<sup>40</sup> Nor were there deportation orders for Polish, Soviet, or Baltic Gypsies. Inso-



far as these Gypsies survived until 1943–44, they were still in danger of being sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau. No Gypsies, however, were ever deported from occupied Denmark, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Norway, or Serbia.

Himmler's deportation order was the result of long and contentious discussions at the national level during the fall of 1942. Participants in these talks came from the RKPA, the RHF, the Party chancellery, the Race and Settlement Main Office of the SS, and from the SS Office for Ancestral Heritage (*Ahnenerbe*), which on Himmler's order and despite the mistrust of the RKPA and the RHF was intervening in Gypsy policy for the first time. The talks encompassed the proper behavior toward the small group of Gypsies classified as "racially pure" and, because of their origins in India, "Aryan." The talks also covered what was to be done with the remaining "Gypsy persons" (*zigeunerische Personen*). Himmler's order reflected the RKPA suggestion to have them deported. Himmler also informed Hitler of the new Gypsy deportation policy, though we have no evidence of the dictator's intervention or even initiative on this point. What mattered was only that Hitler had no objections to the Gypsy policy.<sup>41</sup>

On January 29, 1943, the RSHA decreed the actual conditions for carrying out Himmler's deportation order. These conditions, which had recourse to the "expert opinions" of the RHF, categorized Gypsies into three racial groups, only the first of which—"racially pure" and "good Mischlinge in a Gypsy sense"—was to have a future. The second group, "socially adjusted Gypsy Mischlinge," would be subjected to forced sterilization. The remaining "Gypsy Mischlinge," Rom-Gypsies, and members of Gypsy clans from the Balkans were classified as the lowest group and would be deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau.

In practice, however, the selections for deportation that began in the spring of 1943 and continued through summer 1944 did not rigidly adhere to the above categories. In Germany the criminal police and communal officials often took a great deal of latitude with their instructions in order to make their own communities largely "free of Gypsies." Records from Auschwitz prove that numerous "socially adapted" Gypsies, for example those decorated for military bravery, were sent there. In occupied areas without reliable genealogical data it was impossible for officials to distinguish between "racially pure" Gypsies and "Mischlinge." These selections were determined by a combination of racist improvisation and random notions about "Gypsies" based on current policy.

The Gypsy camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau was liquidated in summer 1944 in order to make room for the hundreds of thousands of Hungarian and other Jews who began arriving in May of that year. RKPA chief Arthur Nebe, Himmler, and Rudolf Höß, the former commandant of Auschwitz, were all involved in the decision to gas the remaining 2,900 Gypsies. In total more than 19,300 of the roughly 22,600 individuals crowded together in the Auschwitz-Birkenau Gypsy camp were killed—more than 5,600 were gassed, while the rest succumbed to hunger and disease.<sup>42</sup>

The forced sterilization of German Gypsies, the second component of the exter-

mination policy, also became more systematic at this time. Yet the British and American bombardments and general social disintegration during the last phase of the war prevented the sterilization program from becoming as extensive as police and racial hygienists had hoped. Scholars estimate that 500 Reich Gypsies were forcibly sterilized before 1943 and another 2,000 following the January 29, 1943 Auschwitz decree.<sup>43</sup>

## Conclusions

In summation, the following points about the relative roles played by center and periphery in Nazi persecution of the Gypsies should be made:

- Hitler did not play a central role in the evolution of National Socialist Gypsy policy. Indeed the question of why the Nazis murdered Gypsies is important in part because of the minimal importance they had in Hitler's worldview.

- In the first years of National Socialist rule official Gypsy policy was intensified both from above and below. Not until 1937–38 was a national-level organization formed (out of the criminal police and the Research Institute for Racial Hygiene) that translated racist theory into a more coherent policy. After the fall of 1939, the RSHA became the most powerful institution working on Gypsy policy as part of the RSHA, the new RKPA coordinated and implemented the persecution of Gypsies in the Reich, in the occupied Czech lands, and in much of German-occupied Western Europe. The RSHA also encouraged the mass murders in Eastern Europe.

- Considering the most important decisions on Gypsy policy, one cannot ignore the polycratic character of the decision-making process.

—In 1940, the Wehrmacht High Command unexpectedly changed the timetable for deportations planned by the RSHA.

—In 1942–43 the competitive struggle sparked by the RHF's and RKPA's hostility towards the SS Ancestral Heritage Office ended in the deportation of about 22,600 Gypsies to Auschwitz-Birkenau.

- Directives on Gypsy policy were not implemented uniformly across German-occupied Europe. The RSHA deportation decree of January 1943, for instance, involved Gypsies from Germany, Austria, Bohemia and Moravia, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Northern France (the departments of Nord and Pas-de-Calais), but not from Denmark, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Norway, Serbia, and the rest of France. Nor in the beginning were there deportation orders for Polish, Soviet, or Baltic Gypsies, though 1,273 Polish, twenty-seven Russian, and twenty-two Lithuanian Gypsies were registered at Birkenau.<sup>44</sup>

- Gypsy policy from above was often subject to re-interpretation by various lower authorities, who could act either to suppress or to radicalize persecution. Thus, for example:

—In the winter of 1941–42, Einsatzgruppe D in the Crimea and Einsatzgruppe A in

the Baltic region began to kill Gypsies systematically, at the same time, however, Einsatzgruppen B (in Belorussia) and C (in Ukraine) were not systematically murdering this victim group

—From the fall of 1941 on, wandering Polish Gypsies were regularly murdered despite the fact that Security and Order Police had no strict orders to do so. Himmler's order of August 1942 that the police should proceed only against Gypsies who participated in crimes or collaborated with the partisans apparently had no major impact on the killing process.

—RSHA categorization of Gypsies for purposes of deportation to Auschwitz-Birkenau was variously interpreted by local authorities. Sometimes criminal police and local administrations ignored these directions altogether

- Nazi Gypsy policy was often polycentric. Initiatives from the periphery sometimes radicalized the persecution, and sometimes interrupted its escalation

—After German Gypsies were deported to the General Government in May 1940, the occupation administration in Poland prevented the RSHA and RKPA from deporting (*aussiedeln*) the remaining Gypsies

—At various times the center worked both to prevent the periphery from murderous action and to sanction such action. In April 1942 Himmler stopped the Gestapo in Belgrade from killing 292 Gypsies in Semlin. Yet in 1941–42 the central authorities directly sanctioned the deportation and murder of the Burgenland Gypsies

- Local, or peripheral, interests occasionally competed with one another. In fall 1941, for example, local mayors, the NSDAP, and the police in Burgenland wanted to expel the Gypsies in their jurisdiction, while ghetto administration and the mayor of Łódź objected to accepting them. In this particular conflict, the deportation efforts won out since they conformed to the official policy of the RSHA and the RKPA.

- And yet, orders and instructions “from above” often did result from discussions that took place solely on the national level. This was especially true for the stigmatization of German and Austrian Gypsies as “asocial,” and their incarceration in concentration camps in 1937–38; for the establishment in 1938 of the “Reich Central Office for Combating the Gypsy Nuisance”, for the deportation of German Gypsies to Poland in 1940, and for Himmler's deportation order of December 16, 1942

The interaction between center and periphery, between government officials, police and SS leadership, and local authorities, was crucial to the development of a Nazi Gypsy policy that culminated in forced sterilization and murder. By comparison to earlier, pre-Nazi efforts to solve the “Gypsy question,” the new regime's racial conception and evolving extermination policy provided heightened incentive for the traditional “fight against the Gypsies.” In this regard, the paradoxical conflict between local initiatives to expel the Gypsies and government attempts to settle them was given new impetus, as center and periphery mutually intensified the decision-making

process. The Nazi synthesis ultimately led to murder. In the end, death was the only condition in which expulsion and settlement became identical.

### **Chronology of the Nazis' Persecution of Gypsies 1933–1945**

April 1, 1933	The Law to Prevent Genetically Deficient Offspring led to the sterilization of approximately 500 Gypsies
1935	Gypsy camp established in Cologne*
Fall 1935	The Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor and the Marital Health Law denied “Aryans” the right to marry Jews, “members of alien races,” and other “inferiors”
1936	Gypsy camp established in Berlin-Marzahn*
1936–37	Founding of the Research Institute for Racial Hygiene (RHF) within the Hereditary Medicine section of the Reich Health Office
1937	Gypsy camps established in Düsseldorf and Frankfurt am Main*
1937–38	The concept of “crime prevention” is adopted by the Reich Criminal Police Office (RKPA)
December 14, 1937	The RKPA designates the “preventive combating of crime” as a Fundamental Decree
December 12, 1938	Decree “on combating the Gypsy nuisance” calls for “solution of the Gypsy problem based on the inner characteristics of that race”
October 17, 1939	“Urgent decree” from the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA), banning free movement for Gypsies
April 27, 1940	“Urgent decree” ordering the deportation of 2,500 Gypsies to Poland
Spring 1941	Gypsy camp established in Lackenbach, in the Austrian Burgenland*
Summer 1941–1944	Killing of communists, Jews, and, from late August 1941, Gypsies in the German-occupied USSR, mostly by Einsatzgruppen and other SS units
Fall 1941	Wehrmacht “retribution executions” of Jewish and Gypsy males in occupied Serbia, confinement of children, elderly, and women, whose men had been shot, in the Semlin camp near Belgrade
Fall 1941–1944	Polish Gypsies murdered by German Order and Security Police and inside concentration camps
November 1941	Deportation of 5,000 Burgenland Roma to the Łódź Ghetto

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\* Selected examples of Gypsy camps throughout the Reich.

January 1942	Burgenland Roma murdered in gas vans in Kulmhof
February 1942	Deportation of 2,000 East Prussian Sinti to Bialystok and (the following fall) to the Brest Ghetto in Ukraine
Spring 1942	Gassing of the Jewish Semlin prisoners, while Roma women and children were released
Fall 1942	Intensive national-level discussions on the development of Gypsy policy
December 16, 1942	Himmler orders the deportation of Gypsy persons ( <i>zigeunerische Personen</i> ) “to a concentration camp”
January 29, 1943	RSHA decree to carry out Himmler’s deportation order
Late February 1943–Summer of 1944	Gypsy deportations to Auschwitz-Birkenau from Germany, Austria, Bohemia and Moravia, the Netherlands, Belgium, Northern France, Poland, the Soviet Union, and the Baltic states
Fall 1943–Spring 1945	Forced sterilization of more than 2,000 Gypsies in the Reich
August 2–3, 1944	Liquidation of the Birkenau Gypsy camp, 2,900 Gypsies gassed

## Notes

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