



EXHIBITION

HOMOSEXUALS AND LESBIANS IN NAZI EUROPE

JUNE 17, 2021 – FEBRUARY 2022

“There is a duty to remember the fate of homosexuals and lesbians in Nazi Europe, which has long been made invisible. With the help of numerous original documents, this exhibition focuses on their plight under the Nazi regime, from stigmatization to persecution, and the struggle for recognition that came afterwards.”

Florence TAMAGNE, scientific curator of the exhibition
Lecturer in contemporary history at the Université de Lille
Specialist in the history of homosexuality



In 2021, for the first time in France a museum will host a chronological and thematic exhibition on the persecution of homosexuals and lesbians under the Third Reich. The exhibition will include a wide array of documents, most of which have never been presented in France before.

Although it has been the focus of first-rate historical research for about 30 years, the fate of homosexual men and women during this period, long a taboo subject, is still unknown to the general public. After the Second World War, few homosexual men and women spoke up about their experiences under the Nazi regime. In Germany, paragraph 175 of the Penal Code criminalizing sex between men remained in force after 1945, denying them the status of victims.

It was only with the rise of the gay and lesbian liberation movement in the 1970s that this chapter in history came out of the shadows, raising many questions. What was the nature of the persecution? How many people were affected? Were all homosexuals targeted? What was the fate of lesbians? What places were affected, especially in France? What are the best ways of honoring the victims' memory?

Through a variety of documents, most of which have never been presented in France before, the exhibition aims to answer these questions while placing the persecution of homosexual men and women under the Nazi regime into a long timeframe and a wide geographical context, although Germany and France will receive the most attention.



The early 20th century saw the blossoming of homosexual subcultures in the major European capitals (like Berlin and Paris) as well as the emergence of the first activist movements. Yet homophobic prejudice, drummed up especially by the religious and medical establishments, remained deeply entrenched. Many countries criminalized male—but more rarely female—homosexuality. Nazi ideology took root in this fertile ground before being implemented in an increasingly radical and repressive system reaching into every corner of society. The exhibition will lay out the various steps and methods involved in this process.

Homosexual men and lesbians met with different fates. Some chose exile; others led a double life. Around 50,000 of the nearly 100,000 homosexual men in the regime's files were convicted. Between 5,000 and 15,000 were sent to concentration camps, where most of them died, although their fate could vary widely depending on the camp and the date of internment. With the exception of a few places, such as Austria, lesbians remained outside the purview of the law. Some were deported as "asocials" or "communists". Paragraph 175 applied only to Germans and people living in annexed territories, such as Alsace-Lorraine. The fate of homosexuals in countries allied with Germany, such as Italy, or under its occupation, could differ significantly.

Life stories will shed light on this dark chapter in all its complexity, for it has many facets. Homosexual men and women could also be Jews, members of resistance movements, even Nazi sympathizers. One section in the exhibition will chart the slow process of recognition, from the commemorative memorials and plaques that began to appear in the 1980s to institutional measures, which have set a process of rehabilitation and compensation in motion.

A lecture series will explore these topics more deeply.

USEFUL INFORMATION

Mémorial de la Shoah
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Open every day except
Saturday from 10 a.m.
to 6 p.m. and 10 p.m. on
Thursday.

Around the exhibition

Guided tours
Lecture series
Publication of a catalogue

Free admission

Metro Saint-Paul
or Hôtel-de-Ville

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THE SHOAH MEMORIAL

The Shoah Memorial, Europe's largest archival center for the history of the Holocaust, is a place of remembrance, education and transmission. The Memorial has two sites: one in the historic Marais district of Paris, the other in Drancy across the street from the Cité de la Muette, the former internment camp from which the majority of the Jews in France were deported.

The Paris site, which opened to the public on January 27, 2005, offers awareness-raising programs designed for every kind of public and hosts many different spaces: a permanent exhibition on the Holocaust and the history of Jews in France during the Second World War, a temporary exhibition space, an auditorium for film screenings and panel discussions, the Wall of Names, where the names of the 76,000 Jewish men, women and children deported from France between 1942 and 1944 are engraved, a documentation center (50 million archived items including 1,500 sound archives, 350,000 photographs, 3,900 drawings and objects, 12,000 posters and postcards, 30,000 cinema documents, 14,500 films including 2,500 testimonies and 80,000 books), a reading room, educational spaces accommodating children's workshops and activities for classes and teachers and a bookshop.

Better knowledge about the history of the Holocaust can play a helpful part in the struggle against the resurgence of hatred and intolerance in all its forms today. For over ten years, the Memorial has also raised awareness of other 20th-century genocides, such as the Tutsi genocide in Rwanda and the Armenian genocide.