

Photographs showing the German occupation of Poland, 1940

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Source b - Polish Jews stacking clothing

Polish Jews stacking clothing and bed clothes outside their homes.



What is this source?

These photographs were in the hands of the British Government. They show scenes of life in Poland under Nazi rule.

The photographs came from a news agency called Interphoto News Pictures. The agency would probably have sold them to newspapers around the world as well as to the British government.

WESTERN EUROPE 1939–1945: OCCUPATION

What's the background to this source?

The Nazis invaded Poland in September 1939. Soon afterwards the USSR invaded Poland from the East and the country collapsed. Conditions for Polish civilians were appalling. For Polish Jews conditions were even worse.

As soon as they had conquered the country the Nazis set about putting their plans into action. The first was to clear Poles out of their homes and off the land so that German settlers could take their place and gain new living space or "Lebensraum". The second was to round up the Polish Jews and force them to live in ghettos. A ghetto is usually a poor section of a city inhabited mainly by people of the same race, religion, or social background, often because of discrimination. Many Jews were killed during the process of forcing them into the city ghetto areas, but at this stage the policy of mass murder had not yet come into force.

It's worth knowing that...

As in Germany, many Polish Jews were well educated and held professional jobs such as university professors, doctors, lawyers. They would lose out because they lost their incomes when the Nazis ran them out of work and they generally did not grow food themselves so they would find it hard to obtain it.

We do not know under what circumstances these pictures were taken. Perhaps they were taken in secret and were then smuggled out of the country. However, in the early days of the invasion of Poland, life was so chaotic it might have been relatively easy for the news agency to get these pictures out of the country. Once the Germans were fully in control it would have been harder.

Do these photographs support the drawing by T.Cuneo?

1. What do you think the Poles in **photograph a** might be feeling on seeing these notices and instructions?
2. Do **photographs b, c** and **e** support the information given in **the documents from Poland** in the box of sources?
3. It is possible that the Jews working in **photograph d** were professional people. If this were so, why would they have been made to do this work?
4. These photographs were taken by a news agency to be sold. Does this affect your view of their reliability?
5. What are the strengths and weaknesses of photographs as evidence of what it was like to live under Nazi rule?

Use this table to record you views.

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