



HIMMLER'S PERSECUTION

His Mistreatment of Homosexuals In the Third Reich

— INTRODUCTION —

Heinrich Himmler was the infamous leader of the SS during the Nazi reign of World War II. He organized death camps that held Jews, homosexuals, gypsies (Roma), Jehovah's Witnesses and other undesirables. Before the outbreak of World War II, Himmler gave a speech to the leaders of the SS on February 18, 1937. In it he outlined his view of homosexuality, and methods for how it needed to be extinguished, especially from among the SS ranks. Himmler's speech had a long-lasting effect on the SS, the German population, and the world at large. The speech was a death sentence on every homosexual in Germany and increased their persecution.

Himmler was much more radical than many other Germans regarding homosexuality. Many Germans ignored homosexuals' presence or tolerated them grudgingly. Even Hitler's views on homosexuals were not as radical as Himmler's. Himmler wanted them destroyed utterly and had no hope for their rehabilitation. This stemmed from Himmler's obsession with racial purity and the survival of the German people. Himmler's policies after this speech put many of his stated goals into action. Their unholy consequences decimated many homosexuals. While their death wasn't on the same scale as Jews in the camps, tens of thousands died. The symbol given to them by Himmler, the pink triangle, has lasted long past the holocaust, and become a symbol of remembrance and rebellion.

— ATTITUDE —

Hitler was more concerned with the persecution of Jews than homosexuals. Concentration camps for homosexuals were portrayed as places of reeducation rather than places of extermination. The homosexual population of Germany was seen as one deserving of reeducation. It was generally believed that a homosexual man could renounce his ways and rejoin society, unlike a Jew who was deemed racially impure and unable to change.

This attitude toward homosexuality from the general German population directly contrasted with what Himmler believed about homosexuals. Himmler stated that a homosexual man would be just as homosexual when he left a camp as when he entered. Heinrich Himmler cared more about the persecution of homosexuals than other Germans, including Hitler. The contradiction between Himmler's beliefs and the rest of the population highlights Himmler's homophobic disdain and desire to push his own agenda.



— HIMMLER'S SPEECH —

- Himmler explained his goals of racial purity and the importance of German growth and supremacy.
“Therefore we must be absolutely clear that if we continue to have this burden [homosexuality] in Germany, without being able to fight it, then that is the end of Germany, and the end of the Germanic World.”
- Himmler showed his disregard for homosexuals' lives through bleak comparisons.
“[Homosexuality] had to be got rid of, just as we pull weeds, throw them on a heap, and burn them.”
- Himmler stated that he thought homosexuality was not something that could be fixed.
“When I bring a homosexual before the courts and have him locked up, the matter is not settled, because the homosexual comes out of prison just as homosexual as before he went in.”

— LEGACY —

Himmler's cruel goals were carried out. The general public thought something could be done to change the homosexuals. Himmler disagreed and used his power to persecute and murder them to keep Germany pure. The legacy of the survivors spread throughout the world. The pink triangle was not widely used in Germany after the war as a symbol. German and American homosexuals have traded cultural symbols. German homosexuals commemorate the 1969 Stonewall Riots in New York in their Christopher Street Day celebrations. Americans use the pink triangle as a symbol of their oppression. This exchange seems to be largely beneficial. American homosexuals were not in the camps with many of the German homosexuals, but their use of the pink triangle is still a powerful symbol. Himmler's goal to “pull out weeds...and burn them”, was ultimately unsuccessful. The symbol of the oppression of homosexuals, the pink triangle Himmler gave them, is now a symbol of defiance.

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