

Homosexual persecution in the essay



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For most of the medieval and early modern times death was the penalty for homosexual acts. Due to the impact of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, many German States, starting with Bavaria, decriminalized homosexuality. Prussia was the exception. It heightened legislation concerning this issue which eventually was carried over in 1871 on to the Reich as a whole. (Burleigh and Wipperman, 184).

Homosexuals were never recognized as “victims” of Nazi persecution in either of the post-war German states. This is despite the fact that while in the concentration camps they were branded with the pink triangle, signifying sexual preference. They were harshly mistreated by camp guards and fellow inmates. Two main factors produced this unsatisfactory state of affairs. For one, it is a reflection of mass widespread dislike toward homosexuals and their indecisiveness to prosecute their instigators due to fear of rejection among their peers towards their preference. Secondly, the interpretation of paragraph 175 of 1871 Reich criminal code, criminalizing acts of indecency as well as sexual intercourse between two men, was not repealed until 1969. This meant that homosexuals who had been persecuted and sent to concentration camps could now be punished under the same law. Also, homosexuals were not counted among Hitler’s victims. Neither post-war German state had a “relevant” record in this area (Burleigh and Wipperman, 183). In 1935, the Reichstag amended paragraph 175 of the Criminal Code to close what were seen as loopholes in the current law. The new law had three parts. One of them stating “A male who commits a sex offense with another male or allows himself to be used by another male for a sex offense shall be punished with imprisonment.” Very little has been written about the tens of

thousands of homosexuals who were the damndest of the damned, the outcasts among the outcasts in the concentration camps. There are really only estimates of figures. During the twelve years of Nazi rule, nearly 50,000 were convicted of the crime of homosexuality. The majority ended up in concentration camps, and virtually all of them perished. According to a recent study, at least 500,000 gays died in the Holocaust. As Stefan Lorant observed in 1935, the homosexuals “lived in a dream”, hoping that the heyday of gays in Germany of the 1920’s would last forever. Their awakening was terrible. Yet, the few survivors among them did not qualify for postwar restitution as the Jews or the politicians, because as homosexuals they were outside the law. By German law, homosexuality was a crime. After the prison sentences most homosexuals were automatically shipped to concentration camps. In 1935, a new law legalized the compulsory sterilization (often in fact castration) of homosexuals.’ A special section of the Gestapo dealt with them. Along with epileptics, schizophrenics, and other “degenerates”, they were being eliminated. Yet homosexuality was still so widespread that in 1942 the death penalty was imposed for it in the army and the SS (Kogon, Eugen 38).

In concentration camps, some pink triangles became concubines of male kapos or other men in supervisory positions among the inmates. They were known as doll boys; this brought them certain protection while the love affair lasted. The pink triangles were constantly abused by the SS, camp bumfuckers. They were allowed to talk only to each other, they had to sleep with the lights on and with hands above their blankets. These people were not

child molesters; those were considered professional criminals, green triangles.

While men with pink triangles were given the hardest jobs and were constantly being abused for their admitted sexual preference, considerable numbers of “normal” men engaged in homosexual acts with impunity that was an emergency outlet. This double standard was an additional psychological burden for the pink triangles (Heger, Hienz 12).

The SS considered it great sport to taunt and torture the homosexuals. The camp commander at Flossenburg often ordered them flogged; as the victims were screaming, he “was panting with excitement, and masturbated wildly in his trousers until he came,” unperturbed by the hundreds of onlookers (Rector, Frank 116).

A sixty-year-old gay priest was beaten over his sexual organs by the SS and told: “You randy old rat-bag, you can piss with your arse-hole in the future”. He could not, for he died the next day. Eyewitnesses tell of homosexuals being tortured to death by tickling, by their testicles immersed alternately in hot and icy water, and by having a broomstick pushed into their anus.

Himmler, who wanted to eradicate homosexuals “root and branch”, had the idea to “cure” them by mandatory visits to the camp brothel at Flossenburg. Ten Ravensbruck women provided the services with little success. The woman were also told that they would go free after six months, but instead they were shipped to Auschwitz. Himmler, who had also once defended Roehm, assumed leadership of the SS, and in the process, also assumed the role of ridding the movement and Germany of homosexuals. In the wake of <https://assignbuster.com/homosexual-persecution-in-the-essay/>

the Roehm execution, Hitler ordered the registration of homosexuals and the Gestapo was charged with the responsibility of creating dossiers on homosexuals and other “ asocials” in the Third Reich.

The pink triangles worked in the clay pits of Sachsenhausen, the quarries of Buchenwald, Flossenburg and Mauthausen; they shoveled snow with their bare hands in Auschwitz and elsewhere; they were used as living targets at the firing range; they had the dirtiest jobs in all camps. Towards the end of the war, they were told they would be released if they let themselves be castrated. The ones who agreed were shipped to the famous Dirlwanger penal division on the Russian front.

Precise figures on the number of homosexuals exterminated in Nazi Death camps have never been established. Estimates range from 10, 000 to 15, 000. It does not appear that the Nazis ever set it as their goal to completely eradicate all homosexuals. Rather, it seems, the official was to either re-educate those homosexuals who were “ behaviorally” and only occasionally homosexual and to block those who were “ incurable” homosexuals through castration, extremely intimidation, or both. For a fascinating empirical sociological examination of this idea, the reader is referred to the work of Reudiger Lautmann. Nor does it does appear that their efforts extended beyond Germany itself to the occupied territories.

However, the numerous testimonies by homosexuals who survived the camp experience suggest that the SS had a much less tolerant view. Those who wore the pink triangle were brutally treated by camped guards and other categories of inmates, particularly those who wore green (criminals), red

(political criminals), and black (asocials) triangles. Not only were the male gender persecuted for being homosexual. Lesbians were also targets of SS brutality.

There are few resources dealing with the fate of lesbians under the Nazis. This is largely due to the fact that they were classed generally with the “anti-socials” to obliterate the fact of their actual existence, which effectively obliterates them from history.

The fact that the pink triangle is regarded as a symbol of gay and lesbian liberation is disturbing because pink triangles were exclusively worn by those men the Nazis had identified as gay. By contrast, the average lesbian enjoyed a kind of legal immunity. This was not the result of greater acceptance of lesbianism. Rather, love between women was so intolerable that lesbian existence had been vociferously denied.

Graphic first hand accounts of the homosexual persecution in the concentration camps were recorded and documented (Lorant, Stefan 8).

On homosexual man recalls in 1933: “ Then came the thunderbolt of the 30 January 1933, and we knew that a change of political climate had taken place. What we had tried to prevent, had taken place.

Over the years, more and more of my political friends disappeared, of my Jewish and my homosexual friends. Fear came over us with the increasingly coordinated pressure of the Nazis. For heaven’s sake not to attract attention, to exercise restraint. 1933 was the starting-points for the persecution of homosexuals. Already in this year we heard of raids on homosexual pubs and

meeting place. Maybe individual, politically uneducated homosexuals who were only interested in immediate gratification did not recognize the significance of the year 1933, but for us homosexuals who were also politically active, who had defended the Weimar Republic, and who tried to forestall the Nazi threat, 1933 initially signified a reinforcing of our resistance.

One last issue deserves brief attention. The Nuremberg War Crimes Trials, held in 1945, did not address the plight of homosexuals with the same seriousness accorded other victims of the Holocaust. Burleigh and Wipperman (1991: 183) suggest that this may reflect the fact that after the war homosexuality was still a crime under German law and there still existed widespread homophobia. In fact, the Reich laws against homosexuality were not repealed in Germany until 1969. As a consequence, homosexual survivors of the camp experiment were still reticent to press their case before courts since they could still be prosecuted under existing laws.

However, the contemporary Gay Rights Movement, both in the United States and in Europe, has led to a re-opening of the plight of homosexuals in Nazi Germany. The unparalleled treatment of homosexuals under the Nazi regime raises the same questions raised by the Holocaust itself: How could it happen? Can it happen again? And how can it's recurrence be prevented?