



The Jewish Women of Ravensbrück Concentration Camp

Rochelle G. Sidel

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Ravensbrück was the only major Nazi concentration camp for women. Located about fifty miles north of Berlin, the camp was the site of murder by slave labor, torture, starvation, shooting, lethal injection, "medical" experimentation, and gassing.

While this camp was designed to hold 5,000 women, the actual figure was six times this number. Between 1939 and 1945, 132,000 women from twenty-three countries were imprisoned in Ravensbrück, including political prisoners, Jehovah's Witnesses, "asocials" (including Gypsies, prostitutes, and lesbians), criminals, and Jewish women (who made up about 20 percent of the population). Only 15,000 survived.

Drawing upon more than sixty narratives and interviews of survivors in the United States, Israel, and Europe as well as unpublished testimonies, documents, and photographs from private archives, Rochelle Saidel provides a vivid collective and individual portrait of Ravensbrück's Jewish women prisoners. She worked for over twenty years to track down these women whose poignant testimonies deserve to be shared with a wider audience and future generations. Their memoirs provide new perspectives and information about satellite camps (there were about 70 slave labor sub-camps). Here is the story of real daily camp life with the women's thoughts about food, friendships, fear of rape and sexual abuse, hygiene issues, punishment, work, and resistance. Saidel includes accounts of the women's treatment, their daily struggles to survive, their hopes and fears, their friendships, their survival strategies, and the aftermath.

On April 30, 1945, the Soviet Army liberated Ravensbrück. They found only 3,000 extremely ill women in the camp, because the Nazis had sent other remaining women on a death march. The *Jewish Women of Ravensbrück Concentration Camp* reclaims the lost voices of the victims and restores the personal accounts of the survivors.

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