

# The History of the Twentieth Century

## Episode 372

### “The Road to the Holocaust”

#### Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

“The road to Auschwitz was built by hate, but paved with indifference.”

Sir Ian Kershaw.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening War Theme]

Episode 372. The Road to the Holocaust.

Today I want to continue our discussion about the Holocaust.

This is a difficult and complicated topic. It will take more than one episode to do it justice. I think the best way to begin today is by talking about concentration camps.

Concentration camps have been part of the narrative of *The History of the Twentieth Century* since some of the very first episodes. In general, a concentration camp is a place where large numbers of people are being held in confinement. A concentration camp is different from a prison in that individuals held in prisons are there because they have been found guilty of a specific crime, or at least they are accused of committing some specific crime.

The inmates held in a concentration camp, by contrast, are held there not for any specific act they are accused of committing, but because they belong to a class of people the state has determined represent some kind of threat. We exclude POW camps from this definition; the term usually refers to the internment of civilians.

The term *concentration camp* entered the English language from Spanish, as the first concentration camps were used by the Spanish military in Cuba as part of its campaign to suppress an uprising in support of Cuban independence in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. You can probably find earlier historical examples of internments that might be called concentration camps if you look hard enough, but this is where the term originates.

In the early episodes of the podcast, we saw the British use concentration camps to confine Boer civilians during the Boer War. The US military used them in the Philippine War as well. During both world wars, concentration camps, or internment camps, were used by many countries on both sides.

As in these instances, concentration camps were typically employed in times of war, to hold civilians deemed potential enemy sympathizers. This is especially true during insurgencies or guerilla warfare. In guerilla warfare, the distinction between civilians and guerilla fighters can be blurry. Civilians sometimes aid guerillas by providing them with food or sanctuary. Guerillas sometimes force civilians to aid them. In such circumstances, governments interning these civilians in a concentration camp often emphasize the latter aspect; that is, they argue that internment protects the civilians from guerilla intimidation.

In principle at least, interning civilians in concentration camps for reasons of military necessity is a defensible act, provided the internees are well treated. In practice, concentration camps historically have been rife with mistreatment, commonly in forms such as inadequate food or shelter provided to the inmates, or cruelty and violence perpetrated on inmates by guards or other inmates.

Repeated revelations of mistreatment in concentration camps led to the term *concentration camp* developing a pejorative sense. *Your* country builds concentration camps; *my* country builds internment camps.

Naturally, the existence and degree of mistreatment depends on the time and place. During the First World War, combatant nations held hundreds of thousands of citizens of enemy nations in internment. In most of these cases, treatment of internees was pretty good. They were generally well fed and were able to send and receive mail and packages. The International Red Cross began an inspection program to help insure proper treatment of internees.

An obvious exception in this period was the horrific treatment of ethnic Armenians by the Ottoman Empire, but even so, the First World War experience overall helped rehabilitate the image of concentration camps.

It didn't last. During the Russian Civil War, the Bolsheviks established prison camps for civilians thought to be disloyal or class enemies, but after the war ended, these camps didn't disappear. They got bigger. The new Communist government continued the practice of putting those thought to be political enemies of the government into these camps. Over time, both political prisoners and criminals were imprisoned in these camps, with the political prisoners generally getting the worst treatment.

The Communists also began to impose forced labor on inmates. Often the amount of food a prisoner got was linked to their labor, which was supposed to be a form of rehabilitation or reeducation.

The camps were often located in underpopulated regions of the USSR, especially Siberia. In such places, the camps functioned as a program for economic development of these regions, through forced labor. Camps were administered by a branch of the NKVD, the secret police, and became known by the Russian acronym for the name of that office: GULAG. In English, we use the word *gulag* to mean either one of these camps, or more broadly, the whole system of punitive labor camps.

By 1928, some 30,000 Soviet citizens were held in these camps; at this time, these were political prisoners and forced labor was not yet common. Under Stalin, the system was expanded and criminal convicts were included. When Stalin began his crackdown on peasant farmers, the so-called *kulaks*, they were also held in these gulags. By 1930, the camps held more than 100,000 prisoners. By 1932, 200,000. By 1935, over a million. At the time Germany began its war against the USSR in 1941, the gulags held more than one and a half million.

The gulags were concentration camps in all but name. Concentration camps of the past were used to hold civilians of enemy nations or civilians of a nation under occupation, as in South Africa and the Philippines. While we can't say that these camps never held any citizens of the very nation operating them, it is only with the Soviet gulag that we first encounter a nation setting up concentration camps primarily for the purpose of holding its own citizens. You can see this as a natural consequence of their ideology of class struggle. The camps are for enemies of the proletariat; whether these enemies are foreign or domestic is immaterial.

So these examples were what concentration camps were understood to be as of 1933. There had been no concentration camps in Germany when Hitler became chancellor, but that quickly changed. Within months, the SS set up the first German concentration camp, at Dachau, not far from Munich.

And let me point out that the SS was not an office of the German government; it was a paramilitary within the Nazi Party, at least until the Nazis took over the German government. From then on, the SS became a *de facto* government agency, led by Heinrich Himmler, which oversaw the German police and security services, and, beginning with Dachau, oversaw the German concentration camp system. When Germany invaded and occupied Poland, the SS was put in charge of the mass murder campaign there. The SS would go on to be instrumental in the Nazis' most heinous crimes.

The first inmates placed in Dachau in 1933 were socialists and Communists, deemed enemies of the Reich. I can't resist noting the irony here of the Nazis, who hated Bolshevism so much they launched the biggest invasion in world history to destroy it, adopting the Communist innovation of concentration camps used to hold political opponents, beginning with Communists.

I want to emphasize here that these camps were used for holding prisoners, not for mass murder. That is yet to come. In our time, people sometimes speak casually of the Nazi mass murder camps, like Auschwitz, just to name one well-known example, as "concentration camps." This is

a misnomer. Concentration camps are primarily for holding certain categories of people. Camps like Auschwitz are...well, we'll come back to that.

About 50,000 people were rounded up and put in concentration camps in Germany in 1933, mostly political opponents of the Nazis. Two years into Nazi rule, German concentration camps held just 4,000, though an additional 25,000 political prisoners were held in regular prisons. Most of the rest had been released, now that Hitler and the Party felt secure in their control over Germany. One might have argued that the need for concentration camps was gone and that conventional prisons were sufficient to hold any future political prisoners, but Heinrich Himmler argued just the opposite. Now that the first wave of enemies had been dealt with, Himmler wanted to imprison broader categories of enemies of the state. You have to think he was motivated at least in part by a desire to preserve and enhance the prestige and power of the SS within the Nazi state.

Before this period, 1935-6-ish, inmates in these camps wore street clothes. As the camps took in more types of prisoners and expanded, the SS began requiring prisoners to wear prison uniforms with vertical stripes and identification numbers stitched on, along with one additional, and distinctively National Socialist, feature: an inverted triangle of fabric that came in different colors. The color of the triangle corresponded to the category of the prisoner, allowing the guards to see at a glance who had been accused of what.

Green triangles designated habitual criminals, in other words, people who had already been convicted of crimes in civilian courts and served out their sentences, but were regarded as likely to commit more crimes, so they were transferred to a concentration camp rather than being released.

Now is a good time to add that the SS administration of these camps included a program of deputizing prisoners to help maintain order. Prisoners in this category, habitual criminals, were most frequently chosen, because of their experience and familiarity with violence. They used these guys to bully the political prisoners, in other words. Being one of these deputies, known colloquially in German as *kapos*, meant a more comfortable life for yourself and power over the other prisoners. Some *kapos* relished the opportunity to push other people around; others tried to make life a little easier for the other prisoners. The guards in these camps often killed prisoners for trivial offenses. By keeping the other prisoners orderly, a *kapo* could help keep them alive. In fact though, *kapos* were generally hated by the other prisoners, regardless of their intentions. Keeping the inmates and the *kapos* hostile toward one another helped make it easier for the SS to run the camp.

A red triangle designated a political prisoner. A blue triangle meant "emigrant," someone being held until they left Germany. A purple triangle meant "Bible student." Practically every prisoner in this category was a Jehovah's Witness. When Germany reintroduced conscription in 1935, the law made no exemption for conscientious objectors. Germany's roughly 2,000 Jehovah's

Witnesses refused as a matter of religious principle to serve in the military, which put them at odds with the regime. That the denomination originated in the United States and that its members spent a lot of time studying Jewish scripture further antagonized the Nazis.

A brown triangle marked a Romani prisoner. The Nazis hated Romani as much as they hated Jews, and Germany had anti-Romani laws on the books even in the Weimar days. Romani were regarded with suspicion because of their nomadic lifestyle and their rejection of conventional employment, and were stereotyped as thieves and criminals. The Nazis had the same attitudes, plus their trademark racial purity agenda. Romani were not Aryans. Not to the Nazis.

And now we come to the most famous of the concentration camp triangles: the pink triangle, which designated gay men. Some background on this is in order. The German criminal code contained an infamous provision, §175, which criminalized sexual relations between two men. The same section also contained language criminalizing bestiality, male prostitution, and sex acts with minors, though it says nothing about sexual relations between two women. By contrast, there were other European countries that had decriminalized gay relations, including France and Italy.

Section 175 was enacted in 1871, shortly after the formation of the German Empire. In the days before German unification, some German states had repealed such laws, but Prussia had not, and Prussia usually had its way in Imperial Germany. It remained in the German criminal code throughout Imperial times, through Weimar times, and into the Nazi era. There were occasional attempts to repeal it—the Social Democratic Party took up the cause, but was unable to get repeal through the Reichstag. Others advocated for adding language criminalizing sex between women.

But §175 survived with only small changes. If you remember our episodes on Weimar Germany, you'll recall that in Berlin and many other major cities, no attempt was made to enforce this provision, and LGBTQ people could be pretty open about their sexuality, but the law remained in force, and the Weimar years saw prosecutions under §175 generally run in the 800-1000 range per year. Apart from big cities where the authorities had abandoned enforcement of this section, there were difficulties in successfully prosecuting a case. The language of §175, as interpreted by German courts, only criminalized actual sex acts between men. The courts would not sustain prosecutions against a man merely for being attracted to other men, or flirting with other men, or hugging or kissing other men. The prosecution had to prove actual sexual relations, which could be difficult.

In 1935, two years into the Third Reich, the Nazi-controlled Reichstag toughened the language of §175. No longer was it necessary to prove intercourse. A man could violate §175 merely by “exciting sexual desire” in another man, even in the absence of physical contact, or by offending public morals, a nice vague phrase. The maximum penalty for violating §175 was also increased, from six months in prison to five years.

Prosecutions under §175 skyrocketed during the period of Nazi rule, from 800 or so per year to 8,000. Additionally, the Gestapo could and did put men into concentration camps based on suspicion or accusation that they were gay, or even men who had characteristics the Gestapo deemed effeminate, even though not all men with effeminate-seeming characteristics are gay, and not all gay men exhibit characteristics that might be deemed effeminate. Men who were already convicted under §175 and served out their sentences could be put into a concentration camp immediately upon their release from prison.

And this brings me to the final color, the black triangle. The black triangle tagged those whom the Nazis determined were *asozial* or *arbeitsscheu*, that is, anti-social or work-shy. Anti-social was a catch-all term that embraced basically anyone who lived their lives in a way in which the Nazis did not approve. This could be as simple as some sort of social nonconformity. Pacifists who opposed the war fell in this category. Romani were sometimes placed in this category, as were prostitutes, or those who violated the provisions in the Nuremberg laws barring sexual relations with Jewish people.

A moment ago, when I was talking about §175 and treatment of gay men in Nazi Germany, you may have been thinking, well, what about lesbians? There was no legal prohibition against sexual relations between two women, but such women could be and were put into the concentration camps as anti-social. The same was true for transgendered people.

The category of “work-shy” meant those who refused to work or were sporadic or undependable in their employment. This included those who were consciously refusing to work, but more commonly it meant the unemployed, the homeless, or draft evaders. It also included alcoholics and drug addicts, and people with mental illnesses or developmental disabilities.

In these early years, Jewish Germans were not put into concentration camps, at least not for merely being Jewish, though Jewish people could be and were imprisoned in these camps for being in one or another of the categories I just described for you. When these color-coded, inverted triangle badges were introduced, the system included a special twist for Jewish prisoners. Their inverted-triangle badges were sewn onto their uniforms on top of an upright yellow triangle, so that the combined triangles made a yellow Star of David overlaid with a color designation.

Within the concentration camps, prisoners whose badges marked them as either Jewish or gay got the worst treatment, from the SS guards, the *kapos*, and even from their fellow prisoners. Prisoners marked as both gay *and* Jewish suffered the worst of all.

The early days of Nazi rule and concentration camps were also the days when Germany was still pulling out of the Great Depression, a time when unemployment was regarded more as a misfortune and less as a character flaw, so the “work-shy” category in particular was seldom invoked. Even so, at the end of 1936, the German concentration camp population was around

5,000, an increase of 1000 from the previous year. By the end of 1937, the number was pushing 8,000.

The year 1938 saw a massive increase in the German concentration camp population. You'll recall that in March of that year, Germany annexed Austria. When I told you about that in episodes 303 and 304, I also told you that in the immediate aftermath of the *Anschluss*, Austrian Nazis began an enthusiastic campaign of persecuting and imprisoning Jewish Austrians, so enthusiastic that the German Nazis had to tell them to take it down a couple of notches. The concentration camps took in thousands of new prisoners after the *Anschluss*, Jewish people and political prisoners, that is, Austrians who opposed the *Anschluss*.

Also by 1938, unemployment was no longer much of a problem in Germany. To the contrary, the Reich was in the middle of a huge military buildup and Hitler and his favorite architect, Albert Speer, were drawing up grandiose plans to remake Berlin into a monumental new capital for the new Germany. The demand for cheap labor led to the introduction of forced labor within the concentration camp system.

For example, the SS set up a corporation, the German Earth and Stone Works, for the purpose of quarrying stone and making bricks for state construction projects using concentration camp labor. The SS built two new concentration camps in the mountains, Flossenbürg in Bavaria and Mauthausen in Austria, where prisoners could quarry stone, and built brickworks at two existing concentration camps, at Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen, so that camp labor could be used to make bricks.

Once the SS instituted forced labor, and found a way to make a profit off it, incarceration of the so-called "work-shy" really took off. The month of April 1938 saw the arrests of some 2,000 people across the Reich. At the end of May, Adolf Hitler demanded more arrests, this time of people in the "anti-social" category. In addition to the usual sorts of people included in this category, police were specifically directed to arrest Jewish people who were "unpleasant" or "criminally disposed."

"Criminally disposed" meant they had some kind of criminal record, and could include the pettiest of offenses, even traffic violations, while "unpleasant" could be taken to mean any Jewish person of whom the police took a dislike. In June 1938, the camps took in a total of some 9,000 new prisoners. By mid-1938, the camps held some 24,000 people, three times the number from the beginning of the year.

The Munich Agreement and the annexation of the Sudetenland took place in October, which led to another round of arrests, primarily Jewish and political prisoners taken in the Sudetenland. Then came *Kristallnacht*, the November Pogrom, barely a week after the Munich Agreement. I talked about that in episode 306, and I told you then that more than 25,000 Jewish people were put into concentration camps. By and large, their internment was relatively brief, because the

Nazis didn't want to hold these people in custody; it wanted them to emigrate, and most of the prisoners were released once they agreed to leave Germany.

Even so, during the period of their confinement, they were subjected to serious mistreatment and abuse, much worse than what the other inmates got, and hundreds of these prisoners died in SS custody.

On the eve of the war, the SS was holding about 20,000 prisoners. Recall that when the invasion of Poland began, concentration camp inmates were killed and their bodies dressed in Polish Army uniforms and left lying on the ground near the border as evidence to support German government claims that Germany was invading Poland in response to Polish attacks on German soil.

I told you about the invasion and defeat of Poland in episode 316. I also described some of the mistreatment of Poles, but I didn't go into a lot of detail at the time. Since then, I've described how Germans treated Soviet POWs and civilians after the invasion of the USSR. In simple terms, most everything the Germans did to Soviet POWs and civilians, they did to Polish POWs and civilians first.

Polish POWs were often subject to summary execution. Jewish Polish POWs were singled out for special mistreatment and most of those who weren't killed outright were put in one of the Jewish ghettos. Germany took about a quarter-million Polish POWs. You'll recall that officers were executed, as were educated Poles generally, in a Nazi effort to erase Polish culture. Polish women and girls were forced into German military brothels.

Three million Poles did forced labor in Germany; only a small fraction of them went voluntarily. Polish laborers in Germany were forced to wear inverted triangles with the letter "P" on them to identify them. They were denied many civil rights and paid only a fraction of what a German was paid for the same work. Sexual relations with Germans were grounds for execution.

In occupied Poland, Nazi policy was to reduce the Polish economy and society to subsistence agriculture and use Poles as slave labor. You can think of this as an effort to turn the whole country into one huge concentration camp.

The war increased the demand for labor, as young German men were drafted to serve in the Wehrmacht, which in turn increased the demand for forced labor in the concentration camps. As the war progressed and more and more Germans were drafted and the demand for war-related production soared, the need only became greater.

This is always true in modern total war, when armies number in the millions. The Allied nations experienced labor shortages as well, but in the United Kingdom, the United States, and the Soviet Union, governments encouraged women to go to work, even in factory jobs in war-related industries. Especially in factory jobs in war-related industries. This had important implications



for the status and role of women in those societies, and I really need to talk about that sometime, don't I?

In Germany and Italy, though, the circumstances were quite different. Both Nazis and Fascists had ideological objections to women doing factory work. Women were supposed to stay home and raise large broods of children to serve the Fatherland. With women workers off the table, labor camps became the alternative. Because under Nazism or Fascism, women working in factories is appalling, while slavery is perfectly fine.

In the early stages of the war, from the invasion of Poland to the invasion of the Soviet Union, the SS opened five new concentration camps to deal with the influx of prisoners from occupied countries. One of them stood near the Polish town of Oświęcim, which the Reich had annexed after occupying Poland, and which in German is known as Auschwitz.

The name Auschwitz has become irrevocably linked to the Holocaust, which we're going to talk about more next time, but Auschwitz began as a concentration camp for Polish political prisoners. At first it operated much the same as the older German concentration camps, including forced labor.

It's because of the forced labor that the camp at Auschwitz had the famous sign over its gate, the sign that arriving inmates had to walk under to enter the camp. It read *Arbeit macht frei*, which you could translate as "work will set you free," and in this context has to count as one of the most egregious instances of false advertising in all history. *Arbeit macht frei* parallels "The truth will set you free," a declaration attributed to Jesus in the Gospel of John. A 19<sup>th</sup> century German writer titled a novel *Arbeit macht frei*, and in the early days of Nazi rule it was appropriated as a slogan for German employment programs during the Great Depression. Later the SS began posting the slogan at the entrances to a number of concentration camps, including Dachau, Theresienstadt, and Sachsenhausen, among others.

A number of German corporations set up factories at Auschwitz to make use of prisoner labor, including Krupp, IG Farben, and Siemens. The SS imported criminals from German concentration camps, the guys with the green triangles, to serve as *kapos* at Auschwitz. Cruelty and violence directed against the prisoners was encouraged and was rife. From its early beginnings, Auschwitz had a reputation for being particularly cruel to its inmates.

[music: Aulin, *Fyra Aqvareller*.]

By the end of the war, a quarter of Germany's work force consisted of slave labor brought in from other countries, and most German factories had a contingent of prisoner laborers. The ones from Western European countries were generally paid wages comparable to what German workers received, but the majority came from either Poland or the Soviet Union, were paid little or nothing, and were generally badly treated.

Even before the war, Nazi ideology distained “useless feeders,” that is, people who consumed food provided by German society but contributed little or nothing in return. This was the justification for herding the “work-shy” into forced labor camps. This was the justification for murdering disabled people. The Nazis views Jews and Slavs, especially the former, as people who contributed little or nothing positive to society.

The coming of the war and wartime shortages of workers only encouraged more of this thinking, and freed up the Nazis to put it into practice. Then came the invasion of the Soviet Union and the Hunger Plan, which envisioned deliberate starvation of millions of people on the basis that Nazism had no use for them.

The minutes of the Wannsee Conference reflect the same thinking with regard to Jewish people:

*Under proper leadership, the Jews shall now in the course of the Final Solution be suitably brought to their work assignments in the East. Able-bodied Jews are to be led to these areas to build roads in large work columns separated by sex, during which a large part will undoubtedly drop out through a process of natural reduction. As it will undoubtedly represent the most robust portion, the possible final remainder will have to be handled appropriately...*

“Handled appropriately” was a euphemism for mass murder. As for the rest of it, it’s a plan to work prisoners to death, which was seen by the Nazis as an efficient way to solve the labor shortage and eliminate the “useless feeders” at the same time.

One example is the quarry at the Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria. Slave laborers there were forced to raise stone blocks weighing hundreds of pounds up and out of the quarry by carrying them on their backs up a long stair, which the prisoners nicknamed the “Stairs of Death,” because prisoners could only survive the strain of this literally backbreaking work for a short time. The strain of heavy labor was compounded by feeding the prisoners starvation rations, forcing them to sleep in cramped, unheated spaces, and subjecting them to random abuse and torture, all of which were common in these camps.

As a result, slave laborers lasted no more than a few months, on average, which the Nazis did not see as a problem, since there were always more slaves where those came from. Late in the war, when there were no longer necessarily more slaves where those came from, and with demand for military production soaring, the word came down from Berlin to maybe go a little easier on these people. We need their labor.

The evidence suggests that directive was largely ignored. Abusing prisoners was like an addictive drug; once you got hooked, it was very hard to quit.

This process has been dubbed “extermination through labor,” and it was used by the Nazis as a way of committing mass murder without owning up to it.

Now, the scholarship on Nazi concentration camps has mostly assumed that the Nazis intended to kill off all their concentration camp inmates in this way, but in recent years, some historians have pointed to evidence that the treatment of concentration camp inmates varied considerably, depending on which category the prisoner belonged to. The most disfavored groups were Jews, Slavs, especially Soviet POWs, and the gay men with the pink triangles.

But even if this is so, there's no doubt the concentration camps were awful for even the most "favored" prisoners.

We'll have to stop there for today. I thank you for listening, and I'd especially like to thank Samuel for his kind donation, and thank you to Andy for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons like Samuel and Andy help cover the costs of making this show, which in turn keeps the podcast available free for everyone, so my thanks to them and to all of you who have pitched in and helped out. If you'd like to become a patron or make a donation, you are most welcome; just visit the website, [historyofthetwentiethcentury.com](http://historyofthetwentiethcentury.com) and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons.

The podcast website also contains notes about the music used on the podcast. Sometimes it's my own work, sometimes it's licensed, but many times, the music you hear here is free and downloadable. If you hear a piece of music on the podcast and you would like to know more about it, including the composer, the performers, and a link to where you can download it, that would be the place to go. While you're there, you can leave a comment and let me know what you thought about today's show.

I'm going to be attending Readercon in Quincy, Massachusetts the weekend of July 12. If any of you plan to be there, I hope you'll look me up. I'm also planning to attend this year's World Science Fiction Convention in Glasgow the weekend of August 8. If there are any Glaswegians listening, maybe we can get together. Dunediners are welcome, too.

Next week is a bye week for the podcast, but I hope you'll join me in two weeks' time, here on the *History of the Twentieth Century*, as we examine the development of the Nazi murder machine. That's in two weeks' time, here, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. I gave you a little of the history of §175 up through the Nazi period. After the war, in Soviet-occupied Germany, a 1957 revision of the criminal code added a provision to set aside the prosecution of a crime if the act posed no danger to socialist society. Afterward, East German courts began to set aside prosecutions under §175 on these grounds, and gay sex between consenting adults became effectively, if not officially, legalized. In 1987, the East German Supreme Court made it official.

The Western Allies required the new West Germany to repeal everything in the legal code that was enacted to further Nazi goals, but they did not include the tougher version of §175 in that requirement. West German courts upheld §175 and sentenced tens of thousands of men to prison

for homosexuality during the years between 1945 and 1969. In 1969, §175 was finally amended to legalize gay sex, except in cases where one of the men was under 21 years of age and the other was not, or when the act arose out of an unequal relationship, employer and employee, for example. In 1973, the age of consent for gay sex was lowered to 18, still higher than what it was for opposite-sex relationships.

In 1994, following German reunification, as the German government worked on reconciling the legal codes of the two Germanies, it decided to abolish §175 altogether. In 2002, the Bundestag annulled all criminal convictions under §175 made during the Nazi period, while leaving post-war convictions in place. In 2017, the Bundestag passed legislation granting every person convicted under §175 in the post-war period a full pardon plus financial compensation.

As for the symbol the Nazis used to mark gay prisoners, the pink triangle, when movements for LGBTQ rights began to emerge in the 1970s, many of them adopted the pink triangle symbol, as a memorial to those persecuted by the Nazis, or all LGBTQ people who faced persecution or oppression, or in protest against ongoing discrimination, or as all three of those things.

In 1987, the militant group ACT UP was formed. It adopted an emblem that used an upright pink triangle along with the slogan “Silence = Death.”

In times since, it has sometimes been used as a pride symbol, although not everyone is comfortable with the use in this way of a concentration camp symbol originally devised by the SS as a tool of persecution.

Less controversially, the pink triangle has been incorporated into many public monuments memorializing LGBTQ people who suffered oppression, including one installed at Dachau. San Francisco has a small triangular park named Pink Triangle Park, and you can find other pink triangle memorials in Amsterdam, Sydney, Chicago, Barcelona, and in other places around the world.

[music: Closing War Theme]