

RESOURCES ON THE GERMAN MILITARY AND THE HOLOCAUST

Belarus

From 1919 until September 1939, the area that makes up present-day Belarus was divided between two countries: Poland and the Soviet Union. The eastern part of Belarus, where this case study takes place, was part of the Soviet Union.

Jewish Life in Belarus

In Soviet Belarus, Jews suffered as much as non-Jews in terms of suppression of religious practices, loss of private property, and political oppression; however, there was little or no legal, educational, or economic discrimination based on their Jewishness. Thus, they assimilated more into the new Soviet middle and bureaucratic classes and had more chances for productive interaction with non-Jews. Given the relatively formative stage of Belarusian national consciousness, and the absence of strong national feelings about the Jews, antisemitism tended to be less pervasive and less intense than on the Polish side of the border, where such negative sentiment received official reinforcement.

Invasion of Belarus

In June–July 1941, the German military quickly advanced through Belarus. Many people in the Soviet Union initially viewed the German Army as a potential liberator from the oppressiveness of Soviet control. Some nationalist activist groups, especially in Ukraine and the Baltic states, collaborated extensively with the German invaders in the hopes that such collaboration would purchase national sovereignty. In Belarus, where the sense of national identity was much less developed, relatively fewer locals came forward in the initial months to assist the Germans with their anti-Jewish and anti-Communist actions.



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