

Access Press

Hadamar documentary is a haunting story of many lives lost needlessly



The Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities presents a new documentary, *Hadamar: The Forgotten Holocaust*, detailing Hitler's extermination of people with disabilities

On September 1, 1939, World War II began with the German invasion of Poland. That was followed by the September 19 invasion of Poland by the Soviet Union. Those invasions triggered unimaginable loss of life and the widespread destruction of property.

The tragedies occurred in what is known as the Second Polish Republic, or interwar Poland. That refers to Poland of 1918-1939, the period between the two World Wars.

This republic ceased to exist after the invasions by Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union and the Slovak Republic.

This history is important for the disability community to remember because Nazi Germany leader Adolph Hitler targeted people with disabilities for extermination. Hitler was determined to create a "master race" of people. It is estimated that more than six million Jews were killed during the holocaust. But before the Holocaust began Hitler targeted others he deemed unworthy of life.

The Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities in September released a new documentary entitled, *Hadamar: The Forgotten Holocaust*. The documentary focuses on Adolph Hitler's order to kill hundreds of thousands of people with disabilities as he sought to create a master race and kill people who didn't fit his vision. People with many types of disabilities were targeted.

The name Hadamar refers to one of the hospitals in which people were killed. Hadamar Euthanasia Centre was known as the "House of Shutters," was a psychiatric hospital located in the German town of Hadamar.

Beginning in 1939, the Nazis used Hadamar as one of six for the T-4 Euthanasia Programme, which performed mass sterilizations and mass murder of "undesirable" members of German society, specifically those with physical and cognitive disabilities. In total, an estimated 200,000 people were killed at these facilities, including thousands of children. Children were the first killed. People were typically killed with deadly gas.

After many people died, their organs were used for further study. Gold teeth were harvested. Staff celebrated when a milestone number of deaths was reached.

Hadamar and its hospital fell within the American occupation zone after the war. In October 1945, a trial was conducted by U.S. forces. It was the first mass atrocity trial following WWII. Doctors and staff were tried on murder charges. Several people were found guilty and executed.

After German courts were reestablished during the Allied occupation, more trials were held under those courts' jurisdiction.

The hospital at Hadamar continues to operate. It holds an annual memorial to the euthanasia murders as well as an exhibit about the Nazi program.

The documentary is very powerful and contains images that may be very disturbing to some people. But it presents a striking look back at how many innocent people with

disabilities were regarded, and how they suffered. Material came from Dave Reynolds of Spokane, Washington, who has extensively researched the genocide. Tim Lewis from Mastcom converted Reynolds' lecture materials for use as a documentary.

The History Note is a monthly column sponsored by the [Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities](#)