



Women in the Holocaust

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As Jews throughout Europe faced Nazi persecution, Jewish women - wives, daughters, mothers - encountered special problems and had particular vulnerabilities. By examining women's unique responses, their resourcefulness, their courage and their suffering, the book should enhance our understanding of the experiences of all Jews during the Nazi era. The introductory essay by Lenore Weitzman and Dalia Ofer shows how questions about gender should lead to an understanding of the Holocaust. Testimonies of Holocaust survivors, written especially for this book, shed light on women's lives in the ghettos, the Jewish resistance movement, and the concentration camps. The narratives personalize and exemplify many of the larger themes explored in other chapters by Holocaust historians, sociologists and literary experts. These chapters explore the variety and complexity of gender differences during the Holocaust. The culturally defined pre-war roles of Jewish men and women endowed them with different spheres of knowledge, expertise and skills with which to face the Nazi onslaught. During the war the Nazis imposed different regulations, work requirements and sanctions on the two sexes. Women had to assume new roles as family protectors during the ghetto period, when men were more vulnerable. On the other hand women, and especially mothers, were more vulnerable in the concentration camps. The detailed portraits of women in these chapters show us their individuality, strength and humanity.

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