

## Cologne National Socialism Documentation Center (short version)

Cologne's National Socialism Documentation Center was founded by a resolution passed by the Cologne city council on December 13, 1979 and has become the largest regional memorial site in all of Germany for the victims of the Nazis. Since 1988, it has been housed in "EL-DE Haus," the EL-DE building, named for the initials of its owner, Catholic businessman Leopold Dahmen. This building was the headquarters of the Cologne Gestapo (secret police) between December 1935 and March 1945. In the final months of the war, several hundred people, most of them foreign forced laborers, were murdered in the courtyard of the building. In a bit of historical irony, the EL-DE building remained largely untouched by the ravages of the war.

The NS Documentation Center (NS-DOC) is dedicated to memorializing the victims of the Nazi regime, as well as research and teaching about Cologne's history during the Nazi era. The former Gestapo prison was inaugurated as a memorial site on December 4, 1981. Some 1,800 inscriptions and drawings done by prisoners have survived on the walls of the ten cells. The Gestapo prison memorial site is one of the best preserved prisons from the Nazi era, representing an historical asset of national and European importance.

Since June, 1997, the permanent exhibition in the EL-DE building has depicted political, social and community life in "Cologne During the Nazi Era." That includes the seizure of power and the power apparatus, propaganda and the "national community," everyday life, youth culture, religion, racism, the genocide of Cologne's Jews and its Sinti and Roma, and opposition, resistance, war and society during war. In addition, temporary exhibitions depict local and national aspects of the Nazi regime. The center also mounts more than 130 events each year. The museum's educational department and the *Information and Education Association against Right-wing Extremism (ibs)* also run educational and teaching programs.

The NS Documentation Center views itself as an important research locus. This is supported by the library, with literature on Cologne under the Nazis, general Nazi history and right-wing extremism. It is also the task of the documentation department, with its extensive collections of photographs, posters, artifacts, documents and witness statements, which are organized into databases and made accessible. Numerous research projects deal with, among other subjects, Jewish history, contemporary witness statements and interviews, forced labor, the police, youth culture, the press, clubs and organizations, various victim groups and commemorative activities, such as the Cologne artist Gunter Demnig's project "Stolpersteine" (*Stumbling Blocks*) Among the large, ongoing research undertakings are the history of the Holocaust, resistance, the Gestapo, the Nazi system of Gauleiter (district overseers), urban planning, public health policies and the Hitler Youth movement. The results of the research projects are published in a series of writings in book form, a workbook series, a series put out by the Information and Education Association, and the center's Internet page.

The NS Documentation Center is a municipal institution and, since 2008, part of Cologne's city museums associations. So within the municipal administration, it is responsible for dealing with all subjects related to the city's Nazi past, including the visitor programs for former forced laborers, which the city has been running since 1989.

The center has been the recipient of numerous awards, including the “special recommendation” of the 2000 Museum of the Year Award.

## **Cologne National Socialism Documentation Center (long version)**

Cologne's National Socialism Documentation Center is the largest regional memorial site in all of Germany for the victims of the Nazis. It was founded by a resolution passed by the Cologne city council on December 13, 1979. For many years, the center's activities were restricted to research and academics. So on June 11, 1987, the council once again passed a resolution calling for "the foundation of the NS Documentation Center of the city of Cologne," and the center gradually developed into the comprehensive institution it is today.

Since 1988, the NS Documentation Center (NS Doc) has been housed in "EL-DE Haus," the EL-DE building. Significantly, this building was the headquarters of the Cologne Gestapo (secret police) between December 1935 and March 1945. The name EL-DE is based on the phonetic pronunciation of the letters L and D and comes from the building's developer, Leopold Dahmen, a Catholic businessman who rented the building to the Gestapo even while it was still under construction. The Gestapo had the building reconfigured for its own purposes, which included building ten prison cells in the basement. In the final months of the war, several hundred people, most of them foreign forced laborers, were murdered in the courtyard of the EL-DE building. The name "EL-DE Haus" became the embodiment not only of the Nazi reign of terror in Cologne, but also of how the city dealt with it and, after 1945, the later confrontation of the city's Nazi history. In a bit of historical irony, the EL-DE building remained largely untouched by the ravages of the war. Between 1947 and 1949, it was refurbished and enlarged, in keeping with its original style. Among other alterations, an additional storey was added to the building and it was expanded onto Appelhofplatz and Elisen street. Several municipal agencies moved in, including the pension office and the legal department, the citizens' advisory office for social benefits and even, temporarily, the registry of vital statistics. Since an expansion in 2012, the NS DOC uses about 2,800 square meters of space in the EL-DE building.

The former Gestapo prison was inaugurated as a memorial site on December 4, 1981. The exhibition was updated in 2009. In addition, the Gestapo rooms at the back of the prison, as well as their bunker in the sub-basement were opened to the public. Beginning in 2012, the former place of execution in the courtyard will also be a part of the memorial. Some 1,800 inscriptions and drawings done by prisoners have survived on the cell walls. They were written with pencil or chalk, sometimes even with lipstick; or scratched into the cell walls with iron nails, screws or even the prisoner's fingernails. The former Gestapo prison and the prisoners' cell wall

scribblings, are perhaps the most immediate and powerful reminders of the Nazi horrors linked to the EL-DE building. The Gestapo prison memorial site is one of the best preserved prisons from the Nazi era, representing an historical asset of national and European importance.

The permanent exhibition opened in June, 1997. Spread across some 900 square meters and two stories, it depicts life in "Cologne During the Nazi Era." With Cologne as a model, it depicts the essentials of the Nazi system as they applied to the local populace. In doing so, the exhibition refutes the widespread perception that because Cologne was largely Catholic, liberal and resistant to authority, the Nazi regime was not as bad there as elsewhere. The exhibition covers the period from the ascent of National Socialism during the Weimar Republic to the end of Nazi rule in the spring of 1945. The exhibition is not limited to the subjects of persecution and resistance, but covers many aspects of political, social and community life in Cologne in the Nazi era. That includes, among other things, the seizure of power and what the Nazis euphemistically called "gleichschaltung," meaning the elimination of political opposition, the power apparatuses of the NS party and national authorities such as the judiciary, the police and the Gestapo, propaganda and the "national community," everyday life, youth culture, religion, racism and racist persecution tactics such as forced sterilization and "euthanasia," as well as persecution of "asocial people" and homosexuals, and the genocide of Cologne's Jews and its Sinti and Roma. Also explored are war, society during war, forced labor and the collapse of the Nazi regime. The permanent exhibition was extensively remodeled in 2009 and 2010 and the number of media stations expanded to 31.

Between 2002 and 2011, the number of visitors to the museum more than doubled. In 2011, about 54,000 people visited the center.

The NS documentation center today serves in equal part as a memorial and a research center, linking the commemoration of the victims of the Nazi regime to the exploration and portrayal of Cologne under Nazi rule. The center considers itself a combination memorial site, learning center and research locus.

The memorial site and the permanent exhibition are an essential part of the learning center and the educational program. In addition, temporary exhibitions on a broad range of subjects explore local and national aspects of the Nazi era. Between the beginning of 1998 and the beginning of 2012, the center mounted 53 temporary exhibitions. A comprehensive supplementary program was developed for each exhibition. The NS Documentation Center organizes more than 130 events per year,

in a variety of different formats. Events range from small lectures, readings and panel discussions to workshops, large conferences and cultural events with theater and music.

The NS DOC's education department develops tours of the museum and the memorial. In addition, the center runs a workshop on "Youth Culture in the Nazi Era", a tour called "Navajos and Edelweiss Pirates" through Cologne's Ehrenfeld district, where an anti-Nazi resistance group operated during the war, a "Childmobile – Suitcase Full of History" that works in schools and day-care centers and the family tour entitled "What Happened in the EL-DE Building?" In addition, the department develops specialized programs for target groups such as specific professions, university students, student teachers and teachers.

Since the beginning of 2008, the *Information and Education Association against Right-wing Extremism (ibs)* has complemented and broadened the work of the NS Documentation Center. The ibs addresses the issue of extreme right-wing ideology in the world today. The work includes organizing a variety of workshops and lectures, as well as conferences and seminars, both for young people and for adults. The work of ibs also includes documentation, P.R. work and networking. Its goal is to foster a consciousness of human rights, democracy, cultural diversity and non-violence, as well as to confront and prevent extreme-right patterns of thought and action. The Information and Education Association fund a mobile counseling project against right-wing extremism in Cologne county. The project provides support to people who are confronted with right-wing extremism, racism and anti-Semitism in their residential, professional, or social surroundings and who want to help strengthen a democratic culture.

The NS Documentation Center has, since the beginning, also viewed itself as an important research locus, as the name suggests. Much of the documentation from Cologne's Nazi era was destroyed or lost during the war. So the first task is and was examining, collecting and securing materials (files, documentation, artifacts and photographs, as well as books and brochures), then cataloguing them in databases and analyzing them. The results of this research work are reflected in all areas of the institution's activities – in publications, special exhibitions, events, the Internet presence and the educational programs.

The library and documentation play a key role in research and education. The *library* is primarily a reference library, with a focus on literature about Cologne during the Nazi era, the general history of the Nazi regime, as well as its didactics, and about right-wing extremism. In addition to current books and newspapers, the library collects dissertations, contemporary magazines, books, brochures and printed

materials published by Nazi organizations, such as public notifications. Also in the collection are in-house organs from companies in the Cologne area. The library holdings comprise approximately 17,300 volumes (as of 2011). Use of the library is free. The catalogue can be viewed online on three Internet pages. Library users receive help and advice on their projects, and a media center can be used for viewing materials. In addition, work stations are available for small groups. The *documentation section* provides a critical foundation for historical research, as well as for processing the results. This is where various historical source materials are secured, managed and made accessible, and where the information databases are created and maintained. The collection is made up primarily of photographs, photo albums and collections, posters, museum objects, personal documents, diaries, letters and witness statements. Gifts, permanent loans and the reproduction of photographs ensure that the holdings are constantly growing. The “Jewish Life in Cologne” collection alone comprises materials from 300 smaller and 30 larger personal estates, including some 4,000 photographs and numerous original documents. The photo archive has catalogued 30,000 photographs so far, with many more still to be processed.

Since its founding, the NS Documentation Center has implemented numerous *research projects*. One central task is researching Jewish history, which is actually more of an ongoing task than a project. Creating a Memorial Book dedicated to the Nazi’s Jewish victims from Cologne has been, and continues to be especially important. One project related to this was launched in 2006 and is dedicated to investigating the fates of 2,000 Jews deported from Cologne in the autumn of 1941 to the Łódź ghetto. The collection of contemporary witness statements and interviews has played a large role in the center’s activities since the mid 1980s. It started with a collection of written memory pieces commemorating the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the war. That was followed by numerous interviews recorded on audio cassettes and, finally, the innovative video project “First-hand History.” The resulting videos can be viewed on the Internet and at the media stations in the permanent exhibition. Research into the subject of forced labor has been substantially enriched by the visitor programs for former forced laborers, which the city has been running since 1989 and which have achieved great renown, both nationally and internationally. That program is organized by the NS Documentation Center working with the “Project Group Messelager Labor Camp” in the Friends of EL-DE society. The project’s name refers to a former deportation and labor camp site at the convention center in the middle of Cologne. Between 1996 and 2000, the project “Cologne’s Police in the Nazi Era,” in cooperation with the city’s police, became the first of its kind in Germany. The center puts particular emphasis on a variety of projects dealing with the subject of

young people. A few examples of this are the projects “Child Evacuations to the Countryside,” “Youth Culture 1945,” “Navajos and Edelweiss Pirates,” and the “Rheinsich Bergisch Research and Presentation Project,” which deals with the subject of “non-conformist youth in the Nazi era.” The Cologne artist Gunter Demnig developed the “Stolperstein” (*Stumbling Block*) project, in which cobblestone-sized memorials to individual victims of the Nazis are laid into sidewalks. It has since become one of the most widespread and best-known of the German and European memorial activities. The NS DOC supported Demnig’s project from the very beginning, including providing support for the cooperative project, “Stolpersteine in Hungary.” Additional, smaller projects address subjects such as the press, clubs and organizations, Cologne’s economy, the artistic community and the Nazis and World War II, as well as the persecution of Sinti and Roma, Nazi “euthanasia” policies or Nazi military justice. Among the large, ongoing research undertakings are the history of the Holocaust, opposition and resistance in Cologne from 1933 to 1945, the history of the Cologne Gestapo, the Nazi system of Gauleiter (district overseers), architecture and urban planning, Cologne’s public health policies under the Nazis and the Hitler Youth movement in the Rhineland.

Since 1994, Cologne publisher Emons has brought out series of “writings of the NS Documentation Center of Cologne.” In 2012, a sub-series called “biographies and materials” was added. In addition, since 2005, the NS DOC has itself published a series of teaching workbooks and, since 2008, a series by the ibs. There have also been numerous individual publications related to the work of the documentation center. Since 2003, the center’s activities have been documented in detailed annual reports.

The development of the NS Documentation Center is itself a typical example of the history of German memorial domain and commemorative policies. It would not have been possible without the efforts and commitment of citizens and, even today, their support is crucial to important parts of the work. Since January 1988, that work has been supported by the Friends of the EL-DE Building Society.

As a municipal institution, the NS Documentation Center was initially part of the Cologne city archives. In 1997, it was turned into an independent municipal department and attached to the city’s office of cultural affairs. Finally, in 2008, it became part of Cologne’s city museums association. As a municipal department, the NS Documentation Center is responsible for dealing with all subjects related to the city’s Nazi past. That includes providing input into any planned re-naming of streets or installation of memorial plaques or monuments. A competition was held for the

design of the memorial to the victims of Nazi military justice that was inaugurated on September 1, 2009. Another important aspect of the center's work is its citizens' inquiry service, available not only to people from Cologne, but also to inquiries from all over Germany and abroad. Numerous people turn to the NS Documentation Center for information about their own experiences of persecution, as well as those of their parents or grandparents during the Nazi era. The greatest number of inquiries is about Jewish fates and forced labor. In addition, amateur historians and academics turn to the center for information about institutions, events, people or available source materials relating to Cologne's Nazi history. The NS Documentation Center reaches out directly to the public in a variety of ways – with the library, the museum's teaching programs, the Information and Education Association against Right-wing Extremism and, last but not least, the entire museum with its exhibitions and events.

There are 17 full-time staff positions at the NS Documentation Center, currently filled by 21 people (as of 2011; including the staff of the educational department, which is considered part of the museum's service department). That is complemented by an independently-funded, full-time academic post and temporary positions created for various projects. The communications division employs more than 20 people to help with specific exhibitions. The museum also has four guards and a cleaning lady. The municipal budget allocates € 1.8 million to the NS Documentation Center (as of 2011), most of that for personnel and rent.

The center has been the recipient of numerous awards. It has received 17 important prizes and awards, some of them national or international. These include the "special recommendation" of the 2000 Museum of the Year Award; the 2001 Architecture Prize of North Rhine-Westphalia and Cologne; induction in 2002 into the "Excellence Club" of the "Best in Heritage" organization; the 2006 History Award from TV's History Channel; the 2007 prize for innovation in adult education from the German Institute for Adult Education; the 2008 Freya Stephan Kühn prize for "excellence in effort and achievement in communicating history" awarded by the state association of North Rhine-Westphalian history teachers and, in 2011, the award for best museum during Cologne's Long Night of Museums.