

The Camp's Hierarchy

The SS classified prisoners according to its ideological scale of "racial value". Prisoners from groups classified as "racially inferior" were at the bottom of the camp's hierarchy and therefore had to endure even more deprivation than their fellow prisoners. Knowledge of a foreign language could help prisoners climb the rungs of the pecking order. Administrative and labour organisation positions were given almost exclusively to prisoners who spoke German. Prisoners who worked in positions that were important to the SS were generally subjected to less brutal treatment. Prisoner functionaries received more food, better clothes and were often housed separately. Sometimes, a prisoner's number also affected the prisoner's position in the camp's hierarchy. Because of the long time they had spent in the camp, prisoners with low numbers were regarded as experienced concentration camp inmates, to which other prisoners had to defer.