

## THE HOLOCAUST: GERMANY'S PATH TOWARDS A "FINAL SOLUTION"

In this lesson students will learn how Germany's Nazi Party rose to power and how that party's rise affected Jews and other minority groups throughout Europe.

Grades 8-12

State Goals covered: 1B, 3C, 16A, 16B, 16D, 18B

Vocabulary words: interwar, nationalism, imperial, nation-states, minority, extremist, anti-Semitism, Marxist, Providence, prophesy, estrangement, dynastic, strife, chancellor, promulgated, supremacy, propaganda



Fig.1: Adolf Hitler

### Section 1: Historical foundations for the rise of the Nazi Party in Germany

*Important concepts to consider:*

- Nationalism and Germany's own troubled history are both important factors to analyze when looking at the political developments in Germany that led to the Holocaust.
- Economic, social, and political factors all contributed to the rise in popularity of the Nazi Party in Germany. Evaluating how the Nazi Party used these factors to gain support helps us understand how ideas became brutal realities for those affected by the Holocaust.

Though World War I ended in 1918, the armistice brought lasting effects to the nations of Europe. Many of these consequences arose due to issues of how these nations would define themselves after drastic changes to the European map. For Germany, Austria, Hungary, and Russia, the losses of imperial territories and the development of new smaller European nation-states that came from them resulted in a new Europe. Europe began to develop greater separations based on race, language, and culture. New states like Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia struggled thus to be independent and separate based on their own definition of who they were as a people. Poland, which had ceased to exist as a sovereign nation in 1795, was reborn the Second Republic of Poland following the armistice.

Similarly, Germany had to redefine itself, struggling with the humiliation born of territorial loss and economic decline brought about by economic reparations required by the victorious nations following its loss in World War I. Nationalism grew along racial lines, and the Jewish minorities of Europe increasingly found themselves in limbo. In Germany, they were not perceived as fully German, though they were still accorded fully legal rights as citizens. This differentiation grew in intensity with the rise of the Nazi Party (German National Socialist Party), whose own extremist prejudices and anti-Semitism were in part products of Adolf Hitler's racial view of the world. Germany began moving down a bloody and dangerous path in 1933. This was the year the Nazi Party consolidated its power and popular support throughout Germany, with Chancellor Adolf Hitler at the top.

Text 1: "On National Socialism and World Relations," Adolf Hitler, speech delivered in the German Reichstag on January 30<sup>th</sup>, 1937

"The main plank in the National Socialist program is to abolish the liberalistic

concept of the individual and the Marxist concept of humanity and to substitute therefore the folk community, rooted in the soil and bound together by the bond of its common blood. A very simple statement; but it involves a principle that has tremendous consequences.

This is probably the first time and this is the first country in which people are being taught to realize that, of all the tasks which we have to face, the noblest and most sacred for mankind is that each racial species must preserve the purity of the blood which God has given it.

And thus it happens that for the first time it is now possible for men to use their God-given faculties of perception and insight in the understanding of those problems which are of more

momentous importance for the preservation of human existence than all the victories that may be won on the battlefield or the successes that may be obtained through economic efforts. The greatest revolution which National Socialism has brought about is that it has rent asunder the veil which hid from us the knowledge that all human failures and mistakes are due to the conditions of the time and therefore can be remedied, but that there is one error which cannot be remedied once men have made it, namely the failure to recognize the importance of conserving the blood and the race free from intermixture and thereby the racial aspect and character which are God's gift and God's handiwork. It is not for men to discuss the question of why Providence created different races, but rather to recognize the fact that it punishes those who disregard its work of creation.

Unspeakable suffering and misery have come upon mankind because they lost this instinct which was grounded in a profound intuition; and this loss was caused by a wrong and lopsided education of the intellect. Among our people there are millions and millions of persons living today for whom this law has become clear and intelligible. What individual seers and the still unspoiled natures of our forefathers saw by direct perception has now become a subject of scientific research in Germany. And I can prophesy here that, just as the knowledge that the Earth moves around the sun led to a revolutionary alternation in the general world-picture, so the blood-and-race doctrine of the National Socialist Movement will bring about a revolutionary change in our knowledge and therewith a radical reconstruction of the picture which human history gives us of the past and will also change the course of that history in the future.

And this will not lead to an estrangement between the nations; but, on the contrary, it will bring about for the first time a real understanding of one another. At the same time, however, it will prevent the Jewish people from intruding themselves among all the other nations as elements of internal disruption, under the mask of honest world-citizens, and thus gaining power over these nations.

We feel convinced that the consequences of this really revolutionizing vision of truth will bring about a radical transformation in German life. For the first time in our history, the German people have found the way to a higher unity than they ever had before; and that is due to the compelling attraction of this inner feeling. Innumerable prejudices have been broken down, many barriers have been overthrown as unreasonable, evil traditions have been wiped out and antiquated symbols shown to be meaningless. From that chaos of disunion which had been caused by tribal, dynastic, philosophical, religious and political strife, the German nation has arisen and has unfurled the banner of a reunion which symbolically announces, not a political triumph, but the triumph of the racial principle. For the past four-and-a-half years German legislation has upheld and enforced this idea. Just as on January 30th, 1933, a state of affairs already in existence was legalized by the fact that I was entrusted with the chancellorship, whereby the party whose supremacy in Germany had then become unquestionable was not authorized to take over the government of the Reich and mold the future destiny of Germany; so this German legislation that has been in force for the past four years was only the legal sanction which gave jurisdiction and binding force to an idea that had already been clearly formulated and promulgated by the party.

When the German community, based on the racial blood-bond, became realized in the German State we all felt that this would remain one of the finest moments to be remembered during our lives. Like a blast of springtime it passed over Germany four years ago. The fighting forces of our movement who for many years had defended the banner of the Hooked Cross against the superior forces of the enemy, and had carried it steadily forward for a long fourteen years, now planted it firmly in the soil of the new Reich."



Fig.2: Mit unsern Fahnen ist der Sieg!  
(With our flags is the victory!)

## Discussion and Analysis: Section 1

Instructions: After reading the excerpt taken from Adolf Hitler's 1937 speech, use what you know and what you can take from the speech to answer and discuss the following questions:

1. In the excerpt you've read, Hitler is trying to drive home a central message. In speeches, speakers will often repeat their main point. What is Hitler's central message? See if you can find the key words and messages that Hitler repeats the most. That might give you some clues.
2. How does Hitler define a people? Here again those key words and messages can give you clues to what he would define as an ideal German society. How do the Jews factor into his view of an ideal society?
3. Hitler's speech is directed towards the German people; however, his ideas seem to go beyond the boundaries of the German state. See if you can locate sections where his ideas encompass a broader scope and summarize what he's trying to say.

## Making Connections

Germany was going through a national economic crisis in the interwar period between World War I and World War II. During that period of fear and hardship, based on his speech and using everything you know about the subject, in what ways do you think Hitler and the Nazi Party would have seemed appealing to the German people?

Do you think that in times of crisis, people tend to gravitate towards strong authorities and are more willing to trust them? If so, can you think of an example in American history where this has seemed to happen? And if not, explain why.

Hitler was spreading his ideas in this speech, which we have already discussed in depth. However, what are the imaginable consequences for the German society and the people in it? Who would be affected and in what ways? These are important questions to ponder as we will focus on the very **real** implications of Hitler's words and thoughts in the following sections.

## Section 2: Laws and citizenship in Germany

*Important concepts to consider:*

- Citizenship in a nation can provide people with certain rights and legal protections. Consider this as you read through the timeline of laws concerning Jews and other ‘undesirable’ members of German society.
- Focus on the progression of laws in Nazi Germany, paying special attention to patterns and what these changes would have meant to the people they actually affected.



Fig.3: Watch Dogs for the Ghetto

Still dealing with a global depression and its own internal economic limitations, the democratically moderate government of Germany in 1933 seemed incapable of creating effective changes. The German people supported the Nazi Party as a party of authoritative strength, decisive leadership, and symbolic of German national unity. At this point in time, the Nazi Party represented leadership, not intolerance and discrimination. The Nazi Party’s more radical racial policies would slowly develop later through propaganda and increasingly discriminatory policies as the party strengthened its support throughout Germany. The leadership of the popular Adolf Hitler would help the Nazi Party expand its racial definition of what it meant to be German. For them, German meant “Aryan” (separate and genetically superior to Slavic and Semitic peoples of Europe, among others) or “Master Race,” while all of the rest were perceived as dangerous to the superiority and purity of the German society. In the years leading up to World War II, Hitler and the Nazi Party utilized a multi-pronged system of control (see below) so as to reach their desired outcome: a pure Aryan Germany.

- Firstly, not only were Jews and other ‘undesirables’ slowly stripped of citizenship and all financial or legal recourse, their gradual isolation from the greater German society made later plans for extermination easier and more efficient to execute.
- Secondly, the Nazi Party utilized propaganda to both vilify non-Aryans and also convince the German society that the party’s policies were for the greater good and in fact merciful towards the people they affected.
- Lastly, the final process came through the use of war to create an environment of danger, death, fear, and hostility which would both desensitize the German people to the reality of death and veil the Nazi regime’s intentions behind the threat of enemies from without and within. By the time World War II began in 1939 with the invasion of Poland, the steps towards “The Final Solution” were well underway.

The following is a partial list of laws and decrees instated by the Nazi government in Germany. These laws specifically targeted Jews but also affected other non-Aryan Germans.

## 1933

- Law for the Reestablishment of the Professional Civil Service removes Jews from government service.
- Law on the Admission to the Legal Profession forbids the admission of Jews to the bar.
- Law against Overcrowding in Schools and Universities limits the number of Jewish students in public schools.
- The Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Offspring established "Genetic Health Courts" which decided on compulsory sterilization of persons suffering from a hereditary disease. These included mental deficiencies, schizophrenia, hereditary blindness, hereditary deafness or generally any severe hereditary deformity.
- De-Naturalization Law revokes the citizenship of naturalized Jews and "undesirables."
- Law on Editors bans Jews from editorial posts in newspapers.

## 1935

- Jews excluded from military service
- Jews were forbidden to live in marriage or to have extramarital relations with persons of German blood.
- Nazi leaders announce the Nuremberg Laws, a series of laws and decrees that officially began completely disenfranchising and segregating all those of non-Aryan blood. The laws specifically targeted Jews; however, they applied to all other minority groups deemed unworthy of inclusion in German citizenship.

## 1936

- Jews denied the right to vote.
- Executive Order on the Reich Tax Law forbids Jews to serve as tax-consultants.

- Reich Veterinarians Law expels Jews from the veterinary profession.
- Reich Ministry of Education bans Jewish teachers from public schools.

## 1938

- Jews were relegated to an inferior status by the denial of common privileges and freedoms. Thus, they were denied access to certain city areas, sidewalks, transportation, places of amusement, restaurants, etc.
- Law on the Alteration of Family and Personal Names forbids Jews from changing their names.
- The Gun Law excludes Jewish gun merchants.
- Decree against the Camouflage of Jewish Firms forbids changing the names of Jewish-owned businesses.
- Order for the Disclosure of Jewish Assets requires Jews to report all property in excess of 5,000 Reich marks.
- Reich Ministry of the Interior bans Jews from health spas.
- Executive Order on the Law on the Alteration of Family and Personal Names requires Jews to adopt an additional name: "Sara" for women and "Israel" for men.
- Decree on the Confiscation of Jewish Property regulates the transfer of assets from Jews to non-Jewish Germans.
- The Reich Interior Ministry invalidates all German passports held by Jews. Jews must surrender their old passports, which will become valid only after the letter "J" has been stamped on them.
- Decree on the Exclusion of Jews from German Economic Life closes all Jewish-owned businesses.
- Reich Ministry of Education expels all Jewish children from public schools.
- Reich Ministry of Interior restricts the freedom of movement of Jews.
- The Reich Interior Ministry forbids Jews to keep carrier pigeons.
- An Executive Order on the Law on the Organization of National Work cancels all state contracts held with Jewish-owned firms.

## 1939

- Decree Concerning the Surrender of Precious Metals and Stones in Jewish Ownership.

## 1942-1945

Finally, by 1942 the Jews and other “undesirables” were placed beyond the protection of any judicial process by decree; the police and military command were given full authority over them. And the “Final Solution” became reality.



Fig.4: Nazis  
Round Up  
Jews

Instructions: As Americans we define our citizenship in this country by the sets of rights and responsibilities outlined in our Constitution. These protect us and provide the gateways through which we can operate and move freely within our nation. With this as a consideration and after looking at the progression of discriminatory and exclusionary Nazi laws, follow these instructions as a class.

1. As a class, discuss and debate how these laws can be grouped using the categories provided below. (Feel free to create your own categories.)
2. Use the discussion questions in the last section to further analyze the implications of these laws for the people they affected.

### Life and Pursuit of Happiness Legal Protections

### Economic Freedoms and Protections

### Expression

### General Citizenship/Civic Duties/Political Inclusion

## Making Connections

Having read through the discriminatory laws of the Nazi regime, what did they culminate in for those targeted by them? What were the real implications of how the stripping of these legal protections would later affect those groups of people?

Given what you know about Nazi ideologies and Hitler's own prejudices, how did these laws serve to aid the Nazi powers in achieving their ultimate goal? Consequently, how do you imagine these laws affected how the Nazis would be able to execute "The Final Solution" (a plan that would come later during wartime)?



Fig.5: Mass Burial

### Section 3: “The Final Solution” and its victims

*Important concept to consider:*

- As war became a reality in Germany, the Nazi Party began to act upon its ideologies of racial purification. Keep that in mind as you read a message from Heinrich Himmler to his subordinates. Think of the implications of these words, and while he never explicitly states it, pay attention to where you can read between the lines and see what he is actually ordering.

The Nazi Party began implementing strict exclusionary policies towards the non-Aryan peoples of Germany immediately upon seizing control of the national government in 1933. While these series of laws severely limited the rights and freedoms of these minority groups, especially the Jews, it was not until the outset of war in Europe that government officials would begin implementing procedures aimed at extermination and mass murder. The European Roma (“Gypsies”) and the Jews both faced concentrated efforts by the Nazi regime to eliminate them completely. Non-Jewish Poles were also heavily targeted. Seen as subhuman, like the Slavs and Serbs, the Nazis mainly targeted the elite and educated population of non-Jewish Poles for slaughter, while the rest of the able-bodied populations were to be used for labor. Jehovah’s Witnesses were particularly seen as threats due to their non-compliance with state governments. And while blacks, homosexuals, and the disabled or mentally ill were not explicitly targeted for extermination they nevertheless faced euthanasia, sterilization, and medical mutilation/experimentation.

Within the Nazi regime there was a hierarchy to race, with the Aryan bloodline firmly situated at the top. Their goal was not only to preserve the purity of that race in Germany but to expand and advance its greatness by cleansing Europe of inferior and polluting genes.

**Text 2: Himmler Orders Completion of the Final Solution, July 19, 1942**

Message from the leader of the Nazi military police, Heinrich Himmler to Nazi officials.

I herewith order that the resettlement of the entire Jewish population of the Government-General be carried out and completed by December

31, 1942.

From December 31, 1942, no persons of Jewish origin may remain within the Government-General, unless they are in collection camps in Warsaw, Cracow, Czestochowa, Radom, and Lublin. All other work on which Jewish labor is employed must be finished by that date, or, in the event that this is not possible, it must be transferred to one of the collection camps.

These measures are required with a view to the necessary ethnic division of races and peoples for the New Order in Europe, and also in the interests of the security and cleanliness of the German Reich and its sphere of interest. Every breach of this regulation spells a danger to quiet and order in the entire German sphere of interest, a point of application for the resistance movement and a source of moral and physical pestilence.

For all these reasons a total cleansing is necessary and therefore to be carried out. Cases in which the date set can not be observed will be reported to me in time, so that I can see to corrective action at an early date. All requests by other offices for changes or permits for exceptions to be made must be presented to me personally.

Heil Hitler!

H.  
Himmler

Text 3: Passage from Elie Wiesel's *Night*, which he wrote as a reflection and description of his personal experience as a Holocaust survivor.

*“Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, which has turned my life into one long night, seven times cursed and seven times sealed. Never shall I forget that smoke. Never shall I forget the little faces of the children, whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky. Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever. Never shall I forget that nocturnal silence which deprived me, for all eternity, of the desire to live. Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things, even if I am condemned to live as long as God Himself. Never.”*

Below is a list of the most fiercely targeted victims of the Nazi Holocaust, including estimated real numbers and percentages of their respective European populations killed by the end of the war. Certainly many others fell victim to the prejudices of the Nazis; even the numbers we do have vary and are estimates. Many victims will likely never be accounted for.

Victims of The Holocaust		
Ethnic/Religious Targeted Group	% Of That Population Killed	Estimate of Casualties
Roma (gypsies)/Sinti	25+%	220,000-800,000
Jews (from throughout Europe)	60+%	5,000,000-6,000,000
Non-Jewish Poles	8%	1,900,000
Jehovah's Witnesses	6%	1,650
Homosexuals Disabled/mentally ill Black Population	While few reliable figures exist when it comes to calculating the number of victims for these groups, each group faced the same chilling reality of the Holocaust and the ideologies of the Nazi regime.	

## Discussion and Analysis: Section 3

Read and discuss/answer the following questions.

The Holocaust was not inevitable. Individuals, leaders, and groups of people made choices and their action or inaction resulted in what we now know as the Holocaust. Perpetrators, silent bystanders, rescuers, and victims all played a role in this event, and everyone's experience was not the same.

Consider what you know about the Nazi rise to power, the ideologies of Adolf Hitler and his "Movement" in Germany, and the surrounding context of how and why the Holocaust happened in Europe. What lessons can be learned from this event? In your opinion, how could it have been avoided? And lastly, how can you apply those lessons to your life and the way you view and interact with your peers at school?

## Making Connections

The democratic system of the United States has provided many venues for the equal representation and freedoms of all of its members, but this has not always been the case, and continues to be a constant struggle in our legal system. Looking at how the events of the Holocaust unfolded in Nazi Germany as an example of how things can go in a very negative direction very quickly, how do we ensure we preserve our ideals of equality and liberty in America? What challenges do we face? And ultimately, whose responsibility is it to keep prejudiced, dangerous, and tyrannical forces at bay?

## Bibliography

### Images

Figure 1: “Der Fuhrer,” Pritzker Military Library Historic Photographs and Negatives Collection, Pritzker Military Library, Chicago, IL.

Figure 2: “Mit unsern Fahnen ist der Sieg!” Pritzker Military Library Prints and Posters Collection, Pritzker Military Library, Chicago, IL.

Figure 3: “Watch Dogs for the Ghetto,” Pritzker Military Library Historic Photographs and Negatives Collection, Pritzker Military Library, Chicago, IL.

Figure 4: “Nazis Round Up Jews,” Pritzker Military Library Historic Photographs and Negatives Collection, Pritzker Military Library, Chicago, IL.

Figure 5: “Mass Burial,” Pritzker Military Library Historic Photographs and Negatives Collection, Pritzker Military Library, Chicago, IL.

All images can be accessed at the Pritzker Military Library’s Online Gallery, [www.pritzkermilitarylibrary.org](http://www.pritzkermilitarylibrary.org).

### Texts

Text 1: “National Socialism and World Relations Speech Delivered In the German Reichstag on January 30th 1937.” Calvin College. [www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/hitler1.html](http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/hitler1.html) (accessed November 15, 2010).

Text 2: “Himmler Orders Completion of the Final Solution (July 19, 1942).” The Jewish Virtual Library. [www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/holocaust/himorder.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/holocaust/himorder.html) (accessed November 15, 2010).

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Statistics for the chart “Victims of The Holocaust” found on page 10 taken from Yehuda Bauer’s history, cited above.

All print publications used can be found at the Pritzker Military Library.