



The Holocaust

The Nazi Rise to Power

In 1918, the First World War came to an end and Germany was defeated. The Treaty of Versailles set harsh terms for Germany’s surrender—the country had to make huge payments, give up territory, and severely limit the size of its armed forces.

One of the surviving soldiers was a man named Adolf Hitler, who was outraged by the terms of the treaty and determined that they should be overturned. In 1921, Hitler became the leader of a small political party, the National Socialist German Workers Party, also known as the Nazi Party. At first, the party had little influence, but it quickly gained support as the Great Depression of 1929 began to devastate the German economy and impoverish German citizens. Many Germans were desperate for change, and Hitler was a charismatic speaker who promised to make Germany prosperous and powerful again.

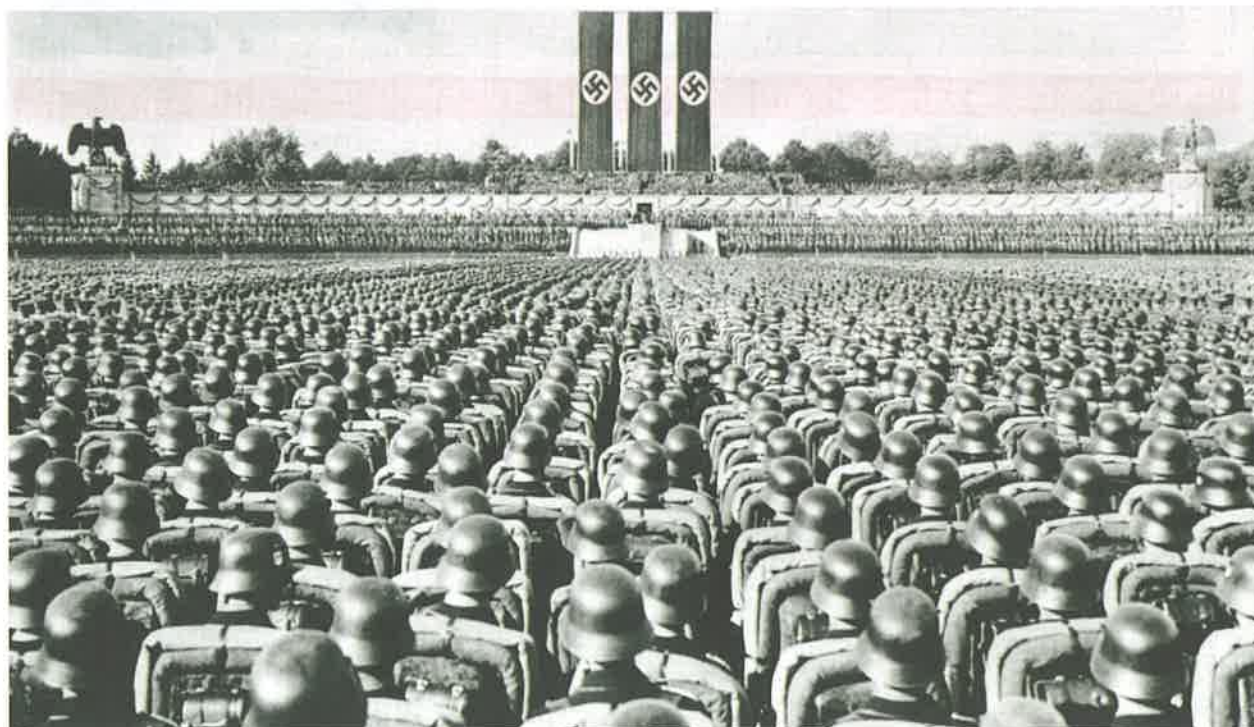
In 1933, Hitler became chancellor—head of the government. From the very beginning, Nazis made it their goal to control all aspects of German life. All newspapers and radio stations that did not support the party were censored, bookstores and libraries were raided, and thousands of books were burned. All other political parties and social organizations except the Nazi Party and Hitler Youth were banned, and Hitler’s opponents were arrested or killed. This all happened within the first few months of 1933.

^ Adolf Hitler was in firm control of Nazi Germany from 1933 until his suicide in 1945. His actions and ideas led to the deaths of an estimated 40 million people.

✓ Throughout the late 1930s, German power was on display at massive rallies, such as this Nazi rally at Nuremberg.

Nazi Ideology

Nazis believed in the superiority of the “Aryan” race—an invented category of “pure” Germans that excluded Jews, gypsies, and the



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< Hungarian Jewish prisoners arrive at Auschwitz-Birkenau, the largest of the extermination camps. About one million Jews were killed there.

descendants of immigrants from Eastern Europe. They targeted German Jews in particular for violence and persecution. Nazis forced Germans to boycott Jewish-run businesses, banned Jews from many professions, and prevented Jews from marrying those they considered Aryan or “pure” Germans. Schools taught that Jews were “polluting” German society and culture.

In 1938, the Nazis organized a rampage, “The Night of Broken Glass,” against German Jews, destroying homes, businesses, and synagogues. More than 90 Jews were killed, and 30,000 were imprisoned in concentration camps. The message to German Jews was clear—leave everything behind and flee Germany, or face persecution.

The Final Solution

In 1939, Germany invaded Poland, starting World War II. As the Nazis overran much of Europe, their plans for Jews became increasingly extreme. They rounded them up and relocated them to sealed ghettos, in which overcrowding and starvation were common.

Even treatment this harsh rapidly intensified, as German plans grew more organized and deadly. In 1942, the Nazis began to transport millions of Jews from all across Europe to forced labor camps and extermination camps they had established. In two camps in Poland, perhaps a quarter of the prisoners were worked to death. The rest were sent immediately to gas chambers to be killed. In the other four camps, all of the prisoners were gassed as soon as they arrived.

When the Allied forces finally occupied Germany and Poland in 1945, the camps were liberated, and the Nazis’ horrific plans were stopped. But the “Final Solution” had already resulted in the deaths of about six million Jews—two-thirds of Europe’s prewar Jewish population.



^ The words *Arbeit Macht Frei*—“work makes you free”—appeared at the entrance to every concentration camp. Meant to give false hope, the slogan became a cruel joke in camps where prisoners were gassed, starved, or worked to death.