

INTRODUCTION TO THE HOLOCAUST

Organized around the 38-minute documentary, *The Path to Nazi Genocide*, these materials and discussion questions provide students with a solid introduction to the Nazi rise to power and the Holocaust. The film was produced by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. It examines the Nazis' rise and consolidation of power in Germany, as well as their racist ideology, propaganda, and persecution of Jews and other innocent civilians. It also outlines the path by which the Nazis led a state to war and, with their collaborators, killed millions -- including systematically murdering six million Jewish people. By providing a concise overview of the Holocaust and what made it possible, this resource is intended to provoke reflection and discussion about the role of ordinary people, institutions, and nations between 1918 and 1945.

Materials for this Lesson

THE PATH TO NAZI GENOCIDE (VIDEO): [Museum Website](#) | [YouTube](#)
 THE PATH TO NAZI GENOCIDE: TRANSCRIPT & DISCUSSION GUIDE (PDF)
 THE PATH TO NAZI GENOCIDE: IMPORTANT EVENTS (PDF)

The Path to Nazi Genocide is available in: [English](#) | [عربى](#) | [Español](#) | [فارسی](#) | [Français](#) | [Magyar](#) | [Polski](#)
 | [Русский](#) | [Türkçe](#) | [简体中文](#)

Suggested Questions For Discussion

1. How did conditions in Germany and Europe at the end of World War I contribute to the rise and triumph of Nazism in Germany?
2. How did the German government under Nazi rule build support among the German people?
3. How did Nazi Germany gradually isolate, segregate, impoverish, and incarcerate Jews and persecute other perceived enemies of the state between 1933-1939?
4. How did the Nazis lead Germany to war in Europe and, with their collaborators, kill millions -- including systematically murdering six million Jewish people?
5. Why is learning about the Holocaust important?

Supporting Materials

The Museum's multimedia [Holocaust Encyclopedia](#) includes hundreds of articles, most of which are shorter than two pages in length and are written at an appropriate reading level for high school students. The articles are linked to historical photographs and film footage, personal stories and eyewitness testimony, artifacts, and music to tell the story of the Holocaust. The following articles can be used to deepen student learning with *The Path to Nazi Genocide*.

CHAPTER 1: Aftermath of World War I and the Rise of Nazism, 1918-1933

- [World War I](#)
- [World War I: Treaties and Reparations](#)
- [World War I: Aftermath](#)
- [Weimar Republic](#)
- [Special Focus: World War I](#)

CHAPTER 2: Building a National Community, 1933-1936

- [Foundations of the Nazi State](#)
- [Dictatorship under the Third Reich](#)
- [Third Reich](#)
- [Nazi Racial Ideology](#)
- [Nuremberg Laws](#)
- [Rallying the Nation](#)

CHAPTER 3: From Citizen to Outcast, 1933-1938

- [Early Stages of Persecution](#)
- [The First Concentration Camps](#)
- [Kristallnacht](#)
- [Defining the Enemy](#)

CHAPTER 4: World War II and the Holocaust, 1939-1945

- [World War II in Europe](#)
- [Persecution and Murder of Jews](#)
- [Ghettos](#)
- [Mobile Killing Squads \(Einsatzgruppen\)](#)
- [Killing Centers](#)
- [Additional Victims of Nazi Persecution](#)
- [Death Marches](#)
- [Liberation](#)

The Holocaust Museum website includes a [timeline](#) of key events from World War I through the Holocaust and its aftermath. This is a simple tool to help fill in context for the narrative presented in *The Path to Nazi Genocide*.

For teachers and students seeking a more concise overview of the Holocaust than that presented in *The Path to Nazi Genocide*, consider the animated map, “[World War II and the Holocaust](#).” It is one of several [animated maps](#) that illustrate the scope and impact of the Holocaust.

Finally, the Museum offers guidance on [teaching about the Holocaust](#), including guidelines, resource materials, and information about professional development opportunities.

THE PATH TO NAZI GENOCIDE: IMPORTANT EVENTS

Chapter 1: Aftermath of World War I and the Rise of Nazism, 1918-1933

How did conditions in Germany and Europe at the end of World War I contribute to the rise and triumph of Nazism in Germany?

- **The Treaty of Versailles was signed in France, June 1919:** Many Germans were shocked and angered over the terms of the treaty, which deprived Germany of any significant military power. Having lost World War I, Germany had to accept full responsibility for starting the war, pay heavy reparations, and forfeit 13 percent of its territory.
- **The ratification of the Weimar Constitution in August 1919:** In the wake of losing World War I, a national assembly drafted a democratic constitution. This was a new and unfamiliar form of government for Germans. Fearing the unknown, the delegates agreed to the inclusion of Article 48. In case of state emergency, Article 48 allowed the government to rule by presidential decree and to suspend basic rights and constitutional protections of individuals without parliamentary consent.
- **Inflation and the world economic crisis:** In order to finance World War I, the German government sold bonds. After the Treaty of Versailles, the government printed paper money to pay back the bondholders and make reparation payments. These and other measures generated a catastrophic inflation that peaked in 1923. After a short period of stability, the US stock market crash of 1929 and the world economic crisis that followed forced German banks to close and unemployment to skyrocket.
- **Hitler is imprisoned at Landsberg Prison in 1924:** Hitler tried to overthrow the government in November 1923. His trial for high treason in 1924 brought him additional fame and followers. He used his jail time during the rest of that year to dictate his political ideas in a book entitled *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle).
- **President Hindenburg appointed Hitler as Chancellor in January 1933:** The German Nationalists and the traditional elites felt they needed the popular support that the Nazis could mobilize in order to create a functioning government and that they could better control Hitler if he were a part of the coalition government. President Hindenburg appointed Hitler as Chancellor and the Nazi Party began to assume control of the German state.
- **The Reichstag building torched on February 27, 1933:** A lone arsonist set fire to the Reichstag, Germany's parliament building, just a month after Hitler became Chancellor. The Nazis and their Nationalist coalition partners demanded emergency legislation, and stoking popular fears, claimed that the arson signaled the beginning of a Communist uprising. Convinced by these arguments, President Hindenburg invoked Article 48, and the Nazi-Nationalist government issued the Reichstag Fire Decree. It suspended all basic civil rights and constitutional protections, providing the basis for arbitrary police action and restricting access to alternative sources of information. German police and Nazi paramilitary groups targeted, terrorized, and indefinitely incarcerated political opponents. Government decrees severely restricted freedoms of the press, the creative arts, literature, and theater. Many Germans willingly accepted or actively supported these extreme measures in favor of order and security. Right-wing propaganda and demonstrations played on fears of a Communist revolution spreading from the Soviet Union.

Chapter 2: Building a National Community, 1933-1936

How did the German government under Nazi rule build support among the German people?

- **Hindenburg's Death in August 1934:** After securing agreement from the army, Hitler abolished the office of President, declaring himself Führer and Reich Chancellor, leader of the nation, and head of the government. No longer did government or military officials swear allegiance to a constitution; they now swore an oath to Hitler as the supreme leader of the German nation.
- **Remilitarization:** Huge public works projects, such as a network of highways (autobahn), strengthened the economy and facilitated the remilitarization of Germany. These projects and the employment they spawned encouraged hope for the future and strengthened popular faith in the Nazi government. In 1935, Germany openly defied the 1919 Treaty of Versailles by reinstating military conscription and full rearmament.
- **Introduction of Race Laws:** In Nazi ideology, “superior” races must battle “inferior” races or be corrupted by them. Such racist ideas were taught in schools. The Nazis labeled groups that had endured centuries of prejudice and hostility—such as Jews, Slavs, blacks, and Roma (also called Gypsies)—as “racially inferior.” The German government enacted hundreds of laws to define, segregate, and impoverish German Jews. In September 1935, the Nazi Party gathered in Nuremberg for its annual rally. New race laws were introduced by Hitler and read by Parliament President Hermann Göring. Most important, the decrees stripped Jews of German citizenship and the rights guaranteed by citizenship. By 1938, Jews were isolated and segregated from German society, eliminated from most opportunities to earn a living. German Jews became “foreigners” blamed for Germany’s suffering under the parliamentary republic and depicted as waiting to undermine Germany again. German Jews were excluded and were labeled as “Germany’s Misfortune.”

Chapter 3: From Citizen to Outcast, 1933-1938

How did Nazi Germany gradually isolate, segregate, impoverish, and incarcerate Jews and persecute other perceived enemies of the state between 1933 and 1939?

- **1933 Boycott of Jewish Businesses:** On April 1, 1933, the Nazis carried out the first nationwide, planned action against Jews in Germany: a boycott of Jewish businesses. Signs reading “Don’t Buy from Jews” and “The Jews Are Our Misfortune” were posted on local businesses. Though of limited success and lasting just a day, the boycott marked the beginning of a nationwide campaign by the Nazi Party against the entire German Jewish population.
- **Invasion of Austria:** In March 1938, German troops moved into neighboring Austria. Germany shredded another provision of the Versailles Treaty, as Hitler’s homeland was incorporated into Germany.
- **Kristallnacht—“Night of Broken Glass”:** On November 9-10, 1938, the Nazi Party orchestrated an outbreak of anti-Jewish violence throughout greater Germany. Nazi thugs killed at least 91 Jews during the violence and vandalized over 7,000 Jewish-owned businesses. Germans cynically referred to the violence as Kristallnacht— “Night of Broken Glass”—for the shattered windows of Jewish-owned stores that littered the streets.

Chapter 4: World War II and the Holocaust, 1939-1945

How did the Nazis lead Germany to war in Europe and, with their collaborators, kill millions—including systematically murdering six million Jewish people?

- **Invasion of Poland:** Until 1939, Great Britain and France sought to avoid war by making concessions to German expansionist demands. However, on September 1, 1939, a massive German force invaded and conquered Poland within one month. Two days later, after Germany failed to respond to their demands to withdraw, Britain and France declared war on Germany. World War II had begun.

- **Invasion of Western Europe:** In April–June 1940, Germany occupied Denmark and Norway. In May, the German armed forces attacked France, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and Belgium. In June, Paris fell. The French acknowledged defeat and signed an armistice. The swift and unexpected victory over France avenged Germany’s defeat and humiliation in World War I, propelling Hitler to a new level of popularity and trust among the German people.
- **Invasion of the Soviet Union:** In June 1941, the German Army—with more than three million soldiers—invaded the Soviet Union to wage a war of annihilation that targeted tens of millions of civilians. Also, this invasion meant a million more Jews under Nazi control. German authorities declared Communist officials and party members as lethal enemies and killed them outright in the tens of thousands. After September 1941, the German occupation authorities deliberately reduced food rations to Soviet prisoners of war and civilians in the Soviet cities below survival levels, causing the death of millions of Soviet soldiers and civilians by starvation, exposure, and associated disease. In addition, German SS and police shot hundreds of thousands of captured and disarmed Soviet soldiers.
- **Establishment of Ghettos:** Under conditions of war and military occupation, the Nazi regime pursued its political and racial goals with more radical measures. German authorities exploited existing anti-Jewish attitudes among Eastern European populations. German authorities segregated those identified as Jews from the non-Jewish population by forcing them into tightly packed areas called ghettos. Jews in the larger ghettos were imprisoned behind brick walls and barbed wire.
- **The “Final Solution”:** In July 1941, Hermann Göring—Hitler’s second in command—authorized all necessary preparations for the “final solution of the Jewish question” in German-controlled Europe. The Nazis established five killing centers in Poland: Auschwitz, Belzec, Chelmno, Sobibor, and Treblinka. Unlike concentration camps, which served primarily as detention and labor centers, killing centers were created for the purpose of efficient mass murder. Mass deportations of Jews from occupied Europe to the killing centers began in the autumn of 1941.
- **The United States enters the War:** On December 7, 1941, the Japanese Imperial Naval Air Service carried out a surprise attack on the U.S. Naval Base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Eight U.S. Navy battleships were damaged, four of which were sunk along with other smaller vessels. 188 U.S. aircraft were destroyed; 2,403 Americans were killed and 1,178 others were wounded. The next day, December 8, the United States declared war on Japan, followed by Germany’s declaration of war on the United States on December 11.
- **Allies discover and liberate the concentration camps:** The Western Allies launched the largest amphibious assault in history on the northern coast of France at Normandy on June 6, 1944. The Allied invasion of Germany started with the Western Allies crossing the River Rhine the following March 1945. As Allied troops moved across Europe, they began to encounter tens of thousands of concentration camp prisoners. Moving from the east, the Soviet Red Army forces liberated the Auschwitz concentration camp and killing center facility on January 27, 1945. In the following months, the Soviets liberated additional camps in the Baltic states and in Poland as well as Stutthof, Sachsenhausen, and Ravensbrück concentration camps in Germany. U.S. forces liberated the Buchenwald concentration camp near Weimar, Germany, on April 11, 1945. American forces liberated more than 20,000 prisoners at Buchenwald. They also liberated Dora-Mittelbau, Flossenbürg, Dachau, and Mauthausen. British forces liberated concentration camps in northern Germany. They entered the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, near Celle, in mid-April 1945. Some 60,000 prisoners, most in critical condition because of a typhus epidemic, were found alive. More than 10,000 of them died from the effects of malnutrition or disease within a few weeks of liberation.
- **Germany surrenders:** Adolf Hitler committed suicide in his bunker in Berlin on April 30, 1945. A week later, on May 7, 1945, Germany surrendered to the Allies, bringing to an end the conflict in Europe. General Alfred Jodl, representing the German High Command, signed the

unconditional surrender of both eastern and western German forces in Reims, France; the surrender took effect the next day.

- **Jewish life in Europe after the Holocaust:** For the survivors, returning to life as it had been before the Holocaust was impossible. Jewish communities no longer existed in much of Europe. When people tried to return to their homes from camps or hiding places, they found that, in many cases, their homes had been looted or taken over by others. Returning home was also dangerous. After the war, anti-Jewish riots broke out in several Polish cities. Many survivors ended up in displaced persons' (DP) camps set up in western Europe under Allied military occupation at the sites of former concentration camps. There they waited to be admitted to places like the United States, South Africa, or Palestine. At the end of 1946, the number of Jewish DPs is estimated at 250,000.

THE PATH TO NAZI GENOCIDE: TRANSCRIPT & DISCUSSION GUIDE

This 38-minute film examines the Nazis’ rise and consolidation of power in Germany. Using rare footage, the film explores their ideology, propaganda, and persecution of Jews and other victims. It also outlines the path by which the Nazis and their collaborators led a state to war and to the murder of millions of people. By providing a concise overview of the Holocaust and those involved, this resource is intended to provoke reflection and discussion about the role of ordinary people, institutions, and nations between 1918 and 1945.

This film is intended for adult viewers, but selected segments may be appropriate for younger audiences.

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Film Chapters

Prologue (Starts at 00:00)

Aftermath of World War I and the Rise of Nazism, 1918–1933 (Starts at 00:58)

Building a National Community, 1933–1936 (Starts at 12:22)

From Citizens to Outcasts, 1933–1938 (Starts at 18:12)

World War II and the Holocaust, 1939–1945 (Starts at 24:34)

Sources and Credits (Starts at 37:25)

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[CHAPTER 1: Aftermath of World War I and the Rise of Nazism, 1918-1933](#)

In the aftermath of World War I, Germans struggled to understand their country’s uncertain future. Citizens faced poor economic conditions, skyrocketing unemployment, political instability, and profound social change. While downplaying more extreme goals, Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party offered simple solutions to Germany’s problems, exploiting people’s fears, frustrations, and hopes to win broad support.

Discussion Question

How did conditions in Germany and Europe at the end of World War I contribute to the rise and triumph of Nazism in Germany?

Transcript

NARRATOR:

Paris, 1900. More than fifty million people from around the world visited the Universal Exposition—a world’s fair intended to promote greater understanding and tolerance among nations, and to celebrate the new century, new inventions, exciting progress. The 20th century began much like our own—with hope

that education, science and technology could create a better, more peaceful world. What followed soon after were two devastating wars.

TEXT ON SCREEN:

The Path to Nazi Genocide

NARRATOR:

The first “world war,” from 1914 to 1918, was fought throughout Europe and beyond. It became known as “the war to end all wars.” It cast an immense shadow on tens of millions of people. “This is not war,” one wounded soldier wrote home. “It is the ending of the world.” Half of all Frenchmen aged 20 to 32 at war’s outbreak were dead when it was over. More than one third of all German men aged 19 to 22 were killed. Millions of veterans were crippled in body and in spirit. Advances in the technology of killing included the use of poison gas. Under the pressure of unending carnage, governments toppled and great empires dissolved. It was a cataclysm that darkened the world’s view of humanity and its future. Winston Churchill said the war left “a crippled, broken world.”

TEXT ON SCREEN:

Aftermath of World War I and the Rise of Nazism, 1918-1933

NARRATOR:

The humiliation of Germany’s defeat and the peace settlement that followed in 1919 would play an important role in the rise of Nazism and the coming of a second “world war” just 20 years later. What shocked so many in Germany about the treaty signed near Paris, at the Palace of Versailles, was that the victors dictated a future in which Germany was deprived of any significant military power. Germany’s territory was reduced by 13%. Germany was forced to accept full responsibility for starting the war and to pay heavy reparations. To many, including 30-year old former army corporal Adolf Hitler, it seemed the country had been “stabbed in the back”—betrayed by subversives at home and by the government who accepted the armistice. In fact, the German military had quietly sought an end to the war it could no longer win in 1918. “It cannot be that two million Germans should have fallen in vain,” Adolf Hitler later wrote. “We demand vengeance!”

Many veterans and other citizens struggled to understand Germany’s defeat and the uncertain future. Troops left the bloody battlefields and returned to a bewildering society. A new and unfamiliar democratic form of government—the Weimar Republic—replaced the authoritarian empire and immediately faced daunting challenges. Thousands of Germans waited in lines for work and food in the early 1920s. Middle class savings were wiped out as severe inflation left the currency worthless. Some burned it for fuel. Economic conditions stabilized for a few years, then the worldwide depression hit in 1929. The German banking system collapsed, and by 1930 unemployment skyrocketed to 22%. In a country plagued by joblessness, embittered by loss of territory, and demoralized by ineffective government, political demonstrations frequently turned violent. Many political parties had their own paramilitary units to attack opponents and intimidate voters. In 1932, ninety-nine people were killed in the streets in one month. Right-wing propaganda and demonstrations played on fears of a Communist revolution spreading from the Soviet Union.

New social problems emerged from the impact of rapid industrialization and the growth of cities. Standards of behavior were changing. Crime was on the rise. Sexual norms were in flux. For the first time, women were working outside the home in large numbers, and the new constitution gave women the right to vote. Germany’s fledgling democracy was profoundly tested by the crumbling of old values and fears of what might come next. Adolf Hitler had been undisputed leader of the National Socialist German Workers Party—known as Nazis—since 1921. In 1923, he was imprisoned for trying to overthrow the government. His trial brought him fame and followers. He used the jail time to dictate his political ideas

in a book, *Mein Kampf—My Struggle*. Hitler's ideological goals included territorial expansion, consolidation of a racially pure state, and elimination of the European Jews and other perceived enemies of Germany. He served only a short jail sentence, and after the ban was lifted on his National Socialist Party, Hitler and his followers rejoined the battle in the streets and in the countryside.

The Nazi Party recruited, organized, and produced a newspaper to spread its message. While downplaying more extreme Nazi goals, they offered simple solutions to Germany's problems, exploiting people's fears, frustrations, and hopes. In the early 1930s, the frequency of elections was dizzying. So was the number of parties and splinter groups vying for votes. Hitler proved to be a charismatic campaigner and used the latest technology to reach people. The Nazi Party gained broad support, including many in the middle class—intellectuals, civil servants, students, professionals, shopkeepers and clerks ruined by the Depression. But the Nazis never received more than 38% of the vote in a free national election. No party was able to win a clear majority, and without political consensus, successive governments could not effectively govern the nation.

Adolf Hitler was not elected to office and he did not have to seize power. He was offered a deal just as the Nazis started to lose votes. In January 1933, when the old war hero, President Paul von Hindenburg, invited Hitler to serve as Chancellor in a coalition government, the Nazis could hardly believe their luck. The Nazis were revolutionaries who wanted to radically transform Germany. The conservative politicians in the new Cabinet didn't like or trust Hitler, but they liked democracy even less, and they saw the leftist parties as a bigger threat. They reached out to the Nazis to help build a majority in Parliament. They were confident they could control Hitler. One month later, when arson gutted the German parliament building, Hitler and his nationalist coalition partners seized their chance. Exploiting widespread fears of a communist uprising, they blamed Communists for the fire, and declared emergency rule. President Hindenburg signed a decree that suspended all basic civil rights and constitutional protections, providing the basis for arbitrary police actions.

The new government's first targets were political opponents. Under the emergency decree, they could be terrorized, beaten and held indefinitely. Leaders of trade unions and opposition parties were arrested. German authorities sent thousands, including leftist members of Parliament, to newly established concentration camps. Despite Nazi terror and brutal suppression of their opponents, many German citizens willingly accepted or actively supported these extreme measures in favor of order and security. Many Germans felt a new hope and confidence in the future of their country with the prospect of a bold, young charismatic leader. Nazi propaganda chief Joseph Goebbels planned to win over those who were still unconvinced.

GOEBBELS [speaking German]:

One must govern well, and for good government one must also practice good propaganda. They work together. A good government without propaganda is not more possible than good propaganda without a good government.

NARRATOR:

Hitler spoke to the SA, his army of storm troopers.

HITLER [speaking German]:

Germany has awakened! We have won power in Germany. Now we must win the German people.

CHAPTER 2: Building a National Community, 1933-1936

With the rise of support for the Nazi Party in the 1920s and early 1930s, President Paul von Hindenburg invited Hitler to serve as Chancellor in a coalition government. After Hindenburg's death, Hitler declared himself Führer and Reich Chancellor, leader of the nation and head of the government. The Nazi Party boosted the economy's recovery and national morale with huge public works projects for the unemployed and with open defiance of the Treaty of Versailles. They were delivering on their promises to restore and strengthen the nation. Their achievements encouraged many people to overlook, or even to support, radical Nazi policies.

Discussion Question

How did the German government under Nazi rule build support among the German people?

Transcript

TEXT ON SCREEN:

Building a "National Community," 1933-1936

NARRATOR:

The ceremonial reopening of Parliament, orchestrated by Joseph Goebbels, aimed to link the Hitler government to Germany's imperial past and portray the Nazis as saviors of the nation's future. The event was carefully staged to reassure the German establishment, including the military, that Hitler would respect their traditions. Nazi-controlled newsreels then gave the impression that the Army supported the new government. Though Hitler walked behind longtime President Hindenburg for now, the new chancellor would soon be Germany's absolute dictator.

NEWSREEL VOICEOVER:

Today was dedicated to the New Germany. And more than one hundred thousand schoolchildren stood, shoulder to shoulder, as the car bearing the aged President and the Chancellor proceeded through the crowd to the speaker's stand. Whether you agree with his doctrines or not, it must be admitted that the leadership of Hitler has united the German people for the first time since the war. Their almost fanatical enthusiasm is a marvel to the entire world...

NARRATOR:

Hindenburg remained President until his death in August 1934. With Hindenburg gone, Hitler, by agreement with the army, abolished the office of President, declaring himself Führer and Reich Chancellor, leader of the nation and head of the government. Now there was no authority above or beside him. Immediately, the armed forces swore an oath of allegiance to Adolf Hitler.

GERMAN ARMED FORCES [taking oath in German]:

I swear by God this sacred oath to the Führer Adolf Hitler to render unconditional obedience...

NARRATOR:

All civil servants, including teachers and police, members of parliament and the judiciary, swore an oath of loyalty—not to any constitution—but to Hitler as Führer of the German nation. The economy had reached rock bottom when the Nazis came to power. They boosted its recovery with huge public works projects for the unemployed.

NAZI NEWSREEL VOICEOVER [speaking German]:

A half million folk comrades have gone back to work this year. Since the takeover of power, unemployment has fallen by more than half.

NARRATOR:

Hitler christened new autobahns triumphantly in a display of national will that would unite the country and facilitate the secret expansion of Germany's armed forces. In 1935, Germany openly defied the 1919 Treaty of Versailles by reinstating the draft and increasing its military strength. The Nazis were delivering on their promises to restore and strengthen the nation. Their achievements encouraged many people to overlook radical Nazi policies, or even to support them.

In September 1935, the Nazi Party gathered in Nuremberg for its annual rally. It opened with a traditional hymn that added solemnity and a sense of continuity with the past. It ended with a special session of Parliament far from Berlin. New race laws were introduced by Hitler and read by Parliament President Hermann Göring.

GÖRING [speaking German]:

German citizenship is restricted to persons of German or kindred blood. Marriages between Jews and citizens of German or kindred blood are forbidden. [Cheering]

NARRATOR:

The Nazi regime aimed to create a racially pure Germany whose so-called "superior traits" would make it ideally suited to rule the entire European continent. Nazism taught that racial struggle was the driving force in history—"superior" races must battle "inferior" races or be corrupted by them. The Nazi concept of a national community was exclusive and based on race, as defined in the new laws and decrees. Heinrich Himmler and the SS led the ideological battle. Racist ideas were taught in schools. Some groups, such as Jews, Slavs, Blacks and Roma (also called Gypsies) were labeled racially inferior. People with mental or physical disabilities were designated "unworthy of life." Scientists and medical professionals applied pseudo-scientific theories for measuring and valuing racial characteristics.

CHAPTER 3: From Citizens to Outcasts, 1933-1938

Through hundreds of legal measures, the Nazi-led German government gradually excluded Jews from public life, the professions, and public education. The goal of Nazi propaganda was to demonize Jews and to create a climate of hostility and indifference toward their plight. On Kristallnacht—the Night of Broken Glass—Jewish businesses and synagogues were destroyed in the first act of state-sponsored violence against the Jewish community. Many Jews who had the means tried to leave Germany but encountered countless bureaucratic hurdles.

Discussion Question

How did Nazi Germany gradually isolate, segregate, impoverish, and incarcerate Jews and persecute other perceived enemies of the state between 1933 and 1939?

Transcript

TEXT ON SCREEN:

From Citizens to Outcasts, 1933-1938

NARRATOR:

Before the Nazis assumed power, Jews enjoyed all rights of citizenship in Germany. After 1933, the German government gradually excluded Jews from public life and public education. Newly established Jewish private schools provided a safe learning environment for some. By 1938, German authorities had isolated and segregated Germany's Jews, expelling them from the professions and eliminating most opportunities to earn a living.

CAROLA STEINHARDT:

We felt so... why can't we be part of it? Why can't we? Everybody said, "Heil Hitler," like this. I did, too. What did I know? I was eight years old. So my mother said to me, "You're not supposed to do that." I said, "Why not?" She said, "Haven't you been told that you are Jewish?" I said, "Oh, I forgot."

NARRATOR:

Germany's Jews would get plenty of reminders.

VOICE FROM LOUDSPEAKER [speaking German]:

Ladies and gentlemen, this is a boycott of Jewish shops. Please keep moving.

GUY STERN:

This sense of isolation that came upon us after 1933, gradual and increasing, it also affected us psychologically. We knew we were in a hostile world.

NARRATOR:

Between 1933 and 1939, the German government enacted hundreds of laws to define, segregate and impoverish German Jews.

GERDA HAAS:

My sister and I used to slink by those huge banners that were all over the city. And we used to just try not to see them, thinking if we didn't see them, they weren't there. But they were there. That just, little by little, that really took over.

JULIUS STREICHER, Der Stürmer Editor [speaking German]:

...without a solution to the Jewish question, there will be no solution for humanity.

NARRATOR:

The goal of Nazi propaganda was to demonize Jews and encourage Germans to see Jews as dangerous outsiders in their midst. After 1935, everyday antisemitism was a regular part of carnival parades and floats. Public displays of antisemitism reinforced a climate of hostility toward Jews in Germany, or at the least, indifference to their treatment. In March 1938, German troops moved into neighboring Austria. Germany shredded another provision of the Versailles Treaty, as Hitler's homeland was incorporated into Germany. It was a disaster for Austrian Jews. Within a year, the Nazis achieved in Austria what had taken five years to carry out in Germany.

On November 9th, the Nazi Party orchestrated an outbreak of anti-Jewish violence throughout Greater Germany. It was a lawless onslaught that outraged the world and provoked criticism of the regime by many Germans. Jewish businesses that had already suffered antisemitic attacks were targeted for deliberate vandalism disguised as spontaneous public action. Party officials directed the SA, SS and Hitler Youth to destroy Jewish shops and torch synagogues. Over 7,000 Jewish-owned businesses were vandalized. Germans named the violent attacks Kristallnacht—Night of Broken Glass—for the shattered windows of Jewish-owned stores that littered the streets. The nationwide violence damaged or destroyed more than 250 synagogues.

GERDA HAAS:

After Kristallnacht, I remember driving through Berlin and seeing the synagogues in flames and all the glass on the streets, and the people huddled and depressed. They walked around like the victims, like the hunted.

NARRATOR:

German police filled the concentration camps with thousands of Jewish inmates. The SS released them only if they agreed to emigrate. But Jews faced increasingly restrictive immigration quotas in most countries and bureaucratic hurdles in Germany. A new law issued in October 1938 required Jews to surrender their old passports, which would be valid only after the letter "J" was stamped on them. Two months later, another law prevented the flight of capital owned by Jews, when the Economics Ministry froze all Jewish property and assets. Many who had the means and somewhere to go tried to leave Germany. Some families sent their children alone to other, safer countries. They could not know how soon the world would be at war.

CHAPTER 4: World War II and the Holocaust, 1939-1945

With the start of the second World War and a swift succession of German victories, the Nazi regime began realizing its longstanding goal of territorial expansion. Under conditions of war and military occupation, they could pursue racial goals with more radical measures. The German Army, military, SS, and German police units took an active part in authorized mass murders of Jews in the Soviet Union. The Germans and their collaborators deported roughly 2.7 million Jews and others from occupied Europe to killing centers in German-occupied Poland. At the largest of the camps, Auschwitz-Birkenau, transports arrived from all across Europe. The camps of Majdanek and Auschwitz were the first liberated, as Soviet troops reached Poland. As more Allied soldiers saw the camps with their own eyes, the truth was undeniable.

Discussion Question

How did the Nazis lead Germany to war in Europe and, with their collaborators, kill millions—including systematically murdering six million Jewish people?

Transcript

TEXT ON SCREEN:

World War II and the Holocaust, 1939-1945

NARRATOR:

As the Nazi regime implemented its long-standing goal of territorial expansion, aggression against Germany's neighbors initially succeeded without encountering armed resistance. Hitler counted on the reluctance of Britain and Europe to intervene, for fear of another war. The German occupation of Prague, capital of Czechoslovakia, left no doubt as to Germany's intent on military conquest in Eastern Europe. On September 1, 1939, a massive German force invaded and conquered Poland within a month. It was the start of the Second World War. In April 1940, Germany occupied Denmark and Norway. In May, the German armed forces attacked France, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Belgium. In June, Paris fell and France surrendered. The swift and unexpected victory over France avenged Germany's defeat and humiliation in the First World War. It propelled Hitler to a new level of popularity and trust among the German people. In June 1941, the German Army, with more than three million soldiers, invaded the Soviet Union to wage a war of annihilation that targeted tens of millions of civilians. Under conditions of war and military occupation, the Nazi regime could pursue its political and racial goals with more radical measures. As German troops advanced into eastern Europe, Germany's power extended over millions more Jewish inhabitants in the occupied lands, where German authorities could exploit existing anti-Jewish attitudes among local populations.

Across eastern Europe, German authorities forced those identified as Jews into tightly packed areas called ghettos. Separated from the non-Jewish population, Jews in the larger ghettos were imprisoned behind brick walls and barbed wire. The German drive eastward was cast as a crusade against Judaism and Communism—in the Nazi view, two aspects of the same evil. German soldiers and police officials treated Soviet prisoners of war as sub-humans, either shooting them or deliberately causing their deaths by exposure to the elements and by starvation. Millions died in German captivity. On the eastern front, racial political instruction was part of regular training for all types of German occupation forces. SS chief Heinrich Himmler referred to the war against the Soviet Union in an address to his men: "This invasion is an ideological battle and a struggle of races. Here in this struggle stands National Socialism—an ideology based on the value of our Germanic, Nordic blood... On the other side stands a population of 180 million, a mixture of races whose very names are unpronounceable, and whose physique is such that one can shoot them down without pity and compassion..." In July 1941, Hermann Göring—Hitler's second-in-command—authorized all necessary preparations for the "final solution of the Jewish question" in the European territory under German control.

As German military forces advanced, mobile killing squads advanced with them. The German Army, military SS and German police units took an active part in authorized mass murders. The Germans and their accomplices rounded up the victims, drove them on foot or in trucks to a killing site, often made them remove their clothes, and shot them. Participants in the murders included local collaborators—especially police—in Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Ukraine and Belarus. The German killing squads and their auxiliaries murdered at least two million Jewish men, women and children in mass shooting operations.

Back in Germany, SS and police deported the remaining Jews to the occupied eastern territories. In German-occupied Warsaw, the walled ghetto that German Jews entered as newcomers in 1942 was already a place of mass suffering due to terrible overcrowding, lack of sanitation, disease and starvation imposed by the Germans. Despite all efforts of the imprisoned Jews to find ways of surviving and sustaining their communities, those conditions increasingly led to death for scores of thousands. Most vulnerable were the orphaned children.

Originally, German occupation authorities established ghettos to concentrate Jews and separate them from the non-Jewish population. Later in the war, many ghettos served as staging grounds for the transportation of Jews to the east, euphemistically called “resettlement” by the Germans, who promised their captives better conditions and opportunities to work. People endured unimaginable suffering on journeys that lasted days, without food, water, or toilet facilities. Many of the weak, the young, and the elderly died before reaching the destination.

The Germans and their collaborators deported roughly 2.7 million Jews and others to killing centers in German-occupied Poland. At the largest of the camps, Auschwitz-Birkenau, transports arrived from all across Europe.

LILLY MALNIK, Auschwitz Survivor:

Transports were coming in every day, people with all kinds of different languages—Hungarian, Poles, Czechoslovakians, from Holland, from France, from Belgium, from Germany, from Italy, Russians. They were from everywhere.

NORBERT WOLLHEIM, Auschwitz Survivor:

My wife was somehow waving to me, and that’s the last I’ve seen of her.

FRITZIE FRITZSHALL, Auschwitz Survivor:

The smell, gas chambers. When I asked, “When will I see my mother?”—I was shown the smoke. This is how I found out where she went.

ERNEST KOENIG, Auschwitz Survivor:

It took a long time until I started to realize that we are condemned to die. All Jews are condemned to die.

NARRATOR:

Those whom the SS judged unable to work were killed, often within two or three hours of arrival. Those who could work would be used for forced labor, under punishing conditions. When they could no longer work, they, too, would be put to death. In several killing facilities, exclusively designed to kill human beings on an industrial scale, camp authorities used poison gas to murder children, women and men. At these killing centers, nearly half of all Holocaust victims died.

The camps of Majdanek and Auschwitz were the first liberated, as Soviet troops reached Poland. News of Majdanek’s liberation in summer 1944 was met with disbelief. The New York Herald Tribunesaid, “Maybe...we should wait for further corroboration...this...sounds inconceivable...” In April 1945, US

troops in Germany and Austria came upon concentration camps at Buchenwald, Dachau, Nordhausen, Mauthausen and Ohrdruf. The soldiers saw the camps with their own eyes, and the truth was undeniable. General Dwight Eisenhower, Commander of the Allied liberating forces, wrote: “The things I saw beggar description.... The visual evidence and the verbal testimony of starvation, cruelty and bestiality were...overpowering...” In American movie theaters, newsreels made witnesses of thousands more. One commentator said, “To future generations it must be told: Once man did this to his brothers. In the 20th century there existed a civilization which for twelve years returned to barbarism.”

Shock permeated the camps as liberating troops tried to grasp what they had found. Soldiers did all they could to attend to the dead and to support the living. Those who survived faced the slow task of reclaiming their dignity and returning—somehow—to life.

TEXT ON SCREEN:

The Holocaust darkened the world’s view of humanity and our future. As the world struggled to understand what had happened, a new word, genocide, was needed for these crimes—crimes committed by ordinary people from a society not unlike our own.