

LECTURE: TOWARD THE “FINAL SOLUTION”

- I. **Removal of the Jews from German Society:** Hitler believed that Germany’s main problem was the presence of the Jews. His goal was to make Germany *Judenrein*, free of Jews (literally “clean of Jews”). His plans for Germany called for the elimination of Jews from German culture and society.
 - A. **The First Solution:** The so-called “first solution” to this problem was to remove Jews from the economy and to isolate them within Germany.
 - B. **The Second Solution:** The “second solution” was to expel Jews from Germany.
 - C. **The Final Solution:** The third or “final solution,” the annihilation of the Jews, began with the start of World War II in 1939.
 1. **1939:** Germans started killing Jews in Poland when they invaded that country.
 2. **1941:** At some point in 1941, the SS leadership and Hitler developed a plan to destroy all the Jews in Europe.
 - a. This idea was unbelievable to Europeans, both Jews and non-Jews.
 - b. Not only did Hitler decide to eliminate the Jews of Germany but *all* the Jews of Europe.

NOTE TO TEACHER: This historical evolution is a critical point. The idea to annihilate the Jews did not spring full-blown but gradually emerged as historical circumstances changed.

II. Preparatory Stages for the “Final Solution”:

A. Legislation: The first stages of the Nazi solutions to the “Jewish Problem” were carefully devised in legal steps. Each law was instituted according to accepted governmental procedures. Like most Germans, German Jews had been educated to obey state authorities and abide by the law.

1. **February 28, 1933; Emergency Decree for the “Protection of People and State”:**
With this law, the police could arrest anyone they considered anti-Nazi or a political threat to the state.
2. **March 23, 1933; The Enabling Act, “Law for the Relieving of the Distress of People and Reich”:**
The *Reichstag* (Parliament) voted that Hitler and his cabinet now had the right to make laws on their own.
 - a. Hitler gained the legal right to rule by decree (direct order).
 - b. Hitler could remove basic civil rights from Germans he determined were dangerous to the *Reich*.

NOTE TO TEACHER: This law and the emergency decree of February 28 were not specifically aimed at Jews but would soon be used to persecute them as well as political opponents.

3. **April 1933; “Law for the Restoration of a Professional Civil Service”:** This law, the first anti-Jewish law, removed “non-Aryans” (Jews) from the civil service. Included in the civil service in Germany were postal, fire, and police departments, the courts, railroads and public schools. It, therefore, included office workers, judges, lawyers, railroads conductors, public school teachers, etc.
4. **April 1933; “Law Regarding the Admission to the Bar”:** Persons of “non-Aryan descent” (Jews) and/or pro-Communists could not practice law.
5. **April 1933; “Law Against the Overcrowding of German Schools and Institutions of Higher Learning”:** The number of “non-Aryan” (Jewish) students was reduced in public and private schools.
6. **July 14, 1933;** The Nazi Party was officially declared the only legitimate political party in Germany.

7. September 1935; “Reich Citizenship Law” and the “Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor” (Nuremberg Laws):

- a. According to the Nuremberg Laws, people were of the Jewish “race” if one grandparent was considered Jewish or if they considered themselves members of the Jewish “race.” A grandparent was considered Jewish if he or she had belonged to a Jewish religious *gemeinde* or community.
- b. The first of these laws reclassified Jews as “subjects” rather than “citizens” and, thereby, removed basic civil rights from them.
- c. The second of these laws was directed at governing private life.
 - 1) It prohibited intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews.
 - 2) Sexual intercourse was forbidden between Jews and non-Jews.
 - 3) Jews could not employ non-Jewish women under age 45 as domestic helpers.
 - 4) Because of this last provision, Jews were forbidden from staying in hotels where non-Jews under 45 were employed. (Guests of hotels were considered “employers” of hotel employees.)

NOTE TO TEACHER: The Nuremberg Laws made it possible to begin to carry out policies of discrimination and exclusion by removing civil rights. The *legal* definition of a “race” was now dependent upon membership in a religious group.

B. Consequences of the Laws:

1. **Concentration Camps Open:** Because of arrest of political opponents after the laws of February 28 and March 23, 1933, the prisons became overcrowded. To relieve this problem, concentration camps were opened.
 - a. The largest camp was DACHAU, near Munich. This concentration camp opened on March 21, 1933, for “the enemies of the *Reich*.”
 - b. Prisoners in these camps were potential, imagined or real political opponents of the Nazis.
 - 1) They included socialists, communists, Catholics who had spoken out against the ideas of Hitler, some Protestant clergymen, newspaper editors and reporters, labor leaders (trade unionists) and others.
 - 2) Some of these opponents were Jews, but they were arrested because of their “political affiliations.”

3. **Removal of Jews:** Anti-Jewish legislation was aimed at eliminating Jews from the German economy and society.
 - a. In April 1933, five thousand Jews were dismissed from the civil service.
 - b. Eventually, Jews were forbidden to practice law, medicine and pharmacy and were removed from other businesses as well.
 - c. Jews who were excluded by law from their professions were now forced to do other work in order to make a living.
 - d. Eventually, all German Jews were forced to abandon their homes and businesses.

C. Expulsion, Violence and Reaction:

1. **Deportations:** In October 1938, over 17,000 Jews of Polish citizenship were expelled from Germany to a Polish border town.
 - a. Those expelled were quarantined in barns under deplorable conditions.
 - b. Among the deportees was the Grynszpan family.
 - 1) One of Mr. Grynszpan's sons, Herschel, a seventeen year old boy who had been born in Germany, was a student in Paris.
 - 2) Mr. Grynszpan sent Herschel a post card describing the deportation scene.
 - 3) The young Grynszpan, furious at the news from his father, went to the German embassy in Paris and shot the first official he met, Ernst vom Rath, on November 6, 1938. Three days later, vom Rath died.
2. **The Kristallnacht (Night of the Broken Glass):** Joseph Goebbels, Minister of Propaganda, delivered an inflammatory anti-Jewish speech on the night of November 9, 1938.
 - a. The shooting of vom Rath was the excuse for the nation-wide pogrom, anti-Jewish riots, which followed for the next two days in Germany and Austria.
 - b. Shops, synagogues and homes were broken into and destroyed by SA men all over the country.
 - 1) One hundred ninety-one synagogues were looted and/or burned.
 - 2) Seven thousand five hundred shops were destroyed and thousands of homes attacked.
 - 3) Thirty-five Jews were killed.

- c. Members of the SS and police arrested over 30,000 Jews and imprisoned them in concentration camps.
 - 1) This was the first mass arrest of Jews.
 - 2) Families were not notified about where the prisoners were or why they had been arrested.
 - 3) Most prisoners were released within a month but only after humiliating and degrading treatment in the camps.

3. **General Reaction was Quick:**

- a. The violence in the streets was reported in foreign newspapers.
- b. Many German citizens were horrified at the sight of synagogues in flames or innocent Germans—Jewish Germans—beaten in the streets and taken away.
- c. German insurance companies were stuck with the bills for the damages.
- d. The first public protests against the government's anti-Jewish policies were voiced.
- e. The American Ambassador to Germany was temporarily withdrawn in protest of the violence.

4. **Nazi Reaction:**

- a. Goering called a meeting of leading officials on November 12, 1938.
 - 1) Goering, Himmler and Heydrich, along with the German insurance representative, were enraged at the random violence.
 - 2) They expressed their disapproval to Goebbels for instigating the pogrom
 - a) They were not annoyed by the murdering of Jews but by the disorganized and unprofitable methods used by the SA.
 - b) They were also concerned about the unfavorable publicity.
 - 3) Goering informed the others that such violence would not occur again.
 - 4) The government would force the Jewish community organizations to pay a penalty fee of one billion *Reichsmarks* (about \$400 million at the time) which would cover the insurance companies' losses.

- b. Goering declared that the Jews were to be removed legally and systematically from the economy “once and for all.”
 - 1) Goering stated that all anti-Jewish actions must now be coordinated by a central office.
 - 2) Referring to the random violence of the *Kristallnacht*, Goering’s final words were: “I want to eliminate once and for all these individual actions of SA men.”

NOTE TO TEACHER: Jews were to be increasingly isolated from the rest of German society so there would be no feeling of obligation toward them on the part of German citizens. The *Kristallnacht* showed Nazi leaders that the German population would not yet tolerate open violence even though there had been no protest against the anti-Jewish laws. The removal of the Jews would, therefore, proceed legally. The *Kristallnacht* was the last pogrom in Germany.

D. Development of Ghettos:

1. **World War II Begins:** Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, and the European War began.
2. **Defeat:** Poland fell to Germany in three weeks.
 - a. As prearranged in the secret Nazi-Soviet Pact between Hitler and Stalin (leader of the Soviet Union), Eastern Poland was occupied by the Soviet Union and Germany took Western Poland ([see map](#))
 - b. With this invasion, the Third *Reich* now included 2 ¼ million more Jews than before the war.
3. **Ghettos:** Heydrich ordered that Jews from Polish rural areas and small towns be forced into major cities like Lodz, Krakow and Warsaw where they could be concentrated in ghettos that were to be created ([see map](#))
 - a. Ghettos were to be located only in cities that were railway junctions.
 - b. Frequently, Jews were given less than an hour to prepare to leave their homes for the ghetto.
 - c. Jews were usually told that they were allowed to bring only one suitcase filled with their possessions into the ghetto.
 - d. Councils of Jewish Elders were to be set up in each ghetto.

- 1) The councils were created so that the Jews would “administer their own needs.”
 - a) The “needs” might include care for the sick, orphans, elderly or the distribution of food.
 - b) The needs might include whatever else each separate community might think necessary.
- 2) The councils might include whatever else each separate community might think necessary.
- 3) The councils were to provide complete census information of the Jewish population.
- 4) By 1942, the councils were to provide the required numbers of Jews for deportation on demand from German authorities.
 - a) Jews were told they would be “resettled” in the East.
 - b) In fact, they were taken to death camps.
- e. Food was drastically rationed. Eventually orders were sent from Himmler that food supplies to the ghettos were to stop altogether.
- f. Living space was reduced to bare minimum: 8 to 15 people lived in a small room.
- g. Curfews were enforced.
- h. Sanitation facilities and running water became terribly inadequate.
- i. Diseases like typhus and dysentery broke out within days.
- j. Malnutrition was commonplace and people began to starve.
- k. Because there was a charge to bury the dead and because the cemetery was outside the ghetto, many of those who died were left on the streets for burial details to collect. The men in these burial details picked up the bodies, put them on wagons and removed them to be buried in mass graves outside the ghetto.
- l. Jews were forced into labor gangs where they were abused, humiliated and some murdered.

NOTE TO TEACHER: When Heydrich issued his “Concise Order” for the forming of ghettos, much was left up to the interpretation and responsibility of those who received the

order. SS commanders knew that Jews could be killed. However, at this point, there was no plan for the annihilation of *all* Jews, no clear statement of a “Final Solution.”

Nowhere in Heydrich’s instructions does the word “kill” appear and nowhere does the term “Final Solution” appear. The deliberate vagueness left room for individual decision on the part of the officials and German officers who received the memorandum. Thus, for example, while all ghettos were surrounded by armed guards, some commanders ordered ghettos to be enclosed by barbed wire or, as in Warsaw, by brick wall. By 1944, one-half million people had died of starvation, disease or mistreatment in ghettos.

4. **Escape:** A few Jews felt that the Nazi system of persecution was something different from anything that had come before in thousands of years of anti-Jewish persecution. A few proposed escape from the ghettos.
 - a. **Sanctity of the Family:** The German authorities recognized the importance of family life in Jewish tradition.
 - b. **Collective Responsibility:** The German authorities operated on the principle of “collective responsibility.”
 - 1) Thus, if any individuals escaped or refused to obey orders, the Germans threatened to kill their families
 - 2) Anyone who thought of resistance or escape had to decide whether or not to sacrifice the lives of their families and friends.

E. Summary:

1. **First Stage:** The first stage in the preparations that led to the “Final Solution: involved anti-Jewish legislation. The goal in this stage was to isolate Jews from the rest of German society and, finally, remove them.
2. **Second Stage:** The second stage involved forced expulsion from Germany by deportation to Poland based on the laws passed in the first stage.
3. **Third Stage:** The third stage in the process was the confinement of Jews to ghettos in the countries occupied by the German armies.