



Germany

Country located in central Europe. During World War I (which lasted from 1914 to 1918), Germany fought alongside The Austro-Hungarian Empire and Italy against Great Britain, France, the United States, and Russia. After the defeat of Germany by the Allies, the democratic Weimar Republic was established in Germany, under which the country's Jews enjoyed complete legal equality. However, the Weimar period was fraught with unemployment and economic disaster. The Allies demanded large repatriation sums from Germany. Economic desperation in Germany led to great turbulence: extremist political parties gained momentum, including the Nazi Party on one end of the political spectrum and the Communist Party on the other. Both gathered many new followers in the late 1920s and early 1930s, and both proposed radical solutions to the country's economic and social woes.

In January 1933, Adolf Hitler and his Nazi Party rose to power in Germany. Hitler soon became the country's dictator, and declared the establishment of the Third Reich—his name for the new German Empire. During their initial years in power, the Nazis attempted to redraw the face of Germany. One of their main goals was to erase the line between Government and Party institutions. For example, after 1936 both the police (a Government institution) and the SS (a Party institution) were directed by the same man, Heinrich Himmler. In addition, many police officers acquired SS ranks. The Nazis also sought to restrict and supervise German art and culture, thus the 1933 public burning of books that were not approved of by the Nazi Party.

During the first years of the Nazi regime, all those who opposed the Nazis by any means, were imprisoned in the newly established concentration camps and were forced to stay there until their opposition had been suppressed. Many Germans truly accepted Nazism, whilst others did not. However, they conformed in public in order to avoid confrontation. Very few Germans actively resisted the Nazis, and on the surface, Germany became a Nazi society.

Hitler's foreign policy successes amassed before World War II even started, gained him immense public support. Several regions were either reunited

with, or simply annexed to Germany. For example the Saar region in 1935, Austria and the Sudeten region of Czechoslovakia in 1938, and Bohemia and Moravia in 1939. On September 1, 1939 German troops invaded Poland, launching World War II. In the spring of 1940, the fighting extended to Western Europe, to the Balkans in the spring of 1941, and to the Soviet Union in late June of that year. The Germans gained victory after victory; the Nazis were fighting to ensure their place of dominance in Europe and by extension the world, and to gain living space, or Lebensraum, for the German People. Germans wished to reshape the world in their own racial image, which included solving the so-called “Jewish problem.” However, their fortunes changed after their defeat by the Soviets at Stalingrad in early 1943. The Allied invasions of Italy in 1943 and France in 1944, sealed Nazi Germany's fate, and its final defeat befell them in May 1945.

In 1933 when Hitler rose to power, some 566,000 Jews, by a racial definition were living in Germany, making up less than 1% of the entire population. One-third of those Jews lived in the capital Berlin, and another third resided in other big cities. Immediately after the Nazis took control of the government, they commenced excluding Jews from German society and stripped them of their legal and civil rights. Jews were fired from their jobs, not allowed to study at universities, and were kept out of German cultural life. In September 1935 the Germans passed the racial Nuremberg Laws which led to the definition of who was to be considered a Jew, further isolating Jews from the rest of the society and stripping them of their citizenship. In addition, Antisemitic measures continued to be implemented, culminating in the destructive *Kristallnacht* pogrom of November 1938, during which hundreds of synagogues were burned down, Jewish homes and businesses attacked and pillaged, and thousands of Jews abused and sent to concentration camps.

In response to the constantly multiplying anti-Jewish measures, the Jews of Germany set up a comprehensive network of “self-help” associations. Their most important goal was to facilitate emigration, however they also set up organizations for relief within Germany itself. These included adult education centers (see also Mittelstelle fuer Juedische Erwachsenenbildung), cultural associations (see also Cultural Union of German Jews), social welfare bodies,



and the umbrella organization called the Reich Representation of German Jews.

Between 1933 and 1941 about 346,000 Jews emigrated from Germany, most before the outbreak of the war. Between *Kristallnacht* and the outbreak of the war, emigration reached panic level proportions.

In September 1941, all Jews in Germany over the age of six were ordered to don the Jewish badge (see also Badge, Jewish). The deportation of German Jews began in 1940, when Jews from Stettin were sent to Poland and Jews from Baden and the Saar region were sent to France. Most were later transported to their deaths. Deportations from the rest of Germany began in October 1941. Initially, Jews were sent to the ghettos of Eastern Europe, but later deportation transports were sent directly to Auschwitz and other extermination camps. Approximately 200,000 German Jews died during the Holocaust. About 137,000 were deported from Germany, of whom 128,000 were murdered. The rest of the murdered German Jews had fled to countries that later fell under Nazi influence. In Germany itself about 20,000 Jews survived, including three-quarters of the *Mischlinge*.