

Nazi Racial Policy: Persecution and Genocide

Why did the Aryans fear their "inferiors"?



In the nineteenth century, Charles Darwin published his theory of evolution: all creatures change over time, with the strongest surviving: THE SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST. Many applied this theory to humans (Social Darwinism.) The Nazis believed that they were ethnically ARYAN; superior to all other humans due to their greater level of intelligence and capacity for hard work. The Nazis believed that the reason for Germany's weakness in the 1920s was that many Aryan men had been killed in the Great War. Once in power, the Nazis encouraged all single Aryans to marry each other and produce as many Aryan children as possible.

It was essential to behave like an Aryan. All Aryans had to make a positive contribution to the VOLK (community). All "unproductive" people – the homeless, physically or mentally disabled, beggars, gypsies, homosexuals, Jews, alcoholics, prostitutes and juvenile delinquents – were

considered dangerous to the volk. They threatened the "purity" of the Aryan race, and had to be relegated or removed from society. Nazi theories were of course ridiculous.

When Berlin hosted the Olympic Games in 1936, Hitler expected his Aryan sportsmen to win every event. Although the German athletes did well, the black American sprinter **JESSE OWENS**, who won several gold medals, overshadowed them. Hitler watched Owens defeat his Aryan sprinters, but left the Olympic stadium rather than have to shake Owens' hand and present him with his gold medals.



Propaganda for Nazi Germany's [T-4 Euthanasia Program](#): "This person suffering from hereditary defects costs the community 60,000 Reichsmark during his lifetime. Fellow German, that is your money, too." from the [Office of Racial Policy's Neues Volk](#).

What groups did the Nazis persecute?

Contrary to popular belief, the Jews are not the only people who suffered from the atrocities of the Nazi Germany. Other groups 'failed' Hitler's genetic scrutiny and were considered [Untermensch](#) (or "sub-humans.") Members of these groups were compelled to wear a coloured triangle on their clothes to mark them out in public:

- Gypsies (brown)
- Homosexuals (pink)
- Jehovah's Witnesses (purple)
- African-Germans
- Political opponents (red)
- Criminals (green)

"Our starting point is not the individual: We do not subscribe to the view that one should feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, or clothe the naked ... Our objectives are different: We must have a healthy people in order to prevail in the world."

[Joseph Goebbels](#), 1938



[Eva Justin](#) of the 'Racial Hygiene and Demographic Biology Research Unit' measuring the skull of a [Romani](#) woman.



"We do not stand alone": Nazi poster from 1936 with flags of other countries with compulsory sterilization legislation and a shield with the name and date of enactment of the German sterilization law.

The socially 'unfit' : How did the Nazis deal with 'burdens on the "volk"?

PROPAGANDA: as soon as the Nazis gained power, they began a campaign to stir up resentment against these groups.

STERILIZATION: in July 1933, the Nazis passed a Sterilization Law. This allowed for the compulsory sterilization of the "simple minded and chronic alcoholics". Between 1934 and 1945 around 335,000 "undesirable" men and women were sterilized to prevent them "infecting" the Aryan race.

CONCENTRATION CAMPS: by 1936, many "burdens" were being sent to concentration camps. In one in 1937, 11,000 beggars and homeless were arrested and sent to Buchenwald. They were never seen or heard from again.

EUTHANASIA: in 1939, Hitler began a secret campaign to exterminate many mentally and physically limited babies, children and teenagers by starvation or lethal injection.

When news of this leaked to the German public in 1941, Hitler was forced to abandon the policy. Nevertheless, in 2 years 72,000 children had been exterminated on Hitler's orders.



Why did Hitler persecute the Jews in particular?

Jews had been outcasts in Europe for over 1,400 years, after they had been expelled from Palestine. Many European nations were ANTI-SEMITIC (hated Jews); believing Jews were Christ-killers and money-lenders. Germany was no exception. In 1930, Jews made up less than 1% of the German population; they made up 16% of all German lawyers and 17% of all German bankers. Many Germans were jealous of the financial success of this group on the fringes of German society.

How did the Nazis treat the Jews 1933-1939?

As soon as they came to power, the Nazis began a systematic persecution of Germany's Jewish population:

- › **April 1933:** One day boycott of all Jewish businesses.
- › **May 1935:** Jews banned from the German army.
- › **September 1935:** NUREMBURG LAWS: Jews no longer German citizens but "subjects". No Jewish-Aryan marriages allowed.
- › **September 1937:** many Jewish businesses confiscated.
- › **April 1938:** All Jews had to register their property, making it easier for the Nazis to confiscate.
- › **June-July 1938:** No Jewish doctor, dentist or lawyer was allowed to treat Aryans for fear of "contamination".
- › **October 1938:** All Jews had to have a large "J" stamped on their passports, making it difficult for them to leave the country.



- › **November 9th-10th 1938:** KRISTALLNACHT "the night of the broken glass". Nazi storm-troopers destroyed 400 synagogues and 7,500 Jewish businesses. Jew removed from the German economy.
- › **November 12th 1938:** much of the property damaged on Kristallnacht had been rented by Germans to Jews. Jewish shop owners were fined 1 billion reichmarks for the damage.
- › **November 15th 1938:** Jewish students could only attend Jewish schools.
- › **December 1938:** all remaining Jewish businesses were confiscated.
- › **January 1939:** all Jewish women to be called "Sarah", all Jewish men "Israel".
- › **March 12th 1939:** 30,000 Jews arrested and sent to concentration camps.



1935 Chart from Nazi Germany used to explain the [Nuremberg Laws](#). The Nuremberg Laws of 1935 employed a [pseudo-scientific basis](#) for racial discrimination against Jews. People with four German grandparents (white circles) were of "German blood," while people were classified as Jews if they were descended from three or more Jewish grandparents (black circles in top row right). Having one or more Jewish grandparents made someone a Mischling (of mixed blood)

From Persecution to Genocide 1939-1945

As the Nazis conquered most of Europe, they gained control over large numbers of Jews, many of whom had fled Germany after the Nazis came to power. The Nazis were faced with a problem, how to rid themselves of all these Jews. Their first idea was mass executions: in the period June-December 1941, the SS (a special unit of the Nazis) shot 500,000 Russian and Polish Jews.



A policy called THE FINAL SOLUTION was developed by the Nazis to deal with the Jews. All Jews were to wear a yellow star and be transported to GHETTOS (walled sections of Polish cities). Many Jews died in the dreadful living conditions of the ghettos. Those who survived were transported in cattle trucks to concentration (or death) camps, which

mostly were situated in Poland to hide their existence from the German people. Conditions in the death camps all but defy description.

When it seemed that Germany was going to lose the war, leading Nazis ordered the destruction of the death camps. But the speed of the Allied advance, coupled with the sheer size and scale of the death camps meant that Allied troops liberated most of the death camps before the Nazis could destroy them.

“Not counting Jews, the Nazis killed about 2,400,000 Poles, 3,000,000 Ukrainians, 1,400 Byelorussians, and 1,593,000 ethnic Russians, all Slavs. They were often murdered because they were Slavs, as Jews were murdered because they were Jews, and the total Slavs thus killed amounts to 10,547,000, many more than Jews killed.”

Victims	Killed
Jews	5.9 million
Soviet POWs	2-3 million
Ethnic Poles	1.8-2 million
Romani	220,000-1,500,000
Disabled	200,000-250,000
Freemasons	80,000
Slovenes	20,000-25,000
Homosexuals	5,000-15,000
Jehovah's Witnesses	2,500-5,000

Did the German people know about the death camps?

This is a very difficult question to answer. The evidence seems to suggest that they did not. Although it would be easy to blame the German people as a whole, the truth is much more complex

"the road to Auschwitz was built by hate, but paved with indifference".¹

Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich, Ian Kershaw

The Nazis had given up their campaign to exterminate the mentally and physically disabled when the German public found out about it. As a result, they had taken more care to hide the existence of the death camps from the German people. Most of them were situated in Poland and called “labour camps”. Those in Germany itself were in remote locations.

Many Germans must have had their suspicions, but when they were confronted with the truth – the terrible medical experiments performed on Jews, gold fillings ripped from Jews mouths, the gas chambers, lampshades made from human skin – their reaction was one of shock and horror. The Allied formed a denazification squad that made movies about the holocaust. Every German was compelled to watch the movies. There was one example of two teenage girls who were seen laughing as they left the movie theatre, They were arrested and forced to watch the movie again alone in the theatre under armed guard. Confronted with these facts, it did not take long for the Germans to be denazified.

Questions:

1. What groups did the Nazi consider untermensch?
2. How were threats to the Volk treated?
3. What steps did the Nazis take to destroy the Jews before deciding to sent them to Concentration/Death camps?
4. How did the Nazi treatment of the untermensch help unify Germany?
5. Could these things happen in the United States?

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