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# Oppression



The Nazi regime was characterised (To describe the nature of something.) by the brutal oppression and persecution of Jewish people and other minorities. The Nazis aimed to completely exclude Jews and other minorities from everyday life.

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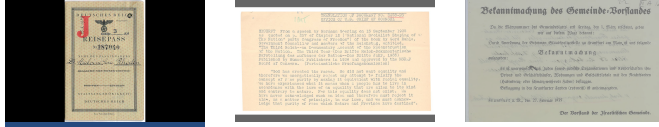
Whilst not the primary focus of the Nazi regime its first few years, persecution started from the moment that the Nazis entered power and almost continuously escalated.

This section will explore what forms of oppression the Nazis used against the different groups in German society.

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## Antisemitic laws

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The Jews were the most persecuted group of people under the Nazis. Nazi ideology was, at its heart, extremely antisemitic. Between 1933 and 1938, over four hundred antisemitic laws were enacted. These laws limited every area of Jewish life.

One of the first laws enacted was the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service on the 7 April 1933, which ordered that Jews were no longer allowed to work for the Civil Service (The umbrella term for all government departments which help the administrative running of government, excluding the armed forces. Examples of civil service roles include judges and doctors.)

. This was quickly followed by the Law Against Overcrowding in Schools and Universities on the 25 April 1933, which limited Jewish students in German schools to a maximum of 1.5% of the total intake. Just four months later, on 29 September 1933, the Hereditary Farm Law was passed, banning Jews from owning or running farms.

The laws above are just a few examples of the range of persecutory and exclusionary laws that the Nazis passed.

## Nuremberg Laws

The Nuremberg Laws, announced at the Nazi Party annual rally in Nuremberg in late 1935, marked an escalation in the persecution of the Jews.

There were two main laws. The Reich Citizenship Law declared that only 'Aryans (In Nazi terminology, this word was used describe people of North Western European descent with 'pure blood'. Typical and desirable physical traits included blonde hair and blue eyes.)' were Reich citizens. As Jews were considered non-'Aryan', this law stripped them of their German citizenship and made them stateless in their own country.

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The Nazis defined anyone with Jewish ancestors as Jews, even if someone who only had one grandparent who had converted from Judaism to Christianity as a child. This made lots of people who had previously thought not thought of themselves as Jewish, or those who no longer practiced Judaism, potential targets of persecution.

The second Nuremberg law was the Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honour. This law banned marriages and sexual intercourse between Jews and 'Aryans', and forbid the employment of 'Aryan' women under the age of 45 in Jewish households.

These two laws aimed to racially cleanse and protect German people of true 'Aryan' descent. For Jews and people of Jewish descent, they were terrifying. The laws marked a new period of persecution in Nazi Germany.

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## The Evian Conference

Throughout the 1930s there was a large increase in those attempting to emigrate (To leave one country to go to permanently live in another.) from Germany due to the increasing persecution of the Jews and other minority 'non-Aryan' groups.

Those attempting to emigrate often found it difficult to get the visas (A document issued on a passport by the authorities of a country to show that the bearer may travel to that country.) necessary to enter other countries. This was because other countries had low quotas for immigration (The process of people applying to live permanently in a different country to their own), partly due to the world depression following the Wall Street Crash of 1929.

An international conference was called to discuss the growing refugee problem following pressure from the US President Franklin D. Roosevelt. The conference was held in July 1938 in Evian, France.

Almost all of the 32 countries represented at the conference agreed that there was a growing German Jewish refugee problem, and expressed sympathy for those persecuted. However, few offered to extend their quotas or contribute to a practical solution.

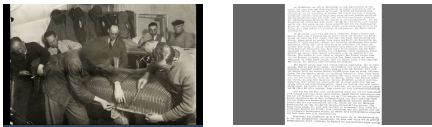
In the end, almost no real action came from the conference.

The Evian Conference made it clear to the Nazis that although other countries didn't necessarily approve of their persecution of the Jews, they would not actively take any steps against the Nazis, or go out of their way to help the Jews and other victims of Nazi Germany to emigrate.

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## The Polenaktion

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The *Polenaktion* ('Polish Action' in German) was the first forced expulsion of Jews from Germany and Austria and took place between the 27 to 29 October 1938.

From the late nineteenth century many Jews had emigrated (To leave one country to go to permanently live in another.) from Eastern Europe to Germany, especially to larger cities such as Berlin and Hamburg. There were approximately 50,000 Jews with Polish citizenship living in Germany in 1938. Antisemitic sentiment against Eastern European Jews in Germany was widespread. As early as 1920-1921 camps were set up to detain unemployed migrant Jewish men, before they were deported out of the country. From 1933 the Nazis also began to carry out individual expulsions of Eastern European Jews, often fabricating charges for arrests.

Antisemitism was also common in Poland even before the country was invaded by Germany, as demonstrated by waves of pogroms (An organised massacre of a particular ethnic or religious group of people.) targeting Polish Jews between 1935 and 1937. On 6 October 1938, the Polish parliament passed a law stating that any Pole who had resided abroad for more than five years would have their citizenship removed. The Polish government feared that the annexation of Austria by Germany would lead many Jews with Polish citizenship living in Germany to flee back to Poland.

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The Nazis saw this plan as a potential obstacle to their own plans to expel Eastern European Jews. They gave an ultimatum to the Polish government that if it did not retract the law, Germany would deport Polish citizens before the end of October.

A nationwide campaign to expel Polish Jews began on 27 October. The people targeted were arrested in their homes and were only allowed to pack a few essential belongings. They were then transported to the German-Polish border on special trains, to the towns of Chnojnice, Zbąszyń and Bytom. They had to cross the border on foot, often at night and accompanied by armed guards.

25,000 Polish Jews were expelled from Germany in a few days. They received little support from the Polish state when they arrived in Poland. Help came from local Jewish communities and organisations, who organised the building of refugee shelters and camps in 116 different Polish towns.

Jewish aid organisations from the UK also coordinated transports of children from Poland to London. Approximately 150 children reached UK on these *Kindertransports*.

Expulsions of Polish Jews did not stop after the *Polenaktion* of October 1938. An estimated 12,000 people were told to leave the German Reich in smaller campaigns in the following months, and by July 1939 almost all Jews in Germany with a Polish passport had received an expulsion order. Most people who were expelled to Poland were eventually murdered.

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## Kristallnacht

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*Kristallnacht*, also referred to as the November Pogrom or the Night of Broken Glass, was a series of violent antisemitic attacks which took place across Germany on the 9 – 10 November 1938. The name refers to the broken glass lining the streets after the pogroms.

Antisemitic laws and decrees had been increasing from the time that the Nazis rose to power, with over 400 passed between 1933 and 1938. *Kristallnacht* marked a dramatic escalation in the Nazi's treatment of Jews.

### **Assassination of Ernst Vom Rath**

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*Kristallnacht* started in response to the murder of Ernst vom Rath, a German official in Paris.

Vom Rath was shot by Herschel Grynszpan, a seventeen-year-old Jewish teenager, on the 7 November 1938. The German press widely reported on the attack and vom Rath's injuries.

Grynszpan stated that he shot vom Rath to bring the world's attention to the plight of his family and other Jews affected during the

Polenaktion (The Polenaktion was the movement of thousands of Jews by the SS and German police who had been born in Poland but were living in Germany, back to Poland in October 1938. When they arrived in Poland the Polish guards sent them back to Germany, and they were then stuck between the two borders without food or shelter in harsh conditions.)

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The *Polenaktion* (<https://www.theholocaustexplained.org/life-in-nazi-occupied-europe/oppression/the-polenaktion/>) was the movement of thousands of Jews in October 1938 by the SS and German police who had been born in Poland but were living in Germany, back to Poland.

When the Polish Jews arrived in Poland, Polish guards sent them back to Germany, and they were then stuck between the two borders without food or shelter in difficult conditions. One of the families involved was the Grynszpan family, whose son Herschel lived in Paris.

On the 9 November, vom Rath died of his injuries.

That evening, as the Nazi Party leadership met in a Beer Hall to observe the anniversary of the Beer Hall Putsch (<https://www.theholocaustexplained.org/the-nazi-rise-to-power/the-early-years-of-the-nazi-party/the-beer-hall-putsch/>),

Joseph Goebbels (A German politician and a leading member of the Nazi Party. After joining the Nazi Party in 1924, he became the Gauleiter for Berlin in 1926. In 1933, following the Nazis rise to power, he became Minister of Propaganda. Goebbels' racist and antisemitic beliefs, which were widely advocated through every means possible in his role as Minister for Propaganda, played a key role in the persecution of Jews in Germany. In 1944, Goebbels became the Reich Plenipotentiary for Total War. Following Hitler's suicide in 1945, Goebbels became chancellor for Germany. The following day, Goebbels and his wife poisoned their six children, and then committed suicide themselves.)

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gave a speech. He ordered that all Jewish businesses and synagogues should be destroyed in response to vom Rath's death. The police were told to stay away and not interfere with the attacks.

Goebbels later wrote in his diary on the 10 November 1938:

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*I go to the party reception in the Old Town Hall. A gigantic event. I describe the situation to the Führer. He decides: let the demonstrations continue. Withdraw the police. For once the Jews should feel the rage of the people.... I issue corresponding instructions to the police and the party. Then I speak briefly to the officials of the party. A storm of applause. They all rush to the telephones. Now the people shall act!*

## Violence

Violence spread across the nation in almost every city and town. Whilst the attacks were led by the SA, citizens, and specifically young people, joined in to aggressively attack and cruelly humiliate Jewish women, men and children: in their homes, in their businesses, and on the streets.

Over 7,500 businesses had their windows smashed by the SA and Hitler Youth. Over 1,200 synagogues were desecrated, looted and burned and at least 90 people were killed.

## Eyewitness Testimonies

In the months following November 1938, [Alfred Wiener and his colleagues at the JCIO in Amsterdam](https://www.theholocaustexplained.org/resistance-responses-collaboration/responses/the-creation-of-the-wiener-holocaust-library/) (<https://www.theholocaustexplained.org/resistance-responses-collaboration/responses/the-creation-of-the-wiener-holocaust-library/>) collected over 350 contemporary testimonies and reports ([https://www.pogromnovember1938.co.uk/viewer/search/-/PI:\\*/1/-/](https://www.pogromnovember1938.co.uk/viewer/search/-/PI:*/1/-/)) of the November Pogrom in Germany and Austria, including the three testimonies below:

[Report by Mr. Frank, Düsseldorf, regarding deaths and looting during the November Pogrom](https://www.pogromnovember1938.co.uk/viewer/fulltext/93614/en/) (<https://www.pogromnovember1938.co.uk/viewer/fulltext/93614/en/>)

[List of synagogues burned down in Berlin, Cologne and Halberstadt](https://www.pogromnovember1938.co.uk/viewer/fulltext/93688/1/eng/) (<https://www.pogromnovember1938.co.uk/viewer/fulltext/93688/1/eng/>)

[Report regarding the November Pogrom and its aftermath in Nordhausen](https://www.pogromnovember1938.co.uk/viewer/fulltext/94034/1/eng/) (<https://www.pogromnovember1938.co.uk/viewer/fulltext/94034/1/eng/>)

## Mass Arrests of Jewish Men

From the 10 to the 16 November, over 25,000 men were arrested and sent to concentration camps (Concentration camps are where groups of people are held under armed guard outside of any judicial process for an indefinite period of time. Camp prisoners are sometimes made to complete forced labour. The Nazis built hundreds of these camps all over Europe. These camps were unsanitary, overcrowded and brutal. Concentration camps were for civilians used [Back to the](#) Nazi era, for example in the Boer War.)

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, such as

Buchenwald (One of the largest concentration camps in Germany. It was located five miles north of the city of Weimar. The camp was established on 16 July 1937, and liberated on 11 April 1945. A total of 238,980 prisoners from 30 countries passed through this camp. Of those, 43,045 were killed.)

and

Dachau (The first Nazi concentration camp opened on 22 March 1933 in the grounds of an abandoned factory. The camp was initially created to hold political prisoners, but soon expanded to hold all Nazi prisoners. Dachau had approximately 100 sub camps. It was liberated on the 29 April 1945.)

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. A smaller number of women were also arrested. Conditions in the camps were horrific and both men and women endured extreme violence. Hundreds of people died from the brutal treatment.

The greater majority of German and Austrian Jews incarcerated during the November pogrom were gradually liberated between November 18, 1938 and the spring of 1939 on the condition that they undertake to emigrate without delay leaving behind most of their belongings.

## Aftermath

The events of *Kristallnacht* were widely reported across the world, and met with reactions of shock and disgust from the international community.

Despite this, again, very few countries made practical steps to increase their quotas for refugees. The Quaker and Jewish community in Britain did secure visas for 10,000 child refugees in a scheme known as the *Kindertransport* (<https://www.theholocaustexplained.org/resistance-responses-collaboration/responses/kindertransport/>), but this was financed privately and not by the British government.

Emigration for the Jewish community of Germany was difficult. A large amount of the Jews in Germany became even more desperate to leave, relentlessly attempting to obtain visas to any safe country. Some families were successful in this despite the tough conditions they faced.

Approximately 120,000 Jews left Germany between *Kristallnacht* and the outbreak of the Second World War.

The [outbreak of the Second World War](http://outbreak of the Second World War) (<http://outbreak of the Second World War>) made escape almost impossible, shutting down most legitimate (Something which is valid, approved or correct.) methods of emigration.

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## The Impact of Kristallnacht on Jewish Families

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## The Bergmann Family

Ruth and Fred Bergmann were German Jews from Leipzig. They married in 1933, the year Hitler came to power, and had two children Renée and Tommy. Fred was a practising doctor until the beginning of October 1938, after which he was no longer allowed to practice medicine because he was Jewish.

Renée recalled how, two days before *Kristallnacht*, Ruth was purchasing meat from the market when the shopkeepers informed her that 'They're coming for Jewish doctors today.' Ruth ran home with the children and told Fred to hide at the Jewish hospital (*Israelisches Krankenhaus*) where he worked.

In Leipzig alone, more than 500 men were taken to concentration camps during *Kristallnacht*. Upon hearing of the pogrom, Ruth hurriedly packed clothes for the family and took Renée and Tommy to join their father in hiding in the hospital. Whilst all other surgeons had been arrested, Fred was put under house arrest at the hospital. Operations were now carried out under Gestapo (The official secret police of Nazi Germany and German-occupied Europe.) observation. Due to the shortage of staff, the untrained Ruth became Fred's theatre assistant. The Gestapo never questioned her credibility and the family stayed at the hospital for nine months. The family never returned to their apartment.

At the hospital, Fred hid people in the cellar, often those released from camps like Buchenwald. Fred's work was fraught with danger and so the family knew it was imperative for them to leave Germany. Through contact with a Quaker organisation, Ruth secured temporary visas to England.

In September 1939, two days before the outbreak of the war, the family emigrated to England. Ruth and the children lived in a hostel in Cheshire with other female refugees, while Fred was held at Huyton and Douglas internment camps until 1941. Upon release, Fred was offered a position in Emergency Medical Services in Macclesfield. Fred worked as a general practitioner in a surgery in Leytonstone, and the family settled in Wanstead.

## The Callman Family

Hannah and Dr Curt Callman were Jews from Berlin with two daughters Ellen (born in 1920) and Gerda (born in 1925).

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During *Kristallnacht* in 1938, Curt was rounded up and sent to Sachsenhausen. His brother, factory-owner Walter Callmann, effected his release two weeks later. Although Curt had only spent two weeks in the camp, he was unrecognisably emaciated, weak and sick when he returned home.

The two Callman daughters were sent to England in the summer of 1939, Ellen on a domestic servant visa and Gerda via a *Kindertransport* (<https://www.theholocaustexplained.org/resistance-responses-collaboration/responses/kindertransport/>). In late August 1939 Hannah and Curt also tried to obtain visas but were unable to collect them as the British Embassy offices had already closed. The following day the war began, and all hopes of emigration were destroyed.

In 1942, Hannah and Curt were deported to Theresienstadt via Bauschowitz. Having been a lawyer, Curt became a member of the Ghetto court and established a synagogue in the camp, while Hannah worked at a factory. On 16 October 1944, every member of the Ghetto court and other camp dignitaries were deported to Auschwitz. Curt was murdered upon arrival.

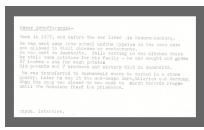
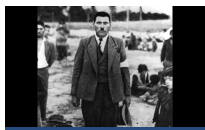
Hannah was not permitted to accompany her husband and survived Theresienstadt. After the liberation of Theresienstadt, Hannah spent six weeks at the collection camp Winzer, then a year in Deggendorf Displaced Persons Camp.

In October 1946, Hannah was finally reunited with her daughters Ellen and Gerda in London. Hannah worked in a clothing factory for many years until receiving restitution money.

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## Roma

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## 1933-1938

Roma (A collective term used to describe a group of people who historically emigrated to Europe from northern India approximately one thousand years ago. Roma are often referred to in Britain as Gypsies. The Nazis believed Roma were racially inferior and a threat to the racial strength of the 'Aryan' master race. As such, the Nazis and their collaborators extensively persecuted and murdered Roma across occupied Europe.)

and Sinti (Sinti refers to Roma people of western and central European origin.) were persecuted before, during and after the Holocaust.

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Following the Nazi rise to power, the persecution of all Roma in Germany increased and eventually

became

genocidal (Relating to or involving genocide (an act committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group).)

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. Prior to the Second World War, approximately 30,000 Roma lived in Germany, and just under a million lived across Europe.

The Nazis believed Roma were 'non-Aryan' and an inferior race which had genetically inherited criminal qualities. This belief was reinforced by the research of the eugenic (The science of regulating a population through controlled breeding. Eugenic scientists aim to eliminate traits believed to be undesirable, and emphasise those that are desirable in order to 'improve' races of human beings. In Nazi Germany, eugenic scientists aimed to ensure the survival of the 'Aryan' race and destroy other races, such as Roma or Jews.)

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scientist

Dr. Robert Ritter (A German doctor who was born on the 14 May 1901 and died on the 15 April 1951. Ritter was a racial scientist who became prominent following his appointment as head of the Nazis Racial Hygiene and Demographic Biology Centre in Berlin in 1936. Ritter was primarily focused on the racial study of Roma and Sinti. His research was used to justify the persecution and murder of those that the Nazis deemed undesirable.)

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. As a result of Ritter's research and their racist beliefs about Roma, the Nazis subjected many Roma to forced sterilisations (A medical procedure which makes a human being unable to produce children.) to prevent them from having children.

On 17 June 1936, Heinrich Himmler became Head of the German Police. This new role gave Himmler unlimited control over the terror forces in Germany. Just under two years later, on 16 May 1938, Himmler established the Reich Central Office for Combating the Gypsy Nuisance. This office centralised efforts to persecute Roma living in the Third Reich.

On 8 December 1938, Himmler issued the *Decree for Combating the Gypsy Plague*. Amongst other actions, the decree ordered the creation of a nationwide database of all Roma living in the Third Reich. This database would later be used to round up Roma and put them in forced labour and concentration camps.

Alongside these developments, in the second half of the 1930s, a large number of holding camps were created. These camps designated certain areas of the cities or towns where Roma could live. The camps were created individually by the different regional governments, varying from city to city and between states.

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The initial Roma camps were portrayed as a move to clean up inner cities and remove any

unauthorised dwellings in municipal areas, which often attracted complaints. The camps varied, but most had limited sanitation and were guarded by a police or SS officer. At this stage, most people were free to enter and leave the camps for work or leisure. Despite this, the camps still marked a large escalation in the persecution of Roma, and a huge infringement (To limit or break something.) on people's freedom and privacy.

This was, however, simply the beginning. Following the outbreak of the Second World War, the nature of the camps changed. The rules became stricter, with increased supervision, curfews, and daily head counts of the occupants. In October 1939, a decree was issued banning the movement of Roma. People in the camps also became subject to compulsory labour.

### 1939-1945

The Nazi policy towards the Roma population escalated following the outbreak of war and soon became

genocidal (Relating to or involving genocide (an act committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group).)

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On 27 April 1940, Heydrich issued the *Decree for the Resettlement of the Gypsies*, which aimed to deport all German Roma from the Reich within one year. This decree resulted in 2500 people being deported to the General Government in Poland, before it was suspended in September 1940.

In September 1941, 5,000 Austrian Roma were deported to the Łódź Ghetto, where many of them died from infection or were murdered.

On 16 December 1942, a decree was issued by Himmler to move all Sinti and Roma in Reich Territory to Auschwitz, where a special camp had been built to hold them. Following the order, more than 22,000 Roma (most of the remaining Roma in Germany) were rounded up and sent. Just a few survived.

A number of inhumane medical experimentations took place on Roma in the various concentration camps they ended up in, including the infamous experiments by Dr. Joseph Mengele (A German doctor who was born on the 16 March 1911 and died on the 7 February 1979. Following the Nazi rise to power, Mengele joined the Nazi Party in 1937 and the SS in 1938, eventually making the rank of captain. Mengele is most well-known for his role as a doctor at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Mengele supervised the selection of arriving transports of prisoners, determining who was to be killed and who was to become forced labour. His other main role was

performing human experiments on camp prisoners. Mengele escaped Germany following the end of the Second World War, and died in hiding in 1979 after having a stroke when swimming.)  
 at Auschwitz, and typhus injections at Natzweiler.

In addition to their horrific treatment in camps, Roma were also murdered in their thousands by the *Einsatzgruppen* (A German word used to describe the mobile killing squads of the SS. The *Einsatzgruppen* followed the German *Wehrmacht* into occupied territories throughout the Second World War, where they conducted mass shootings of the Nazis ideological enemies. Approximately two million people were killed by the *Einsatzgruppen* over the course of the Second World War.)

in eastern Europe. The *Einsatzgruppen* conducted mass shootings of any 'undesirable' groups in occupied territories, following behind the invading German Army.

The total number of Roma murdered in the Holocaust is unknown. A number of factors contribute to this. Many of the Roma killed were murdered by the *Einsatzgruppen* or Nazi collaborators in Soviet territories and Yugoslavia, where murders were often not recorded. The Nazis variety of camp categories for Roma (they were classified

*Zigeuner* (The word *Zigeuner* is a German word, used by the Nazis to describe Roma, Sinti and Traveller communities. It is thought to derive from a term meaning 'untouchable' and reflects the history of prejudice and discrimination faced by Roma in Europe.)

, criminals or a-socials (Someone who the Nazis thought to be an undesirable person in society.)

depending on where and when they were imprisoned) also makes calculating a definite figure challenging. Finally, many camp records are incomplete, meaning accurately assessing the number of victims, and different types of victims specifically, is very difficult.

The total number of Roma murdered by the Nazis has been roughly estimated by historians to be between 200,000 to 500,000 people.

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## People with disabilities



People with disabilities were some of the first persecuted under the Nazis.

The Nazis believed that people with disabilities did not, and could not, be a part of the German master race. They believed that they were genetically 'impure', and a financial burden on the state. Ultimately, this view led to the murder of thousands of disabled people.

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## **Sterilisation**

The Nazis started their oppression of people with disabilities shortly after their rise to power. The Law for the Prevention of Genetically Diseased Offspring, more commonly referred to as the Sterilisation Law, was passed on the 14 July 1933. This law named nine disabilities and forced anyone with them to be sterilised (A medical procedure which makes a human being unable to produce children.) .

These disabilities ranged from severe physical deformity to epilepsy, to chronic alcoholism.

The Nazis justified this law by proclaiming it would allow Germany to achieve racial purity by limiting future disabled generations. They based this view on eugenic (The science of regulating a population through controlled breeding. Eugenic scientists aim to eliminate traits believed to be undesirable, and emphasise those that are desirable in order to 'improve' races of human beings. In Nazi Germany, eugenic scientists aimed to ensure the survival of the 'Aryan' race and destroy other races, such as Roma or Jews.)

research. In the 1930s, eugenics was widely believed to be a legitimate science, which was popular across the world. This helped to legitimise the Nazis' view.

The Nazis also stressed the government financial savings if the amount of people with disabilities in Germany decreased.

As a result of the 1933 law, over 400,000 people with disabilities were sterilised.

## **Euthanasia centres**

Following the sterilisation programme, the Nazis persecution of people with disabilities soon escalated. In the Autumn of 1939 the Nazis, led by Phillip Bouhler and Dr. Karl Brandt, initiated a ' euthanasia (The killing of people, who have expressed a desire to die, in a painless way to stop them suffering from an incurable disease. In Nazi Germany the murder of disabled people was falsely termed as euthanasia: it was in fact murder.)

' programme of people with disabilities.

This programme was code named T-4, after the address of its headquarters Tiergartenstrasse 4. Unlike the sterilisation law, T-4 was never formally announced as the Nazis tried to keep the programme a secret.

The programme focused on people with disabilities living in state-run nursing homes or hospitals. Doctors and nurses in these institutions were asked to complete a questionnaire on each patient. The staff in the institutions were told the questionnaire was to collect statistics for the

government. The real purpose of the survey, to establish victims, was concealed. Once identified, the victims were transported on buses to one of the six killing centres: Brandenburg, Gradfeneck, Bernburg, Sonnenstein, Hartheim, Hadamar. Initially, they were murdered via lethal injection (An injection of drugs which is used to kill a human being.) . In 1940, this changed to gassing by carbon monoxide gas, as a cheaper and more effective way of mass killing. Victims were cremated, and their families informed that they had died of natural causes.

This procedure provided the Nazis with a blueprint (A plan.) that they would later refine and replicate on a mass scale in

extermination camps (Extermination camps were camps set up by the Nazis from 1941 to 1945 to murder Jews, Roma, Poles, Slavs, Soviet prisoners, political opponents, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, and others thought to be ideologically undesirable. Over three million people were killed at these camps over the course of the Holocaust.)

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Although the programme was carried out in secrecy, it became hard to conceal and soon became public knowledge. There was considerable public and private outrage over the murders. On the 13 August 1941, Catholic Church minister Clements August Count von Galen protested against the programme in a sermon.

Under pressure from public, Hitler publically ordered a halt to the programme on the 24 August 1941. The gassing centres were dismantled and shipped to the new camps in the occupied east.

In total, 70,273 people were killed at the 'euthanasia' centres between January 1940 and August 1941.

Despite Hitler's public order, the programme was in fact still encouraged to continue in a decentralised (To move something away from or change something from its primary location or form.) form.

Many infants continued to be killed via starvation or lethal injection in individual hospitals across the Third Reich, and people with disabilities continued to be portrayed as 'degenerate' and a burden to the greater German 'Aryan' race.

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## Political prisoners

This pamphlet was issued by the Social Democratic Party (SPD), one of the major opponents of the Nazi regime. It reads 'The revolution against Hitler! The historical task of the German social democracy'. The SPD was banned by the Nazis on the 22 June 1933, but continued to operate in exile. Many of its leadership and supporters were imprisoned and murdered by the Nazis.

Courtesy of The Wiener Holocaust Library (<https://www.wienerlibrary.co.uk/>) Collections.

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In order to ensure total obedience and conformity to their regime, the Nazis suppressed all of their political opponents.

Following the [Reichstag Fire](https://www.theholocaustexplained.org/the-nazi-rise-to-power/how-did-the-nazi-gain-power/reichstag-fire/) (<https://www.theholocaustexplained.org/the-nazi-rise-to-power/how-did-the-nazi-gain-power/reichstag-fire/>), Hindenburg declared a state of emergency. Amongst other aspects, this move removed people's right to trial before imprisonment. The Nazis used this to their advantage in the immediate period following the declaration, rounding up any political opponents and imprisoning them in concentration camps.

Concentration camps were built almost immediately after the Nazi rise to power. The primary purpose of these initially was to house political prisoners. Examples of early camps include Oranienburg (A concentration camp established in 1933 in the town of Oranienburg, Prussia. The camp primarily held political prisoners and homosexual men. The camp was closed in 1934.)

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and

Dachau (The first Nazi concentration camp opened on 22 March 1933 in the grounds of an abandoned factory. The camp was initially created to hold political prisoners, but soon expanded to hold all Nazi prisoners. Dachau had approximately 100 sub camps. It was liberated on the 29 April 1945.)

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In the camps political prisoners were often forced to carry out heavy labour to 'correct' and 're-educate' them of their views. The awful conditions in the camps forced many prisoners to starve or die of the unsanitary conditions. Those that were released, primarily in the early period, were forbidden to speak of their experiences, and told to leave Germany immediately.

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## Gay men

On 6 May 1933, the Nazis led the first physical attack on homosexuals following their rise to power. Students led by members of the SA attacked and looted the Institute of Sexual Research, set up by gay rights pioneer Magnus Hirschfeld in 1919 (<https://www.theholocaustexplained.org/life-before-the-holocaust/pre-war-homosexual-life/>). A few days following this, they burned the stolen books in the street.

Courtesy of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. (<https://www.ushmm.org/>)

Homosexuals were seen as ‘a-social (Someone who the Nazis thought to be an undesirable person in society.)’ by the Nazis – an enemy of the master ‘Aryan’ race. Their attraction to other men meant they were not producing children for the *Volksgemeinschaft* (The Nazi term for ‘people’s community’).

Led by

Heinrich Himmler (A German politician who was a leading Nazi official and one of the main organisers of the Holocaust. Himmler was in charge of all internal and external security **Back to Top** including the SS, the SA, and the Gestapo. As leader of the SS, Himmler was in charge of all the

administration of concentration and extermination camps. Himmler also formed the Einsatzgruppen. He committed suicide in 1945.)

, the Nazis persecuted gay men in several ways.

Initially, the Nazis closed down a large majority of the homosexual bars, and shut down any homosexual publications. They arrested gay men and tortured them, forcing them to give up their address books and names of partners in an attempt to create a register of all gay men in Germany.

On the 28 June 1935, the Nazis revised

Paragraph 175 (A section of the German Criminal Code banning Homosexual contact. The section was first introduced on 15 May 1871 and was not abolished until 10 March 1994.)

, a section of the German Criminal Code which banned homosexual contact. The law was extended to the concept of 'criminally indecent activities between men', which meant that the authorities could then arrest any male suspected on limited or no evidence. This was a crucial turning point in the radicalisation (The process of making something more radical or extreme.) of persecution against homosexuals.

Homosexuals were some of the first people, alongside political prisoners, to be sent to the concentration camps in 1933. In the camps, they were subject to ridicule and hard work. They were also forced to wear pink triangles to define them as homosexuals.

As with Roma, in the camps homosexuals were also the subject of brutal medical experimentations, such as castration.

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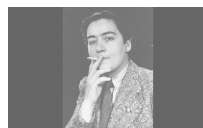
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## Lesbians

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Year	Country	Population	Percentage of Jews
1939	Poland	33,000,000	10%
1939	Czechia	14,000,000	1%
1939	France	40,000,000	0.5%
1939	Belgium	10,000,000	0.5%
1939	Netherlands	17,000,000	0.5%
1939	Denmark	4,000,000	0.5%
1939	Sweden	6,000,000	0.5%
1939	Switzerland	4,000,000	0.5%
1939	Austria	8,000,000	1%
1939	Germany	70,000,000	1%
1939	Italy	45,000,000	0.5%
1939	Spain	25,000,000	0.5%
1939	Portugal	10,000,000	0.5%
1939	Greece	10,000,000	0.5%
1939	Yugoslavia	15,000,000	0.5%
1939	Croatia	10,000,000	0.5%
1939	Slovenia	3,000,000	0.5%
1939	Czechoslovakia	14,000,000	1%
1939	Poland	33,000,000	10%
1939	France	40,000,000	0.5%
1939	Belgium	10,000,000	0.5%
1939	Netherlands	17,000,000	0.5%
1939	Denmark	4,000,000	0.5%
1939	Sweden	6,000,000	0.5%
1939	Switzerland	4,000,000	0.5%
1939	Austria	8,000,000	1%
1939	Germany	70,000,000	1%
1939	Italy	45,000,000	0.5%
1939	Spain	25,000,000	0.5%
1939	Portugal	10,000,000	0.5%
1939	Greece	10,000,000	0.5%
1939	Yugoslavia	15,000,000	0.5%
1939	Croatia	10,000,000	0.5%
1939	Slovenia	3,000,000	0.5%
1939	Czechoslovakia	14,000,000	1%



Whilst, in comparison to other persecuted groups, lesbians were able to continue their lives in a relatively normal manner under the Nazis, their activities were oppressed and there were women who suffered under Nazi rule as a result of their sexual orientation.

The Nazis did not believe that women were inherently corrupted by their sexuality in the same way that gay men were. Despite this, they did not agree with the concept or act of lesbianism. Some high-ranking Nazis, such as Hans Frank and Rudolf Klare, actively campaigned for more extreme oppression of lesbians, though they were not very successful. Lesbians were not seen as a threat in the same way that gay men were, due to the small part that they were seen to play in public life.

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Under the Weimar Republic, lesbian culture had flourished, particularly in Berlin. There were regular lesbian publications, such as *Frauenliebe* (Women's Love) and *Die Freundin* (The Girlfriend), as well as societies and clubs.

Following the Nazi rise to power, all publications, societies, and clubs of this kind were banned as Goebbels established his Chamber of Culture.

The Nazis did not have a definitive policy to persecute lesbians. Despite this, there were some lesbians who were either denounced by neighbours or friends or caught by the Nazis in other ways. These women were arrested and often sent to concentration camps, where they were listed as a-social or political prisoners. Due to this ambiguity surrounding the reasons why they were arrested, the approximate number of women who were taken to concentration camps due to this sexual orientation is unknown.

Overall, most lesbians, if willing to conform to the Nazi ideas about women, were able to survive the Nazi period and avoid persecution. For example, some women married to avoid attention or attacks regarding their lack of children.

Despite this, lesbians were not able to live freely, and were actively subjected to the oppression of their sexuality under the Nazis.

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## Jehovah's Witnesses

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Jehovah's Witnesses were also persecuted by the Nazis. The Nazis suppressed Jehovah's Witnesses for different reasons to Gypsies or homosexuals. As Jehovah's Witnesses are a sub-sect of Christianity, the Nazis did not automatically class them as an inferior or a non-'Aryan' (In Nazi terminology, this word was used describe people of North Western European descent with 'pure blood'. Typical and desirable physical traits included blonde hair and blue eyes.)  
' race.

Instead, Jehovah's Witnesses were persecuted for three other reasons: resistance, their commitment to peace and their international connections.

Jehovah's Witnesses refused to accept the Nazis total power, believing that they were first answerable to God. One example of this resistance was how many Jehovah's Witnesses refused to

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give the 'Heil Hitler' salute when requested. This resistance to Hitler and the Nazis was seen as an outright violation (A breach or break of something.) by a German citizen, and was not accepted. Many Jehovah's Witnesses were arrested as a result of this dissent (To have or promote a opinion different to the popular or common opinion.) .

The second reason Jehovah's Witnesses were persecuted was their commitment to peace, and in turn, opposition to war. Despite conscription being introduced in 1935, many Jehovah's Witnesses refused to fight or work in war-related industries, which became an ever increasing problem as Germany focused on rearmament.

Finally, Jehovah's Witnesses were persecuted for their strong international connections due to being part of a large international movement, which the Nazis were suspicious of. This suspicion escalated following the outbreak of war.

The Nazis harassed Jehovah's Witnesses by breaking up their meetings, ransacking (Intentionally stealing or destroying property.) their offices and banning their publications. If they refused to fight, work in war industry or show obedience to regime they were arrested and often sent to

concentration camps (Concentration camps are where groups of people are held under armed guard outside of any judicial process for an indefinite period of time. Camp prisoners are sometimes made to complete forced labour. The Nazis built hundreds of these camps all over Europe. These camps were unsanitary, overcrowded and brutal. Concentration camps were for civilians used prior to the Nazi era, for example in the Boer War.)

. Here they were forced to wear a purple triangle to identify as a Jehovah's Witness.

By 1939 over 6,000 Jehovah's Witnesses were in concentration camps across the Third Reich. At the end of the war over 1,400 had been murdered in the camps. 250 people were also executed for refusing to fight.

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## Black people



Black people experienced persecution and discrimination before, during and after the Third Reich in Germany and elsewhere. The persecution of black people by the Nazi regime was not straightforward and followed a different timeline to the persecution of other groups. Nazi policies towards black people varied in different places (for example, black people in occupied France, although subject to some restrictions and discrimination, did not face same intensity of actions that

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black people in Germany did in the period).

At the time of the Nazi rise to power, approximately 20,000 black people lived in Germany. The black community had mainly migrated from Germany's former colonies of German East Africa, Togo and Cameroon. During the Nazi era, Nazi policies reduced the rights and living conditions of black people in Germany. This was because the Nazis had false ideas about race, and believed that black people were racially inferior non-

Aryans (In Nazi terminology, this word was used describe people of North Western European descent with 'pure blood'. Typical and desirable physical traits included blonde hair and blue eyes.)

' and therefore a danger to the health of the German '

Aryan (In Nazi terminology, this word was used describe people of North Western European descent with 'pure blood'. Typical and desirable physical traits included blonde hair and blue eyes.)

' population.

## Employment

Nazi employment regulations discriminated against black Germans. For example, the 1933 *Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service* meant that anyone deemed non-

Aryan (In Nazi terminology, this word was used describe people of North Western European descent with 'pure blood'. Typical and desirable physical traits included blonde hair and blue eyes.)

' lost their position working for the government.

Many black Germans were employed in the music and entertainment industry. From 1933, anyone wanting to pursue a career in this industry had to be a member of the Reich Music Chamber (<https://www.theholocaustexplained.org/life-in-nazi-occupied-europe/controlling-everyday-life/culture/>).

Membership was subject to a variety of conditions and was often refused on the basis of race or political views – only one black person was ever known to have gained membership. As a result of these laws, many black Germans and black people living in Germany lost their jobs and careers, and had to resort to finding new work, or working illegally.

## Education

Black people living in Nazi Germany also faced increased persecution in schools and education (<https://www.theholocaustexplained.org/life-in-nazi-occupied-europe/controlling-everyday-life/controlling-education/>). This persecution initially occurred as part of the Nazis' efforts to control education more widely, for example with the introduction of race science as a compulsory subject in schools in 1935. Race science promoted the false and racist idea that some people, such as Jews and Black people, were biologically inferior to white ' Back To Top

Arvan (In Nazi terminology, this word was used describe people of North Western European descent

with 'pure blood'. Typical and desirable physical traits included blonde hair and blue eyes.)

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' children.

In June 1939, the oppression escalated as black children in Austria were excluded from attending school. On 22 March 1941, this law was extended to cover the whole of the Third Reich.

### **Sterilisation**

One of the most extreme actions taken against black Germans by the Nazi authorities was the mass sterilisation of the Rhineland Children in 1937. The Rhineland Children were 600-800 children who were the offspring of German women and black French soldiers who had occupied the Rhineland (An area of land in Western Germany which adjoins France.) following Germany's defeat in the First World War. The children were seen by the Nazis as a particular biological threat to the German 'Aryan' race due to their mixed heritage. In order to prevent the children having children of their own, 385 children were secretly sterilised, shortly before most of them reached adulthood.

### **Imprisonment**

There were 153 official black prisoners of war but their treatment was inconsistent. Some black people were also imprisoned in concentration camps and forced labour camps during the Nazi era.

Although, as the historians Robbie Aitken and Eve Rosenhaft explain: 'the nominal grounds on which Blacks were held make it difficult to assess whether and under what circumstances someone could be arrested for simply being Black' [Robbie Aitken and Eve Rosenhaft, *Black Germany: The Making and Unmaking of a Diaspora Community 1884-1960* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 274], some concentration camp records indicate that race was, at the very least, a significant reason why people were incarcerated. Conditions inside the camps were inhumane, and several black inmates died while imprisoned at the hands of the Nazis.

### **Black Resistance**

Black people also played a key role in the resistance movement. This took on the form of individual acts of sabotage, official spying and spreading propaganda.

Black people from the French colonies significantly participated in French resistance to the Nazis. African soldiers were a part of the *Corps-franc de la Montagne Noire*, a French resistance unit in the mountainous area of Massif Central.

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Josephine Baker, an African-American singer and dancer, was a notable member of the French Resistance movement. As a spy during the Second World War, she passed on confidential information about Nazi strategy to the British authorities and French counterintelligence unit.

## End of war

Although never singled out for genocide or mass murder in the same way that the Jews and Roma were, there is some evidence to suggest that, had Nazi Germany not been defeated, black people would have faced complete removal from the Third Reich, likely by the methods used to remove Jews and Roma: that is, mass murder. For example, on 10 October 1942, Himmler issued an order to register all black people in Germany and the occupied territories.

Although most black people living in Germany survived life in the Third Reich, they were subjected to serious persecution, discrimination and deteriorating living conditions during this era.

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### DID YOU KNOW...

#### Deutsche Afrika-Schau

The Deutsche Afrika-Schau was a show with around forty Black performers which toured Germany between approximately 1934 and 1940. The show featured a recreation of a traditional African village and included singing, dancing, gymnastic and tricks such as fire breathing.

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The show was authorised and supported by the Nazi government because it provided both employment for black people excluded from other areas of work and an opportunity to control their movements. Increasingly, as Eve Rosenhaft and Robbie Aitken explain 'the control aspect of the show was used to legitimate its existence' [Robbie Aitken and Eve Rosenhaft, *Black Germany: The Making and Unmaking of a Disapora Community 1884-1960* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 254].

The show ended in approximately 1940, around the same time that a ban was issued on black performances in public.

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## Soviet Prisoners of War



Soviet Prisoners of War (POWs) were the second-largest group of victims of Nazi genocidal policies. It is estimated that, of 5.7 million Soviet POWs, 3.3 million died as a result of deliberate maltreatment and murder by the Nazis between 1941 and 1945. The deaths of Soviet POWs in German custody during the Second World War represent one of the highest rates of casualties ever recorded during a mass atrocity.

On 22 June 1941, the Nazis launched Operation Barbarossa (<https://www.theholocaustexplained.org/life-in-nazi-occupied-europe/the-second-world-war/invasion-of-the-soviet-union/>

[#:~:text=The%20Nazis%20invaded%20the%20Soviet,took%20the%20Soviets%20by%20surprise.](#)),

the invasion of the Soviet Union, breaking the terms of the

Nazi-Soviet Non Aggression Pact (A pact between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany announced on the 23 August 1939. The two countries were ideological enemies but agreed to peace between each other ten years. The pact also secretly divided Poland up between Germany and the Soviet Union.)

. Soviet forces were initially taken by surprise, and within the first two months of war, 800,000 Soviet soldiers were captured by the Wehrmacht (The German Army under the Nazis.) . These soldiers were taken as prisoners of war and detained in makeshift camps, where they were often forced to sleep outside in pits they had dug themselves, as there were too few barracks to house them.

The Nazis exploited the fact that the Soviet Union had not signed the

Geneva Convention (A convention drawn up by the International Red Cross which set out the treatment of prisoners of war. It came into place on the 19 June 1931.)

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to treat Soviet POWs terribly. The Nazis viewed the Soviets as racially inferior 'Slavs (Groups of people in central and eastern Europe who speak Slavic languages.)' and consequently treated Soviet POWs far worse than prisoners from other countries.

Soviet POWs were initially imprisoned in makeshift camps where the Nazis pursued a deliberate policy of mass starvation. Soviet POWs were supposed to receive 2,200 calories per day when they were carrying out forced labour, but in practice they often received as little as 700 calories a day. Auschwitz, Majdanek and Bergen-Belsen concentration camps were originally constructed as camps to imprison Soviet POWs. Around 15,000 Soviet soldiers died in Auschwitz, and 50,000 in Bergen-Belsen. In Auschwitz, the Nazis used Soviet POWs as test subjects in early experimentation with Zyklon B (The name of the gas used in the mass murders at the extermination camps.) . In September 1941, 600 POWs were selected to be gassed.

Soviet POWs were also the victims of summary executions (When a person who is accused of a crime is killed without a fair trial or legal process.)

by *Wehrmacht* soldiers, intended to 'purge' the POWs who were also Communist officials. The German military command issued so-called 'Commissar (An official in the Communist Party.) orders', the first on 6 June and the second on 17 July 1941, ordering the immediate execution either on the battlefield or while in captivity of Soviet military commissars as well as other 'politically unacceptable' groups, including Jewish Soviet POWs. Out of an estimated 80,000-85,000 Jewish Red Army soldiers in Nazi POW camps, only 5 per cent returned from captivity. By the winter of 1942, nearly 2 million Soviet POWs had been murdered or died in captivity.

From January 1942, Hitler authorised better treatment of Soviet POWs, as the Nazis began to see them as a useful source of

forced labour (The German government forced workers in the countries it occupied to work in Germany in order to fill the manpower shortage in Germany that the war was causing.)

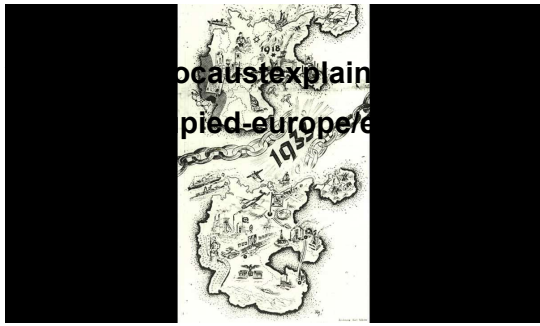
. By August 1944, over 1.9 million POWs were at work in German companies such as Volkswagen. They were given slightly better food rations, but still much less than other POWs or the rest of the German civilian population. By 1943 and 1944, death rates for Soviet POWs however were high once again.

After the end of the war, though they were freed from Nazi camps, many Soviet POWs were accused of collaboration with the Nazis and re-imprisoned in Soviet camps.

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## Economic policy ▶

### 📅 What happened in April



01 April 1933



On 1 April 1933, the Nazi Party led a nationwide boycott of Jewish-owned businesses across Germany

25 April 1933



On 25 April 1933, the Law Against Overcrowding in Schools and Universities was issued, restricting the number of Jewish students.

07 April 1942



On 7 April 1942, the Nazis began the 'Final Solution' at the Chełmno de extermination camp. They would kill all the Jews from the Łódź ghetto.

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