

## HOLOCAUST TIMELINE

### **Reichstag Fire Decree: February 28, 1933**

The Reichstag (German parliament building) burned down. President Von Hindenburg suspended freedom of speech, press, and the right to assemble.

### **Civil Service Law: April 7, 1933**

The German government issued the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service. It removed Jews and political opponents of the Nazi Party from civil service positions, including school and government jobs. Most Jewish lawyers were also forbidden to practice law.

### **Education Law: April 25, 1933**

This law stated that Jewish students could make up no more than five percent of the student population of any public school or university. Many Jewish students had to leave public schools. German schools taught racial ideas held by members of the Nazi Party, who believed the people who belonged to the “Aryan” race (Germans) were superior to “non-Aryans” (Jews, Roma, Sinti, Blacks, and other ethnic minorities).

### **Sterilizations Law: July 17, 1933**

The law allowed the government to forcibly sterilize people with physical or mental disabilities so they could not have children. Under the law, 400,000 Germans were sterilized from January 1934 to May 1945.

### **Law Against “Criminals:” November 24, 1933**

The German government passed a “Law Against Dangerous Habitual Criminals.” The government was authorized to hold prisoners indefinitely, even if they had served their obligatory prison term. Instead of being released from jail, the prisoner was often transferred to a concentration camp — a camp where people were detained under harsh, inhumane conditions.

### **Mandatory Military Service: March 16, 1935**

The German government enacted a conscription law, which applied to all men between 18 and 45. After May 1935, drafted soldiers had to show evidence that they were “Aryan.” Jews were forbidden to serve, and Jehovah’s Witnesses refused to join the military. This law was a violation of the Treaty of Versailles.

### **Jehovah’s Witness Organization Banned: April 1, 1935**

The German government banned the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, which was the publishing house for Jehovah’s Witnesses. Jehovah’s Witnesses also refused to swear allegiance to Adolf Hitler and Nazi Germany.

### **Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor: September 15, 1935**

The German government banned the marriage of Jews and non-Jews. It also made sexual relations between these “mixed race” couples illegal. This law and the “Reich Citizenship Law” are called the “Nuremberg Race Laws.”

### **Reich Citizenship Law: September 15, 1935**

The law defined who the German government considered “German” and who was a “Jew.” The law defined Jews as a race identified by blood and genealogy. It did not identify Judaism as a religion or culture.

### **Racial Definitions Explained: November 14, 1935**

A regulation clarified that Germans who were descended from one or two Jewish grandparents would be considered *mischling* (an insulting term for people who were supposedly of “mixed race”). *Mischling* were allowed to vote and hold civil service jobs.

### **Nuremberg Laws Extended: November 26, 1935**

Roma, Sinti, and Black Germans lost their citizenship and were not permitted to marry “Aryan” Germans.

### **Jewish Name Law: August 17, 1938**

The “Law on the Alteration of Family and Personal Names” required Jews who had first names of “non-Jewish” origin to take the middle names “Israel” (for men) or “Sara” (for women). By January 1, 1939, all Jews needed to obtain new passports or identity cards listing their new names. These documents were marked with the letter “J.”

### **Anti-Jewish Economy Law: August 17, 1938**

The “Decree on the Exclusion of Jews from Economic Life” prohibited Jews from owning businesses or engaging in trade. Jewish-owned businesses had already faced pressure to “Aryanize,” which meant that the Jewish owner would be forced to sell his or her business at a steep discount to a non-Jewish employee or Nazi supporter.

### **Euthanasia Decree: September 1, 1939**

In the fall of 1939, Hitler signed a note that authorized designated physicians to carry out “mercy killings.” In fact, the letter was meant to protect doctors participating in the “euthanasia” program, a secret program of mass murder targeting institutionalized people with disabilities.

### **Jewish Badge Introduced in Germany: September 1, 1941**

A “Jewish badge” was not unique to Nazi Germany but had a long history. Nazi Germany forced Jews to wear badges (most often a yellow patch in the shape of a Star of David) as an easy way to identify them. Jews in German-occupied Poland were forced to wear a badge beginning in 1939; Jews in the Netherlands didn’t have to wear one until 1942.

### **Wannsee Conference: January 20, 1942**

German government and Nazi Party officials held a conference at the Wannsee Villa in a suburb of Berlin. They discussed the logistics of the “Final Solution.” The “Final Solution” was the codename for the mass murder of European Jews. Nazi death squads known as “Einsatzgruppen” marched into towns in Poland and the Soviet Union and sometimes shot hundreds of Jews at one time. Their bodies were thrown into mass graves. By the end of the war, approximately two million Jews had died in this way.

### **Operation Reinhard Begins: March 17, 1942**

Operation Reinhard was the codename for the plan to murder approximately two million Jews in German-occupied Poland. Nazis murdered at least 1.5 million Jews at the Operation Reinhard killing centers: Treblinka, Belzec, and Sobibor. At these killing centers, Jews were crammed into vans or large rooms and were killed with poison gas. Their bodies were quickly disposed of in ovens called crematoria.

### **Death Marches: January-April, 1945**

As the Allied (American, British, French, and Soviet) armies were closing in, the Germans began forcing concentration camp prisoners on what were known as “death marches.” The aim was to relocate prisoners from larger concentration camps, such as Auschwitz, Buchenwald, Dachau, and Stutthof, to smaller labor camps. Nazis forced prisoners to march for miles through the bitter cold, while they were deprived of food, water, and sleep. Prisoners who didn’t die of starvation or hypothermia were often murdered by the Nazis before arriving at the new camp.

### **The End of the Holocaust: April-May, 1945**

As World War II was finally coming to an end, any concentration camps still in operation were liberated. Soviet troops liberated the remaining prisoners at Auschwitz, while American troops, including the 45th Infantry Division based in Oklahoma, liberated Dachau. General Eisenhower urged members of Congress and the press to come to the liberated camps, so they could see firsthand the mangled bodies remaining from the atrocities that had taken place. Germany surrendered on May 7, 1945, one week after Hitler’s suicide.

### **The Creation of the IMT: August 8, 1945**

The Allied powers (US, Soviet Union, Great Britain, France) realized the Nazi leaders had to be brought to justice. The countries organized a group of judges and prosecutors known as the International Military Tribunal (IMT). On October 18, 1945, the IMT indicted 24 war criminals. They were accused of “crimes against humanity” - the “murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation...or persecutions on political, racial, or religious grounds.”

### **The Nuremberg Trials: November 20, 1945-October 1, 1946**

The IMT tried the 24 war criminals in the city of Nuremberg, Germany. During the trial, graphic footage from the concentration camps was shown to the Tribunal. Ultimately, the Tribunal convicted 19 defendants and acquitted three. Of the 19 convicted Nazis, 12 were sentenced to be hanged, and the others received lengthy prison sentences.

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