

# The Nazis in Power Part I: Cultural Changes

In 1933, Hitler and the Nazis took over power in Germany. Looking back on this time period, the focus of the Hitler was clear: prepare Germany for war at all costs. Every action that the Nazis took was to start a war in Europe that would eventually lead to world domination. Hitler had planned for the city of Berlin to become the capital of the world, with plans to call it "Germania." Everything Hitler planned was larger than life. He had massive construction plans to completely redo the city, including a new Reichstag building that was so massive it would hold 500,000 people (*to put in perspective, the largest sports stadium in the world only holds 250,000*). The dome on this building would have been so tall and wide that clouds could form inside the building, causing it to rain indoors. Everything that the Nazis did led to this vision of global domination, building an empire that would last for a thousand years.

The first thing that the Nazis did when in power was to eliminate anyone who had power that opposed them. Thanks to the Communists burning down the Reichstag building, Hitler had strong public support for doing what was necessary to "make Germany safe." Hitler used the police force and the Brown Shirts (*the common fighters within the Nazis party*) to have the Communists rounded up and put into Concentration Camps. Concentration Camps were places to illegally imprison and torture large numbers of people. They consisted of large barracks, with a meal hall, and a large open square. All of this was surrounded by electrified barbed wire fences and outlook posts where soldiers with guns watched for any prisoner trying to escape. These concentration camps were originally run by the Brown Shirts, who would bully and harass the prisoners. Other political "opponents" were arrested and put into prison. Those who got released from the prisons were met in the parking lot by Brown Shirts who took them to the concentration camps. The Jews, who the Nazis blamed for all of Germany's problems, were also bullied and harassed. The Jews were soon forced out of public service jobs with the Government and in Education. No opponent of the Nazis was allowed to be free.



The Nazis' desire was to reshape the body, mind and soul of the German people. To do this, the Nazis took over all aspects of German life. Within the first two years, the Nazis controlled all the newspapers, radio stations, movie theaters, art galleries, and education system. They purged these institutions of everything that the Nazis disagreed with. This included the removal of popular writers, artists, musicians, and scientists who then fled from Germany. One of the many people to flee Germany was the Jewish Scientist Albert Einstein. Einstein came to America where he will play a major role in the future of the war. The Nazis, now in control of all major aspects of German life, preached their messages constantly. This was called propaganda, communication aimed at influencing the attitude of a group of people. The only movies were Nazis themed movies, all music was Nazis approved music, all news stories praised the Nazis while belittling their enemies. The public was saturated with the Nazi message.

The Nazis paid close attention to education and the training of the next generation of the children. The plan was to raise them to think Nazis thoughts and believe the Nazis beliefs. They did this by creating a group called the "Hitler Youth." All children under 18 years old had to be apart of the Hitler Youths. This included mandatory physical training, camping trips, and attending classes that were lead and watched over by Nazis leaders. In their classes, the young Nazis learned about the hardships Germany faced, that these problems were all the fault of the Jews, and that Germany needed a strong military to prepare for "a future war against the Jews." The hope was to raise the next generation to be good Nazis, with the boys prepared for war and the girls prepared to raise large families.



A subject of great importance to the Nazis was that of Race. The Nazis believed in Social Darwinism; that humans were divided into races and that your race was in your blood. There was no escaping your race. Some races were considered superior to others. The Nazis believed that the story of human history was about the survival of the fittest. They believed the Aryan Race (White Northern European) to be the superior race, and that all other races should eventually be eliminated or enslaved. To make sure that the Aryans would take charge of the world, it was necessary to remove all weakness. They did this by putting to death or sterilizing (surgery that keeps people from having children) those who were considered "unfit." This included those who were mentally or physically handicapped, the lazy who refused to work, alcoholics, and repeat criminals.



Along with the socially unfit, the Nazis wanted to get rid of the inferior races. The first group they wanted to eliminate was the Jews, whom they blamed for all of Germany's problems. At first, this took the form of harassment, with the Gestapo (*the secret police for the Nazis*), beating people up or breaking the windows of Jewish businesses. The Jews were also forced out of public jobs in the Government, Newspapers, Radio and in Education.

In 1935, the Nuremburg Laws were passed. The Nuremburg Laws forbid a person of the Aryan race from marrying anyone who was from the Jewish race. You had to have documents proving that your parents and grandparents were pure Aryan. Those who were not pure Aryans were called *Mischlings*, and had less rights than pure Aryans. Aryans were forbidden to shop in Jewish stores or seeing Jewish Doctors. The Jews were also forced to wear the yellow Star of David on all of their Jackets and clothing, while also posting the star on all of their buildings.

In November of 1938, a Jew killed a German in Paris, France. The Nazis government seized this opportunity to unleash terror upon the Jews in Germany. They raided and looted Jewish stores. They burned down Synagogues (*Jewish places of worship*). They rounded up Jews from their homes, leaving all their possessions, and forced them into Ghettos (*a segregated part of the city that was made up of people of only one race*). Because of all of the broken glass on the street, this event was called "Krystallnacht" which means "Night of Broken Glass." By 1938, the Jews in Germany were without work, without money, and living in poor ghettos away from the rest of German society.



In 1937 and 1938, the Concentration Camps underwent a major change from being a holding ground for political prisoners, to being a dumping ground for the "racially unfit." They also had a change in leadership, now being run by the SS (*standing for Schutzstaffel or Shield Squadron*), who had a skull and bones as their logo. The Gestapo began to round up those who had been labeled as "unfit" or "racially inferior," and dump them into the concentration camps. At the camps, the SS would force them to do hard slave labor. The aim was to work those in the camps to death. If you disobeyed the SS officers, you were tortured and/or killed. If you looked

at an SS officer in the wrong way, you were tortured and/or killed. If you refused to work you were tortured and/or killed. If you were sick or injured, you were left to die.

Ironically, if not mockingly, the Nazis put a sign on the front gate saying, "Arbeit Macht Fret" or "Work Makes Free." The only freedom the SS had in mind for those in the camp was through the grave.



## The Nazis in Power Part 2: The Drive to War

As we have stated before, the main goal of the Nazis was war in Europe. Every action and decision had this goal at its core. There was one small problem: the Versailles Treaty. The Versailles Treaty had stripped Germany of her military might. It had limited its army to 100,000 soldiers, as opposed to over 13 million soldiers during WWI. Germany was not allowed to develop planes or tanks, and had to reduce its navy to 6 warships and no submarines. Meanwhile, Germany's neighbors had armies that numbered into the millions, with thousands of planes and the world's largest navy. This put Germany into an extremely vulnerable position.

### ***Rearming Germany***

Once Hitler came to power, he immediately began to push against the boundaries of the Versailles Treaty. At a conference in Geneva, Switzerland, Hitler told France and Great Britain that they should either remove these restrictions or reduce THEIR military to the same size as Germany. Hitler called the restrictions, "unreasonable, humiliating, and degrading." As would be expected, France and Britain scoffed at Hitler, rejecting his proposal. Hitler pulled out of the conference and removed Germany from all international agreements. He asked Germans to vote as to if they approved of his actions. The frightened German people voted overwhelmingly yes, they approved.



Hitler began to take baby steps against the Versailles Treaty. In 1933, Germany secretly expanded their army from 100,000 troops to 300,000. They also built 1,000 air planes. 1935, Hitler openly broke the Versailles Treaty, announcing that the army was going to expand to 550,000 soldiers, and the Luftwaffe, or air force, was going to expand to 2,500 planes. What was the reaction from France and Great Britain? They did nothing. They did not feel they were ready to have a conflict with Germany. France & Britain were trying the plan of appeasement: giving Hitler what he wanted in hopes that it would keep the peace. In 1935, Britain even signed an agreement with Germany, allowing them to have a navy... but it could only be 1/3 the size of the British navy. All of this was done to try to keep the peace.

### ***Restoring Pride***

Another area where the Versailles Treaty humiliated Germany was in taking away Germany's land. A massive chunk of Eastern Germany was taken and made into the country of Poland. Germany's resource rich "Rhineland" was to be free of all war factories, and would be patrolled by French. This does not include the vast lands on other continents that Germany had controlled that had been taken from them. Germany was also not allowed to make alliances, especially with her neighbor Austria.

After Hitler tested the waters with expanding his military, he saw there would be little resistance. Hitler became bolder, speaking out about how awful it was that Germans were not being ruled over by Germany and how embarrassing it was to have foreigners overseeing German soil. In 1936, Hitler marched 32,000 troops into the Rhineland. If the French had shown even the least bit of resistance, the German troops would have fled. The French however showed none. Britain said that this was ok because as Hitler was only "reclaiming his own backyard"... so they did nothing.

Hitler's attention soon turned east. Austria, Hitler's home country, had ancient roots in Germany. Hitler had always viewed himself as being German, and that Austria should be a part of Germany. Since WWI, Austria had been struggling. In March of 1938, Germany marched troops across the border into Austria, being greeted by cheering crowds. Austria became the first part of this new German Reich. What did France and Britain do? Nothing.



Hitler then started to complain about the new country of Czechoslovakia, which had been made out of parts of the old Austria-Hungary empire. Hitler claimed that Germans there were being mistreated and abused, and as a good German he could not stand by and do nothing. Those 3 million Germans should be allowed to choose who they are ruled by. Czechoslovakia wanted to go to war with Germany. Russia (USSR), France, and Great Britain had even promised to assist the Czechs if Germany attacked. Britain's Neville Chamberlin chose instead to negotiate.

In Munich, Germany on September, 1938, Germany, France, Great Britain and Italy (Germany's new ally) met to discuss the fate of Czechoslovakia. The four countries agreed that the areas that were made of a majority of Germans would be returned to Germany immediately. The rest of Czechoslovakia soon fell under Germany's control. Hitler had reclaimed German land to the west, taken over Austria and Czechoslovakia to the east... all without firing a single shot. Hitler's popularity reached a new all-time high.

### ***To the Edge of War***

Hitler was not done. Everyone in Germany was thrilled with Hitler's ability to negotiate. They felt that Germany had overcome the evils of the Versailles Treaty and had restored Germany to its rightful place in Europe. The people of Germany did not want all out war. The army leaders felt that things were going too fast and that Germany was not prepared to fight a large international conflict yet, and needed more time. The businesses German economy was being driven into the ground because of how quickly Hitler wanted this massive army of planes and tanks to be built. The only way that the German economy was to be saved at this point was to take over other countries and use the money from the countries they conquered to help get things straight.

Hitler looked across the border of his new Reich and saw Poland. This was land that was once a part of Germany, which was now a foreign country. Hitler felt that Eastern European "Slavs" were an inferior race to his Aryan Germans. Hitler felt that Eastern European Slavs were at best slaves, and at worst farm animals. There were also millions of Jews that lived in Eastern Europe. According to Hitler, all of these people should be either enslaved or removed to create "Lebensraum" or "Living Space" for the Aryan Germans. Each person would have his own land to work and room to breathe in the new German Reich... at least once the Eastern Europeans were "dealt with."

There was a problem: the USSR (Russia). The USSR had rapidly rebuilt under Stalin and had developed a very powerful military. Hitler was concerned that Stalin would attack if Germany invaded Poland. Stalin, on the other hand, was afraid that Hitler was not going to stop at just conquering Poland and would eventually attack the USSR. Stalin also wanted to control Polish land that had once been a part of Russia before WWI.

In August of 1939, Hitler and Stalin shocked the world by signing the Nazi-Soviet Pact. This agreement said that they would split Poland down the middle, and that neither side would attack the other.

Poland's fate was sealed. Britain and France both pledged to fight if Germany attacked Poland. However, this was too little too late. Hitler now had an army of over 4 million troops. He had a devastatingly huge Luftwaffe, and an equally impressive supply of newly designed tanks. France and Great Britain were just *beginning* to build their military and would be no match. Their old ally in the USSR had created a pact with Germany.

In August of 1939 the world stood on the brink of a new, and more dangerous cliff... and was about to take the deep plunge.



# The Nazis in Power - Questions

- 1) What was the main goal of the Nazis party?
- 2) What are concentration camps? What was their original purpose?
- 3) What is propaganda? How did the Nazis use propaganda? What propaganda do you find in your daily life? Give examples.
- 4) Why did the Nazis care about education? What did they do about it?
- 5) Who were the Gestapo & the SS? What purposes did each serve in society?
- 6) Describe 2-3 actions the Nazis took against the Jews between 1928-1935
- 7) Explain how the purpose of the Concentration Camps change in 1937-38?
- 8) Pretend that the German people had a Twitter account during this time and was tweeting during the major moments of the 1930s. Create a Twitter Timeline of at least 7 Tweets from the perspective of a Jew during between 1933-1938
- 9) Create a list of Hitler's positive accomplishments by 1938, at the height of his popularity. Which accomplishment do you feel was most impressive? Explain.
- 10) What problem had developed in Germany during by 1938? How could they solve this problem? Would you have made the same choice? Explain.
- 11) What was Lebensraum? What was the problem with getting this "Lebensraum" in Poland?
- 12) Why was it shocking that Stalin and Hitler would make a pact? What might have happened if this pact was not signed?
- 13) "The Policy of Appeasement worked to contain Hitler and keep peace." Create an outline/prewriting & write 1 Paragraph proving whether this statement is true or false using supporting evidence from the text.