

# The Path to Nazi Genocide

## Transcript

### The Path to Nazi Genocide

#### Chapter 1

NARRATOR: Paris, 1900. More than fifty million people from around the world visited the Universal Exposition—a world's fair intended to promote greater understanding and tolerance among nations, and to celebrate the new century, new inventions, exciting progress. The 20th century began much like our own—with hope United States Holocaust Memorial Museum | The Path to Nazi Genocide: Transcript & Discussion Guide | <http://www.ushmm.org> 2 that education, science and technology could create a better, more peaceful world. What followed soon after were two devastating wars.

TEXT ON SCREEN: The Path to Nazi Genocide

NARRATOR: The first “world war,” from 1914 to 1918, was fought throughout Europe and beyond. It became known as “the war to end all wars.” It cast an immense shadow on tens of millions of people. “This is not war,” one wounded soldier wrote home. “It is the ending of the world.” Half of all Frenchmen aged 20 to 32 at war's outbreak were dead when it was over. More than one third of all German men aged 19 to 22 were killed. Millions of veterans were crippled in body and in spirit. Advances in the technology of killing included the use of poison gas. Under the pressure of unending carnage, governments toppled and great empires dissolved. It was a cataclysm that darkened the world's view of humanity and its future. Winston Churchill said the war left “a crippled, broken world.”

TEXT ON SCREEN: Aftermath of World War I and the Rise of Nazism, 1918-1933

NARRATOR: The humiliation of Germany's defeat and the peace settlement that followed in 1919 would play an important role in the rise of Nazism and the coming of a second “world war” just 20 years later. What shocked so many in Germany about the treaty signed near Paris, at the Palace of Versailles, was that the victors dictated a future in which Germany was deprived of any significant military power. Germany's territory was reduced by 13%. Germany was forced to accept full responsibility for starting the war and to pay heavy reparations. To many, including 30-year old former army corporal Adolf Hitler, it seemed the country had been “stabbed in the back”—betrayed by subversives at home and by the government who accepted the armistice. In fact, the German military had quietly sought an end to the war it could no longer win in 1918. “It cannot be that two million Germans should have fallen in vain,” Adolf Hitler later wrote. “We demand vengeance!” Many veterans and other citizens struggled to understand Germany's defeat and the uncertain future. Troops left the bloody battlefields and returned to a bewildering society. A new and unfamiliar democratic form of government—the Weimar Republic—replaced the authoritarian empire

# The Path to Nazi Genocide

## Transcript

and immediately faced daunting challenges. Thousands of Germans waited in lines for work and food in the early 1920s. Middle class savings were wiped out as severe inflation left the currency worthless. Some burned it for fuel. Economic conditions stabilized for a few years, then the worldwide depression hit in 1929. The German banking system collapsed, and by 1930 unemployment skyrocketed to 22%. In a country plagued by joblessness, embittered by loss of territory, and demoralized by ineffective government, political demonstrations frequently turned violent. Many political parties had their own paramilitary units to attack opponents and intimidate voters. In 1932, ninety-nine people were killed in the streets in one month. Right-wing propaganda and demonstrations played on fears of a Communist revolution spreading from the Soviet Union. New social problems emerged from the impact of rapid industrialization and the growth of cities. Standards of behavior were changing. Crime was on the rise. Sexual norms were in flux. For the first time, women were working outside the home in large numbers, and the new constitution gave women the right to vote. Germany's fledgling democracy was profoundly tested by the crumbling of old values and fears of what might come next. Adolf Hitler had been undisputed leader of the National Socialist German Workers Party—known as Nazis—since 1921. In 1923, he was imprisoned for trying to overthrow the government. His trial brought him fame and followers. He used the jail time to dictate his political ideas United States Holocaust Memorial Museum | The Path to Nazi Genocide: Transcript & Discussion Guide | <http://www.ushmm.org> 3 in a book, *Mein Kampf—My Struggle*. Hitler's ideological goals included territorial expansion, consolidation of a racially pure state, and elimination of the European Jews and other perceived enemies of Germany. He served only a short jail sentence, and after the ban was lifted on his National Socialist Party, Hitler and his followers rejoined the battle in the streets and in the countryside. The Nazi Party recruited, organized, and produced a newspaper to spread its message. While downplaying more extreme Nazi goals, they offered simple solutions to Germany's problems, exploiting people's fears, frustrations, and hopes. In the early 1930s, the frequency of elections was dizzying. So was the number of parties and splinter groups vying for votes. Hitler proved to be a charismatic campaigner and used the latest technology to reach people. The Nazi Party gained broad support, including many in the middle class—intellectuals, civil servants, students, professionals, shopkeepers and clerks ruined by the Depression. But the Nazis never received more than 38% of the vote in a free national election. No party was able to win a clear majority, and without political consensus, successive governments could not effectively govern the nation. Adolf Hitler was not elected to office and he did not have to seize power. He was offered a deal just as the Nazis started to lose votes. In January 1933, when the old war hero, President Paul von Hindenburg, invited Hitler to serve as Chancellor in a coalition government, the Nazis could hardly believe their luck. The Nazis were revolutionaries who wanted to radically transform Germany. The conservative politicians in the new Cabinet didn't like or trust Hitler, but they liked democracy even less, and they saw the leftist parties as a bigger threat. They reached out to the Nazis to help build a majority in Parliament. They were confident they could control Hitler. One month later, when arson gutted the German parliament building, Hitler

# The Path to Nazi Genocide

## Transcript

and his nationalist coalition partners seized their chance. Exploiting widespread fears of a communist uprising, they blamed Communists for the fire, and declared emergency rule. President Hindenburg signed a decree that suspended all basic civil rights and constitutional protections, providing the basis for arbitrary police actions. The new government's first targets were political opponents. Under the emergency decree, they could be terrorized, beaten and held indefinitely. Leaders of trade unions and opposition parties were arrested. German authorities sent thousands, including leftist members of Parliament, to newly established concentration camps. Despite Nazi terror and brutal suppression of their opponents, many German citizens willingly accepted or actively supported these extreme measures in favor of order and security. Many Germans felt a new hope and confidence in the future of their country with the prospect of a bold, young charismatic leader. Nazi propaganda chief Joseph Goebbels planned to win over those who were still unconvinced.

GOEBBELS [speaking German]: One must govern well, and for good government one must also practice good propaganda. They work together. A good government without propaganda is not more possible than good propaganda without a good government.

NARRATOR: Hitler spoke to the SA, his army of storm troopers.

HITLER [speaking German]: Germany has awakened! We have won power in Germany. Now we must win the German people.

## Chapter 2

TEXT ON SCREEN: Building a "National Community," 1933-1936

NARRATOR: The ceremonial reopening of Parliament, orchestrated by Joseph Goebbels, aimed to link the Hitler government to Germany's imperial past and portray the Nazis as saviors of the nation's future. The event was carefully staged to reassure the German establishment, including the military, that Hitler would respect their traditions. Nazi-controlled newsreels then gave the impression that the Army supported the new government. Though Hitler walked behind longtime President Hindenburg for now, the new chancellor would soon be Germany's absolute dictator.

NEWSREEL VOICEOVER: Today was dedicated to the New Germany. And more than one hundred thousand schoolchildren stood, shoulder to shoulder, as the car bearing the aged President and the Chancellor proceeded through the crowd to the speaker's stand. Whether

# The Path to Nazi Genocide

## Transcript

you agree with his doctrines or not, it must be admitted that the leadership of Hitler has united the German people for the first time since the war. Their almost fanatical enthusiasm is a marvel to the entire world...

NARRATOR: Hindenburg remained President until his death in August 1934. With Hindenburg gone, Hitler, by agreement with the army, abolished the office of President, declaring himself Führer and Reich Chancellor, leader of the nation and head of the government. Now there was no authority above or beside him. Immediately, the armed forces swore an oath of allegiance to Adolf Hitler.

GERMAN ARMED FORCES [taking oath in German]: I swear by God this sacred oath to the Führer Adolf Hitler to render unconditional obedience...

NARRATOR: All civil servants, including teachers and police, members of parliament and the judiciary, swore an oath of loyalty—not to any constitution—but to Hitler as Führer of the German nation. The economy had reached rock bottom when the Nazis came to power. They boosted its recovery with huge public works projects for the unemployed.

NAZI NEWSREEL VOICEOVER [speaking German]: A half million folk comrades have gone back to work this year. Since the takeover of power, unemployment has fallen by more than half.

NARRATOR: Hitler christened new autobahns triumphantly in a display of national will that would unite the country and facilitate the secret expansion of Germany's armed forces. In 1935, Germany openly defied the 1919 Treaty of Versailles by reinstituting the draft and increasing its military strength. The Nazis were delivering on their promises to restore and strengthen the nation. Their achievements encouraged many people to overlook radical Nazi policies, or even to support them. In September 1935, the Nazi Party gathered in Nuremberg for its annual rally. It opened with a traditional hymn that added solemnity and a sense of continuity with the past. It ended with a special session of Parliament far from Berlin. New race laws were introduced by Hitler and read by Parliament President Hermann Göring.

GÖRING [speaking German]: German citizenship is restricted to persons of German or kindred blood. Marriages between Jews and citizens of German or kindred blood are forbidden. [Cheering]

NARRATOR: The Nazi regime aimed to create a racially pure Germany whose so-called "superior traits" would make it ideally suited to rule the entire European continent. Nazism taught that racial struggle was the driving force in history—"superior" races must battle "inferior" races or be corrupted by them. The Nazi concept of a national community was exclusive and based on race, as defined in the new laws and decrees. Heinrich Himmler and

# The Path to Nazi Genocide

## Transcript

the SS led the ideological battle. Racist ideas were taught in schools. Some groups, such as Jews, Slavs, Blacks and Roma (also called Gypsies) were labeled racially inferior. People with mental or physical disabilities were designated “unworthy of life.” Scientists and medical professionals applied pseudo-scientific theories for measuring and valuing racial characteristics.

### Chapter 3

TEXT ON SCREEN: From Citizens to Outcasts, 1933-1938

NARRATOR: Before the Nazis assumed power, Jews enjoyed all rights of citizenship in Germany. After 1933, the German government gradually excluded Jews from public life and public education. Newly established Jewish private schools provided a safe learning environment for some. By 1938, German authorities had isolated and segregated Germany’s Jews, expelling them from the professions and eliminating most opportunities to earn a living.

CAROLA STEINHARDT: We felt so... why can’t we be part of it? Why can’t we? Everybody said, “Heil Hitler,” like this. I did, too. What did I know? I was eight years old. So my mother said to me, “You’re not supposed to do that.” I said, “Why not?” She said, “Haven’t you been told that you are Jewish?” I said, “Oh, I forgot.”

NARRATOR: Germany’s Jews would get plenty of reminders.

VOICE FROM LOUDSPEAKER [speaking German]: Ladies and gentlemen, this is a boycott of Jewish shops. Please keep moving.

GUY STERN: This sense of isolation that came upon us after 1933, gradual and increasing, it also affected us psychologically. We knew we were in a hostile world.

NARRATOR: Between 1933 and 1939, the German government enacted hundreds of laws to define, segregate and impoverish German Jews.

GERDA HAAS: My sister and I used to slink by those huge banners that were all over the city. And we used to just try not to see them, thinking if we didn’t see them, they weren’t there. But they were there. That just, little by little, that really took over.

# The Path to Nazi Genocide

## Transcript

JULIUS STREICHER, *Der Stürmer* Editor [speaking German]: ...without a solution to the Jewish question, there will be no solution for humanity.

NARRATOR: The goal of Nazi propaganda was to demonize Jews and encourage Germans to see Jews as dangerous outsiders in their midst. After 1935, everyday antisemitism was a regular part of carnival parades and floats. Public displays of antisemitism reinforced a climate of hostility toward Jews in Germany, or at the least, indifference to their treatment. In March 1938, German troops moved into neighboring Austria. Germany shredded another provision of the Versailles Treaty, as Hitler's homeland was incorporated into Germany. It was a disaster for Austrian Jews. Within a year, the Nazis achieved in Austria what had taken five years to carry out in Germany. On November 9th, the Nazi Party orchestrated an outbreak of anti-Jewish violence throughout Greater Germany. It was a lawless onslaught that outraged the world and provoked criticism of the regime by many Germans. Jewish businesses that had already suffered antisemitic attacks were targeted for deliberate vandalism disguised as spontaneous public action. Party officials directed the SA, SS and Hitler Youth to destroy Jewish shops and torch synagogues. Over 7,000 Jewish-owned businesses were vandalized. Germans named the violent attacks Kristallnacht—Night of Broken Glass—for the shattered windows of Jewish-owned stores that littered the streets. The nationwide violence damaged or destroyed more than 250 synagogues.

GERDA HAAS: After Kristallnacht, I remember driving through Berlin and seeing the synagogues in flames and all the glass on the streets, and the people huddled and depressed. They walked around like the victims, like the hunted.

NARRATOR: German police filled the concentration camps with thousands of Jewish inmates. The SS released them only if they agreed to emigrate. But Jews faced increasingly restrictive immigration quotas in most countries and bureaucratic hurdles in Germany. A new law issued in October 1938 required Jews to surrender their old passports, which would be valid only after the letter "J" was stamped on them. Two months later, another law prevented the flight of capital owned by Jews, when the Economics Ministry froze all Jewish property and assets. Many who had the means and somewhere to go tried to leave Germany. Some families sent their children alone to other, safer countries. They could not know how soon the world would be at war.

## Chapter 4

TEXT ON SCREEN: World War II and the Holocaust, 1939-1945

# The Path to Nazi Genocide

## Transcript

NARRATOR: As the Nazi regime implemented its long-standing goal of territorial expansion, aggression against Germany's neighbors initially succeeded without encountering armed resistance. Hitler counted on the reluctance of Britain and Europe to intervene, for fear of another war. The German occupation of Prague, capital of Czechoslovakia, left no doubt as to Germany's intent on military conquest in Eastern Europe. On September 1, 1939, a massive German force invaded and conquered Poland within a month. It was the start of the Second World War. In April 1940, Germany occupied Denmark and Norway. In May, the German armed forces attacked France, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Belgium. In June, Paris fell and France surrendered. The swift and unexpected victory over France avenged Germany's defeat and humiliation in the First World War. It propelled Hitler to a new level of popularity and trust among the German people. In June 1941, the German Army, with more than three million soldiers, invaded the Soviet Union to wage a war of annihilation that targeted tens of millions of civilians. Under conditions of war and military occupation, the Nazi regime could pursue its political and racial goals with more radical measures. As German troops advanced into eastern Europe, Germany's power extended over millions more Jewish inhabitants in the occupied lands, where German authorities could exploit existing anti-Jewish attitudes among local populations. Across eastern Europe, German authorities forced those identified as Jews into tightly packed areas called ghettos. Separated from the non-Jewish population, Jews in the larger ghettos were imprisoned behind brick walls and barbed wire. The German drive eastward was cast as a crusade against Judaism and Communism—in the Nazi view, two aspects of the same evil. German soldiers and police officials treated Soviet prisoners of war as sub-humans, either shooting them or deliberately causing their deaths by exposure to the elements and by starvation. Millions died in German captivity. On the eastern front, racial political instruction was part of regular training for all types of German occupation forces. SS chief Heinrich Himmler referred to the war against the Soviet Union in an address to his men: "This invasion is an ideological battle and a struggle of races. Here in this struggle stands National Socialism—an ideology based on the value of our Germanic, Nordic blood... On the other side stands a population of 180 million, a mixture of races whose very names are unpronounceable, and whose physique is such that one can shoot them down without pity and compassion..." In July 1941, Hermann Göring—Hitler's second-in-command—authorized all necessary preparations for the "final solution of the Jewish question" in the European territory under German control. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum | The Path to Nazi Genocide: Transcript & Discussion Guide | <http://www.ushmm.org> 9 As German military forces advanced, mobile killing squads advanced with them. The German Army, military SS and German police units took an active part in authorized mass murders. The Germans and their accomplices rounded up the victims, drove them on foot or in trucks to a killing site, often made them remove their clothes, and shot them. Participants in the murders included local collaborators—especially police—in Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Ukraine and Belarus. The German killing squads and their auxiliaries murdered at least two million Jewish men, women and children in mass shooting operations. Back in Germany, SS and police deported the remaining Jews to the



# The Path to Nazi Genocide

## Transcript

occupied eastern territories. In German-occupied Warsaw, the walled ghetto that German Jews entered as newcomers in 1942 was already a place of mass suffering due to terrible overcrowding, lack of sanitation, disease and starvation imposed by the Germans. Despite all efforts of the imprisoned Jews to find ways of surviving and sustaining their communities, those conditions increasingly led to death for scores of thousands. Most vulnerable were the orphaned children. Originally, German occupation authorities established ghettos to concentrate Jews and separate them from the non-Jewish population. Later in the war, many ghettos served as staging grounds for the transportation of Jews to the east, euphemistically called “resettlement” by the Germans, who promised their captives better conditions and opportunities to work. People endured unimaginable suffering on journeys that lasted days, without food, water, or toilet facilities. Many of the weak, the young, and the elderly died before reaching the destination. The Germans and their collaborators deported roughly 2.7 million Jews and others to killing centers in German-occupied Poland. At the largest of the camps, Auschwitz-Birkenau, transports arrived from all across Europe.

LILLY MALNIK, Auschwitz Survivor: Transports were coming in every day, people with all kinds of different languages—Hungarian, Poles, Czechoslovakians, from Holland, from France, from Belgium, from Germany, from Italy, Russians. They were from everywhere.

NORBERT WOLLHEIM, Auschwitz Survivor: My wife was somehow waving to me, and that’s the last I’ve seen of her.

FRITZIE FRITZSHALL, Auschwitz Survivor: The smell, gas chambers. When I asked, “When will I see my mother?”—I was shown the smoke. This is how I found out where she went.

ERNEST KOENIG, Auschwitz Survivor: It took a long time until I started to realize that we are condemned to die. All Jews are condemned to die.

NARRATOR: Those whom the SS judged unable to work were killed, often within two or three hours of arrival. Those who could work would be used for forced labor, under punishing conditions. When they could no longer work, they, too, would be put to death. In several killing facilities, exclusively designed to kill human beings on an industrial scale, camp authorities used poison gas to murder children, women and men. At these killing centers, nearly half of all Holocaust victims died. The camps of Majdanek and Auschwitz were the first liberated, as Soviet troops reached Poland. News of Majdanek’s liberation in summer 1944 was met with disbelief. The New York Herald Tribunesaid, “Maybe...we should wait for further corroboration...this...sounds inconceivable...” In April 1945, US United States Holocaust Memorial Museum | The Path to Nazi Genocide: Transcript & Discussion Guide | <http://www.ushmm.org> 10 troops in Germany and Austria came upon concentration camps at Buchenwald, Dachau, Nordhausen, Mauthausen and Ohrdruf. The



# The Path to Nazi Genocide

## Transcript

soldiers saw the camps with their own eyes, and the truth was undeniable. General Dwight Eisenhower, Commander of the Allied liberating forces, wrote: “The things I saw beggar description.... The visual evidence and the verbal testimony of starvation, cruelty and bestiality were...overpowering...” In American movie theaters, newsreels made witnesses of thousands more. One commentator said, “To future generations it must be told: Once man did this to his brothers. In the 20th century there existed a civilization which for twelve years returned to barbarism.” Shock permeated the camps as liberating troops tried to grasp what they had found. Soldiers did all they could to attend to the dead and to support the living. Those who survived faced the slow task of reclaiming their dignity and returning—somehow—to life.

TEXT ON SCREEN: The Holocaust darkened the world’s view of humanity and our future. As the world struggled to understand what had happened, a new word, genocide, was needed for these crimes—crimes committed by ordinary people from a society not unlike our own.