LAWS AND DECREES
On February 27, 1933, an arsonist burned down the Reichstag, the German parliament building.

The “Decree of the Reich President for the Protection of the People and the State,” known as the “Reichstag Fire Decree” declared a state of emergency.

With Nazi encouragement, President von Hindenburg suspended freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and the right to assemble. The government could arrest political opponents without charge, dissolve political organizations, and censor newspapers.

FEBRUARY 28, 1933
ENABLING ACT

• The German parliament passed the “Law for Rectification of the Distress of Nation and Reich,” commonly called the “Enabling Act.” The law allowed Hitler to propose and sign legislation into law without consulting the parliament.

• This law effectively created a dictatorship in Germany.

• This propaganda flyer exclaims “The Reichstag in Flames!” and urges “Choose Hitler!”

MARCH 23, 1933
CIVIL SERVICE LAW

The German government issued the “Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service.”

The law fired Jews and political opponents of the Nazis from civil service positions, including schools, universities, and government jobs. They were exempt only if they had been in that job before August 1914, had fought in World War I, or had lost a father or son in the war.

Most Jewish lawyers were also forbidden from practicing law.
EDUCATION LAW

- The German government issued the “Law Against Overcrowding in Schools and Universities.”

- The law stated that Jewish students could be no more than 5% of the student population of any public school or university.

- Many Jewish students had to leave public school and start attending private school.

- German schools taught Nazi racial ideas about the superiority of “Aryans” and the inferiority of Jews.

APRIL 25, 1933
The German government passed the “Law for the Prevention of Offspring with Hereditary Diseases.”

The law allowed the government to forcibly sterilize people with physical or mental disabilities so they could not have children.

This law later expanded to include Roma (gypsies), “asocials” and Afro-Germans.

The caption of this propaganda slide reads “Life only as a Burden.”
PRESS CENSORSHIP LAW

• The “Editors Law” forbid Jews from working in journalism.

• The German Propaganda Ministry kept registries of “racially-pure” editors and journalists. New reporters had to register and show they were not Jewish.

• Newspapers could not publish any information which would “weaken the strength of the Reich abroad or at home.”

• Journalists who broke this law could be sent to concentration camps.

OCTOBER 4, 1933
The German government passes a “Law Against Dangerous Habitual Criminals.”

The government was authorized to hold prisoners indefinitely, even if they had successfully served a prison term, if Nazi officials decided the prisoner was a “dangerous habitual criminal.”

Instead of being released from jail, the prisoner would often be transferred to a concentration camp.
MANDATORY MILITARY SERVICE

- The German government enacted a conscription law, which applied to all men between 18-45.

- After May 1935, drafted soldiers had to show evidence that they were “Aryan.” Non-Jews were forbidden to serve, and Jehovah’s Witnesses refused to join the military.

- Hitler also officially announced that Germany would begin rebuilding its military (which it was already secretly doing). This was a violation of the Treaty of Versailles, which had limited the size of Germany’s military after World War I.
JEHOVAH’S WITNESS ORGANIZATION BANNED

• The German government banned the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, a Jehovah’s Witness publishing house. Local laws had already banned Jehovah’s Witnesses from distributing religious literature. Many Witnesses violated these laws.

• Jehovah’s Witnesses also refused to swear allegiance to Hitler or Nazi Germany or to serve in the military.

• Witnesses faced persecution and arrest. To be released from imprisonment, they could sign a form like this one, swearing allegiance to Nazi Germany. Few did so.

APRIL 1, 1935
The German government revised an existing law which already outlawed male homosexuality.

The revision expanded what activities qualified as sexual contact and increased the punishments for these acts.

Gay men were persecuted because they were seen as corrupting “German values” and not adding to the population. Since lesbians could still have biological children, they were usually not targeted.

JUNE 28, 1935
REICH CITIZENSHIP LAW

- This 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.

- Under this law, Jews lost their citizenship, and became “subjects of the state.”

- This law and the “Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor” are called the “Nuremberg Race Laws.”
LAW FOR THE PROTECTION OF GERMAN BLOOD AND HONOR

• The German government banned the marriage between Jews and non-Jews.

• It also made sexual relations between these “mixed race” couples illegal. This crime was called Rassenschande [Race defilement].

• This law and the “Reich Citizenship Law” are called the “Nuremberg Race Laws.”

SEPTEMBER 15, 1935
RACIAL DEFINITIONS EXPLAINED

- The German government issued the “first regulation” to the September 15, 1935 Reich Citizenship Law.
- The regulation clarified that Germans who were descended from one or two Jewish grandparents would be considered Mischling (mixed race).
- Mischling were still permitted to vote and hold civil service jobs.
- German Jews who served in World War I lost their exemption from the April 7, 1933 law. They had to retire from civil service jobs by the end of the year.

NOVEMBER 14, 1935
NUREMBERG LAWS EXTENDED

• The Reich Minister of the Interior, Wilhelm Frick announced an expansion of the September 15, 1935 Reich Citizenship Law.

• Frick stated that the citizenship law also applied to Roma and Sinti (gypsies) and to Afro-Germans.

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

• This racial identity card identifies Konrad Lehman as a Zigeuner (Gypsy).

NOVEMBER 26, 1935
JEWISH NAME LAW

- The “Law on the Alteration of Family and Personal Names” required Jews who did not have “Jewish first names” 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’.

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 business at a steep discount to a non-Jewish employee or Nazi supporter.

This photo was taken at Arthur Lewy’s cigar shop in Berlin in the 1930s. After this decree, Arthur was forced to “Aryanize” his shop and could no longer work.
EUTHANASIA DECREE

• In October 1939, Hitler wrote this note (backdated to September 1st) which authorized designated doctors to carry out “mercy killings.” The doctors were permitted to murder children and adults with physical and mental disabilities.

• The Nazi euthanasia program was called “Operation T-4” because the address where it was planned was Tiergartenstrasse 4 in Berlin.

• Even though Hitler authorized this program, euthanasia was still considered murder under German law.

• Historians estimate 250,000 people were murdered as part of the Nazi euthanasia program.

SEPTEMBER 1, 1939
Commissars were officials in the Soviet Communist Party assigned to Soviet military units. They spread patriotic, pro-communist propaganda to Soviet troops.

This order authorized and encouraged German soldiers to execute commissars.

The commissar order sent a message to the German military that they did not have to follow the international laws of war.

JUNE 6, 1941
JEWISH BADGE INTRODUCED IN GERMANY

- A “Jewish badge” was not unique to Nazi Germany, but had a long history. In earlier periods, Jews were sometimes forced to wear badges, patches, medals, or other means of identification. These orders were almost always accompanied by antisemitic laws.

- 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.

- Geography mattered. Jews in Poland were forced to wear a badge beginning in 1939; Jews in the Netherlands didn’t have to wear one until 1942.
Non-Jews were often warned against assisting Jews. Although this poster was issued in Warsaw in September 1942, this warning was not new or limited to Poland.

The poster warned that Jews in hiding would be subjected to the death penalty. Anyone caught hiding Jews, or helping them—transporting them, buying valuables from them, or providing them with food—would also be sentenced to death.

Very few non-Jews were willing to risk their lives to help Jews.