LAWS AND DECREES
REICHSTAG FIRE 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.
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 removed Jews and political opponents of the Nazis from civil service positions, including school, university, and government jobs. People 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 to practice 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 percent 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.

Under the law, 400,000 Germans were sterilized from January 1934 to May 1945.

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

- The “Editors’ Law” forbade 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 that 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
LAW AGAINST “CRIMINALS”

- The German government passed 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 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.
- 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.

MARCH 16, 1935
The German government banned the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, a Jehovah’s Witness publishing house. Local laws had already banned the Jehovah’s Witness organization entirely. Many Witnesses violated laws against practicing their religion and distributing religious literature.

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.
The German government revised an existing law that already outlawed male homosexuality.

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

Gay men were persecuted because they were seen as corrupting “German values” and not adding to the population. Because lesbians could still have biological children, they were usually not targeted.
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.”
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). Those who had three or more Jewish grandparents were classified as Jews.

- *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.
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 (so-called “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).
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.”
ANTI-JEWISH ECONOMY LAW

• 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.

• 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.

NOVEMBER 12, 1938
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.

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

Operation T4 was Germany’s first program of mass murder. Historians estimate 250,000 people were murdered as part of the Nazi euthanasia program.
GERMAN MILITARY ISSUES

COMMISSAR ORDER

• 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.
A “Jewish badge” was not unique to Nazi Germany but had a long history. In pre-modern times, 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 German-occupied Poland were forced to wear a badge beginning in 1939; Jews in the Netherlands didn’t have to wear one until 1942.
ANNOUNCEMENT OF DEATH PENALTY FOR AIDING JEWS

- 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 in Poland.

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

SEPTEMBER 5, 1942