



## A History of Hitler's Empire, 2nd Edition

- Lecture 1: The Third Reich, Hitler, and the 20<sup>th</sup> Century
- Lecture 2: The First World War and Its Legacy
- Lecture 3: The Weimar Republic and the Rise of the Nazi Party
- Lecture 4: The Twenties and the Great Depression
- Lecture 5: The Nazi Breakthrough
- Lecture 6: Hitler's Assumption of Power
- Lecture 7: Racial Policy and the Totalitarian State
- Lecture 8: Hitler's Foreign Policy
- Lecture 9: Munich and the Triumph of National Socialism
- Lecture 10: War in the West, War in the East
- Lecture 11: Holocaust—Hitler's War Against the Jews
- Lecture 12: The Final Solution

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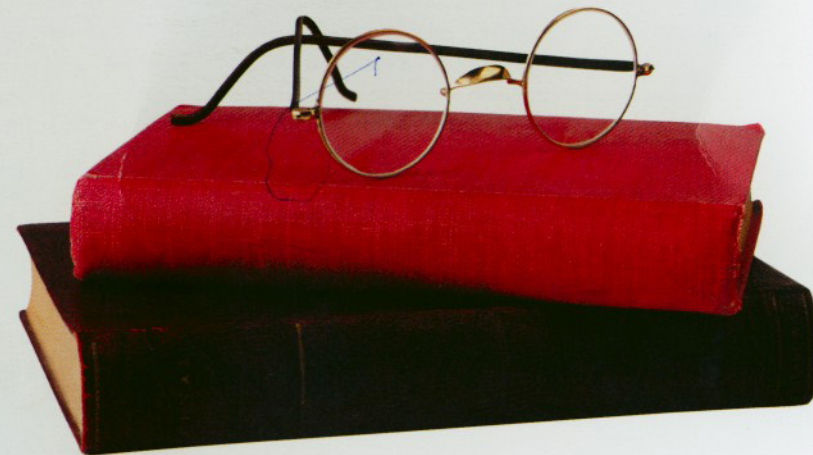
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A History of Hitler's Empire, 2nd Edition  
Professor Thomas Childers



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Professor Thomas Childers  
*University of Pennsylvania*



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## Thomas Childers, Ph.D.

Professor of History, University of Pennsylvania

Thomas Childers was born and raised in East Tennessee. He received his bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Tennessee and earned his Ph.D. in History from Harvard University in 1976.

Since 1976, Professor Childers has taught in the Department of History at the University of Pennsylvania. He is the recipient of numerous fellowships and awards, including a Fulbright scholarship, the Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung Research Grant, a fellowship in European Studies from the American Council of Learned Societies, and a West European Studies Research Grant from Harvard University.

During his tenure at Penn, Professor Childers has won a number of awards for his work in the classroom, including the Ira T. Abrahms Award for Distinguished Teaching and Challenging Teaching in the Arts and Sciences (1987), the Richard S. Dunn Award for Distinguished Teaching in History (1999), and the Senior Class Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching (2000). The recipient of the Senior Class Award is chosen by the graduating class of the University of Pennsylvania.

In addition to teaching at Penn, Dr. Childers has held visiting professorships at Trinity Hall College, Cambridge; Smith College; and Swarthmore College and he has lectured in London, Oxford, Berlin, Munich, and at other universities in the United States and Europe.

Professor Childers is the author and editor of several books on modern German history and the Second World War. These include *The Nazi Voter* (Chapel Hill, 1983), *The Formation of the Nazi Constituency* (London, 1987), and *Reevaluating the Third Reich: New Controversies, New Interpretations* (New York, 1993). He is currently completing a trilogy on the Second World War. The first volume of that history, *Wings of Morning: The Story of the Last American Bomber Shot Down Over Germany in World War II* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1995), was praised by Jonathan Yardley in *The Washington Post* as "a powerful and unselfconsciously beautiful book." The second volume, *We'll Meet Again* (New York: Henry Holt and Company) is set for publication in the fall of 2002. The final volume, *The Best Years of Their Lives*, will follow in due course.

In particular, the grave economic problems confronting the Weimar governments—the chaotic hyperinflation of 1923, the harsh stabilization of 1924, and the Great Depression, with its failed businesses and skyrocketing unemployment. We will see how the NSDAP, using negative campaigning and revolutionary propaganda techniques, was able to exploit this series of devastating economic developments and the failure of the Weimar government to deal effectively with them. We will analyze the party's appeal to the electorate, examining its innovative approach to campaigning and the content of



**Table of Contents**  
**A History of Hitler's Empire**

<b>Professor Biography</b> .....	i
<b>Course Scope</b> .....	1
<b>Lecture One</b> National Socialism, Hitler, and the Twentieth Century .....	3
<b>Lecture Two</b> The First World War and Its Legacy .....	6
<b>Lecture Three</b> The Weimar Republic and the Rise of the Nazi Party .....	8
<b>Lecture Four</b> The Twenties and the Great Depression .....	10
<b>Lecture Five</b> The Nazi Breakthrough .....	12
<b>Lecture Six</b> Hitler's Assumption of Power .....	15
<b>Lecture Seven</b> Racial Policy and the Totalitarian State.....	18
<b>Lecture Eight</b> Hitler's Foreign Policy .....	22
<b>Lecture Nine</b> Munich and the Triumph of National Socialism.....	24
<b>Lecture Ten</b> War in the West, War in the East .....	26
<b>Lecture Eleven</b> Holocaust: Hitler's War against the Jews .....	29
<b>Lecture Twelve</b> The Final Solution .....	32
<b>Timeline</b> .....	36
<b>Biographical Notes</b> .....	43
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	47

**A History of Hitler's Empire**

**Scope:**

In these twelve lectures, we will trace the rise to power of Adolf Hitler and his Nationalist Socialist party (the NSDAP). Although we will address a wide variety of issues, these lectures pose two fundamental questions: First, how could Adolf Hitler and the Nazis come to power in such a highly educated, industrially developed country at the very heart of Western culture and civilization? This question leads to a variety of important issues: What did Germans think they were getting when they voted National Socialist? How did the Nazis present themselves to the German public? What did they seem to stand for? The second basic question deals with the Nazis in power. How were the Nazis able to establish the foundations of a totalitarian regime in such a short time and hurl Europe—and the world—into a devastating war that would consume millions of lives and change the very basis of international politics in the twentieth century? Why was there apparently so little resistance? What made the regime popular at home? How were the Nazis able to seize control of the press, the radio, the courts, and the police with so little trouble?

The first six lectures of the course will be devoted to the rise of the Nazis between 1919 and 1933. We will begin our examination with a look at what might be called long-term factors that shaped German political culture in the twentieth century. Specially, we will focus on the problematic nature of German national unification in 1871 and on the deep cleavages—religious divisions, lingering regional loyalties, and growing social or class tensions—that made nation building in the new Germany difficult. In this vein, we will also explore the impact of World War I on this young German state. Until the very end of the war in 1918, Germany, despite enormous casualties and sacrifices on the home front, seemed to be winning. Then, in November 1918, the roof suddenly caved in. Inexplicably to many Germans, Germany had lost the war! The new democratic government, the Weimar Republic, was forced by the victorious Allies to sign a humiliating treaty and begin its political life carrying a staggering burden. The demands of the war had widened the divisions in German society, and the new regime would have to deal with those potentially revolutionary forces as well.

The lectures then turn to more short-term factors and developments, examining, in particular, the grave economic problems confronting the Weimar governments—the chaotic hyperinflation of 1923, the harsh stabilization of 1924, and the Great Depression, with its failed businesses and skyrocketing unemployment. We will see how the NSDAP, using negative campaigning and revolutionary propaganda techniques, was able to exploit this series of devastating economic developments and the failure of the Weimar government to deal effectively with them. We will analyze the party's appeal to the electorate, examining its innovative approach to campaigning and the content of

its appeals. Then we will attempt to determine what sort of person supported the party and why.

The second half of the course deals with the NSDAP in power, the Third Reich. These lectures begin by treating the Nazi seizure and consolidation of total power in 1933–1934. In particular, they focus on the step-by-step process by which resistance was broken and the major institutions of state and society were brought with surprising speed under Nazi control. We examine the system of terror and propaganda that solidified the new totalitarian state, a state that did not recognize the distinction between public and private and whose claim on the individual was total. By 1935, with power now firmly in Nazi hands, the ideological core of the National Socialist movement began to reveal itself. At this juncture, we will examine Hitler's racial ideas and the policies adopted to transform those ideas into reality. The focus here is largely on the Nazis' mounting repression of the Jewish population and the role of Heinrich Himmler's SS in shaping and enforcing the regime's anti-Semitic policies.

The lectures also address the sources of Hitler's popularity, especially his conduct of foreign policy between 1933 and 1939. We will examine Hitler's views on foreign policy and his systematic destruction of the Treaty of Versailles. We will show how and why he was able to outmaneuver the apprehensive Western European powers and how he entered into accommodation with his rival, Stalin, on the eve of World War II. The closing lectures are focused sharply on the coming of the Second World War, its course on the battlefield, and finally, the Holocaust. Hitler's war was not simply a traditional geopolitical conflict, a grab for land and resources; it was a racial war as well. Revealed most obviously in the ideological war against the Soviet Union, Hitler saw his enemy as a "Judeo-Bolshevist" conspiracy, which he was called on to eliminate. This meant not only a war of annihilation of the Soviet Union, but the destruction of the European Jewish community. We will follow Hitler's war against the Jews from *Mein Kampf* to Auschwitz and, finally, examine how, after so much death and destruction, his evil empire was destroyed.

## Lecture One

### National Socialism, Hitler, and the Twentieth Century

**Scope:** The National Socialist (or "Nazi") movement in Germany arose from the ashes of World War I and led to the cataclysm of World War II. Although a relatively short-lived political phenomenon, its impact on the course of twentieth-century history cannot be overemphasized. This lecture will explain why it is important to study the National Socialist movement, and it will survey the European (especially the German) political context in which Nazism emerged during the early 1920s. Lecture One sets the stage for further investigation of the ideology, personalities, and life cycle of Nazi Germany.

#### Outline

- I. We can point to several compelling reasons to study the National Socialist movement.
  - A. Despite, or perhaps because of, the horrors of war and genocide that are associated with Nazi Germany, we must address, analyze, and cope with it.
  - B. This political movement changed the world balance of power and altered millions of lives forever.
    1. Its victims include the millions of soldiers and civilians who lost their lives in military operations in World War II or the Holocaust, as well as those who had to endure the privations of post-war recovery and dislocation. Fifty-five million people perished during the war.
    2. The legacy of Nazi Germany included the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States. Germany and Berlin were divided between these superpowers for nearly fifty years.
  - C. Germany is an integral part of our civilization. It has contributed immensely to Western culture for centuries in literature, music, science, and other fields of endeavor. Therefore, it is important to fit this period of history into the entire context of German history.
  - D. Finally, it is imperative to study the National Socialist movement because of concerns that a similar regime might rise somewhere else.
- II. These lectures will consider the following short-term factors.
  - A. The kind of people who were attracted to the National Socialists were true believers who were ideologically committed. We need to look at the role of the Nazi ideology *per se*. Did these ideas themselves attract the German people? If so, what aspect of this program elicited such a strong ideological response?



- B. In addressing Hitler's rise to power, we will propose answers to the following questions:
1. How did the National Socialists subvert the postwar "democratic" Weimar Republic (established in 1919 and ended in 1933)?
  2. Who supported the NSDAP and why?
  3. How did the Nazis outmaneuver and effectively break political opposition?
  4. Why was there so little resistance to their emergence to power as a totalitarian regime?
- C. We will also examine daily life in National Socialist Germany from the perspectives of average Germans and of the ultimate victims of the Nazis' racial policy.

III. These lectures will also consider the following longer-term factors.

- A. First, we will examine the problematic nature of Germany's unification in 1871 and its pattern of industrialization
1. German unification came very late; until the late nineteenth century, the history of the German nation was one of disunity and regionalism.
  2. The new German state was not created on a wave of mass nationalism but was the result of Prussian military might.
- B. The political system was beset by three important cleavages, or divisions: region (North and South), religion (Protestant and Catholic), and class (established middle and aristocratic classes and the working class).
- C. Germany's industrialization came later than that of most other Western European countries but grew very quickly, creating strong and important social divisions.

**Essential Reading:**

Childers, Thomas, *The Nazi Voter: The Social Foundations of Fascism in Germany, 1919–1933*, introduction and chapter 1.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Mommsen, Hans, *The Weimar Republic*.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. What are some of the key factors or trends in Germany's past that might help us explain developments in twentieth-century Germany? Do you think National Socialism is consistent with, or a deviation from, this historical background?
2. How does one explain the ongoing, indeed, passionate interest in the Third Reich over fifty years after it collapsed?

## Lecture Two

### The First World War and Its Legacy

**Scope:** This lecture examines the multiple problems of the new democratic government in Germany, especially the legacy of defeat and surrender in the Great War and the hated Treaty of Versailles in 1919.

#### Outline

- I. Before World War I, Germany was wracked by regional, religious, and class divisions, made all the deeper by rapid industrialization.
  - A. In Germany, modern values were mixed with traditional ones. The most advanced industrial workers lived side-by-side with artisans belonging to guilds.
  - B. In the Ruhr, for example, what had been a glorified sheep pasture was transformed within two generations into the heart of industrial Europe.
- II. Otto von Bismarck adopted an expedient for dealing with social divisions. But his strategy for creating a political majority would have a devastating legacy.
  - A. The policy of “negative integration” singled out Catholics as a minority—a tactic the Nazis would later revive with the Jews.
  - B. Bismarck’s policy of persecuting the Church alienated an important minority in Germany.
  - C. His anti-Socialist laws rallied many people to the cause of liberals.
  - D. Instead of building consensus, then, he established a political environment of confrontation. The Nazis would seek to overcome the political and social divisions left by Bismarck.
- III. The impact of World War I and its aftermath on Germany.
  - A. The “Great War” was greeted with great fanfare. The Kaiser called for “peace within the castle” to maintain a united front, stirring feelings of national solidarity.
  - B. But the consequences of the war were deeply destructive.
    1. The war gravely aggravated the already deep divisions in German society. The country was essentially ruled by martial law.
    2. Artisans and farmers felt cheated by inflated prices, and social conflict increased. Over a quarter of a million Germans died in 1916 because of a lack of food.
    3. Germany suffered millions of casualties during the war; only Russia endured greater losses.
    4. German propaganda during the war relentlessly stressed that victory was in the Reich’s grasp.

5. The sudden armistice and defeat left most Germans shocked and dismayed. How had this happened? The army claimed it was betrayed by Jewish liberals and Social Democrats.
6. The Kaiser abdicated, and a revolution swept the country.

- IV. Following the abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm, left and centrist “outsider” political parties created the Weimar Republic. This government signed the hated Treaty of Versailles in 1919.
  - A. As a result, the Weimar government was born and lived under a cloud.
  - B. The Weimar constitution was progressive. It granted universal suffrage, a bill of rights, a commitment to a welfare state, and a radical system of proportional representation. This led to a proliferation of political parties (more than thirty-five by 1928).
  - C. The government was centrist but tended toward coalitions and short-lived cabinets. It had to deal with threats of recession and severe inflation, as well as other problems.
  - D. The postwar period (especially from 1919 to 1924) was plagued by political instability and terror as extreme parties of the left and right vied with centrist parties in power.

#### Essential Reading:

Kershaw, Ian, *Hitler: 1889–1936 Hubris*.

Childers, Thomas, *The Nazi Voter*.

#### Supplementary Reading:

Mommsen, Hans, *The Weimar Republic*.

Burleigh, Michael, *The Third Reich*.

#### Questions to Consider:

1. The Weimar constitution was viewed at the time of its ratification as the most progressive in Europe. Yet, within five years, serious flaws in that constitution emerged. What were they and why were they problematic?
2. How would you evaluate the impact of the First World War on the viability of the new Weimar Republic?



## Lecture Three

### The Weimar Republic and the Rise of the Nazi Party

**Scope:** We will trace the origins of the NSDAP and Adolf Hitler's emerging role as party leader between 1919 and 1923. Until 1923, the NSDAP was a minor curiosity on the fringes of German politics, but the "Beer Hall Putsch" of that year and Hitler's subsequent trial for treason would bring him and his party national attention for the first time. Convicted and jailed after the abortive coup, Hitler used his incarceration to write his manifesto, *Mein Kampf—My Struggle*.

#### Outline

- I. The Weimar Republic was beset by instability early on.
  - A. There were assassinations and coups on the left and right.
  - B. There were nine cabinet changes from 1919 to 1923.
  - C. In January 1923, French and Belgian armies occupied the industrial heartland of Germany, the Ruhr, claiming that the Germans had failed to make the reparations payments called for at Versailles.
- II. Adolf Hitler and the emergence of the NSDAP.
  - A. One of many small extremist political groups that arose in post-World War I Germany, the party traced its genesis to the German Workers' Party.
    1. The German name was *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (National Socialist German Workers' Party), or NSDAP, originally the DAP.
    2. "Nazi" is a contraction of the first two German words; the term was initially used by opponents to taunt members of the party.
  - B. Adolf Hitler quickly emerged as the top attraction of the party.
    1. An Austrian by birth, Hitler served in the German army, receiving the Iron Cross first class, and was in Munich when the war ended.
    2. He was sent by the military authorities to report on the early meetings of the party and quickly joined it.
    3. He began his political career as a speaker with remarkable skill. From his earliest political days, he publicly condemned Bolsheviks and Jews.
    4. By 1920, he was the undisputed leader of the party.
  - C. Hitler drafted the party's platform, the "25 Points of 1920," broadening the party's constituency. The Nazis cast a wider net than traditional and larger German political parties. They seemed to offer something for everyone.

1. Hitler's appearances and the party's activities drew local attention in 1920–1922, but the party was still minuscule and confined mainly to Munich.
  2. Hitler denounced the Treaty of Versailles and outlined an anti-Semitic program under which citizenship would be limited to those of German blood.
- D. The crisis events of 1923–1924 gave the Nazis an opportunity to attract national attention.
1. In November 1923, Hitler and his followers conspired to seize power in Bavaria, then march on Berlin. On November 8, the "Beer Hall Putsch" occurred, and Hitler's plan unraveled.
  2. Yet, in 1924, Hitler turned his trial into a political success, gaining national press coverage of his attacks on various "enemies" of Germany. He was sentenced to five years in prison for high treason. He served one year.

#### Essential Reading:

Kershaw, Ian, *Hitler: 1889–1936 Hubris*.

Childers, Thomas, *The Nazi Voter*.

#### Supplementary Reading:

Mommsen, Hans, *The Weimar Republic*.

Burleigh, Michael, *The Third Reich*.

#### Questions to Consider:

1. From its very founding, the NSDAP was an enigma in the German party system. Why? Was it a party of the left or the right?
2. What was the importance of the Beer Hall Putsch and Hitler's trial?





## Lecture Five

### The Nazi Breakthrough

**Scope:** The efforts of Chancellor Heinrich Brüning (1930–1932) to stem the tide of bad economic news were spectacularly unsuccessful, and in 1932, new elections were called. Using a revolutionary strategy of perpetual campaigning and other propaganda innovations, the Nazis scored dramatic successes in regional and national elections, emerging in the summer as the largest political party in Germany (with 38% of the vote). Brüning's successor, Franz von Papen, had little support and less success in dealing with the economic problems, and having never been in power, Hitler and his party were perfectly positioned to attack the established parties and their failures. Negative campaigning was raised to new heights. In November 1932, the Nazis suffered an unexpected defeat at the ballot box, seeing their vote drop for the first time since they began their dramatic ascent.

#### Outline

- I. Nazi campaigning in the elections of 1932.
  - A. In 1931, the NSDAP briefly took part in an anti-government alliance, giving Hitler access to conservative circles.
    1. The NSDAP's campaigns were now well financed and carefully orchestrated.
    2. In the early spring of 1932, Hitler challenged Hindenburg for the presidency. Although Hitler did not defeat Hindenburg, his public recognition and prestige were increased. The propaganda assault of the Nazis was overwhelming.
  - B. In 1932, the Nazis did well in the four major national campaigns.
    1. In that year, Germany experienced two presidential ballots, two Reichstag elections, and regional elections in virtually every state in the Republic.
    2. During these campaigns, street battles between the Communists and Nazis became a plague, as public violence rose to new heights.
  - C. Chancellor Brüning was unable to strengthen the economy.
    1. Businesses were increasingly unimpressed with his ability to deal with the Depression and to dismantle the Weimar welfare state.
    2. When Brüning suggested settling unemployed workers on East Elbean estates, the Conservatives claimed that he had lost his mind.
    3. President Hindenburg was pressured to dismiss Brüning and finally did so in the spring of 1932.

- II. Brüning's replacement was Franz von Papen (of the Catholic Center Party).
  - A. What little support Papen enjoyed came from the political right.
  - B. He called for Reichstag elections; the Nazis ran the most effective campaign in German history. Although they fell short of a majority (38% of the vote), they won a plurality, which gave them the dominant voice in coalition building.
  - C. Negotiations for the post of chancellor now became the issue.
    1. President Hindenburg did not want to appoint Hitler as chancellor.
    2. Hitler would not accept the vice-chancellorship.
  - D. The beginning of the end of the Weimar Reichstag ensued.
    1. For the first time since 1919, the Reichstag speaker was not a Social Democrat (Hermann Göring of the NSDAP assumed that post).
    2. Göring engineered the almost immediate dissolution of the Reichstag.
  - E. In the aftermath of the July elections, no majority coalition was possible without either the Nazis or the Communists.
    1. Hitler demanded the chancellorship with full emergency decree powers, but Hindenburg refused Hitler and the latter refused to enter the coalition. Hitler wanted all power or nothing.
    2. Papen dissolved the Reichstag, suppressed the Communists and Nazis, and announced his intention of introducing a new authoritarian constitution.
    3. The Reichstag was dissolved and new elections were called for November.
- III. The last days of Weimar.
  - A. In the elections of November 1932, the Nazi vote dropped—and significantly—for the first time since 1928.
  - B. NSDAP was still the largest party, but its constituency seemed to be unraveling.
  - C. In regional elections throughout December, the party's vote continued to dwindle.

#### Essential Reading:

Childers, Thomas, *The Nazi Voter*.

Allen, William Sheridan, *The Nazi Seizure of Power*.

#### Supplementary Reading:

Mommsen, Hans, *The Weimar Republic*.

Burleigh, Michael, *The Third Reich*.

## Questions to Consider:

1. Between 1928 and 1933, the Nazis crafted a social constituency of remarkable diversity. Who voted for the Nazis and why? Who didn't and why?
2. How were the Nazis able to mobilize such massive support in such a short amount of time?

## Lecture Six

### Hitler's Assumption of Power

**Scope:** In the aftermath of the election, party leaders worried that their constituency was beginning to unravel—as, indeed, it was. Yet, at just this moment, in January 1933, Hindenburg would finally appoint Hitler chancellor. That appointment was the result of a “palace intrigue” spearheaded by deposed chancellor Papen. In the second half of the lecture, we will turn our attention to the steps by which the Nazis extended their power over the German state and society. By the summer of 1933, the major potential sources of opposition had been eliminated and the Nazis had established the foundations of a totalitarian regime.

### Outline

- I. Hitler's ascension.
  - A. General Kurt von Schleicher was appointed chancellor in December 1932. Papen stayed on as Hindenburg's private advisor.
    1. Schleicher started a new path of conciliation, hoping to win support from the Social Democrats and Nazis. He did not succeed.
    2. Papen, who despised Schleicher, met secretly with Hitler to discuss plans for a Papen/Hitler government.
  - B. The Nazis did well in January 1933 regional elections, and Hitler was won over to the idea of a Hitler/Papen cabinet.
    1. Schleicher requested the dissolution of the Reichstag and the declaration of a state of emergency, which Hindenburg refused.
    2. Schleicher resigned and, on January 30, Hitler became chancellor.
- II. Hitler sought to reassure the public that his appointment was not a coup.
  - A. The Nazis did not rush to replace people, which created the appearance that they had been contained in a coalition framework.
    1. Only three Nazis, including Hitler, held seats in the new cabinet.
    2. Frick was made Minister of the Interior, and Goering was named Reich Commissar for Prussia, putting both men in charge of important police units.
    3. The storm troopers were deputized as “auxiliary police.”
    4. Hitler called for new elections.
  - B. Hitler made a public show of refusing to use the Treasury to fund the party's campaigns. He also made effective use of the radio in his campaign.
    1. On February 27, the Reichstag building caught on fire. Hitler claimed that the Communists had started the fire, and in the



“Reichstag Fire Decree,” ended all civil liberties. This became the “legal” foundation of the Third Reich.

2. Although the election was anything but free, Hitler and the NSDAP still failed to win a majority (44 %) on March 5. However, they were able to form an alliance with the much smaller Conservative Party, and together, this coalition enjoyed a majority in the parliament.
  3. Hitler at last banned the Communist Party.
- C. Hitler was sworn in as chancellor in March 1933, and called for the passage of an Enabling Act to give him full powers. With the Communists banned, only the Social Democrats voted against it. With its passage, the Weimar Republic was dead, and the Third Reich had begun.
1. In April, the first concentration camp, at Dachau, opened.
  2. In May, the regime banned all labor unions and associations.
  3. In July, the Nazis outlawed all parties except the NSDAP, thus creating a one-party state.

### III. The Nazi consolidation of power.

- A. Hitler and his advisors were convinced that the Communists would revolt following his appointment as chancellor. However, the Nazis secured control with surprising ease, and there was no counter-coup.
- B. In addition to the Communists, the Nazis had two other important power centers to worry about.
1. Not unexpectedly, there was conflict between the Nazis and the Catholic Church.
  2. The German Army worried that it might be absorbed by the SA (the *Sturmabteilung*, “brown shirts” or “storm troopers”) led by Ernst Roehm. The SA was the militia of the Nazis, but because of its growing size, it appeared to be the party’s private army and, thus, was a potential threat to Hitler, as well as the regular German army.
- C. Hitler chose Heinrich Himmler, the head of the SS (*Schutzstaffel*, or “protection staff”), the elite bodyguard unit, to investigate Roehm.
1. Roehm was arrested and executed in June 1934, during the so-called “blood purge” in which Hitler eliminated his rivals.
  2. Hitler passed a retroactive law stating that the action was legal and necessary for the defense of the German state (Roehm was said to be planning a coup by the SA).
- D. The real winner was the secret police.
1. Himmler (the SS leader) created the SD (*Sicherheitsdienst*, or “security service”) in 1931. It was basically an intelligence and internal policing branch of the SS.

2. Hermann Goering created the *Gestapo* (secret state police) in 1933 and merged it with the SS in 1934.
3. The concurrent operations of the Gestapo and the quasi-military SS (virtually a private army for Himmler, not unlike what the SA had been for Roehm) created a police state of unlimited power and ruthless efficiency.

### IV. Hitler became president and chancellor.

- A. President Hindenburg died on August 2, 1934.
- B. The offices of president and chancellor were consolidated, and Hitler assumed them both.
- C. He took the title *Führer*, or “leader” (of the Nazi party and of Germany).

### Essential Reading:

Abel, Theodore, *Why Hitler Came into Power*.

Childers, Thomas, *The Nazi Voter*.

### Supplementary Reading:

Allen, William Sheridan, *The Nazi Seizure of Power*.

Mommsen, Hans, *The Weimar Republic*.

Burleigh, Michael, *The Third Reich*.

Turner, Henry Ashby, Jr., *Hitler's Thirty Days to Power: January 1933*.

### Questions to Consider:

1. How would you evaluate Hitler’s appointment as chancellor?
2. To what extent was it the reflection of the will of the German people?
3. Discuss the development and use of the *Sturmabteilung* (SA), then the *Schutzstaffel* (SS) and *Geheime Staatspolizei* (Gestapo). In what ways were they similar? How were they different? Why did Hitler decide to choose the army over the SA in 1934?

## Lecture Seven

### Racial Policy and the Totalitarian State

**Scope:** This lecture examines the consolidation of power by the Nazis following Hitler's appointment as chancellor. During the first year and a half of Nazi rule, the regime was focused primarily on establishing and consolidating its control over German society. By 1935, the racial core of Nazi ideology began to emerge in ever-greater clarity. The main target of Nazi racial fanaticism was the Jewish population of Germany. We will examine the genesis of the racist ideology and the role of anti-Semitism in Nazi thinking. Specifically, we will trace the steps by which Nazi racial theory was translated into policy between 1933 and 1939.

#### Outline

- I. Hitler's regime was one of totalitarian aspirations.
  - A. The Nazi system was built on ideology and terror.
    1. The regime claimed total control over the individual; there was no distinction between private and public life.
    2. Yet behind the façade of totalitarian order, Nazi Germany was in many ways a system of organized chaos and institutionalized Darwinism.
  - B. The German propaganda machine relentlessly bombarded the public with good news. This barrage was accompanied by the growth of state-imposed terror.
  - C. Hitler, as Führer, saw himself as a "big-picture man" and did not interfere with operations of the SS and Gestapo at the regional level. His orders were quite vague. Thus, the functioning of the regime lacked definition of jurisdiction and responsibility.
  - D. As viewed from the perspective of the average person, the chaos seemed calculated and social life was organized.
    1. There were no checks and balances or substantive civil rights. Even subjective crimes were punishable, and some laws were made retroactive.
    2. The Gestapo usually made its arrests at night and used other repressive tactics to create fear. Although many Germans protested the regime, fewer were willing to speak out when it became clear that their families might also be punished.
  - E. The Nazis used mass rallies and propaganda to build support.
    1. All the news was relentlessly positive.

2. The newspapers, radio, and newsreels spewed forth a steady stream of propaganda, emphasizing the positive achievements of the regime.
3. No dissenting opinions could be heard. The official view of Nazi society was one of happy farmers, workers, and middle-class Germans working together in a classless society—a *Volksgemeinschaft*, or people's community. Hitler was celebrated as a man of the people.

#### II. Evolution of Nazi racial policy.

- A. Anti-Semitism was a central aspect of the Nazi program.
  1. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler propounded his theories about the inferiority of the Jews (and other non-Aryans) and their corruption of German society.
  2. Before 1933, the Nazis subtly linked anti-Semitism to other issues, especially economic ones.
  3. With the onset of the Depression, the Nazis, while still presenting their anti-Semitic positions, tended to emphasize other aspects of their program in their public appeals.
  4. Following their rise to power, they could pursue anti-Semitism more openly.
- B. After 1933, Nazi racial policy proceeded in three phases.
  1. The period from 1933 to 1935 was one of early "legal" discrimination against the Jews in the civil service and the professions—law, medicine, and education.
  2. The years 1935 to 1938 were characterized by the passage of the Nürnberg (Nuremberg) Laws in 1935; Nazi policy in these years focused on *Entjüdung*, pressuring Jews to leave Germany.
  3. The infamous *Reichskristallnacht* in November 1938, the first nation-wide coordinated act of violence against the Jewish community, marked a new and sinister phase of Nazi actions.
  4. The Second World War would usher in the last and most devastating phase of Nazi racial policy, the "final solution to the Jewish question," meaning mass murder.

#### III. The evolution of Nazi Jewish policy.

- A. Complicated bureaucratic politics played as much a role in the decision to exterminate the Jews as did Nazi ideology.
- B. After a burst of anti-Semitic measures in 1933, the national regime seemed to lose interest in new initiatives against the Jews.
  1. Jewish businesses were boycotted in 1933.
  2. Legislation was enacted in April 1933 to eliminate Jews from the civil service. After being chastised by Hindenburg, the Nazis chose not to ostracize Jewish veterans.

3. A terrible irony was that, until this time, Germany was considered a haven for Eastern European Jews.
  4. Regional and local Nazi activists took actions against Jews in what were called *Einzelaktionen*, or “individual actions.”
- C. The repression entered a new phase between 1935 and 1938.
1. The Nürnberg Laws of 1935 deprived Jews of their civil rights; Jews were denied German citizenship, intermarriage between Germans and Jews was prohibited, and Jews were barred from certain professions. The laws were made retroactive.
  2. The regime attempted to define systematically who was or was not a Jew. Hitler refused to take a position, typical of his determination not to make clear decisions or take sides in internal party disputes.
  3. Still, after the Nürnberg Laws, no new measures would be undertaken until 1938.
- D. The regime carried out additional steps between 1938 and 1941.
1. The first act of mass violence against the Jewish community to be clearly orchestrated by the government was the *Kristallnacht* (or “Night of Broken Glass”) on November 10, 1938.
  2. Many Jews were killed or injured, and their property and synagogues were damaged or destroyed.

#### Essential Reading:

Arendt, Hannah, *Totalitarianism*.

Burleigh, Michael, *The Third Reich*.

Hitler, Adolf, *Mein Kampf* (focus on the chapters addressing the Jews and other “undesirables” and his concepts of racial purity).

Friedländer, Saul, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*.

#### Supplementary Reading:

Kershaw, Ian, *Hitler: 1889–1936 Hubris*.

Peukart, Detlev, *Inside Nazi Germany*.

Gellately, Robert, *The Gestapo and German Society*.

Kaplan, Marion, *Between Dignity and Despair*.

Klemperer, Viktor, *I Will Bear Witness, 1933–1941*.

#### Questions to Consider:

1. What is totalitarianism? How is it different from authoritarian dictatorships, such as Mussolini’s Italy or Franco’s Spain?
2. Trace the history of anti-Jewish laws in Germany following Hitler’s assumption of power. What was the international reaction to the Nuremberg Laws and *Kristallnacht*?

3. Were the Nazis acting according to some sort of blueprint as they introduced their anti-Jewish measures step-by-step, or did circumstance, improvisation, and the peculiar decision-making style of the Third Reich play a significant role?

#### II. German foreign policy

A. There was a triangular relationship among Hitler's Reich, Britain, and the United States. Germany's foreign policy was shaped by its desire to dominate Europe and the world. Hitler's goal was to create a new world order based on racial hierarchy. He believed that the United States and Britain were the main obstacles to his goal. He sought to weaken them through diplomatic and military means.

#### Essential Reading:

1. Germany would dominate the European continent. P. J. A. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1875–1914*.

2. Britain would continue to have its global empire. P. J. A. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1875–1914*.

3. The United States would be the dominant power in the Western Hemisphere, but Hitler believed that the U.S. could eventually collapse because of its racial heterogeneity. P. J. A. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1875–1914*.

4. Japan would dominate East Asia. P. J. A. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1875–1914*.

#### C. Germany participated in the Geneva Disarmament Conference

1. Hitler agreed to disband all his armed forces—which were done in 1919. P. J. A. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1875–1914*.

2. When they failed, as Hitler knew they would, he withdrew from the conference and from the League of Nations to which Germany had been invited in 1923. P. J. A. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1875–1914*.

3. There was growing international sentiment, especially in Britain, that the Versailles settlement was indeed unjust to Germany. The treaty was universally hated by Germans. P. J. A. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1875–1914*.



## Lecture Eight

### Hitler's Foreign Policy

**Scope:** Thus far, the lectures have focused on essentially domestic affairs after 1933. In this lecture, we will shift our attention to Nazi foreign policy. It will not do to think of Hitler as simply a “madman bent on world domination.” Instead, we must focus on Hitler’s conception of the international system and Germany’s anticipated role in it. Hegemony over the European continent, Hitler believed, was Germany’s rightful position, and to achieve this, he would have to demolish the Versailles Treaty and the system it had created. As a result, Hitler’s actions between 1933 and 1939 were based on a determination to undo the treaty and position Germany to launch a drive for *Lebensraum* (“living space”) in the east. Ultimately, a showdown with the Soviet Union would be necessary, but in the meantime, Hitler was willing to take intermediate steps as the opportunity arose. The implementation of this aggressive policy led Europe and the world rapidly down the slippery slope to global war.

#### Outline

- I. Hitler’s conception of international politics.
  - A. There was a triangular relationship among Hitler’s racial policy, his desire to create “living space” for the German people, and his crusade against “Judeo-Bolshevism” in the East. Ultimately, Hitler wanted to create a greater German Reich that was economically independent.
  - B. Hitler envisioned a political division of the world among several leading “empires.”
    1. Germany would dominate the European continent.
    2. Britain would continue to have its global empire.
    3. The United States would be the dominant power in the Western hemisphere, but Hitler believed that the U.S. would eventually collapse because of its racial heterogeneity.
    4. Japan would dominate much of Asia.
  - C. Germany participated in the Geneva Disarmament Conference of 1933.
    1. Hitler agreed to disband all his armed forces—which were quite small anyway—if the other European powers did so as well.
    2. When they balked, as Hitler knew they would, he withdrew from the conference and from the League of Nations (to which Germany had been admitted in 1926).
    3. There was growing international sentiment, especially in Britain, that the Versailles settlement was, indeed, unjust to Germany. The treaty was universally hated by Germans.

- D. Hitler took several steps to re-arm Germany.
  1. In 1935, he announced the formation of a German Air Force (*Luftwaffe*). This move was protested ineffectually by the League of Nations.
  2. In the Anglo-German Naval Agreement, Germany pledged to keep her fleet to one-third the size of Great Britain’s.
  3. In 1935, Hitler announced that Germany would institute conscription and build an army.
  4. This was followed by the remilitarization of the Rhineland in 1936, in violation of the Treaty of Versailles and other conventions. Although his advisors had counseled against the move, Hitler went ahead with the gamble and was never challenged.
  5. Hitler also sent forces to Spain to support Franco in the Spanish Civil War, regarded by many historians as a training ground for Fascist forces that subsequently fought in World War II.
- E. Berlin’s hosting of the 1936 Olympics seemed to verify Germany’s return to great-power status and prestige in the world.
- F. In a top-secret conference in November 1937, Hitler laid out to his generals and diplomats what seemed to be a blueprint for his next diplomatic steps to achieve “living space” in the east by 1943–1945. He was certain that war would result.

- II. German foreign policy became increasingly aggressive during 1938. Hitler’s popularity at home reached its pinnacle.
  - A. In the spring of 1938, Austria sought international guarantees of sovereignty, but it was eventually annexed by Hitler (the *Anschluss*).
  - B. Europe was set to begin its slide toward the outbreak of war.

#### Essential Reading:

Taylor, A. J. P., *The Origins of the Second World War*.

Kershaw, Ian, *Hitler: 1936–1945 Nemesis*.

#### Supplementary Reading:

Bullock, Alan, *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny*.

#### Questions to Consider:

1. To what extent was Hitler’s foreign policy driven by Nazi ideology? What role did circumstance and improvisation play in the events of 1933–1938?
2. Why was the reaction of the West so tepid in the face of Hitler’s aggressive foreign policy? How could Hitler justify his claims to Austria?

## Lecture Nine

### Munich and the Triumph of National Socialism

**Scope:** By the provisions of the Munich Pact of 1938, the Sudetenland was ceded to Germany. The German invasion of Czechoslovakia soon followed. In August 1939, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union signed a cynical non-aggression pact that allowed Hitler to invade Poland, sealing the fate of Poland and peace in Europe. On September 1, 1939, Hitler sent his troops into Poland, triggering a European-wide war.

#### Outline

- I. A crisis over the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia developed in late summer; German nationals in the area claimed harassment by the Czech government and appealed to Berlin. Prague mobilized its troops, and Europe appeared on the verge of war.
  - A. Mussolini intervened in support of Hitler's territorial claim, and Neville Chamberlain sought to negotiate a solution.
  - B. Chamberlain was pursuing a policy of "appeasement."
  - C. In September 1938, by terms of the Munich Pact, England, France, Germany, and Italy agreed to cede the Sudetenland to Germany. Russia was not invited to the Munich Conference.
    1. There was some opposition to this move in the German army. Chief of Staff Ludwig Beck resigned in protest of Hitler's apparent determination to go to war over the Sudetenland. The opposition in the army was dashed by the West's capitulation at Munich.
    2. In March 1939, Germany invaded Czechoslovakia, violating the Munich Pact. The Czechs did not resist. England, backed by France, issued a guarantee of Polish territory and sovereignty, because another crisis seemed to be brewing over German claims in Poland.
- II. The final crisis.
  - A. In the late summer of 1939, the key to the diplomatic situation was in Moscow.
    1. Soviet leader Josef Stalin realized (more clearly than ever after Munich) that the West was weak. He feared that the Western powers sought to divert German aggression toward the East.
    2. Nazi foreign minister Joachim Ribbentrop and his Soviet counterpart V.M. Molotov signed a non-aggression pact in late August 1939 that provided for the German and Russian partition of Poland.

3. Although the two regimes were ideological enemies, both had practical reasons for signing the agreement, which was the death knell for Poland and for peace.

- B. On September 1, 1939, Germany launched a *Blitzkrieg* attack on Poland and quickly overwhelmed it from the west.

1. In compliance with their treaty obligations (and contrary to Hitler's expectations), Britain and France declared war on Germany.
    2. The European-wide war had begun.
    3. The Soviet Union attacked Poland from the east, pursuant to Stalin's non-aggression pact with Germany.

#### Essential Reading:

Keegan, John, *The Second World War*.

Kershaw, Ian, *Hitler: 1936–1945 Nemesis*.

#### Supplementary Reading:

Lukacs, John, *The Duel and Five Days in London, May 1940*.

#### Questions to Consider:

1. What were the ideas behind the British policy of appeasement? In retrospect, it seems almost criminally shortsighted, but what constraints did Britain operate under in 1938-1939?
2. What were the implications of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, both within Germany and in the international community? Why did Hitler enter such an agreement with his most hated ideological enemy?

## Lecture Ten

### War in the West, War in the East

**Scope:** In this lecture, we will turn our attention to Hitler's war on the western and eastern fronts. First, we examine the rapid German successes in the west that were halted by the Battle of Britain. We then examine the Nazi ideological view of the Soviet Union as the center of what Hitler invariably referred to as "Judeo-Bolshevism." It was, he believed, Germany's historic duty to smash this world conspiracy and save Western civilization from both Communism and the "pernicious" influence of the Jews. The war in the east, therefore, would be not only a campaign to gain territory (*Lebensraum*, or "living space") for the German nation but a great ideological crusade. It was to be a brutal, no-holds-barred assault, and German troops were issued orders explaining that the usual code of military conduct, the usual rules of war, would not apply in the east. Although England had not broken, Hitler nevertheless launched his attack on the Soviet Union (Operation Barbarossa) in June 1941, believing that the Red Army was severely weakened by Stalin's purges of 1938 and would collapse within weeks.

#### Outline

- I. Would there now be war in the west?
  - A. Between the fall of Poland and the spring of 1940, no significant fighting took place in the west.
    1. The English called this period "the Phoney War"; the French, the "*drole de guerre*"; and the Germans, the "*Sitzkrieg*."
    2. In April 1940, Germany invaded Norway and Denmark.
    3. In May 1940, German units attacked France, Belgium, and Holland and rapidly rolled back the French army, thought to be secure behind the Maginot Line, and drove the British back across the Channel at Dunkirk.
    4. The surprisingly easy victory over France marked the high water mark of Hitler's popularity at home.
  - B. In July 1940, Germany began planning an invasion of Britain (Operation Sea Lion) and launched an air assault (the Battle of Britain) against England.
    1. Standing alone, the British defeated the German *Luftwaffe* in a series of air battles.
    2. Hitler grew impatient—he had not intended a war against Britain—and finally postponed Operation Sea Lion.
    3. Still, National Socialist Germany was the master of Europe.

- II. The main event: the showdown with the Soviet Union.
  - A. Hitler had always believed that war with the Soviet Union was inevitable.
    1. Nazi ideology held the Soviet Union to be the center of a global Judeo-Bolshevist conspiracy.
    2. Thus, war against the Soviet Union would have not only geopolitical objectives, providing the German nation with living space (*Lebensraum*) in the east, but a major ideological goal as well: the destruction of Judeo-Bolshevism.
  - B. Hitler also was convinced that the Red Army was weak.
    1. The purges of the Red Army in 1938 had devastated the command structure.
    2. The Soviets had invaded Finland in late 1939, and although the Red Army prevailed, the Finns had put up a tenacious defense. The international intelligence community's evaluation of the Red Army was that it was large and cumbersome.
    3. Hitler believed that the Soviet Union was rotten to the core and would collapse within a matter of weeks.
- III. In late spring 1940, Hitler shifted his attention to the east and, despite his non-aggression pact with Stalin, ordered his high command to begin planning for an invasion of the Soviet Union.
  - A. Hitler warned his generals that this was to be an ideological war to the finish and German soldiers could not be expected to fight according to the usual rules of war.
    1. Troops were issued the infamous "Commissar Order," instructing them to eliminate all "political commissars [of the Bolshevik party], guerrillas, partisans, and Jews."
    2. Special SS commando units, the *Einsatzgruppen*, would accompany the troops into the Soviet Union and would be given "special tasks."
  - B. On June 22, 1941, Hitler launched Operation Barbarossa, the largest military undertaking in human history.
    1. In the opening weeks of the invasion, Germany's initial success against the unprepared Russian forces was astounding.
    2. The Germans drove deep into the Soviet Union in a matter of days.
    3. They pushed toward Leningrad in the north, Moscow in the center, and Kiev in the south.
    4. The Soviets suffered staggering casualties.
    5. Virtually the entire Soviet air force was destroyed in just two days.
  - C. By late summer, however, the German advance slowed; the German military was running low on supplies and had also suffered growing casualties.



1. Germany had intended to invade before June, but bad weather and Mussolini's ill-advised invasion of Greece forced Hitler to postpone the attack; now Germany paid the price for that delay.
2. Fall rains slowed the German advance, and in late November and early December, the snows came to Russia's aid.
3. On December 5–6, the Russians launched a major counteroffensive before Moscow, almost breaking through German lines.
4. The counteroffensive halted the German advance, and the *Blitzkrieg* phase of the war was over, as were Hitler's hopes for a short war.
5. On December 7, 1941, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, and four days later, Hitler declared war on the United States; the European war had become the Second World War.

#### Essential Reading:

Keegan, John, *The Second World War*.  
 Burleigh, Michael, *The Third Reich*.

#### Supplementary Reading:

Overy, Richard, *Russia's War*.

#### Questions to Consider:

1. How were the Germans able to prevail in the west in 1940? How, in particular, does one account for the totally unexpected collapse of France?
2. How and why was the war in the east fought on such different terms as the war in the west?
3. Why did Hitler and his generals believe that they could defeat the Soviet Union in a month to six weeks?
4. Why did Operation Barbarossa fail?

## Lecture Eleven

### Holocaust: Hitler's War against the Jews

**Scope:** The war, and especially the murderous conflict in the east, fundamentally changed the problems and possibilities of Nazi racial policy. In this lecture, we will trace the radicalization of Nazi Jewish policy between 1939 and 1945, tracing the steps and considerations that led from a policy of expulsion to one of mass murder. We will examine the organizations and individuals charged with shaping that policy, especially the SS, the Central Security Office (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*), Heinrich Himmler, and Reinhard Heydrich. Between 1939 and 1942, the Nazis pursued several options in attempting to solve what they referred to as "the Jewish question": the "Jewish reservation system," the Madagascar Plan, and a campaign of massive pogroms on the eastern front, among others.

#### Outline

- I. The evolution of Nazi racial policy, 1939–1941.
  - A. The invasion of Poland in 1939 and the subsequent invasion of the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941 put the Nazis in control of Europe's largest Jewish communities and required, the Nazis believed, a new policy.
  - B. Hitler placed responsibility for finding a "solution to the Jewish question" in the hands of Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler.
  - C. Already in 1939, the Nazis created the Government General of Poland, an area of Polish territory not annexed outright to Germany. The Government General was to be a "dumping ground" for Jews who were already being rounded up in Czechoslovakia and Austria for "resettlement" by October 1939. In 1940, the deportation of Western European Jews to the Government General began.
  - D. The head of the Nazi government in the Government General complained that the situation there was becoming impossible; a new solution had to be found.
  - E. Himmler delegated Reinhard Heydrich, head of the Reich Security Office, to develop "a final solution" to the Jewish problem.
- II. During 1940–1941, the Nazi leadership considered several options.
  - A. The regime also entertained a proposal to create a "Jewish reservation system" somewhere in the east, possibly beyond the Urals.
  - B. The regime briefly considered using the concentration camp system in Germany—Buchenwald, Dachau, Sachsenhausen, and the others—to imprison Jews but quickly dismissed the idea.

- C. Meanwhile, the *Einsatzgruppen* (special SS units) were given responsibility for rounding up Jews and placing them in ghettos.
- D. Though the Nazis had played on popular anti-Semitic sentiments, their racism was far broader in scope, potentially including anyone of non-Aryan background.
- E. More consideration was given to the so-called Madagascar Plan, which called for the deportation of all European Jews to the French colony of Madagascar; French Prime Minister Pierre Laval was more than agreeable.

### III. Later developments.

- A. Euphemistic terminology, such as “the final solution,” was regularly used to describe the extermination of Jews.
  - 1. In 1939, a euthanasia program was initiated to institute “racial hygiene” in Germany. Children (and later adults) with abnormalities, handicaps, or learning disabilities were labeled as “racially valueless.”
  - 2. Some 5,000 children and 80,000 to 100,000 adults were killed.
  - 3. Hitler avoided any direct responsibility for the program.
- B. While these plans were under considerable criticism, the SS commando units (*Einsatzgruppen*) were murdering Jews by the thousands on the eastern front in what seemed a massive pogrom.
- C. Heydrich considered all these solutions and dismissed each of them.
- D. In particular, the actions of the *Einsatzgruppen* were too public (too many German soldiers witnessed these massacres), too unruly, and too inefficient. Although the eastern policy was never overtly announced, the Germans hardly concealed the facts from their own troops and the local population.
- E. In the summer of 1941, Himmler received a direct order from Hitler to find a permanent solution to the “Jewish problem.”
- F. By 1941, information about the massive pogrom on the eastern front had reached the Allies. Given their tenuous military situation, however, they were in no position to intervene.

#### Essential Reading:

Friedländer, Henry, *The Origins of Nazi Genocide*.

Browning, Christopher, *Ordinary Men*.

Levi, Primo, *Survival in Auschwitz*.

#### Supplementary Reading:

Breitman, Richard, *The Architect of Genocide: Himmler and the Final Solution and Official Secrets: What the Nazis Planned, What the British and Americans Knew*.

Goldhagen, Daniel, *Hitler's Willing Executioners*.

Kershaw, Ian, *The Nazi Dictatorship*.

Kogon, Eugen, *The Theory and Practice of Hell*.

#### Questions to Consider:

1. Was the Holocaust the result of long-term trends in German political culture that were simply waiting for release or a product of a deviant Nazi ideology and the “radicalizing” decision-making process in the Third Reich?
2. Was the Nazi genocide the result of an ideological blueprint that Hitler had envisioned since early in his career or more an ideologically conditioned product of improvisation and circumstance?

## Lecture Twelve

### The Final Solution

**Scope:** In late 1941, the Third Reich finally opted for what it called “the final solution.” Developed by Reinhard Heydrich, this ultimate solution called for the deportation of all Europe’s Jews to specially created concentration camps in the east for “resettlement.” That resettlement, however, was in reality mass murder in the gas chambers of the new death camps, such as Auschwitz and Treblinka. Between 1941 and 1945, six million to eight million Jews would perish in this holocaust. In the first week of May 1945, after Adolf Hitler had committed suicide in his bunker beneath the devastated Reich Chancellery, the war in Europe came, at last, to an end. In the concluding portion of the lecture, we turn our attention to the lessons that the experience of the Third Reich offers us today.

#### Outline

- I. “The final solution.”
  - A. In the summer of 1941, Heydrich, acting on an oral order from Hitler, began drafting his own solution. There appears to be no written document linking Hitler to the plan, but he almost never committed himself to paper anyway. His plan called for:
    1. The creation of a new concentration camp system in the east.
    2. The deportation of all European Jews to these camps for “resettlement.”
    3. The construction in these new camps of special gassing installations, because, in fact, “resettlement” meant mass extermination of European Jews.
  - B. Heydrich called a secret meeting of a small group of party and state officials for January 20, 1942, in the Berlin suburb of Wannsee to announce his plan.
    1. Heydrich was the ranking official present—Hitler, Himmler, Goebbels, and other top officials, though informed of the meeting, were not participants. The subject under discussion was the “resettlement”—or physical extermination—of all European Jews. The meeting lasted little more than an hour.
    2. Death camps would be established in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and elsewhere to handle this massive operation. The “unfit” would be marched directly to the gas chambers. This was to be the “final solution.”
    3. Heydrich emphasized the need for secrecy because the German public was not ready for this sort of extreme action, the Allies

would make great propaganda out of it, and the victims must be ignorant of the fate awaiting them at the end of the train journey.

- C. Implementation of the “final solution” began in the spring of 1942.
  1. Auschwitz, Treblinka, and the other death camps (*Vernichtungslager*) gradually expanded their operations.
  2. Deportations from the Warsaw ghetto began on July 22, 1942, to Treblinka.
  3. Many people arrived in cattle cars. Those selected for immediate death were told they would be taking a “shower” after a difficult journey. In a bunker-like shower room, they were crammed together, one person per square foot, and the door was shut. Once the poison gas filtered in, the dying took anywhere from ten to thirty minutes.
  4. Anything of value from the bodies was claimed.
  5. From 1942 to 1945, it is estimated that four million to five million victims were killed by gassing, while over a million more died in the operations of the *Einsatzgruppen*.
  6. Russians, Poles, gypsies, and others also disappeared into the ovens.
- II. The Allied response to the camps.
  - A. Not until 1944 did hard information on the camps become available to the Allies.
  - B. In August of 1944, the Allies bombed the general area of Buchenwald. A debate raged over whether to attack the camps, however, given that many inmates would unavoidably be killed in such an action.
  - C. The Allies finally decided that the best way to save lives was to attack the Nazi war machine—not the camps—and to destroy it as quickly as possible.
- III. On the military front, 1942–1943 brought the turning point.
  - A. Germany suffered two decisive defeats.
    1. The titanic battle fought at Stalingrad between October 1942 and February 1943 ended with a complete German defeat; the battle marked the turning point in the war in the east.
    2. In November 1942, the Western Allies launched an invasion of French North Africa, which would drive Hitler’s *Afrika Korps* out of Africa by February 1943.
    3. In the spring of 1943, the Western Allies mounted an invasion of Sicily, then Italy; Germany was clearly on the defensive.
  - B. The Allied air assault on Germany gathered momentum in 1943.
    1. The British firebombing of Hamburg in July set the tone for an all-out assault on German industry and urban areas.



2. The Americans pursued a policy of “daylight precision bombing,” seeking to destroy key industrial nodes.
3. The British bombing at night and the Americans by day meant round-the-clock bombing of Germany.

#### IV. The drive for Germany—1944–1945.

- A. On June 6, 1944, the Western Allies invaded Normandy—D-Day.
  1. These forces liberated France by late August and moved into the Low Countries.
  2. Meanwhile, the Red Army unleashed a massive offensive in the summer of 1944 that sent its troops through Poland and to the frontier of Germany.
  3. On July 20, 1944, elements of the German army attempted to assassinate Hitler and bring down the Third Reich, but the plot was a failure.
- B. In the spring of 1945, the vise was closing on Hitler’s Germany.
  1. A bold German counteroffensive in the Ardennes (the Battle of the Bulge) in December 1944 to January 1945 made impressive headway but was ultimately thwarted. It would be the last significant German offensive of the war. It was a disaster for Germany’s military position.
  2. The Western Allies crossed the Rhine and began to fan out over western Germany.
  3. The Russians crossed the Oder and began a final push toward Berlin.
  4. On April 30, Hitler committed suicide in Berlin, and on May 2, 1945, Germany surrendered; the “thousand-year” Third Reich ceased to exist after just twelve horrific years.

#### V. Conclusions.

- A. The German people were burdened with feelings of shame and guilt.
- B. Theirs is a legacy that must be shared by everyone, especially in democratic societies.
- C. Let us hope that being forewarned of such horrors will make us vigilant in making sure they do not recur.

#### Essential Reading:

Keegan, John, *The Second World War*.

#### Supplementary Reading:

Trevor-Roper, Hugh, *The Last Days of Hitler*.

Speer, Albert, *Inside the Third Reich*.

#### Questions to Consider:

1. Could Hitler have won the Second World War? Why did the Allies prevail? What were Hitler’s most critical blunders?
2. How would you evaluate the role of the Third Reich in shaping the post-war world?
3. What did the Allies know about the death camps and what could or should have been done about them?

## Timeline

- 1871.....Unification of German states under Otto von Bismarck as result of the Franco-Prussian War.
- 1914.....Outbreak of World War I; Germany is the leading nation of the Central Powers.
- 1918.....Armistice ends fighting in World War I; Germany is defeated despite the fact that no foreign troops are on her soil.
- 1918.....Left and centrist “outside” parties take over German government from the abdicated Kaiser Wilhelm and create the Weimar Republic.
- 1919.....The Treaty of Versailles is signed and the League of Nations is established; Germany is not allowed to join.
- 1919.....The *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (National Socialist German Workers’ Party, or NSDAP) develops from the German Workers’ Party, founded by Gottfried Feder. Its program was nationalistic, anti-Marxist, German Socialist, and anti-Semitic.
- 1920.....The NSDAP issues its “25 Points of 1920” broadening its constituency, although it is still a minuscule and localized political entity, centered in Munich.
- 1920.....Adolf Hitler, a World War I German enlisted soldier, emerges from obscurity to become the leader of the NSDAP.
- 1923.....France and Belgium invade and occupy the industrial Ruhr Valley in an effort to extract war reparation payments from Germany. The government prints money to pay workers, leading to hyperinflation and failure of the currency. Economic and political life is in turmoil.
- November 8, 1923.....Hitler and NSDAP attempt to seize power in Bavaria and march on Berlin; the plan fails

- in the so-called “Beer Hall Putsch.” Hitler is tried in early 1925 and sentenced to five years in prison for treason.
- 1924–1928.....Period of relative economic recovery; hyperinflation ends in 1923, but harsh stabilization measures create undercurrent of social and political resentment in many elements of the population, which Nazis would later exploit.
- 1925.....Hitler publishes his manifesto, *Mein Kampf* (*My Struggle*), written while imprisoned in Landsberg, and dedicates it to sixteen members of the NSDAP who were killed in the abortive Beer Hall Putsch.
- 1925.....NSDAP re-founded; Hitler is released from prison and regains party leadership.
- 1926.....Germany admitted to the League of Nations.
- 1929.....The Great Depression strikes with full force, causing a drop in industrial production, an increase in unemployment, and a greater deficit. The latest coalition government in Germany collapses and elections are set for 1930.
- 1930.....Nazi electoral gains, although not enough to give them power, provide enough representation to prevent any kind of consensus in the Reichstag; rule by emergency decree becomes the norm. Heinrich Brüning is the Chancellor of Germany.
- 1930–1932.....Economy worsens, and NSDAP continues to build up its strength based on disillusionment with government policies. Hitler’s NSDAP begins dramatic rise in regional and local elections. In elections in spring 1932, Hitler challenges Hindenburg for president, loses, but dramatically increases his national visibility and influence.

1931.....*Sicherheitsdienst* (SD), the security service, is created by Heinrich Himmler (leader of the *Schützstaffel*, or SS).

1932.....Franz von Papen replaces Brüning as Chancellor. Papen has little support and calls for parliamentary elections. The Nazis run the most effective campaign in German electoral history and win 38% of the vote, making them the biggest (although not the majority) party. Negotiations begin for the chancellorship. Hermann Göring of the NSDAP assumes the post of speaker of the Reichstag.

1932.....Hindenburg refuses Hitler's demands for the chancellorship; Papen dissolves the Reichstag. In November elections, Nazi vote drops (to 32%) for the first time since it began its dramatic surge in 1930. Nazis worry that their constituency is dissolving. Kurt von Schleicher is appointed chancellor in December 1932.

January 1933 .....After a mild Nazi rebound in regional elections in January, Schleicher requests another dissolution of the Reichstag, which Hindenburg denies. Schleicher resigns and, on January 30, Hitler is named the chancellor of Germany.

February 1933 .....The Reichstag building catches fire; Hitler blames the Communists and essentially moves to end all civil liberties. In the ensuing elections (which were anything but free), the NSDAP still failed to gain a majority, but were joined by Conservatives in a "Government of National Concentration."

1933.....Hermann Goering creates the *Geheime Staatspolizei* (secret state police), or Gestapo, and in 1934, unites it with the SD. In essence, this move creates two terrorist police agencies, the quasi-military SS (virtually a private police force for Himmler) and the civilian Gestapo.

March 1933 .....The Enabling Act gives Hitler full dictatorial powers. The Weimar Republic comes to an end and the Third Reich begins.

April 1933 .....Legislation is enacted to eliminate Jews from the civil service. Other discriminatory steps against the German Jewish population are taken at local level between 1933 and 1935.

July 1933 .....The Nazis ban all political parties except the NSDAP, thus creating the foundation of a totalitarian state in Germany.

June 1934 .....“Blood purge” of the *Sturmabteilung* (SA); Ernst Röhm, former Chancellor Kurt von Schleicher, and other key rivals, real or imagined, are executed. Hitler passes an *ex post facto* law stating that the action was legal to defend the German state. This action removes a key competitor to the German army, which begins to rebuild.

August 1934 .....President Hindenburg dies; the offices of president and chancellor are united and Hitler assumes both, taking the title of *Führer*.

1935.....“Nuremberg Laws” deprive German Jews of their civil rights by stripping them of citizenship, prohibiting intermarriage with Jews, and barring Jews from certain professions.

1935.....Hitler creates the *Luftwaffe* (German Air Force) and introduces conscription to build a German army, both against the terms of the Treaty of Versailles.

1936.....Germany re-militarizes the Rhineland, in violation of the Treaty of Versailles and other conventions.

1936.....The Olympic Games are held in Berlin, bestowing a degree of legitimacy on Hitler's government.

1936–1939.....Hitler sends troops to Spain to assist Franco's Nationalists. This provides training



	for the German military, especially the <i>Luftwaffe</i> .
November 5, 1937	Hitler, in secret discussion with military and foreign office officials, spells out his plan for attaining <i>Lebensraum</i> (or “living room”) in the east by 1943–1945.
1938	Austria seeks international guarantees for security but is annexed by Hitler in the <i>Anschluss</i> (“union”).
1938	Czechoslovakia mobilizes its forces, fearing German attack on its territory over the Sudetenland; Mussolini supports Hitler’s claims to the Sudetenland. The Munich Pact, brokered by Neville Chamberlain among Germany, France, England, and Italy, gives the Sudetenland to Germany.
November 10, 1938	<i>Kristallnacht</i> (“Night of Broken Glass”), state-sponsored anti-Jewish thuggery; hundreds of Jews are killed or injured and thousands of businesses and homes, as well as synagogues, are damaged or destroyed. This action accentuated government efforts to seize Jewish assets and remove Jews from economic life in Germany.
1939–1941	Forced expulsions and other repressive acts committed against the Jews by the Nazis. In 1939, handicapped children and mentally ill adults are killed, until public outrage stops this in August 1941. The “final solution” begins in 1941, marking the systematic state genocide of over six million people, mostly (but not entirely) Jews.
March 1939	Germany invades Czechoslovakia, violating the Munich Pact of the previous year, and Britain and France offer Warsaw guarantee to defend the Polish state.
August 1939	Hitler and Stalin sign a non-aggression pact (which contains secret provisions for dividing up Poland).
September 1939	Germany invades Poland, triggering World War II.

April 1940	Germany invades Norway and Denmark.
May 1940	German forces attack France, bypassing the Maginot Line.
July 1940	Germany plans an invasion of Britain and launches an air campaign (the Battle of Britain), involving bombing of civilian targets.
June 1941	Germany abrogates its non-aggression pact and launches Operation Barbarossa, the largest land invasion of history, against the Soviet Union.
December 1941	Soviet forces stabilize their position and stop Nazi advance near Moscow; <i>Blitzkrieg</i> phase of the war is over.
December 7, 1941	Japanese naval forces strike U.S. forces in Hawaii in a surprise attack. On December 11, Hitler declares war on the United States.
1942	Allies adopt a “Germany First” policy and plan invasions to regain territory and take the war to Germany.
1942–1945	Germans carry out the “final solution,” aimed at Jews, gypsies, handicapped and mentally ill, homosexuals, and other “undesirables.” Estimates range from six million to nine million victims.
January 1943	Soviet forces stop the German advance at Stalingrad and go over to the offensive on the eastern front.
June 1944	Allies invade France at Normandy in the largest amphibious operation in history.
December 1944	Battle of the Bulge in the Ardennes Forest blunts a German counteroffensive and enables Allied forces to push on for Berlin.
April 30, 1945	Hitler commits suicide in his bunker beneath the Reichstag as Soviet forces move into Berlin.
May 1945	Germany surrenders to the Allies, ending the “Thousand Year Reich” after just twelve horrifying years. Many German war leaders

are subsequently tried for war crimes; several were executed and others were imprisoned for their roles in perpetrating Nazi horrors.

## Biographical Notes

**Brüning, Heinrich** (1885–1970). Chancellor of the Weimar government for two years (1930–1932). He was appointed by President Hindenburg to cope with the severe economic problems besetting Germany during the Great Depression. He failed to gain political or popular support for his harsh fiscal policies, but served on until replaced by Fritz von Papen (q.v.) in June 1932. Unlike Papen, he left Germany after Hitler's rise to power and taught in the United States. He returned to his homeland in 1951, where he continued his academic career at the University of Cologne.

**Chamberlain, Neville** (1869–1940). Conservative Party Prime Minister of Great Britain from 1937 to 1940. His policy of "appeasement" was based on his hopes for preserving the peace and the poor state of British military readiness with which to confront continental dictators, such as Hitler and Mussolini. Through his role in brokering the Munich Pact, Germany was allowed to snap up Czechoslovakia, but Chamberlain realized that further territorial designs by Germany had to be forestalled. His guarantee of protection to Poland brought Great Britain into armed conflict when Germany invaded that nation on September 1, 1939, precipitating World War II. He didn't fare well as a war leader and was replaced by Winston Churchill in May 1940, dying soon thereafter.

**Churchill, Winston** (1874–1965). Having long warned against Hitler's aggressive ambitions in Europe, Churchill became Prime Minister of Great Britain in May 1940. He was an inspiring wartime leader, especially in the dark days of 1940, when Britain stood alone, and was tireless in his efforts to forge a great coalition against Nazi Germany. In 1941, when the Soviet Union and the United States entered the war, Churchill became the driving force in the grand alliance. His influence with Roosevelt and Stalin decreased late in the war, and he was voted out of office in the summer of 1945, before the Japanese had been defeated. He remains the very embodiment of Britain's will to survive the Nazi onslaught and, ultimately, to prevail.

**Goebbels, Joseph** (1897–1945). A brilliant propagandist, Goebbels emerged in 1930 as the head of the NSDAP's Propaganda Department and was responsible for planning and executing the Nazi campaigns of 1930–1932. With Hitler's appointment as chancellor, Goebbels began Minister of Propaganda and Enlightenment and designed Nazi propaganda for the remainder of the Third Reich. Goebbels was prime organizer of the "Night of Broken Glass" in November 1938, the first coordinated nationwide act of public violence against the German Jewish community. He and his family committed suicide in Hitler's Berlin bunker in April 1945.

**Goering, Hermann** (1893–1946). Like Himmler, Goering was an early follower of Hitler's, taking part in the abortive Beer Hall Putsch in November 1923. Like Hitler, he was a World War I veteran, having served as a combat flyer. When

Hitler came to power, Goering was given the task of building up the Gestapo (1933–1934), the *Luftwaffe* (beginning in 1935), and the Office of the Four-Year Plan (1936). He was designated *Reichsmarschall* in 1939 and was second in succession (although Himmler actually had more power). His record as head of the *Luftwaffe* was inconsistent and his influence waned as the war went on. He was captured by the American forces, tried at Nuremberg, and sentenced to be hanged, but he poisoned himself before the execution.

**Heydrich, Reinhard** (1904–1942). A powerful subordinate of Himmler's in the Reich Security Office, Heydrich was the architect of the "final solution of the Jewish question." In 1941, he drafted the plans for the systematic murder of the Jewish population of Europe, which he announced in a top secret gathering of select party officials in January 1942 in the Berlin suburb of Wannsee. He was killed by the Czech underground later in that year.

**Himmler, Heinrich** (1900–1945). An early political associate of Hitler's who took part in the Beer Hall Putsch, Himmler rose to become the second most powerful man in the Nazi hierarchy. In 1929, he became head of the *Schützstaffel*, or SS, and was instrumental in the ruthless suppression of the rival SA in the blood purge of June 30, 1934, which saw the liquidation of Ernst Röhm and other SA leaders. As head of the SS, he was responsible for carrying out Hitler's anti-Semitic policies in occupied Poland and Russia. Later in the war, he accreted additional powers. Captured by British forces after the war, he committed suicide before he could be brought to trial for war crimes.

**Hindenburg, Paul von** (1847–1934). A German field marshal and president from 1925 to 1934 during the Weimar Republic. His military service spanned the period from the Austro-Prussian War (1866), the Franco-Prussian War (1870–1871), and after coming out of retirement, World War I, where he eventually became commander of all German armies. After the war, he served as president of the Weimar government, succeeding Freiderich Ebert in 1925. It was he who appointed Adolph Hitler chancellor in 1933, thus effectively ending the Weimar Republic and launching the Nazi era.

**Hitler, Adolf** (1889–1945). Führer of the NSDAP and Third Reich. Although not by birth a German, he came to be identified with Germany by his rise to power as head of the Nazi Party. He served in the German army in World War I, winning an Iron Cross for bravery. After the war, he became involved in politics in Bavaria, eventually taking over leadership of the small right-wing extremist National Socialist party. This group tried to take power, but its attempt was crushed in the "Beer Hall Putsch" in Munich in November 1923 and Hitler was imprisoned. While incarcerated, he wrote his manifesto, *Mein Kampf*. Upon release, he again involved himself in politics. He had learned from the putsch that the best way to gain power was constitutionally, which he succeeded in doing in a series of elections, culminating in his appointment as chancellor in January 1933. In the course of 1933–1934, Hitler laid the foundations of a totalitarian regime in Germany, transforming the Weimar Republic into the Third

Reich. Under his leadership, the Nazi regime pursued a course of rabid anti-Semitism and racism, as well as an aggressive foreign policy that would lead to the outbreak of the Second World War in Europe and a fanatical and systematic campaign to destroy the Jews. He committed suicide on April 30, 1945, as Allied forces closed in on Berlin.

**Papen, Franz von** (1879–1969). An obscure Center Party politician, Papen was appointed by President Hindenburg to serve as German Chancellor, succeeding Heinrich Brüning (q.v.) in June 1932. During his brief tenure, he attempted to undermine the political and social foundations of the Weimar Republic, unintentionally abetting the Nazi cause. He was replaced by Kurt von Schleicher (q.v.) in November 1932 but was instrumental in bringing about Hitler's appointment as chancellor in 1933. He served as Hitler's vice-chancellor in 1933 and later as ambassador to Austria, playing a significant part in the Nazi absorption of that country.

**Ribbentrop, Joachim** (1893–1946). A relative latecomer to the NSDAP's hierarchy, Ribbentrop became foreign minister in 1938. During 1938–1939, he advocated an aggressive policy, certain that Great Britain would not risk war with Germany over Austria, the Sudetenland, or even Poland. The high point of his career was the Nazi-Soviet Pact in August 1939, which paved the way for Germany's invasion of Poland. Thereafter, his influence waned. He was convicted at Nürnberg after the war and executed.

**Schleicher, Kurt von** (1882–1934). A military man who was prominent in the post-World War I *Reichswehr*, he served as war minister to Chancellor von Papen (q.v.). He then succeeded von Papen as Chancellor and tried to forestall further Nazi political gains through dissolution of the Reichstag and assumption of emergency powers, which President Hindenburg disapproved. He resigned as chancellor in January 1933 and was replaced by Adolf Hitler. Schleicher fell victim to the blood purge of 1934, when Hitler eliminated his enemies and rivals.

**Speer, Albert** (1905–1981). Much admired by Hitler as a young architect, Speer designed numerous building projects for the regime, including the much-photographed stadium at Nürnberg for the NSDAP's annual rally there. During the war, he emerged as Hitler's Minister of Armaments and Munitions and is credited with having brought the war economy under control and dramatically increasing German munitions production. Sentenced to twenty years at Nürnberg after the war, he was released in 1966 and enjoyed a lucrative career as a writer and lecturer on his experiences in the Third Reich.

**Stalin, Josef** (1879–1953). Leader of the Soviet Union who agreed to a non-aggression pact with Hitler in August 1939. The secret terms of this pact enabled him to annex part of Polish territory in September 1939 after Hitler invaded from the west. In June 1941, Hitler invaded Russia (Operation Barbarossa). This invasion was blunted by December 1941 in the vicinity of Moscow and again at Stalingrad in late 1942 to early 1943. Russian forces went over to the offensive



and eventually entered Berlin in 1945. As one of the Big Three Allied leaders, Stalin used his power and political cunning to help prepare for post-war Soviet occupation of much of Eastern Europe.

**Strasser, Gregor** (1892–1934). During the Weimar era, Strasser was the second-in-command of the NSDAP. A tireless campaigner, he advocated a sustained effort to win the German working class for the Nazi cause. After the November elections of 1932 brought a sudden decline in Nazi popularity, he withdrew from the party leadership in protest of Hitler's failure to enter a coalition government. He was among those killed by the Nazis during the "Night of Long Knives" in June 1934.

**Streicher, Julius** (1885–1946). Editor of a scurrilous anti-Semitic newspaper, *Der Stürmer*, and the party chief of Franconia, Streicher was the most vile of all the Nazi anti-Semites. His tireless efforts to eliminate the Jews from German life, expressed in particularly vulgar, even obscene, cartoons and editorials in *Der Stürmer*, would contribute mightily to the enactment of the Nürnberg Laws in 1935. Even loyal Nazis found him and his paper an embarrassment. He was one of Hitler's favorites.

**Stresemann, Gustav** (1878–1929). A respected leader of the Weimar Republic who, both as chancellor and foreign minister, sought to reintegrate Germany into the community of nations, especially in the period 1924–1928. His untimely death in 1929 was a blow to the cause of democracy in Germany.

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