

ADOLPH HITLER

Synopsis

Born in Austria in 1889, Adolf Hitler rose to power in German politics as leader of the National Socialist German Workers Party, also known as the Nazi Party. Hitler was chancellor of Germany from 1933 to 1945, serving as a dictator for the bulk of his time in power. His policies precipitated World War II and the genocide perpetrated against Jewish communities known as the Holocaust. With defeat on the horizon, Hitler committed suicide with wife [Eva Braun](#) on April 30, 1945, in his Berlin bunker.



Background and Early Years

In 1913, Hitler relocated to Munich. At the outbreak of World War I, he applied to serve in the German army. He was accepted in August 1914, though he was still an Austrian citizen. Although Hitler spent much of his time away from the front lines (with some reports that his recollections of his time on the field were generally exaggerated), he was present at a number of significant battles and was wounded at the Somme. He was decorated for bravery, receiving the Iron Cross First Class and the Black Wound Badge.

Hitler became embittered over the collapse of the war effort. The experience reinforced his passionate German patriotism, and he was shocked by Germany's surrender in 1918. Like other German nationalists, he purportedly believed that the German army had been betrayed by civilian leaders and Marxists. He found the Treaty of Versailles degrading, particularly the demilitarization of the Rhineland and the stipulation that Germany accept responsibility for starting the war.

Party Leadership and Imprisonment

After World War I, Hitler returned to Munich and continued to work for the military as an intelligence officer. While monitoring the activities of the German Workers' Party (DAP), Hitler adopted many of the anti-Semitic, nationalist and anti-Marxist ideas of party founder Anton Drexler. Hitler joined the DAP in September 1919.

To increase its appeal, the DAP changed its name to the *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (NSDAP), often abbreviated to Nazi. Hitler personally designed the party banner,

appropriating the swastika symbol and placing it in a white circle on a red background. He soon gained notoriety for his vitriolic speeches against the Treaty of Versailles, rival politicians, Marxists and Jews. In 1921, Hitler replaced Drexler as NSDAP chairman.

Hitler's fervid beer-hall speeches began attracting regular audiences. Early followers included army captain Ernst Rohm, the head of the Nazi paramilitary organization the Sturmabteilung (SA), which protected meetings and frequently attacked political opponents.

On November 8, 1923, Hitler and the SA stormed a public meeting featuring Bavarian prime minister Gustav Kahr at a large beer hall in Munich. Hitler announced that the national revolution had begun and declared the formation of a new government. After a short struggle that led to several deaths, the coup known as the "Beer Hall Putsch" failed.

Hitler was arrested and tried for high treason. He served nine months in prison, during which time he dictated most of the first volume of *Mein Kampf* ("My Struggle") to his deputy, [Rudolf Hess](#). A work of propaganda and falsehoods, the book laid out Hitler's plans for transforming German society into one based on race.

Rise to Power

With millions unemployed, the Great Depression in Germany provided a political opportunity for Hitler. Germans were ambivalent to the parliamentary republic and increasingly open to extremist options. In 1932, Hitler ran against 84-year-old [Paul von Hindenburg](#) for the presidency. Hitler came in second in both rounds of the election, garnering more than 36 percent of the vote in the final count. The results established Hitler as a strong force in German politics. Hindenburg reluctantly agreed to appoint Hitler as chancellor in order to promote political balance.

Hitler used his position as chancellor to form a de facto legal dictatorship. The Reichstag Fire Decree, announced after a suspicious fire at parliament, suspended basic rights and allowed detention without trial. Hitler also engineered the passage of the Enabling Act, which gave his cabinet full legislative powers for a period of four years and allowed for deviations from the constitution.

Having achieved full control over the legislative and executive branches of government, Hitler and his political allies embarked on a systematic suppression of the remaining political opposition. By the end of June, the other parties had been intimidated into disbanding. On July 14, 1933, Hitler's Nazi Party was declared the only legal political party in Germany. In October of that year, Hitler ordered Germany's withdrawal from the League of Nations.

Military opposition was also punished. The demands of the SA for more political and military power led to the Night of the Long Knives, which took place from June 30 to July 2, 1934.

Rohm, a perceived rival, and other SA leaders, along with a number of Hitler's political enemies, were rounded up and shot.

The day before Hindenburg's death in August 1934, the cabinet had enacted a law abolishing the office of president, combining its powers with those of the chancellor. Hitler thus became head of state as well as head of government and was formally named leader and chancellor. As head of state, Hitler became supreme commander of the armed forces.

The Rise of Anti-Semitism

From 1933 until the start of the war in 1939, Hitler and his Nazi regime instituted hundreds of laws and regulations to restrict and exclude Jews in society. The Anti-Semitic laws were issued throughout all levels of government, making good on the Nazis' pledge to persecute Jews if the party came to power. On April 1, 1933, Hitler implemented a national boycott of Jewish businesses, followed by the introduction of the "Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service" of April 7, 1933, which was one of the first laws to persecute Jews by excluding them from state service. This was a Nazi implementation of the Aryan Paragraph, a clause calling for the exclusion of Jews and non-Aryans from organizations, employment and eventually all aspects of public life.

In April 1933, additional legislation furthered the persecution of Jews including laws restricting the number of Jewish students at schools and universities, limiting Jews working in medical and legal professions, and revoking the licenses of Jewish tax consultants. In April 1933, the Main Office for Press and Propaganda of the German Student Union called for "Action Against the Un-German Spirit," prompting students to burn more than 25,000 "Un-German" books, ushering in an era of censorship and Nazi propaganda. In 1934, Jewish actors were forbidden from performing in film or in the theater.

On September 15, 1935, the Reichstag introduced the Nuremberg Laws which defined a "Jew" as anyone with three or four grandparents who were Jewish, regardless of whether the person considered themselves Jewish or observed the religion. The Nuremberg Laws also set forth the "Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honour," which banned marriage between non-Jewish and Jewish Germans; and the Reich Citizenship Law, which deprived "non-Aryans" of the benefits of German citizenship.

Hitler's eugenic policies also targeted children with physical and developmental disabilities, and later authorized a euthanasia program for disabled adults. His regime also persecuted homosexuals, arresting an estimated 100,000 men from 1933 to 1945, some of whom were imprisoned or sent to concentration camps. At the camps, gay prisoners were forced to wear pink triangles to identify their homosexuality, which Nazis considered a crime and a disease.

Hitler also promoted anti-smoking campaigns across the country. These campaigns stemmed from Hitler's self-imposed dietary restrictions, which included abstinence from alcohol and meat. Fueled by fanaticism over what he saw as a superior Aryan race, he encouraged Germans to keep their bodies pure of any intoxicating or unclean substance.

World War II & The Holocaust

In 1938, Hitler, along with several other European leaders, signed the Munich Agreement. The treaty ceded the Sudetenland districts to Germany, reversing part of the Versailles Treaty. As a result of the summit, Hitler was named *Time* magazine's Man of the Year for 1938. This diplomatic win only whetted his appetite for a renewed German dominance.

The Nazis continued to segregate Jews from German society, banning them from public school, universities, theaters, sports events, and "Aryan" zones. Jewish doctors were also barred from treating "Aryan" patients. Jews were required to carry identity cards and, in the fall of 1938, Jewish people had to have their passports stamped with a "J."

On November 9 and 10, 1938, a wave of violent anti-Jewish pogroms swept Germany, Austria and parts of the Sudetenland. Nazis destroyed synagogues, vandalized Jewish homes, schools and businesses and close to 100 Jews were murdered. Called Kristallnacht, the "Night of Crystal" or the "Night of Broken Glass," referring to the broken glass left in the wake of the destruction, the pogroms escalated the Nazi persecution of Jews to another level of brutality and violence. Almost 30,000 Jewish men were arrested and sent to concentration camps, signaling more horrors to come.

Define:

People

Dr. Joseph Goebbels

Paul von Hindenburg

Ernst Rohm

Heinrich Himmler

Rudolph Hess

Terms

Weimar republic

Reichstag

Swastika

Fuhrer

Enabling Act

The Great Depression

Mein Kempf

Gestapo

Anti-Semitism

National Socialist German Workers' Party

