

HSE11

Prompt #1

The Holocaust is the most tragic and horrifying event in human history. In 1933, Adolf Hitler was named Chancellor of Germany, an event that would mark the rise of the Nazi Party and the start of mass identification, discrimination, and the eventual genocide of millions of Jews and other minority groups. The Nazi party established many laws restricting Jews in Germany before the beginning of World War II including identification requirements, rules about serving in government, and marriage laws. While there was some German resistance to the Nazi regime, most people did little to fight back because of a combination of preexisting, widespread antisemitism and fear of the Nazi terror state (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum).

The identification and subsequent discrimination of Jews prevalent throughout the 1930s directly led to the eventual genocide of Jews in Nazi-controlled Europe. Hitler enacted his antisemitic ideas through the Nuremberg Race Laws which were put into force in 1935 (“What Were the Nuremberg Race Laws?”). According to Jacob Flaws, assistant professor of history and expert on the Holocaust, the Nuremberg Race Laws defined a Jew as any person for whom three or four of their grandparents were Jewish. It also forbade Jews from marrying non-Jews and stripped away many other parts of citizenship such as the right to vote and the right to serve in government. These laws made Jews and other minority groups “subjects of the state” which made it easier to separate them from the “Aryan” population later.

Arguably the most unsettling aspect of the Holocaust is that those who contributed to the genocide of millions were regular citizens. There are two main factors that led to the Holocaust. The first is the deep antisemitism in Europe before World War II. The second factor is the Nazi terror state which was split into three main parts: the secret police, propaganda, and concentration camps. The Gestapo were the Nazi’s secret state police. They had the power to arrest anyone and everyone who they deemed to be an “enemy of the state.” Once arrested, many were subjected to violent treatment and torture. The Gestapo had over 150,000 informants throughout Germany. These secret officers wore no uniforms and contributed to the spread of paranoia and fear across the country (“Fear and State”). Suspected “traitors”

were tried by the people's court, a judicial system that existed outside the framework of the law, which required that all judges swear loyalty to the Nazi state. The Nazi party used this "court" to sentence those who voiced their displeasure to death ("The Nazi Party").

The final and most terrible contributor to the Nazi terror state were the concentration camps. These camps were used to house people considered to be enemies of the state and were known for their terrible conditions. Over the course of the war, Nazi Germany established 42,000 concentration camps and ghettos in Nazi-controlled Europe. Twenty-three of them were main camps housing thousands to tens of thousands of prisoners. Six of the camps were designated as death camps ("Concentration Camps"). These were extermination facilities designated for the murder of millions using mass gassing. Once word began to spread about the horrors occurring in concentration camps, Germans felt the need to demonstrate antisemitism toward the Jewish people to avoid becoming labeled as an "enemy of the state" (Meakin Butler).

Despite the risk of death, some Germans did try to resist the Nazi regime. One such group was the White Rose, an intellectual resistance group led by Hans Scholl and Alexander Schmorell. They distributed leaflets condemning the Nazi dictatorship. After their sixth leaflet, the leaders of the White Rose were captured and sentenced to death by the people's court ("The White Rose"). The Edelweiss Pirates were a similar resistance group. They acted in direct opposition to Hitler's Youth, an organization dedicated to promoting fascist ideals, and were significantly less organized than the White Rose ("The Edelweiss Pirates"). Both of these groups were primarily composed of teens and young adults. Young people were a major reason why some Jews and other minorities managed to escape Germany before the onset of the Holocaust.

Around thirteen million innocent people were systematically murdered by Nazis in the Holocaust ("How many people"). It is an event that the world will never truly recover from. The most important step now is to learn, to remember those who died and honor their stories so that something so terrible never happens again.

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