

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE HOLOCAUST FOR TEACHERS:



HOLOCAUST
MEMORIAL
DAY TRUST

In 1933 the National Socialist Party (The Nazis) came into power in Germany, led by Adolf Hitler.

Between 1941 and 1945, the Nazis attempted to annihilate all of Europe's Jews. This systematic and planned attempt to murder European Jewry is known as the Holocaust. The Nazis used propaganda, persecution, violence and legislation to deny human and civil rights to Jews. They used centuries of antisemitism as their foundation.

Boycotts of Jewish doctors, lawyers and shops began in Germany in 1933 and by 1935 Jews were not allowed to join the civil service or the army. The introduction of the Nuremberg laws in September 1935 meant Jews were banned from marrying non-Jews and their citizenship was removed, including their right to vote. Jews were forced to wear a yellow star of David, were barred from all professional occupations and Jewish children were prohibited from attending state schools.

Persecution reached a pre-war peak with *Kristallnacht* (the Night of the Broken Glass) on 9/10 November 1938. 267 synagogues were destroyed, 100 people were killed, all remaining Jewish stores in the Reich were destroyed and almost 30,000 people were taken to concentration camps. This event spurred Britain on to support the *Kindertransport* programme which rescued 10,000 children, the majority of whom were Jewish.

The Nazis invaded Poland on 1 September 1939 and the UK and France declared war on Germany. In spring 1940 the Nazis established ghettos in the larger towns and cities across Poland to control and segregate Jews. The largest ghetto was Warsaw, where 400,000 Jews were crowded into 1.3 square miles of the city. Conditions in the ghettos were appalling, where families were crowded together without adequate supplies of food or water. Many people died from starvation, disease and casual executions carried out by the Nazis.

The Wannsee Conference in January 1942, attended by high ranking Nazi officials, planned the mass-deportation of European Jews to extermination camps in German-occupied Poland, where they would then be murdered. This 'Final Solution' aimed to exterminate all Jews in Europe. Deportation of so many people required organisation on an industrial scale and collaborators across the continent.

It is generally accepted that the Nazis attempted to disguise their intent, referring to the removal of Jews from ghettos to extermination camps as 'resettlement in the East'.

Freight and passenger trains were used for the deportations – where deportees were sealed with little or no room. No food and limited water was provided for those on the trains, which were intensely hot during the summer and freezing cold during the winter. Journeys often lasted several days, sometimes they took a few weeks. Many people died during the journey through starvation or overcrowding.

Auschwitz-Birkenau was the largest Nazi extermination camp, where transports such as these arrived on a daily basis from virtually every Nazi-occupied country in Europe. By the end of the Holocaust, six million Jewish men, women and children had perished in ghettos, mass-shootings, in concentration camps and extermination camps.

You can find out more about the Holocaust by visiting: hmd.org.uk/holocaust