

THE STEPS TO THE HOLOCAUST

The Holocaust did not suddenly happen. The foundations for what would happen in places like Auschwitz, Treblinka and Sobibor were laid at the start of the Nazi's rule in 1933. It is important to look at the development of the Nazi policy towards the Jews in order to see how the Holocaust came about. These events also put into context what we see (and don't see) happening in *The Pianist*.

The key events and legislations are listed below.

1933

Within only a few weeks of coming to power, Hitler's campaign announced new legislation set to exclude Jews from the life of Germany. Laws were passed banning Jews from working in professional capacities; schools were established exclusively for Jewish children and quotas limited their entry into universities. They could neither join the army nor participate in the artistic life of the country.

On the 10 May, 1933, Goebbels, the Nazi propaganda minister, organised a public burning of all non-German literature. Any book written by a Jew or covering a Jewish theme was consigned to the flames.

Whilst this legal process developed, the SS and SA were on the streets, persuading the German public not to shop at Jewish establishments.

1935

This slow process increased in tempo in 1935. Following a gigantic rally of the Nazi Party in Nuremberg, laws were passed which removed the right of Jews to be citizens of Germany. They had effectively become non-people.

TASK

Look at the source documents which give details of the Nuremberg laws on page 2.

- In what ways does this law extend the persecution of the Jews which had been developed in 1933?
- Summarise the ways in which the Nuremberg laws would affect Jews in Germany.
- In what ways would it further remove Jews from the life of the average German?



**NUREMBERG LAW FOR THE PROTECTION OF GERMAN BLOOD
AND GERMAN HONOUR, SEPTEMBER 15, 1935**

Moved by the understanding that purity of the German Blood is the essential condition for the continued existence of the German people, and inspired by the inflexible determination to ensure the existence of the German Nation for all times, the Reichstag has unanimously adopted the following Law, which is promulgated herewith:

§ 1

1) Marriages between Jews and subjects of the state of German or related blood are forbidden. Marriages nevertheless concluded are invalid, even if conducted abroad to circumvent this law.
2) Annulment proceedings can be initiated only by the State Prosecutor.

§ 2

Extramarital intercourse between Jews and subjects of the state of German or related blood is forbidden.

§ 3

Jews may not employ in their households female subjects of the state of German or related blood who are under 45 years old.

§ 4

1) Jews are forbidden to fly the Reich or National flag or to display the Reich colours.
2) They are, on the other hand, permitted to display the Jewish colours. The exercise of this right is protected by the State.

§ 5

1) Any person who violates the prohibition under § 1 will be punished by a prison sentence with hard labour.
2) A male who violates the prohibition under § 2 will be punished with a prison sentence with or without hard labour.
3) Any person violating the provisions under § 3 or § 4 will be punished with a prison sentence of up to one year and a fine, or with one or the other of these penalties.

§ 6

The Reich Minister of the Interior, in co-ordination with the Deputy of the Führer and the Reich Minister of Justice, will issue the Legal and Administrative regulations required to implement and complete this Law.

§ 7

The Law takes effect on the day following promulgation except for § 3, which goes into force on January 1, 1936.

Nuremberg, September 15, 1935 at the Reich Party Congress of Freedom



1938

In 1938 further laws were introduced which removed citizenship from any Jews who was from Polish descent. Several thousand Jews were taken to the Polish border but were refused entry into Poland. Herschl Grynszpan, a Jewish emigree in Paris, as a protest at the treatment of German Jews shot and killed a Nazi diplomat in Paris.

This was the excuse that the Nazis had been waiting for. Shortly after the assassination, a night of violence was launched across Germany - synagogues and Jewish shops were attacked, destroyed and burnt down and Jews were beaten and murdered. 90 Jews were killed and thousands put into concentration camps. Also the Jews were made to pay for the damage which had been caused to their houses and shops. The night, 9/10 November 1938, became known as Kristallnacht - the night of the shattered glass.

TASK

Look at the source documents on page 4.

- How do these two laws try to put the blame for Kristallnacht onto the Jews?
- In what ways do you think that these laws can be seen to pave the way for the Holocaust which was to follow four years later?
- How do the two laws disguise what actually happened?
- In what ways could the conclusions of the Evian Conference be seen as giving Hitler the chance to further develop his anti-semitic policies?



EXTRACTS FROM THE REGULATION FOR THE ELIMINATION OF THE JEWS FROM THE ECONOMIC LIFE OF GERMANY, NOVEMBER 12 1938

On the basis of the regulation for the implementation of the Four Year Plan of October 18 1936, (Reichsgesetzblatt, I, p 887), the following is decreed:

I

- From January 1, 1939, Jews are forbidden to operate retail stores, mail-order houses, or sales agencies, or to carry on a trade [craft] independently.
- They are further forbidden, from the same day on, to offer for sale goods or services, to advertise these, or to accept orders of all sorts, fairs or exhibitions.
- Jewish trade enterprises (Third Regulation to the Reich Citizenship Law of June 14, 1938 (Reichsgesetzblatt, I, p 627) which violate this decree will be closed by police.

I

1. From January 1, 1939, a Jew can no longer be the head of an enterprise within the meaning of the Law of January 20, 1934, for the Regulation of National Work.

2. Where a Jew is employed in an executive position in a commercial enterprise he may be given notice to leave in six weeks. At the expiration of the term of the notice all claims of the employee based on his contract, especially those concerning pension and compensation rights, become invalid.

Berlin, November 12, 1938

EXTRACT OF THE REGULATION FOR THE PAYMENT OF AN EXPIATION FINE BY JEWS WHO ARE GERMAN SUBJECTS, NOVEMBER 12, 1938

The hostile attitude of Jewry toward the German People and Reich, which does not even shrink from cowardly murder, calls for determined resistance and severe expiation. Based on the Decree of October 18, 1936, for the Implementation of the Four Year Plan, I therefore order the following:

I

The totality of Jews who are German subjects will pay a Kontribution (fine) of 1,000,000,000 (one billion) Reichmarks to the German Reich.

Berlin, November 12 1938



1938 - THE EVIAN CONFERENCE

In July 1938, 32 Government representatives from around the world gathered in Evian in France to discuss the plight of Jewish refugees. Most countries rejected the possibility of accepting any greater number of Jewish refugees than the number which were already being accepted into the various countries. None of the countries attending the conference questioned the right of Germany to treat any of its citizens in the way that it wished. As the Jews were the main citizens to be maltreated, the conference seemed to give Hitler the right to continue to persecute Jews as he wished.

TASK

Look at the two sources below.

- As Hitler's speech preceded the Evian Conference, why do you think that the delegates from around the world did not pay serious attention to the threats of Hitler?
- Why did these countries not want to take in additional Jewish refugees?
- What do the comments of the Australian delegate say about attitudes towards Jews around the world?

'Since we have no racial problem, we are not desirous of importing one.'

Australian delegate, Evian Conference

'I can only hope and expect that the other world, which has such deep sympathy for these criminals, will at least be generous enough to convert this sympathy into practical aid. We, on our part, are ready to put all these criminals at the disposal of these countries, for all I care on, even on luxury ships.'

Adolf Hitler March 1938

From 1938 onwards, it was obvious to Jews that they should leave Germany as soon as possible. The stage of expulsion had started. Although half of the Jews left Germany before 1941, over half a million remained, at the mercy of Hitler and the Nazis.

1939

The German invasion of Poland began the Second World War. The millions of Jews who had fled to Poland to escape from the Nazi Party's reach, now suddenly came under its control. Poland had the largest concentration of Jews in Europe and for them and for the Jews of other countries the nightmare of the Holocaust was fast approaching.

The Nazis first act in Poland, the setting for the film *The Pianist*, was to round up all Jews and send them into ghettos.



These were small areas of towns which were sealed off and allocated to the Jews. There they were forced to live in overcrowded and often unsanitary conditions.

Life within the ghetto was intolerable, amidst overcrowding, hunger and disease. Despite this, many Jews survived, thinking and hoping that their suffering must one day cease.

1941 - THE DECISION TO EXTERMINATE

The war moved into full gear in the summer of 1941, and what was called the 'Final Solution of the Jewish Question' then followed in the wake of the German army's advance into Soviet Russia.

From October 1941, German Jews were transported to ghettos in Poland.

The Economic and Administration Main Office of the SS had considerable industrial interests in Eastern Europe, and used Jewish labour, skills and equipment. Auschwitz for example, was an extermination camp (at Birkenau) for Jews, a general concentration camp (Auschwitz I), and industrial complex (Buna - Auschwitz III) for the production of synthetic rubber, and a prisoner of war camp.

The total Jewish population killed in Ghettoisation was approximately 800,000.

Until 1941 there had been no plan to exterminate every Jew in Europe. As you will have seen, from work that you have already completed, Hitler's hatred of the Jews seemed to point to what would happen from 1941 onwards. However, until this moment it was never official Nazi policy to exterminate all Jews in Europe.

In invading Russia, Hitler had different ideas compared to his invasion of Western Europe. He was now involved in a war of ideologies - his wish was not simply to conquer territory but to remove those people who he felt were 'sub human' the Slav race and, more importantly to Hitler, the Jews.

Following behind the invasion forces into Russia were mobile extermination squads whose task was to kill both communists and also Jews.

The **Action Groups** were divided into four - A, B, C and D - and operated just behind the advancing troops. Immediately after entering a town or village, the commander of the Action Group would send for the rabbi and demand that his community should assemble for despatch to a Jewish region.

When the Jewish community had assembled, the Action Group, with the help of local militia, would usually transport the Jews by truck nearby to be forced to dig a trench. The whole population would then be machine-gunned.



**EXTRACT FROM A REPORT BY KARL JAGER, COMMANDER OF EINSATZKOMMANDO 3,
ON THE EXTERMINATION OF LITHUANIAN JEWS, 1941**

Final Summary of Executions carried out in the operating area of ED (Einsatzkommando) 3 up to December 1, 1941.

... I can confirm today that Einsatzkommando 3 has achieved the goal of solving the Jewish problem in Lithuania. There are no more Jews in Lithuania, apart from working Jews and their families.

These number

in Shavli, about 4,500

in Kovno, about 15,000

in Vilna, about 15,000.

I wanted to eliminate the working Jews and their families as well, but the Civil Administration (Reichskommissar) and the Wehrmacht attacked me most sharply and issued a prohibition against having these Jews and their families shot.

The carrying-out of such Aktionen is first of all an organisational problem. The decision to clear each sub-district systematically of Jews called for a thorough preparation for each Aktion and the study of local conditions. The Jews had to be concentrated in one or more localities and, in accordance with their numbers, a site had to be selected and pits dug. The marching distance from the concentration points to the pits averaged 4 to 5 kms. The Jews were brought to the place of execution in groups of 500, with at least 2 kms distance between groups...

I consider the Aktionen against the Jews of EK 3 to be virtually completed. The remaining working Jews and Jewesses are urgently needed, and I can imagine that this manpower will continue to be needed urgently after the winter has ended. I am of the opinion that the male working Jews should be sterilised immediately to prevent reproduction. Should any Jewess nevertheless become pregnant, she is to be liquidated...

Jäger
SS Standartenführer
January 1942



THE PIANIST

A ROMAN POLANSKI FILM

F I L M EDUCATION

The Wannsee Conference for the Final Solution of the Jewish Question held in Berlin, spelt out the fate of the Jews in Europe:

'In view of the dangers of emigration in time of war and in view of the possibilities in the East, the Reichsfuhrer SS and Chief of the German Police (Himmler) has forbidden the emigration of Jews. In lieu of emigration, the evacuation of the Jews to the East has emerged, after an appropriate prior authorisation by the Fuhrer, as a further solution possibility.

In the course of the final solution, the Jews should be brought under appropriate direction in a suitable manner to the East for labour utilisation. Separated by sex, the Jews capable of work will be led into these areas in large labour columns to build roads whereby doubtless a large part will fall away through natural reduction. The residual final remainder which doubtless constitutes the toughest element, will have to be dealt with appropriately, since it represents a natural selection which upon liberation was to be regarded as a germ cell of a new Jewish development (see the lessons of history).'

From the haphazard murders of the Action Groups, the Nazis had come to the decision to systematically exterminate every Jew in Europe. Special death camps were to be set up with the sole purpose of murdering Jews.

Over 3 million Jews were killed in these death camps which were built near cities: Treblinka to Warsaw, Belzec, Sobibor and Majdanek to Lublin, and Chelmno to Lodz. The camp at Auschwitz in Silesia was chosen to exterminate longer-distance deportees from Western, Central and Southern Europe, and was astride a major railway route from Vienna to Crakow.

TASK

Why do you think that the Nazis chose to locate the death camps in Poland rather than in Germany?

TASK

Look at the two sources on pages 9 to 10.



EXTRACT FROM WRITTEN EVIDENCE OF RUDOLPH HESS COMMANDER OF THE AUSCHWITZ EXTERMINATION CAMP

In the summer of 1941, I cannot remember the exact date, I was suddenly summoned to the Reichsführer SS,* directly by his adjutant's office. Contrary to his usual custom, Himmler received me without his adjutant being present and said in effect:

'The Führer has ordered that the Jewish question be solved once and for all and that we, the SS, are to implement that order.

The existing extermination centers in the East are not in a position to carry out the large Aktionen which are anticipated. I have therefore earmarked Auschwitz for this purpose, both because of its good position as regards communications and because the area can easily be isolated and camouflaged.

The Jews are the sworn enemies of the German people and must be eradicated. Every Jew that we can lay our hands on is to be destroyed now during the war, without exception. If we cannot now obliterate the biological basis of Jewry, the Jews will one day destroy the German people.'

We discussed the ways and means of effecting the extermination. This could only be done by gassing, since it would have been absolutely impossible to dispose by shooting of the large numbers of people that were expected, and it would have placed too heavy a burden on the SS man who had to carry it out, especially because of the women and children among the victims.

We calculated that after gas-proofing the premises then available, it would be possible to kill about 800 people simultaneously with a suitable gas. These figures were borne out later in practice...

EXTRACT FROM THE TESTIMONY OF AN AUSCHWITZ SURVIVOR

Hugo Gryn was born in Czechoslovakia in 1930. Not long after his bar mitzvah he was sent with his family to Auschwitz. This is how he describes what happened:

Although we did not yet know the name of our destination we were, in fact, at Auschwitz-Birkenau. When the SS guards, with rifles at the ready pointing at us, led us to the train, the ghetto-commandant announced that this transport was heading 'East' where Jews would be resettled and given agricultural work. The war had made a shortage of food and Jewish colonies would have to help the Axis war effort. In the process, the commandant added 'You will be well housed, well fed and when the war ends maybe we shall let you go to your homes again!'

'...my father returned,...he sat down beside me and said, 'We are in the most terrible place in the world, and we are abandoned people. I don't know what is to become of us.' And for the



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F I L M E D U C A T I O N

first time since we got on the train my father cried and his sobs were the saddest sounds I had ever heard.

In the next two or three days I discovered how Auschwitz-Birkenau worked. How the young and old, to the sound of music were marched to the low buildings that looked like our shower block, how they had to strip and make neat piles and how instead of hot water they were engulfed by the vapours of Zyklon B gas and how they were then taken to ovens and cremated... And about the way in which human fat and ashes were turned into soap. Perhaps the small grey bars of soap we were given.

TASK

- Reading the second source, how is the testimony of the Auschwitz survivor reflected in Hess' description of the camp and its activities?
- What reasons are given to the Jews for their transportation?
- How does this affect the ways in which they react?
- The death camps kept up their murderous work often until just before they were liberated by the allies in 1945. By the end of the war, 6,000,000 Jews had been murdered.

