

Menu

Section: **How and why did the Holocaust happen?**

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Topics in this section: 

Why did the Holocaust happen?

Antisemitism was one of the most fundamental causes of the Holocaust. The banner in this picture reads 'Germany does not buy from Jews'. This photograph is taken from The Wiener Holocaust Library's Motorcycle Album (<https://www.wienerlibrary.co.uk/The-Motorcycle-Album>), a collection of photographs taken on a journey from the Dutch border to Berlin in 1935.

Courtesy of The Wiener Holocaust Library Collections. (<https://www.wienerlibrary.co.uk/>)

The Holocaust was the culmination of a number of factors over a number of years.

Historic antisemitism (Hostility, prejudice, or discrimination towards Jews.) , the rise of eugenics (The science of regulating a population through controlled breeding. Eugenic scientists aim to eliminate traits believed to be undesirable, and emphasise those that are desirable in order to 'improve' races of human beings. In Nazi Germany, eugenic scientists aimed to ensure the survival of the 'Aryan' race and destroy other races, such as Roma or Jews.)

wrong or illegal.)

all played key roles in the timing and scale of the final catastrophe.

This section aims to explore how these individual factors contributed to the Holocaust.

Nationalism and the First World War

This leaflet was produced and distributed by the *Deutsche Fichte-Bund*, a nationalist organisation founded in Hamburg in 1914. The organisation spread nationalist and antisemitic propaganda in Germany and across the world.

Courtesy of The Wiener Holocaust Library Collections. (<https://www.wienerlibrary.co.uk/>)

German military personnel serving in the First World War pictured in Aisne, Northern France, in July 1915.

Courtesy of The Wiener Holocaust Library Collections. (<https://www.wienerlibrary.co.uk/>)



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Following the Enlightenment (<https://www.theholocaustexplained.org/anti-semitism/modern-anti-semitism/enlightenment/>) (late seventeenth century – early nineteenth century), there was a growth in nationalism (An extreme form of patriotism, to the point of thinking less of other countries.) . The rise in nationalism intensified the rise in antisemitism, which had also been growing since the Enlightenment. The First World War (1914-1918) strengthened these feelings of nationalism across Europe, as nations were pitted against each other.

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socialists (People who believe that a country's land, transport, natural resources and main industries should be owned and controlled by the whole country, and not private companies.)

and Jews on the home front. This myth fostered the growth of extreme
antisemitism (Hostility, prejudice, or discrimination towards Jews.) ,
nationalism (An extreme form of patriotism, to the point of thinking less of other countries.) and
anti-communism (Opposing a system of government based on a classless society or opposing people
that support this idea.)

These feelings were exacerbated further by the
Treaty of Versailles (The peace agreement between the Allied and Central powers that formally
brought the First World War to an end. Germany was not allowed to be involved in the negotiations. In
June 1919, the German government representatives were called to the Palace of Versailles to either
sign the treaty or face the restarting of war.)

in 1919. The Treaty of Versailles forced Germany to admit complete responsibility for the war; pay
large amounts of
reparations (Paying compensation for damage inflicted in a war. Germany had to pay a large amount
of reparations for the First World War.)
(which undermined the Germany post-war economy); give up significant proportions of land, and
limited the size of its army. The Treaty was extremely unpopular in Germany, where the public
regarded it as a *diktat* (dictated peace). This led to a lack of faith in the
Weimar Republic (The governments in Germany between 1919 and 1933.) , the newly established
regime of rule in Germany.

An *Ahnenpass* or ancestry pass belonging to Rita Jarmes. Ancestry passes were used to demonstrate Aryan heritage in Nazi Germany. The Nazis often requested *Ahnenpasses* as proof for eligibility for certain professions, or citizenship after 1935.

Courtesy of The Wiener Holocaust Library Collections. (<https://www.wienerlibrary.co.uk/>)



Hitler [right] is pictured doing research in 1936

Courtesy of Bundesarchiv (R 165 Bild-244-71 / CC-BY-SA 3.0) [Public Domain].



A photograph showing an antisemitic street sign in Mainbernheim, central Germany, taken in September 1935. The sign reads 'The Jew is our misfortune. He shall stay away from us'. This photograph is taken from The Wiener

the African race and desire, other races, such as Roma or Gypsies,



What happened in August

02 August 1934
[http://www.bbc.com/history/germany/1934_08_02_germany_nazi_rise_to_power_how_did.shtml](#)

19 August 1934
[http://www.bbc.com/history/germany/1934_08_19_germany_nazi_rise_to_power_how_did.shtml](#)

01 August 1936
[http://www.bbc.com/history/germany/1936_08_01_germany_life_in_nazi_occupied_europe.shtml](#)

17 August 1938
[http://www.bbc.com/history/germany/1938_08_17_germany_life_in_nazi_occupied_europe.shtml](#)



the-nazi-gain-
power/death-of-
hindenbureg/)

On 2 August 1934,
President von
Hindenburg died.



the-nazi-gain-
power/)

On 19 August 1934,
Hitler abolished the



/controlling-
everyday-
life/olympics/)

On 1 August 1936,
the Olympic Games



/oppression/anti-
semitic-laws/)

On 17 August 1938, a
law was passed

/life-in-nazi-
occupied-europe-
/oppression-
/disabled/)

On 24 August 1941,
Hitler publicly ordered
the end of the T4
programme to murder
disabled people. It still
continued in secret.

Resources

Educational Resources

(<https://www.theholocaustexplained.org/educational-resources/>)

Timeline (<https://www.theholocaustexplained.org/timeline/>)

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(<https://www.theholocaustexplained.org/survivor-testimonies/>)

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The Wiener
Holocaust Library

(<http://www.theholocaustexplained.org/>)



(<https://www.lgfl.net>)

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