

3.4 What was it like to live in Nazi Germany?

Topic Summary



The Nazis put great priority on winning over the hearts and minds of the young. They set up youth movements for children and young people in different age groups, and they tightly controlled education. They had traditional views about women in society. They thought the job of women was to stay at home and have children. There were few good employment opportunities for women. However, the Nazis knew that solving the unemployment crisis was one of their most important tasks. Re-armament produced many new jobs in industry and the armed forces. Public works schemes further cut the number of unemployed. On the face of it, the Nazis dealt successfully with unemployment, but German workers paid a price. Free trade unions were banned, wages remained low, and consumer goods were in short supply. There were also many groups, and notably the Jews, who became targets of Nazi persecution. From 1933, persecution of the Jews became progressively worse, and large numbers emigrated to avoid it. In 1938 Jewish shops and synagogues were attacked in *Kristallnacht*. Other minorities also suffered. Anyone who did not conform to the Nazis' ideas of racial perfection was at risk: homosexuals, the mentally disabled, tramps and beggars, and people labelled as 'gypsies'. This persecution reached its peak during the war when the Nazis launched the 'Final Solution' - the mass murder of Jews in the death camps. The war brought first triumph and then disaster to Germany. As the tide of war turned against Germany, civilians suffered greatly. Food was in short supply, and Allied bombing reduced many German cities to rubble.

What do I Need to Know?



You will need to understand why the Nazis placed so much importance on indoctrinating the young, and how they went about achieving this in education and by setting up youth movements. You should know how women were treated in Nazi Germany. You should be able to explain how the Nazis managed the economy, and the impact this had on the workforce. You should be aware of the Nazi persecution of minority groups, and how this developed into the 'Final Solution'. You should know how the Second World War affected life in Germany.

Key Topics



How did young people react to the Nazi regime?

- The Hitler Youth was founded in 1926. It already had 100,000 members when the Nazis took power.
- There were different branches of the Hitler Youth movement for girls and boys, and for age groups. Only boys between 14 and 18 were full members of the Hitler Youth; girls between 14 and 17 were members of the League of German Maidens. Children were indoctrinated with Nazi ideas, and prepared for their roles in life - boys as soldiers, girls as mothers.
- Originally membership was optional, but the Hitler Youth Law of 1936 made it compulsory. Many young people were happy to join. There weren't many other organisations for them, and many enjoyed the kinds of activities - sports, camping, marching and so on - that the Hitler Youth encouraged.
- The Nazis controlled education. They dictated the subjects that were to be taught and made sure that Nazi ideas and racial beliefs were included in the teaching of subjects like History and Biology. Teachers were forced to join the Nazi teachers' organisation.

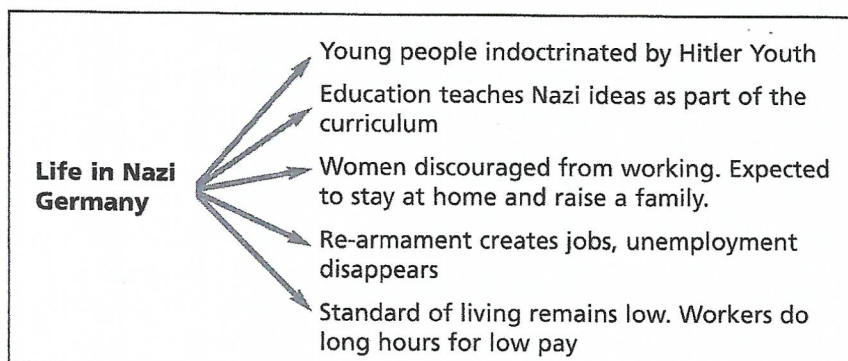
How successful were Nazi policies towards women and the family?

- Motherhood and family life were an important part of Nazi propaganda. The Nazis had traditional and conservative views about family matters, and the roles of men and women.
- Women were not equal with men in Nazi Germany. They were expected to remain at home and raise children. If they did work, the better jobs were closed to them.
- Hitler was alarmed at the falling birth rate and women were encouraged to have large families. The Mother's Cross was given to women with more than three children, with the golden version of the cross awarded for eight or more.

Did most people in Germany benefit from Nazi rule?

- When Hitler came to power 6 million were unemployed. He promised to deal with unemployment.
- Re-armament created many jobs. Armaments industries employed more workers, and the introduction of conscription meant that numbers in the armed forces increased rapidly.
- Public works schemes, such as the construction of autobahns (motorways), also made more jobs.
- By 1938, there was almost no unemployment in Germany.
- However, there was a price to be paid. Workers had no rights, they had to join the Nazi Labour Front, and free trade unions were banned. Wages stayed low while working hours increased. There were few consumer goods to purchase.

Summary Box 1

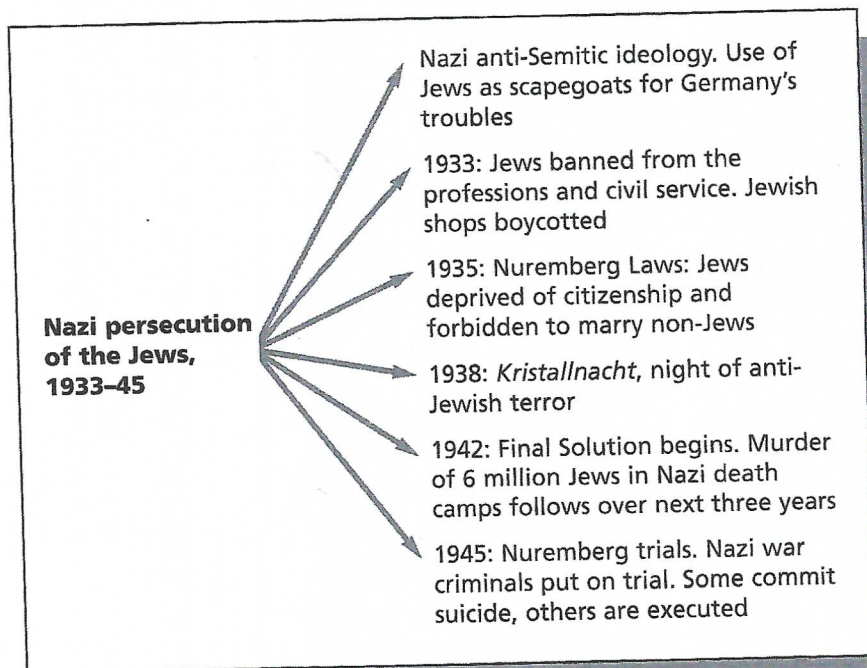


Why did the Nazis persecute many groups in German society?

- Nazis believed that the Germans were the master race. Their racial group, the Aryans, were supposed to be tall and blond with blue eyes. They believed that other races were inferior (or *Untermenschen*), and they reserved a particular hatred for the Jews.
- Nazi propaganda blamed the Jews for everything that had gone wrong in Germany, including defeat in the First World War. Once in power, Hitler began to persecute them.
- From 1933 Jews were banned from the professions and were not allowed to work for the government. The SA organised boycotts of Jewish shops and intimidated anyone who dared to shop in them.
- In 1935 the Nuremberg Laws deprived Jews of citizenship and forbade marriages between Jews and non-Jews. Many Jews fled the country.
- In 1938 a German diplomat was shot dead in Paris by a Jewish assassin. As a reprisal, the Nazis organised *Kristallnacht* (the Night of Broken Glass) in which Nazi mobs attacked and burnt Jewish shops, homes, businesses and synagogues. Over a hundred Jews were murdered in the violence of *Kristallnacht*.
- The Nazis persecuted many other groups who were thought inferior. Many homosexuals were sent to concentration camps. Mentally disabled people were compulsorily sterilised. Later, many disabled people were murdered in a euthanasia programme. Even beggars were rounded up and imprisoned in the labour camps.
- During the war, when Germany captured huge areas of eastern Europe, millions of Jews came under Nazi control. In January 1942, at the Wannsee Conference, it was decided to exterminate them. The Nazis called this the 'Final Solution' to their 'Jewish problem'.
- By the summer of 1942 the extermination camps had started the process which led to the murder of 6 million Jews over the next three years.

- Jews from all over Europe were transported by rail to the death camps. Most were killed in gas chambers soon after their arrival. A smaller number were temporarily reprieved to work in appalling conditions in the camps. Their possessions were looted by the Nazis, who even removed gold teeth from corpses. The slaughter of the Jews in the death camps is known as the Holocaust.
- After the war, trials of Nazi war criminals were held at Nuremberg. Some, like Himmler and Goering, committed suicide; others were executed.

Summary Box 2



~~How did the coming of war change life in Nazi Germany?~~

- The start of the war saw great German victories. Victory was won quickly and easily so there was little impact on life in Germany itself.
- After the attack on the Soviet Union in 1941, the war began to affect Germany more. Supplies were needed for the army, and shortages became more obvious at home. In 1942 Albert Speer was made armaments minister and prepared the country for 'total war'. Factories worked longer hours. Food rations were cut.
- From 1942 Allied bombing raids began to hit German cities. Civilian casualties mounted. As the war went on, these raids intensified, reducing large areas of many cities to rubble. In one raid on Dresden in February 1945, 135,000 civilians died.
- By the end of the war, the civilian population of Germany had suffered great hardship. There were more than 3 million civilians dead, much of the surviving population was starving, and their country had been reduced to ruins.

What do I Know?



What was the importance of:

- the Hitler Youth
- the Nuremberg Laws
- *Kristallnacht*
- the Wannsee Conference?

- 1 In which year was the Hitler Youth formed?
- 2 Which branch of the Hitler Youth was for girls of between 14 and 17 years of age?
- 3 What was the purpose of the Hitler Youth Law of 1936?
- 4 Why were the Nazis so keen to have their version of Biology taught in schools?
- 5 To how many children did a woman have to give birth to win the golden Mother's Cross?
- 6 Approximately how many Germans were unemployed when Hitler took power?
- 7 One way the Nazis made jobs was to build autobahns. What were these?
- 8 Name the Nazi trade union organisation that all workers had to join.
- 9 What did the Nazis call the ideal Germanic racial group?
- 10 What word did the Nazis have for all races they regarded as inferior human beings?
- 11 From what jobs were Jews banned in 1933?
- 12 What was the German name for the 'Night of Broken Glass'?
- 13 Name a group other than the Jews who were persecuted by the Nazis.
- 14 Who was put in charge of organising the German economy for 'total war' in 1942?
- 15 Where were the trials of Nazi war criminals held in 1945?

My score ...

Exam Type Question



The Optional Depth Studies are tested in Section C of Paper 1. On your chosen Depth Study you will have to answer two questions. The first will be a compulsory source-based question. There will be three sources, and three sub-questions to answer. The second will be a structured question consisting of three parts (4/6/10 marks). There will be two questions, and you choose one.

Here is an example of a structured question on life in Nazi Germany.

- (a) What did the Nazis believe about the differences between racial groups? (4 marks)
- (b) Why did the Nazis attack Jews and Jewish property on *Kristallnacht*? (6 marks)
- (c) 'The only reason the Nazis started the Holocaust in 1942 was their hatred of Jews.' Do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer. (10 marks)

Have a go yourself at parts (a) and (b), but here are a couple of students' answers to part (c).