

LIFE UNDER NAZISM

Shortly after assuming power in 1933, the National Socialist German Workers' Party passed the first anti-Jewish legislation in Germany. This law removed Jews from select professions and businesses.

In September 1935, the Nuremberg Laws further restricted the rights of Jewish citizens in Germany. The first of these laws, known as the Reich Citizenship Law, reclassified Jews as second-class citizens and removed their basic civil rights. Other laws prohibited intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews.

At that time, Jews were forced to wear yellow stars of David on their clothing. They were forbidden from attending certain theatres, cinemas and parks and were barred from specific parts of cities. Along with these restrictions from public life, religious Jews were often specifically targeted for persecution. Some Jewish men had their beards cut off in public, and both women and men were forced to scrub the streets.

Jewish businesses and department stores became convenient targets for boycotts. All known Jewish business owners were forced to transfer their businesses to German (Aryan) ownership, receiving little or no compensation for the expropriation of their property.

When the Nazis occupied other European countries, Jews in those places began to experience the same treatment as those in Germany. Racial laws, aimed at isolating and oppressing Jews, were implemented. Similarly, synagogues were destroyed, and Jewish children were removed from schools.

In many cities across Europe, the Nazis transferred Jews into hundreds of ghettos. These ghettos were located in the poorest areas of the city and often enclosed by walls or barbed wire fences. The inhabitants were forced to live in unsanitary and overcrowded conditions, and were subjected to violence and starvation. German-appointed Jewish Councils organized daily life in the ghettos — including labour, distribution of food rations and eventually deportations to concentration and death camps.