

100% Sheet

The world at war: Were ordinary Germans 'consenting mass executioners' of the Holocaust?

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Holocaust refers to the genocide and systematic murder by Nazi Germany of approximately six million Jews. Other persecuted minorities include gypsies, homosexual and disabled people. It occurred in stages, having begun in 1933 with persecution and discrimination, with the appointment of Hitler as Chancellor, and led to state-sponsored extermination and genocide, until the defeat of Nazi Germany in WW2.

KEY KNOWLEDGE 1: *Denial of rights: What was life like for Jews before the Nazis came to power and how did it begin to change?*

- Pre-war context: Europe had a long history of anti-Semitism but Jews had been living similarly to their European peers
- In 1933 Hitler was appointed Chancellor and then Fuhrer in 1934, proclaiming Jews to be amongst the enemies of the Volksgemeinschaft ("people's community"), persecuting Jews and others, denying their legal, political & social rights

SECONDARY INTERPRETATION/ DEBATE ABOUT PERIOD

"Germany during the Nazi period was inhabited by people animated by beliefs about Jews that made them **willing to become consenting mass executioners**"

Daniel Goldhagen, 'Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust'

KEYWORDS : *Genocide* *Anti-Semitism* *Persecution* *Concentration camps*
Auschwitz *Perpetrator* *Ghetto*

KEY KNOWLEDGE 2: *From ghettos to death camps: How were Jews separated and murdered under Nazi rule?*

- Discrimination of Jews (Nuremberg Laws 1935) and increased violence (Kristallnacht 1938) led to segregation as Jews were moved to poor walled off areas called ghettos (and gypsies to a smaller extent)
- This led to mass extermination as Jews were moved to concentration camps/ death camps as the Nazis pursued 'The Final Solution' between 1941 and 1945, building mass killing centres for the industrial killing of Jews– the largest of which was Auschwitz

TIMELINE



KEY KNOWLEDGE 3: *Architects of genocide: Who is to blame?*

- Hitler's leadership endorsed antisemitism and state sponsored violence in the name of racial purity
- However, the SS and high-ranking individuals like Himmler are considered architects of genocide, for carrying out orders and murdering with impunity
- Ordinary Germans were complicit, not just bystanders