The Third Reich in Power
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The subject of today's class is how the Nazis governed, and in many ways transformed, Germany from January 30, 1933, the day Hitler became Reich Chancellor, until late August 30, 1939, the day before World War II began.

The overarching questions I want you to consider for today are:

*How did the Nazis take control of virtually all aspects of German social, political, and economic life between 1933 and 1939? What were some of the main policies pursued by the Nazis? How effective were those policies in achieving the Nazis' aims?*

To answer those questions, we need to have a solid understanding of the Nazis' actions in nine main areas. Note, of course, that there is often considerable overlap between these various subjects, but I have separated some topics in order to emphasize key aspects. Those areas are:

1. Inciting fear of an internal or external enemy to justify increasing the power held by the government
2. Enactment of laws to ban political opposition and destroy civil liberties
3. Creation of a 'police state' and the use of surveillance, violence, and imprisonment to terrorize dissenters
4. Economic policies, designed to restore German economic strength & provide a high standard of living for the German people
5. Strengthening the German military
6. Anti-Semitic policies designed to restrict the rights of Jews and expel them from the country
7. Racial "improvement" policies
8. Strengthening Nazi rule via control over the media, educational system, propaganda campaigns, and cultural affairs
9. Further entrenchment of the 'Fuehrer cult'

Your goal for today's class should be to use the outline I have written below, as well as the readings on the course website, to identify at least one major example of a way that the Nazis pursued their policy aims in the nine areas listed above. For example, for point [1], 'Inciting fear..., you could write something like "The Nazis attempted to convince Aryan Germans that Jews represented a profound threat to German society, and therefore had to be restricted from participating in government or holding economic power."

On point [2], you should be able to identify a specific example of an anti-civil liberties law. On point [3], provide an example of one or more specific example(s) showing how the Nazis created a police state. And so on.

Questions on the mid-term will undoubtedly reference this material.
Part I. Timeline of the Third Reich's domestic policies, January 30, 1933 through August 30, 1939

1933

January 30. Hitler becomes Reich Chancellor. President Hindenburg appointed Hitler as Chancellor in conformity with German law at the time. Given that the Nazis constituted the largest party in the German Parliament and in the country as a whole, it is therefore accurate to state that Hitler initially gained power through democratic means.

February 1. In his first radio speech, Hitler declared that Nazi economic policy would be founded on the belief that the "salvation of the German worker" would be found in an "massive and comprehensive attack on unemployment...[and] within four years, unemployment must finally be overcome."1

February 8. In a secret meeting, Hitler privately explains to his ministers that the Nazi program to rebuild the German economy was more than about simply improving economic conditions for the German people. He identified an even more important goal of the Nazi economic: "The next 5 years in Germany must be devoted to the rearmament of the German people. Every publicly supported job creation scheme must be judged by the criterion of whether it is necessary from the point of view of the rearmament of the German people. This principle must always and everywhere stand in the foreground...Germany's position in the world will be decisively conditioned by the position of Germany's armed forces. Upon this, the position of Germany's economy in the world also depends." Most German economic programs had 'dual use' elements. For example, "the build-up of automobile production would allow factories to be converted to military production at short notice..."2

February 27. The Reichstag burns. A Dutch Communist, Marinus van der Lubbe, set fire to the Reichstag building, seeking to protest the imposition of Nazi rule and strengthen the working class's resolve to fight against the Nazis. He was arrested, along with the head of the German Communist Party. Lubbe was subsequently convicted and executed.

February 28. Hindenburg announces the 'Decree for the Protection of People and the Reich,' commonly known as the 'Reichstag Fire Decree.' Hitler and other Nazis claimed that the arson attack represented the first act in a broader communist uprising against the German government, and argued that they needed a sweeping expansion of their power to combat the threat. According to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Decree "...suspended individual rights and due process of law...permitted the regime to arrest and incarcerate political opponents without specific charge, dissolve political organizations, and to suppress publications. It also gave the central government the authority to overrule state and local laws and overthrow state and local governments. The decree was a key step in the establishment of the Nazi dictatorship. Germany became a police state..."

in which citizens enjoyed no guaranteed basic rights and the SS, the elite guard of the Nazi state, wielded increasing authority through its control over the police."

March 6. Hitler (de facto) bans the Communist party and imprisons, kills, or exiles its leaders. The KPD had been the third largest party in Germany just before the Nazis' ascent to power, receiving nearly 6 million votes in the November '32 parliamentary elections (the Nazis received roughly 12 million votes). By early summer 1933, the Nazis had successfully used violence, imprisonment, confiscation of property, and legal prosecution of its leaders to essentially destroy it as an organized political entity, thus removing a key potential center of resistance to Nazi rule.

March 22. The SS establishes the first Nazi concentration camp in the town of Dachau, ten miles northwest of Munich. In a press conference, Nazi leader Heinrich Himmler announced the camp's founding. In its first year, the camp population was roughly 4,800, and most of prisoners were imprisoned because of their political opposition to the Nazis (many were members of the now-defunct Communist Party and Social Democratic Party.). After Kristallnacht, in late 1938, the composition of the camp population changed, with the addition of 10,000 newly-imprisoned Jewish Germans. Dachau served as a 'training center' for SS camp guards, and all subsequently built Nazi concentration camps were constructed using Dachau as a model.

March 24. The Reichstag passes the "Law to Remedy the Distress of the People and the Reich," more commonly known as the Enabling Act. The law gave Hitler the power to enact laws without parliamentary input or approval. German judges, who, in theory, possessed the power to challenge the legality of the law, refused to do so. It served as the single most important legal step in the removal of any legislative or legal restraints on the power of the Nazi dictatorship.

April 1. The Nazi government organizes a boycott of all Jewish-owned businesses in the country. Nazi storm troopers picketed outside Jewish-owned stores and professionals, calling on Germans to 'Buy German' and recognize the threat posed by Jews to the interests of the German people. Although SA troopers had previously beaten and imprisoned individual Jews, this was the first national-level, government-approved and formally proclaimed anti-Jewish campaign.

April 7. The Nazi government passes the 'Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service.' The law required all state-government employees to provide proof of their Aryan ancestry, and effectively banished Jews from government agencies and the German judicial system.

April 25. Nazis pass laws to restrict the number of Jewish students in public schools. This removed any potential dissent from within the schools, and served to further limit the rights of Jews in the country.

3 U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. https://www.ushmm.org/learn/timeline-of-events/1933-1938/reichstag-fire-decree. Between the 1930s and 1960s, many people believed that the arson attack was a "false flag" operation orchestrated by the Nazis to justify expanding the government's powers. Most historians today believe that Lubbe did, in fact, set the fire, but no one would dispute that the Nazis used the fire as a pretext to justify the establishment of their dictatorship.


5 Ibid. https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-enabling-act


April 26. The Nazis establish the Gestapo (an abbreviation of Geheime Staatspolizie, or 'Secret State Police.') The agency became the primary weapon used by the Nazi government to persecute any internal enemies of the Reich. It had virtually unrestricted authority to surveil, arrest, question, torture, and dispatch to concentration camps anyone it deemed to be a threat to the Nazi government. Many Germans lived in fear of being denounced by their neighbors. A German Jewish professor, Victor Klemperer, wrote in his diary on August 19, 1934, "Everyone cringes with fear...No letter, no telephone conversation, no word on the street is safe any more. Everyone fears the next person may be an informer."9

May 10. Throughout the country, Nazis burn thousands of "un-German" books. Support for the burning emerged from the 'grass roots,' as student groups at German universities enthusiastically confiscated books from university libraries and threw them into bonfires. The largest of the book burnings took place at the Opernplatz public square, in Berlin. 70,000 people attended and 20,000 books burned. Most of the books fell into one or more of several categories: they had been written by socialists, pacifists, or Jews; represented "degenerate" art; or promoted values that contradicted Nazi ideology. Among the authors whose books burned were Thomas Mann, Erich Maria Remaque, Freud, Einstein, Hemingway, Proust, and H.G. Wells. The most fitting, and hauntingly prophetic, line written by any of the targeted authors appeared in a poem from Heinrich Heine, who wrote in 1821 that "where they have burned books, they will end in burning men."10

June. By the beginning of summer 1933, "the whole fabric of associational life was Nazified," with the exception of churches and the Army. Those associations included "industrial and agricultural pressure groups, sports associations, football clubs, male choirs, women's organizations....[even] rabbit-breeding clubs."11

July 13. The Nazis ban all other political parties, leaving Germany a one-party state with no organized political opposition.12 This move solidified the Nazi's success in "systematically depr[iving] all Germans of virtually every basic human and civil right they had enjoyed under the Weimar Republic."13

July 14. The Nazi government enacts the "Law for the Prevention of Genetically Diseased Offspring." The law permitted public health officials to forcibly sterilize, without an individual's consent, men or women who "suffered from any on nine conditions assumed to be hereditary: feeblemindedness, schizophrenia, manic-depressive disorder, genetic epilepsy, Huntington's chorea, genetic blindness, genetic deafness, severe physical deformity, and chronic alcoholism." Historians have estimated that 400,000 Germans were forcibly sterilized, with hundreds of women dying from botched tubal ligations.14

September 22. 'Reich Chamber of Culture,' led by Joseph Goebels, is founded. It sought to control all aspects

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9 Evans, 105.
11 Evans, 14, 58.
13 Evans, 117.
of German culture, as reflected in its many subagencies: the Reich Film Chamber, Reich Music Chamber, Reich Theater Chamber, Reich Press Chamber, Reich Chamber for Fine Arts, and the Reich Radio Chamber. The organization's mission was to inculcate into the hearts and minds of the German people profound devotion to the Nazi government and its ideals. Novels, poetry, paintings, photography, radio programs, music, films, and propaganda rallies that celebrated war, Aryan achievements and racial greatness, dedication to the government above all other loyalties, love of the Fuhrer, and anti-Semitism were the tools of the Chamber. Among the most significant cultural productions were *Triumph of the Will* and *The Eternal Jew*. Nazi cultural leaders believed that convincing the German people to support the party was not only a question of using "a pervasive atmosphere of fear and terror," but also a matter of "rous[ing] Germans into positive, enthusiastic endorsement of their ideals and their policies, to change people's minds and spirits and to create a new German culture that would reflect their values alone."  

November 27 1933. The Nazi government creates the 'Strength through Joy' program. Known as the KdF, its purpose was to build support for the Nazi state among working-class Germans by providing organized leisure activities such as concerts, sporting events, skiing vacations, river cruises, hiking trips, and other tourist activities. The KdF's ambitious initiatives included constructing the "most colossal seaside resort in the World," on the Baltic Sea, as well as the construction of the "People's Car," which later became the Volkswagen Beetle.  

**1934**  

February 28. Hitler provides more details on his strategic and economic vision to leaders of the SA and SS. He explains to them that "it would be necessary in about eight years' time to create 'living space for the surplus population in the East...Rearmament had to be complete by 1942."  

June 30-July 2. "Night of the Long Knives." During a three day span, Hitler and his closest advisors (Goring, Hess, Goebbels, Himmler, and Heydrich) orchestrate a sweeping purge of the leadership of the SA, the three-million member strong paramilitary organization which had played a key role in the Nazi rise to power. Hitler viewed the SA leaders such as Ernst Rohm as a potential threat, and the German military elite likewise feared the SA's influence. Hitler used the massacre to solidify his dominance over the government by removing any rivals and reinforcing his alliance with German military commanders by assuring them that they would be the Nazi's armed wing, instead of the "people's Army" the SA represented. A total of 150 to 200 SA leaders (and other leading figures on the non-Nazi right-wing of German politics) were murdered. Historians, and observers at the time, viewed the purge as a decisive step towards the Nazi regime's "preparedness to go outside the law and the norms of civilization society to commit murder as an act of state for the survival of the nation."  

August 19. After President Hindenburg dies on August 2, Hitler abolishes the office of the presidency and concentrates all power in his hands, as Chancellor and "Fuhrer of the German Reich and People." Hitler  

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16 Evans, 118.  
18 Evans, 338.  
19 https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/roehm-purge
also requires the entire German military to swear a personal oath of allegiance to him. 20 From this point forward, Hitler becomes the unchallenged, absolute dictator of Germany. 21

1935

March 10. Hermann Goering publicly announces the re-establishment German air force, the Luftwaffe. He claimed that its power already surpassed that of the British Royal Air Force, arguably the best in the world at the time.

March 16. One week later, Hitler announces, to Germany and the world, that Germany will no longer abide by the military restrictions imposed upon it by the treaty of Versailles. The rearmament campaign he proclaimed involved the reintroduction of conscription, the formation of an army of 550,000 men (5 and a half times the army size allowed by the treaty of Versailles), and rapid expansion of the German navy and Luftwaffe. 22 German rearmament was, Hitler said, a "purely defensive measure."

June 28. The Nazis begin the "systematic persecution" of homosexual men, as Heinrich Himmler creates the Reich Central Office for the Combating of Homosexuality and Abortion, focusing on the threat that homosexuality and abortion pose to the demographic health of the Aryan race. Nazi police had begun harassing gay men as early as 1934, but widespread arrests did not begin until 1937. According to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Between 1933-45, an estimated 100,000 men were arrested as homosexuals, and of these, some 50,000 officially defined homosexuals were sentenced. Most of these men spent time in regular prisons, and an estimated 5,000 to 15,000 of the total sentenced were incarcerated in concentration camps...One leading scholar, Ruediger Lautmann, believes that the death rate for [these men] in the camps may have been as high as sixty percent." 23

September 15. Nazi authorities enact the Nuremberg Race Laws. The first, the Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor,' forbade marriage and extra-marital intercourse between Aryans and Jews, as a means of avoiding "race pollution and defilement." The second, the Reich Citizenship Law, stripped German Jews of their citizenship and any remaining civil rights. A supplementary protocol, instituted in November 1935, defined a Jew as any German with at least three Jewish grandparents. 24 The Nuremberg laws provided a regimented, systematic basis for persecution of German Jews. 25

20 https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-fuehrer-oath
22 Kershaw. Hubris. 12198.
24 https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/background-and-overview-of-the-nuremberg-laws
25 https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/nuremberg-laws
1936

June 12. The German General Staff estimates that the "total personnel strength of the army stood at just over 793,000 men." In 1933, the number of men in the military had been 100,000.

August 1. The Berlin Olympic Games provide a propaganda victory for the Nazi regime. Many international observers are impressed with German economic prosperity and the political popularity enjoyed by Hitler's government, and some conclude that claims that Jews faced persecution in Germany had been exaggerated.

September. Hitler launches an ambitious 4-year plan to focus the majority of German economic production on dramatically increasing the size of the military and enhancing the country's ability to function as an autarky (essentially, being a position to require no economic supplies from outside the country) in order to fully supply its military during war-time. Those plans included promoting German agricultural self-sufficiency, the development of synthetic substitutes for crucial resources that Germany lacked (such as oil), and a regimentation of German economic life under the direction of the government (in coordination with large corporations). At the same cabinet meeting at which he discusses these economic plans, Hitler informed the Nazi leadership that "the German armed forces must be operational within four years...and the German economy must be fit for war within four years." From this point forward, the German economy essentially shifted to a war-time footing.

1937

January 1. German unemployment drops. In January 1933, 6 million Germans were unemployed. According to Nazi economists, four years later, the number of unemployed German workers had been reduced to 500,000. Employment numbers had been skewed by the removal of many women and Jews from the workforce and conscription of men into the military, but Germans clearly saw that unemployment had drastically declined under Nazi rule. That economic improvement, historian Richard Evans writes, "pumped new euphoria into the Third Reich's supporters. Belief that Hitler was reconstructing the German economy was a major factor in underpinning popular acceptance of his regime..."

November 8. "The Eternal Jew" exhibit opens in Berlin, seeking to educate the German people about Nazis' understanding of the threat posed by Jews to the Reich.

1938

342 Evans.
27 https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-nazi-olympics-berlin-1936
28 Evans, 345-346. 357.
29 Evans, p. 333.
January. Nazi spending on rearmament continues to skyrocket. According to Evans, "By 1938, expenditures on preparations for war were clearly spiraling out of control...rearmament costs had risen from 1.5% of national income in 1933, to 7.8% in 1934, to 15.7% in 1936, and 21% in 1938." 30

April-November. Nazis escalate efforts to further repress Jews in Germany, as well as newly-annexed Austria, by confiscating Jewish-owned property, arresting several thousand Jews and sending them to concentrations camps, expelling Jewish children from all public schools, forbidding Jews from giving their children Aryan names, in addition to ad hoc beatings and other methods of intimidation. At this stage in the oppression of Jews, Nazi leaders concentrate on using campaigns of repression to coerce Jews into emigrating from Germany.

August 26. 'Central Bureau for Jewish Emigration' opens in Austria, led by Adolf Eichmann. The Bureau organized the expulsion of Austrian Jews in a multi-step process, requiring all Austrian Jews to concentrate in Vienna, establishing goals for the number of Jews who would emigrate in a certain time frame and compelling the Jewish community to meet those targets and fund emigration efforts. Nazi auxiliaries beat Jews in the streets. Similar strategies were soon adopted by Nazi authorities in other parts of the Reich.

November 9-10. On 'Kristallnacht,' or "Night of the Broken glass,' Nazi authorities and German citizens carry out nationwide attacks to terrorize and intimidate Jews and destroy Jewish institutions. Thousands of members of the Hitler Youth participated in the attacks. Nazis killed almost one hundred Jews, destroyed more than 7,000 Jewish-owned businesses, desecrated Jewish cemeteries, and vandalized or burned Jewish schools and synagogues. Although Nazi authorities claimed the pogrom was a spontaneous response to the assassination of a Nazi diplomat in Paris by a Jewish emigre, the attacks were in fact a carefully organized and executed plan to further remove Jews from German life and compel them to emigrate from the country. The SS became the agency chiefly responsible for persecuting German Jews. Kristallnacht represented another major step down the path leading to the Holocaust.

1939

Summer. The total population in German concentration camps (the largest among them being Buchenwald, Dachau, Flossenburg, Ravensbruck, Mautha heusen and Sachenhausen) reaches 21,000. Those imprisoned included political prisoners, 'enemies of the state, and Jews, but also thousands of "asocial" and "degenerate" Germans, ranging from prostitutes to habitual criminals and "work-shy" vagrants, as well as homosexuals and Jehovah's witnesses. 31

August 22. After nearly 7 years of preparation for war, based on the transformation of German political, economic, social, and cultural life, Hitler orders the Nazi war machine into battle. He demands that his generals "Close your hearts to pity...Act brutally! The stronger man is right! Eighty million people must obtain what is their right. Their existence must be made secure. The greatest harshness!" 32

30 Ibid., 360.
31 Evans, 90.
32 Ibid., 712.