

The Nazi Regime

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

When the Nazis gained power they dissolved a number of institutions and absorbed others. In September 1935 all sexual liaisons between Jews and non-Jews were described as crimes against the state. In 1938 Jewish communal bodies were put under the control of the Gestapo, and Jews were forced to register their property. Later in the year the Nazi Party organized an onslaught against the Jewish population. This event, known as *Kristallnacht*, was a prelude to the terrors of the death camps. The first stage of the Nazis' plan for European Jewry began with the invasion of Poland in September 1939. In every conquered town and village the Germans forced Jews to clear rubble, carry heavy loads, hand over jewellery, and scrub floors and lavatories with their prayer shawls. In addition, the Germans cut off religious Jews' beards and sidelocks with scissors or tore them from their faces. When the Jewish population was forced into what Hitler referred to as a huge Polish labour camp, a massive work programme was initiated.

The next stage in the plan of extermination began with the invasion of Russia in 1941. This was designed to destroy what was described by the Nazis as the 'Jewish-Bolshevik conspiracy'. At first, mobile killing battalions of 500–900 men (the *Einsatzgruppen*) under the supervision of Reinhard Heydrich began the slaughter of Russian Jewry. Of the 4,500,000 Jews who resided in Soviet territory, more than half fled before the German invasion; those who remained were concentrated in large cities making it easier for Heydrich's troops to carry out their task. Throughout the country the *Einsatzgruppen* moved into Russian towns, sought out the rabbi or Jewish council and obtained a list of all Jewish inhabitants. The Jews were then rounded up in market places, crowded into trains, buses and trucks and taken to woods where

mass graves had been dug. Reflecting on these tragic events, you should consider the extent to which the German population approved of such actions against the Jews. Were ordinary Germans responsible for this onslaught? Or was the assault against Jewry undertaken only by Nazi officials. Further, you should ask yourself what factors gave rise to such virulent anti-Semitism. How could the German nation have embarked on such a policy of mass murder? In recent years a number of Christian scholars have debated the responsibility of the Church in the Third Reich? Were Church leaders, including the Pope, culpable for doing so little to curtail the destruction of millions of innocent Jewish victims?

THINGS TO DO

- Go to Google. Search for websites dealing with the Nazi treatment of the Jews, such as <www.ihr.org/books/hoggan/04.html>.
- Stay in Google. Click on images. Type in subjects mentioned in this chapter: 'Hitler', 'Kristallnacht', 'Hermann Göring', 'Final Solution', 'Einsatzgruppen', etc.
- Go to Amazon.com. Search for books dealing with Hitler. Go back to Google, and type in 'Hitler and Jews'. Imagine you are a psychiatrist. Write a short case study of Hitler, focusing on his anti-Semitic attitudes.

TIPS FOR TEACHERS

- Go to Google. Search for websites dealing with Hitler and the Jews, such as www.vagobondpages.com/september/Jews.html. Click on images for illustrations of Hitler and the Jews during the Third Reich. Make a powerpoint presentation illustrating Hitler's anti-Semitism.
- Invite a history teacher to speak to your class about the Third Reich. She should focus on the Nazi attitude to the Jews.
- Stage a debate. One side should criticize the attitudes of the Church during the Holocaust. The other side should defend Church leaders.