The Concentration Camps
Inside the Nazi System of Incarceration and Genocide

Part 1: The Nazi Strategy of Concentrating People

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This document contains historical images of the Holocaust and the concentration camps.

Please be advised that some of these pictures and descriptions are graphic and may be disturbing to viewers.
In 1933, during the first year of Hitler’s rule, 200,000 people were arrested in Nazi Germany.

Adolf Hitler and Nazi SS leader Heinrich Himmler review SS troops during Reichsparteitag (Reich Party Day) in Nuremberg, Germany. 1935. Photo credit: USHMM #11775.
In 1935, the Nuremberg Race Laws institutionalized many of the racial theories underpinning Nazi ideology. People were defined as “Jewish” if they had Jewish grandparents, not if they practiced Judaism.

The laws also excluded Jews from German citizenship and prohibited Jews from having sex with persons of “German or related blood.”
The Nazis instructed German women to avoid all contact with foreign workers, part of the ban on sexual relations between Aryans and non-Aryans (the “race defilement law”). German women who disobeyed were publicly humiliated and arrested, while foreign men were subject to the death penalty.

Nazi propaganda poster cartoonishly depicting a Jewish man interacting with an Aryan woman that reads: “Defiling the Race.”

Photo credit: USHMM.
When Adolf Hitler came to power in 1933, he banned all homosexual groups, raided gay businesses, and imprisoned many homosexuals. In 1934, Hitler ordered the execution of his loyal aide, and known homosexual, Ernst Röhm.

In 1935, laws forbidding homosexuality were made even stricter. Soon, many who were found to be “habitual homosexuals” were sent to concentration camps, where they were treated very harshly and perished by the thousands.

Adolf Hitler (center) walks with other members of the Nazi Party, circa 1933–1934. Directly behind him is SA Chief of Staff Ernst Röhm, whom Hitler would order the SS to kill during the “Night of the Long Knives” in 1934. Photo credit: USHMM #48174, courtesy of Jeff Kemper.
The Reichstag Fire Decree, passed by the newly formed Nazi government on February 28, 1933, gave the Nazi regime the legal power to arrest, detain, and eventually incarcerate people without charges.

Onlookers in front of the Reichstag (German parliament) building the day after it was damaged by fire. *Photo credit: USHMM and Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz.*