

# BBC Bitesize GCSE History - 20th century Germany

## Episode 7 – Nazi persecution, 1933-1939

**Announcer:** BBC Sounds, music, radio, podcasts.

**Katie:** I'm Katie Charlwood.

**Datshiane:** And I'm Datshiane Navanayagam.

**Katie:** And this is Bitesize GCSE History.

**Datshiane:** Before we begin today's episode, we wanted to let you know that we will be discussing the Holocaust, one of the darkest periods in human history; this topic involves deeply distressing themes, and the suffering of millions of innocent people. Whilst it's crucial to learn about this period to understand the impact of hatred and intolerance, some of the content may be upsetting or difficult to hear.

**Katie:** And if at any point you feel overwhelmed, please just take a break or speak to someone you trust. Remember it's okay to feel emotional about these events, and it's important to approach the subject with respect and care.

**Datshiane:** In this episode, we'll examine the Nazi persecution against Jewish people between 1933 when Hitler gained total power, up until the beginning of the war in 1939.

**Katie:** And we'll have the usual hints and tips for revision and exam questions along the way; and get those pens, paper or your digital equivalent handy to take notes.

**Katie:** So antisemitism has existed for centuries, and can be traced as far back as biblical times. When the Nazis came to power in Germany in 1933, they began transforming their antisemitic ideology into dangerous antisemitism laws, and Jewish people were being stripped of their jobs, their possessions, and their citizenship.

**Datshiane:** We've looked at how they did this in previous episodes, and how their policies changed everyday life for Germans.

**Katie:** Hitler and the Nazis believed in the idea of the Aryan race; this was a concept with no scientific basis used by Nazis and other racists to describe people of white European origin.

**Datshiane:** And it was this idea that fed into the Nazis' belief and policies shaped by eugenics.

**Katie:** They used these false racist ideas to claim that German society was under threat from so called inferior or non-Aryans, whom they said included Jewish people, Roma and Sinti, but also other groups such as Slavs from Eastern Europe, black people, homosexuals, Jehovah Witnesses, and even disabled people.

**Datshiane:** Now, as soon as they were in power the Nazis began to persecute these groups. This might be a good time to grab a pen because there's a timeline of important dates and events.

**Datshiane:** Okay, in March 1933, the first concentration camp was built in Dachau. Originally this was intended to imprison political opponents of the Nazis, such as communists.

**Katie:** On the first of April 1933, the Nazis began boycotts of Jewish businesses. Jewish shops were all singled out with a yellow Star of David or the German word for Jew, Jude.

**Datshiane:** Also in April 1933, German law restricted the number of Jewish students at German schools and universities.

**Katie:** And in schools the science lessons included the teaching of race studies, indoctrinating pupils in Nazi ideas and the belief that Jewish people were enemies of the so-called Aryan race.

**Datshiane:** Now September 1935, the Nuremberg Laws were passed. These laid the legal foundation for the persecution of Jewish people in Nazi Germany. These laws stripped Jewish people of their German citizenship, forbade marriage or sexual relations between Jewish people and Aryans, and took away all their civil and political rights.

**Katie:** Essentially, the Nuremberg Laws isolated Jewish people from the rest of German society, now making them legally inferior, and opening the door to further discrimination and violence.

**Datshiane:** The next month, in October 1936, Jewish teachers were banned from working in state schools, and by November 1938, Jewish children were forbidden to go to non-Jewish state schools. In

July 1938, Jewish doctors were banned from first treating non-Jewish patients, and then eventually they were stripped of their rights to practise medicine at all.

**Katie:** Then, by August 1938, all Jewish men were forced to change their first name to Israel, and all women to Sara.

**Datshiane:** In October 1938 all Jewish owned property had to be given away to non-Jewish people, and all Jewish passports had to be stamped with the letter J.

**Katie:** But it was Kristallnacht or the Night of Broken Glass on the 9th of November 1938 that the escalation culminated with intimidation and erosion of Jewish rights, with violent attacks on a large scale. So, let's have a look at those events. On that evening Nazi activists and security forces used news of the assassination of the German ambassador to France by a Jewish person, as an excuse to organise attacks on Jewish homes, businesses and synagogues all over Germany.

**Datshiane:** In fact, over 1400 synagogues were damaged or destroyed and Jewish cemeteries and homes were desecrated. The violence led to at least a hundred Jewish deaths, though some estimates suggest there could be even higher numbers; and 30,000 Jewish men were sent to concentration camps and held there until they agreed to emigrate from Germany.

**Katie:** For Jewish people, Kristallnacht caused widespread fear and trauma, the violence and destruction were a clear sign that Jewish people were no longer safe in Germany, leading to heightened anxiety and despair amongst the community.

**Datshiane:** I've got here a primary source: it's a transcript from an interview with Hanne Hirsch Liebmann whose parents owned a photographic shop; she's remembering the morning after Kristallnacht when she was a schoolgirl. She says, "I went to school in the morning, Jewish school obviously, and something seemed wrong yet I didn't know what. And when I came to school and I mentioned that I saw the fire engines standing in front of a building, and in the back of this building was the Orthodox synagogue I was told, 'Don't you know what's going on?' And I said, 'No I don't.' The teachers, other than the female teachers, did not come in, the male teachers were arrested, and then they sent us home. And when I came home, all our shop windows had been smashed. Next to us was a store that dealt in oriental carpets. The shop windows were gone, inks were thrown over the carpets. My mother was sweeping up the street, I remember the taunts and harassment of the people. It was impossible."

**Katie:** That is a powerful source. Thanks, Datshiane. How can we use our words to analyse the events in the aftermath of Kristallnacht?

**Datshiane:** Well analysing sources is something we look at in the Exam Skill series. We look there at the provenance of the source, so who wrote it, when, and why, and how to cross reference that to our knowledge so that we can make a judgment on how useful the source is. In this case Hanne was remembering an event from her youth, it's first person evidence because she was there, and she describes what she saw. We know that those events happened because there are multiple documents and testimonies that back up Hanne's description.

**Katie:** Absolutely, I find her words even more powerful as you can get a sense of her confusion and fear as the events in the day after Kristallnacht unfold. Okay, so, many Jewish people sought to emigrate from Germany and Austria, although it was becoming more difficult due to restrictions.

**Datshiane:** Yes, some were able to leave even though emigration was becoming more difficult, due to the restrictions and the reluctance of many countries to accept Jewish refugees. By 1939, those people who were still in Germany were forbidden to even own a business. There's been lots of information to take in here and maybe if you feel the need, press pause here, and have a break to reflect on some of this.

**Katie:** So, let's tackle an example question based on this episode. Describe how the events of Kristallnacht marked a significant escalation in the Nazi regime's antisemitic policies, and its effect on Jewish communities. Have a think about this question yourself, and either press pause now or write your answer after the podcast. Datshiane, have you got any thoughts on how to begin?

**Datshiane:** Well, I think what you should always do is think about what the question is asking. And, if it helps, underline any key words that keep that in focus. So, the key words here are Kristallnacht, antisemitic policies and significant escalation.

**Katie:** Think about the specific evidence you know about Kristallnacht. It's important to show that knowledge as well as the causes leading up to it.

**Datshiane:** Yes, the question is also asking you to ask about Nazi antisemitic policies and how they escalated, so again there are marks to be gained by demonstrating your knowledge; in this case on the key policies before Kristallnacht such as the Nuremberg Laws, which were legal means to marginalise Jewish people.

**Katie:** Then I'd write about the antisemitic policies after Kristallnacht, which include the immediate organised violence actively encouraged by the Nazis, and I would explain the Nazi policies of Jewish ghettos, that would culminate in the Holocaust.

**Datshiane:** You might conclude that by linking your analysis back to the question. So, something like, Kristallnacht was a significant escalation in the Nazi regime's antisemitic policies, marking a shift from legal discrimination to violent persecution.

**Katie:** Okay, let's summarise this episode. Hitler and the Nazis believed that Germans were the so-called master race and that all other races were inferior and wanted them removed.

**Datshiane:** This was particularly related to Jewish people, but also to other minority groups.

**Katie:** Nazi policies towards Jewish people was a gradual process that escalated over time.

**Datshiane:** The Nuremberg Laws removed citizenship and banned the marriage of Jewish people to non-Jewish people.

**Katie:** Kristallnacht was a turning point from intimidation to organised violent attacks. If today's episode has stirred difficult emotions, please know it's okay to feel this way. It's important to talk about what you've learned and if you need to, reach out to a teacher, a friend or a family member.

**Datshiane:** You might want to listen to the episode again and summarise your thoughts and subject knowledge. There's more information on the Bitesize website about the Holocaust; this was a dark period in history, but hopefully it also teaches us how to build a more compassionate future.