

# History of the Jews in Germany

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**German Jews** have lived in Germany for over 1700 years, through both periods of tolerance and spasms of anti-Semitic violence, culminating in the Holocaust and the near-destruction of the Jewish community in Germany and much of Europe.

Today, over 200,000 Jews or persons of Jewish descent live in Germany, one of the largest Jewish populations in a European country.

[1] (<http://www.destatis.de/basis/e/bevoe/bevoetab5.htm>) , [2] (<http://www.zentralratjuden.de/en/topic/154.html>)

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## Early settlements

The date of the first settlement of Jews in the regions called by the Romans "Germania Superior," "Germania Inferior," and "Germania Magna," is not known. The first authentic document relating to a large and well-organized Jewish community in these regions dates from 321 AD, and refers to Cologne on the Rhine; it indicates that the legal status of the Jews there was the same as elsewhere in the Roman empire. They enjoyed some civil liberties, but were restricted regarding the dissemination of their faith, the keeping of Christian slaves, and the holding of office under the government.

**Political movements · Zionism**  
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Jews were otherwise free to follow any occupation open to their fellow citizens, and were engaged in agriculture, trade, industry, and gradually money-lending. These conditions at first continued in the subsequently established Germanic kingdoms under the Burgundians and Franks, for ecclesiasticism took root slowly. The Merovingian rulers who succeeded to the Burgundian empire, were devoid of fanaticism, and gave scant support to the efforts of the Church to restrict the civic and social status of the Jews.

## Under Charlemagne

Charlemagne readily made use of the Church for the purpose of infusing coherence into the loosely joined parts of his extensive empire, by any means a blind tool of the canonical law. He made use of the Jews so far as suited his diplomacy, sending, for instance, a Jew as interpreter and guide with his embassy to Harun al-Rashid. Yet even then a gradual change occurred in the lives of the Jews. Unlike the Franks, who were liable to be called to arms at any moment in those tumultuous times, the Jews were exempt from military service; hence trade and commerce were left almost entirely in their hands, and they secured the remunerative monopoly of money-lending when the Church forbade Christians to take usury. This decree caused the Jews to be sought everywhere as well as avoided, for their capital was indispensable while their business was viewed as disreputable. This curious combination of circumstances increased their influence. They went about the country freely, settling also in the eastern portions. Aside from Cologne, the earliest communities seem to have been established in Worms and Mainz.

## Up to the Crusades

The status of the German Jews remained unchanged under Charlemagne's weak successor, Louis the Pious. They were unrestricted in their commerce, merely paying into the state treasury a somewhat higher tax than did the Christians. A special officer, the "Judenmeister," was appointed by the government to protect their privileges. The later Carolingians, however, fell more and more in with the demands of the Church. The bishops, who were continually harping at the synods on the anti-Semitic decrees of the canonical law, finally brought it about that the majority Christian populace was filled with mistrust against the Jewish unbelievers. This feeling, among both princes and people, was further stimulated by the attacks on the civic equality of the Jews. Beginning with the tenth century, Holy Week became more and more a period of persecution for them. Yet the Saxon emperors did not treat the Jews badly, exacting from them merely the taxes levied upon all other merchants. Although they were as ignorant as their contemporaries as regards secular studies, they could

Jews of Germany, thirteenth century.

read and understand the Hebrew prayers, and the Bible in the original text. Halakic studies began to flourish about 1000.

At that time R. Gershom ben Judah was teaching at Metz and Mayence, gathering about him pupils from far and near. He is described as a model of wisdom, humility, and piety, and is praised by all as a "lamp of the Exile." He first stimulated the German Jews to study the treasures of their religious literature. This continuous study of the Torah and the Talmud produced such a devotion to their faith that the Jews considered life without their religion not worth living; but they did not realize this clearly until the time of the Crusades, when they were often compelled to choose between life and faith.

## A period of massacres (1096-1349)

The wild excitement to which the Germans had been driven by exhortations to take the cross first broke upon the Jews, the nearest representatives of an execrated opposition faith. Entire communities, like those of Treves, Speyer, Worms, Mayence, and Cologne, were slain, except where the slayers were anticipated by the deliberate self-destruction of their intended victims. About 12,000 Jews are said to have perished in the Rhenish cities alone between May and July, 1096. These outbreaks of popular passion during the Crusades influenced the future status of the Jews. To salve their consciences the Christians brought accusations against the Jews to prove that they had deserved their fate; imputed crimes, like desecration of the host, ritual murder, poisoning of wells, and treason, brought hundreds to the stake and drove thousands into exile. They were accused of having caused the inroads of the Mongols, even though they suffered equally with the Christians. When the Black Death swept over Europe in 1348-49, the Jews were accused of well-poisoning, and a general slaughter began throughout the Germanic and contiguous provinces, causing a massive exodus east to Poland, where they at first were warmly greeted by the Polish King, forming the future foundations of the largest Jewish community in Europe.

## In the Holy Roman Empire

Nevertheless, the legal and civic status of the Jews was undergoing a transformation. They found a certain degree of protection with the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, who claimed the right of possession and protection of all the Jews of the empire in virtue of being the successor of the emperor Titus, who was said to have acquired the Jews as his private property. The German emperors claimed this right of possession more for the sake of taxing the Jews than of protecting them. Ludwig the Bavarian especially exerted his ingenuity in devising new taxes. In 1342 he instituted the "golden sacrificial penny," and decreed that every year all the Jews should pay to the emperor one kreutzer in every gulden of their property in addition to the taxes they were paying to the state and municipal authorities.

The emperors of the house of Luxemburg devised still other means of taxation. They turned their prerogatives in regard to the Jews to further account by selling at a high price to the princes and free towns of the empire the valuable privilege of taxing and mulcting the Jews. On the



German Jews (identifiable by the Judenhut's that they were required to wear) were killed by the tens of thousands during the First Crusade. French Bible illustration from 1250.

reorganization of the empire in 1356, Charles IV., by the "Golden Bull," granted this privilege to the seven electors of the empire. From this time onward the Jews of Germany gradually passed in increasing numbers from the authority of the emperor to that of the lesser sovereigns and of the cities. For the sake of sorely needed revenue the Jews were now invited, with the promise of full protection, to return to those districts and cities from which they had shortly before been cruelly expelled; but as soon as they had acquired some property they were again plundered and driven away. These episodes thenceforth constituted the history of the German Jews. Emperor Wenceslaus was most expert in transferring to his own coffers gold from the pockets of rich Jews. He made compacts with many cities, estates, and princes whereby he annulled all outstanding debts to the Jews in return for a certain sum paid to him, adding that any one who should nevertheless help the Jews to collect their debts should be dealt with as a robber and peacebreaker, and be forced to make restitution. This decree, which for years injured the public credit, impoverished thousands of Jewish families during the close of the fourteenth century.



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A Jew of Swabia.

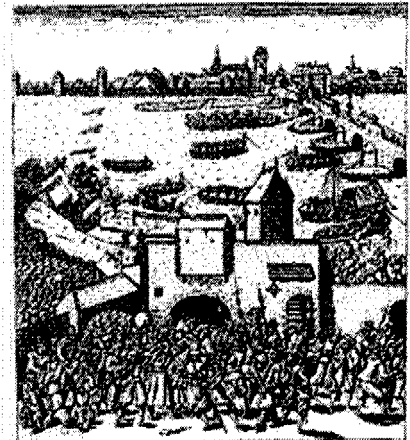
Nor did the fifteenth century bring any amelioration. What happened in the time of the Crusades happened again. The war upon the Hussite heretics became the signal for the slaughter of the unbelievers. The Jews of Austria, Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia passed through all the terrors of death, forced baptism, or voluntary immolation for the sake of their faith. When the Hussites made peace with the Church the pope sent the Franciscan monk Capistrano to win the renegades back into the fold and inspire them with loathing for heresy and unbelief; forty-one martyrs were burned in Breslau alone, and all Jews were forever banished from Silesia. The Franciscan monk Bernardinus of Feltre (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02504c.htm>) brought a similar fate upon the communities in southern and western Germany. As a consequence of the fictitious confessions extracted under torture from the Jews of Trent, the populace of many cities, especially of Ratisbon, fell upon the Jews and massacred them.

The end of the fifteenth century, which brought a new epoch for the Christian world, brought no relief to the Jews. They remained the victims of a religious hatred that ascribed to them all possible evils. When the established Church, threatened in its spiritual power in Germany and elsewhere, prepared for its conflict with the culture of the Renaissance, one of its most

convenient points of attack was rabbinic literature. At this time, as once before in France, Jewish converts spread false reports in regard to the Talmud. But an advocate of the book arose in the person of Johannes Reuchlin, the German humanist, who was the first one in Germany to include the Hebrew language among the humanities. His opinion, though strongly opposed by the Dominicans and their followers, finally prevailed when the humanistic Pope Leo X permitted the Talmud to be printed in Italy.

## During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries

The feeling against the Jews themselves, however, remained the same. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries they were still subject to the will of the princes and the free cities, both in Catholic and in Protestant countries. The German emperors were not always able to protect them, even when they desired to do so, as did the chivalrous Emperor Maximilian I; they could not prevent the accusations of ritual murder and of desecration of the host. The unending religious controversies that rent the empire and finally led to the Thirty Years' war further aggravated the position of the Jews, who were made the prey of each party in turn. The emperors even occasionally expelled their "Kammerknechte" from their crown lands, although they still assumed the office of protector. Ferdinand I expelled the Jews from Lower Austria and Görz, and would have carried out his vow to banish them also from Bohemia had not the noble Mordecai Zemaḥ Cohen of Prague induced the pope to absolve the emperor from this vow. Emperor Leopold I expelled them in 1670 from Vienna and the Archduchy of Austria, in spite of their vested rights and the intercession of princes and ecclesiastics; the exiles were received in the Margraviate of Brandenburg. The "Great Elector," Frederick William (1620-1688), deciding to tolerate all religious beliefs impartially, protected his new subjects against oppression and slander. In spite of the civic and religious restrictions to which they were subjected even here, the Jews of this flourishing community gradually attained to a wider outlook, although their one-sided education, the result of centuries of oppression, restricted them in European culture and kept them in intellectual bondage.



Etching of the expulsion of the Jews from Frankfurt on August 23, 1614. The text says: "1380 persons old and young were counted at the exit of the gate"

## Jewish life through the Holy Roman Empire



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Fortunately, the Jews had kept their piety and their intellectual activity. They were devoted to the study of the Halakah. In the eleventh century Rabbi Gershom (<http://members.aol.com/LazerA/rgershom.html>)'s pupils had been the teachers of Rashi, and his commentaries on the Bible and Talmud marked out new paths for learning. The German Jews contributed much to the spread and completion of these commentaries. Beginning with the twelfth century they worked independently, especially in the fields of Haggadah and ethics. R. Simon ha-Darshan's "Yalḳuṭ." (c. 1150), the "Book of the Pious" by R. Judah ha-Ḥasid of Ratisbon (c. 1200), the "Salve-Mixer" (Rokeaḥ) of R. Eleasar of Worms (c. 1200), the halakic collection "Or Zarua'" of R. Isaac of Vienna (c. 1250), the responsa of Rabbi Meïr of Rothenburg (d. 1293), are enduring monuments of German Jewish industry. Even the horrors of the Black Death could not completely destroy this

German Jews of the upper Rhine, sixteenth century.

literary activity. Profound and wide scholarship was less common after the middle of the fourteenth century, which led to the institution of allowing only those scholars to become rabbis who could produce a written authorization to teach

("hattarat hora'ah") issued by a recognized master. To this period of decline belong also a number of large collections of responsa and of useful commentaries on earlier halakic works. The customs and ordinances relating to the form and order of worship were especially studied in this period, and were definitely fixed for the ritual of the synagogues of western and eastern Germany by Jacob Mölln (Maharil) and Isaac Tyrnau. As it was difficult to produce any new works in the field of the Halakah, and as the dry study of well-worn subjects no longer satisfied, scholars sought relief in the interpretations and traditions embodied in the Cabala. There arose a new, ascetic view of life, that found literary expression in the "Shene Luhot ha-Berit " by Rabbi Isaiah Horowitz of Frankfort-on-the Main (d. 1626), and that appealed especially to the pietistic German Jews. The end and aim of existence were now sought in the aspiration of the soul toward its fountainhead, combined with the endeavor to saturate the earthly life with the spirit of God. By a continuous attitude of reverence to God, by lofty thoughts and actions, the Jew was to rise above the ordinary affairs of the day and become a worthy member of the kingdom of God. Every act of his life was to remind him of his religious duties and stimulate him to mystic contemplation.

### Separation from the world

The oppressions under which the Jews suffered encouraged an austere view of life. They lived in fear in their Jews' streets, subsisting on what they could earn as peddlers and as dealers in old clothes. Cut off from all participation in public and municipal life, they had to seek in their homes compensation for the things denied them outside. Their family life was intimate, beautified by faith, industry, and temperance. They were loyal to their community. In consequence of their complete segregation from their Christian fellow citizens, the German speech of the ghetto was increasingly interlarded with Hebraisms, and also with Slavonic elements since the seventeenth century, when the atrocities of Chmielnicki and his Cossacks drove the Polish Jews back into western Germany. As the common people understood only the books written in this peculiar dialect and printed in Hebrew characters, a voluminous literature of edifying, devotional, and belletristic works sprang up in Judæo-German to satisfy the needs of these readers. Although this output was one-sided, presupposing almost no secular knowledge, its importance in the history of Jewish culture must not be underestimated. The study of the Bible, Talmud, and halakic legal works, with their voluminous commentaries, preserved the plasticity of the Jewish mind, until a new Moses came to lead his coreligionists out of intellectual bondage toward modern culture.



16th century drawing of two Jews from Worms, Germany, each wearing the required yellow badge, and the man holding a moneybag and a garlic bulb.

### From Moses Mendelssohn (1778) to the Nazis (1933)

## Moses Mendelssohn

Moses Mendelssohn located with true insight the point of departure for the regeneration of Jewish life. The Middle Ages, which could take from the Jews neither their faith nor their past intellectual achievements, had yet deprived them of the chief means (namely, the vernacular) of comprehending the intellectual labors of others. The chasm that in consequence separated them from their educated fellow citizens was bridged by Mendelssohn's translation of the Torah into German. This book became the manual of the German Jews, teaching them to write and speak the German language, and preparing them for participation in German culture and secular science. Mendelssohn lived to see the first fruits of his endeavors. In 1778 his friend David Friedländer founded the Jewish free school in Berlin, this being the first Jewish educational institution in Germany in which the entire instruction, in Scripture as well as in general science, was carried on in German only. Similar schools were founded later in the German towns of Breslau (1792), Seesen (1801), Frankfurt (1804), and Wolfenbüttel (1807), and the Galician towns of Brody and Tarnopol (1815). In 1783 the periodical "Der Sammler" was issued with the view of providing general information for adults and of enabling them to express themselves in pure, harmonious German.

A youthful enthusiasm for new ideals at that time pervaded the entire civilized world; all religions were recognized as equally entitled to respect, and the champions of political freedom undertook to restore the Jews to their full rights as men and citizens. The humane Austro-German emperor Joseph II was foremost in espousing these new ideals. As early as 1782 he issued the "Patent of Toleration for the Jews of Lower Austria," establishing thereby the civic equality of his Jewish subjects. Prussia conferred citizenship upon the Prussian Jews in 1812, though this by no means included full equality with other citizens. The German federal edicts of 1815 merely held out the prospect of full equality; but it was not realized at that time, and even the promises that had been given were modified. In Austria many laws restricting the trade and traffic of Jewish subjects remained in force down to the middle of the nineteenth century, in spite of the patent of toleration. Some of the crown lands, as Styria and Upper Austria, forbade any Jews to settle within their territory; in Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia many cities were closed to them. They were, in addition, burdened with heavy taxes and imposts.

In the German Kingdom of Prussia, also, the government modified materially the promises made in the disastrous year 1813. The promised uniform regulation of Jewish affairs was time and again postponed. In the period between 1815 and 1847 there were no less than twenty-one territorial Jews' laws in the eight provinces of the Prussian state, of which each one had to be observed by a part of the Jewish community. There was at that time no official authorized to speak in the name of all German Jews. Nevertheless a few courageous men came forward to maintain their cause, foremost among them being Gabriel Riesser, a Jewish lawyer of Hamburg (d. 1863), who demanded full civic equality for his race from the German princes and peoples. He aroused public opinion to such an extent that this equality was granted in Prussia April 6, 1848; in Hanover and Nassau respectively Sept. 5 and Dec. 12 of the same year. In Württemberg equality was conceded Dec. 3, 1861; in Baden Oct. 4, 1862; in Holstein July 14, 1863; in Saxony Dec. 3, 1868. After the establishment of the North-German Union by the law of July 3, 1869, all existing restrictions imposed upon the followers of different religions were abolished; this decree was extended to all the provinces of the German empire after the events of 1870.

## The Jewish enlightenment in Germany

The intellectual development of the Jews kept pace with their civic enfranchisement. Recognizing that pursuit of modern culture would not at once assure them the civic status they desired, their leaders set themselves to reawaken Jewish self-consciousness by applying the methods of modern scholarship to the study of Jewish sources, and to stimulate the rising generation by familiarizing them with the intellectual achievements of their ancestors which had been accumulating for thousands of years; and at the same time they sought to rehabilitate Judaism in the eyes of the world. The leader of this new movement and the founder of modern Jewish science was Leopold Zunz (1794-1886), who united broad general scholarship with a thorough knowledge of the entire Jewish literature, and who, with his contemporary Solomon Judah Löb Rapoport of Galicia (1790-1867), especially aroused their coreligionists in Germany, Austria, and Italy. The German scholars who cooperated in the work of these two men may be noted here. H. Arnheim (<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=1795&letter=A&search=arnheim>) wrote a scholarly manual of the Hebrew language; Julius Fürst and David Cassel (<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=234&letter=C&search=cassel>) compiled Hebrew dictionaries; Fürst and Bernhard Bär (<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=144&letter=Z>) compiled concordances to the entire Bible; Wolf Heidenheim and Seligmann Baer edited correct Masoretic texts of the Bible, and Solomon Frensdorff subjected the history of the Masorah to a thoroughly scientific investigation; the Bible was translated into German under the direction of Zunz and Salomon; Ludwig Philippson, Solomon Hirschheimer, and Julius Fürst wrote complete Biblical commentaries; H. Grätz and S. R. Hirsch dealt with some of the Biblical books; Zacharias Frankel and Abraham Geiger investigated the Aramaic and Greek translations. Nor was the traditional law neglected. Jacob Levy compiled lexicographical works to the Talmud and Midrashim. Michael Sachs and Joseph Perles investigated the foreign elements found in the language of the Talmud. Numerous and, on the whole, excellent editions of the halakic and haggadic midrashim were issued - for instance, Zuckermann's edition of the Tosefta and Theodor's edition of Midrash Rabbah to Genesis. Zacharias Frankel wrote an introduction to the Mishnah and to the Jerusalem Talmud, and David Hoffmann and Israel Lewy investigated the origin and development of the Halakah.

Religio-philosophical literature was also assiduously cultivated, and the original Arabic texts of Jewish religious philosophers were made accessible. M. H. Landauer issued Saadia Gaon's works, and H. Hirschfeld the works of Judah ha-Levi. M. Joel and I. Guttmann investigated the works of the Jewish thinkers and their influence on the general development of philosophy, while S. Hirsch attempted to develop the philosophy of religion along the lines laid down by Hegel, and Solomon Steinheim propounded a new theory of revelation in accordance with the system of the Synagogue.

### **Reorganization of the German Jewish community**

The enfranchisement of the Jews and the reflorescence of Jewish science led to a reorganization of their institutions with a view to transmitting the ancient traditions intact to the new generations. Opinions differed widely as to the best methods of accomplishing this object. While Geiger and Holdheim were ready to meet the modern spirit of liberalism, Samson Raphael Hirsch defended the customs handed down by the fathers. And as neither of these two tendencies was followed by the mass of the faithful, Zacharias Frankel initiated a moderate Reform movement on a historical basis, in agreement with which the larger German communities reorganized their public worship by reducing the medieval payyetaic additions to the prayers, introducing congregational singing and regular sermons, and requiring scientifically trained rabbis.

It was easier to agree upon the means of training children for the Reformed worship and of awakening the interest of adults in Jewish affairs in general. The religious schools were an outcome of the desire to add



religious instruction to the secular education of Jewish children prescribed by the state. As the Talmudic schools, still existing in Germany in the first third of the nineteenth century, were gradually deserted, rabbinical seminaries were founded, in which Talmudic instruction followed the methods introduced by Zacharias Frankel in the Jewish Theological Seminary opened at Breslau in 1854. Since then special attention has been devoted to religious literature. Text-books on religion and on Biblical and Jewish history, as well as aids to the translation and explanation of the Bible and the prayer-books, were compiled to meet the demands of modern pedagogics. Pulpit oratory began to flourish as never before, foremost among the great German preachers being M. Sachs and M. Joël. Nor was synagogal music neglected, Louis Lewandowski especially contributing to its development.

The public institutions of the Jewish communities serve to supplement the work of teachers and leaders, and to promote Jewish solidarity. This is the primary object of the Jewish press, created by Ludwig Philippson. In 1837 he founded the "Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums," which has been followed by a number of similar periodicals. They have succeeded in preserving a certain unity of religious opinion and conviction among the Jews, with the gratifying result of unity of action for the common good. Societies for the cultivation of Jewish literature were founded, as well as associations of teachers, rabbis, and leaders of congregations.

### Birth of the Reform Movement

In response to The Enlightenment and the emancipation, elements within German Jewry sought to reform Jewish belief and practice, starting the Reform movement. In light of modern scholarship, they denied divine authorship of the Torah, declared only those biblical laws concerning ethics to be binding, and stated that the rest of halakha (Jewish law) need no longer be viewed as normative. Circumcision was abandoned, rabbis wore vestments modeled after Protestant ministers, and instrumental accompaniment --- banned in Jewish Sabbath worship since the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. --- reappeared in Reform synagogues, most often in the form of a pipe organ. The traditional Hebrew prayer book (the Siddur) was replaced with a German text which truncated or altogether excised most parts of the traditional service. Reform Synagogues began to be called Temples, a term reserved in more traditional Judaism for the Temple in Jerusalem. The practice of Kashrut (keeping kosher) was abandoned as an impediment to spirituality. The early Reform movement renounced Zionism and declared Germany to be its new Zion. This anti-Zionist view is no longer held; see below. One of the most important figures in the history of Reform Judaism is the radical reformer Samuel Holdheim.



### Freedom and Repression (1815-1930s)

Napoleon emancipated the Jews across Europe, but with Napoleon's fall in 1815, growing nationalism resulted in increasing repression. In 1819, Hep-Hep riots — according to one interpretation, from the Latin *Hierosolyma est perdita* ("Jerusalem is lost"), the rallying cry of the Crusaders, but more likely derived from the traditional herding cries of the German Folk, destroyed Jewish property and killed many Jews. The Revolution of 1848 swung the pendulum back towards freedom for the Jews, but the financial crisis of 1873 created another era of repression. Starting in the 1870s, *völkische* anti-Semites were the first to describe themselves as such, because they viewed Jews as part of a Semitic race that could never be properly assimilated into German society.

Walter Rathenau, Jewish industrialist and Foreign Minister of Germany, was a proponent of Jewish assimilation until his assassination by right-wing nationalists in 1922

Such was the ferocity of the anti-Jewish feeling of the *völkische* movement that by 1900 the term "anti-Semitic" had entered the English language to describe anyone who had anti-Jewish feelings. However, despite massive protests and petitions, the Völkisch movement failed to persuade the government to revoke Jewish emancipation and in the 1912 *Reichstag* elections, the *völkische* parties suffered a temporary defeat.

Jews experienced a period of legal equality from 1848 until the rise of Nazi Germany. In the opinion of the historian Fritz Stern, by the end of the 19th century, what had emerged was a "Jewish-German symbiosis," where German Jews had merged elements of German and Jewish culture into a unique new one. A higher percentage of German Jews fought in World War I than that of any other ethnic, religious or political group in Germany—in fact, some 12,000 died for their country.[3] (<http://www.germanjewishsoldiers.com/introduction.php>) German Jews enjoyed full equality in the Weimar Republic, many receiving high political positions like foreign minister and vice chancellor. The Weimar constitution was the work of a German Jew, Hugo Preuss, who later became minister of the interior. Marriages between Jews and non-Jews became somewhat common from the 19th century; for example, the wife of German Chancellor Gustav Stresemann was Jewish.

## Jews under the Nazis (1930s-1940)

In 1933, persecution of the Jews became active Nazi policy, but at first laws were not as rigorously obeyed and were not as devastating as in later years.

On 1 April 1933, Jewish doctors, shops, lawyers and stores were boycotted. Only 6 days later, the "Law for the Restoration of the professional Civil Service" was passed, banning Jews employed in government. These laws meant that Jews were now indirectly and directly dissuaded or banned from privileged and upper-level positions reserved for "Aryan" Germans. From then on, Jews were forced to work at more menial positions, beneath non-Jews.

On 2 August 1934, President Paul von Hindenburg died. No new President was appointed; instead the powers of the Chancellor and President were combined. This, and a tame government with no opposition parties, allowed Adolf Hitler totalitarian control of law making. The army also swore an oath of loyalty personally to the Führer, giving Hitler power over the army also. This allowed Hitler to easily create more pressure on the Jews than ever before.

In the years 1935-1936, persecution of the Jews increased apace. In May 1935, Jews were forbidden to join the Wehrmacht (Armed Forces), and in the summer of the same year, anti-Jewish propaganda appeared in Nazi-German shops and restaurants. The Nuremberg Racial Purity Laws were passed around the time of the great Nazi rallies at Nuremberg; On 15 September 1935 the "Law for the Protection of German Blood and

The Holocaust
<b>Early elements</b>
Racial policy · Nazi eugenics · Nuremberg Laws · Forced euthanasia · Concentration camps (list)
<b>Jews</b>
Jews in Nazi Germany, 1933 to 1939
<b>Pogroms:</b> Kristallnacht · Bucharest · Dorohoi · Iași · Kaunas · Jedwabne · Lwów
<b>Ghettos:</b> Warsaw · Łódź · Lwów · Kraków · Budapest · Theresienstadt · Kovno · Wilno · Łachwa
<b>Einsatzgruppen:</b> Babi Yar · Rumbula · Ponary · Odessa
<b>Final Solution:</b> Wannsee · Aktion Reinhard
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<b>Resistance:</b> Jewish partisans · Ghetto uprisings (Warsaw)

Honour" was passed preventing marriage between any Jew and non-Jew. At the same time the "Reich Citizenship Law" was passed, and was reinforced in November by a decree, stating that all Jews, even quarter- and half-Jews, were no longer citizens (*Reichsbürger*) of their own country (their official title became "subject of the state" or *Reichsangehöriger*). This meant that they had no basic citizens' rights, e.g., to vote. (But at this time the right to *vote* for the non-Jewish Germans only meant the obligation to vote for the Nazi party.) This removal of basic citizens' rights preceded harsher laws to be passed in the future against Jews. The drafting of the Nuremberg Laws is often attributed to Hans Globke.

In 1936, Jews were banned from all professional jobs, effectively preventing them from exerting any influence in education, politics, higher education and industry. Because of this, there was nothing to stop the anti-Jewish actions that spread across the Nazi-German economy.

After the "Night of the Long Knives", the SS became the dominant policing power in Germany. The *Reichsführer*-SS Heinrich Himmler was eager to please Hitler, and so willingly obeyed his orders. Since the SS had been Hitler's personal bodyguard, they were far more loyal and professional than the SA had been. Because of this, they were also supported by the army, which was now more willing to agree with Hitler's decisions than when the SA had still existed.

All of this allowed Adolf Hitler more direct control over the government and political attitude towards Jews in Nazi Germany. In the period 1937-1938, harsh new laws were implemented, and the segregation of Jews from the true German "Aryan" population was started. In particular, Jews were penalized financially for their perceived racial status.

On 4 June 1937 a young Jewish German named Helmut Hirsch was executed for being mixed up in a plot to kill the Nazi Leadership-including Adolf Hitler.

On 1 March 1938, Government contracts could not be awarded to Jewish businesses. On 30 September of the same year, "Aryan" doctors could only treat "Aryan" patients. Provision of medical care to Jews was already hampered by the fact that Jews were banned from being doctors or having any professional jobs.

On 17 August, Jews had to add "Israel" (males) or "Sarah" (females) to their names, and a large letter "J" was to be imprinted on their passports on 5 October. On 15 November Jewish children were banned from going to normal schools. By April 1939, nearly all Jewish companies had either collapsed under financial pressure and declining profits, or had been persuaded to sell out to the Nazi-German government. This further reduced their rights as human beings; they were in many ways officially separated from the German populace.

The increasingly totalitarian, militaristic regime that was being imposed on Germany by Hitler allowed him to control the actions of the SS and the army. On 7 November 1938, a young Polish Jew,

**End of World War II:** Death marches ·  
Berihah · Displaced persons

#### Other victims

Polish and Soviet Slavs (Poles) · Serbs ·  
Roma · Homosexuals

#### Responsible parties

**Nazi Germany:** Hitler · Eichmann ·  
Heydrich · Himmler · SS · Gestapo · SA

#### Collaborators

**Aftermath:** Nuremberg Trials ·  
Denazification

#### Lists

Survivors · Victims · Rescuers

#### Resources

*The Destruction of the European Jews*  
Phases of the Holocaust  
Functionalism vs. intentionalism



Nazis in uniform in Vienna, Austria 1938 mock Jewish men forced to scrub streets

Herschel Grynszpan attacked and shot two German officials in the Nazi-German embassy in Paris. (Grynszpan was angry about the treatment of his parents by the Nazi-Germans) On 9 November the German Attache, vom Rath died. Goebbels issued instructions that demonstrations against Jews be organized and executed in retaliation throughout Germany. That night the SS ordered the Night of Broken Glass ("Kristallnacht"), to be carried out the night of November 9-10, in which the storefronts of Jewish shops and offices were smashed and vandalised, and many synagogues were destroyed by fire.

Approximately 100 Jews were killed, and another 20,000 arrested, some of whom were sent to the newly formed concentration camps.

Many Germans were disgusted by this action when the full extent of the damage was discovered, so Hitler ordered it to be blamed on the Jews. Collectively the Jews were made to pay back one billion Reichsmark in damages, the fine being raised by confiscating 20% of every Jewish property. The Jews also had to repair all damages at their own cost.

As many as half of the 500,000 Jews in Germany in 1933 fled before the Holocaust.

## The Holocaust (1940-1945)

*Main article: The Holocaust*

The Nazi persecution of the Jews culminated in the Holocaust, in which approximately 6 million European Jews were deported and exterminated during the Second World War. On May 19, 1943, Germany was declared Judenrein ("free of Jews"). It is believed that between 170,000 and 200,000 German Jews were killed. Many Jews were shielded from the labour camps by other German traders, unsympathetic to the Nazis and their policies.

Approximately 150,000 German Jews served in the German Wehrmacht, including decorated veterans and high-ranking officers, even generals and admirals. A great many of these men did not even consider themselves Jewish and had embraced the military as a way of life and as devoted patriots eager to serve a revived German nation. In turn, they had been embraced by the Wehrmacht, which prior to Hitler had given little thought to the "race" of these men but which was now forced to look deeply into the ancestry of its soldiers.[4] (<http://www.kansaspress.ku.edu/right.html>)

## Jews in Germany since 1945

Most German Jews who survived the war in exile decided to remain abroad; however, a small number returned to Germany. Additionally, approximately 15,000 German Jews survived the concentration camps or survived by going into hiding. These German Jews were joined by approximately 200,000 "displaced persons" (DPs), eastern European Jewish Holocaust survivors. They came to Allied-occupied western Germany after finding no homes left for them in eastern Europe (especially in Poland) or after having been liberated on German soil. The overwhelming majority of the DPs wished to emigrate to Palestine and lived

in Allied- and U.N.-administered refugee camps, remaining isolated from German society. After Israeli independence in 1948, most left Germany; however, 10,000 to 15,000 remained. Despite hesitations and a long history of antagonism between German Jews (*Yekkes*) and eastern European Jews ("Ostjuden"), the two disparate groups united to form the basis of a new Jewish community. In 1950 they founded their unitary representative organization, the Central Council of Jews in Germany. Although often disputed, the Central Council continues to be the most important Jewish organization in Germany.

## Jews of West Germany

The Jewish community in West Germany from the 1950s to the 1970s was characterized by its social conservatism and generally private nature. Although there were Jewish elementary schools in West Berlin, Frankfurt, and Munich, the community had a very high average age. Few young adults chose to remain in Germany, and many of those who did married non-Jews. Many critics of the community and its leadership accused it of ossification. In the 1980s, a college for Jewish studies was established in Heidelberg; however, a disproportionate number of its students were not Jewish. By 1990, the community numbered between 30,000 and 40,000. Although the Jewish community of Germany did not have the same impact as the pre-1933 community, some Jews were prominent in German public life, including Hamburg mayor Herbert Weichmann ([http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herbert\\_Weichmann](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herbert_Weichmann)) ; Schleswig-Holstein Minister of Justice (and Deputy Chief Justice of the Federal Constitutional Court) Rudolf Katz; Hesse Attorney General Fritz Bauer; former Hesse Minister of Economics Heinz-Herbert Karry; West Berlin politician Jeanette Wolff; television personalities Hugo Egon Balder, Hans Rosenthal, Ilja Richter, Inge Meysel, and Michel Friedman; Jewish communal leaders Heinz Galinski, Ignatz Bubis, Paul Spiegel, and Charlotte Knobloch (see: Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland); and Germany's most influential literary critic, Marcel Reich-Ranicki.

## Jews of East Germany

The Jewish community of East Germany numbered only a few hundred active members. Most Jews who settled in the Soviet occupation zone or the German Democratic Republic did so either because their pre-1933 homes had been in eastern Germany or because they had been politically leftist before the Nazi seizure of power and, after 1945, wished to build an antifascist, socialist Germany. Most such politically engaged Jews were not religious or active in the official Jewish community. They included writers Anna Seghers, Stefan Heym, Jurek Becker, and composer Hanns Eisler.

## Jews in the united Germany (post 1990)

Today, Germany is home to a nominal Jewish population of more than 200,000, though only 108,000 are officially registered with Jewish religious communities.[5] (<http://www.zentralratjuden.de/en/topic/154.html>.) [6] ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union\\_progressiver\\_Juden\\_in\\_Deutschland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union_progressiver_Juden_in_Deutschland)) . Most Jews in Germany are recent immigrants from the former Soviet Union. There is also a handful of Jewish families from Muslim countries, including Iran, Turkey, Morocco, and Afghanistan. At present Germany has the third-largest Jewish population in Western Europe and the fastest growing Jewish population in Europe in recent years. The influx of refugees, many of them seeking renewed contact with their Jewish heritage, has led to a renaissance of Jewish life on German soil. In 2002 a Reform rabbinical seminary, Abraham Geiger College, was established in Potsdam. In 2006, the college announced that it would be ordaining three new

rabbis, the first rabbis to be ordained in Germany since 1942. [7] (<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/762347.html>)

Partly owing to the deep similarities between the Jewish language Yiddish and German, Jewish studies has become a very popular subject for academic study, and many German universities have departments or institutes of Jewish studies, culture, or history. Active Jewish religious communities have sprung up across Germany, including in many cities where the previous communities were no longer extant or moribund. Several cities in Germany have Jewish day schools, kosher facilities, and other Jewish institutions beyond synagogues. Additionally, as many of the Russian Jews were alienated from their Jewish heritage and unfamiliar or uncomfortable with Orthodox Judaism, American-style Reform Judaism, led by the Union of Progressive Jews in Germany, has emerged as a powerful and popular force in Germany, even though the Central Council of Jews in Germany and most local Jewish communities officially adhere to Orthodoxy. The unresolved tension between the (re-)emerging Reform movement in Germany and the official Orthodoxy is one of the most pressing issues facing the community at present.

An important step for the renaissance of Jewish life in Germany occurred when on January 27, 2003 German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder signed the first-ever agreement on Federal level with the Central Council, so that Judaism was granted the same elevated, semi-established legal status in Germany with the Roman Catholic and the Evangelical Church in Germany at least since the Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany of 1949.

In Germany it is a criminal act to deny the Holocaust or the fact that six million Jews were murdered in the Holocaust (§ 130 StGB); violations can be punished with up to five years of prison.[8] (<http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,2144,1833619,00.html>)

More recently, far-right groups have been on the rise in Germany [9] (<http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,2144,2214527,00.html>) [10] (<http://www.ifcj.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=13865&autologin=true>) , and especially in the formerly communist Eastern Germany. Israeli Ambassador Shimon Stein warned in October 2006 that Jews in some parts of Germany feel increasingly "unsafe," stating that they "are not able to live a normal Jewish life," with heavy security surrounding some synagogues and/or Jewish community centers in Eastern Germany [11] (<http://www.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/europe/10/22/germany.nazis.ap/index.html>) [12] (<http://www.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/europe/11/10/germany.nazi.reut/index.html>) .

A flagship moment for the burgeoning Jewish community in modern Germany occurred on November 9, 2006 (the 68th anniversary of Kristallnacht), when the newly constructed Ohel Jakob synagogue was dedicated in Munich, Germany [13] (<http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,2144,2230576,00.html>) [14] ([http://www.ihf.com/articles/ap/2006/11/09/europe/EU\\_GEN\\_Germany\\_Synagogue\\_Of\\_Hope.php](http://www.ihf.com/articles/ap/2006/11/09/europe/EU_GEN_Germany_Synagogue_Of_Hope.php)) [15] (<http://www.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/europe/11/09/germany.synagogue.ap/index.html>) . This is particularly crucial given the fact that Munich was once at the ideological heart of Nazi Germany, the city that contributed more than any other to the rise of Hitler and Nazism.

## See also

- List of German Jews

- Ashkenazi Jews
- *On the Jews and Their Lies*
- Martin Luther and the Jews
- Martin Luther
- The Holocaust
- Germany-Israel relations

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### History of the Jews in Europe

[hide]

Albania · Andorra · Armenia<sup>2</sup> · Austria · Azerbaijan<sup>4</sup> · Belarus · Belgium · Bosnia and Herzegovina · Bulgaria · Croatia · Cyprus<sup>2</sup> · Czech Republic · Denmark · Estonia · Finland · France · Georgia<sup>4</sup> · **Germany** · Greece · Hungary · Iceland · Ireland · Italy · Kazakhstan<sup>1</sup> · Latvia · Liechtenstein · Lithuania · Luxembourg · Republic of Macedonia · Malta · Moldova · Monaco · Montenegro · Netherlands · Norway · Poland · Portugal · Romania · Russia<sup>1</sup> · San Marino · Serbia · Slovakia · Slovenia · Spain · Sweden · Switzerland · Turkey<sup>1</sup> · Ukraine · United Kingdom

#### Dependencies, autonomies, and other territories

Abkhazia<sup>4</sup> · Adjara<sup>2</sup> · Akrotiri and Dhekelia · Åland · Azores · Crimea · Faroe Islands · Gagauzia · Gibraltar · Guernsey · Jan Mayen · Jersey · Kosovo · Man, Isle of · Madeira<sup>5</sup> · Nagorno-Karabakh<sup>2</sup> · Nakhchivan<sup>2</sup> · South Ossetia<sup>4</sup> · Svalbard · Transnistria · Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus<sup>2, 3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Has significant territory in Asia. <sup>2</sup> Entirely in West Asia, but considered European for cultural, political and historical reasons. <sup>3</sup> Only recognised by Turkey. <sup>4</sup> Partially or entirely in Asia, depending on the definition of the border between Europe and Asia. <sup>5</sup> Entirely in the African Plate, but considered European for cultural, political and historical reasons.

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