

Unit 2 / Lesson 2.3 / Overview

Unit 2: Nazism in Power

Lesson 2.3: Complicity of the Elites

Background:

In order to understand how the Nazi Party assumed control of the state and German society, it is important to study the role that key groups in German society played in Nazi Germany and how they acquiesced to Nazi Party dictates.

Over half of the German population had never voted for Hitler, the Nazi Party had only 3 of 12 seats in the Cabinet appointed on January 30, 1933, and President Hindenburg, for a while, retained the decisive political position. Hitler and his associates knew that they needed time to persuade most Germans that persecuting Jews was a necessary defensive act, indispensable to national survival. The elites in law, medicine, business, and education were essential if Hitler was to gain total control of the state and society.

Video Running Time: 14:30

Goal:

Understand and analyze the importance that elites in the fields of law, medicine, business, and education had for the success of Hitler and his ability to consolidate power.

Essential Question:

- How did key German professional groups dehumanize and eliminate people based on political ideology?

Learning Goal:

- Students will explain how participation by various types of professionals in the Nazi Party allowed the Nazis to control German society.

Success Criteria:

- Students will explain what judges and lawyers did to support the Nazi Party in Germany.
- Students will explain what physicians did to support the Nazi Party in Germany.
- Students will explain what business leaders did to support the Nazi Party in Germany.
- Students will explain what educators did to support the Nazi Party in Germany.

Topics For Further Discussion:

- What were the motivating factors for each group to accept Nazi ideology?
- How did the interests of each of these elites align with Nazi policies?
- What is the essence of human responsibility?

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Recommended Background Reading from *How Was It Possible? A Holocaust Reader*

Unit 2 – Lessons 2.1; 2.2; and 2.3

Chapter 2

- Introduction to **Chapter 2: Nazism in Power**
- “Elite Cooperation” from the translation of *Das Amt und die Vergangenheit [The Office and the Past]* by Peter Hayes et al.
- “Street Level Coercion” from *Defying Hitler* by Sebastian Haffner
- “The Claims of Community” from *Belonging and Genocide* by Thomas Kühne

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Unit 2: Nazism in Power

Lesson 2.3: Complicity of the Elites

Question	
Which groups of elites are the focus of this presentation?	
Why were judges and lawyers important to the Nazi Party?	
How did the Reichstag fire change the legal system?	
What did the Enabling Act call for?	
How did medical professionals foster antisemitism?	
What was the Sterilization law of July 14, 1933?	
What was the T4 Program?	

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What role did physicians have in the T4 Program?	
When did the T4 program end?	
How did the Nazis defend medical experiments?	
How did the T4 program lead to the mass murder of the Jews?	
Why was “big business” important to the Nazis?	
What happened to Jewish businesses and workers?	
Why were schools, teachers, and professors important to the Nazis?	
What happened to Jewish educators?	

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What was taught in schools?	
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Answer Key

Question	Possible Answers
Which groups of elites are the focus of this presentation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Law • Medicine • Business • Education (Slide 2)
Why were judges and lawyers important to the Nazi Party?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They were important for the crafting of new laws for the new state • They fashioned their judicial decisions for the benefit of the state and the Nazi Party, and not the individual (Slide 3)
How did the Reichstag fire change the legal system?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Reichstag Fire Decree suspended individual liberties such as freedoms of speech, the press, and assembly • Germany was placed under martial law, and political opponents were arrested • Judicial review was suspended (Slide 4)
What did the Enabling Act call for?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gave Hitler the power to create laws which could not be challenged by the President or the Reichstag, laying the foundation for the complete Nazification of German society (Slide 5)
How did medical professionals foster antisemitism?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • German organized medicine was often antisemitic • In 1938, Jews were banned from the practice of medicine • There was rapid and widespread acceptance by the medical and scientific professions of race science and eugenics • Believed National Socialism was “nothing more than applied biology” (Slide 7)
What was the Sterilization law of July 14, 1933?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People with mental illness and physical, intellectual, and developmental disabilities, as well as certain “asocials,” were to be sterilized without their consent (Slide 7)

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What was the T4 Program?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was a program of “euthanasia,” which was actually mass murder • Mentally ill or developmentally disabled patients would be transported from all over the Reich to one of 6 killing centers, where they would be examined by a doctor and then killed by gassing • Condolence letters and death certificates with fake diagnoses would be sent to the families • Victims of T4 were not terminally ill, not necessarily suffering, and never consented (Slide 8, 9)
What role did physicians have in the T4 Program?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People were identified by physicians • Physicians administered the program • Physicians did the killing (Slide 7, 8, 9)
When did the T4 program end?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hitler ordered the T4 program to end in August 1941 • Killings continued until the end of the war (Slide 10)
How did the Nazis defend medical experiments?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They claimed it was to benefit the German military • Some were simply medicalized torture and were done purely in the service of Nazi racial ideology (Slide 11)
How did the T4 program lead to the mass murder of the Jews?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When one is able to murder one’s own, it is easier to murder the “Other,” and Jews were that “Other” • After the official T4 program ended in 1941, much of the personnel and the technology of mass murder was transferred to the death camps in the East • T4 was a dress rehearsal for the Holocaust (Slide 12)

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Why was “big business” important to the Nazis?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provided the capital, influence, and finished goods the Reich needed• Steel factories produced weaponry and utilized slave labor and concentration camp inmates• Companies processed gold and silver plundered from Jews• Manufactured the poison gas Zyklon B used to kill prisoners in Auschwitz• Concentration camp inmates were used in drug trial experiments (Slide 14, 15)
What happened to Jewish businesses and workers?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Jewish businesses were forced to “Aryanize” and were sold to non-Jews for far less than they were worth• Large and small businesses acquiesced to Nazi demands• Companies demoted and then fired their Jewish directors and employees to comply with Nazi edicts (Slide 14)
Why were schools, teachers, and professors important to the Nazis?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Instilled Nazi ideals and loyalty to the state and encouraged antisemitism against Jews (Slide 16)
What happened to Jewish educators?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• After the passage of the law restricting the civil service, which included teachers, to Aryans only, Jewish and Communist teachers were removed from their positions (Slide 17)

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What was taught in schools?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The National Socialist Teachers' League was founded in 1929 to encourage educators to adopt a National Socialist worldview and to learn how to indoctrinate their students• Race science and eugenics, and indoctrination with Nazi Party political and social propaganda, were mandated for all students and incorporated into mathematics and science word problems or woven into humanities discussions (Slide 17, 18)
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Unit 2: Nazism in Power

Lesson 2.3: Complicity of the Elites

Slide 1 – Complicity of the Elites

Welcome to Lesson 2.3 of *How Was it Possible? A Holocaust Curriculum For and By Teachers™*, from The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous. This presentation will give you an overview of the topic “The Complicity of the Elites” in Nazi Germany. This lesson was prepared by Mindy Walker, who teaches social studies and the Holocaust at Holt High School in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and Dr. Steven Field, clinical ethicist, and Clinical Assistant Professor of Medicine at the NYU Grossman School of Medicine in New York City.

Slide 2 – Complicity of the Elites

In this lesson we are going to look at four representative professional segments of German society: law, medicine, big business/major corporate interests, and education. The participation of the professions was critical in the Nazis’ plan to dominate German society.

In the photograph on the current slide, the man in the center is Roland Freisler, a brilliant German jurist and a committed Nazi, and the Presiding Judge of the People’s Court, the court charged with trying cases of the Nazis’ political opponents and other “enemies of the state.” People convicted in this court were usually immediately executed; there was no appeals process. As you can see, Freisler’s arm is extended in the Nazi salute. The symbolism is clear: opposition to the Party, whether in speech, writing, or act, would find no unbiased judgment in the Third Reich’s legal system, and would be swiftly and brutally dealt with.

Slide 3 – Judges & Lawyers

We will start with the legal profession. Along with physicians, they constituted an often upper middle class and in general a highly esteemed professional group, that would be important for the crafting of new laws for the new state. This photograph shows a panel of judges swearing an oath to the Führer. The highest authority figures in the legal profession would now be fashioning their judicial decisions for the benefit of the state and the Nazi Party, and not the individual.

Slide 4 – The Reichstag Fire (February 27, 1933) and the Establishment of a Police State

On February 27, 1933, the Reichstag, or German Parliament, burned to the ground. An unemployed Dutch Communist confessed and was tried and executed. The Nazis claimed that their hated enemies the Communists had done this. On the basis of peril to the state, the Reichstag Fire Decree was enacted the next day. It suspended individual liberties such as freedoms of speech, the press, and assembly. Germany became a police state, political opponents were arrested, and judicial review was suspended.

Slide 5 – The Enabling Act (March 23, 1933) and the Nazification of the Legal Profession

In March of 1933, the Enabling Act was passed, which gave Hitler the power to create laws which could not be challenged by the President or the Reichstag. The effect on the legal profession was immediate. Lawyers now had to swear their oath to Hitler and the Party, and

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judicial duty was reinterpreted to mean duty to the Nazi Party. Resistance in the German legal profession was muted at best; many eagerly embraced the new order. In the same year, the government enacted a series of laws which restricted the right to practice law to Aryans only. Jewish and Socialist or Communist lawyers would ultimately be disbarred and de-licensed. Under Hitler, the legal profession was rigidly controlled and made to conform to Nazi ideology. During the twelve years of the Third Reich 25% of all German lawyers would join the Party, much higher than the 9% figure for the general population.

Slide 6 – Physicians

We are now going to look at the medical profession. The photograph on the left is that of Karl Brandt, Hitler's personal physician, who ran the T4 program, which we will talk about in a moment.

Slide 7 – Medicine

Physicians had the highest percentage participation in the Nazi Party of any profession; 45%, nearly half, of all doctors in Germany joined. The motivation for the alliance between physicians and the Party stemmed from several factors. Physicians in Germany were traditionally politically conservative and organized medicine was often antisemitic. Physicians complained about significant competition for a limited pool of patients from Jewish physicians, who they claimed were “taking over” the profession. And critically important, there was rapid and widespread acceptance by the medical, scientific, and educational professions of race science and eugenics, which advocated the blood-based superiority of certain races and the elimination of others. According to its leaders, National Socialism was “nothing more than applied biology.”

With the introduction of the Sterilization Law of July 14, 1933, people with mental illness and physical, intellectual, and developmental disabilities, as well as certain “asocials,” were to be sterilized without their consent. Under the Sterilization Law, approximately 400,000 people were sterilized between 1933 and 1939.

By 1938, Jews would be completely banned from the practice of medicine.

Slide 8 – Killing of People with Disabilities (“Euthanasia Program”)

This is a document signed by Adolf Hitler in which he authorizes certain physicians to provide “mercy killings” to patients with terminal illnesses. This was the beginning of the so-called Euthanasia program, also known as the T4 Program. We should note that “euthanasia” and “mercy killings” are misnomers; the program was organized murder. The victims of T4 were not terminally ill, not suffering, and certainly never consented. These were mostly inmates of state institutions who were considered “lives not worthy of life” by the state. They were identified by physicians, physicians administered the program, and physicians did the killing.

Slide 9 – T4 Killing Centers

The T4 program was carried out in six killing centers in the Reich. These were all state institutions for the mentally ill or developmentally disabled except for Brandenburg, which was a

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former prison. Patients would be transported from all over the Reich to one of these centers, where they would be examined by a doctor and then killed by gassing. Condolence letters and death certificates with fake diagnoses would be sent to the families. Records discovered at Hartheim after the war indicate that from 1939 to 1941, when the program formally ended, 70,273 patients were murdered in these six centers.

Slide 10 – End of Euthanasia Killings

Hitler ordered the program to stop in August 1941; however, the killings continued unofficially, the so-called “wild T4,” in many state hospitals and institutions across the Greater German Reich. Most people were murdered by drug overdose or starvation. We do not have precise figures for this period; however, historians estimate the number of people murdered in this phase of the killing, from 1941-1945, to be in the vicinity of 150,000. This photograph is of one of the last euthanasia victims; this child was killed at a psychiatric institution after Germany had already surrendered and the war had ended.

Slide 11 – Medical Experiments

Physicians were also involved in medical experiments, which took place mostly though not exclusively in concentration camps. Some experiments, such as the high-altitude trials (pictured here) and the freezing experiments, were intended to answer questions to benefit the German military, such as how to best protect servicemen against very low temperatures and the reduced air pressure at high altitudes.

Others, such as the twin studies and eye color experiments performed by Dr. Josef Mengele, and sterilization trials performed by Drs. Carl Clauberg and Horst Schumann, were simply medicalized torture and were done purely in the service of Nazi racial ideology.

Slide 12 – T4 Program Leads to Mass Murder

T4 was a program that targeted the so-called “lives unworthy of life.” It was not for the most part specifically aimed at Jews; any Germans, including Jews, who fell into the specified categories, were included. But when one is able to murder one’s own, it is easier to murder the “Other,” and Jews were that “Other.” After the official T4 program ended in 1941, many of the personnel became key administrators in concentration camps and killing centers. Additionally, T4 technology and some equipment were moved to death camps in the East. T4 was a dress rehearsal for the Holocaust.

Slide 13 – Business

The business elites provided the capital, influence, and finished goods the Reich needed, and so became indispensable to the government. The man on the left is Alfried Krupp, head of Krupp Industries. Krupp utilized his family’s steel factories to produce weaponry for the Nazi cause, and he utilized slave labor and concentration camp inmates, mostly Jews, to keep factories running at full capacity.

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Slide 14 – Business

Both large and small businesses quickly found it to their advantage to give into Nazi demands. Companies initially demoted and then fired their Jewish directors and employees to comply with Nazi edicts. Jewish-owned enterprises, some of them large and powerful until then, were forced to be sold to non-Jews for far less than they were worth. After 1939, many industries were forced to retool to support the war effort, and as government contracts were a lucrative source of payments, many companies were only too happy to comply.

In the image on this slide, you see the cover of a book dealing with the complicity of one company, Degussa. Degussa was a chemical company, which during the war years was involved in processing gold and silver plundered from Jews. Degussa had a subsidiary company, which manufactured the poison gas Zyklon B used to kill prisoners in Auschwitz.

Slide 15 – Slave Labor and Medical Experiments

These are some of the companies whose use of forced and slave labor has been documented. These were among the most prominent corporations in Germany, and all benefitted from their association with the Nazi state. Many of these names are probably well known to you. Most of these companies used prisoners to work on their assembly lines. In this photograph you see prisoners building airplane parts for Siemens in a subcamp of Auschwitz. Drug companies also used concentration camp inmates in drug trial experiments.

Slide 16 – Teachers

The last group we will look at is educators. The education profession was co-opted by the state at all levels. Primary and secondary school teachers created an environment which instilled Nazi ideals and loyalty to the state. And it was never too early to start; notice here the swastikas in front of this primary school classroom.

Slide 17 – Education

Teachers used their classrooms to encourage antisemitism and racism, and to reinforce ideals of racial purity and German nationalism. In this photograph, children are reading *The Poisonous Mushroom*, and you can see the Star of David on the mushroom and the Jewish caricature in the face on the stem.

Educators at all levels, from primary school to university professors, were considered state employees, and thus Jewish and Communist teachers were removed from their positions. Even before the Nazis came to power; however, the National Socialist Teachers' League was founded in 1929 to encourage educators to adopt a National Socialist worldview and to learn how to indoctrinate their students. Similar to the lawyers, with which we began this lesson, approximately 22% of the teachers in Germany were members of the Nazi Party.

Slide 18 – Education

In April 1933, a law was passed removing most Jewish university professors, and Jewish students were targeted next. The teaching of race science and eugenics was mandated at the

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secondary school and university levels. The advancement of race science remained a major goal of the Reich Education Ministry. In the photograph on this slide, Eugen Fischer, a physician, and leading Nazi race scientist, who was the most senior administrator of the Frederick Wilhelms University in Berlin, is seen addressing university students. Teachers and administrators at German universities usually could not hold their jobs unless they were committed to Nazi Party ideals.

Slide 19 – Summary – Complicity of the Elites

In summary, judges and lawyers perverted the legal system, turning it into a mechanism for Nazi power and control. Physicians perverted the ideals and practice of medicine in the service of the Nazi state, changing from healers to killers. Big Business provided the capital and the materials for the success of the Nazi state and the early Nazi war effort and used forced and slave laborers to do so. And teachers were entrusted with forming the minds of the next generation of Germans – perhaps the most important responsibility of all. The alliance of these four elite groups galvanized the Nazi state in its rise to power.

Thank you for joining us today as we learned about “The Complicity of the Elites.” Please continue your educational journey with us. This concludes our presentation of Lesson 2.3 from *How Was it Possible? A Holocaust Curriculum For and By Teachers*™. On behalf of The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous, thank you.

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Name: _____

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Circle the correct answers below.

1. Why were judges and lawyers important to the Nazi Party?
 - a. They supported individual rights for all citizens
 - b. They defended Hitler if he was charged with a crime
 - c. They crafted new laws for individual freedom
 - d. They crafted new laws and made judicial decisions for the state and Nazi Party
2. Why were medical professionals important to the Nazi Party and the implementation of the T4 program?
 - a. Physicians could contact families to learn about patients
 - b. Physicians could prescribe medicine to help patients
 - c. Physicians identified people to be murdered, administered the programs, and participated in murder
 - d. Only physicians could write letters of condolences to families of people who died
3. Why was big business important to the Nazi Party?
 - a. They could pay more taxes
 - b. They could monitor Jewish businesses
 - c. They could hire more people so unemployment would go down
 - d. They could provide capital and finished products for the war effort
4. Why were teachers important to the Nazi Party?
 - a. To instill a good work ethic in all students
 - b. To instill good study habits to recognize propaganda
 - c. To instill Nazi ideals and loyalty in the next generation while encouraging antisemitism and racism
 - d. To instill morals and values to support students and families during wartime
5. Why was the participation of all four groups critical to the Nazi Party?
 - a. It was critical to support families during wartime
 - b. It was critical in the Nazis' plan to dominate German society
 - c. It was critical in their plan to bring religious freedom to the people of Germany
 - d. It was critical to show the world how Germany was taking care of all segments of society

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Unit 2: Nazism in Power

Lesson 2.3: Complicity of the Elites

Lesson Quiz with Answers Highlighted and Bolded

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Link to Google Form Quiz (Instructions Available in the Appendix)

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1O5HKui_nv3eyUN8Z8sN7u_vh4Cxsy8gC0wZ6HvTRu78/copy

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Slide 6 - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy
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Slide 11A - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Anonymous Donor

Slide 11B - Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum

Slide 12 - Bundesarchiv, B 162 Bild-00636 / Fotograf(in): o.Ang,
<https://www.bild.bundesarchiv.de/dba/de/search/?yearfrom=&yearto=&query=162+00636>

Slide 13 - National Archives and Records Administration,
College Park, MD

Slide 14 - Hayes, Peter, From Cooperation to Complicity: Degussa in the Third Reich,
Cambridge University Press

Slide 14A - Bundesarchiv, Bild 146-2007-0056 / Fotograf(in): o.Ang,
<https://www.bild.bundesarchiv.de/dba/de/search/?yearfrom=&yearto=&query=146-2007-0056>

Slide 15 - United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Charles Stein

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Köhne (Purper) / Art Resource, NY

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