



## The Situation of the Jews in Berlin 1933–1940

### **ETERNAL ECHOES**

Teach and Learn About the Holocaust

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The Olympic games in Berlin, August 1936.

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Election propaganda at Potsdamer Platz in Berlin, March 1932.

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Albany Evening News, Albany, New York, July 16, 1935.

## A Diverse City

When Walter Frankenstein came to Berlin in 1936, the city was “disguised”: As during the Olympic games, the capital of Nazi Germany had been made to give the appearance of a modern and welcoming metropolis to the international audience. Fierce Nazi propaganda had been temporarily removed from the city’s streets.

In the mid-1930s Berlin was still remarkably diverse and not the “ideal” capital for the Nazi regime: in 1932-33 the majority of Berlin’s voters had not voted for the National Socialist Workers’ Party (NSDAP) but rather for the left wing, yet marginalised parties of the workers’ movement; above all the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) and the Communist Party of Germany (KPD).

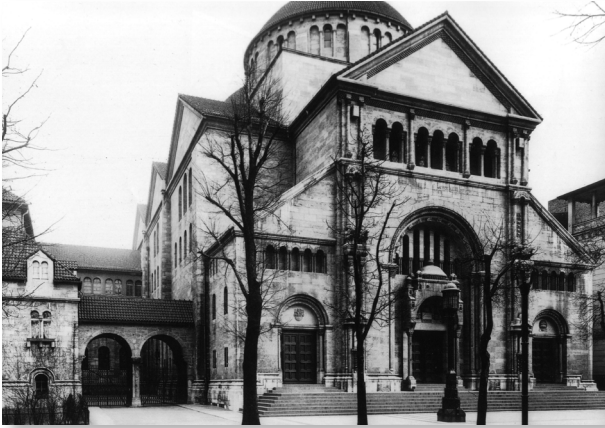
Even after several years of Nazi terror, there were still residential areas in the city where an oppositional spirit prevailed, especially in the working-class neighbourhoods, in artistic circles and in some parishes. And although the Nazis fought modern art and music, remnants of expressions of modern culture – for example clubs where jazz music was played – could still be found in Berlin.

After the Nazis came to power, the city witnessed several violent waves of arrests against political opponents. The Jewish population was harassed by the “boycott” campaign of 1933 as well as during violent riots in 1935 on the Kurfürstendamm, one of the main shopping avenues.



## Jewish Life in Berlin Before 1933

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The Liberal synagogue on the Fasanenstrasse, Berlin.

The Jewish community of Berlin was the largest in Germany. In 1933 there were approximately 500 000 Jews in Germany and they made up only 0.76 percent of the entire population. Of these, roughly 150 000 lived in Berlin. Not all of them still felt connected to Judaism, but those who did had access to a variety of Jewish institutions.

© Beit Hafsot, courtesy of Eliezer and Margalit Paldi



The Boys' Choir of the Fasanenstrasse Synagogue, Berlin, 1926.

The Jewish Congregation of Berlin, created as a united congregation in the 19th Century, had 16 synagogues with Conservative and Liberal services, the oldest of which was consecrated in 1714.

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There was also a smaller Orthodox Jewish congregation with separate institutions. The Conservative synagogue on Rykestrasse, close to Walter's Auerbach orphanage, was one of the largest in Germany.

The Conservative synagogue on Rykestrasse, close to the Auerbach orphanage.

## Nazi Brand Jews as “Outsiders”

© Jewish Museum Berlin



Jewish students of the ORT school in Berlin at work in the metal workshop.

In Berlin there were 48 Jewish schools from junior to high school level, the highly acclaimed Jewish hospital, welfare institutions, and several clubs serving different causes.

When the Nazis came to power in 1933 they sought to isolate Jews within the population, exclude them from public and economic life, and force their emigration. Jewish institutions had not yet been banned but their work was restricted. They focused their activities on welfare assistance, the expansion of emigration counselling centres, the enlargement of the Jewish school system, and particularly language and vocational training for life abroad. All of these activities offered solidarity and provided room for free personal development and self-esteem.

In 1936 and 1937 emigration remained at the same level as before with more than 20 000 Jews leaving the country each year. But in 1938, the Nazi regime implemented a new, far tougher wave of persecution. With an ever-increasing number of laws and prohibitions imposed on the Jewish population, they tried to block Jews from access to employment, education, and general civic life, and brand them as “outsiders”.

© Jewish Museum Berlin



Jewish emigrants waving goodbye.



## Increased Violent Attacks and Isolation

© Mary Evans Picture Library



Windows of a Jewish-owned store defaced with the word “Jude” (Jew). Berlin, Germany, June 19, 1938.

Furthermore, in the summer of 1938 the Berlin Jews found themselves again exposed to violent attacks. 2 000 Jewish men were sent to concentration camps because of minor violations, and gangs of the paramilitary “Storm Troopers” (SA) and the Hitler Youth pulled through Berlin’s business streets to deface and destroy the shops of Jewish owners. The police did not intervene.

© German Resistance Memorial Center

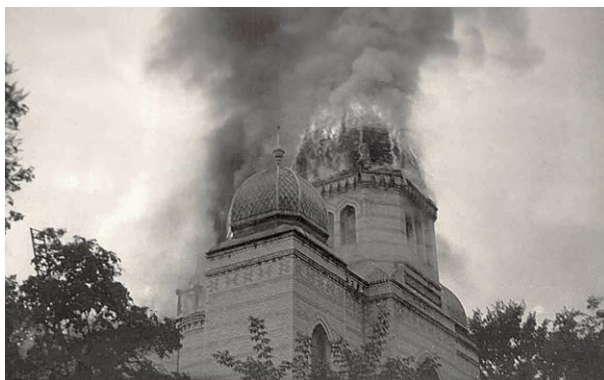


Identification card issued to Kurt Hirschfeldt. It is stamped with a “J” for “Jude”. Also, the name “Israel” has been added.

From the autumn of 1938 and onwards all German Jews were obliged to carry special ID cards marked with a “J”. They likewise had to identify themselves with additional names – men and boys with “Israel”, women and girls with “Sara”.

During the pogrom of November 9-10, 1938, nearly all of Berlin’s synagogues were set ablaze, more than 12 000 Jewish men were sent to concentration camps, and shops and apartments were destroyed and plundered. In the weeks that followed, all Jewish merchants and producers were forced to close their mostly demolished shops and establishments by the end of the year or to sell them for far below the market rate. In 1938 and 1939 alone more than 4 300 Jewish companies disappeared from the Berlin cityscape with the loss of thousands of jobs. From now on, every unemployed Jew could be forced to perform menial work such as garbage disposal.

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The Eberswalde synagogue in suburban Berlin set on fire, November 9-10, 1938.

After the November pogrom, all Jewish children and young people had to leave public schools and switch to private Jewish schools, which ironically also felt safer to many. Jewish institutions such as youth clubs were forcefully shut down. Participation in general cultural and sporting events as well as visits to cinemas and theatres were forbidden to Jews. Access to several areas in the inner cities was also restricted to them. And if they hadn’t already done so, swimming pools and other recreational facilities now prohibited Jews from entering.

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Antisemitic inscription at the entrance of the library in the Deutsches Museum in Munich.

## Like a Ghetto Without Walls

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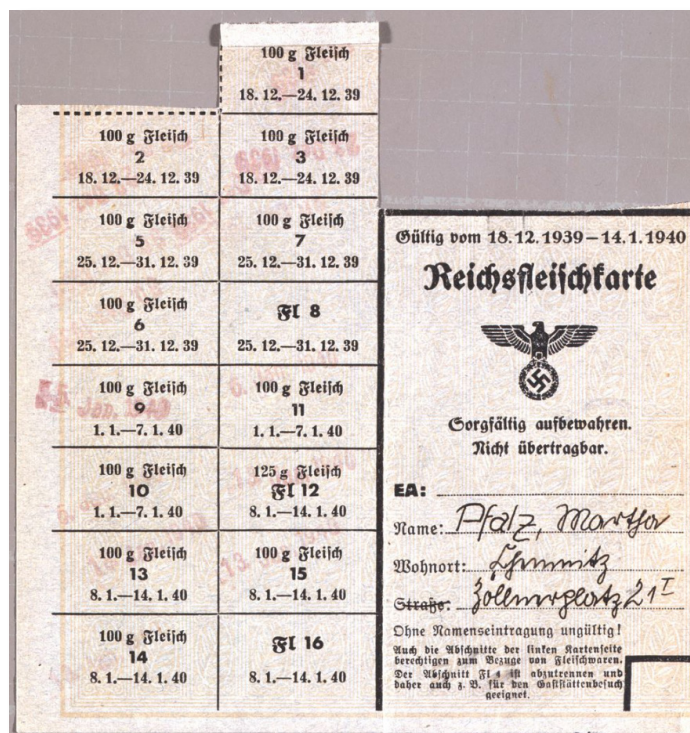


Four youngsters and two men stand in front of a display board reading the current edition of the antisemitic propaganda newspaper *Der Stürmer*. The text on top of the board says: "With no solution to the Jewish question, there is no salvation for the German people"

About 32 000 Berlin Jews fled between 1938 and the start of the Second World War in the autumn of 1939. Now it was no longer a planned emigration, but an expulsion. Yet 80 000 Jews still remained in Berlin.

With the start of the war on 1 September 1939, all German men between the ages of 18 and 45 could be drafted for military service. Jewish men were prohibited from serving. Jewish forced labourers would increasingly compensate for the loss of industrial workers. Although not drastically at first, food and consumer goods were rationed during the war, but from the very beginning Jews received lower rations than Gentile Germans.

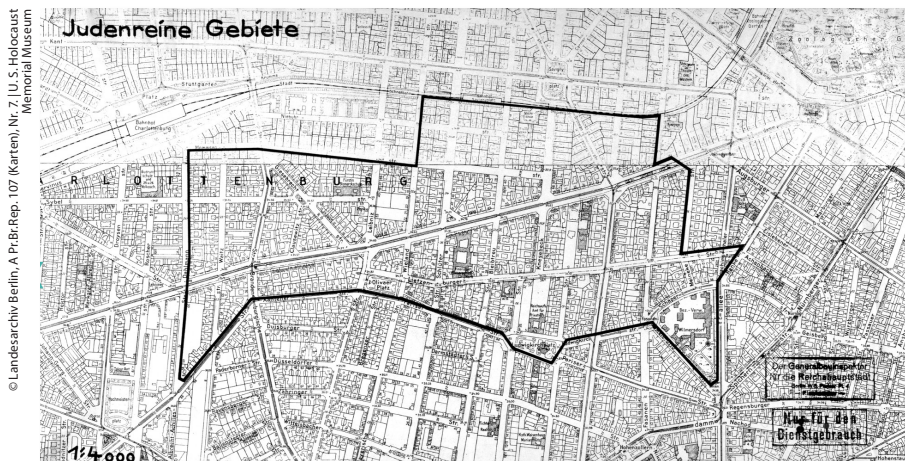
© Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin



Ett ransoneringskort för mat giltig från 18 december 1939 till 14 januari 1940.



## The Situation of the Jews in Berlin 1933–1940



Unlike in many countries occupied by Germany during the war, the Nazi leadership wanted to avoid the formation of ghettos in Germany. But in 1939 a law cancelled tenant protection rights for Jews meaning that their homes could be taken away from them at any time. More and more Jews were forced to move in with relatives or were confined to special homes where several families had to share a flat. These “Jewish houses” were established all over Berlin.

The Berlin office (Generalbauinspektor für die Reichshauptstadt) created this map for city planning in 1939. It shows a district of Berlin's Western city centre with areas to be “purged of Jews” by relocation.

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Graphic design: Cecilia Undemark Péterfy

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