



Hitler, Adolf

(1889--1945), Dictator (*Fuehrer*) of the Third German Reich. Hitler was born in Braunau, Austria, to a family of small landowners. His father was a customs official. From 1900--1905 Hitler went to secondary school in the Austrian town of Linz, marking the end of his formal education. His father died in 1903. In 1907 Hitler attempted to get into the Vienna Academy of Art's School of Painting, but he failed the entrance exam. That same year, his mother died of breast cancer - her doctor had been Jewish. In 1908, Hitler moved to Vienna. He survived on the orphan's allowance that he received from the government and from the sale of postcards he painted. At that time, antisemitism was rampant in Vienna. The city's mayor, Karl Lueger, was rabidly antisemitic, and Hitler embraced his ideology. Hitler later declared that the period during which he lived in Vienna was extremely influential in molding his opinions and views.

Hitler moved to Munich in 1913. When World War I broke out the following year, he joined the Bavarian army. Working as a message runner in Belgium and France, Hitler was quite a good soldier. He was promoted to lance corporal and was awarded medals for his bravery.

After the war, Hitler returned to Munich bitterly disappointed over Germany's defeat. He believed that the Jews were responsible for Germany's loss. At that point, he wrote his first political document, in which he stated that the final aim of antisemitism should be the "total removal of the Jews." He soon joined the small antisemitic German Workers' Party that, in 1920, changed its name to the National Socialist German Workers' Party—or the **Nazi Party**, for short. The Party's platform called for all German Jews to be denied civil rights and for some of them to be removed or exiled from the country. People began recognizing Hitler as an extraordinary and charismatic public speaker. In 1921 he became his Party's all-powerful chairman and a cult of personality was created, which depicted him as the greatest of Germans, with infallible judgment. By 1923 the Nazi Party included 56,000 members and a private army of 15,000 Storm Troopers (**SA**).



In November 1923, Hitler attempted to take over the Bavarian Government in Munich during an armed revolt called the Beer Hall Putsch. The bid failed, and Hitler was sentenced to five years in jail. However, he was released after nine months. Whilst in jail he had written the first part of his book, *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle).

In 1925 Hitler reestablished the Nazi Party. Its membership continued to grow, particularly at the end of the decade, when Germans were hit hard by the Great Depression and needed a scapegoat for their troubles. Hitler and his Party were seen as dynamic and youthful. In the national elections of 1932, the Nazi Party won 230 seats of a total of 599, giving it 37.3 percent of the vote—making it the largest political party in the German parliament. On January 30, 1933, as a result of backroom deals, Hitler was named chancellor of Germany. Despite the fact that his Party did not hold an absolute majority in the government, Hitler was able to gain increasing power. On February 27, Hitler masterminded a fire in the parliament building—and used it as an excuse to destroy his political opponents in the government. Less than a week later, Hitler passed a law annulling German democracy and bequeathing unto him, absolute power. With the death of the German president Paul Von Hindenberg on August 2, 1934, Hitler assumed that office, as well.

From within his racial view of the world, Hitler sought to revitalize Germany. Thus, among his main goals were building up the army and implementing anti-Jewish measures. On April 1, 1933 an anti-Jewish boycott took place all over Germany (see also *Boycott, Anti-Jewish*,] and on April 7, a law was passed making it legal to fire Jews from their civil service jobs. In September 1935, the racial Nuremberg Laws were passed and the Nazis introduced a series of anti-Jewish measures excluding the Jewish population from all facets of German life. Meanwhile the Nazis had also begun establishing concentration camps where their political and ideological opponents were imprisoned.

In March 1938, Hitler annexed Austria to Germany. This added almost 200,000 more Jews to Hitler's domain. Later that year, he was given the Sudetenland region of Czechoslovakia as a result of the Munich Conference, and in March 1939, he took over the rest of the Czech lands and established a puppet regime in Slovakia. On September 1 of that same year, Hitler's army



invaded Poland, signaling the beginning of World War II and the start of an amazing string of military victories adding greatly to Hitler's aura. The Germans immediately began persecuting Polish Jewry. In the spring of 1940, Hitler's armies conquered most of Western Europe in a lightning campaign, and the following spring victory over the Balkans. The systematic mass killing of Jews, also known euphemistically as the "Final Solution" began in June 1941 after Germany attacked its former ally, the Soviet Union, and began to conquer large portions of its territory.

Hitler viewed the Jews as his ideological enemies and a danger to the "Aryan" race, Germany, and the world in general. He also saw them as the major proprietors of democracy, liberalism, and Socialism—ideological trends directly opposed to his beliefs. Thus, as *Fuehrer* (Leader) of Germany, Hitler focused on destroying the Jews through Nazi racial principles and establishing German dominance in Europe, and later the world.

The first massacres of Jews in the Soviet Union were carried out by *Einsatzgruppen* units, regular army units, various police units, and local collaborators. Soon, Hitler decided to extend the mass murder of Jews to all of Europe. His regime established extermination camps where millions of Jews were abused and exterminated. However, by the end of 1942, Hitler's luck began to change. The Soviet army began winning battles against the Germans on the eastern front, and in 1943 and 1944 the Western Allies, including the United States, which had joined the war in December 1941, were beating the Germans on the southern and western fronts. He blamed others for his failures, and in 1944, some of his generals unsuccessfully tried to assassinate him. As Germany lost increasingly more battles and military defeat seemed imminent, Hitler continued the "Final Solution." By April 2, 1945, Hitler was able to brag about the murder of European Jewry. However, less than a month later, on April 30, 1945, Hitler committed suicide in his Berlin bunker, with his wife Eva Braun. He will be remembered as the man who orchestrated and implemented one of the worst evils in history.