

The Nazi Worldview

The crimes committed by the Nazis were the result of a system of belief and a set of practices. Nazi ideology was synonymous with Hitler's worldview. According to this, there was no equality between people, but only a racial hierarchy. In this view, blond, blue-eyed, Nordic German Aryans were at the top, while Jews were located at the lowest rank. All other coloured people were placed in between depending upon their external features. Hitler's regime is considered as the most barbaric regime in world history.

Ideas Behind Hitler's Racism

Hitler's racism was borrowed from the ideas of Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer. Darwin tried to explain the creation of plants and animals through the concept of evolution and natural selection.

Herbert Spencer added the idea of 'Survival of the Fittest'. According to this idea, only those species survived on Earth that could adapt themselves to changing climatic conditions. These ideas were used by the racist thinkers and politicians to justify imperial rule over conquered people. The Nazi argument was simple, the strongest race would survive and weak ones would perish. The Aryan race was the finest. It had to retain its purity, become stronger and dominate the world.

Geopolitical Concept

The other aspect of Hitler's ideology is related to the geopolitical concept of *Lebensraum*, or living space.

He believed that new territories had to be acquired for settlement and to increase the area of the mother country. Hitler intended to extend German boundaries by moving Eastwards, to concentrate all Germans geographically in one place. Poland became the laboratory for this experimentation.

Establishment of the Racial State

Nazis wanted only a society of pure and healthy Nordic Aryans. They alone were considered as 'desirable', while other communities were classified as 'undesirable'. Jews, Gypsies and Blacks living in Nazi Germany were considered as racial inferiors who threatened the biological purity of the 'superior Aryan' race.

The captured civilians were being forced to work as slave labour. In Nazi Germany, Jews were the worst sufferers. Jews had been stereotyped as killers of Christ and usurers. Jews lived in separately marked areas called ghettos.

Hitler's hatred of Jews was based on pseudoscientific theories of race, which could be satisfied only through their total elimination.

From 1933 to 1938, the Nazis terrorised, pauperised and segregated the Jews. From 1939-1945, they aimed to kill them in gas chambers of Poland.

The Nazis tried to realise their racial ideal through **genocide**. They divided the occupied Poland. The most of North-Western Poland was made part of Germany. Poles were forced to leave their homes and properties, which were then occupied by Germans.

Polish children who looked like Aryans examined by 'race experts' and if they passed the race tests, they were raised in German families.

Youth in Nazi Germany

Hitler believed that a strong Nazi society could be established by teaching children Nazi ideology.

'Undesirable children and teachers' – Jews, the physically handicapped and Gypsies were thrown out of schools. The school textbooks were rewritten. Germans and Jews could not sit and play together.

Racial science was introduced to justify Nazi ideas of race. Stereotypes about Jews were popularised even through maths classes. Children were taught to be loyal, submissive, hate Jews and worship Hitler. Even sports like boxing were introduced to nurture a spirit of violence and aggression among children. Hitler thought that boxing could make children iron-hearted, strong and masculine.

Formation of Youth Organisations and Youth League

Youth organisations were made responsible for educating German Youth in the 'Spirit of National Socialism.' Ten-year-old children had to join Jungvolk. At 14, all boys had to join the Nazi youth organisation 'Hitler Youth'. After a period of rigorous ideological and physical training, they joined the Labour Service at the age of 18. Then they had to serve in the armed forces and enter one of the Nazi organisations. In 1922, the Youth League of the Nazis was founded. After four years, it was renamed as Hitler Youth. To control the youth, all other youth organisations were banned.

The Nazi Cult of Motherhood

In Nazi Germany, young people and even children, were repeatedly told that women were radically different from men. According to the Nazi ideology, the fight for equal rights for men and women, was quite wrong and it would destroy society. While boys were taught to be aggressive, masculine and hardworking, girls were told to become good mothers and bring up pure-blooded Aryan children.

Women had to maintain the purity of the race, look after the home and teach their children Nazi ideology.

Those mothers who produced racially desirable children were awarded, given favoured treatment in hospitals, concessions in shops, theatres and even in the railways. Honours of bronze was given for cross for four children, a silver for six and a gold for eight or more was given to eligible women.

Women who maintained contacts with Jews, Poles or Russians were punished or imprisoned.

The Art of Propaganda

The Nazi regime used language and the media effectively to describe their activities. They never used the words 'kill' or 'murder' in their official communications, but used **euphemisms**. Mass killings were called *special treatment*, *final solution* for the Jews, *euthanasia* (for the disabled), *selection* and *disinfection*.

'Evacuation' meant deporting people to gas chambers for killing them. The gas chambers were called 'disinfection-areas'.

Role of Media in Propaganda

Media was carefully used to win support for the regime and popularise its worldview. Nazi ideas were spread through visual images, films, radio, posters, catchy slogans and leaflets.

Socialists and liberals were represented as weak and degenerate and attacked as malicious foreign agents. Propaganda films were made to create hatred for Jews. The most infamous film was *The Eternal Jew*. Jews were referred to as vermin, rats and pests. Their movements were compared to those of rodents.

Ordinary People and The Crimes Against Humanity

Many ordinary people genuinely believed Nazism would bring prosperity and improve general well-being. However, some Germans organised active resistance to Nazism, suffering police repression and even death. But most Germans were passive onlookers and **apathetic** witnesses, as they were too scared to act, to differ or to protest.

But for the Jews, life was altogether different. Charlotte Beradt, an author, in her book the **Third Reich of Dreams** wrote that Jews themselves began believing in the Nazi stereotypes about them.

The stereotypical images publicised in the Nazi press haunted the Jews and they troubled even in their dreams. They died many deaths before they reached the gas chambers.

Knowledge About the Holocaust

Some of the horrible practices followed by Nazis had trickled out of Germany during the war, but its full extent was known only when the war ended. The atrocities and sufferings that Jews had experienced during the Nazi killing operations are called the **Holocaust**.

The indomitable spirit to bear witness and to preserve documents can be seen in many ghetto and camp inhabitants who wrote diaries, kept notebooks and created archives. In contrast, the Nazi leadership distributed petrol to its followers to destroy all incriminating evidence when they started losing the war. These memoirs by the victims are a tribute to those who resisted the persecution, a reminder to those who collaborated and a warning to those who watched in silence.