

Kristallnacht



Kristallnacht, (German: “Crystal Night”), also called **Night of Broken Glass** or **November Pogroms**, occurred on the night of November 9–10, 1938, when German [Nazis](#) attacked Jews and their property in Germany and newly acquired territories in Austria and the Sudetenland. The name *Kristallnacht* refers to the broken glass left in the streets after these [pogroms](#). The violence continued during the day of November 10, and in some places, acts of violence continued for several more days.

Some 30,000 Jews were sent to concentration camps, marking the first instance in which the Nazi regime incarcerated Jews on a massive scale simply on the basis of their ethnicity.

On November 12, Hermann Goering, Hitler’s designated successor, announced. *“I have received a letter written on the Fuehrer’s orders requesting that the Jewish question be now, once and for all, coordinated and solved one way or another.”*

In the weeks that followed, the German government promulgated dozens of laws and decrees designed to deprive Jews of their property and means of livelihood. Ensuing legislation barred Jews, already ineligible for employment in the public sector, from practicing most professions in the private sector. Jewish children were expelled from German schools. German Jews lost their right to hold a driver’s license or own an automobile. Legislation restricted access to public transport. Jews could no

longer gain admittance to “German” theaters, movie cinemas or concert halls.

In the United States, expressions of sympathy for the plight of the Jews were not matched by deeds. The U.S. did not impose economic sanctions against Nazi Germany, sever diplomatic relations or change in immigration policy to admit more Jews. The Nazis suffered no serious consequences as a result of their actions.

Kristallnacht symbolized the final shattering of Jewish existence in Germany, as the Nazi regime expanded and radicalized measures aimed at removing Jews entirely from German economic and social life in the forthcoming years. The passivity of the German people showed that the Nazis would encounter little opposition—even from the German churches.

With such minimal opposition, and no serious consequences for their actions, the Nazis felt they could now do what they wanted with the Jews. Kristallnacht gave Hitler and the Nazis a green light to proceed with their plans to murder all the Jews living in Europe. Within a year, Hitler invaded Poland and started World War



Why Kristallnacht Is Important

Eighty years ago, momentous changes were occurring in Central Europe. Few understood the historic significance of the times, and fewer still saw these events as precursors to what would become one of humanity's darkest hours.

Territorial expansion, disregard for international law, persecution of people based on their identity — these were all signs of impending war and the Holocaust. Looking back, those events are undoubtedly clearer today than they were then. Although newspapers around the world reported on the events of Kristallnacht, very few nations, individuals or groups chose to help. Nonetheless, opportunities for international intervention existed and could have saved many lives. Why did so many countries and individuals fail to respond to the warning signs? And what can we learn from this?

As we reflect on these questions, we remember all whose lives were lost or forever altered by the Holocaust, including my parents, their family members and other relatives. And we are challenged to think about what might motivate us to respond to warning signs of genocide today. History teaches us that genocide can be prevented if enough people care enough to act. As Edmund Burke said, "All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing."

Reverend Martin Niemöller, a pastor in the German Confessing Church who spent seven years in a concentration camp stated the following:

First they came for the communists, and I did not speak out because I was not a communist. Then they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out because I was not a socialist. Then they came for the labor leaders, and I did not speak out because I was not a labor leader. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak out for me.

The Holocaust did not start with gas chambers. It started with politicians dividing the people into “us” vs. “them.” It started with intolerance and hate speech. It continued when people stopped caring, became desensitized and turned a blind eye. Our choices in response to hatred truly do matter. If we are sincere when we pledge “*liberty and justice for all*” and truly believe in and practice the Golden Rule, we can help fulfill the promise of “Never Again.”

Sheldon “Shelly” Bleiweiss is a son of Holocaust survivors, a liberal Reform Jew and a Holocaust educator. To commemorate the 80th Anniversary of Kristallnacht, Mr. Bleiweiss will speak at the L. Russ Bush Center for Faith and Culture at Southeastern Seminary in Wake Forest on November 8, 2018 at 7:15 pm for an interactive talk about Kristallnacht.