

WHAT YOU DO MATTERS LESSONS FROM THE HOLOCAUST



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In 1998, Charles H. Ramsey was hired to become the Chief of the Metropolitan Police Department for the District of Columbia. Chief Ramsey was invited to take a tour of the United States Holocaust Museum, an invitation that he accepted, but wondered to himself what possible connection the Holocaust could have to his job as police chief. Ramsey later described the tour of the Museum as an encounter unlike any he had ever experienced. After the tour, Ramsey had a “haunted” feeling that lingered, but he could not put his finger on what was bothering him. Despite his busy schedule, Ramsey returned to the Museum several days later, on his own, hoping to find the source of his uneasiness.

On that follow-up visit as he stepped off the elevator onto the fourth floor of the Museum, Ramsey immediately discovered what had haunted him for the past several days. On one of the Museum walls was a large photograph of a German police officer on patrol in Berlin. Ramsey asked himself: “How could the Holocaust have happened? The police are supposed to serve and protect their fellow citizens.”

Although millions had toured the Museum by 1998 and historians had written books about the role of the German police during the Holocaust, no law enforcement official had ever asked the Museum staff that question. Ramsey wanted to know more; specifically, he wanted to know if there were lessons that contemporary police could learn from the Holocaust history. Working with Lynn Williams from the Museum and David Friedman from the Anti-Defamation League, a course was soon created to explore that question: “Law enforcement and Society: Lessons of the Holocaust.”

Initially taught to Ramsey’s command staff of the MPDC, the course soon became a standard for many law enforcement agencies, including the FBI. Since its inception, the course has trained an estimated 80,000 law enforcement professionals, and served as a model for other professionals such as the military, judiciary, and State Department officials.

In 2005, Sheila Polk, the Yavapai County Attorney in Arizona, was approached by members of the Jewish Community Foundation of Greater Prescott and invited to travel with a group of local civic leaders to Washington DC to participate in the course that Chief Ramsey had initiated. Two thoughts immediately came to her mind: “Is there a problem in the Yavapai County Attorney’s Office? And what does the Holocaust have to do with me and my job?” Reassured there was no problem in her office, Polk quickly agreed to take the trip for educational purposes. Polk was transformed by her experience at the Museum. Later, Polk recalled how she felt. “I have taken ethics courses for over 26 years and have never been impacted the way the ‘Lessons of the Holocaust’ impacted me. I went from believing the Holocaust had nothing to do with me and my role as a prosecutor to a person who today makes every decision within the framework of the ‘Lessons of the Holocaust.’ By the time I flew out of Washington DC the next day, I was already thinking that I want all Arizona’s prosecutors to have the advantage of this course.”

Working with the educators at the United States Holocaust Museum, the Jewish Foundation, and Doug Bartosh, the former Cottonwood Arizona Police Chief, Polk and her partners created today's program.

Goals of Class

- The purpose of this class is to gain an understanding of how the German police shifted from protectors of the people to enforcers of Nazi ideology in a few short years.
 - The purpose of class is not to suggest that law enforcement today is comparable to the Nazis or to offend in any way. This class is not about acting or not acting like Nazis. This is a class about learning from history.
 - We could do this by examining any segment of German society – doctors, teachers, businessmen, etc. In this class, we focus on the role of law enforcement, examining the challenges and changes faced by police officers as the Nazi party gained control of the German government in the 1930's. One of the reasons we can learn from this history is that over 230 tons of evidence was collected after the war documenting the atrocities.
 - Ultimately, the goal of this class is to focus on personal responsibility for our actions.



**Chancellor Adolf Hitler and President Paul von Hindenburg.
Potsdam, Germany, 1933**

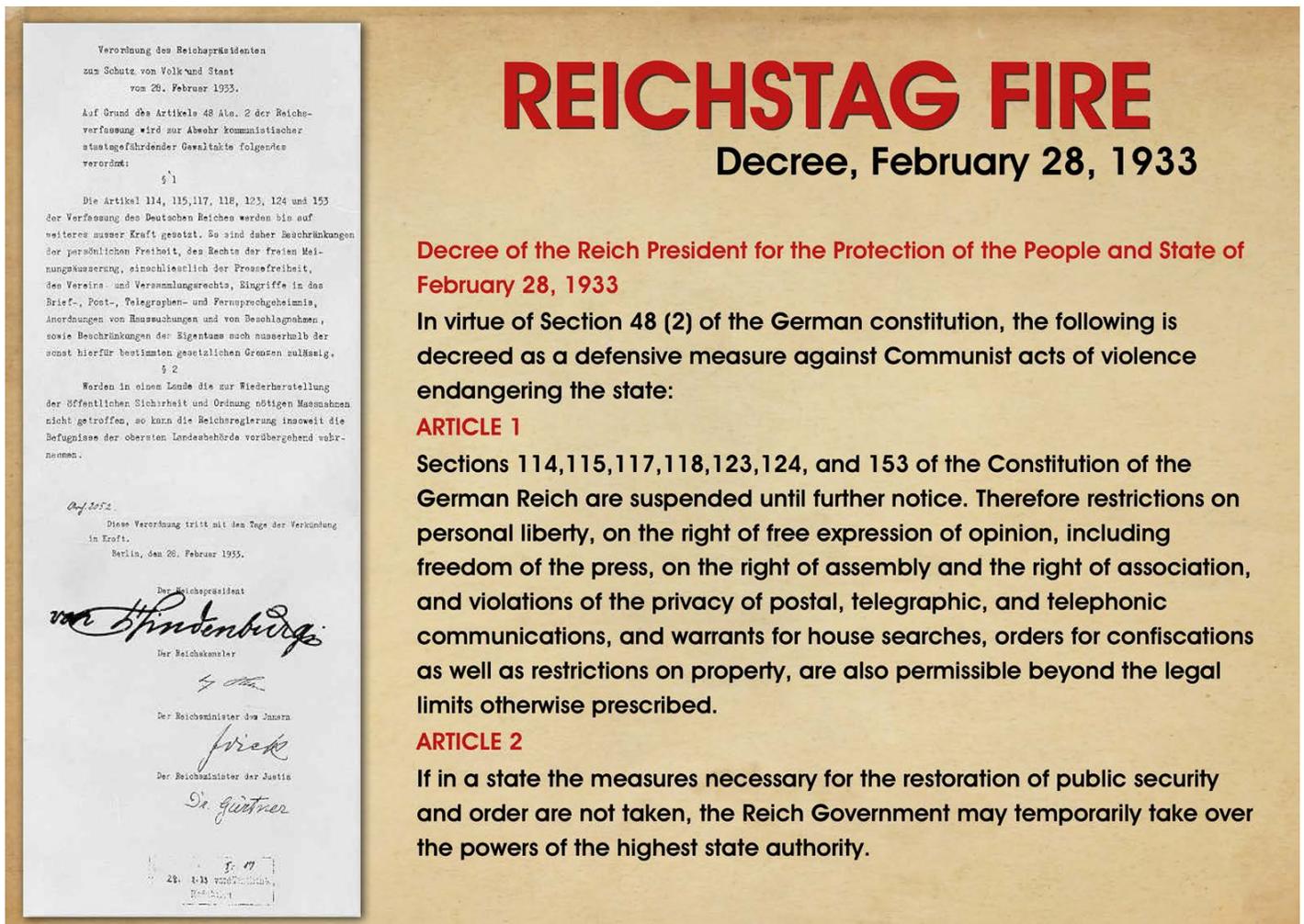
1. *Based on this photograph, who appears to be more powerful – Hitler or Hindenburg? Why?*
2. *Was Hindenburg a Nazi?*
3. *Why would Hitler want to convey this image to the public?*
4. *Why would Hindenburg want this image circulated?*
5. *Look at the people around them in the photograph. Are they Hitler's men or Hindenburg's? Do you see any swastikas?*



**The Reichstag (German parliament) building on fire.
Berlin, Germany, February 27, 1933**

Hitler convinced Hindenburg that the arson was part of a Communist uprising. Hindenburg declared a national emergency, suspending provisions of the Constitution protecting individual rights and the due process of law.

1. ***What do you think the reaction of the German public was to the arson? What was your reaction to 9-11?***
2. ***Why do you think Hindenburg was willing to allow such a decree to eliminate civil rights?***



Reichstag Fire Decree, February 28, 1933

Hindenburg issued the decree for the Protection of the People and the State which suspended important provisions of the Weimar Constitution—those safeguarding individual rights and due process of law.

1. ***How were the provisions suspended by Hindenburg similar to the Bill of Rights of the United States Constitution?***
2. ***How would the suspension on the right to free express of opinion, freedom of the press, the right to assembly and the right of association affect how you do your job today?***
3. ***How would the suspension of the need to get a search warrant prior to conducting a search or confiscating property affect how you do your job today?***

Law to Remedy the Distress of the People and the Nation

The Reichstag has enacted the following law, which is hereby proclaimed with the assent of the Reichsrat, it having been established that the requirements for a constitutional amendment have been fulfilled:

Article 1

In addition to the procedure prescribed by the constitution, laws of the Reich may also be enacted by the government of the Reich. This includes the laws referred to by Articles 85 Paragraph 2 and Article 87 of the constitution.^[2]

Article 2

Laws enacted by the government of the Reich may deviate from the constitution as long as they do not affect the institutions of the Reichstag and the Reichsrat. The rights of the President remain undisturbed.

Article 3

Laws enacted by the Reich government shall be issued by the Chancellor and announced in the Reich Gazette. They shall take effect on the day following the announcement, unless they prescribe a different date. Articles 68 to 77 of the Constitution do not apply to laws enacted by the Reich government.^[2]

Article 4

Treaties of the Reich with foreign states, which relate to matters of Reich legislation shall for the duration of the validity of these laws not require the consent of the Reichstag. The national government shall adopt the necessary legislation to implement these agreements.

The Enabling Act, Signed by Hindenburg March 23, 1933

The Law to Remedy the Distress of the People and the Reich, also known as the Enabling Act, became the cornerstone of Hitler's dictatorship by allowing him to enact laws, including ones that violated the Weimar constitution, without approval of either parliament or Reich President von Hindenburg.

Since the passage of this law depended upon a two-thirds majority vote in parliament, Hitler and the Nazi party ensured the outcome by intimidation and persecution. They prevented all 81 Communists and 26 of the 120 Social Democrats from taking their seats, detaining them in so-called protective detention in Nazi-controlled camps. In addition, they stationed SA and SS members in the chamber to intimidate the remaining representatives and guarantee their compliance. In the end, the law passed with more than the required two-thirds majority, with only Social Democrats voting against it.

The Supreme Court did nothing to challenge the legitimacy of this measure. Instead, it accepted the majority vote, overlooking the absence of the Communist delegates and the Social Democrats who were under arrest. In fact, most judges were convinced of the legitimacy of the process and did not understand why the Nazis proclaimed a "Nazi Revolution." Erich Schultze, one of the first Supreme Court judges to join the Nazi party, declared that the term "revolution"

did not refer to an overthrow of the established order but rather to Hitler's radically different ideas. In the end, German judges, who were among the few who might have challenged Nazi objectives, viewed Hitler's government as legitimate and continued to regard themselves as state servants who owed him their allegiance and support.



**A police officer and a member of the SS on patrol.
Berlin, Germany, March 5, 1933**

1. *What do you see in this photograph? Look at the SS man. To whom or what does this man answer to? How is that different than the police officer and what he answers to?*
2. *What is the police officer doing? Who is holding the dog's leash?*
3. *Why would the Nazi state want to keep existing police officers in their positions (i.e., why not just replace them with SS men)?*
4. *Very few policemen left their positions after the Nazi rise to power and most worked for the Nazi state right up until its demise. Why would ordinary police officers agree to (or even want to) work with the Nazi state?*
5. *What is normal about this police activity?*
6. *What is not normal?*

7. *What would an ordinary person think if they came across this scene? How would ordinary Germans interpret this sight? Who would be terrorized by the site of Nazis patrolling with the police?*



Municipal police search a historically Jewish neighborhood in Berlin, Germany, April 1933

1. *Whom do you see and what appears to be going on?*
2. *What is the police officer doing? What police function is illustrated here? What is normal about the police's activity?*
3. *Has the police officer's job or function changed? What is not normal?*
4. *What would an ordinary person think if they came across this scene? Why is it important to the Nazis that they are in the Jewish quarter? Who feels Jews are a natural threat? What links is this operation intended to forge in the public mind?*

Oath of Office under President Hindenburg

“I swear loyalty to the Constitution, obedience to the law and conscientious fulfillment of the duties of my office, so help me God.”

Oath of Office under Adolf Hitler

“I swear I will be true and obedient to the Fuhrer of the German Reich and people, Adolf Hitler, observe the law and conscientiously fulfill the duties of my office, so help me God.”

Civil Service Oath

1. *What do you think the reaction of law enforcement officers was to this new oath?*
2. *What is the same about both of these oaths?*
3. *What is different about the oaths?*
4. *What are some of the reason that law enforcement would take this oath?*
5. *What does Hitler stand for in the text of this oath?*
6. *How is the oath similar to or different from your oath of office as a civil servant in Arizona?*
7. *Has the role of law enforcement changed with this oath?*



**Public humiliation of a couple for violating race taboos. They are forced to carry a sign reading: "I am a defiler of the race."
Norden, Germany, July 1935**

1. *Describe who you see in this photograph.*
2. *How is this a normal police function? What are the police doing here? What is the obligation of a police officer when there is a crowd gathering in the street? Are they enforcing the law? Could the police also be acting as protectors here?*
3. *What is not normal about the police activity?*
4. *Who insists that it is a crime for non-Jews to marry Jews?*
5. *What would an ordinary person think if they came across this scene?*
6. *By 1935, how has policing changed after the Nazi rise to power?*



**A specialist in criminal biology from the Reich Criminal Police Office in Berlin, and a German police officer interview a Romani woman.
Germany - date uncertain**

1. *What do you see in this photograph? Is the setting urban or rural?*
2. *What is the police officer doing? What might bring a police presence to the doorstep of a rural household on an afternoon? Why do you think the gendarme is present?*
3. *Has this woman committed a crime?*
4. *Do police often provide support for government operations?*
5. *Has the police officer's job changed? What is not normal? Is it a function of the police to prevent crime? Is arrest often the implied threat to ensure compliance in police interrogations?*
6. *What is a common stereotype about Gypsies that is neither German nor Nazi?*
7. *How has Nazi racial ideology altered the role of police in preventing crime?*
8. *What would an ordinary person think if they came across this scene*



Deportation of Jews from Würzburg, Germany April 25, 1942

1. *What do you see in this photograph? (people, objects, location, etc.) Is the setting urban or rural?*
2. *Who are these people? Is there anything in the picture that indicates they are Jews?*
3. *Do you think this is a secret operation or a public one? Do the people in the line look dangerous?*
4. *What do you think is going on here? Where do you think they are going? Is there evidence in the photo that suggests whether they knew they were going to their deaths?*
5. *What do the police appear to be doing here?*
6. *Do you think the police knew these people were being deported to their deaths?*
7. *What did the police know?*
8. *Is this a normal police function? How is it different from crowd control in an evacuation? Has the police officer's job or function changed?*
9. *What has changed about policing in Germany?*

10. *What would an ordinary person think if they came across this scene?*



**A German police officer shoots wounded Jewish women following the mass shooting of Jewish civilians outside the Mizocz ghetto.
Eastern Poland, October 1942**

LESSONS FROM THE HOLOCAUST

- When WWII ended, perpetrators were held accountable on an international scale at the Nuremberg Trials. Defendants included military leaders, physicians, judges, industrialists, etc. Robert Jackson, who was a justice on the United States Supreme Court, took a leave of absence in order to serve as the U.S. Chief Prosecutor at the Trials.
 - “The crimes which we seek to condemn and punish have been so calculated, so malignant and so devastating, that civilization cannot tolerate their being ignored, because it cannot survive their being repeated.” - U.S. Chief Prosecutor Robert Jackson in his Opening Statement to the United States International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg, November 21, 1945.
- No one can predict the consequences when we start down a slippery slope of incremental change, but we do know from this history, that heading down that slope can have unpredictable and dangerous consequences that may threaten our democracy. The German police went down that slope and ended up as participants and collaborators in mass genocide.
- There is no easy answer to how we can best protect ourselves from sliding down a slope toward abuses of authority and violations of individual rights. How do we keep the ideals we started out with? It is up to each of you who engage in difficult tasks every day to make such decisions.
- The question for us today is: What are the lessons from this history that we can take away to help ensure that we, as individuals, do not start down a slippery slope?
- What are some of the lessons I can personally live by to make sure I do not slide down the path of the slippery slope?