

destroyed the papers which **incriminate**¹¹ his family. That there are no records of the seven other Jews can only strengthen this suspicion, since H. relies on the destruction of these records to justify the absence of a listing of his own family.

In view of the above, I request that the appeal of Mrs. Heimann be rejected and that the *Mischlinge* of the 1st degree Mally and Eva Heimann be classified as Jews in accordance with §5, section 2 of the First Ordinance to the Reich Citizenship Law. I hereby return the material sent to me under the decree of May 29, 1942—IV B 4 a 847/742.

Berlin SW 11, January 1, 1943
Gestapo
RSHA IV C 2
Arrest No. H. 16981

Protective Custody Order

First and Second Name: Wilhelm Israel Heimann
Birthday and Birthplace: January 27, 1900 in Elberfeld
Occupation: writer
Marital Status: married
Nationality: German
Religion: Mosaic
Race (to be noted with Non-Aryan): Jew
Residence: Wuppertal-Elberfeld, Sophia Street 12

is taken into custody

¹¹ **incriminate**—show evidence of a crime or fault.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. In the eyes of the law, what people were classified as “Jews”?
2. What do you think motivated the Heimanns to file their petition?
3. Why was the Heimanns’ petition denied?

Kristallnacht

BY MILTON MELTZER

After the passage of the Nuremberg Laws, the overt persecution of the Jews intensified in Germany. On November 7, 1938, a young German Jew, Herschel Grynszpan, shot an official at the German embassy in Paris. Grynszpan’s family had just been deported from Germany to Poland and the young man was outraged by their treatment. When the official died on November 9, a terrifying wave of organized violence broke out against the Jews in Germany. During this infamous Kristallnacht (“Night of Broken Glass”), thousands of Jewish homes, businesses, and synagogues were destroyed throughout Germany. Many Jews were killed and the survivors were forced to pay a large fine in return for the “damage” caused that night.

On November 7, 1938, a seventeen-year-old boy, Herschel Grynszpan, walked up to the German embassy in Paris and shot to death one of its minor staff, Ernst vom Rath.

Young Herschel was the son of one of the 12,000 Jews of Polish origin who a few days earlier had been deported from Germany to Poland. Herschel’s father

had lived in Germany for twenty-seven years. Like many such immigrants, he had never bothered to seek **naturalization**.¹ Now, overnight, his life had been senselessly smashed.

When Herschel, in Paris visiting an uncle, got a postcard telling of his father's deportation, the act of murder followed. Exactly why the boy did it or what he hoped to achieve by it has never been clear. But the consequences were catastrophic.

The assassination triggered a nationwide **pogrom**² in Germany on the night of November 9, the *Kristallnacht* (Night of Broken Glass), which foreshadowed the extermination of the Jews. The assault had been planned by Heydrich and Goebbels at the first news of the shooting of vom Rath. Nazi regional chiefs were instructed by teletype to destroy Jewish shops, synagogues, businesses, and homes. The police were not to interfere, except to protect **Aryan**³ life and property. Jews, especially rich ones, were to be arrested and confined in concentration camps.

The Party carried out its orders. The torch was set to most of Germany's synagogues; 7,500 shops were ransacked and many destroyed; and hundreds of homes were looted and wrecked. Damage to property, equipment, and stock was estimated at several hundred million marks. At least 1,000 Jews were murdered, and 26,000 were flung into concentration camps.

An American eyewitness described what he saw in Leipzig that night:

Jewish dwellings were smashed into and the contents demolished or looted. In one of the Jewish sections, an eighteen-year-old boy was hurled from a three-story window to land with

¹ **naturalization**—the process of gaining the rights of citizenship.

² **pogrom**—the organized massacre of helpless people.

³ **Aryan**—term used by the Nazis to describe Caucasian non-Jews.

both legs broken on a street littered with burning beds and other household furniture. . . . Jewish shop windows by the hundreds were systematically and **wantonly**⁴ smashed throughout the city at a loss estimated at several millions of marks. . . . The main streets of the city were a positive litter of shattered plate glass. . . . The debacle was executed by SS⁵ men and Storm Troopers, not in uniform, each group having been provided with hammers, axes, crowbars and incendiary bombs. . . .

A fourteen-year-old boy, M. I. Libau, had gone to bed that night in his home in Berlin. Suddenly, at six o'clock in the morning, the doorbell rang, waking him up. His mother went to the door and opened it. He told what happened then:

I heard the shrill, barking, yelling voices of men. It seemed to me there were at least twenty.

"Are here Gojim or Iwrim [Gentiles or Jews]?" Then I heard my mother's calm voice. "Please speak German. I understand it very well, but if you wish to know whether we are Christians or Jews, we are Jews!"

"Where are the Jews? Where are they?" they yelled. I heard noises of falling furniture and breaking glass. I could not imagine what was happening. I stood behind my bed when one Nazi in full uniform entered the room. He stepped back a fraction of a second when he saw me; then he began to yell, "I'll do nothing to you. I won't do any harm to you."

⁴ **wantonly**—cruelly; without cause.

⁵ **SS**—Nazis who served as Hitler's bodyguard and as a policing unit of the German army.

Now he stood near me, his face sweating. A smell of bad alcohol came out of his mouth. He took another glaring look at me and began to destroy everything within reach. While he was breaking the closet door, my mother came into the room. He commanded her to hold the clothes for him so that he would be able to tear them better. Desperately my mother called out, "Those are all our clothes! What shall we wear?"

"You wear? Nothing!" he shouted. "You don't need any more clothes! You can go naked now."

It almost broke my heart when I saw him take my father's best suit. "This is my father's best suit," I called out. "Don't tear it! Don't!"

... We watched the men destroy the whole apartment of five rooms. All the things for which my parents had worked for eighteen long years were destroyed in less than ten minutes. Piles of valuable glasses, expensive furniture, linens—in short, everything was destroyed; nothing was left untouched. After those ten minutes, the apartment was a heap of ruins.

My mother and I looked at everything without shedding a tear. We felt as if we had lost our minds. The Nazis left us, yelling, "Don't try to leave this house! We'll soon be back again and take you to concentration camp to be shot."

But the Nazis did not come back—then. Mr. Libau, who had been working nights as a forced laborer on the railroad, came home and went into hiding in the cellar of a Christian friend. Many of the family's friends committed suicide that night, some went insane, and some were murdered.

In cold, precise detail, like a bookkeeper's account, the leader of the SS in the town of Geldern reported the action taken locally on orders he had received by telephone:

The first measure was the setting on fire of the synagogue in Geldern at about 4 A.M. By 9 A.M. this was burned down to the foundations. Some bibles in Hebrew characters were taken into safekeeping. Simultaneously the interior fittings of the synagogue in Xanten (a private house) were completely destroyed. There existed two Jewish shops in the Sturm district, the fittings and small stock of which were likewise completely destroyed.

The furnishings of the remainder of the Jews, former cattle-Jews and now earning their living by private means, were totally demolished and rendered unusable, the windows and windowpanes first having been broken in. . . .

By about 11 hours [11 A.M.] all the male Jews fifteen to seventy years of age were arrested by the police and kept temporarily in the local guardhouses. . . . The population took a passive attitude to the demonstrators. . . .

Making a secret report on Nazi party members who had murdered Jews that night, the chief Party judge, Major Walter Buch, revealed how justice had disappeared in Hitler's Germany:

In the following cases of killing Jews, proceedings were suspended or minor punishments were pronounced: Party Member Fruehling, August, because of shooting of the Jewish couple Goldberg and because of shooting of the Jew Simasohm . . . Party Members Behring, Willi and Heike, Josef, because of shooting of the

Jew Rosenbaum and the Jewess Zwienicki . . .
Party Members Schmidt, Heinrich, and Meckler,
Ernst, because of drowning of the Jew Ilsoffer . . .
etc. etc. etc.

Why the *Kristallnacht* pogroms at this moment? Earlier, if they had wished, the Nazis could have invented any pretext to commit the same barbarism. But not until now did Hitler feel secure enough to dare a crime of this magnitude. He had learned he need fear no opposition from Germans or from the world outside.

Kristallnacht was still another measure of how far Hitler would go. Coming immediately after his successful intimidation of the major powers at Munich, it tested the German spirit. If his people could swallow this, they could swallow anything. Was any voice raised in protest? Neither the Catholic nor the Protestant Church offered sanctuary to the stricken Jews. Hitler could smile comfortably and say, "My Germans are united behind me."

There were notable exceptions. One Catholic churchman, Bernard Lichtenberg, Provost of Saint Hedwig's Cathedral in Berlin, spoke out from the pulpit the morning after the pogrom:

What took place yesterday, we know; what will be tomorrow, we do not know; but what happens today, that we have witnessed outside, the synagogue is burning, and that, also, is a house of God. . . .

In a number of Berlin homes, an anonymous inflammatory rag against the Jews is being distributed. It says that any German who, from allegedly false sentimentality, helps the Jews, commits treason against his own people. Do not let yourself be led astray by such unChristian thoughts, but act according to the

clear command of Christ: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

Because Father Lichtenberg spoke, he served two years in prison. Released, he was seized by the Gestapo and sent to Dachau. He died on the way.

Far more true to the feelings of German Christians at the time was the action of *Landesbischof* Weidemann of Bremen; on November 28, shortly after the burning, pillaging, imprisonment, and murder of the Jews throughout Germany, the state bishop sent this telegram:

TO: THE FUEHRER AND REICHS
CHANCELLOR ADOLF HITLER

THE THREE CHURCHES OF GRATITUDE
IN BREMEN HAVE BEEN INAUGURATED.
THEY BEAR YOUR NAME, MEIN
FÜHRER, IN GRATITUDE TO GOD FOR
THE MIRACULOUS REDEMPTION OF
OUR NATION AT YOUR HANDS FROM
THE ABYSS OF JEWISH-MATERIALISTIC
BOLSHEVISM. I THANK YOU FOR
HAVING ENABLED US TO EXPRESS IN
THESE NEW CHURCHES WHAT IS A
DEEP CONFESSION FOR US WHO ARE
FULLY CONSCIOUS CHRISTIAN NATION-
AL SOCIALISTS.

HEIL, MEIN FÜHRER!

The pogroms of *Kristallnacht* were the unofficial penalty for the death of vom Rath. The next day, Hitler decided to demand the collective punishment of all the Jews. The Fuehrer told Goering that the "Jewish question" must be "coordinated and solved, now, once and for all, in one way or another."

The German bureaucracy swung into action. Measures against the Jews would be planned in an orderly, legal, and systematic way. Pogroms were too messy. The mob turned loose could not always be controlled: *Kristallnacht* had done harm to non-Jewish property and had cost the state some losses. No more. The experts would confer; decisions would be scientifically made; the proper **directives**⁶ would be issued; the necessary reports made out and filed.

When casual violence on the streets stopped, many Jews were fooled into believing the worst was over. But it was not; terror simply took another form. Goering imposed the huge fine of 1 billion marks on the Jews; it was the value of 20 percent of all their remaining property. Two billion marks had already been taken from the Jews. The government had collected this "Atonement Payment" and poured it into the rearmament program. Compulsory Aryanization of Jewish businesses moved ahead rapidly. By the year's end, what was left of Jewish business and self-employment was wiped out. It is worth noting that such steps taken "for the good of the German people" at first benefited only one class—the owners of Aryan enterprises. Later the state pocketed a part of the loot.

Before the time of *Kristallnacht*, about a quarter of the Jewish population of Germany had **emigrated**.⁷ A year later, more than half the Jews were gone. Three-quarters of those who remained were older people—their businesses, savings, professions, jobs, all gone. They were a dependent community badly in need of relief. It was now that the SD⁸ took over the Representative Council of Jews, converted it into the Reich Association of Jews in Germany, and made membership for all "racial" Jews compulsory. It was the

⁶ **directive**—official guideline that calls for specific actions.

⁷ **emigrate**—leave one's country to live elsewhere.

⁸ SD—security police established as a branch of the SS.

equivalent of a Nazi-controlled ghetto. Public relief was denied the Jews. Unemployed Jews were put to hard labor on construction and reclamation projects, or in arms plants. Jewish wages were slashed, and what was left, taxed. It was slave labor.

"But," said Heydrich,⁹ "in spite of the elimination of the Jews from economic life, the main problem remains, namely, to kick the Jew out of Germany."

⁹ Heydrich, Reinhard (1904-1942)—Hitler's deputy in charge of the "final solution to the Jewish problem."

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Why did Hitler wait until the night of *Kristallnacht* to begin his pogrom against the Jews?
2. From the perspective of the German bureaucracy, what went wrong with the pogroms? How did they intend to remedy the problem?
3. Do you think anything like the pogroms of *Kristallnacht* could happen in the United States? Explain why or why not.