

Kristallnacht: A Campaign of Terror

On November 7, 1938, Herschel Grynszpan, a 17 year old Polish Jew, shot Ernst vom Rath, a German diplomat in Paris. The Nazi Party used vom Rath's death two days later as an excuse to fan the flames of anti-Semitism. Propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels delivered a speech that blamed the attack on Jews and suggested the government would do nothing to prevent reprisals against German Jews.

On November 9, 1938 German Nazis launch a campaign of terror against Jewish people and their homes and business. Violence against Jews broke out all over Germany and its territories. Mobs attacked an estimated 7,500 Jewish-owned stores and businesses, breaking windows and looting. They broke into synagogues, vandalizing their interiors, smashing everything they could find, and burning more than 1,000 places of worship.

The mobs attacked Jewish people, beating them, humiliating them in the streets and killing at least 96 people. People were spit upon, hit and called racial slurs. An estimated 30,000 Jewish men were rounded up and arrested with most being sent to concentration camps for several months. Though the attacks seemed random, most were carried out by Nazi Party adherents who had been given instructions to riot as police and fire fighters looked the other way and did nothing to prevent the destruction.

In the aftermath, the German government blamed the Jews for the attacks against them, levied a massive fine on German Jews, and forced them to hand over insurance payouts they received for the damage. A series of strict anti-Jewish laws followed.



The violent rampage marked a turning point in the history of the Third Reich and the beginning of the Holocaust



During Kristallnacht, also known as the "night of broken glass," anti-Semitic rioters terrorized Jews throughout Germany and its territories. They vandalized homes and businesses, attacked and harassed Jewish people, and destroyed their places of worship. Kristallnacht offered a terrifying vision of what was to come: the annihilation of six million European Jews.