

***“Kristallnacht”* refers to the night of November 9, 1938 and the following day, when rampaging mobs throughout Germany, Austria, and areas of the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia freely attacked Jews in the street, in their homes, and at their places of work and worship.** Tens of thousands of Jews were arrested, hundreds were injured, and almost 100 were murdered; approximately 7,000 Jewish businesses and homes were damaged and looted; 1,400 synagogues were burned; cemeteries and schools were vandalized; and 30,000 Jews were arrested and sent to concentration camps.

From the time the Nazis had come to power in 1933, they had isolated Jews in Germany and passed many laws to that effect. German Jews lost their citizenship, and thus protection of the law, in 1935. In October 1938, 17,000 Jews living in Germany who held Polish citizenship were arrested and expelled across the Polish border. The Polish government refused to admit them. Stateless refugees, they were treated brutally by the Germans and often had nowhere to sleep but in stables or pigsties.

Among the deportees was the Grynszpan family, who were forced out of their home by German police. Their store and possessions were confiscated.

The family had a 17-year-old son, Herschel, who was living in Paris. He heard about his family’s expulsion in a postcard from his sister, who told him that the family had been left penniless. Distraught, he resolved to avenge them. He went to the German embassy in Paris on November 7, 1938 and shot the first German diplomat he could find, Ernst vom Rath. Rath was critically wounded and died two days later, on November 9.

The shooting was exploited by Joseph Goebbels, Germany’s Chief of Propaganda, and was cast as a direct attack against the Reich and used as an excuse to launch a pogrom against the Jews. The Nazis euphemistically called this pogrom *Kristallnacht*, “Night of the Broken Glass”; the harmless sound of the name intentionally disguised the terror and devastation of the pogrom and the demoralization faced by Jews across Germany, Austria, and the Sudetenland.



Interior of a synagogue in Nuremberg, Germany, after Kristallnacht, 1938. Yad Vashem Photo Archive (1806/2)