

The Reich Expands

Once Hitler had solid control of Germany, he turned his attention to expansion. Due to his extreme nationalistic views, Hitler wanted to unite all German speaking peoples by acquiring Austria and parts of Czechoslovakia. The military build up and prewar preparations also demanded a larger industrial capacity for Germany, which Austria and Czechoslovakia would satisfy. With the Reich expanding, Hitler was testing the limits of the Versailles Treaty, and violating much of it.

In March of 1938, Hitler launched the invasion of Austria, after orchestrating a political crisis within the country. Austria possessed a large German speaking population with many Nazi supporters. This allowed for an invasion without resistance, called the *Anschluss*, and a smooth annexation process. The degradation and oppression of Jews, which happened gradually in Germany, began immediately after the annexation.

Shortly thereafter, Hitler set his sights on the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia. However, Czechoslovakia resisted such action. This led to the Munich Agreement, in which the rest of Europe, lead by Britain and France, sought to appease Hitler by forcing Czechoslovakia to cede the Sudetenland. Rather than curbing Hitler, this decision emboldened him and the next year sees the start of World War II.



"One People, One Empire, One Leader"
Courtesy of German Propaganda Archives, Calvin College

The Führer Principle

The leader principle is a hierarchy of leaders, close in appearance to a military structure, based on one becoming a leader due to the laws of nature. The Führer Principle under the Nazis required unquestioning obedience to the leadership, with Hitler at the top, in order for the "worthy" to share in the order and prosperity of the nation.



Map courtesy of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum



Hitler receives an ovation from the Reichstag for the Anschluss with Austria, March 1938. USHMM, courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration, College Park.

"I had my tenth birthday on 8 March 1938, with the usual Viennese child's birthday party – every child had to do a little dance or a song or a poem – and everything was as it ought to be. Four days later Hitler took Austria.

We were all at dinner... The radio was on... Everybody around the table fell silent as [President] Schuschnigg announced that he was resigning his post in favor of Hitler, who was in the process of marching in. I remember the depth of silence with which people listened to a disaster, to their own disaster."

Lore Segal
Vienna, Austria
Into the Arms of Strangers

