Marion Kaplan, Jewish Life in Nazi Germany

Professor Kaplan’s lecture focused on the life of Jews in Nazi Germany leading up to their extermination in the concentration camps. The separation and then isolation of Jews came in irregular, unpredictable steps over a period of about 6 years. One of the first signs was the disassociation of previous friends. Fear of the government’s laws, regulations, and decrees made other Germans avoid the company of Jews, which was especially hard on Jewish women because so much of their life was based around social interactions. However, random acts of kindness by some Germans gave mixed signals to the Jews, and gave them reason for hope. They didn’t believe the radical Nazi plans would be carried out because of their faith in the moderate German citizen.

After separation from society, economic problems set in for the Jews. Before, Jewish Germans had been a mainly middle class group. When the Nazi party was in power, the majority of Jews lost their jobs and businesses. One point Professor Kaplan made that I wasn’t aware of was how much this profited the rest of the German population. With the removal of Jews from the work force, there was a large amount of job openings for others. Likewise, when Jewish businesses shut down, other businesses no longer had to compete for customers. Since Germany had recently lost World War 1 and was in economic turmoil, the measures taken to remove Jews from the workforce was even approved of by non-Nazis. The job prospects for Jewish teens dwindled drastically since they could no longer attain any education past high school. Girls were encouraged to become seamstresses or stay home and do housework, while boys were encouraged to be painters, carpenters, and other low-paying occupations.

Professor Kaplan also covered the emigration of Jews of Germany, and examined the differences in the emigration of men and women. She explained a variety of reasons why more men ended up emigrating Germany than women.

I really enjoyed the talk given by Professor Kaplan because it took a different approach to the study of Nazi Germany, which is a topic that obviously receives in depth research from all angles. The question-and-answer period after the lecture was over was also brought up many interesting points, such as the long-term effects of more male than female emigration.