The National Socialist regime in Germany seized power on 30 January 1933. The immediate measures against socially active students and the law against flooding the university with non-Aryan students (Gesetz gegen die Uberfüllung deutsch Schulen und Hochschulen), which was promulgated in 23 April 1933 [1,2], abruptly limited the number of Jewish students in the faculties of medicine. The remaining Jewish students were forbidden to take care of any Aryan patients (mainly those in the gynecological departments). The Jewish hospitals and their staff, which were previously affiliated to the medical faculty, were excluded. However, they remained the only places where a Jewish student was allowed to continue an internship until the summer of 1937. Some students also conducted their medical studies in these hospitals.

On 20 December 1933, a new law restricted the rights of the Jewish students unless they or their fathers had fought in World War I. Just a few weeks later, at the beginning of 1934, another law was promulgated. Jewish students were allowed to take the examinations if they renounced their German citizenship and guaranteed they would emigrate from Germany. They were able to present their dissertation and apply for the doctor’s examination (MD) even before taking the final governmental examinations. This “privilege” was given almost exclusively to Jewish students before their dismissal [1,3].

The Nuremberg racial laws in 1935, which canceled the citizenship of the whole Jewish population of Germany and regarded them as “natives” with limited rights, further limited the ability of Jewish students to apply for examinations. Finally, the law in April 1937, which barred them from taking the examinations [1,2], forced most of the Jewish students to leave their studies.

In May 1933, the Ministry of the Interior, because of foreign policy considerations, declared that the restrictions in the Civil Service Law did not apply to foreign citizens [1,4]. Yet, during the first few months of 1938 all Eastern European citizens were expelled from Germany and only American Jews were allowed to commence their studies.

Previous studies have described the events [1,4], the administrative measures, and statistical data on the decline of the Jewish student population. However, so far, there have been no studies of the Jewish students who, in spite of the severe restrictions, were able to continue their medical studies.

**ABSTRACT**

**Background:** In April 1937 it was forbidden for German Jewish students to sit for examinations. However, a few Jewish medical students were able to continue studying at Berlin University. The order to expel all Jewish students from German Universities was published on the morning after Kristallnacht (November 1938) and was strictly imposed.

**Objectives:** To identify the last Jewish medical students who managed, in spite of the severe restrictions, to continue their studies and apply for the examinations in Berlin from summer 1937 through 1938.

**Methods:** We accessed reviews of the dissertations written in the medical faculty of Berlin during 1937–1938 to identify the Jewish students. We presented their demographic and academic characteristics.

**Results:** Sixteen Jewish students were identified: six Germans, six Americans, and four Eastern Europeans. Their average age was 18.7 ± 1.0 years, 22.5 ± 2.0 years, and 20.8 ± 2.5 years, respectively. The last Jewish student took the exams in July 1938 and submitted a thesis one month later. One German student was half Jewish. Five gained the rights to take the examinations as foreign students by renouncing their German citizenship. They were the main group affected by the government’s restrictions. The American and the Eastern European students were more protected by law.

**Conclusions:** Each of those groups had different academic careers. The Americans were the last Jewish students allowed to study in Germany. It seems that they were less aware of the national socialist atmosphere in the medical faculty in Berlin during 1937–1938.

**Keywords:** Berlin, foreign Jewish students, Kristallnacht, medical faculty, November Pogrom
PATIENTS AND METHODS

The Humboldt University of Berlin archive includes MD dissertations presented in Berlin from the beginning of the 19th century [5]. One reviewer (G.E.) reviewed all of the MD dissertations written at the Friedrich Wilhelm University in Berlin (1937–1938). Dissertations submitted by possibly Jewish students from the summer semester of 1937 until the summer semester of 1938 (3 semesters) were collected and photocopied.

Demographic characteristics of the students and their academic careers were extracted from the curriculum vitae (CV) section of the dissertations, including the numbers of semesters studied until the first exams (Physicum) as well as the length of study until the final governmental exams (Staatsexamen) and until the MD exam (Collaquoim).

The research areas of the dissertations were classified by one of the authors (G.E.).

IDENTIFYING JEWISH STUDENTS

A student was considered Jewish if he declared so on his forms or belonged to the Mosaic Religion, his family name was Cohen or Levi, his father was a Rabbi, he studied in a Yeshiva or Jewish school, or he completed his thesis in a Jewish hospital after the National Socialists came into power (no Aryan student was allowed to work in a Jewish hospital). Foreign students who took the MD examination before the final governmental medical examination were listed and checked carefully. Data about female students born in Germany who married foreign husbands and renounced their German citizenship (in this way they gained foreign nationalities) were also extracted from the CVs. Students who moved to Germany during the Weimar Republic period and received German citizenship, but returned back to their original nationality by renouncing their German citizenship (and in that way were considered to have gained the rights of the foreign students) were also listed.

Further confirmation was obtained by identifying students on Nolte’s list [5], which identified more than 600 medical students who were unable to complete their studies in Berlin. Nissim and Levy [6] provide a short synopsis of MD doctors who immigrated to Palestine. Students whose identity was not evident enough were excluded.

The students were categorized into one of three subgroups: originally German citizen, Eastern European, or American Jew.

RESULTS

Sixteen Jewish students submitted their dissertations and successfully passed the MD examinations at the medical faculty in Berlin between the summer of 1937 and until the fall of 1938. There were six German Jews, six American Jews, and four Eastern European citizens (2 Polish, 2 Russians).

Three of the German Jews were originally Eastern European citizens who belonged to the German minorities in their homelands. They received German citizenship after moving to Germany and completing their high school education there. Two others were married to foreign Jewish students (from Latvia and the United States) and the last German student was a mischling (a legal term used by the Nazi regime to denote persons of both Aryan and Jewish ancestry). Two of the Eastern European students emigrated from their home countries before starting their medical career. One emigrated to another Eastern European country and one to Palestine, before arriving in Berlin.

All six American citizens studied at an American university or college (pre-medicine and science studies) before moving to Germany.

At the time of starting medical school the mean age was 18.7 ± 1.0 years for the Germans, 20.8 ± 2.5 years for the Eastern Europeans, and 22.5 ± 2.0 years for the American Jewish students.

Four of the American students studied outside of Berlin before arriving in Berlin. Only one of the six German students and one of the Eastern European citizens started medical school in a university outside Berlin.

THE EXAMINATIONS AND TESTS

All of the German-Jewish citizens passed the first group of examinations (Physicum) before the National Socialist period. Four of the American students and two of the Eastern Europeans took this examination during the National Socialist regime. There was no significant difference in the lengths of study (semesters) at the first examinations between the Eastern European (4.9 years) and American students (4.2 years) students. However, the average number of semesters studied by the German students (3.8 years) was shorter.

There was no difference among the three groups in the number of semesters until the final government examinations (Staatsexamen).

All German-Jewish students, but only two Eastern European students and two American students, wrote their dissertations (and concluded the MD examination) after completing the final governmental examinations. Therefore, these students completed the MD examination earlier in the course of their medical study, compared to the German students.

The last German student took the government exams in September 1937 and submitted his thesis one month later. The last Eastern European student completed the exams in August 1937 and finished his MD degree in March 1938. The last American student took the exams in July 1938 and submitted his thesis one month later.

Students from all three groups conducted research in the field of internal medicine, but only the German students conducted research in the field of pediatrics. While no German Jew and only one of the East European conducted their research in surgery, four of six of the American students completed their thesis with a surgeon tutor.
By tracing the students’ names listed in Levy’s study [6] we were able to identify two German and two Eastern European students who managed to pursue their medical career in Palestine (and in Israel). We were able to identify two American physicians who were active in the United States via internet searches. We were unable to trace the fate of the 10 other Jewish students.

DISCUSSION

In this article we describe, for the first time the demographic and academic background of the last 16 Jewish medical students who studied at the Friedrich Wilhelm University in Berlin, the leading German medical school. At the same time, other leading medical faculties in Germany did not enroll Jewish students or enrolled very few) [7].

Our study deals only with Jewish students who continued their education after the law that banned most of the Jewish students from continuing their academic careers was published in the summer of 1937 and until 11 November 1938 [4].

The demographic data collected from the dissertations (the CV section) provides a reliable and authentic source of information for each of the students. To the best of our knowledge, this historic source has not been used before on such a large scale.

Preparing dissertations after completing the final Staatsexam, either during or after a year of internship, used to be the normal practice for medical students in order to complete their academic requirements and to be eligible to apply for the MD examination and receive the title of doctor. Yet, between the summer of 1937 and 11 November 1938, no Jewish student could complete the internship in medicine. However, the non-Aryan students who expressed an intention to emigrate could take the MD examination before medical license approbation.

The main finding in this study is that the last Jewish medical students in Berlin during the National Socialist regime were foreign students.

Previous research has showed that some non-Aryan German students requested permission to sit for the examinations as foreigners after renouncing their German citizenship [4,8]. We found that this was the case for two married female German-born Jewish students and three native Eastern European students. We also identified a Mischling who successfully passed the examinations. Usually Mischlings were treated like man-born Jewish students and three native Eastern European students [9,10].

All German Jewish students began medical studies immediately after finishing high school. Among the Eastern Europeans, two completed one year of studying at the Deutsch Institute fur Ausslender in Berlin prior to starting medicine. All American students studied at an American university or college (pre-medical or science studies) before arriving in Germany. That finding explains the differences in ages of those starting medical studies in Germany. The Germans were younger and the Americans were significantly older.

We have shown that the German-Jewish students were the main group affected by the rules. Only German students already enrolled in the advanced clinical semesters, after passing the first set of examinations during the Weimar Republic era, were allowed to continue their medical studies [1]. This finding explains why all of the German students in our survey began studying medicine prior to 1932. Several foreign students began studying a few months prior to the rise of the National Socialist regime.

The German students took the Physicum significantly earlier (fewer semesters) compared to the other two groups (half of whom completed the examinations during the National Socialist period). As for the foreigners, some probably encountered language difficulties. Some of the Eastern Europeans also experienced economic difficulties and most of the Americans encountered the need to change faculties, which led to a longer period of time between the start of studies and the completion of the Physicum.

German students studied for longer periods of time (semesters) between the first set of examinations and the final governmental examinations. This longer period may reflect the difficulties this group faced during the National Socialist regime.

We hypothesized that the American students moved to Europe to study medicine because of the Numerus Clauses, restrictions imposed against Jews in U.S. academia at that time [4]. They were probably less aware of the anti-Jewish atmosphere and the hierarchy of the German medical faculties in the early 1930s. Most of them began studying at a peripheral and less prestigious faculty where the anti-Semitic and the anti-foreigner hostility were more prominent. Only after realizing that, they moved to Berlin. Since Berlin, with its relatively large and strong Jewish community, which in 1933 comprised approximately 4% of the whole population and 60% of their physicians [10], provided the Jewish students with a more secure and protected atmosphere.

Regarding the American students, we found a preference for research in the field of surgery. The German students and the Eastern Europeans preferred other research fields. Overall, the Jewish doctors in Germany, even during the Weimar Republic era, encountered difficulties when starting an academic career in the field of surgery. Only a few of them succeeded in overcoming these barriers. It is well-known that some of the surgical medical staff members in Berlin during the Nazi era were famous figures who planned and conducted the gravest crimes against human beings [Eugenasia and Euthanasia ideas (Karl Brandt)] [11] and other medical crimes (Paul Rostock) [12]. Why the American Jewish students cooperated with these tutors needs to be questioned. Was it because they had no other choice, as was the case of a different German Jewish student who described in her interview for the university archive that she had no other choice but to write her dissertation, against her will, with a surgeon tutor in Berlin [13].
Were the American students less aware of the ideological background of the professors or did they not care much as they were trying to complete their studies before having to leave the country?

Why six Jewish students prepared their theses and took the MD examinations before completing their other main academic requirements is not clear. We presume that some of them did so to salvage some credits for their studies since they knew that they would have to leave Germany. It is also possible that some students planned to continue studying medicine in their homeland or elsewhere. One American student expressed, in his CV, a desire to return to Berlin at a future date to sit for the final examinations and conduct an internship, which reflects his unawareness of the overall situation.

After November 1938 no American Jewish students sat for the exams, indicating that the decree of 11 November was very vigilantly imposed.

CONCLUSIONS

We identified 16 students who were able to continue studying medicine after the summer of 1937. The data extracted from their dissertations are a reliable historical source that has not been used on such a large scale in the past. One student was a German citizen with both Jewish and Aryan ancestors. The rest held foreign citizenship. Five Germans renounced their German citizenship and passed the examinations as foreigners. The other 10 students were foreign Jewish citizens who moved to Germany to study medicine (six Americans and four Eastern European Jews).

The number of semesters for completing pre-clinical studies was significantly shorter for the German students studying during the Weimar era. Yet, it took them more semesters to continue to the final state examinations and to the dissertation examination during the National Socialist regime, which reflects the special difficulties encountered. The German students were more selective in their choice of research subjects, while some Americans studied with German surgeon tutors.

The morning after Kristallnacht, the order to expel all the few remaining American Jewish students from German universities was published and strictly imposed. It was declared in the press that, “The goal has been achieved! No more Jews at German Universities” [4].

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors thank Prof. Michael Cohen, Bar-Ilan University and Rotem Kozer for their advice and comments.

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