

Name _____ Date _____

The Reformation

Learn more about this topic! Each section gives more detail on one of the lyrics from the song. Read each section, and then respond by answering the question or taking notes on key ideas.

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As the figurehead of the Reformation, Martin Luther became known for his fiery speeches, provocative writings, and ad hominem attacks on his opponents. While many of his works lambasted the practices of the powerful Catholic Church, others expressed deep-seated bigotry toward minority groups like Jews and Muslims. Luther's antisemitism was particularly notable: In a 60,000-word polemic published in 1543, he advocated burning synagogues, destroying holy texts, banning rabbis from preaching, and seizing assets owned by Jews. His violent rhetoric prompted widespread riots and pogroms, and several German states expelled their Jewish residents.

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While the extent of his influence on antisemitism is debated, many historians today assert that Nazi ideology was in part informed by Luther's work. Prominent Nazis and Protestant leaders spoke admiringly about his racist writings and sermons, even citing them in support of the policy that forced German Jews to wear a yellow star for identification. When Jewish homes and businesses were destroyed during Kristallnacht, Nazi sympathizers drew parallels between the event and Luther's infamous treatise. Though some scholars believe that the Nazis' references to Luther were simply opportunistic, most agree that his works contributed significantly to the eventual rise of the Third Reich.

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Notes

Books have been around for thousands of years but for much of that time, producing them was prohibitively difficult and time-consuming. The earliest texts were written by hand, while later volumes were printed using wooden blocks carved in reverse to transfer ink onto cloth or paper. Movable type, which was invented in China around the year 1000, made printing much easier. This system consisted of carvings of individual characters, rather than entire sections of text, that could be reconfigured and reused. When this invention reached Europe four centuries later, a German goldsmith named Johannes Gutenberg built the world's first printing press, which mechanized the movable type system. Gutenberg also utilized his expertise as a metalworker to create durable metal characters and precise molds for making new ones.

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Within a few decades, the printing press had spread to hundreds of cities throughout Europe. It could produce up to 3,600 pages per day, dramatically lowering the cost of book production. Now, revolutionaries and other thinkers had an easy way to disseminate their ideas to a wide audience. Spearheaded by the printing press, this new era of mass communication enabled the rise of social movements like the Protestant Reformation, the European Renaissance, and the Enlightenment.

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For centuries, much of Europe was governed by a single entity known as the Holy Roman Empire. It was a Catholic state, with emperors appointed by the Pope. But with the onset of the Reformation in the 16th century, many Protestants began to rise up against their Catholic rulers. At first, they tried to resolve these tensions by dividing the empire into Catholic and Protestant states. However, the continuous expansion of Protestantism led to boundary disputes and social conflict.

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In 1618, violence broke out when the Catholic king of Bohemia, now a region of the Czech Republic, was deposed and replaced by a Protestant ruler. Though it started as a local religious conflict, the resulting Thirty Years' War quickly became about political control of the continent. Various powers from outside of the Holy Roman Empire intervened on behalf of their political allies, with the Protestants gaining support from countries that viewed the empire as a threat. By the time the war ended in 1648, the balance of power in Europe had shifted dramatically: The Holy Roman Empire had suffered major territorial losses, weaker states like France were poised to become major powers, and Protestantism was recognized as a legitimate religion. To date, it remains one of Europe's most devastating conflicts, with an estimated death toll of eight million.

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