The Nuremberg Laws Deprived Jews of Their Rights in Nazi Germany

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Maria (right), a 6-year-old girl of the Romanian Jewish community, wears a yellow Star of David badge bearing the word "Jude," a symbol of Nazi persecution, along with another girl during a ceremony at the Holocaust memorial in Bucharest, Romania, October 11, 2011. About 800,000 Jews lived in Romania before World War II. Half of them died during the war or were sent to concentration camps. Only about 6,000 Jews live in Romania currently, according to official statistics. AP Photo/Vadim Ghirda

The Nuremberg Laws were laws that took away the rights of Jewish people in Germany. They were designed by Adolf Hitler and approved by the Nazi Party in the city of Nuremberg on September 15, 1935. The first law was called the Reichsbürgergesetz, or "Law of the Reich Citizen" in German. The "Reich" was the name for the German empire. This law took away the Jews' citizenship. The other law was Gesetz zum Schutze des Deutschen Blutes und der Deutschen Ehre, or "Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor. It outlawed
marriage or sexual relations between Jews and Germans. These racist Nazi laws were among the first of many that led to the Holocaust, the mass killing and imprisonment of Jews in Europe during World War II.

**No legal rights for Jews in Hitler’s Germany**

Under the Nuremberg laws, Jews were not allowed to fly the German flag. They were forbidden to hire German maids, cooks or other servants under 45 years old. There were 13 decrees that were later added to segregate the Jews. The first was made on November 14, 1935. It defined a Jew as a person with at least one Jewish grandparent. It said that a Jew cannot be a citizen of Germany, vote or serve as a government official. Before long, Germany made sure that Jewish passports were stamped with a red “J” for Jude, the German word for “Jew.” Jews were not allowed to swim in public swimming pools or go to movie theaters. They could not act in movies. Nazis kicked Jewish children out of public schools. Jews were forced to take “Jewish” names, like Israel for men and Sara for women. In the decree of March 28, 1938, Jewish communities lost their legal rights.
The Nazis defined the Jews as a race. This meant they were persecuted not because of their religion but because of a racial identity passed down by their ancestors. Nazis thought Jewish blood was different than Aryan blood. Nazis later forced the Nuremberg Laws on countries they occupied. It became a model for the treatment and eventual murder of the Roma (once negatively called Gypsies), and other “non-Aryans.”

**Origins of Germany's "Aryan race"**

The theory of an “Aryan race” appeared in the mid-1800s in Europe. According to this idea, light-skinned Aryans invaded and conquered ancient India from the north. They were responsible for all the progress that benefited humanity, and were superior to “Semitic” (Jews), Asians and black people. The Nazis through that Nordic and Germanic peoples were descended from the Aryans and were the purest members of the “race.” (Nordic people come from Scandinavia.) By the time Hitler got into power, anthropologists said this idea of an Aryan race was completely false. However, Hitler and the Nazis made it the center of their worldview and used it to justify killing Jews, Roma and other “non-Aryans.”

Hitler believed that races, nations, and individuals were not equal. The “Aryan race” was at the top and everyone else was inferior. Morality and truth, or even life, were not important on their own. The only thing that was important was the German people.

**Germans vs. Jews: Breaking down the family tree**

The Nuremberg Laws divided Germany into Germans and Jews, but did not say who was a Jew. German officials eventually decided that there were two basic types of Jews. A full Jew was anyone with three Jewish grandparents. Part-Jews were called Mischlinge, which means “mongrels” in German. First-degree Mischlinge were people who had two Jewish grandparents but did not practice Judaism and did not have a Jewish husband or wife. Second-degree Mischlinge were those who had only one Jewish grandparent.

For Germans, it became very important to prove they had non-Jewish ancestors. This created a new business. “Licensed family researchers” were hired by anxious Germans afraid of having a Jew in the family tree.