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 two sets of racist laws, which deprived Jews of their rights in Germany. They were designed by Adolf Hitler and approved by the Nazi Party in the city of Nuremberg (spelled Nürnberg in German) on September 15, 1935. The Reichsbürgergesetz (German for “Law of the Reich Citizen”) deprived Jews of German citizenship, designating them as “subjects of the state.” The other, the Gesetz zum Schutze des Deutschen Blutes und
der Deutschen Ehre ("Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor") forbade marriage or sexual relations between Jews and Germans or Jews and people of "kindred" blood. These rules were some of the first racist Nazi laws that led to the Holocaust.

**Jews could not attend public schools**

Jews could not fly the German flag and were forbidden to hire German maids, cooks or other servants under the age of 45 years. There were 13 decrees that gave more details. The first, on November 14, 1935, defined Jews as persons with at least one Jewish grandparent, and declared that "a Jew cannot be a citizen of the Reich. He cannot exercise the right to vote; he cannot occupy public office." (The "Reich" was the German empire.) The other laws completed the process of segregating Jews. Before long Jewish passports were stamped with a red “J” (for Jude, the German word for "Jew"). Jews were banned from public swimming pools, movie theaters and theaters. Jewish children could not attend 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 and Jewish doctors could not treat non-Jewish patients.
This racial definition meant that Jews were persecuted not for their religious beliefs and practices but for a racial identity passed down by their ancestors. The Nazis later imposed the Nürnberg Laws on territories they occupied. The laws also provided a model for the treatment and eventual genocide of the Roma (once negatively called Gypsies) and other “non-Aryans.”

**Origins of “Aryan race”**

The theory of an “Aryan race” appeared in the mid-19th century and was popular until the mid-20th century. According to this idea, light-skinned Aryans invaded and conquered ancient India from the north. Members of that so-called race spoke Indo-European languages, were responsible for all the progress that benefited humanity, and were superior to “Semitic” (Jews), “yellows,” and “blacks.” Believers in Aryanism came to regard the Nordic and Germanic peoples as the purest members of the “race.” By the time Hitler came to power, anthropologists said there was no Aryan race and Germans were not better than everyone else. However, these ideas were seized upon by Adolf Hitler and the Nazis, who used them 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 as the creative element of mankind, and everyone was inferior. According to Hitler, the natural unit of mankind was the Volk (“the people”), of which the German people was the greatest. Moreover, he believed that the state existed to serve the Volk. Morality and truth were judged by this standard: whether it was in the interest and preservation of the Volk.

**Racist laws divided the nation**

Although the Nuremberg Laws divided the German nation into Germans and Jews, neither the term Jew nor the phrase German or kindred blood was defined. The laws contained criminal penalties for officials that did not follow them, so officials had to define what the words meant. Two basic Jewish categories were established. A full Jew was anyone with three Jewish grandparents. The second category was made up of part-Jews, who were called Mischlinge, which means “mongrels” in German. They were eventually divided into two types. First-degree Mischlinge were people who had two Jewish grandparents but did not practice Judaism and did not have a Jewish spouse. Second-degree Mischlinge were those who had only one Jewish grandparent.

It became so important for Germans to prove that their blood was pure that a new industry sprung up. “Licensed family researchers” were hired by anxious Germans afraid of finding a Jew in the family tree.