

Who was a Jew in Nazi Germany? By Walter S. Zapotoczny

The Jew had given form and structure to Adolf Hitler's world since his years in Vienna, just prior to the outbreak of the World War in 1914. It was there, Hitler claimed, that he met the Jew for the first time and learned of the real nature of the Jewish problem. From that time forward the world made sense to Hitler because of the Jew and his inherently evil nature. All that was evil, be it in German defeat in 1918 or the collapse of his own Reich in 1945, could be laid at the feet of the Jews. When after 1918 he became involved in the jumbled world of Weimer politics, Hitler assigned the Jew the ultimate responsibility for all the difficulties Germany faced. The hated Weimer Republic itself was a product of a Jewish seizure of power; the building of divisive parliamentary factions only the means through which Jews could weaken the German fiber. During the years of the Weimer Republic, Jewish malevolence, according to Nazi pronouncement, reached unprecedented proportions. Jews had captured control of the government, the press, the professions, the arts, economic life, and worst of all, through intermarriage, had made great inroads in corrupting the biological purity of Aryan racial stock. This was the Jewish problem to which the Nazis incessantly referred to which gave them unqualified promise of finding a solution. These were the reason the Nazis viewed the Jews as dangerous and placed so much importance in race.

Since the Nazis came to power, they struggled with the definition of a Jew. At the Nuremberg Party Congress on September 15, 1935, Hitler, announced three new laws that were to be cornerstones of German racist policies and the suppression of Jews and other non-Aryans. These decrees became known as the Nuremberg Laws. They were decrees which in Nazi Germany had the force of law forbidding contacts between Aryan Germans and Jews, especially marriage and stripping Jews of German citizenship. The first 1935 decree established the swastika as the official emblem of the German state. The second established special conditions for German citizenship that excluded all Jews. The third titled "The Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor" prohibited marriage between German citizens and Jews. Marriages violating this law were voided and extra-marital relations prohibited. Jews were prohibited from hiring female Germans under 45 years of age. Jews were also prohibited from flying the national flag. The first three Nuremberg Laws were subsequently supplemented with 13 further decrees, the last issued as late as 1943, as the Nazis constantly refined the suppression of non-Aryans. These laws affected millions of Germans, the exact number depending on precisely how a Jew was defined. That definition was published November 14, 1935. The Nazis defined a Jew as anyone who either 1) had three or four racially full Jewish grandparents, 2) belonged to a Jewish religious community or joined one after September 15 when the Nuremberg Laws came into force. Also regarded as Jews was anyone married to a Jew or the children of Jewish parents. This included illegitimate children of even the non-Jewish partner. There appears to have been no serious public objection to these laws.

The intent of these laws was to define a Jew so that the policies towards Jews and their property could be carried out without the confusion of who is a Jew and who is not. The Nuremberg Laws had the unexpected result of causing confusion and heated debate over who was a "full Jew." The Nazis then issued instructional charts to help distinguish Jews from *Mischlinge* (Germans of mixed race) and Aryans. The Nuremberg Laws by their general nature formalized the unofficial and particular measures taken against Jews up to 1935. The Nazi leaders made a point of stressing the consistency of this legislation with the Party program, which demanded that Jews should be deprived of their rights as citizens. After the Nuremberg Laws of 1935, a dozen supplemental Nazi decrees were issued that eventually outlawed the Jews completely, depriving them of their rights as human beings.

The Nuremberg Laws laid the foundation for the next ten years of racial policy. In 1936, Dr. Wilhelm Stuckart and his assistant Dr. Hans Globke in the Reich Ministry of the Interior, claimed that Nazi racial laws differed little from Jewish law: "The German people want to keep their blood pure and together just like the Jews have done since the prophet Ezra ordered them to do so." Regardless of what the Nazi officials said, these laws inflicted humiliation and suffering on Jews and *Mischlinge*. The Reichstag felt it had secured the purity of blood essential for the German people's future existence.