

READING

The Nuremberg Laws

Violence was a crucial tool of the Nazi government, but its leaders were also eager to show that they were acting within the framework of the law. As they worked to consolidate power and reshape Germany according to their racial ideals, Nazi leaders passed a number of new laws that redefined citizenship and laid the groundwork for a “racial state.”

On September 15, 1935, at a party rally in Nuremberg, the Nazis announced two new laws that changed who could be a German citizen. The Reich Citizenship Law required that all citizens have German “blood.” As a result, Jews and others lost their rights to citizenship, which not only stripped them of the right to vote but also made them stateless. This meant that they could not get a valid passport for travel between countries or acquire a visa to leave Germany.

The second law was called the Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor, which stated the following:



Discouraging German-Jewish Integration

In 1933, Jewish businessman Oskar Danker and his girlfriend, a Christian woman, were forced to carry signs discouraging Jewish-German integration. Intimate relationships between “true Germans” and Jews were outlawed by 1935.

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Moved by the understanding that purity of German blood is the essential condition for the continued existence of the German people, and inspired by the inflexible determination to ensure the existence of the German nation for all time, the Reichstag has unanimously adopted the following law, which is promulgated herewith:

Article 1

1. Marriages between Jews and subjects of the state of German or related blood are forbidden. Marriages nevertheless concluded are invalid, even if concluded abroad to circumvent this law.

2. Annulment proceedings can be initiated only by the state prosecutor.

Article 2

Extramarital relations between Jews and subjects of the state of German or related blood are forbidden.

Article 3

Jews may not employ in their households female subjects of the state of German or related blood who are under 45 years old.

Article 4

1. Jews are forbidden to fly the Reich or national flag or display Reich colors.
2. They are, on the other hand, permitted to display the Jewish colors. The exercise of this right is protected by the state.

Article 5

1. Any person who violates the prohibition under Article 1 will be punished with a prison sentence.
2. A male who violates the prohibition under Article 2 will be punished with a jail term or a prison sentence.
3. Any person violating the provisions under Articles 3 or 4 will be punished with a jail term of up to one year and a fine, or with one or the other of these penalties.

Article 6

The Reich Minister of the Interior, in coordination with the Deputy of the Führer and the Reich Minister of Justice, will issue the legal and administrative regulations required to implement and complete this law.¹

The two new laws announced at Nuremberg made sharp distinctions between the rights and privileges of Germans and Jews. They also raised an important question: What determined who was and who was not a Jew? According to most Jewish teachings, an individual was defined as a

¹ "Reich Citizenship Law of September 15, 1935," trans. by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, last updated January 26, 2016.

Jew if he or she was born to a Jewish mother or formally converted to Judaism. If a Jew converted to Christianity, he or she was no longer considered Jewish by most Jews. The Nazis did not accept that definition. They regarded Jews as members of neither a religious group nor an ethnic group (defined by their cultural heritage). Instead, they regarded Jews as members of a separate and inferior "race." Since, according to Nazi logic, "race" was not altered by conversion, people who were born Jewish would always be Jews regardless of their religious beliefs or practices.

Though the Nazis believed that identity was biological, something "carried in the blood," this idea had no scientific reality. Whether someone was German or Jewish could not be determined by medical or scientific tests. The question of defining German and Jewish identity was further complicated by the fact that there had been a great deal of intermarriage between the two groups, and there were thousands of people of mixed Jewish and non-Jewish ancestry, known to the Nazis as *Mischlinge* ("half-breeds" or "mixed-blood").

On November 14, 1935, the Nazi government officially defined who was a German and who was a Jew through an additional decree called the First Regulation to the Reich Citizenship Law. (Debates about how to classify *Mischlinge* went on for years and were never completely resolved.) It stated:

Article 1

1. Until further regulations regarding citizenship papers are issued, all subjects of German or kindred blood, who possessed the right to vote in the Reichstag elections at the time the [Nuremberg] Citizenship Law came into effect, shall for the time being possess the rights of Reich citizens. The same shall be true of those to whom the Reich Minister of the Interior, in conjunction with the Deputy of the Führer, has given preliminary citizenship.
2. The Reich Minister of the Interior, in conjunction with the Deputy of the Führer, can withdraw the preliminary citizenship.

Article 3

Only the Reich citizen, as bearer of full political rights, exercises the right to vote in political affairs or can hold public office. The Reich Minister of the Interior, or any agency empowered by him, can make exceptions during the transition period, with regard to occupation of public office. The affairs of religious organizations will not be affected.

Article 4

1. A Jew cannot be a citizen of the Reich. He has no right to vote in political affairs and he cannot occupy public office.
2. Jewish [government] officials will retire as of December 31, 1935. If these officials served at the front in the world war, either for Germany or her allies, they will receive in full, until they reach the age limit, the pension to which they were entitled according to the salary they last received; they will, however, not advance in seniority. After reaching the age limit, their pensions will be calculated anew, according to the salary last received, on the basis of which their pension was computed.
3. The affairs of religious organizations will not be affected.
4. The conditions of service of teachers in Jewish public schools remain unchanged until new regulations for the Jewish school systems are issued.

Article 5

1. A Jew is anyone who is descended from at least three grandparents who are racially full Jews. Article 2, para. 2, second sentence will apply.
2. A Jew is also one who is descended from two full Jewish parents, if (a) he belonged to the Jewish religious community at the time this law was issued, or joined the community later, (b) he was married to a Jewish person, at the time the law was issued, or married one subsequently, (c) he is the offspring of a marriage with a Jew, in the sense of Section I, which was contracted after the Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor became effective, (d) he is the offspring of an extramarital relationship with a Jew, according to Section I, and will be born out of wedlock after July 31, 1936.

Article 6

1. Requirements for the pureness of blood as laid down in Reich Law or in orders of the NSDAP [the Nazi Party] and its echelons—not covered in Article 5—will not be affected.
2. Any other requirements for the pureness of blood, not covered in Article 5, can be made only by permission of the Reich Minister of the Interior and the Deputy Führer. If any such demands have been made, they will be void as of January 1, 1936, if they have not been requested by the Reich Minister of the Interior in

agreement with the Deputy Führer. These requests must be made by the Reich Minister of the Interior.

Article 7

The Führer and Reich Chancellor can grant exemptions from the regulations laid down in the law.²

In time, the Nazis extended the Nuremberg Laws, as these laws institutionalizing Nazi racial theory came to be known, to include marriages between “Aryans” and other “racially inferior” groups. Nazi officials interpreted the wording to mean that relations between “those of German or related blood” and “Gypsies,” Afro-Germans, or their offspring were also forbidden. Some people within the Nazi government considered requiring “Aryans” to divorce their Jewish spouses, but they did not go through with this plan.

² Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham, eds., *Documents on Nazism 1919–1945* (New York: Viking Press, 1974), 463–67.

Connection Questions

1. How do the Nuremberg Laws define what makes someone a “German”? How do they define Germany’s universe of obligation?
2. How do the Nuremberg Laws reflect earlier ideas about racial difference and hierarchies? How do they reflect what you have already learned about Nazi ideology?
3. Why do you think Article 3 was included in the Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor? What idea might the law be implying?
4. How did the Nuremberg Laws make it necessary for the Nazis to issue the First Regulation to the Reich Citizenship Law two months later? Why might it have been so complicated to figure out who was “Jewish” without these laws?
5. The Nuremberg Laws meant that Jews could no longer define their identities for themselves. What does it mean to lose the right to define yourself? How was the problem confronting Germans of Jewish descent in 1935 similar to that faced by the Bear in reading, **The Bear That Wasn’t** in Chapter 1? How do the two differ?
6. What happens when a government says that one part of your identity is more important than other parts?