

Mr. Heagy's U.S. History



Mini Read # 20 The Nuremberg Laws

When the Nazis came to power, they took immediate action against the Jews. The members of the Nazi Party's SA, the storm troopers, had been used for street fighting. They attacked and beat up communists and political enemies of the Nazis. Now that the Nazis controlled the German government, the Gestapo, the German secret police, then under the command of Herman Goering, could arrest many of these people.

The large numbers of storm troopers were set to work harassing the Jews. SA men attacked them in the streets. The police often watched these attacks and did nothing. SA men went about marking Jewish shops and businesses with Stars of David. Often they stood outside these shops and demanded that German citizens not do business with Jews. They did this by reminding people they knew who they were and where they lived.

Hitler's government went even further. It wrote and implemented a set of laws regarding the Jews and the Reich. They came to be called the Nuremberg Laws because they were announced with great fanfare at the 1935 Nazi Party Rally in Nuremberg. The laws were designed to maintain what the Nazis preferred to call "racial purity." Racial purity was just a term for granting a certain people, the supposed but non-existent Aryan Germans, special status in the Reich and the world. Aryan Germans were supposed to be the ultimate in human beings, the super race. They were not to pollute their bloodline by marrying or even having sex with lesser human beings, especially the lowest form of something that only looked human, the Jews.

To achieve racial purity, the Jews would be put on notice and stripped of their German citizenship and rights. Jews were no longer citizens with rights, they were subjects ruled by the Reich. They would also be segregated from the rest of German society. The laws forbade Jews from marriage or sexual relations with Aryan Germans. The Nazis settled on defining a "full Jew" as a person with three Jewish grandparents. Those with less were designated as *Mischlinge* of two degrees: First Degree - two Jewish grandparents; Second Degree - one Jewish grandparent. Jews could not hire female Aryan Germans under the age of 45 as a domestic worker. They could not display the Reich flag, but they could and were encouraged to display something identifying them as Jewish.

The Nuremberg Laws had two important effects. First, they made it legal, indeed mandatory, to discriminate against Jews. This fact made persecution of Jews legal within the Reich. Second, it made persecution of the Jews national and social policy. Thus one purpose of the laws was to make anti-Semitism a social institution of the Reich. It was taught in schools. It was reinforced through the creation of children's games that help Aryan Germans identify and wipe out Jews. Ill-treatment of Jews became part of "good" manners in Germany.

The Nuremberg Laws became the basis for a series of even more restrictive anti-Semitic laws to follow, and laid the social and emotional groundwork that made the "Final Solution" the physical extermination of the Jews acceptable, even desirable, within Nazi German society.